



**14-19 Diplomas: the student experience of the Advanced Diploma in Construction and Built Environment**

**Karen Gaston  
Department of Real Estate & Construction  
School of Built Environment  
Oxford Brookes University**

This report falls into four broad parts: (1) a quantitative collection and analysis of student numbers and an evaluation of the take up of the Level 3 Advanced Diploma in Construction and Built Environment and (2) a qualitative overview of the student experience. Part (3) will focus on what has been achieved and learnt from the Advanced Diploma and will include a reflective review and evaluation of the Construction and Built Environment Advanced Diploma. The concluding, part (4) looks towards the future.

**1. Student demand for the Advanced Diploma**

1.1. The 14-19 Diploma for Construction and Built Environment was first introduced in 2008. However, many Local Education Authorities and 14-19 Consortia did not begin their provision until more recently.

1.2. At a national level, results from the 2009-10 cohort (the first cohort of students to complete the Advanced Diploma) suggest only 58 students in England completed the Advanced Diploma in Construction and Built Environment in the summer of 2010 (Construction Manager, 2010). 10.3% (6) received a grade 'B', 27.6% (16) and grade 'C' and 24.1% (14) a grade 'D'. This suggests only 36 students will be qualified for entry to university in 2010-11. Of the remaining 22, 8.6% (5) were unclassified and 29.3% (17) rated at grade 'E'.

1.3. Table 1 provides a summary of the numbers of students enrolled in the Progress South Central Lifelong Learning Network region for 2010-11. It also provides an outline of the varied nature of initial planned provision in this region.

*Table 1: 14-19 Diplomas in Construction and Built Environment: students planned/enrolled in the Progress South Central Lifelong Learning Network region for 2010-11.*

LA No	LA Name	CBE	CBE	CBE
		L1	L2	L3
	<b>All England</b>	<b>802</b>	<b>2169</b>	<b>320</b>
867	Bracknell Forest	0	0	0
825	Buckinghamshire	0	11	0
850	Hampshire	7	74	16
826	Milton Keynes	34	0	10
931	Oxfordshire	0	0	0
870	Reading	0	0	28
871	Slough	0	0	0
334	Solihull	0	0	0
936	Surrey	0	30	0
866	Swindon	32	34	5
868	Windsor & Maidenhead	*	*	*
		73	149	59

The main trend is similar to the national picture – a larger take-up for Level 2, but significantly fewer at Level 3. At the national level in 2010-11, 2,169 registered for Level 2 and 320 for Level 3.

1.4. Table 2 is a breakdown of numbers planned or enrolled for 2010-11 taken from personal sources. This may vary from the data previously contained in Table 1. Table 1 is what was previously planned – Table 2 is an actual projection.

*Table 2: 14-19 Diplomas in Construction and Built Environment: students planned/enrolled in the Progress South Central Lifelong Learning Network region for 2010-11*

	CBE	CBE	CBE
14-19 Consortia/College	L1	L2	L3
BCOT (Basingstoke 14-19)	0	12	14
Bucks GFL (14-19)	0	0	0
Epsom, Ewell & Banstead (14-19)	0	20	0
Guildford College (Woking & Surrey 14-19)	0	16	16
Milton Keynes College	10	10	12
Oxford City/Oxford & Cherwell Valley College	0	16	0
Reading College	*	*	12
Swindon College	14	14	12
	24	88	66

For 2010-11, Guildford College (via the Woking Federation – 14-19 Consortia) have indicated that the Advanced Diploma is running for the first time and 16 students have been enrolled, 10 of whom completed the Higher Diploma (Level 2) in 2009-10. Reading College are also continuing with the Advanced Diploma (Year 2 intake), with 12 enrolled in 2010-11 for the final year of the course. Swindon College and Milton Keynes College have indicated they have 12 planned places for 2010-11. BCOT or Basingstoke College of Technology (Basingstoke 14-19 Consortia) have 14 planned student numbers starting in 2010-11.

## **2. A qualitative overview of the student experience**

### The National perspective

2.1. A collection of student experience examples can be found on various websites, for example [www.cbepdiploma.co.uk/employers/casestudies/](http://www.cbepdiploma.co.uk/employers/casestudies/). Each entry comprises of a 2 to 3 page summary of an individual experience of studying on the Construction and Built Environment Diploma. Most provision is based in a College of Further Education linked through a 14-19 Consortia to schools and employers in the area. The employers involved range from large Public Limited Companies to Small to Medium Sized companies. The experiences can be varied – in some situations Colleges of Further Education, schools and employers have been working well together – in other cases schools have not been involved. Case study examples from the national collection do not include any experience undertaken in the Progress South Central Lifelong Learning Network region.

