

**An investigation of partnership working in the implementation and
delivery of the 14-19 diploma.**

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Abstract

In this thesis I investigated partnership working in the development and implementation of the 14-19 diploma in the North-East of England. The research encompassed the period from the implementation of the 14-19 diploma in 2008 to its withdrawal in 2013 by the Conservative-Liberal coalition government. The focus of my research was whether partnership was happening and how partnership working was viewed and undertaken by those involved.

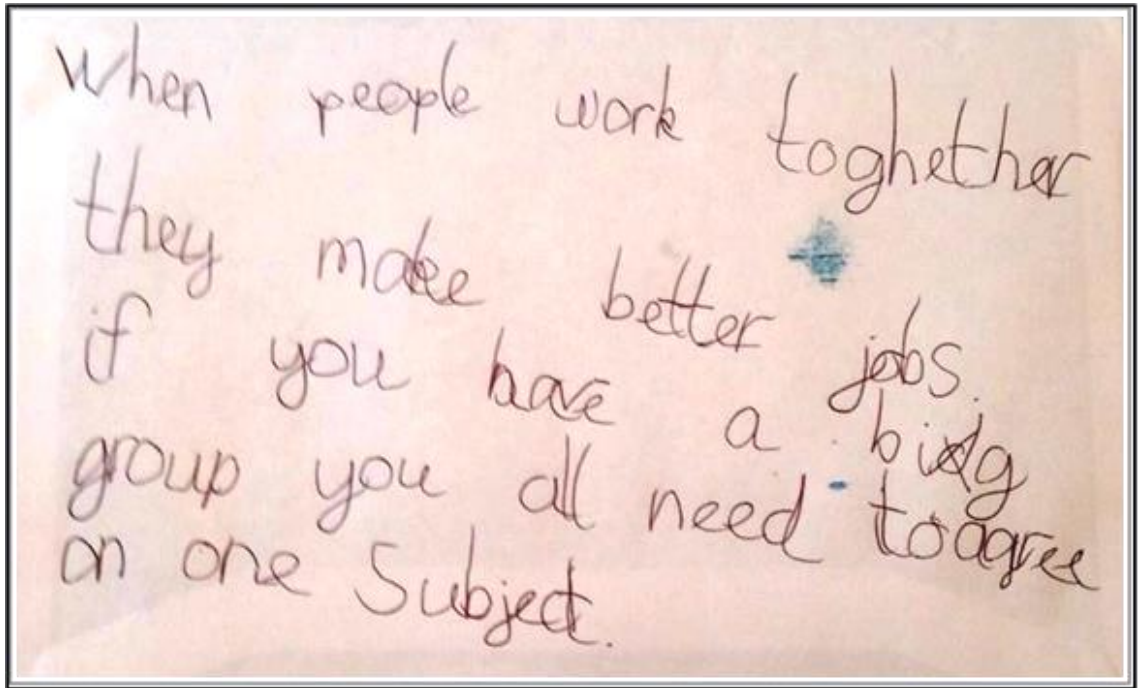
I used a mixed-methods approach to examine data from participants across North-East England, including diploma practitioners, learners, and parents to gain their perspective on diploma design and implementation. My methodology comprised electronic questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and a personal notebook supported by secondary research. I collected and analysed qualitative and quantitative data to investigate my two research questions:

- Was partnership working taking place in the development and delivery of the diploma in the North-East of England?
- What did ‘partnership’ mean to the stakeholders involved in the development and delivery of the diploma?

I analysed the data in relation to these questions which allowed me to identify and discuss further themes from within the responses, including; competition, collaboration, and the specific nature of partnership working in education. I then considered these themes in terms of their effect on partnership working and how they related to theory explored in the literature review.

From the data analysis I identified a new concept in relation to partnership working in education. I have contributed to the understanding of the development and implementation of the diploma in the region, to the understanding of partnership working in 14-19 education, and to wider partnership working knowledge. The results were particularly useful for exploring issues of competition and collaboration, and understanding how partnership work was viewed and used by practitioners, learners and parents involved with the 14-19 diploma.

Frontispiece



Thomas Mabbitt (aged 6), 2014.

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I am grateful to everyone who has helped me to complete what has been an extensive and challenging piece of work. It is difficult to mention everyone who has supported me over the years, and I feel it is important to recognise those people who have made a significant impact on my ability to achieve this qualification.

