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Delivering the 14-19 Education Entitlement

Review of the Development of 14-19 Years Education Provision in Bracknell Forest by a Working Group of the Children's Services and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel



December 2009

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Local employers which responded to the employers’ questionnaire	

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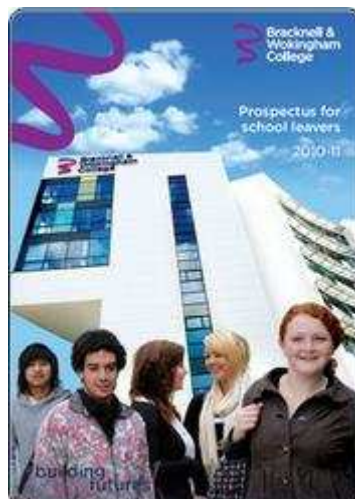
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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 14-19 years education provision has been identified by the Children's Services and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel as a topic which it wished to review owing to the significant national reforms taking place in this area and it established a Working Group to pursue this task. These reforms consist of Diplomas, which combine practical and theoretical learning both in the classroom and in work situations as an alternative to the traditional GCSE and A-Level qualification route; Foundation Learning; Apprenticeships; and Functional Skills.
- 1.2 Post-16 Funding Transfer reforms are also being made to the effect that from April 2010 the Learning and Skills Council will no longer have responsibility for funding Post-16 education and funding will then be routed through the local authority which will assume responsibility for the commissioning of the education provision.
- 1.3 The Working Group was concerned to learn from April 2009 figures that levels of young people who are not in education, employment or training are rising across Berkshire as a whole and in Bracknell Forest in particular. The review has considered whether the new education entitlement will meet the needs of such young people and engage them, especially as the age of compulsory participation in education and training is increasing.
- 1.4 The involvement of local employers in the design and development of Diplomas to enable them to deliver the skills required for employment is crucial to their success.
- 1.5 This report describes the work of the Working Group and sets out its findings. Members hope that the report will be well received and look forward to receiving responses to their recommendations.
- 1.6 The Working Group comprised:
 - Councillor Mrs Gill Birch (Lead Member)
 - Councillor Trevor Kensall
 - Councillor Mrs Jennie McCracken
 - Councillor Mrs Jacqui Ryder
 - Parent Governor Representative Dr Josephs-Franks



2. Background

2.1 When considering its work programme for 2008/09 and beyond, the Children's Services and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel recognised 14-19 years education provision as a theme which it wished to review owing to the considerable national reforms taking place in this field. Accordingly, a working group of the Panel was established to undertake a review of the development of 14-19 education in Bracknell Forest.

2.2 The key objectives of the review were to:

- develop an understanding of the 14-19 Education Plan 2008-13;
- consider methods to ensure successful future partnership working both within the Berkshire sub-region and with the wider region, providers and employers;
- look at the range, quality and entitlement of provision available to young people with regard to 14-19 years education and training opportunities;
- ensure that sufficient high quality, comprehensive and impartial Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) is available to support learners;
- look at the development of the workforce providing the new Diploma qualification and determine whether further training of staff is required to support the learning need for the new qualifications in the 14-19 Education Plan.

2.3 The scope of the review was to:

- gain an understanding of the national 'Gateway' process, determine how well the Bracknell Forest application to provide Diplomas meets with the national criteria and monitor the success and implementation of the application;
- consider the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) 14-19 Partnerships and Planning guidance document;
- review other local authorities' Diploma applications and implementation with a view to identifying sources of experience and best practice for possible application in Bracknell Forest;
- review the protocols and logistics involved with working in partnership with a large number of different parties;
- look specifically at young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) to determine why they may be in this position and if the reforms in 14-19 education are likely to encourage them to return to education or training and prevent other young people becoming NEET in the future.

2.4 The scope of the review excluded funding and cost effectiveness of the reforms in 14-19 education as these are high level decisions that are taken nationally and subject to legislation.

3. Investigation, Information Gathering and Analysis

Scoping Meeting with the former Director of Social Care and Learning, the Chief Advisor: Learning and Achievement and the Senior Secondary Advisor

- 3.1 The Senior Secondary Advisor briefed the Working Group on the development of 14–19 years education provision in Bracknell Forest. His related presentation addressed the national context, recurring themes and priorities, internal and external evaluation, the Bracknell Forest 14-19 Education Plan (2008-2013), the introduction of Diploma qualifications, how Diplomas differed from existing qualifications, 14-19 reform key messages, Post-16 Funding transfer changes, key issues and supporting information. A copy of his presentation is attached to this report at Appendix 1. The Working Group were advised that:

The Diploma is a new qualification for young people aged 14-19 years old.

It is available at three different levels and offers the qualifications which are the equivalent of existing GCSE's and A-Level qualifications.

- The Foundation Diploma (Level 1) is the same as 5 GCSEs at grades D to G
- The Higher Diploma (Level 2) is the same as 7 GCSEs at grades A* to C
- The Advanced Diploma (Level 3) is the same as 3.5 A-Levels

Diplomas take 2 years to study in most cases and allow young people a greater choice about what they learn and how they learn, with an emphasis on combining practical and theoretical learning both in the classroom and in real work situations.

Noteworthy points arising from the presentation were that:

- a) Over the last 5 years there has been increased attention on 14-19 years education. The national context for the 14-19 Education Plan stemmed from papers including Every Child Matters: Change For Children (November 2004), Youth Matters - Green Paper (July 2005) and Delivering 14-19 Reform: Next Steps (October 2008), in addition to the Education and Inspections Act 2006.
- b) The emphasis of the development of 14-19 education was on increasing young people's participation in education and training and on improving their outcomes. Recurring themes and priorities were:
 - Raising young people's participation and achievement.
 - Strengthening the basic skills: literacy and numeracy, IT etc.
 - Broadening the range of opportunities available to young people and catering to their particular needs, including enhanced vocational routes.
 - Ensuring that young people were stretched and challenged by the programme they were following.
 - Increasing young people's functional skills to better prepare them for the workplace.

- Responding to individual needs, recognising diversity and improving young people's motivation.

The latter two points were the keys drivers behind the 14-19 Education Plan.

- c) Internal evaluation has identified a rising trend in GCSE results in Bracknell Forest. The results in 2008 were 15% higher than in 2002 leading to levels of achievement that met or exceeded the national average.
- d) A-Level results have improved at a slower pace. All six secondary schools in Bracknell Forest had 6th Forms which varied in size and quality. The variable quality was evident across all the 6th Forms in addition to across departments within individual 6th Forms.
- e) Until recently schools in Bracknell Forest were dependent on the traditional 'one size fits all' curriculum dominated by GCSEs at 14-16 and A-Levels at 16-19 years. A culture of partnership working was being established to replace the independent thinking that previously existed amongst providers with a view to providing wider variety across the Borough. This has been assisted by the establishment of the 14-19 Years Partnership of which representatives of all the Borough's secondary schools were members.
- f) The Increased Flexibility Programme was evidence of progress in developing provision through collaborative delivery. This enabled pupils to spend usually half a day per week out of school and in Bracknell and Wokingham College (BWC) learning different and often practical skills such as mechanics or hair and beauty.
- g) Despite efforts so far, the Working Group noted that a persistent core of young people who were NEET, usually post 16, remained. These young people tended to 'drop out' at the age of 17. The rate of drop out at 17 was around 12% which was lower than the national figure but higher than the Borough's nearest neighbours. It was thought that the high 'drop out' rate may be due to young people following a one year course and then not pursuing further education. Another area felt to account for this figure was young people commencing the wrong course and then discontinuing it. This was further evidence of the need to provide young people with IAG in respect of course availability and suitability and career paths.
- h) External evaluation recognised that, although Bracknell Forest was unsuccessful in its December 2006 application to offer four new Diploma qualifications, resulting feedback had informed measures to address shortcomings. The assessment stemming from DCSF 14-19 Progress Checks in 2006, 2007 and 2008 was 'amber/green' indicating that, although the Council had some strengths, further progress was needed. Whilst the Joint Area Review in 2007 recognised developments in 14-19 provision, it considered progress to be too slow. However, the 2008 Annual Performance Assessment acknowledged that decisive action was being taken by the 14-19 Partnership to extend provision. The overall message was that progress was being made where needed and although services were already good in some areas, further development was required in others.

- i) The presentation included information concerning the Bracknell Forest 14-19 Education Plan and the Working Group was advised that it was a rolling plan subject to annual review. Working in collaboration was felt to be key to delivering the Plan which embraced the NEET Strategy, promoted IAG services and included a strategy to introduce Diplomas as part of the new 14-19 curriculum entitlement by 2013.
- j) Phased national introduction of Diplomas on a pilot basis was taking place from September 2008 and introduction required approval via a national 'Gateway' application process. Entitlement to 17 Diploma 'lines of learning' would exist from 2013. In November 2008 Bracknell Forest had submitted an application to deliver 8 Diplomas which was felt to be stronger than the 2006 application. A response to the application was expected by mid April 2009 and, if successful, the first Diplomas would be offered locally from 2010 with the remainder following in 2011. It was not expected that applications in respect of all 8 Diplomas would be successful and it was difficult to gauge which ones would succeed. Although there were insufficient students and resources in Bracknell Forest to justify or enable all 17 Diplomas to be offered, it would be possible for some to be delivered outside the Borough e.g. land based agricultural studies, for which there was no provision in Bracknell Forest, could be delivered by Berkshire College of Agriculture in Maidenhead. Implementation of Diplomas would require a significant range of planning and delivery issues to be resolved including flexible timetabling. Successful delivery of Diplomas would necessitate a significant cultural shift featuring collaborative working between the secondary schools in Bracknell Forest and BWC to create an integrated Borough-wide learning provision. The associated financial remodelling would present challenges and one issue was that funding for the Diploma would tend to follow the learner and not be allocated to schools which would become commissioners of teaching. An exception was where some Diploma funding would be allocated to schools in the case of pupils pursuing elements of their course at different schools / colleges.
- k) All Post-16 learners would go through a Common Application Process (CAP) which would be used to support their subject choices and inform school / college admission. When the associated form became web-based all involved parties would be able to access the information. It was difficult to estimate the number of students opting for which courses and possible that local employment opportunities might influence choice.
- l) It was problematical to determine the number of students that would take up the Diploma and nationally the uptake had been disappointing. This was possibly due to the lack of history behind the qualification which had no track record to show that it was beneficial and would lead to enhanced employment opportunities for young people. There were concerns that parents might be sceptical of Diplomas and view them as experimental.
- m) As some local authorities introduced Diplomas in earlier phases than Bracknell Forest was expected to, there were opportunities to learn from their experiences. Reading Borough Council had been successful in its 2006 application to offer Diploma qualifications and could therefore be a source of experience and good practice.
- n) As the Diploma qualifications included a greater practical element than traditional GCSE and A-Level qualifications which were of a more academic

nature, it was possible that they would have wider appeal. Diplomas included an element of mandatory work experience and there was an expectation that employers would have a role in working with teachers to design Diplomas. At present students in Years 10 and 11 were permitted to undertake one week of work experience if they chose to. However, in the future those pursuing Diploma courses would be obliged to participate in 10 days work experience although there was no requirement for this to specifically relate to their course. This would present a challenge in securing sufficient work experience placements and the Council and the NHS were suggested as possible large scale employers who may be able to assist in this area.