### Positive outcomes

2.2. In many cases, high levels of attendance and completion of coursework has been achieved. The CBE Diploma offers an introduction to the construction industry, although involvement in the Diploma is not seen as an indication of a final commitment to a career in construction and built environment. In this way, it is an introduction to careers in construction and the built environment – a rising awareness exercise.

2.3. The Diploma is seen as academic, applied and practical – a balance between all three - in this way it 'keeps all doors open' as it combines academic work with a more practical and vocational experience. The 14-19 Diploma naturally favours the student who falls between academic and vocational i.e. someone who is less academic and more practical. The Diploma provides a variety – a mix of subjects and learning approaches to studying.

2.4. The Principal Learning element of the Diploma means: design, create and value the built environment. The emphasis of the course is on a holistic education rather than a specialist training. The two broad aims of the Diploma are: progression to a university degree in construction and built environment related programme (for example: urban planning, property development, estate agent or architect) or a career in building services, construction, as an electrician, plumber, bricklayer, carpenter,

joiner or painter and decorator – or even potential for involvement in skills development for low energy construction projects. Whatever the outcome and further decision making in terms of a career, further/higher education, training and qualification would be required.

2.5. Other important features include: the Extended Project, inclusion of Functional Skills and Work Experience. The Extended Project offers a chance for the student to pursue a piece of work which is individual to them – something which is of interest to them – something which motivates them. The inclusion of a Functional Skills element means the students are taught applied numeracy, literacy and the relevant use of Information Technology. This form of tuition in the more formal subjects of English Language, Mathematics and Information Communications Technology can also be incorporated into the programme. This not only enhances learning, it is also delivered side-by-side with the delivery of more practical skills development – the theoretical and technical knowledge required for progression in Construction and Built Environment subject areas at the higher level of study. The Advanced Diploma offers at least 10 days work experience – a key feature of the course.

2.6. In terms of what the student gains from the experience – attendance is high and drop-out from the programme is low. In some cases, employer engagement is good – there does not seem to be a problem as local links between colleges, schools and employers already exist.

2.7. The delivery of the 14-19 Diploma is less likely to be effected by downturns in the economy – national or local. The 14-19 Diploma represents a 'placement' rather than paid full-time employment.

2.8. The 14-19 Diploma is a more employer-led, curriculum developed provision. Activities and assessments are devised with the help of employers. The employer can also assist academic staff and students in the preparation of Curriculum Vitae and job interviews.

2.9. Advanced Apprenticeships (Level 3) can also be offered to students who pass the 14-19 Diploma at Level 2 – an alternative progression route rather than the obvious one which is the Advanced Diploma. The student is already known to the employer and as a consequence has employment-related aspects which serve as a basis for a reference as required by an employer. The student's ability, attitude and motivation has already been tested and determined.

#### Employer involvement and support

2.10. Employer involvement and support appears to be limited to a select few of construction employers. The main three identified are outlined below:

*Costain* – actively support the 14-19 Diploma in the Greater Manchester area. Students from Hope Valley College in Derbyshire have been involved with the Bredbury Parkway (the Greater Manchester Waste project) site as part of their studies. This involves monthly visits by the students to the Costain site at Bredbury Parkway – the aim for Costains being to encourage the next generation into the industry. The study programme includes: presentations by Costain and its design team, site tours and involvement in learning outcome assignments based on the visits. In recognition, Costains have received the Employers Recognition Award from the Peak 11 14-19 Diploma Consortium.

*Lovell* – is committed to the Construction and Built Environment Diploma – a qualification designed by employers to help them recruit skilled young people. Lovell believes the Foundation and Higher Diploma provides a solid foundation for an apprenticeship and the Advanced Diploma for management training.

*Wates* – actively support the development of the Advanced Diploma:

*"Here at Wates we are passionate about the continuing development of the construction and built environment industries, and fully support the Diploma, which can only serve to improve perceptions of people. Changing the image and content of young people's introductions to our thriving sectors are key to ensuring a larger, better prepared pool of recruits for employers like ourselves to build Britain's future." Chris Simpson, Education Liaison Adviser, Wates Group.*

Other construction companies such as Bovis Lend Lease, Balfour Beatty and Kier have also supported the new diploma.

#### Problems

2.11. Good communication between Colleges of Further Education, schools and employers is essential if success is to be achieved. Success is also reliant on open and honest working relationships forged between partners – education, employers and students. Many problems include: limited funding and Health and Safety issues for employers, colleges and schools.

2.12. A problem of complexity, no one organisation can deliver actually the Diploma. Schools, colleges and employers all play a part in design and delivery. This complexity causes major problems in planning and logistics – one reason why schools have not been able to take part. Many schools find budget restrictions limit them to taking part in the 14-19 Consortia's efforts to provide educational and training opportunities in Construction and Built Environment. In the more rural areas, problems of transport to a local College of Further Education and/or employer's business premise, may be difficult – logistics and funding support. However, the main problem is time. Many find delivery of the Diploma is very time consuming.

