

**Responses to Questions to BWC and Local Secondary Schools and Pupils**

**Questions to BWC**

The following information was provided in response to the Working Group's questions:

**1. Do the college / schools offer Diplomas yet or intend to?**

Diplomas were not currently being provided in Bracknell Forest. The first set of Diplomas would be delivered from September 2010.

**2. Are the college / schools becoming involved in the development of Diplomas?**

Both the College and the schools were involved in the development of Diplomas. The 14-19 Years Partnership had played a successful part of this.

In larger education authorities geographical areas were often divided into different consortiums that co-ordinated the Diploma provision in their particular area. These consortiums were all members of the overarching 14-19 Partnership where they worked jointly. The 14-19 Partnership and the 14-19 Consortium in Bracknell Forest were coterminous as it was a small authority. Although there had been some initial reluctance, this had now been overcome and all the local mainstream secondary schools and BWC were involved in the Bracknell Forest 14-19 Partnership.

Some schools were more advanced in their preparations for Diploma delivery than others which needed to invest further in the provision of facilities for the Diplomas they would be offering.

Although BWC had dedicated facilities for Diploma provision and more accommodation than many of the secondary schools, it would experience difficulties in catering for all of the pupils that wished to attend the College.

In addition to the Church Road building in the centre of Bracknell, the College operated from the Eastern Road Centre adjacent to the A329 London Road which was approximately 20 minutes walk from Bracknell bus and train stations.

Factors such as the impending requirement for young people to remain in education until the age of 17 years could lead to a significant increase in pupils wishing to pursue vocational courses.

**3. Where Diplomas are currently delivered, what subjects are available and what are the associated take up rates?**

The take up rates for Bracknell Forest were not yet available as Diploma provision did not commence until September 2010, however, this offered the advantageous opportunity to discover the take up rates of other providers and explore their actions to encourage take up.

Although the Diploma had not been as popular nationally as initially expected, this was likely to be the result of it being a new and unestablished qualification.

The offering of Diplomas against available courses required careful consideration as it was a complicated course; students needed to complete all the elements of the course, which presented a significant workload, to achieve a successful outcome. One of the issues that BWC had with the Diploma qualification was placing it in the correct student ability range. The courses were not accessible for some lower level students that the College would like to work with. They were also not designed for the most academically minded students who were likely to follow the traditional academic route of GCSEs followed by A-Levels.

It was important that students, teachers and parents realised that the Diploma was not an easy option and was not necessarily suitable for someone who was experiencing difficulties with GCSE courses.

As GCSEs and A-Levels would continue alongside the Diploma qualification, it was likely that their appeal would be the subject area that they covered, in addition to being less traditionally academic. The Level 3 Diploma was the equivalent of three A-Levels and would allow students entry into university.

As the current Diploma provision was currently in the pilot stage it was possible that the nature of the Diploma lines could alter. When first introduced they were originally named 'Vocational Diplomas'. This name had subsequently changed to 'Specialised Diplomas' with the qualification now being known as Diplomas.

Since the initiative was first introduced, the Diploma had become less vocational and did not offer students the opportunity to learn practical skills. A Diploma line was not the correct choice of qualification for a student wishing to become a carpenter or an electrician. BWC subscribed to teaching their students life skills but there was a difference between teaching a trade course and the Diploma courses.

Schools would experience difficulties in accommodating Diplomas in the event that they assumed a greater vocational focus as they would not have the facilities.

It was possible that the Diploma may alter and develop in the future and without some change it was likely that many students would not be able to achieve the qualification.

#### **4. What partnerships have been established to deliver Diplomas and are partnerships with employers likely to be difficult to achieve?**

The College had found that difficulties could be experienced in securing employer involvement in Diploma provision. Although the Education Business Partnership (EBP) undertook much good work in engaging employers, more work was needed in this area to provide placements for all the students.

Engagement with employers and the range and number of placements that could be provided for a Diploma line could vary according to the location and its variety of employers. The amount of work experience required for a Diploma course had been moderated and was no longer subject specific easing the provision of work experience.

For example, Bracknell Forest did not offer sufficient mechanics based work experience placements to accommodate all the students pursuing a course of that nature.