- o) The 14-19 reforms, which required the new Diploma entitlement to be in place by 2013, would broaden and improve the quality of provision and offer more appropriate progression routes, choice and flexibility to meet the individual needs of learners. The reforms entailed a busy development and implementation schedule which was reliant on local partnership working and would have significant implications for all partners involved in the 14-19 phase of education and training.
- p) Post-16 Funding Transfer changes meant that from April 2010 the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) would no longer have responsibility for funding Post-16 education and funding would then be routed through the local authority which would assume responsibility for the commissioning of the education provision. For the Council this represented a new form of education commissioning with funding aligned to commissioned provision. Having the new arrangements in place by April 2010 was a demanding task requiring a steep learning curve and presenting a capacity issue.
- q) Bracknell Forest would need to work with providers as part of a coherent sub-regional group for Berkshire which included all six of the unitary authorities in the County. There was much student mobility across the region with BWC taking students from outside the Borough and some Bracknell Forest students attending other colleges such as Farnborough College. Collective commissioning of college places outside Berkshire by the sub-regional group would ease the process. It was necessary to ensure that curriculum breadth and quality met the education and training needs of young people.
- r) Shadowing / tracking discussions had been held with BWC and the LSC during 2008/09 and it was anticipated that closer work would occur in 2009/10, a transitional year. In addition to human resources and finance, capacity and expertise were significant implications.
- s) The age of compulsory participation in education and training would rise to 17 years in 2013 and 18 years in 2015.
- t) Demand led provision was an emerging priority of the skills agenda and there were two interpretations as to its meaning. The LSC's view was that an analysis of the local labour market to identify required skills and meet any skills shortage was needed. Schools felt that they were already offering demand led provision by delivering the A-Level subjects sought by learners. It was important to consider local labour market demands in order to provide courses that would give young people the qualifications they needed to gain employment. It was anticipated that many students may

want to gain a qualification for which there was no or limited demand and the different market forces, such as the skills needed in the local labour market and the demand from pupils and their parents, needed to be carefully managed and balanced. The economic climate would have an effect on the labour market and the demand for some jobs, such as those in the construction industry, were cyclical. It was not known how many local learners left the area for employment purposes.

u) In summary, the key issues for the 14-19 Years Plan were:

- The range of provision and learner entitlement
- The quality of provision
- Funding and cost effectiveness
- Workforce development and training
- The IAG given to young people
- Leadership, management and partnership working

v) The Working Group was provided with a folder of supporting information relating to 14-19 education for its use.

Further Meetings with the Senior Secondary Advisor

- 3.2 The Working Group met the Senior Secondary Advisor on two further occasions to explore the new 14-19 entitlement and receive an update on its implementation in Bracknell Forest.
- 3.3 On the first occasion the Working Group was advised that the Council had recently established and appointed to a new 14-19 Consortium Co-ordinator post.
- 3.4 With regard to NEET young people, the Working Group discovered that, although the overall responsibility for supporting NEET lay with the Chief Officer: Access and Inclusion, many other professionals including the Youth Offending Team, Housing Section and Teenage Pregnancy Team also worked with NEETs and improvements in co-ordination were sought. The Chief Officer held NEET data, managed the Connexions contract and worked with the Social Inclusion Group whose membership included Deputy and Assistant Head Teachers of Bracknell Forest secondary schools. The Senior Secondary Advisor's role related to the curriculum which he felt was in need of diversification as the 'one size fits all' approach may not suit NEETs. There were issues around what provision was required to meet the needs of NEET and re-engage them in education or training and around measures such as Pre-16 support to prevent young people from becoming NEET. At the time of the meeting slightly fewer than 200 young people fell into the NEET category and the number was not reducing. Raising of the education participation age would impact on NEET as those 'dropping out' at 16 years would not be able to access employment unless there was an element of training attached, rendering the employer responsible for ensuring that the training was pursued. It was felt that managing this situation required further consideration. Parallels between the Diploma applications and the Council's 'Grow Our Own' project were drawn.
- 3.5 The Working Group was advised that BWC had accepted Bracknell Forest's 14-19 Years Education Plan and the Council enjoyed a good working

relationship with the College which had impressed inspectors with its links with local secondary schools. BWC had assumed co-ordinated lesson timetabling arrangements with the secondary schools to enable students to learn away from their home school during a corresponding lesson block. The College offered a wider curriculum than the schools e.g. construction industry studies and this would increase with the introduction of Diplomas. The Principal of the College was in favour of Diplomas.

- 3.6 The Senior Secondary Advisor explained the Diploma 'Gateway' application process followed by Bracknell Forest to the Working Group. The process consisted of three sections. Section A of the application was prepared in accordance with a template featuring prescribed questions with fixed word count replies. The Section included the Bracknell Forest Diploma Consortium Statement which described its vision, intended education provision and the extent of collaboration and a record of it as it was necessary to provide evidence of how involved parties would work together as a consortium. The 2006 Diploma applications were examples of past collaborative working as a consortium.
- 3.7 Section C of the application consisted of the 14-19 Partnership Statement. The Partnership was a strategic body overseeing the Consortium and 14-19 provision in the Borough. Membership of the Partnership presently consisted of the local authority, the head teacher or principal of each school or college with students in the 14-19 age range and representatives of the LSC, Connexions, the East Berkshire Education Business Partnership (EBP), Reading University and local employers, including Syngenta, a world-leading plant science company. Learners were entitled to access 17 Post-16 and 14 Pre-16 Diplomas by 2013 and the 14-19 Partnership was responsible for ensuring that the qualifications and related support mechanisms were in place by that date to enable all young people to access their chosen qualifications, and for tasking the Consortium to achieve this. Although the membership of the Partnership and Consortium was similar as geographically Bracknell Forest was a small local education authority (LEA), members had the two differing roles. This similarity led to close working links.
- 3.8 Although arrangements had been informal to date, from April 2010 when the LSC would cease to have responsibility for funding Post-16 education and funding would be routed through the local authority which would then assume responsibility for the commissioning of the education provision, closer links with the other Berkshire unitary authorities creating a sub-region of provision would be necessary. An example of joint working was Charters and Easthampstead Park Schools both wishing to offer Sports Diplomas. Joint working also took place at a more strategic level involving the Senior Secondary Advisor and the former Director of Social Care and Learning meeting with other councils on a four-five weekly basis to plan delivery of provision following the funding changes in 2010.
- 3.9 Informal feedback received at the date of the meeting in respect of Bracknell Forest's Diploma applications indicated that Sections A and C, which had been prepared by the Council, were acceptable. Section B, which related to the eight 'lines of learning' applied for, detailed how the Consortium would deliver all aspects of the Diplomas in Bracknell Forest including the learning venues, equipment provision and staffing resources. Any weakness found in the applications would be a failure to demonstrate an adequate understanding of all the measures required to deliver Diplomas successfully. Colleagues in

schools and colleges had assisted with the preparation of Section B where the Council lacked sufficient expertise and informal feedback showed that quality varied between the eight Diploma applications in this Section. Assessment of the Diploma applications took account of past successes in provision of other qualifications such as A-Levels as previous accomplishments generated confidence in the ability to deliver. The quality of Section B would dictate which Diplomas could be offered in 2010 and which would be delayed until 2011 and unofficial indications were that Bracknell Forest would be successful in applications to deliver four Diplomas in 2010 and the remaining four in 2011. Diploma application assessor comments would inform actions and timetables required to implement Diplomas and the following stage would involve the assessor meeting the Senior Secondary Advisor to progress matters.

- 3.10 The Working Group was advised that the Phase 1 'Gateway' application in 2008 for delivery in 2010 consisted of the following Diplomas:
- Construction and the Built Environment
 - Engineering
 - Hair and Beauty
 - Information Technology
 - Society, Health and Development
 - Hospitality and Catering
 - Business Administration and Finance
 - Sports and Active Leisure
- 3.11 Formal feedback would dictate whether further work would be required in respect of the applications relating to some of the above Diplomas and future work streams would reflect this. However, in the event that all eight of the Phase 1 Diploma applications were successful, it was anticipated that the 14-19 Partnership would seek to offer the following two supplementary Diplomas in a Phase 2 'Gateway' application in 2009 for delivery in 2011 in addition to extending the delivery of some of the above listed Diplomas from a greater number of seats of learning in the Borough:
- Creative and Media
 - Retail Business
- 3.12 Creative and Media was the most popular Diploma in the country and therefore all local schools and the College sought to deliver it leading to over-capacity and the necessity to determine which learning venues would offer the course. Other 'lines of learning' were likely to follow school / college specialisms. The Retail Business Diploma would become more relevant when the town centre redevelopment progressed. The Senior Secondary Advisor suggested that, in the event that a re-application became necessary to deliver some of the Diplomas applied for, the 14-19 Partnership might seek to include the Retail Business Diploma in a subsequent Phase and discussion with the Council's Regeneration Team and developers would inform such an action.
- 3.13 Diplomas were developed in partnership with employers and lay between the GCSE / A-Level traditional academic route and apprenticeships giving students three pathways to employment or university enabling them to choose the route which suited them best. National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), which offered a vocational route, had to be pursued at college or through employment. This choice and flexibility benefited learners.