2.13. In terms of academic quality, there is a tendency for the focus to be on the 'employer to student' collaboration – the academic content and delivery can be diluted as a result as it is given less of a priority. This may give rise to questions over the academic rigour of the course. Other problems include individuals struggling with the English and Mathematics component of the course. Another fear is the 14-19 Diploma is too theoretical, too classroom based and not practical enough. It portends to be a vocational and applied qualification, but it is also very academic – providing a jack-of-all-trades experience of all three, rather than a solid craft-based training.

2.14. In terms of provision and enrolment, the 14-19 Diploma tends to be more successful at Level 1 and Level 2. Regionally and nationally, the student enrolments are higher for Level 1 and Level 2 in comparison to Level 3 where take up tends to be patchy and limited. However, like the Advanced Diploma they also tend to be regionally focused – not all regions are taking part. For example, only 5 students have completed the Level 3 Advanced Diploma in Construction and Built Environment in 2009-10 at Swindon College. Average class sizes for the new Advanced Diploma also seem to be limited to an average of 15. Classes for BTEC National have previously been higher – around 25 to 30 per cohort. However the reason for this might be more due to falling numbers i.e. demographic change.

2.15. From 2010 to 2011, Thames Valley University and South Kent College (admittedly a College of Further Education outside the Progress South Central LLN area) plan to cease offering the Level 3 Advanced Diploma in Construction and Built Environment, but they will continue to offer this at Level 1 and Level 2 for the foreseeable future.

### **3. Reflection and evaluation of the Advanced Diploma**

#### Academic evaluation of the Advanced Diploma

3.1. The 14-19 Diploma comprises a number of components. The most important and overarching element is principal learning. Principal learning is a combination of practical and theoretical learning – a form of blended learning.

3.2. The key success of the Advanced Diploma has been its structure and the incorporation and encouragement of Personal Learning and Thinking Skills. All students are encouraged to develop personal learning and thinking skills such as team-working, creative thinking and self-management as part of the course. All these skills are transferable no matter what path is taken in later life.

3.3. The 14-19 Diploma has been designed for the world of work, but still serves to provide support to gain functional skills such as English Language, Mathematics and Information Communications Technology.

3.4. The inclusion and requirement of a personal project, which in itself mirrors the independent research requirement of the honours degree, provide a foundation of experience, both in terms of project management and in report writing. The personal project or extended project is a single piece of work of the student's choice related to the sector area. It requires evidence of planning, preparation, research and final report writing.

3.5. Finally additional – specialist learning can also be incorporated into diploma. Many students complete this 'additional' qualification to add depth to their principal learning. Typical qualifications include: GCSE, A Levels, BTEC and technical certificates.

#### Vocational evaluation of the Advanced Diploma

3.6. Several employers in construction have hinted at dissatisfaction with the new 14-19 Diploma. The main problem being the actual content of the Diploma programme, many see it as being still too academic – a course on the built environment rather than a practical training in aspects of construction. In reality, if an individual wants to pursue a less academic pathway i.e. going to university and would rather do something more practical like plumbing, they would have to retrain and qualify as a plumber.

14-19 Diplomas: the student experience of the Advanced Diploma in Construction and Built Environment

It must be remembered, that the Diploma is actually designed to promote progression – it is a qualification for admission into university.

3.7. On the other hand, especially the Higher Diploma should be seen as an introduction to the construction and built environment industries. It is in essence an introduction to careers within the industry. This in no way means the student has to commit themselves to a clearly defined career path, but it does expose the student to a wide range of career pathways in construction and built environment.

3.8. In terms of vocational content - there is a minimum of 10 days work experience. This ensures all students have some experience of the workplace.

3.9. In conclusion, the 14-19 Diploma may be too ambitious. One major criticism is it is too time consuming for both academics and employers. The other problem is the 'triple lock' - the three-way collaboration between schools, colleges and employers. In most cases this results in the responsibility for delivery being uneven between the three partners and therefore the balance between what the students receive in terms of tuition and experience is varied.

#### A national review and evaluation of the 14-19 Diploma in terms of progression to higher education

3.10. In terms of its acceptability, there has been limited success in the number of applications made by Advanced Diploma students and also in the success rate in terms of offers of a place to study at university being made. The universities of: Bath, Bristol, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Imperial, Oxford, Queens University (Belfast), Surrey and University College London and University of East Anglia may have received applications from Advanced Diploma candidates, but all have failed to accept any for the academic year 2010-11. Conversely, the universities who have received applications and made offers include: East London, Essex, King's College (London), Lancaster, Leeds, Lincoln, Liverpool, London Metropolitan, Sussex and Warwick (Daily Telegraph, 15<sup>th</sup> August, 2010).