It was important that all the students on a particular course undertook their work experience simultaneously to avoid the disruption of students in and out of classes throughout the term to pursue placements at various times and students missing classes.

The shortage of work experience placements for all the students was not due to lack of employer co-operation but to their other priorities, particularly in the current economic climate which had resulted in fewer placements being available than usual.

It was necessary for BWC to be proactive in seeking work experience. It had been found that most companies would take on a pupil for work experience if they were able to, however, doing so diverted employers' time away from pursuing their own occupation.

BWC had produced a sheet for each Diploma line to be provided which was aimed at employers and explained what they could do to assist Diploma delivery. This consisted of offering work experience placement or sending experts to the College to talk to the students. The Working Group received copies of the sheets.

Whilst the EBP provided work experience for schools in Bracknell Forest, BWC currently had one full time and two part time work experience co-ordinators of its own whose workload had increased as a result of the introduction of the Diploma. The College also had contacts in different sectors who assisted to identify work experience placements.

The employer element was a challenging part of the Diploma provision but was significant as it was part of what set the course apart from others.

**5. Do you believe that all necessary partners are actively involved in planning for Diplomas and other 14-19 developments and could anything be done further to engage partners? Please outline any suggestions you have for engaging partners further.**

It was felt that partnership working in Bracknell Forest was as good as it could be and that the 14-19 Partnership worked very well.

All the schools and BWC sought to offer a viable joint provision which was cost effective. Their individual institutions would of course take priority so it was important to find a way forward which suited all.

All the members of the 14-19 Partnership had operated professionally and benefited from good support from the LEA for which the Diploma offering was also a new experience.

**6. Has the Borough's 14-19 Education Plan influenced or impacted on the College's / Schools' education plans?**

Yes, the College had been closely involved in producing part of the Plan. The Borough's 14-19 Education Plan was also reflected in BWC's strategic objectives. The College worked closely with the LEA to pursue the associated initiatives.

**7. Are additional training, equipment and resources required to deliver Diplomas?**

Yes, this was a significant issue. The facilities for delivering Diplomas were not currently sufficient to meet the expected take up and BWC was looking at expanding and identifying a way of delivering courses that needed specialised facilities in the available budget and time frame.

Staff development was one of the less challenging aspects of Diploma delivery as there were national and regional training events available for staff to attend.

Accommodation was proving to be the most significant issue associated with offering the new 14-19 entitlement. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) had no more funding available and the College was currently faced with using short term leases to provide more space for pupils to learn.

In the summer of 2010 BWC wished to close its Eastern Road facility as it was costly. The College was currently looking at various facilities in the Wokingham and Bracknell area to refurbish using capital funding from both of the authorities.

**8. How do Diplomas fit in with A- and AS-Levels and will they fill a Curriculum Gap?**

Much of this had already been answered in previous questions.

A- and AS-Levels would remain unchanged for the foreseeable future. It was unlikely that the Government would abolish them, at least not until Diplomas were well established and the majority choice of students, which could take at least ten to fifteen years.

Some young people would benefit from pursuing a Diploma course in place of GCSEs and Diplomas were considered to fill a curriculum gap.

**9. Is it necessary to market Diplomas or have students and parents expressed interest in them?**

Acceptance of Diplomas would require effective marketing, particularly as parents were not in favour of their children pursuing unestablished courses at the experimental stage.

Perceptions of Diplomas would improve in the event that a significant number of students progressed to higher education (HE) after completing the qualification. HE 'buy in' and university acceptance of Diplomas on an equal footing with the traditional GCSE and A-level route was necessary to ensure their success.

The Diploma needed to be slowly embedded and this was a long term process.

**10. Are Diplomas seen as a means of assisting and engaging young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)?**

The needs of NEETs were not addressed by the Diploma. BWC did not currently have the space or the resources to provide flexible start dates for the Diploma lines which could make them more accommodating for NEETs.

The College offered vocational course taster sessions to enable prospective students to ascertain whether a course would suit them. BWC's role was to offer appropriate quality programmes for students and in many cases college was not the method of assisting NEETs into education, employment or training.