- 3.14 Some employers had previously complained that school / college leavers were not sufficiently prepared for employment and hoped that Diplomas would enable students to be more adequately prepared and skilled for the work place. Work experience also assisted in this area. Once more people became qualified with a Diploma and entered the workplace, employers would become better informed in respect of the qualification. EBP was utilised as a link to employers and the Diploma applications listed the 60 employers Bracknell Forest had been in contact with as part of the process. Although it was difficult to secure employer commitment to Diplomas at the application stage, when the outcome of the applications was received and it was known which Diplomas were to be delivered the Partnership would vigorously pursue relevant employers who would be more amenable at that stage. The assistance of employers would lead to a stream of well equipped employees. The Council's Leisure Centre was a potential future employer of learners pursuing the Sports and Active Leisure Diploma. Smaller companies would be less likely to become involved in the development of Diplomas than larger employers as they did not have the capacity. As the workforce of some local employers travelled some distance to work, it was recognised that locally available staff might be welcomed. The Working Group received a list of employers that had agreed to provide work experience for pupils in Bracknell Forest and of the employers engaged with the Diploma. The latter list was a starting point and this was an area for development in the coming year. The list of engaged employers needed to include businesses covering a variety of different sizes and subject areas.
- 3.15 The Senior Secondary Advisor provided the Working Group with a copy of a presentation he gave in respect of 14-19 years education when he met schools and the Connexions service in 2008. The presentation showed the different routes pupils could follow after Key Stage 3 (KS3) and an extract is attached to this report at Appendix 3.
- 3.16 Traditionally in KS3 pupils chose the subjects they would pursue at GCSE level without giving much consideration to the steps they would take following completion of these qualifications. In the past students would follow a mixture of core GCSE subjects they had selected. The Diploma qualification would require students to pursue the core GCSE subjects such as Mathematics, Science and English whilst allowing them to study the remainder of the qualification in a different way to traditional GCSEs. When Diplomas were introduced there would be three 3 different routes of learning available to students following KS3:
- GCSE's
 - Diploma (Level 1 and 2)
 - Young Apprentice / Vocational Qualifications
- 3.17 The Diploma qualification was only part of the 14-19 years education developments by central government. Foundation Learning (FL) was another qualification that would be an option for 14-19 years learners. For some learners there could be a significant leap from KS3 to the above three qualification routes and FL (covering Entry Levels 1-3 and Level 1), which offered a progression pathway for students who had only attained lower grade GCSEs and those with learning disabilities or difficulties (LDD) or other challenges, was being introduced in an endeavour to soften the jump after KS3. FL, which remained in the developmental stage and was currently being trialled in Surrey, would be available from 2010 and could be taken at any

stage. It was possibly more appropriate for a 16 year old wishing to return to education than a Diploma as it would provide opportunities for students to gain 'bite sized' qualifications which they could build into a portfolio of qualifications. Diploma courses were full time and did not offer opportunities for students to be gradually eased back into education. The Diploma needed to be viewed as part of a wider range of options for young people wishing to gain qualifications. The emphasis in the new 14-19 Years education provision was 'stage, not age'. NEET young people could pursue FL in the event that they did not achieve good results in their GCSEs. However, as the new education strategy focused on early intervention and prevention, it was hoped that the situation where a pupil did not achieve a qualification and needed to return to FL should not arise. Hopefully, pupils who would benefit from FL would be identified during their school career and pursue it to enable them to take smaller steps and experience an education provision that was more engaging and suitable for their learning needs.

- 3.18 Pupils who had studied the Diploma at Level 1 or 2 were not obliged to continue to Level 3 and had the option to transfer to A-Levels or a Vocational Qualification. Similarly, a pupil who had studied GCSEs was not required to progress to A-Levels and could pursue a Level 3 Diploma as an alternative. There was scope for pupils to take whichever qualification they felt was the most suitable at each Level. After pupils had completed a Level 3 qualification, either A-Levels, a Diploma or a Vocational Qualification, they were not locked into a particular pathway and had the choice of progressing to higher education, further training or employment.
- 3.19 The different education options were now in comparable bands. Traditionally vocational qualifications were for lower achieving pupils and GCSEs were for higher achieving, more academic pupils. This was no longer the case. To obtain a Level 2 Diploma, students were required to achieve Level 2 in every element of their Diploma course. Students would be graded on the individual components of the course and once it was completed they would have a portfolio of individual components in addition to the overall Diploma Qualification. This portfolio could also be shown to employers to highlight areas in which the pupil was particularly successful.
- 3.20 The Working Group recognised that the pace of change and development of the Diploma in Bracknell Forest would be very considerable as there was much to organise and co-ordinate in the coming year. When comparing Reading Borough with Bracknell Forest, the Working Group felt that Reading may have an advantage given that the Thames Valley University (TVU) in Reading was a major partner in the provision of Diplomas and offered neutral ground for pupils away from their home school. Given the small geographical size of Bracknell Forest for an LEA, delivering most of the Diploma provision in one location would not be a particular advantage. The Borough had schools with particular strengths and the expertise at the individual schools should be built on.
- 3.21 At the subsequent update meeting with the Senior Secondary Advisor, the Working Group established that:
- 3.22 The latest 'Gateway' application for Diploma provision in Bracknell Forest resulted in 3 Diplomas awarded category 2 status and 5 Diplomas being given category 3 status. Having received telephone feedback from the latest 'Gateway' application, it was apparent that in practice the difference between a category 1 result for a Diploma qualification and a category 2 result was not

that significant as far as Diploma delivery was concerned. The difference equated to a 6 month delay whilst further development work was undertaken. The variation between a category 2 result and a category 3 result was greater resulting in a gap of one year. Following its promotion to 'Gateway' application result category 2, the Hair and Beauty Studies Diploma would be reviewed in summer 2009 together with Bracknell Forest's other category 2 Diplomas.

3.23 Although Bracknell Forest had not progressed Diploma delivery as rapidly as some other authorities, it now had 8 Diplomas that would be in place from September 2010. A further 5 Diplomas would be offered in 2013. Bracknell Forest now had a clear plan and could focus on providing successful Diploma courses. The following points arose from the meeting:

- a) The appointment of the 14-19 Consortium Co-ordinator had facilitated much progress to be made towards implementing the new 14-19 entitlement.
- b) Each Diploma was being developed by a working group and meetings were in progress.
- c) A Diploma Newsletter, produced by the 14-19 Consortium Co-ordinator, provided information and updates in respect of all lines of learning which were currently being developed for teaching in September 2010 and September 2011, plus those the subject of future 'Gateway' bids. The Senior Secondary Advisor highlighted and expanded on the following aspects of the newsletter:
 - The four Diplomas lines available from September 2010 were: IT; Business Administration and Finance; Hospitality; and Hair and Beauty.
 - Those awaiting final approval for delivery in September 2011 were: Sport and Active Leisure; Society, Health and Development; Engineering; and Construction and the Built Environment.
 - During the week commencing 2 November 2009 the Children, Young People and Learning Department had received a monitoring visit from Cambridge Education on behalf of the DCSF and the assessor was very pleased with the work being pursued.
 - 'Gateway' 4 closed on 25 November 2009 for consortia which wished to apply to deliver any further Diplomas from 2012.
 - Once a 'Gateway' application had been approved in respect of one school, others could join without the consortia going through the Gateway application process again.
 - The EBP had hosted an afternoon at Legoland, Windsor, to introduce various employers and businesses to the Diploma and explain how they could get involved. Around 60 different businesses attended and were now in discussions with the EBP to formalise how they could support Diploma learning throughout East Berkshire. The event was funded by the three local authorities in East Berkshire, Bracknell Forest, Slough and Windsor & Maidenhead, who each paid £2,000.
 - The IAG Strategy Group met on a regular basis to discuss the implementation of Diploma teaching and to ensure that all students and parents had access to information concerning the qualification.
 - Later in November 2009 a theatre piece entitled 'Opt Into Learning' would be delivered in schools to encourage pupils to consider suitable qualifications.
 - The Diploma Roadshow would be available to Year 11 students and parents in February 2010.

- A parent's guide to the Diploma had been produced and would be available for all parents in Bracknell Forest once printed. The Working Group received copies of the guide.
 - All Diploma lines should be included in school options books / 6th Form prospectuses.
 - The budget for the planning work surrounding Diplomas was sufficient and could be utilised for purposes such as paying for supply teachers if teaching staff needed to take time off to plan for Diploma delivery.
- d) Two strands that the 14-19 Consortium had been working on were planning and ensuring that young people and teachers were fully aware of the Diplomas.
 - e) The Diploma IAG Consultancy Report prepared by Allister McGowan concluded that significant efforts had been made to provide advice relating to Diplomas. The report would be given to the 14-19 Partnership later in November.
 - f) Work was currently on track to introduce Diplomas and consideration was being given to having the 14-19 entitlement in place in 2013.
 - g) National publicity in respect of Diplomas was thought to be negative and unhelpful. The Working Group had read several articles criticising the new educational certificate.
 - h) Although Garth Hill College's technology buildings at Wick Hill were due to be demolished and the site sold as part of the funding arrangements for the new BWC building, the Children, Young People and Learning Department wished them to remain as a Diploma teaching facility. The Principal of the College was currently discussing the matter with Bracknell Forest and Wokingham Councils. Any refurbishment of the buildings would be funded partly by Diploma capital funding and in part by Wokingham Council.
 - i) The 14-19 Consortium was currently seeking to address the issue that a number of students would not gain Level 1 on a Diploma course or attain higher than grade 'G's in their GCSEs.
 - j) Level 1 provision was limited for post 16 students and associated concerns had been conveyed to schools.
 - k) There was currently an issue with young people 'dropping out' of 6th Form courses after one year and it was questionable whether the correct course had been selected by individuals. In the current year, a higher number of students were dropping out at 17 years of age. This problem may not have arisen where individuals had commenced a Diploma at 16 as the nature of work was different to A-Levels and may be more accessible.
 - l) A package for school training had been produced and schools had been given the opportunity to receive a briefing from the Senior Secondary Advisor on Diplomas.

The Senior Secondary Advisor then addressed the following specific concerns and questions of the Working Group:

- m) A young person's guide to Diplomas had not been created since the information had been incorporated into course booklets and prospectuses.
- n) A draft partnership agreement had been created, which covered in outline topics such as uniform, discipline, transport and responsibility. Members were provided with a draft form.
- o) Issues concerning uniform worn by Diploma students remained under discussion.
- p) There were currently not any cases of cross-border working.

- q) Young people were sometimes reluctant to travel, particularly those NEET. This problem has been recognised at Connexions meetings and was a strong reason for seeking to make use of the facilities at Wick Hill.
- r) It was noted that some of the Working Group's concerns would be sent to central government as they did not lie in the implementation of Diplomas.
- s) A timetable structure had been agreed and a common timetable was required to ensure that any child in any school could access a Diploma, which would be taught on Tuesdays and Thursdays.
- t) It was possible to study A-Levels after taking a Diploma, depending on which course was followed.
- u) Following their transfer from the LSC, employees would work on behalf of all of Berkshire, with all lead members sitting on a central group. This was unique to the area, with six small unitary authorities located close together.