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List of abbreviations

A-Level	General Certificate of Education Advanced Level
ANMS	Aimhigher National Mentoring Scheme
BERA	British Education Research Association
BSF	Building Schools for the Future
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CLC	City Learning Centre
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DDP	Diploma Development Partnership
DENI	Department of Education Northern Ireland
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DIUS	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
EAZ	Education Action Zone
EBLO	Education Business Link Organisation
EBP	Education Business Partnership
ECM	Every Child Matters
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Scheme
FE	Further Education
FEBL	Federation of Education Business Links
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GNVQ	General National Vocational Qualifications
GONE	Government Office for the North-East
HE	Higher Education
HOPE	Higher Opportunity Progression Eco-system
IFP	Increased Flexibility Programme
KTP	Knowledge Transfer Partnership
LA	Local Authority
LEA	Local Education Authority
LLSC	Local Learning and Skills Council
LOPE	Low Opportunity Progression Equilibria

LSC	Learning and Skills Council
MIAP	Managing Information Across Partners
NEBP	Newcastle Education Business Partnership
NECC	North-East Chamber of Commerce
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
NMPP	National Mentoring Pilot Project
NUT	National Union of Teachers
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
ONE	One North-East
PFI	Private Finance Initiatives
PPP	Public-Private Partnerships
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
TVEI	Technical and Vocational Education Initiative
TWEBLO	Tyne and Wear Education Business Link Organisation
UCU	Universities and Colleges Union
UK PLC	United Kingdom Public Limited Company

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1. Introduction

1.1 Personal background to the study

This thesis was inspired by my interest in 14-19 education and the launch of the 14-19 diploma (hereafter the diploma) as what could have been one of the most significant changes to 14-19 education in recent history. I am particularly interested in how education addresses the complex needs of learners in this age range as I have worked with young people in this age group throughout my adult life. This has included leadership with the Senior Section of Girlguiding UK, the Prince's Trust Volunteers, and in my career at Newcastle University. In my work I have developed and delivered the Career Development Module (Newcastle University 2014a). I have also managed funded partnership work including the Aimhigher National Mentoring Scheme (ANMS, previously the National Mentoring Pilot Project - NMPP), and 'Gear Up' mentoring, which was run in partnership with Tyne and Wear Education Business Link Organisation (TWEBLO). This experience has given me a positive insight into the potential benefits of partnership working as well as an appreciation of some of the practical difficulties involved in developing an effective partnership.

These experiences of partnership working in education influenced my desire to explore these areas in greater depth. I gained further impetus towards this thesis from conversations with Professor Ann Briggs regarding the *Leading Partnerships for 14-19 Education Provision* research (Briggs *et al.* 2007a; 2007b) which, although focusing on leadership, explored regional partnership working in education and suggested models for future working partnerships.

1.2 Context

The diploma was introduced in 2008 at a time of social, political, and economic instability. The Labour government promoted the diploma as a new approach, with diploma policy including a requirement for partnership work as a core element of delivery throughout a staggered launch which would have seen the extension of the geographic availability and subject scope of the qualification (DfES 2004a; Nuffield 14-19 Review 2007a; DCSF 2007a; 2008a; 2009). I was interested in the diploma as it presented a new and controversial option between GCSE/A-Level and BTEC, even

though previous qualifications in this third strand position have historically had little success.

The diploma was the first qualification to require such manifest and widespread partnership working across stakeholders as part of governmental education policy (DCSF 2006; 2007a). Within diploma delivery the focus on skills development and practical experience required schools to develop working relationships with other schools, education providers including colleges and universities, local and national employers, and learners and their parents.

In this thesis I aimed to explore how partnership working was viewed and undertaken in the context of the development and delivery of the diploma in the North-East of England. I explored how multi-agency working, or partnership working, had been modeled elsewhere in 14-19 education, as well as in other areas of education to gain knowledge of how working in partnership was viewed in examples from the broader sector. I used personal accounts and experiences of those involved to explore how individuals and agencies worked together and how relationships were negotiated and undertaken between participants to launch and manage this new qualification.