- 11. Will there be sufficient opportunities to provide work experience when Diplomas have been introduced and which local companies are utilised to provide work experience?**

These points were covered in the answer to question 4.

- 12. Do you think there are going to be logistical difficulties with providing work experience for pupils and do you feel that the Education Business Partnership is sufficiently engaged in Diploma provision?**

The answer to this question was provided in the response to question 4.

- 13. What is the course success rate of students on half-day release from school to pursue Diplomas at the College?**

As Diplomas would not be provided in Bracknell Forest until 2010 no information concerning success rates was yet available. Elsewhere there had been a high success rate of 96% for 14-16 provision which was to the credit of the staff involved. This success rate was particularly good given that Diplomas represented a completely new way of providing education with associated new issues of care and partnership working with other schools.

As the College had not taught under 16's before, 14-16 years education provision would be a new experience for it. After completing a 14-16 course these pupils could continue their education at either a school or a college depending on the path they chose.

- 14. Is support from the local authority and the college / other schools forthcoming to assist with overcoming logistical difficulties in delivering Diplomas? Is free school transport available to assist students travelling between different learning venues to pursue Diploma Courses?**

Although support appeared to be forthcoming it was yet to be tested. It would be necessary for the LEA to provide transport in co-ordination with Wokingham Council which currently successfully offered free bus passes to students.

One of the most significant logistical issues associated with Diploma delivery was working with other LA's. Co-ordinating timetabling between the College and schools was challenging. Partnership working on LA, county and sub-regional levels was necessary and, after much negotiation, there was now a workable structure in place across Berkshire. Borough and county boundaries remained an issue.

- 15. Do you think there has been enough support from the Council in the introduction and implementation of the Diploma qualifications and have the College / schools been sufficiently engaged and adopted the right approach?**

The LA had limited resources and was not in a position to offer more support than it had done. Officers have been good in facilitating development, particularly the 14-19 Advisor who had been excellent.

Although partners were primarily protecting their own interests and there were layers of competition between schools, for the most part all parties worked well together. The operational phase of Diploma provision would present the greatest test.

- 16. What do you see as the most significant issues in implementing the Diplomas, for example providing sufficient work experience, provision of facilities and equipment, co-ordinating timetables etc, and to what degree are you confident that these issues can be resolved?**

Having sufficient high quality, dedicated and well equipped accommodation was the most significant issue for BWC followed by work experience and transport.

The Disability Discrimination Act placed BWC under a legal obligation to provide access to provision for the physically disabled. It was more challenging to provide facilities for people with learning disabilities. The College currently had a number of students with learning disabilities who were assessed on an individual basis to ascertain course suitability.

Disabled students would require support to study Diplomas lines and individual decisions on whether they could pursue the course of their choice would need to be made. The College did its best for each student and believed in recruiting with integrity.

### **Questions to Ranelagh School**

The following information was provided in response to the Working Group's questions:

- 1. Do the college / schools offer the Diploma yet or intend to?**

Ranelagh School did not yet offer any lines of Diploma learning, however, provision would be in place for September 2009 along with the commencement of the IB Programme.

- 2. Are the college / schools becoming involved in the development of Diplomas?**

This answer to this question had been provided in the briefing above.

- 3. Where Diplomas are currently delivered, what subjects are available and what are the associated take up rates?**

No Diplomas are currently delivered.

**4. What partnerships have been established to deliver Diplomas and are partnerships with employers likely to be difficult to achieve?**

Ranelagh School had its own data base of businesses that were willing to offer work experience to pupils and many of its placements come from parents of students and their contacts.

Availability of placements for work experience could become an issue when the number of placements needed increased to accommodate Diploma students. Availability was an increasing concern in the current economic climate.

The Education Business Partnership (EBP) played a role in identifying placements for Diploma students and was a member of the 14-19 Partnership. The EBP, a single supplier, provided placements for the whole of East Berkshire and monitoring would be required to see how this situation evolved and impacted on the current work experience placements required for year 11 which needed careful management.

