

Questions / Information Requests to Peter Shotts, 14-19 Co-ordinator, Reading Borough Council

- **Can you please give an interpretation of what the 'Gateway' application results mean and offer an opinion as to how the Bracknell Forest results compare to those of the South East as a whole. What are your general impressions of progress in Bracknell?**

Having been successful to differing extents in three Gateways, it has become clear that 'success' has actually been more difficult to achieve year on year. Thus, I note that only a minority of submissions in the South East were given a '1' rating – with the Reading submission, not being one of these.

I am not sure that comparisons with other authorities are necessarily a helpful way of looking at the development of Diplomas. The critical issue is ensuring that one has a clear plan leading to delivery of the entitlement curriculum in 2013.

The other issue to consider is the work that is involved in implementing Diplomas – and whether it is desirable to be too successful. Had Bracknell achieved a grade 1 or 2 in all 8 of its submissions there would have been a huge amount to achieve in a very small amount of time. The amount of work and range of issues that Reading has had to address this year in trying to develop 5 different Diplomas has been colossal. Some of these issues would be the same whether we were running one Diploma or five – e.g. timetabling. Others such as monitoring the quality of provision are literally five times as great. Also being in the vanguard has often meant that we have not been able to benefit from the experiences of others and have had to make and learn from our own mistakes along the way.

I note that all the Diplomas that Bracknell Forest will be delivering in 2010 will already have had one year of life. This is a tremendous advantage. If you are in the vanguard then specifications from exam boards may not be ready in time for development work.

The critical issue is how Bracknell Forest will move forward toward the delivery of the entitlement curriculum. As I see it, Bracknell Forest will be offering 3 Diplomas in 2010, 8 in 2011 leaving a further 5 pre 16 and 8 post 16 Diplomas to be rolled out over the course in order to meet the entitlement. In Reading we deliberately put forward only one Diploma for 2010 – Sport and Active Leisure. This was because we were keen to have time to consolidate our current situation. Also, critically, we have a plan for the roll out of all future Diplomas. Our aim is to have met the entitlement curriculum by 2012 and, thereby, to have a year's grace should there be issues along the way.

- **Why do you think that Reading was 100% successful in its first application to offer Diplomas?**

Reading has very strong links with its local Further Education college. The fact that this college was also a Higher Education Institution was also significant. It utilised

the strengths of each of its specialist schools in delivery. It put forward a clear plan for workforce development. It demonstrated very strong links with its education business partnership and showed how this would lead to strong employer engagement. It demonstrated good IAG systems mentioning, in particular, the work of the Connexions services in promoting equal opportunities.

- **What has been required in Reading to reach the current stage of development in terms of 14-19 planning generally and Diploma planning in particular, including the mechanisms / structures which are in place to facilitate this?**

It has been a huge task. Our 14-19 partnership leads on all strategic (and financial) matters. We are very keen to engage with partners across authority boundaries, and therefore have membership from neighbouring authorities on our partnership.

Underneath the partnership sits a Curriculum Implementation Group that manages and has decision making authority on all operational issues. We also have a Diploma Coordination Group that works specifically on issues relating to Diplomas. Marketing and IAG are of huge importance and so we have a group focusing on this specific issue. We did at one stage have a group focusing on employer engagement. The group was ineffective and was disbanded.

- **Please provide background information in respect of the Diplomas delivered in Reading including the subjects offered, rates of take up and the dates the ‘Gateway’ applications were made and the Diplomas were implemented.**

We started delivery of the first five Diplomas in September 2008, following our success in Gateway 1. Post 16 there were significant numbers. Indeed, Reading has the largest number of students on post 16 Diplomas in the country. Pre 16, the numbers were very small indeed.

Diploma line	Level 1		Level 2		Level 3	
	Pre 16	Post 16	Pre 16	Post 16	Pre 16	Post 16
Construction	0	0	0	0	0	24
Creative and Media	8	42	11	13	0	23
Engineering	0	10	16	15	0	30
Society, Health & Dev	0	0	7	24	0	22
ICT	0	24	7	24	0	14

We took the decision that in this first year we would fund pre 16 Diplomas by course rather than by pupil so that all Diplomas that could run would run.

For Gateway 2, we put forward three Diplomas: Business, Admin and Finance; Hair and Beauty and Hospitality. We were deemed Category 1 for the first two of these, and so will be delivering these from September 2009 and Category 3 for Hospitality, and so will be delivering this from September 2010.

Current numbers for 2009 Diplomas are once again small. However this time we are funding Diplomas on a per pupil basis. Therefore only viable Diplomas will run. It is looking like we will be able to run 5 Diploma lines pre 16 and 7 Diploma lines post 16. Pre 16 the majority of courses are running at level 2 only. Only Hair and Beauty and Society, Health and Development are being considered at level 1.

From 2010 we will be offering Sport and Active Leisure as well making a total of 10 Diplomas.

- **Please advise of the successful aspects of the Diploma application / implementation process and any lessons learnt from it and resulting changes you would make if pursuing the process again.**

There has been a huge job of work to do with so many different facets:

Quality assurance
Examinations and Assessment
Employer Engagement
Workforce development
Transport
Information, Advice and Guidance
Marketing
Timetabling

The critical task is to get people to recognise the magnitude of the task and to prioritise the work. This has been a struggle when take up has been small and the impact on schools limited. In essence there is a chicken and egg problem here!

It is also really important to get adequate resource in place for the task. The appointment of a partnership manager is crucial. It is also critical to ensure that schools provide staff with sufficient release time to get the job done. Making best use of Diploma Development funding can be difficult. We are in the process of trying out our third method of allocation!