I felt that the uniqueness of the North-East is important to this study. Relevant regional factors include: specific patterns of unemployment caused by changing industrial and socio-economic circumstances resulting in poor educational attainment and low progression rates to higher education (HE); attitudes to education; social history; and status. These factors influence attitudes to education and participation in education, which affects both practitioners and learners. Some of these issues will be considered as part of the research.

Despite the withdrawal of the diploma in 2013 there were lessons that could be learned for partnership working and education. My research brings together research and literature on partnership working, and on 14-19 education to provide consideration of wider issues associated with partnership working in education.

1.3 Research aims

The aim of my research was to explore how partnership was identified, defined and undertaken in the context of the development and implementation of the diploma. I

investigated the collaborative working which facilitated the diploma in the region and evaluated models for partnership working that could be applied more widely. I considered differing relationship dynamics, including issues of power and equality to evaluate how far the research participants considered themselves to be partners or working in a partnership.

When I started my research the diploma was a topical and developing qualification with scope for research to contribute to local and national debates on its potential impact and to wider discourses relating to partnership working. As an emerging area of study literature on the diploma consisted mainly of diploma policy and guidance documents, and reviews discussing the implementation of the new qualification. When the diploma was withdrawn in 2013 I had completed my data collection and focused my analysis on wider implications of the results for partnership working across 14-19 education provision.

1.4 Research questions

In this research I addressed key questions relating to how partnership working was envisioned and understood within the development and delivery of the diploma. The focus is whether partnership working was evident between stakeholders in the development and implementation of the diploma, and my exploration of this includes consideration of other themes including education policies, practitioners and learners, and their working relationships.

Research question one: Was partnership working taking place during the development and implementation of the diploma in the North-East of England?

Research question two: What did ‘partnership’ mean to the stakeholders involved in the development and delivery of the diploma in the North-East of England?

This thesis is an original study, and I concentrated on examining partnership working within the diploma. Other studies and commentaries such as the *Nuffield 14-19 Review* (2007a-b; 2008a-d) and Allen’s (2007) investigation of the diploma focused on political agendas, policies and the qualification itself. I focused on partnership in this context as partnership working was specifically identified in education policy as being central to diploma delivery. I also investigated how partnership working was understood and

practised, and how it affected the individuals involved. This research is regionally significant as I included a range of practitioners and others involved at different levels and provided an overview of engagement with and attitudes to partnership working across the north-east of England. In addition, my findings have national significance relating both to the diploma and to partnership working as my research considered the regional delivery of a national qualification and how the issues involved are relevant to broader applications of partnership working in education.

1.5 Situating the research/er

In evaluating the research and considering the literature, data collection and theoretical approaches, it was also essential to consider myself as a researcher. My identity as a researcher, my beliefs and approaches have been acknowledged as these contributed to and influenced my research and shaped my thesis. I remained aware of my generally positive outlook towards partnership throughout the research, and considered other influences on my research. For example (in no particular order) my identities of researcher, mother, wife, student, professional, feminist, Christian, historian, were all applicable at different times and at different levels, and contributed to my stance as a researcher, and therefore, consciously or subconsciously, to the research.

I have rejected a positivist approach of ‘sterile’ observations and ‘facts’ collected from ‘objects’ (Bryman 2008, p.15; Morrison 2007), as I believe that it would be impossible to divorce myself and my views from the research. The individuals who contributed to the research are participants alongside myself and their feelings and perspectives are the basis for my thesis. In this interpretivist approach, different ‘realities’ are recognised and respected as an integral part of the data (Scott and Morrison 2006). The influence of these ideas and perspectives on my research, data collection and analysis are considered further as part of a discussion of the methodology (Chapter 3 below).

1.6 Overview of the thesis

I organised this thesis into six chapters.

This Chapter provides an outline of the subject and an overview of how I organised my research, including a summary of the methodology and a statement of how I, as the researcher, was positioned in relation to the research.

In Chapter 2, I consider the literature relevant to the research questions, particularly the background and development of the diploma and diploma policies, partnership working within education, and the definition and application of the term partnership, as well as considering appropriate theoretical approaches.

I consider the methods and techniques used for the research in Chapter 3 where I present the rationale for the choice of methods and outline key assumptions I have made as the researcher. I also introduce the research participants and describe the areas in which they work to provide a context for the results.

In Chapter 4, I outline the results, allowing the reader to engage with the primary data that I collected.