**5. Do you believe that all necessary partners are actively involved in planning for Diplomas and other 14-19 developments and could anything be done further to engage partners? Please outline any suggestions you have for engaging partners further.**

This question had been covered in earlier discussion.

**6. Has the Borough's 14-19 Education Plan influenced or impacted on the College's/ Schools' education plans?**

This answer to this question had been previously provided.

**7. Are additional training, equipment and resources required to deliver Diplomas?**

Additional resources were required. Training was taking place and benefiting from a wide range of available courses at a national level. Local training options in respect of the specific Diploma lines to be provided were being sought.

**8. How do Diplomas fit in with A- and AS-Levels and will they fill a Curriculum Gap?**

As some pupils were not suited to A-Levels, National Vocational Qualifications or the IB programme but wished to remain in education and gain qualifications in preparation for employment, a successful alternative course that followed a nationally recognised framework was needed to cater for such young people.

**9. Is it necessary to market Diplomas or have students and parents expressed interest in them?**

Despite Government awareness campaigns to promote Diplomas, parents continued to lack understanding of this new qualification. The Government needed to provide further information and awareness to inform parents of all the educational options available for their children.

**10. Are Diplomas seen as a means of assisting and engaging young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)?**

Yes, but the NEETs need to be identified earlier than 14-16 years old.

**11. Will there be sufficient opportunities to provide work experience when Diplomas have been introduced and which local companies are utilised to provide work experience?**

The answer to this question had been provided in earlier discussion.

**12. Do you think there are going to be logistical difficulties with providing work experience for pupils and do you feel that the Education Business Partnership is sufficiently engaged in Diploma provision?**

As previously discussed, difficulties would be encountered in securing sufficient work experience places.

**13. What is the course success rate of students on half-day release from school to pursue Diplomas at the College?**

This is not known as the Diploma provision has not yet commenced.

**14. Is support from the local authority and the college / other schools forthcoming to assist with overcoming logistical difficulties in delivering Diplomas? Is free schools transport available to assist students travelling between different learning venues to pursue Diploma Courses?**

Cost free school transport was not currently available and funding for this should not be at the expense of other provision.

**15. Do you think there has been enough support from the Council in the introduction and implementation of the Diploma qualifications and have the College / schools been sufficiently engaged and adopted the right approach?**

This response to this question had been previously provided.

**16. What do you see as the most significant issues in implementing the Diplomas, for example providing sufficient work experience, provision of facilities and equipment, co-ordinating timetables etc, and to what degree are you confident that these issues can be resolved?**

Although co-ordination between schools in the Borough, particularly the town schools, was occurring, this was needed to cater for a small number of pupils only and risked an adverse effect on provision for other students. The new lines of learning needed to fit in with the present operation of the school.

The Diploma qualifications were partly appropriate for Ranelagh and enhanced collaborative working with the other schools and partners in the Borough.



The Working Group recognised the importance of continuing to monitor 14-19 years education provision once Diplomas had been introduced to address any arising issues.

## **Questions to Sandhurst School**

### **1. Do the college / schools offer the Diploma yet or intend to?**

Sandhurst School had recently been advised that it could pursue delivery of Level 2 Hospitality and IT Diplomas at Key Stage 4 from September 2010 and that other Diplomas would be available across the local authority. However, no indication of funding to purchase equipment and train teachers had been confirmed. Employer engagement would be commenced the following year. The Working Group was advised that a significant amount of Sandhurst School's pupils were from outside its designated area and as they had chosen to study there was it possible that studying parts of a Diploma course at another educational institution may not appeal to them owing to the travel time and difficulties which would be incurred. There was also an issue of being separated from friends. Sandhurst residents related more closely to the Blackwater Valley area than Bracknell Forest and the prospect of receiving some education at a school in Bracknell could feel alien to some pupils. Mr Fletcher anticipated that Edgbarrow School would have the same perspective whilst the three secondary schools in and around Bracknell town centre would find joint working to deliver Diplomas more straightforward. It was possible that schools with the most academic pupils nationally would be reluctant to offer Diplomas as they were successfully delivering the traditional academic qualifications and Diplomas may compromise their ability to continue doing so. The delivery of Diplomas would incur much time, effort and resources to accommodate a small number of pupils and would impact on the School's timetable. Arrangements concerning the funding of transport between schools / Bracknell and Wokingham College had not been agreed to date and it was anticipated that paying for travel to a second seat of education may be a disincentive for some parents. As there was traditionally some competition between schools it was recognised that this could conflict with collaborative working and trust building. In order to be in a position to deliver Diplomas in September 2010, the School would need to be able to explain to parents and students by February 2010 how the courses would operate.

