



Promoting the Diploma to Key Stakeholders

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Scope

- The Innovation Unit was commissioned by DCSF to develop ways of promoting Diplomas to engage key stakeholders: ***Parents, Young People, Schools, Further & Higher Education and Employers***
- We developed a localised model in two contrasting areas urban and rural to engage key players and work with them on finding effective approaches to promoting Diplomas
- We focussed on the introduction of Construction and the Built Environment Diploma in Sheffield and the Environment and Land-Based Studies Diploma in Sussex
- We captured and then analysed the key learning from the field trials. The engagement needs to be local & ongoing.

Methodology

- ❑ Research on the two localities was undertaken to provide a crucial understanding of the context
- ❑ We kept up to date with the press coverage in mainstream, specialist, and teenage press and media
- ❑ To build relationships in Sheffield we linked with the LA 14-19 Partnership manager. In Sussex we worked with the School Vocational Course Manager at Plumpton College. These were the local “champions”-a key role-working closely with school curriculum deputies & other gatekeepers in colleges and HEIs and employers.
- ❑ In the schools we agreed the process focussing initially on parents as the key influencers, selecting the target group to be invited to work with us on developing the model.

Methodology

- ❑ The employer contacts agreed to provide introductions to employer meetings-seeing them on their own ground
- ❑ Employers have internal & external stakeholders to satisfy-especially if they are constructing local schools!
- ❑ We interviewed careers staff and attended the annual Options evenings
- ❑ We interviewed Admissions Department and Faculty staff in HEIs and carried out “mystery” student phone calls
- ❑ In response to requests from parents, we drew all the key stakeholders together in one partnership event.
- ❑ We interviewed each stakeholder group to capture their views on what worked well.

Parents

- Working with parents to find the answers on how to promote Diplomas to parents produced rapid effective results on all sides.
- The ideal mix included engaged parents, parents who are support staff, parent governors, “challenging” parents, with a mixed background and age range of children. Parents enjoyed working with other parents
- We were told the current approach to communicating with parents on careers and options in many schools can lead to “a great fog” & “booklets you get for reading after an event when it’s too late to ask the questions”
- An initial session on general communication on choices at 14 served as a creative ice breaker before launching into the great unknown of Diplomas in a second session

Parents

- ❑ School presentations were often seen as too full of jargon with words like “curriculum” and “level 2”. Parents were forthcoming with ideas and questions.
- ❑ The parents struggled to compare Diplomas with GCSEs and A levels and wanted reassurance that Diplomas would be equally valued by HEIs and employers
- ❑ They were concerned that their children would be cutting off their options at 14 by choosing a Diploma
- ❑ They questioned if teachers were qualified to teach the specialist parts of Diplomas and who would train them
- ❑ Above all the parents wanted to focus on progression : they wanted reassurance that employers and Universities were backing the qualification “I’d like to hear what they have to say, face to face. That’s not too much to ask is it?”

Parents

Parents wanted :

- to know what jobs Diplomas would lead to and the type of jobs that would be available at the different levels of qualifications
- face to face discussions with teachers and employers rather than thick glossy generic leaflets but with summary information given before the event
- information earlier and more gradually, and in easily accessible bite sized chunks; in an engaging format such as interactive websites, DVDs with a flavour of the career option and live demonstrations.
- to learn about Diplomas in an open setting with their children so they could discuss the benefits and downsides with them, and give sound and informed advice

Parents

- The concept of different schools hosting different Diplomas raised questions over competition and fairness of choice. In Sheffield they were less concerned about travel across the city to a central training location than going to other schools
- In Sussex parents' specific concerns included: the logistics of timetabling; travel arrangements and cost; cost of equipment and protective clothing
- By asking the parents how Options evenings should work and acting on responses, there was an increase of 12% attendance in one school and 20% in another. Schools recognised the importance of parental involvement
- The parents were really pleased to be involved in the process and appreciated being asked their viewpoints.

Young People

- Young people we spoke to in Year 8 were receiving messages about Diplomas mainly from their school and the careers service
- A variety of speakers were used by different schools including Careers Teachers, external Careers advisors, or the Year Tutor. However results were mixed, as the quality of delivery was variable and inconsistent. Year Tutors, for example, change each year and briefing was again variable
- Providing information to young people in small groups was a common approach. Where young people got clear impartial advice about what was available in school and options off site, they often wanted to access them

Young People

- Though some of them had a picture of what career they wanted to go in to, they had little idea of which route to follow and were changing ideas on a weekly basis. They saw little link between studies at school and work beyond
- Though few role models for Diplomas exist yet young people have met students attending off site courses.
- Everyone agreed on more localised information and guidance with an understanding of local career routes
- Glossy leaflets and a billboard campaign (in Sheffield) raised awareness but blanket coverage, especially in the initial phase, was seen as counter-productive as it raised expectations amongst young people and their parents which the city was not in a position to fulfill

Young People

- ❑ In preparing questions for the stakeholder events, most of them of them found it easy to work in groups with their parents and other adults. Parents & young people said they did not want to ask questions in public as they were afraid of appearing stupid but actually did so on the day

Young people wanted to know :

- ❑ what were the entry requirement for different levels of Diploma
- ❑ the balance between coursework, practical and exams
- ❑ whether a student can work at their own pace or whether they need to complete the Diploma within a set timescale
- ❑ how the work placement element would be structured
- ❑ Job opportunities and how much they would earn