I analyse and discuss the results in Chapter 5, with reference to relevant literature, and I consider what this research has contributed to the field of knowledge.

I conclude the thesis with Chapter 6 where I suggest developments that could be made in regional (and national) partnership working as a result of this research, including recommendations that could be implemented by practitioners and educational researchers, and in addition, I make suggestions for further research into this area.

2. Literature review

2.1 Introduction to the literature review

In this chapter I explore the theoretical, educational and socio-economic contexts for my research and the parameters of the research and identify what I can add to existing knowledge (Keeble and Kirk 2007; Briggs and Coleman 2007). I examine partnership working by drawing together partnership literature, education policies and other sources to explore the key themes based on the areas of interest and the research questions identified in the previous chapter. I specifically seek to explore:

- Definitions of partnership - through exploring meanings of partnership, including how the term is used and what language is involved, different definitions of partnership are considered and models for partnership are examined.
- Partnership and education - in particular the issues that affect partnership in education, how partnership has been used in 14-19 education and how 14-19 education has changed in recent years to lead up to the development of the diploma.
- New Labour policy context - in relation to competition and collaboration in public service delivery, education and diploma requirements.
- Partnership and the diploma - including the policy background to the diploma and to partnership working and the diploma, as well as the scope of the qualification and the requirements for working in partnership with employers.
- Benefits and impediments to partnership – reasons why people and organisations might work together, the influence of social and cultural capital and the need for equity and equality.

Exploration of these areas will directly inform and develop my methodology and contribute to my theoretical analysis and discussion of the results.

2.2 Definitions of partnership

To fully understand partnership and how it relates to the diploma, it is necessary to examine different aspects of the concept. In this section I explore the meanings and uses of partnership and the understanding of partnership language and terminology to provide a starting point for further exploration. Subsequently, I consider different definitions of partnership to gain a wider perspective on how partnership can be interpreted, and examine models of partnership to explore how these can then be used in practice.

2.2.1 What partnership means

The use of partnership working and a range of partnership terminology is evident throughout British society, in work, culture, governance and social interactions. For example, we can work or shop within the John Lewis Partnership (John Lewis Partnership 2013), same-sex couples could enter into a civil partnership before equal marriage was recognized in 2014 (GOV.UK 2014), and organisations such as Newcastle University engage in and promote civic partnership with others (Newcastle University 2014b). To fully understand partnership and partnership working within the context of this thesis it is essential to clarify and define the terminology, as meaning and interpretations of partnership can differ. Understanding how and why individuals and organisations interpret partnership is crucial to understanding how and why they are undertaking partnership working to facilitate diploma development and implementation.

Academic literature on educational partnership working and associated theory has been more challenging to identify as it remains a developing field, and while there are a significant number of project reports on working in partnership and partnership initiatives, specific partnership theory and literature is a small, but growing field. Working partnerships have been observed and noted since before the Middle Ages (Weber and Kaelber 2003) and a large body of work exists on partnership working within business and on business models to support this, to the extent that this is a separate and unique topic of study (Reuvid 2000; Tayeb 2001; Weber and Kaelber 2003; Kamiya 2011), and a separate area of legal practice (Morse 2006; Blackett-Ord and Haren 2011). Some appropriate information has been identified from other working spheres as partnership is a common and accepted mode of working practice in other sectors and in both public and private organisations. Although examples of partnership

and partnership working are numerous, some are worth highlighting, for example, the government works in many partnerships, including health and business (as well as education), and employs facilitators to support and enhance the way it works with its departments, agencies and across sectors (for example, Changes 2014). In other sectors partnership also appears to be common practice, for example: energy companies engage in partnership with other energy providers, businesses and charities (for example, Ecotricity 2014; EDF 2014); the John Lewis Partnership is a significant retail example which brings together co-managed businesses and their shareholder-employees (John Lewis Partnership 2013); partnership working is viewed as being so desirable that organisations have been created solely to facilitate partnership working such as Changes (as mentioned above), a consultancy business which helps others to work collaboratively (Changes 2014). Moving forward from these examples, it would be almost impossible to consider partnership without acknowledging the significance of partnership to business and the transference of knowledge regarding this mode of working between business and education, and between businesses and education.