14-19 Provision in Reading

- 3.24 As Reading Borough Council had first, if not best, practice in delivering Diplomas and would be able to assist the review by sharing lessons learned and informing comparison of Bracknell Forest's success in Diploma delivery against that of other local authorities, the Working Group invited Mr Peter Shotts, 14-19 Advisor at Reading Borough Council, to one of its meetings to answer its questions in relation to 14-19 Years Education Provision in Reading. Mr Shotts' written answers are attached to this report at Appendix 2.
- 3.25 Reading 14-19 Partnership, which had been successful in its early Diploma 'Gateway' applications, offered the greatest number of Post-16 Diplomas in the country. It had applied for the delivery of only one additional Diploma in the recent application which received a category 2 status. Further consolidation was required to ensure that all provisions and logistics were in place to facilitate the successful delivery of the Sport and Active Leisure Diploma in Reading.
- 3.26 Planning for the efficient roll out of successful Diplomas courses was critical and speed was not the issue. The viability of providing each Diploma course required careful consideration as over and under-subscription were issues. The provision of eight Diplomas over two years was considered to be manageable.
- 3.27 As Bracknell Forest was a small authority it was beneficial for it to look broadly across the area and link with partners, providers and other neighbouring authorities to collectively deliver an effective and successful Diploma programme. The size of Bracknell Forest meant that numbers for viability was an important issue and it would be preferable for one local authority to offer a particular Diploma course rather than two neighbouring authorities delivering the same course to small classes, for example, Wokingham Council would not be providing the Hair and Beauty Diploma and would instead send its students who wished to take this course to Reading. Such flexible working would provide the best facilities for students. Student numbers for Post-16 Diploma courses in Reading were high due to the location of TVU in that Borough which attracted students from outside Reading. As TVU was introducing Diplomas in place of B-Tech qualifications, pupils were moving by default to many of the Diploma courses.
- 3.28 The Working Group noted that partnership working was a very important issue, and that encouraging a close and open relationship with local schools, BWC,

employers and organisations outside Bracknell Forest was key to providing a successful program of Diplomas.

- 3.29 Reading LEA was keen to work with partners and organisations outside its borough and was proposing to replace the Reading 14-19 Years Partnership with a Reading and Central Berkshire equivalent. Much of the liaison work with partners outside Reading Borough happened as a consequence of South East Funding.
- 3.30 Where students numbers had been low last year in Reading, permission had been obtained from the local 14-19 Partnership to fund courses rather than pupils. This had proved to be costly as the grant formula was calculated on a per student basis and it had been necessary to pool schools' dedicated learning grant to meet the costs of Diploma qualification courses. From September 2009, funding of pupils and not courses would be resumed and only financially viable courses would be run. The Construction and the Built Environment Diploma has been the most unpopular Diploma qualification in Reading where alternatives for unviable Diplomas courses were being sought.
- 3.31 The Diploma courses were operated at three different levels:
- Level 1 learners were the equivalent of grade D and below GCSE standard.
 - Level 2 learners were the equivalent of grade A* - C GCSE standard.
 - Level 3 learners were the equivalent of A-Level standard.
- 3.32 Young people aged 16 generally pursued Level 1 and 2 Diplomas. It would be unusual for a pre-16 student to be following a Level 3 Diploma as only full time advanced students would be in a position to do so.
- 3.33 The Working Group was advised that a standard pre-16 course took two years to complete as other qualifications were being pursued along-side the Diploma course. Post-16 Level 1 and 2 learners could complete the course in one year. This was proving to be a significant challenge for many learners as the Diploma qualification was an aggregate of several qualifications.
- 3.34 No statistics were available at the time of the meeting to indicate how many pupils who were NEET had taken up a Diploma course or how successful they had been. It was more likely that NEETs would progress to alternative short part time courses than Diploma qualifications.
- 3.35 One of the difficulties that Reading had encountered with the current Diploma course was the foundation level. Although it had been assumed that the foundation Diploma would provide a new type of learning that was more practically based than the current GCSE and A-Level option, this did not appear to be the case. However, it was possible that Diplomas may be adapted over time to increase practicality. Currently, Reading LEA was offering very few foundation Diplomas as it was felt that there were other courses of the equivalent qualification level that were more appropriate for learners.
- 3.36 There were fewer problems with the Post-16 Diploma courses which allowed students to experience a broad range of knowledge and skills based around the chosen subject area.

- 3.37 Level 2 learners could study some GCSE courses along-side a Diploma or as part of it. Although Reading currently offered over two days release to enable students to study courses elsewhere with flexibility, it would review this model in the future to ensure that it offered adequate student choice. Learning the practical elements of a Diploma was time consuming and Diplomas required the completion of a project which could be undertaken at a student's home school.
- 3.38 Students studying a hospitality Diploma in Reading had found that the Diploma did not limit their options and that they studied all aspects of hospitality in a broad and holistic manner which opened their options and increased their experience. B-Tech National courses were felt to be more restricted than Diplomas.
- 3.39 Bracknell Forest was liaising closely with Reading Borough Council in respect of Diploma delivery, particularly around timetabling where some common practices would be required in the future. A new Berkshire Advisory Group had been formed and its membership included the 14-19 Years Advisor and co-ordinator from each of the six Berkshire unitary authorities together with partnership managers. The Advisory Group would be meeting for a second time in May 2009 and played an important role in allowing representatives from each of the authorities to co-ordinate Diploma provision which would have a bearing on course take up. For example, Berkshire College of Agriculture was the only facility in the area that could deliver the Environmental and Land based Studies Diploma and therefore all authorities would be utilising it as the provider of this qualification. In time it was likely that Diploma specialisms would occur and facilities which were successful in delivering a particular subject would become the main provider in the wider area for that Diploma. Many schools were choosing to offer the Diploma that reflected their specialism and the Specialist School and Academies Trust had encouraged some schools to provide the Diploma that they specialised in as a condition of being a specialist school or academy.
- 3.40 The Hair and Beauty Diploma would be offered in Reading from September 2009. TVU was pivotal in the provision of Diplomas in Reading and delivered many of those on offer there. There were protocols and agreements in place across schools and colleges in Reading who worked in partnership with the Council on an equal footing. The Berkshire Advisory Group was considering capacity issues and the ability to deliver Diplomas. Few students had expressed an interest in the Environmental and Land-Based Studies Diploma in Reading and the Construction and the Built Environment Diploma would not be viable in Berkshire, identifying viable provision across a wider area including Oxfordshire would be considered to resolve such issues on a broader basis. Any necessary changes would be identified and addressed once the Diploma system had an opportunity to establish itself. It was recognised that young people from different areas had varying needs, interests and employment opportunities.
- 3.41 As delivery of Diplomas in Reading had commenced in September 2008, the first qualification results would not be known until the end of the 2008/09 academic year, however, there was an element of continuous assessment. The qualification results for Post-16 students following a one year Diploma course would give an outcome indication.

3.42 One aspect of the Diploma qualification that Reading had not yet considered in depth was student progression once they have succeeded in gaining the qualification. South Central's Lifelong Learning Network had been developing links with higher education institutes to promote the Diploma qualification and ease students' transition to them. Reading LEA currently had arrangements in place with four or five higher education institutes to receive Diploma graduates. Although there had been some press speculation regarding universities not supporting Diplomas, virtually all institutes had now issued statements to the effect that they supported and recognised the Diploma.

3.43 Berkshire Connexions, a key partner in Diploma delivery, formed part of an IAG Sub Group which was focussing on introducing young people to Diplomas and then developing a path for students once they had completed the Diploma qualification.

3.44 Some of the issues that needed to be tackled when introducing Diplomas were:

- Quality assurance was pivotal to the delivery of Diplomas owing to their significant equivalence to seven GCSEs and the resulting delivery risks and responsibilities. In Reading it was necessary for providers to gain the approval of a panel where they were required to meet a criteria checklist before delivery of the course was permitted.
- The associated examination system was extremely complex to administer and co-ordinate as it consisted of elements of continuous assessment and some examinations linking in with other courses as it was an umbrella qualification.
- Workforce development, transport, IAG, marketing and timetabling all needed to be completed and in place for a Diploma to be viable.
- Employer engagement was a crucial success factor and although twenty employers in Reading had been lost due to the recession, the EBP had been key in assisting in this area and to date sufficient placements in Reading had been found to cater for all Diploma students.
- In Reading it was considered beneficial to offer Diploma students two sessions of five day periods of work experience at two different employers rather than a single ten day work experience placement with the same employer. Although the preferred option was more costly and complex to arrange, it would provide students with a better experience. In Reading the 14-19 Partnership bore the cost with some input from the Borough Council.
- Developing and delivering Diplomas promoted engagement with employers and although the EBP had good business links and co-ordinated student work experience, it was not experienced in the world of business. Reading sought to work directly with a wide range of business practitioners and this was recognised as one of the most challenging aspects of Diplomas. Ideally teachers and other staff would develop links with employers and be from, or spend some time in, industry themselves.
- It was important to distinguish between Diplomas and apprenticeships. The latter clearly focussed on occupational learning and was appropriate for young people who wished to be in employment and gain a qualification whilst working and Diplomas offered a wider and more academic approach without placing much emphasis on students being in the work place.

3.45 Diplomas had been promoted strongly in Reading last year and initial Post-16 take up was higher than expected. This has not caused a dip in A-Level take-up as it was likely that many of the students taking the Diploma would have

previously opted for a B-Tech qualification rather than an A-Level course. However, Pre-16 take up was very low. Engaging with parents and teachers had been an issue. One school had worked to achieve a significant increase in A*-C GCSE results and was therefore reluctant to move away from that success and saw Diplomas as a risk to the school and its pupils.

- 3.46 Diplomas were demanding qualifications, Level 2 being more challenging and complex than GCSEs, and some schools had misunderstood the type of pupil suitable to pursue a Diploma. Early indications were that some pupils currently following Diploma courses were struggling. Whilst the Diploma at Level 2 offered a very good experience for appropriate pupils (not NEETs), the foundation Diploma was not currently fit for purpose. Diplomas offered independent learning compared to GCSEs.
- 3.47 Promotion of Diplomas to employers was a key issue to ensure that the qualification was recognised in the workplace as an equal to GCSEs. It was intended that Diplomas met employers' demands for functional and independent workplace skills and would prepare students for employment making them more appealing to employers.
- 3.48 Much of the work on Diplomas at the time of the meeting looked at entry to the qualification rather than exit to employment. In addition to a national campaign advertising the Diploma qualification, there were Diploma champions who were working to promote the value of the Diploma.
- 3.49 There had been a host of issues arising from the training of teachers who would be providing the Diploma qualification and it was important that the further education sector and the schools sector were brought together to provide the best possible teaching to students taking the Diploma. There was ample training available to teachers, however, releasing teachers from schools to train them had proved to be difficult. Teacher training was not a funding issue and schools had been advised that they would receive development funding to cover the costs of teacher training. The main issue appeared to focus on losing lesson time. Reading LEA was seeking to identify a way to work with schools before the timetables were constructed to create time for teacher training outside of lesson time. Some teachers felt that they were already fully equipped to teach Diplomas and were therefore not in need of such training. Where a teacher had a bad experience on a training course it was often difficult to persuade them to follow other courses. The key was for teachers to recognise that the Diploma was different from what they have been teaching so far. Reading was developing a toolkit for teacher training.

