

## 14-19: What would make a difference?

**Teaching begins on the first five 14-19 diploma strands in September and preparation is already underway on the second round, so what lessons have been learned thus far?**

Leaders shared their experiences of implementing the new qualification in a talk2learn hotseat led by David Waugh, Deputy Principal of the Brook Learning Partnership, the largest school community in the country.

Key challenges contributors cited were:

- marketing problems and general misconceptions about diplomas
- timetabling and capacity concerns
- the complexities of collaboration in practice

The diploma has been devised in consultation with employers yet exams officer Lesley Penrose said there was general concern about how it was perceived by businesses in her area.

"Local firms are being encouraged to have input into its development and to offer work experience but will those not directly involved actually know what it is when it is offered on an application form by a prospective employee?" she asked.

Prior to joining her school in Burnley, Sara Pelling served as an employer in a consortium – "at that time I was rather dismayed about the negativity and cynicism that seemed to be generated by discussions regarding implementation. The marketing has not been as successful as it needs to be."

David Waugh said he was convinced the qualifications would meet the needs of everyone but admitted they were 'complicated beasts' – *"you cannot explain the complexities of diplomas to someone in five minutes and, therefore, people simply switch off and carry around with them preconceived ideas."*

Amanda Clegg described the practical problems that arose when her school, which already runs vocational courses in collaboration with a local college, successfully bid for three diplomas.

"We have been told that the existing partnerships cannot occur on the same day as the diploma as the college cannot staff this. The impact therefore on our timetable and the year 10 students is great."



Miriam Tait, a school business manager in South Gloucestershire, said greater collaboration among providers was a must.

"This can be difficult in rural areas where transport can be a bit hit and miss; there is also the added confusion of schools going down different routes – for example academies and trusts. We need to wade through all the differences to be able to find the ability to work collaboratively," she warned.

Another school leader's consortium had collaborated successfully, generating genuine trust between senior colleagues in the schools and colleges and a growing confidence that the diplomas would make a difference to young people. But that had not always been the case, she said.

*"At first, the heads of schools in the partnership did not want to engage in pursuing this agenda but as their senior leaders have begun to work together and the progress is tangible, this has proved more effective in changing hearts and minds than anything that went before."*

David Waugh said collaboration worked best when based on 'infrastructural', rather than institutional, relationships.

"My own consortium, for example, has common timetabling, a common QA process, common application processes for all collaborative curriculum delivery, a common constitution and common staff.

"But this was many years in the making; each organisation needs to find its own way."

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