Academic and educational commentators have characterised partnership in a number of ways. At the most basic level, Kamiya (2011, pp.3-4) provides a (deliberately simplistic) metaphor which I have used as a starting point, stating that the partners are drivers, partnership the car, and the resource is the fuel - all three parts are required for this mode of working to function. This indicates the complexity of partnership working involving different aspects rather than existing as a one dimensional concept.

Government policy and guidance relating to the diploma, such as *14-19 Partnerships and Plans* (DCSF 2008a, p.6), which documented emerging findings from volunteer diploma partnerships, described partnership as the functional structure of diploma delivery, using 'consortium' as the term for the 'group of partners and providers which come together' to deliver the qualification. This was further refined in the guidance document *Partnership and Planning* (DCSF 2009, para.1.12) which suggested that members of the partnership can 'deliver a wide range of opportunities and higher quality options than they could alone as partnership working enables the pooling of resources and facilities... a more personalised offer to more learners... maximum opportunity for providers to deploy their specialisms'. These descriptors are necessarily functional, but straightforward, and are acknowledged as such in their creation (DCSF

2008a, p.6; DCSF 2009, para. 1.12) as they have been designed as a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to attempt to manage the complexity of partnership working at the scale of diploma delivery. These documents indicate a base level of engagement with terminology that policy makers have used to communicate within government and with practitioners.

Researchers including Pring (2000), and Hodgson and Spours (2003; 2006; 2011; 2013a-b) have advanced the definitions provided by government guidance. This research includes extensive evaluation of partnership working in the *Nuffield 14-19 Review* (2007a-b; 2008a-d) and *Education for All* (Pring *et al.* 2009). These built on the evaluation of collaborative approaches to 14-19 learning systems previously developed by Hodgson and Spours (2006) and Higham and Yeomans (2005; 2006; Higham *et al.* 2004) which provided a useful basis for considering how individuals, organisations and agencies worked together to deliver and develop educational qualifications in this sector (Nuffield 14-19 Review 2007b). Hodgson and Spours (2006; 2011; 2013a-b) have published extensively analysing 14-19 education and in particular the diploma, and the conclusions of these studies investigate the approaches that have been taken, including whether these are the most appropriate modes of working to meet learner need. McDonald (2005, p.579) explores partnership working in relation to educational governance, commenting that partnership has been manifested in the language of governance ‘as offering the potential for a more resource-efficient, outcome-effective and inclusive-progressive form of policy delivery’, although this is not necessarily what actually happens during delivery/development.

Finally, Daniels *et al.* (2007 p.522) present a more complex vision of partnership where ‘many configurations of diverse social practices’ and ‘development of new forms of hybrid practice’ are required, describing partnership working as requiring recognition of and access to expertise, as well as negotiation of boundaries with other professionals and clients. This provides some indication of the complexity involved in partnership as the different layers and levels of individuals and organisations involved are considered in relation to ‘knotworking’ where ‘otherwise loosely connected actors and their work systems’ are brought together (Daniels *et al.* 2007, p.526 citing Engestrom 1999). This view of tying and untying the threads of people and activities resonates with traditional modes of partnership working where relationships are made and developed, while the

‘knot’ terminology can also be interpreted to indicate the issues and problems inherent in these modes of working.

These were just some examples of how partnership and partnership working has been defined and discussed in relation to the diploma. I felt that it was also important to explore the term ‘partnership’ further. The multivalency of partnership may be explained in some way by a structuralist approach to the interpretation, as both the language and implementation of partnership can be seen to shape or ‘construct’ its meaning and understanding, suggesting that it can also be ‘deconstructed’ to further explore its meanings (McDonald 2005, p.582). The application of communication models offers further opportunities for examining the differences between the meanings of partnership and the understanding of the term (Shannon and Weaver 1949; Berlo 1960). For example, the ‘sender’ and ‘receiver’ of the ‘message’ (partnership) understand and experience partnership according to their own personal interpretation of the term and include ‘interference’ or ‘noise’ that may have both added or taken away from the meaning based on their experience as well as their culture or the context within which the partnership is being enacted (Shannon and Weaver 1949; Berlo 1960). Consequently, a straightforward one-size-fits-all approach to the term ‘partnership’ can neither be defined nor anticipated.