Meeting with Janet Hughes, Berkshire Connexions Manager

- 3.50 By way of background, Janet Hughes, the Berkshire Connexions Manager, explained her role and the function of the Connexions service. In addition to being the specific manager for Bracknell Forest Connexions, which was based at Time Square and her main focus, Mrs Hughes was also the overarching Berkshire-wide Connexions Manager. She explained that the role of Connexions was to provide IAG to young people aged between 13 and 19 or up to 25 years in the case of people with LDD under a contract to the local authority which received funding to purchase the service. All of the six Berkshire unitary authorities contracted Connexions for this purpose and the funding was pooled offering value for money and tackling the economies of

scale and access barriers. Mrs Hughes felt that the associated travel to work and learn patterns and resources were targeted correctly.

- 3.51 Mrs Hughes worked with partners and Connexions' staff included a full time personal adviser with a specialist role to assist young people following treatment from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), who supported young people with mental health problems up to the age of 18 years before they transferred to adult mental health services. Joint working with CAMHS had improved. Connexions work was tailored to the local area and therefore differed between Berkshire unitary authorities. Mrs Hughes had adopted a matrix management approach operating in a flat structure and, although she produced the delivery plan, she was not responsible for its delivery. Other developments included smarter, faster and more appropriate referral methods and better funding, operational patterns, partnership working and training to deal with more challenging clients. Joint group behavioural work had also been introduced.
- 3.52 The Working Group received a presentation from Mrs Hughes, a copy of which is attached to this report at Appendix 4, in respect of NEET young people in the 16 to 18 years age range. The presentation advised on achievements against targets, performance of vulnerable groups against 2010 targets, the results of the Annual Activity Survey 2008 for Year 11 leavers, NEET comparisons from 2005 as at 1 November 2008, the Berkshire NEET position by local authority, NEET trend data, current NEET position, NEET ward data as at April 2009, latest NEET numbers as at 11 May 2009, individual circumstances of NEETs, available job vacancies, impact of the economic downturn, locally available support projects and factors required to reduce the NEET number.
- 3.53 Mrs Hughes advised that Connexions had met its NEET 2008/09 targets and achieved reduced average NEET numbers over the November 2008 to January 2009 period. Bracknell Forest Connexions was very successful at tracking and maintaining regular contact with local young people and consistently achieved between 0.4% and 1.1% against a target of 5% in terms of not knowing their whereabouts or education / employment status. Bracknell Forest's performance in this area was second only to the Isles of Scilly where there were significantly fewer numbers of young people. As at 11 May 2009 there were 163 young people NEET in the Borough.
- 3.54 National DCSF targets for vulnerable groups for 2010 required 60% of teenage mothers aged between 16 and 19 years to be in education, employment or training (EET). This was a consistently challenging target, due to the cost of childcare, mothers' lack of education and wish to be with their babies, and Connexions had achieved a 28% average across November, December and January. The national average was 26% of teenage mothers returning to education one to two years after giving birth. Those who had babies at 18 years tended to drop out of the education system altogether. Selection of the correct course was a significant success factor and many young mothers missed classes owing to child sickness which led to them falling behind and discontinuing courses. At the time of the meeting there were 38 mothers aged between 16 to 19 years in Bracknell Forest and they were encouraged to make use of the crèche at BWC or the Family Tree Nursery in Bracknell. Courses were required to be 15 hours or more to count as accredited EET learning. An education maintenance allowance and care to learn package were available to assist learners. Expectant mothers were placed into the 'Not applicable' category for NEET statistical purposes 11 weeks before the baby was due and

figures were collected six months after the birth. Mothers suffering from post natal depression or other conditions remained in the 'Not applicable' category until they had recovered. 26 of the 38 local young mothers had expressed a wish to remain at home with their babies and 9 sought to be in EET. Connexions had performed more successfully against its target of 70% of people with LDD in EET by achieving 79% across the same period. There were 24-25 Kennel Lane Special School pupils from Bracknell Forest with a statement of special educational need (SEN) and although they tended to stay in education until they were 19 years age, subsequent employment opportunities were limited. Connexions had exceeded the target of care leavers in to EET by 2% giving a total of 65%, the figure was calculated on the number residing in the Borough on their 19th birthday.

- 3.55 Connexions needed to know the destination of every young person leaving school in Bracknell Forest at Year 11 and the Annual Activity Survey 2008 had found that 90.7% were in learning at school sixth forms or colleges of Further Education. 4.8% of June 2008 school leavers, which equated to 54 young people, were NEET and this amount was significantly higher than the previous year when the figure had been 3.4%. Some of these, of 16 years of age, had made a positive decision to seek employment, however, opportunities were limited owing to the economic downturn. Destinations were compiled in November and forwarded to the DCSF. Apprenticeships were sought by some young people and although there was a new national apprenticeship scheme and database, Connexions advisers had found that very few were available and many had an eligibility requirement of five or more Grade C or above GCSE passes. 65 young people (5.8%) were described as 'not settled' in education and Connexions was required to monitor them as there was a danger that they may drop out of courses. A small percentage of school leavers moved away from the Borough but they were not included in Connexions' figures.
- 3.56 One presentation slide compared the number of leavers from the six secondary schools in Bracknell Forest who become NEET. The figure varied between different cohorts and Connexions could target schools with the greater incidence of NEET. April 2009 figures showed that NEET levels were rising across Berkshire as a whole and in Bracknell Forest particularly. During May the number of NEET in Bracknell Forest rose to 165 and growing local unemployment was thought to be a factor. It was possible that this might prompt young people to return to education in the absence of employment. NEET trend data rose in July and August as young people had left school but not commenced further education or employment and for this reason figures were collected between November and January when they were more stable. The small numbers involved exacerbated variances. The Government published NEET league tables which did not show Bracknell Forest in a good position, however, this was due to low targets for the Borough owing to the lack of local deprivation.
- 3.57 The NEET target of 4.8% for 2009/10 would be challenging and the NEET position as at April 2009 was 7.4%. NEET numbers in Bracknell Forest were extremely low compared to national figures. The Working Group received a breakdown of NEET for each ward of the Borough and noted that the majority lived in central Bracknell. Although there was much modern housing development in Binfield and Warfield, there was less social housing in those areas. The percentage of NEET in each Berkshire LEA was provided and in terms of actual numbers of NEET, these were as follows:

Unitary Authority	Number of NEET
Bracknell Forest	163 (as at 11 May 2009)
Reading	311
Slough	211
West Berkshire	215
Windsor & Maidenhead	154
Wokingham	153

- 3.58 Windsor & Maidenhead and Wokingham had lower percentages of NEET than Bracknell Forest as they had larger cohorts of young people.
- 3.59 In many instances the personal circumstances of young people led them to being NEET and the Working Group received a breakdown (without names) of the individual circumstances of the 69 NEET in Bracknell Forest affected by issues such as a LDD statement or family circumstances which prevented them from entering EET. Some young people faced more than one issue.
- 3.60 At the time of the meeting there were 60 employment vacancies available in Bracknell or the surrounding commutable area. Although this amount was surprisingly high given the economic downturn, many of the vacancies required A-Levels or other qualifications, a good school record or were short-term contracts and therefore offered limited employment opportunities for those NEET. Also, travel costs could be prohibitive in the case of low paid jobs. Figures reflecting the impact of the economic downturn were fed to central Government. Although some young people had successfully pursued an apprenticeship for a year, the training / employment had been terminated for reasons of the economy. Eleven young people had become unemployed in April 2008 compared with a figure of 20 in April 2009. The Working Group was provided with a breakdown of jobs lost by occupation from 1 January to 30 April 2009. The most significant job losses in Bracknell Forest had been in the areas of construction and catering / hospitality which had mainly affected males and retail / sales that had impacted largely on females. The construction industry was tending to utilise sub-contractors in place of offering apprenticeships. Some young people had found re-employment having the benefit of a working track record. Connexions staff pursued all employment opportunities in Bracknell town centre including a new home store which was opening. Although the net number of Europeans entering the UK for employment purposes continued to increase, this was at a slower rate than previously.
- 3.61 Locally available facilities to support young people included NEET Activity Days which sought to provide motivation and confidence. Some NEETs had been excluded from school and such activities offered inclusivity. There were various activities one day per week during the summer holidays. The NRG ('energy') project provided by the Youth Service at Coopers Hill was popular with young people and offered drop-in and service delivery opportunities for Connexions and drug and housing advisers etc. In order to enhance their employment prospects, many young people had pursued accredited Health and Safety courses that were offered at various centres throughout the Borough. E2E (Entry to Employment) programmes funded by the LSC were provided in Wokingham and participants benefited from reimbursement of their travelling costs and received an education maintenance allowance. Consideration would be given to offering an alternative provision in 2010 when

the LSC ceased to exist and a Bracknell-based provision was favoured. A successful regional bid by Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire had been made to the European Social Fund (ESF) to finance a ten week project offering preparation for work skills for 15-16 hours over three days per week with approximately 18 places. Strict criteria applied to the ESF project which sought to move NEETs on to a positive destination and it included a strand for targeting young people with LDD. An accredited programme would be delivered from June which consisted of a computer-based package to enhance basic literacy and numeracy skills and teach letter writing and preparation of CVs. There were various packages through which young people progressed at their own pace and received accreditation at the completion of each stage. Some partnership NEET early intervention funding was being utilised to finance this support.

- 3.62 More job vacancies, increased entry to employment provision, flexible college start dates and Level 1 vocational provision Post-16 were identified as future needs to assist young people who were NEET. The Working Group welcomed taster courses and although the Principal of BWC was prepared to consider offering them, he was not in favour of flexible start dates as he felt that they would hinder tailoring of courses and that young people would struggle to make up lost ground and complete course work. Transferable courses such as Diplomas with common elements were considered to be beneficial. With regard to young people in care and care leavers, the Working Group indicated that it was regrettable that the Council as corporate parent and an employer did not offer more work experience or apprenticeships.
- 3.63 The Working Group agreed that many inducements would be required to persuade teenage mothers NEET to return to learning and that associated Government targets were unrealistic.

