



Qualifications and
Curriculum Authority

department for
children, schools and families



Leading learning and skills

Progression routes between apprenticeships and the Diploma

A joint statement by QCA, DCSF and LSC

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Apprenticeships and Diplomas provide different learning approaches but both support progression into employment, Further and Higher Education opportunities.

An Apprenticeship is not a single qualification, but a composite qualification comprising a mix of work-based and theoretical learning for a specific occupation. A key distinction of any Apprenticeship is the requirement for an Apprentice to be employed before the completion of their Apprenticeship. Therefore, Apprenticeships offer an attractive opportunity for those 16-18 year olds who already have a clear idea about the particular occupation they want to enter, and who learn best in a work-based environment.

Diplomas are qualifications which offer broad, educational programmes for young people, which combine theoretical and practical learning. Diplomas offer learners the opportunity to learn about broad economic sectors which are of relevance to many Apprenticeship frameworks and provide them with knowledge and skills that are of value in the world of work.

Diplomas and Apprenticeships share some common features that support the young person to move between Diploma learning and Apprenticeships. Both programmes enable young people to develop generic, transferable skills that are valued by employers and are necessary for further and higher learning. Additionally, they may have qualifications in common. Some qualifications in the Diploma catalogues for Additional and Specialist Learning (ASL) are also constituent qualifications of Apprenticeship frameworks.

The features provide the starting point for ensuring that progression from Diplomas to Apprenticeships is made as straightforward as possible.

Following the Government's review of Apprenticeships in England, "World-class Apprenticeships: Unlocking Talent, Building Skills for All" and the publication of "Delivering 14-19 Reform: Next Steps", we have been looking at the existing linkages between Diplomas and Apprenticeships and what future work is necessary to clarify the pathways from Diplomas to Apprenticeships. We want to provide clear guidance so that young people know whether they will need to take particular qualifications within the ASL component of Diplomas so that they have the knowledge and the skills needed to progress, for example, from a Higher Diploma in Construction and the Built Environment to an Advanced Apprenticeship in Construction.

We have produced guidance for consortia that will be planning their ASL offer and want to reflect the supportive role of ASL for those aiming to move into an Apprenticeship:

Progression illustration examples from the first 10 Diploma lines of learning are available now:
Available: www.qca.org.uk/qca_18073.aspx

We have started a mapping exercise of the qualifications common to the Diploma ASL catalogue and relevant Apprenticeship frameworks across the first five lines of learning. This will establish the guiding principles for progression. We will continue to build on and extend this work in the future to cover all subsequent Diploma lines and to make sure that a young person with an interest in any Apprenticeship framework will know how Diploma ASL will support that progression and vice versa.

Longer term work is linked to the aims and objectives of the report on World-class Apprenticeships. The report outlined that in order to meet the ambitions of world class skills, the government would introduce an entitlement to an Apprenticeship place for each suitably qualified young person from 2013, strengthen Apprenticeships by improving the apprenticeships “blueprint” and by enabling easier movement between Diplomas and Apprenticeships, among other measures.

DCSF, QCA, the LSC are working together to make sure that the pathways from Diplomas to Apprenticeships are clear. We want ASL to be able to support learners acquire the practical skills and knowledge that will assist them to move into an Apprenticeship, and vice versa.

The funding arrangements for Apprenticeships established by the LSC support the movement of learners from Diplomas into Apprenticeships. At present, some young people who have achieved equivalent to a Level 2 qualification enter a Level 2 Apprenticeship. We expect that relevant qualifications available in the ASL component of Diplomas will allow young people to acquire knowledge and skills relevant for Apprenticeships and to enable them to complete an Apprenticeship programme more quickly, in line with current LSC funding guidance, or to progress to the next level of Apprenticeship. We want young people where they have achieved a Higher Diploma to go onto an Apprenticeship at Level 3 where possible.

From April 2009, the new National Apprenticeship Service comes into effect and we will work closely with it to continue to make sure that the progression links between Diplomas and Apprenticeships are well understood.

Understanding the choices available and the impact of those choices will be very important for curriculum planners in Diploma consortia: to make sure that the right range of choice of ASL is available; and for learners and their parents to make the appropriate choices to support progression from Diplomas to Apprenticeship and vice versa.

Sources of information include:

For learners: the local Connexions Service and the Learning and Skills Council apprenticeships website: www.apprenticeships.org.uk/

For Diploma consortia curriculum planners: the QCA website: www.qca.org.uk/qca_5396.aspx