

POLICY WATCH

2006/82

6 October 2006

14 - 19: Gateway Guidance (October)

The latest Gateway Guidance, released at the beginning of this week, sets out the procedures for the more detailed submissions required from consortia seeking to offer the first specialised Diplomas from September 2008.

In effect, consortia have 4,300 (written) words with which to make their case.

300 words to provide an overall summary of the proposal; "you should outline which centres will be taking part and how many young people you anticipate will be taking the Diploma at each level." 3,000 words or 600 each to meet the five criteria of collaboration, facilities, workforce, information, advice and guidance, and employer engagement identified in the May Guidance. Finally, and something that may cause a little apprehension, a 1,000 word endorsement from the 'sponsor,' namely the Local Authority working with the LSC to provide a concluding "covering statement." "There is no Local Authority veto over submissions" the Guidance states firmly "but we do want to ensure strategic coherence."

The Gateway is "to help providers identify whether they are ready and capable of delivering the Diplomas to the high standard required." At its heart is a self assessment form using a traffic light rating system. Red if "arrangements are not yet in place and much development is required," amber/red and amber/green if partially in place or a bit of tweaking needed and green if "comprehensive arrangements are in place and working well."

"An honest and robust assessment of your current situation" is the brief along with 'credible plans for initiating and executing any necessary change to get there.' A red 'card' will not necessarily rule out a bid as long as what the Guidance calls "a robust and compelling plan of action is in place now to address specific conditions by July 2007." The word "robust" crops up a lot but then there's a lot at stake.

The five criteria that consortia have to meet were first sketched out in the May Guidance, this follow up Paper adds more detail and applies three questions to each criteria. They follow a similar format; what's in place now, what would be needed by September 2008 and, if necessary, how would you get from A to B?

Under **collaboration**, there is the familiar emphasis on the need to work together although there is "no requirement that an institution must collaborate on the teaching and learning of any particular Diploma." What is being sought is evidence of "a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each member...collaborative structures for funding...and a shared approach to other features such as providing advice and guidance and working with employers."

For **facilities**, there is some extra funding available, £1m each for 40 consortia, to support those who get through the Gateway but need further capital to develop facilities. For the present, evidence is sought of two things; that a high level of

resources, equipment and accommodation is in place or planned, and that systems are in place to make such facilities accessible to all members of the consortium.

A lot of work is currently going on to support the **workforce**. Some is to develop materials and networks and being led by QIA, the SSAT and the Secondary National Strategy; some to prepare and support leaders and managers led by the National College for School Leadership and the Centre for Excellence in Leadership, and some to 'staff develop' the wider workforce led by the Training and Development Agency and Lifelong Learning UK. Consortia will need to demonstrate a clear understanding of 'what types of staff will be needed to deliver Diplomas' and what forms of support and development will be needed for the future. As consortia will also be expected to participate in the functional skills pilot from Sept 2007, any training needed in that area would also need to be factored in.

The importance of **information, advice and guidance** has been stressed throughout the 14 - 19 developments and under this criteria, consortia will be expected to have or to develop "effective and timely provision for advice and guidance" with an emphasis on enabling progression and challenging stereotypes.

Finally, the "critical" area of **employer engagement**. "You will need to show how you will work with employers to deliver work related learning and sufficient high quality work placement opportunities for young people studying for a Diploma." This is an area that's worrying many centres but the sense is of obligations on both sides, "employers must be actively involved in helping your consortium plan."

So what happens once the forms have been submitted?

Firstly they will be considered, during January and February 2007 by one of nine Regional Panels. These will contain some pretty key players including reps from QCA, the DfES, HE, National Strategies, LSC, the DDP and chaired by the Government Office Director for Children and Learners. The Panels may make different decisions on different Diploma lines but essentially have a three card option; ready to pass through "possibly with minor improvement," conditional recommendation to pass through "dependent on significant improvement" and not ready for Sept 2008 but, with further support, possibly ready for a Sept 2009 kick off. Further support will be offered to each category to progress.

Passing through Gateway opens up the second stage of the 'approval' process, namely Awarding Body approval which will take place from Sept 2007. The former effectively approves the consortia and its systems, the latter its ability to offer particular Diplomas. Awarding Bodies will therefore be looking for 'robust mechanisms to assure the quality of delivery and assessment, appropriate resources, equipment and accommodation and trained staff.

The bids have to be from Local Authorities by 5.00pm on Monday 11 December 2006. The traffic is already revving up.

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