Teenage Pregnancy Project (TPP)

- 3.64 Owing to the high number of teenage mothers NEET and the consistently challenging target requiring 60% to be in EET, the Working Group identified this as an area requiring further attention and therefore invited the TPP Manager to one of its meetings to provide further information.
- 3.65 Bracknell Forest was considered to be a green authority in the 'traffic light' rating for teenage pregnancy. The national target for the reduction of teenage pregnancy levels for local authorities was 45% by 2010 and Bracknell Forest had already reached a reduction level of 51%. It was thought that there may be a slight rise in teenage pregnancy levels nationally in the future due to the economic downturn, which could make motherhood an attractive alternative to unemployment and change the current Bracknell Forest level.
- 3.66 In Bracknell Forest the TPP assisted with delivery of sexual education in schools. Sexual health clinics were currently located in three of the six secondary schools in the Borough and these clinics worked in partnership with the local authority, the schools and their governors to provide sexual guidance and information to pupils. A sexual health clinic in Bracknell Town Centre catered for pupils attending the three schools without their own clinics.
- 3.67 Currently the service provided by the TPP focused on prevention and was offered to pupils in Years 10 and 11. However, the latest trend information indicated that younger children were sexually active and becoming pregnant.

In an attempt to combat this, the TPP was commencing road shows in schools which were aimed at pupils in Year 9. However, it was thought that awareness needed to be raised at an even younger age and that pupils should be educated on sexual health and pregnancy from Year 8. Although the percentage of these younger teenage pregnancies was not substantial in Bracknell Forest, one or two cases had a significant impact on overall percentages as teenage pregnancy numbers were fairly low. The number of school age pregnancies had increased to a level of five in the last year.

- 3.68 The TPP had introduced the 'Maybe Baby' scheme which allowed young people to gain some parenting experience and created opportunities for teenage parents to become armed with the information they needed to make an informed choice about being a young parent. Further development was needed to engage with young people and support teenage parents on both a national and local level.
- 3.69 Although there were isolated pockets with high levels of teenage pregnancy in the Borough, there were no particular wards with a high rate and no common trend found across the teenage parents in Bracknell Forest.
- 3.70 Two years previously a new document 'Supporting Teenage Mums' was released. From this document it was clear that more needed to be undertaken to assist teenage mums and encourage them to return to education or training of some type. The TPP had introduced a drop in service at The Oaks Children's Centre with a view to engaging teenage parents and building trust. This service had been in operation for two years and had proved to be very successful.
- 3.71 The TPP received some funding from the LSC as pregnant teenagers fell into the NEET category and this was used to provide formal training. As young parents tended not to participate in academically focussed training, the TPP had utilised the funding in respect of courses based at The Oaks. This year the TPP had received further funding from the LSC with which it had established a youth club. The EBP was increasing its work with young people at risk of becoming NEET using European funding from Local Employment Access Projects.
- 3.72 Housing and transport were two of the key issues that hindered engaging with young parents and often limited their ability to become more involved in the TPP's work and take part in training.

Education Business Partnership (EBP)

- 3.73 Bob Ellis, Managing Director of the EBP, advised that the Partnership had been established for over 20 years and was a registered charity that organised work experience for young people. It acted as the link between education and businesses and was funded from different sources including the LSC.
- 3.74 The 14-19 Partnership had the foresight to engage at an early stage with the EBP and employers in the development of Diplomas and the EBP was a member of the Partnership. It was felt that the 14-19 Partnership worked well and benefited from a strong lead from the local authority.
- 3.75 The EBP was currently developing Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with each of the East Berkshire unitary authorities. The three authorities sought to

work jointly across the Diplomas lines, however, by creating individual SLAs, each authority could identify work experience that most closely fitted the Diplomas being studied. Part of the SLA set out each authority's exact requirements, their approach to work experience provision and the related cost. The EBP then received the funding to implement the SLAs through the authority's education fund.

- 3.76 A booklet regarding work related learning had been produced by the EBP and sent to all head teachers in the area. This booklet was available electronically and copies were circulated to the Working Group.
- 3.77 The EBP currently had a database of active employees that numbered approximately 3,000. Most work experience placements were provided by small and medium sized businesses as many of the larger organisations had their own national placement schemes. It was important that the EBP engaged with possible work experience providers in the area and to promote this it had produced a booklet for employers explaining how they could become involved with work related learning. This booklet was available electronically and copies were circulated to the Working Group.
- 3.78 Employer engagement was currently challenging owing to the economic downturn. The number of work experience placements available had recently reduced owing to a number of small businesses ceasing to trade or experiencing difficulties.
- 3.79 The EBP currently received no funding for providing work related learning in primary schools, however, it was experiencing some success with Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Support Centres (STEM) funding.
- 3.80 The results of inspections and examinations showed that some primary schools were struggling with science and mathematics education provision. The EBP utilised STEM funding to work with employers in industry to create a science / mathematics etc project at a school with an ambassador from industry who would visit and work with the school and children on the project.
- 3.81 Transition from primary to secondary school represented a challenging leap for some pupils and working with children from a young age eased identification of potential NEETS and early intervention to help them become more engaged with a view to preventing them from becoming NEET.
- 3.82 The EBP strived to provide sufficient work experience placements for all pupils in the Borough requiring them and was currently working with the 14-19 Consortium Co-ordinator for Bracknell Forest to further this. Once the Diploma lines were more established the EBP wished to work with the leads for each of the lines from the various schools in order to map available and suitable employers to support the schools by providing work experience placements and opportunities. The EBP organised some out of area placements where appropriate but these were not always suitable for pupils as travel was involved.
- 3.83 The EBP enjoyed a good relationship with the head teachers of Bracknell Forest schools and the small size of the authority enhanced the development of good relationships between the different partners.

Bracknell Forest 14-19 Partnership

- 3.84 The Working Group received a copy of the minutes of the meeting of the 14-19 Partnership held on Thursday 19 March 2009 and attended the meeting of the Partnership on Thursday 14 May 2009 as observers. These evidenced strong partnership working. The agenda for the latter meeting included attendance of a representative of the DCSF to discuss how that Department's Partnership and Planning document related to the 14-19 reforms together with a presentation from the Connexions Manager who represented NEETs on the Partnership.

Discussion with Heather White, South East 14-19 Regional Adviser, DCSF

- 3.85 Mrs White explained her role as South East 14-19 Regional Adviser for the DCSF which involved working with directors and assistant directors of education in nineteen local authorities to support them in the co-ordination and implementation of the new statutory 14-19 years entitlement by 2013.
- 3.86 The 14-19 Regional Adviser had been in post since October 2007 and during her first year had concentrated on assisting the implementation of the first Diploma lines introduced to ensure smooth logistical delivery. As Bracknell Forest's Gateway application for delivery of Diplomas in 2010 had been successful, her involvement with the Borough would increase and Martin Surrell, the 14-19 co-ordinator, was her main Council contact. Mrs White had already gained familiarity with the Borough through working with officers to develop the 14-19 Years Education Plan and its implementation plan which set out the actions to be pursued each year to 2018 to support implementation of entitlement.
- 3.87 Collective thinking and strategy planning was required to deliver the entitlement including estimation of the number of young people choosing to pursue Diplomas and apprenticeships. As Bracknell Forest was a small unitary authority it would need to work jointly with other boroughs to face the challenges associated with offering the full breadth of entitlement. It would be necessary for organisational and logistical details to be agreed and in place by November 2009 to inform school and college options booklets for 2010. The Berkshire shared service model, which consisted of schools, colleges, Connexions, apprenticeships and specialist provisions for people with LD and offenders, was felt to be enhancing cross boundary working across the sub-regional group. The local Connexions was a shared Berkshire-wide service and the commissioning and provision of post-16 entitlement was also shared. The shared service stemmed from and aggregated the individual 14-19 plans produced by all of the Berkshire unitary authorities. Although offering the entitlement across or outside the sub-region made planning more complex, this would ease in time as experience of offering the entitlement developed and greater provision became available locally.
- 3.88 The Working Group advised Mrs White that transport provision and cost, safeguarding and school uniforms were issues that had been raised in various quarters. She responded to the effect that there were clear protocols and strategies available both locally and nationally which had been developed with the introduction of BTEC national qualifications and flexible learning which had taken pupils out of their host schools and these could be utilised to solve some of the operational issues associated with Diploma delivery. The Working Group was advised that it was possible for local authorities to share the cost of

transport with neighbouring authorities and that all local authorities involved in the transport of Diploma students between different seats of learning were responsible for their safeguarding. The wearing of a Diploma uniform, such as recognised Diploma T-shirt, by students when attending their second school / college could solve the uniform issue. Alternatively, Diploma students could wear clothing appropriate to their course in place of school uniforms e.g. suits for students pursuing business studies and overalls for those studying construction. Although the purchase of additional clothing could have a financial impact for parents, it was possible that contributions from the start up funding could go towards the cost. Those local authorities that had implemented Diplomas earlier would be able to supply protocols that they had developed to overcome these practical difficulties.

- 3.89 Mrs White advised that Bracknell Forest's Local Area Agreement (LAA) included target NI090 of 175 students pursuing Diploma courses in 2010/11. She felt that it would not be possible to achieve this target without collective working between schools and colleges and that head teachers and local authority and 14-19 Partnership leaders needed to drive the new entitlement process and speak with one united voice. 21% of learners in East Sussex would be following Diploma courses by 2009.
- 3.90 Reference was made to a newly issued guidance booklet entitled 'Delivering the 2013 Diploma Entitlement: guidance to local authorities and providers' which advised on best practice in this area.
- 3.91 When asked whether employers were receiving Diplomas favourably, Mrs White advised that this varied from area to area and that communication was crucial. As the LEA, the Council was in a position to express its support for the 14-19 entitlement and could include a clause in its procurement arrangements to the effect that, as an employer and 14-19 partner, it could offer work experience and apprenticeships. Functions carried out by the Council and its partner organisations and contacts, including hotels offering conference facilities, were relevant to all the Diploma lines to be offered locally with the possible exception of the Hair and Beauty Diploma. Council staff were in a position to mentor students with the assistance of the numerous guidance documents currently available. The 14-19 Consortium had a dedicated member to direct students towards training support and guidance and the 14-19 Regional Adviser was able to offer support to develop employer engagement with the assistance of the EBP. Small employers experienced difficulties with offering work experience and apprenticeships owing to their limited capacity. Mrs White felt that FL would support young people who were at risk of becoming NEET.
- 3.92 National messages concerning the new 14-19 entitlement would soon be strengthened and Diplomas would be publicised in autumn 2009 when all Year 7 pupils would receive a curriculum booklet.
- 3.93 The next phase of the entitlement planning process was the transfer of funding, planning and commissioning from the LSC to local authorities which would need to project their local population and gauge how many young people would suit each level and aspect of the programme to match provision with need. Councils could plan holistically and develop provision over time looking at implications for training, staffing etc. Although this was the responsibility of the 14-19 Partnership, a shared understanding by all involved would assist and head teachers and local authority officers were expected to be aware of their

respective roles at this stage. The accountability system was changing as schools needed to be accountable to the wider community and not just their own pupils. Collaborative management skills were required to implement the new entitlement and placing policies together to bridge collective and individual responsibilities was necessary and presented challenges. There was also a need to balance proven procedures with new opportunities. Specialist schools were intended to lead in the Diplomas lines that reflected their specialism although delivery could be from alternative premises. All parties needed to support the programme in a partnership approach and those who sought to block progress should be challenged. It was felt that the Council should be committed to the delivery of Diplomas to assist economic wellbeing and develop the future workforce. The membership of some 14-19 partnerships included councillors and it was considered beneficial for officers to be supported and encouraged by elected members.