3.11. In terms of more local progression, students who completed the Advanced Diploma in Construction and Built Environment at Swindon College have been accepted onto degree programmes at the Anglia Ruskin University and University West of England. Students now currently studying on the Advanced Diploma at Reading College have plans to go to University of West London, Oxford Brookes, Portsmouth, Reading and Southampton Universities on completion of the course.

#### Future Case Studies: Advanced Diploma students from the Progress South Central Lifelong Learning Network region

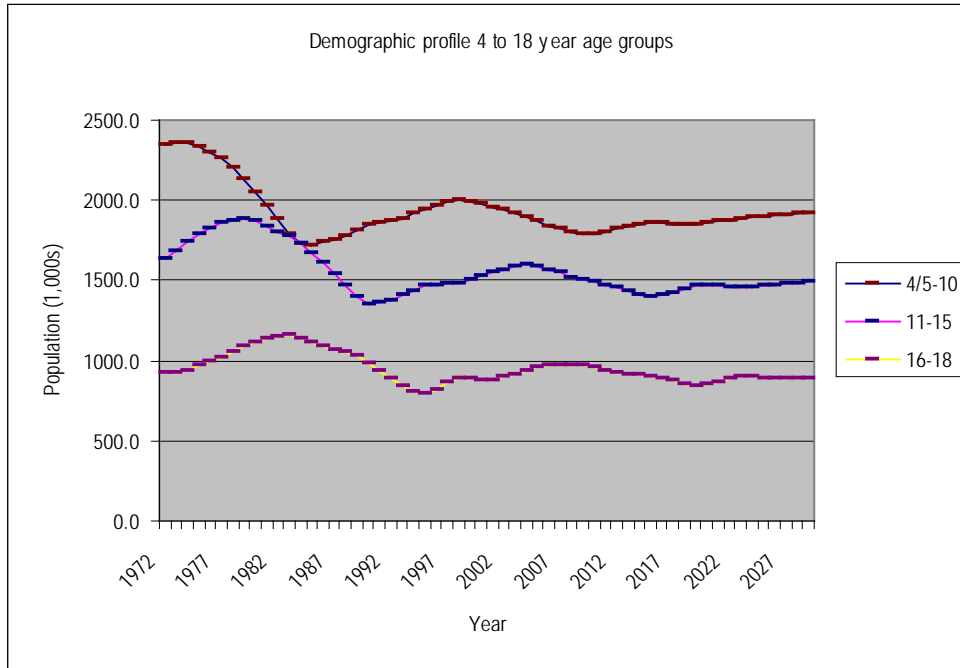
3.12. Thames Valley University (Further Education) now Reading College has been approached with the view of interviewing members of academic staff and ascertaining their views, experiences and evaluations of the new 14-19 Diploma. In order to review and evaluate the student experience of the Advanced Diploma, questionnaires have been circulated to Advanced Diploma students who are now in their final year of the Construction and Built Environment Diploma at Reading College. This project will begin in October, 2010 and will run to the end of the academic year 2010-11. The aim of the survey will be to track progression through the Advanced Diploma course and then beyond into employment or onto further study in higher education.

3.13. In 2010-11 Guildford College have offered the Advanced Diploma for the first time – attracting 16 students – 10 of whom completed the Higher Diploma (Level 2) in 2009-10. A similar project is proposed for Guildford and this will also begin in October 2010.

#### **4. Looking ahead – long-term planning**

4.1. At this point it might be appropriate to consider the future of the 14-19 Diploma. At the national level in 2009-10 only 58 students completed the Advanced Diploma in Construction and Built Environment. Out of those, only around 36 (60%) will be eligible for entry into higher education. Numbers registered on the Advanced Diploma have increased in the last 2 years, but only 59 students (an estimate) are registered in the Progress South Central Lifelong Learning Network region for 2009-10. A progression rate of 60% suggests only around 37 will go onto higher education in the future from the Progress South Central Lifelong Learning Network region.

Figure 1: Demographic profiles – demand for education in the next decade



4.2. In terms of demographic projection, Figure 1 is an attempt to illustrate how the compulsory school age population has changed over the last four decades and is projected to do so for the next 2 decades. The 16 to 18 year old age group reached a peak in 2010. From 2010 the numbers in this age group will slowly decline and this will continue to do so until 2022. The pattern for the 11-15 age group is also on the decline at the present time. With a slight difference, this age group will begin to increase in number again from around 2018. However, the reverse is true for the 4 to 10 year old age group – they are now on the rise at the present time and this will steadily increase in the next 2 decades.

4.3. What will the implications of a declining 16 to 18 population have for enrolment onto the Advanced Diploma in future years?