- **Please describe your work with the Education Business Partnership and your partners in delivering Diplomas.**

This is critical. We rely heavily on our EBP both for our work experience placements and also for engaging employers to work with teams developing Diplomas. Where possible we get specific people from the EBP to be aligned with particular Diplomas and to sit on Diploma Development Teams. We have allocated funding from our pooled Dedicated Schools Budget to play for additional work required of the EBP. This year we have allocated £25K for 14-16 Diplomas. This recognises the added costs of having two one week work experience placements and also the work needed in engaging employers.

The LA has a very close working relationship with the EBP because of a wide range of other activities (e.g. engagement programmes, NEET reduction activity etc.) and so the work on Diplomas is just on small part of our work with them.

- **Does Reading have 14-19 provision links with other local authorities?**

Reading works very closely with Wokingham. We have a joint 14-19 post which has proved invaluable. Our EBP also works across Reading and Wokingham. Our 14-19 partnership includes members from Wokingham, West Berkshire and Oxfordshire. We do not call ourselves the Reading partnership but the Reading and Central Berkshire partnership.

- **Please explain Reading's 14-19 resources in terms of available funding and staffing numbers and structures.**

Up until last year each successful gateway application carried with it £30K of funding to be used for development purposes. In our first year of operation with £150K it was possible to use the funding creatively putting money into marketing, employer engagement as well as providing timetabled time for staff to work together on developing the Diploma. In our second year we were still able to use funds to support further marketing activity. Employer engagement activity has now been built into our funding formula.

For Gateway 4 more funds have been made available per Diploma line and we have not as yet discussed the use of this additional funding.

The funds used to pay for pre 16 Diploma provision are the Diploma Formula Grant, school contributions and Dedicated Schools Grant for practical learning. Reading schools agreed to pool Dedicated Schools Grant for practical learning. This is used to fund not just Diploma provision but other aspects such as employer engagement, key worker support (to provide the pastoral care to students accessing provision away from their home school), Diploma uniforms and time for staff taking on the role of Diploma line assessors.

- **Was it necessary to train teachers to deliver Diplomas and were there any funding implications?**

Staff delivering Diplomas have undergone a range of training opportunities which have included discussions with examining boards, free Diploma training opportunities run by a range of national organisations, locally arranged employer engagement events. Generally it has not been necessary to pay for any of the provision.

- **Please explain the logistics of how and where the Diplomas are delivered and the number of secondary schools and colleges in Reading. Are there any associated transport or timetable co-ordination issues?**

There are 5 comprehensive schools, including one academy and two Grammar schools. Thames Valley University is the local FE provider. However this year Reading has linked up strongly with Wokingham. For certain lines (IT and Creative and Media) the two authorities have been working separately. For all the other

lines the offer is for all students across the two authorities. We operate a common two day timetable. Tuesday and Thursday for Year 10 and Wednesday and Friday for Year 11. This ensures that all students can access Diploma provision. Students travel out by public transport. Because provision is for the whole day, students only need to worry about travelling at the start and end of the day. Transport is free for students. Reading buses pays for half the costs and Reading Borough Council the other half of the costs.

- **How do young people receive advice concerning course availability and suitability and career progression paths?**

In September students attended the national roadshow on Diplomas held at the University of Reading. There were then a series of events – either based around option evenings or separate events where students could find out more about particular Diplomas. Connexions obtained information on students' interests at the September roadshow and then kept in contact with individuals, providing them with information on the events that were taking place. All students opting for Diplomas take literacy and numeracy tests to ensure that they are able to work at the appropriate level. One of the biggest problems we faced in our first year was having students of too low ability attempting to do the Diploma. Students opting for Diplomas will participate in an induction course which is intended to give students a true flavour of what Diplomas are like before they commit to starting in September.

- **Is there a facility for students to apply for Diplomas on-line?**

Not yet, but we need to develop a common application process.

- **Have Diplomas been marketed in Reading?**

Yes. We currently have an advertising campaign running on Reading buses. Every student in Year 9 and Year 11 received a letter from the Director of Children Services explaining all about Diplomas.

- **Has Reading identified young people not in education, employment or training as a group that may benefit from pursuing Diplomas and taken any steps to promote them to this group?**

It is difficult to say whether any students progressed into Diplomas rather than becoming NEET. The Diploma is a very demanding qualification and our NEET reduction strategy has focused on other forms of provision for this cohort – in particular Entry to Employment.

- **Have any students completed Diploma courses to date and, if so, what are the outcomes in terms of student success, pass rates and drop out rates?**

For our pre-16 learners, Diplomas are two year courses and so we will not have any results until 2010. The same applies for Advanced Diplomas post 16. Foundation and Higher Diplomas post 16 are currently running as one year courses and we will have our first results for these courses in August of this year.

- **Which Diplomas have been the most successful and is there any evidence of variation in the quality of delivery?**

It would be fair to say that all Diplomas have had their moments of glory and challenge throughout the year. We have developed a toolkit for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and this will be used in June when we carry out a summative review of provision across the partnership.

- **Has feedback from students pursuing Diplomas been positive?**

Generally feedback has been very positive with students preferring Diploma delivery to the rest of the curriculum. In January we had a number of Diploma students speaking to our Education and Children Services scrutiny panel, and they were effusive in their praise of Diplomas. They were particularly keen to stress that Diplomas provide students with a wide range of options. By being such a broad based qualification, they provide students with background information and skills to a wide range of future occupational areas. Something that would not have been possible, had they pursued the BTEC route, for example.

- **Is there any evidence to date that Diplomas are assisting young people to access employment?**

This is too early to say because students are not yet seeking employment.