- 3.94 When the LAA target of 175 young people studying Diplomas was divided by the amount of Diploma lines of learning there could be few students studying each Diploma course and therefore viability could become an issue, in which case barriers to viability such as transport difficulties would need to be addressed. Most of the range of funding streams available to support the new entitlement, including the Dedicated Schools Grant, was not ring fenced and the cost of one Key Stage 4 pupil studying a Diploma was £1k to the Council. The 14-19 Partnership was aware of which grant streams could be utilised for transport, the funding of which might not have significant financial implications. Reading Borough Council was using funding to offer Diploma students a bus concession card. £40k in a devolved grant was available towards the development of each Diploma line for use by August 2010. Medium and long term planning for the new entitlement lay side by side and longer term trajectory planning was also required. Development of FL, which involved extended learning featuring training in the work place or on a college course, had been slower than hoped. Mrs White advised that there was much assistance, support and enthusiasm which the Council could call on and that it needed to support ground level workers.
- 3.95 The 14-19 Regional Adviser felt that it was possible that Diplomas could engage NEETs as they had a good pupil retention rate and consideration would need to be given to future pathways for students completing a one year course. Although examination results in the Borough were generally improving, results of 19 year olds studying Level 2 and 3 courses were slower to improve. There was a need to consider the Post-16 offering in order to relate it to potential NEETs who would become disengaged in the absence of availability of suitable courses.
- 3.96 The appointment of a 14-19 champion was identified as a positive step to raise the profile of Diplomas. Mrs White advised that it was not overly challenging to successfully introduce the first Diploma lines, particularly with the assistance of a champion. Although a champion need not be a member of the Partnership, he / she could liaise with it. Students needed to be supported in pursuing the new entitlement and integrated youth services support would assist in this area. An IAG strategy for Diplomas needed to be agreed and consideration needed to be given to the dissemination of related information at option and career evenings. The Working Group was advised that the DCSF website included information to assist in this regard and its support pack contained useful information. The involvement of the Council's Communications and

Marketing Team would be beneficial to publicise the new entitlement and promotional information could be included on the Council's website.

Visits to Bracknell and Wokingham College (BWC) and Three Secondary Schools in Bracknell Forest

- 3.97 Information gained during visits to the College and three secondary schools in the Borough is set out below and responses to the Working Group's questions are attached at Appendix 5.

Visit to BWC

- 3.98 The Working Group met the Principal and Chief Executive and the Deputy Principal Curriculum of the College who expressed the view that Bracknell Forest was a small LEA and this facilitated joint working with its partners. Whilst this small size benefited communication, it resulted in limited resources being available.
- 3.99 BWC had received the toolkit from the DCSF concerning Diploma Partnerships and Planning. It was anticipated that the toolkit provided for colleges would be similar to the one provided for schools and it was expected that the main difference would be the terminology utilised.
- 3.100 It was possible that the implementation of the Diploma qualifications would have more implications for BWC than for the Borough's schools. This was because the College had previously provided vocational courses and the introduction of the Diploma would require BWC to transfer to a new framework rather than commence the provision of a new type of course which was the case for the schools.
- 3.101 Working in collaboration with the local schools was a new way of working for BWC as it was not part of the LEA and would need careful management due to the split of Diploma students' learning time between school and the College. This ratio would vary depending on the Diploma line being studied.
- 3.102 A Level 2 Diploma would require 1½ to 2 days of a student's time in the College with the remainder of the week spent in school. Timetabling for students utilising multiple learning venues in Bracknell Forest was considerably complex and complicated by the need to co-ordinate with partners in other local authorities who may be involved in the provision of a particular Diploma line. Consideration was being given to extension of the common timetable developed across Bracknell Forest for post-16 education to include 14-16 years education.
- 3.103 College staff recognised that, in addition to co-ordinating when and where Diploma students should study, it was also important to agree responsibility and supervision for them between classes and during breaks and this was an area in need of consideration. The College operated differently from schools and had no tutor rooms for pupils to wait in should they arrive early for their classes.

- 3.104 An issue that had arisen from Diploma provision in Reading and Wokingham was the rivalry that could occur between students wearing different school uniforms. It was considered important that students were able to break out of their school peer groups.



Visit to Ranelagh School

- 3.105 The Working Group received a briefing from Mrs Winrow, Head Teacher at Ranelagh School, on the current position of 14-19 years education provision at the School.
- 3.106 The Head Teacher referred to significant issues both nationally and locally associated with the new Diploma qualification which she expected to continue for years to come. Diploma provision at Ranelagh School would differ from that at the other secondary schools in the Borough as Ranelagh offered the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme along-side A-Levels.
- 3.107 The concept of the Diploma qualification emerged nationally amongst head teachers at a time when there was a clear focus on offering a vocational option as an alternative route to the traditional GCSE's and A-Levels. Consideration had been given to the qualification being offered on the same basis as the English IB. As the development of the Diploma continued it had become less vocationally orientated and the clarity of the original concept had blurred.
- 3.108 Mrs Winrow felt that offering the IB programme met the School's aspirations and the needs of its pupils and advised that staff had been working towards its provision for three years. There had been some uncertainty around the number of students that would enrol on the IB programme, particularly as the School had not been able to advertise that it would be offering the programme until accreditation was received. The School had now been accredited and would deliver the IB programme from September 2009 to 40 students alongside the existing A-Level provision. This would offer the opportunity to pilot a demanding course.

- 3.109 In addition to the IB programme and A-Levels, the School intended to offer some of the Diploma lines as they were felt to suit some of the pupils. The Diploma was thought to offer a good opportunity for collaborative working between the secondary schools in the Borough. Unlike the local secondary schools and BWC, Ranelagh School was not working to the common 6th Form timetable as only a small number of its pupils attended classes at the other institutions. Although it would not be practical to alter the entire timetable to accommodate such small numbers, the School had left two days per week clear for the teaching of the Diploma lines it would be offering.
- 3.110 The School had not experienced any demand for Diploma provision at 14-16 and would only be offering Diploma lines for Post-16. Transporting 14 year old pupils to different locations throughout the week to enable participation in all aspects of the Diploma was not considered practical and often parents did not want their children to leave school grounds at such an early age. Ranelagh would not be providing any Level 1 learning (pre-16) and would focus mainly on Level 3 learning (post-16) with an element of Level 2 (pre-16).
- 3.111 The School was currently offering an Applied Business course so it was practical to switch from this to the Business, Administration and Finance Diploma which would be in place for September 2010. Delivery of the Creative and Media Diploma would also be of interest to the School but not at Level 1 as there was no demand for such.
- 3.112 The provision of Diplomas by other local institutions would influence the lines that Ranelagh chose to offer in the interests of avoiding duplication and achieving viability, particularly as there was some concern that the number of Ranelagh pupils wishing to enrol on a Diploma course could be very low.
- 3.113 Transport remained a fundamental issue as at the time of the meeting there had been no clarity regarding free transport provision to assist pupils to attend classes at other locations.



[Visit to Sandhurst School](#)

- 3.114 The Working Group met Mr Andrew Fletcher, Headteacher of Sandhurst School, to discuss Diploma provision and receive answers to the Working

Group's questions. Mr Fletcher provided the Working Group with copies of a newspaper article entitled 'Lessons in Synchronicity' which the Guardian had published in November 2006 giving his views on Diplomas at that time. The article was negative in places and highlighted issues with Diploma provision such as logistical difficulties associated with synchronising lesson timetabling, transport and supervision between schools / colleges; responsibility for misbehaviour, poor performance and accidents on other campuses; and ownership of examination results. Mr Fletcher felt that the common timetable required to deliver Diplomas to a small number of pupils could constrain the timetable for the majority of pupils whose lessons would need to be squeezed into the three days when Diplomas were not being taught. He highlighted the protocol issues to be addressed such as which school uniform should be worn by visiting pupils, a matter that was under active discussion with the 14-19 Partnership group. Receiving schools would not be familiar with pupils or their family backgrounds and this could also present difficulties.

- 3.115 As Sandhurst school was located at the apex of three counties, schools in Hampshire and Surrey were closer to it than those in Bracknell Forest and there had been no attempt to facilitate closer collaboration with schools in those counties whose Diplomas delivery plans were unknown. Mr Fletcher felt that the government had made assumptions around Diplomas which did not reflect reality and did not always appreciate the local difficulties and impracticalities associated with their delivery. The Government had placed immense pressure on LAs to pursue the Diploma 'Gateway' application process and joint working and this had in turn led to associated pressures being placed on schools. Diplomas may restrict existing 14-19 provision and there had been some concern that insufficient pathways were offered at Key Stage 4 to meet the needs of all learners. The government had made several changes to the focus of Diplomas away from the original emphasis on vocational learning towards a more academic emphasis. This may not meet the needs of all learners. Vocational and academic courses running alongside each other with some common and overarching aspects was welcomed as the present system required pupils to follow either a vocational or an academic route. The take up rates of Diplomas offered elsewhere, including Reading, in 2008 had been low and the results to indicate the success levels were not available at the time of the meeting. It was unknown whether BTEC, Oxford, Cambridge and Royal Society of Arts and other national vocational qualifications, which met the needs of many learners, would remain after Diplomas were established. Qualifications would no longer be market-led. Reference was made to the Tomlinson Report which suggested 14-19 reforms including the introduction of the Diploma and to the White Paper 14-19 Education and Skills which was prepared in response to the Report. The Working Group received copies of the Report. Although the Report had originally suggested that Diplomas be introduced to replace A-Levels, this view had not been supported as it was considered to be too far reaching and therefore elements of the Report had been accepted and added to the existing 14-19 qualification system.