### **2. Are the college / schools becoming involved in the development of Diplomas?**

The Assistant Headteacher had attended Diploma development meetings at Garth Hill College in relation to both IT and hospitality and other staff had been actively involved in Diploma development meetings.

### **3. Where Diplomas are currently delivered, what subjects are available and what are the associated take up rates?**

Diplomas are not currently delivered.

### **4. What partnerships have been established to deliver Diplomas and are partnerships with employers likely to be difficult to achieve?**

Sandhurst School had developed a partnership with Garth Hill College and Bracknell and Wokingham College to deliver the two Diploma lines it was involved with. There would

be wider partnership working to provide the full range of lines. Developing partnerships with employers was proving to be more challenging and many had been reluctant to commit to specifics during the creation of the bid. However, the School had enjoyed positive relationships with employers linked to the current GCSE catering course which it hoped would continue to benefit the Hospitality Diploma. Engaging with IT companies was expected to prove more difficult. The School had one full time employee to co-ordinate work place experience and learning who would endeavour to form links with employers next year. Although the School ran an IT course, it did not provide work related learning and background as to how IT systems operated in the workplace which employers could deliver.

- 5. Do you believe that all necessary partners are actively involved in planning for diplomas and other 14-19 developments and could anything be done further to engage partners? Please outline any suggestions you have for engaging partners further.**

Although all partners were now becoming more actively involved in Diploma planning, some grey areas around the detail of Diploma delivery remained which needed to be resolved to enable all Diploma development groups to work towards a consistent goal.

- 6. Has the Borough's 14-19 Education Plan influenced or impacted on the College's / Schools' education plans?**

The Borough's 14-19 Education Plan has influenced Sandhurst School's plans in so far as the School has actively engaged in the Diploma partnership and is set to become a delivery institution. This has included the requirement for the School to re-construct its timetable to achieve a combined co-terminous timetable to accommodate a low number of pupils studying part of their courses elsewhere.

- 7. Are additional training, equipment and resources requires to deliver Diplomas?**

Additional ICT resources would be required for delivering Diplomas together with additional resourcing to fund equipment utilised for Diplomas only. Staff training would also be required and lead staff would need time to meet with partner organisations to undertake the detailed planning necessary to successfully implement Diplomas. It would be beneficial for lead staff involved in each line of learning to visit institutions where Diplomas were being successfully used as part of the training process.

- 8. How do Diplomas fit in with A- and AS-Levels and will they fill a Curriculum Gap?**

Level 3 Diplomas were equivalent to A-Levels and will fill a curriculum gap to the extent that they allow a greater degree of specialism into more vocational subjects such as construction and engineering which were not currently available. At Levels 2 and 3 Diplomas appeared to retain a fairly high academic content which could mean that less academic students were not well served by them. However, Diploma delivery necessitated student travel to other places of learning, possibly outside the Borough and the funding method in the latter situation was unknown. In the event that courses were oversubscribed, the School would need to decide whether it should give preference to its own pupils over those from other schools. Sandhurst had been offering a BTEC Level 2 Hair and Beauty course and it was not yet clear whether this would need to be replaced by a Diploma and the School did not welcome such an occurrence.

**9. Is it necessary to market Diplomas or have students and parents expressed interest in them?**

A small number of parents made enquiries in respect of Diplomas during the 2008/09 option selection process. However, the provision of clear and consistent information as to the nature of Diplomas and type of pupils they would suit was required. The correct balance between 'marketing' Diplomas as an attractive new qualification, providing accurate and clear information to correctly inform parent and student choices and not raising false expectations was crucial. Details of the Hospitality and IT Diplomas lines were not yet available and would be included in the option booklet relating to the 2010 offer. Diplomas in other subjects could be available at other schools and all subjects were to be on offer locally by the deadline of 2013. An element of flexible pathways to other courses was currently offered through BTEC National courses and a mini bus was utilised to transport students studying such courses. Transport funding was currently provided by the local authority retrospectively at the year end. However, as the local authority was dependant on the government for the receipt of this funding, it could not be guaranteed.