Schools

- The initial challenge in introducing the Diplomas to school leaders was seen by many LAs as a credibility battle. Juggling other priorities, diplomas were at the outset low on the agenda in many schools & not seen as part of a bigger picture
- By holding regular meetings with curriculum deputies, the knowledge of diplomas increased and working in smaller partnerships made collaboration more manageable
- Heads discussing Diploma delivery recognise the potential impact and challenge of collaboration and movement of students across areas. Explorations of the implication of “common delivery” can lead to creative ideas on reconfiguring & improving the school experience
- Parental engagement gives great impetus to partnership

Employers

- Most employers were broadly keen to engage further but needed better understanding of Diplomas and the local delivery before they could fully explore their commitment
- Without sufficient understanding some employers reverted to outdated attitudes and criticisms of education
- Local seminars in employer forums were the preferred medium for engagement-particularly sector specific
- They wanted localised information produced by a local partnership rather than general national material with a local person to link Diplomas to the industry
- They wanted to see a map of the equivalence across the 14-19 framework but in a jargon free language
- Their questions covered concerns over the training given to teachers and their understanding of the industry and whether brighter students would be encouraged to apply

Employers

- When given the description of the specialist areas to be covered and examples of functional skills they were gripped
- With more understanding came more creativity
- Employers saw the opportunity in Diplomas of:
 - **Shaping a course to make it more relevant to industry**
 - **Reversing a limited “trades” view of construction**
 - **A route for young professionals**
 - **An ability to carry out succession planning**
 - **Working closely with schools & developing longer relationships with young people**
 - **Promoting a better gender balance in the industry**
 - **Promoting better recruitment and retention**
 - **Developing a robust profile with the local community**

Higher Education

- Admissions and recruitment staff were well informed about Diplomas and received updates from their networks including UCAS and the Academic Registrars' Council. Sheffield Hallam publicly backed the C&BE Diploma
- The head of Department's knowledge of the Diploma, Consortium arrangements and local employers was limited and information coming from professional organizations such as RICS would give endorsement
- The positive response from SHU was not a recruitment drive. Their corporate plan promoted their role in regional regeneration
- Education departments in both locations played a major role in training and updating local teachers and were actively partnering local schools. A useful route into schools.

Higher Education

- Aim Higher and the outreach programme were perceived as playing a key local role in attracting local students
- Sussex held an annual plenary with Heads of 6th Form and career advisers, so they could keep abreast of progress as the programme rolls out
- HEIs reinforced that Diplomas needed to have universal acceptance as a qualification of equal standing
- HE welcomed playing an active part in developing and delivering Diplomas particularly to give themselves reassurance that academic integrity was built in
- HE engagement was fairly straightforward but that small investment reaped wonders. They have a crucial part to play and they need to be given an active role in the partnership

The Role of The Champion

- ❑ The key to local stakeholder engagement!
- ❑ Presentation skills are essential to driving the message forward and engaging with all stakeholders at events recognising particular local challenges and tensions
- ❑ Managing expectations and getting the right message across at the right time across a local area as options exercises in schools are not always synchronised
- ❑ Local credibility with key stakeholders particularly schools and employers and HE is key
- ❑ The champion-particularly at LA level can play a key role in scaling up from lessons learned across a number of schools and Gateways
- ❑ Recognising that diplomas are part of a larger reform agenda

Stakeholder Partnership Event

- ❑ No one person holds all the questions and all the answers, so bringing all the key players parents, young people, schools, employers, careers, further and higher education in the same room allows them to all listen to and learn from each other's questions and answers
- ❑ 117 people attended:4 schools,8 construction employers, 3 HE, Careers, FE College, parents and young people mainly year 8 from different social class & ethnicity
- ❑ Most people visited SHU for the first time and parents recognised that their children might be able to attend a University with an international reputation
- ❑ Parents and young people had direct contact with employers and could hear of the range of opportunities open to young people progressing from Diplomas.

Stakeholder Partnership Event

- ❑ Parents gained awareness and understanding that their children might progress to professional or managerial roles through the Diploma route
- ❑ Answers from different employers exemplified the different types of company, employment options and understanding of what they could offer
- ❑ Even though many of the key stakeholders had not met each other prior to the event, this was not evident to parents and young people. The role of various partners in planning and delivering the Diploma was explicit
- ❑ Employers' interrelationship with HE was evident from discussions and helpful when they compared students' level of readiness for work post HE

Stakeholder Partnership Event

- Transferring the preprepared questions onto cards made the session run smoothly without the usual inhibitions and allowed some preparation by all participants
- Bringing parents and young people from different schools together made everyone realise that this is a coordinated cross authority provision
- The timing of the event was chosen between Year 9 options evening and Academic Review
- The turnout from each of the stakeholders and the overall numbers were rapidly reported round the areas
- All stakeholders were very positive about the event and employers and HE were prepared to do it again

Stakeholder Partnership Event

" I'm clear now. Thank you. This really changed my mind and I'll certainly let my son go ahead and sign up for Diplomas" (father)

"It was a great evening and certainly an important event for us bringing so many local parents and young people into the University , many for the first time and I was really impressed by the number of people who came. I learned a lot more about the Diplomas and recognised some of the opportunities we could give to young people on the course." (HE)

"That we managed to get Hallam engaged is really important as a model for all our Diplomas. Having Hallam hosting an event and saying they'll take students with Diplomas and give them a world class education raised parents' aspirations just like that" (School)

"We are all in this together and we're going to make it work" (employer)

Engaging Key Stakeholders in Diplomas

Thanks for listening

Full report available at

<http://www.innovation-unit.co.uk/content/view/489/1047/>

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