Visit to Garth Hill College

- 3.116 The Working Group met Mr Keith Grainger, Principal, and Mr Andrew Stevens, Assistant Principal and Curriculum & Timetable Manager, of Garth Hill College to discuss Diploma provision and receive answers to the Working Group's questions. Members then met a group of four Year 9 Pupils of the College to ascertain their views and knowledge in respect of Diplomas.
- 3.117 The main points to emerge from the discussion with Mr Grainger and Mr Stevens were the rigidity of the Diploma course structures, wearing of uniform by Diploma students and the absence of tutor group rooms for use by Diploma students when away from their host school.
- 3.118 The rigidity of the Diploma course structures had not previously been brought to the Working Group's attention. Once a pupil had commenced a Level 1 course he / she was restricted to this level until completion and was denied the opportunity to progress to Level 2 despite demonstrating a greater aptitude than originally anticipated. This hindered students who showed promise and improvement from being able to progress and achieve higher than originally foreseen. This rigidity went against the College's aim to push young people to reach their potential and maximise their outcomes and placed pressure on ensuring that pupils were commencing Diplomas at the relevant level. This differed from the current courses available, where there was the scope for a successful pupil to progress throughout the course and achieve a higher grade than previously thought.
- 3.119 The Principal and Assistant Principal did not envisage uniforms or lack of a tutor group room to accommodate Diploma students becoming an issue at Garth Hill. The only concern they highlighted was that pupils attending from elsewhere must respect and adhere to the dress code.



New Garth Hill College building

Questions to Employers

- 3.120 In addition to meeting the EBP, the Working Group decided that it would be beneficial to approach local employers directly to ascertain their views on Diplomas and assess their interest in becoming involved in the development and delivery of Diplomas. Accordingly, the Working Group compiled a list of six questions which was distributed to 100 local companies. Questionnaires were circulated to 100 employers and the response rate of 6 is disappointingly low. The responses from employers were generally positive towards Diplomas and offering work experience with the exception of one employer which did not

support the Diploma, was not interested in becoming involved with and supporting the development of Diplomas and did not envisage the qualification enhancing its organisation or making school / college leavers more employable. The full findings of the exercise are attached at Appendix 6.

4. Conclusions

From its investigations, the Working Group has drawn the following conclusions:

- 4.1 Learners are entitled to access 17 Post-16 and 14 Pre-16 Diplomas by 2013 and local education authorities and 14-19 Partnerships are under a duty to commission the qualifications within a timescale which will not interrupt pupils' education. The age of compulsory participation in education and training will rise to 17 years in 2013 and 18 years in 2015, which will restrict the choice for young people to seek employment without training.
- 4.2 Diplomas have been developed in partnership with employers and lie between the GCSE / A-Level academic route and apprenticeships giving students a third pathway to employment or university. The Level 1 Diploma is equivalent to five grade D-G GCSEs, Level 2 is comparable to seven grade A*-C GCSEs and Level 3 is equal to three and a half A-Levels.
- 4.3 Bracknell Forest's Phase 1 'Gateway' application in 2008 for delivery of four Diplomas from September 2010 and a further four Diplomas from September 2011 has been successful. A Phase 2 'Gateway' application has been made in November 2009 to add a Creative and Media Diploma to the list of those commencing in September 2011.
- 4.4 The delivery of eight lines of learning in the above timeframe represents an intensive and challenging task dependent upon successful partnership working between the Council, the Bracknell Forest 14-19 Partnership and Consortium, providers and employers. Cross boundary and sub-regional working with other local authorities will be an essential requirement.
- 4.5 Having the new Post-16 Funding Transfer arrangements in place by April 2010 is a demanding task requiring a steep learning curve and raising capacity issues for the Council.
- 4.6 As the development of the Diploma continued it has become less vocationally orientated and the government has made several changes to the focus of Diplomas away from the original vocational leaning towards a more academic emphasis to more closely meet the needs of all learners. Diplomas therefore may not provide the intended employment skills or suit those who are seeking vocational rather than academic courses. A resulting issue may be that Diploma graduates will leave school or college unprepared for the work place and possibly face unemployment.
- 4.7 Diplomas have also been found to be complex courses pitched at the more academically able pupils who would have progressed to GCSEs and A-Levels otherwise and do not fill the potential gap, through which NEETs can fall, between underachievers and achievers. Action needs to be taken to fill this gap and provide courses which are accessible to the less academically able to give them an education provision that is more engaging and suitable for their learning needs and the opportunity to meet their potential and experience success. Without this, there is a worrying potential for high drop-out rates, with the Diplomas not being fit for purpose.
- 4.8 The Working Group remains concerned in relation to NEETs and does not feel that Diplomas provide sufficient incentive for those who are unmotivated and at

risk of opting out of formal education, or who already have done so. Members have not yet seen anything which is likely to motivate this group or raise its self-esteem and confidence. Whilst FL or the Level 1 tier will be accessible to these young people, it remains in the developmental stage and is currently being trialled whilst the emphasis has been on delivery of the Level 2 and 3 Diplomas which can be more readily implemented by colleges and schools by modification of existing BTEC national courses. There are concerns that Level 1 is not pitched towards meeting the needs of NEETs and the less academically able and there is a need for more Level 1 vocational provision Post-16.

- 4.9 NEET teenage mothers require many inducements to persuade them to return to learning and it is felt that associated government targets are unrealistic. Awareness raising and education in respect of sexual health and pregnancy needs to be commenced at a younger age from Year 8.
- 4.10 Unlike existing educational courses, Diplomas have rigid course structures which can hinder pupils' progress to higher levels of the qualification, go against the aims of colleges / schools to encourage young people to reach their full potential and place pressure on teachers to ensure that pupils commence Diplomas at the relevant level.
- 4.11 There are a number of logistical issues associated with Diploma delivery which have been raised by many, including Head Teachers, as concerns. These include transport arrangements and costs, safeguarding, monitoring and addressing under performance, discipline, school uniforms and securing sufficient work placements, particularly in the current economic climate which is affecting the labour market and Diploma choice.
- 4.12 The Working Group has particular concerns around safeguarding as Diploma students will be travelling between different learning venues and may not have a tutor group room to use at their second school / college.
- 4.13 It is problematical to determine the number of students who will pursue Diploma courses and nationally the up take has been disappointing. This is possibly due to the lack of history behind the qualification which has no track record to show that it is beneficial and can lead to enhanced employment opportunities for young people.
- 4.14 There are concerns that parents might be sceptical of Diplomas and view them as experimental. Parents need to be made more aware of Diplomas to inform decisions concerning their child's educational pathways and employment prospects.
- 4.15 There is an on-going need for Borough-wide circulation of coherent and comprehensive information explaining educational choices for 14-19 year olds. Communication between Bracknell and Wokingham College and schools in the Borough is necessary to ensure that consistent messages are being sent.
- 4.16 A 14-19 champion would be beneficial to promote and raise the profile of the new 14-19 entitlement. The Executive Member for Education is identified as a suitable champion for this purpose.
- 4.17 The Working Group welcomes the proposal to retain the technology buildings at Wick Hill as a Diploma teaching facility.

- 4.18 It can be at least ten years before the outcomes of education reforms are apparent owing to the implementation and acceptance of new qualifications and therefore it will be some time before the success of the new 14-19 entitlement can be gauged.
- 4.19 During the current economic climate, more young people are choosing to remain in formal education longer rather than risk becoming unemployed. This is likely to increase demand for Diploma courses beyond that envisaged originally and the level of national funding available for distribution at a local level needs to be sufficient to meet this increased demand.

5. Recommendations

It is recommended to the Executive Member for Education that:-

- 5.1 Copies of this report be sent to the Secretary of State and Shadow Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families to inform them of the Working Group's concerns that the Diploma is unlikely to meet the needs of all children and young people;
- 5.2 More promotion and delivery of clearer consistent messages concerning the new 14-19 entitlement be pursued with particular emphasis on accessible information for young people to enable them to make an informed choice;
- 5.3 Bracknell Forest secondary schools and Bracknell and Wokingham College be encouraged to deliver Level 1 Diplomas and tailor them as much as possible towards meeting the needs of NEETs, those at risk of becoming NEET and the less academically able;
- 5.4 Bracknell and Wokingham College and secondary schools in the Borough be encouraged to offer taster courses in respect of Diplomas and offer as much flexibility within them as possible to enable highly attaining students to progress to a higher level Diploma without the need to first complete their current level;
- 5.5 Best practice by local authorities, such as Reading Borough Council, which has successfully commenced the offering of the 14-19 entitlement, be forwarded to schools and Bracknell and Wokingham College to assist them overcome the logistical difficulties associated with Diploma delivery i.e. transport arrangements, monitoring and addressing under performance, discipline, school uniforms and securing sufficient work placements;
- 5.6 A robust process to ensure the safeguarding of children and young people studying Diplomas be put in place;
- 5.7 A 14-19 Champion, preferably the Executive Member for Education, be appointed to promote and ensure the delivery of the new 14-19 entitlement;
- 5.8 The government be made aware that the level of national funding available for distribution at a local level needs to be sufficient to meet the likely higher demand for Diploma courses during the current economic climate (see paragraph 4.18).

It is recommended to the Children's Services and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel that:-

- 5.9 The implementation of Diplomas be monitored and the Panel receive annual updates in respect of the number of pupils studying Diplomas in each school / college, a breakdown of the Diploma subjects being studied, the number of courses completed, the success rate and future education or career path of Diploma graduates.

6. Glossary

ASL	Additional and Specialist Learning
BWC	Bracknell and Wokingham College
CAP	Common Application Process
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CEO	Chief Executive's Office
CYPL	Children, Young People and Learning
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
EBP	Education Business Partnership
EET	In education, employment or training
ESF	European Social Fund
FL	Foundation Learning
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
IAG	Information, Advice and Guidance
IB	International Baccalaureate
IT	Information Technology
KS3	Key Stage 3
LDD	Learning disabilities or difficulties
LEA	Local Education Authority
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
NEET	Not in education, employment or training
NHS	National Health Service
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
SEN	Special Educational Need
SLA	Service Level Agreement
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Support Centres
TPP	Teenage Pregnancy Project
TVU	Thames Valley University



Science students at Garth Hill College



Bracknell and Wokingham College media students

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