**10. Are Diplomas seen as a means of assisting and engaging young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)?**

It was not felt that Diplomas would entirely meet the needs of this group of young people. However, it was arguable that should a Diploma course at Key Stage 4 keep a pupil engaged in school it could lead to continuing education or entering employment at the end of school. The economic downturn was leading to a rise in the number NEET and the extended statutory school leaving age was expected to impact on numbers. In increase in classrooms, teachers and funding would be required to accommodate the additional year of learning. A member expressed regret that this new age limit would prevent school leavers from entertaining employment at the age of 16 years and then returning to education after when they had a clearer focus on a chosen career path and were aware of the educational route to follow it.

**11. Will there be sufficient opportunities to provide work experience when Diplomas have been introduced and which local companies are utilised to provide work experience?**

Given the significant challenges faced by the School in 2008/09 in securing sufficient work experience placements for Year 10 pupils who were required to undertake one week of work experience, it was anticipated that the ten days of work experience required by Diploma courses would present greater difficulties, particularly where there was a need for a large number of placements linked to a particular sector such as catering. There were limited options for work experience in Sandhurst and as work experience placements for the School's pupils were confined to Berkshire, employers in neighbouring Camberley could not be utilised. It was felt that the local EBP would need to liaise with other EBPs in neighbouring areas to meet the need.

- 12. Do you think there are going to be logistical difficulties with providing work experience for pupils and do you feel that the Education Business Partnership is sufficiently engaged in Diploma provision?**

Although the EBP was becoming more involved in working with Diploma development groups, employer engagement remained a vital and challenging aspect of successfully delivering Diplomas.

- 13. What is the course success rate of students on half-day release from school to pursue Diplomas at the College?**

This is currently unknown as the School will not be involved in Diploma delivery until 2010.

- 14. Is support from the local authority and the college/ other schools forthcoming to assist with overcoming logistical difficulties in delivering Diplomas? Is free schools transport available to assist students travelling between different learning venues to pursue Diploma Courses?**

The School had been obliged to arrange transport to Bracknell and Wokingham College in past years as part of the Increased Flexibility Project. The local authority had contributed towards the funding of this and had provided a free mini bus for some of the journeys during the past year. The School hoped that this would continue into next year and become standard transport for students studying Diplomas. Central co-ordination of this transport would significantly reduce the associated workload for the School.

- 15. Do you think there has been enough support from the council in the introduction and implementation of the Diploma qualifications and have the College/ schools been sufficiently engaged and adopted the right approach?**

Different schools had engaged to varying degrees and the next twelve months would be when support and clear leadership from the local authority would be essential.

- 16. What do you see as the most significant issues in implementing the Diplomas, for example providing sufficient work experience, provision of facilities and equipment, coordinating timetables etc, and to what degree are you confident that these issues can be resolved?**

The success of Diplomas would be dependent on the operational details. As Diploma students could need to attend another school for two days per week and would need to feel safe and secure to do so, clear and consistent protocols would be essential to support them. Work experience and employer engagement remained significantly challenging. Timetable co-ordination also presented issues and the recent change from the original two full day model to two mornings had caused frustrations owing to the amount of time invested in trialling the two day model for next year's timetable. Clarity over the delivery of the full breadth of the Diploma was now essential and although much consideration had been given to principal learning and some to the additional and specialist learning (ASL) aspects, unresolved issues surrounding ASL, functional skill and the project elements remained. Every educational institution with students involved in Diplomas needed to have a consistent approach to these broader elements of Diplomas as they could not be taught differently in different institutions or across different

lines of learning. Transport would also become an issue as students would potentially be travelling between four and five locations simultaneously.

### **Discussion with Garth Hill College**

The following information was received in discussion at Garth Hill College:

1. The hospitality course was to be offered by both Bracknell and Wokingham College and Garth Hill College, with an agreement that the former offered Level 1 at Key Stage 4, and the latter provided Level 2 for Key Stage 5.
2. The viability of IT courses depended on how many pupils wish to take them up. There may not be enough students to make Level 1 provision viable. This would need to be balanced with the importance of promoting the Diplomas; it may be possible to run the course regardless of low numbers for the first year.
3. The rigidity of the Diploma course structures, which prevented pupils progressing to the next Level before completing the current Level despite demonstrating that they were capable of higher attainment than originally anticipated, was highlighted. This could hinder pupils' progress, went against the College's aim to encourage young people to reach their full 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.
4. The College was currently awaiting information on how the functional skills qualifications were changing and it was unknown where the benchmark would be.
5. Options evenings, presentations and taster mornings at Bracknell and Wokingham College would give an early indication of Diploma uptake numbers.
6. In terms of partnerships, the College was working through the Education Business Partnership to secure individual employers for its potential lead on the Creative and Media Diploma, and it also received support from Waitrose.
7. The College had not engaged directly with Bracknell Forest Council as an employer partnership.
8. Garth Hill was working well with the Council on the provision of Diplomas and both Keith Grainger and Andrew Stevens praised the support and work of Martin Surrell, Senior Secondary Advisor, and Sarah Henderson, 14-19 Co-ordinator.
9. College staff had visited Slough to explore how Diplomas worked there, and had received visitors from Abingdon for the same purpose. It had been highly useful to hear from others and to learn from errors made.
10. The links between schools were better within the town than the remainder of the Borough.
11. The provision of Diplomas would produce additional challenges in planning timetables and managing staff to areas of demand.

12. Although there was sufficient funding available to cover the cost of accommodation and equipment associated with Diploma delivery, this was not the case where teachers were concerned.
13. Potentially, the College could require new teachers for September 2010, and would therefore ideally need to advertise in January. However, whether they would be needed would not be known until after January.
14. Neither Keith Grainger or Andrew Stevens had concerns around the issues of uniform or lack of a tutor group room to accommodate Diploma students. The only concern they highlighted was that pupils attending from elsewhere must respect and adhere to the dress code. They did not feel that pupils attending the College from elsewhere would have any difficulty in fitting in with College students or be unfavourably targeted by them.
15. The Principal and Assistant Principal raised the financial issue of sending pupils elsewhere for courses but not taking any external students themselves. This would be viable over a short period, but if it continued for many years it would be difficult. The suggestion was therefore made that this situation should be monitored.
16. It was important that all schools provided quality information in respect of courses available throughout the Borough so that pupils were adequately informed and could consider all options, including taking courses at other schools. It was only fair that all schools / colleges make pupils aware of the option for them to complete courses elsewhere.
17. Both Mr Grainger and Mr Stevens agreed that Diplomas added to and enriched the courses currently available but did not necessarily provide for NEETs. Whilst Diplomas may attract a few potential NEETs, the courses were not sufficiently specific to individual needs to engage and appeal to all. There was disappointment that Diplomas would make a transformational difference for a very small number of young people.
18. It was suggested that foundation learning, not Diplomas, could meet the needs of NEETs, who required a greater connection between their course and their future life and work.
19. The College was conscious of the dangers of over-marketing Diplomas and detracting from the current courses which suited the majority of students. It was important to protect GCSEs and A-Levels. Diplomas were an expansion, not a replacement of current educational provision.

### **Questions to Garth Hill College Pupils**

The Working Group then met with a group of four Year 9 pupils and received the following information in response to its questions.

#### **1. What do you know about Diplomas?**

All pupils in the group were aware of Diplomas.

**2. Are you interested in taking a Diploma?**

Only two pupils of the group would consider taking a Diploma.

**3. How do you feel about going to another school for 1 or 2 days a week to study?**

The pupils were not concerned about attending another school to pursue a course, but felt that others attending Garth Hill College may experience initial difficulties settling in.

**4. How do you feel about travelling to another school / college?**

The pupils did not feel that travelling between different educational providers would be a problem.