2.2.2 The indefinable in pursuit of the unachievable’: Towards a definition of partnership

Partnership may not be as indefinable as the quote from Powell and Dowling (2006, above) suggests, but any definition is contextual; explanation and statement of terms is required as there is a diverse range of possible meanings and understandings.

Definitions have been advanced by Easen *et al.* (1996), Pugh (1989), Cross (1989) and there are many models of partnership working in education, such as Bastiani's (1987) four models of home-school relations, and McDonald's (2005) models of partnership and governance. It is clear that partnership working involves a myriad of interconnected issues, including, communication, power and governance, organisational culture, effectiveness and people. My research is important to partnership working research as there remains a significant lack of academic theory in relation to partnership working and a similar lack of relevant and appropriate theoretical models.

In the previous section I explored what partnership meant and how it had been interpreted in more general terms before moving to considering its application in 14-19 education. In this section I consider definitions of partnership within the context of education and explore how this can be considered. In partnership literature, many terms used interchangeably with 'partnership', such as, 'multi-agency', 'collaboration', 'working together', 'collegiate', 'network', and 'in association'. These terms are also subject to their own complexity of meaning and differing interpretations (Shannon and Weaver 1949; Berlo 1960) and this range of terminology appears to be integral to the language of partnership.

Scholarly literature consistently notes that partnership working is difficult to define and difficult to achieve. For example, Lumby (2009, p.312) states that:

Despite the ubiquitousness of the term partnership there persists some conceptual vagueness in how it is understood... the terms collaboration and partnership have been used... interchangeably by practitioners and commentators.

Kamiya (2011, p.9) explores apparent overuse of the term partnership to encompass any work undertaken with another agency and states that the strengths and potential of partnership are frequently overemphasised. This has also been identified in other research:

Part of the difficulty in achieving partnership has been the assumption that its definition is understood and agreed by those involved. Most moves towards partnership either fail to define it, or fail to think through the implications of its own definition (Todd 2000, p.48).

This varied range of terms has increased the complexity of engaging with and exploring partnership as a concept. This means that exploring the use and meaning of partnership in relation to practical implementation and theoretical discussion is essential. My discussion is less about producing a specific definition of partnership than exploring and developing a working model which identifies the main characteristics without being overly simplistic, prescriptive or exclusionary, which I will also consider further in the methodology.

2.2.3 Modeling partnership

In order to begin to understand more about how diploma partnerships have been working in the region and to address the research questions, it was essential to explore models of partnership working to understand how partnership can be discussed and demonstrated. Other studies have not considered how and why those involved in diploma development and delivery engage in partnership work in the same way that this thesis has approached these issues.

A broad range of studies of partnerships have been undertaken. In particular, Briggs *et al.* (2007a, p.9) aimed to determine ‘the relationship between policy, collaborative partnership activity and leadership’; the DCSF (2008a) explored whether partnership was happening as required in a sample of delivery partnerships, and Hodgson and Spours explored partnership working in 14-19 education, providing models including ‘Weakly collaborative arrangements for partnership working’ (2006) and ‘Higher and lower eco-systems in learning’ (2013a-b).

As a starting point, Sherry Arnstein’s *A Ladder of Citizen Participation* (1969) is one of the earliest partnership models and remains relevant to partnership discourse. Arnstein (1969, para.2.0) positioned partnership towards the top of a typological ladder (figure 1), classing partnership as ‘citizen power’ and indicating that, in an ideal situation, those involved should all be active participants. ‘Participation’ becomes a connecting thread between models and theories, and can be linked forwards to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations 1989). There are limitations, for example, other applications of the model may have more or fewer ‘rungs’, or require the rungs to be closer together or wider apart (Arnstein 1969). Arnstein’s model was re-envisaged by Hart (1992, p8), who used it to express children’s participation in life changing decisions (figure 2) and although Hart’s naming of the rungs differs, Arnstein’s original structure and its subsequent development can be seen clearly. In Hart’s model, partnership is not directly named as a mode, but the top rung describes shared decisions which, based on definitions of partnership presented earlier, could represent partnership between the adults and the children. Hart’s model refers to children’s ‘participation’ rather than ‘partnership’, but it is still useful to compare the degrees of participation and the terminology involved and the way in which involvement of the child was anticipated in decisions affecting them.

Figure 1. Arnstein's (1969, para.2.0) ladder of participation.

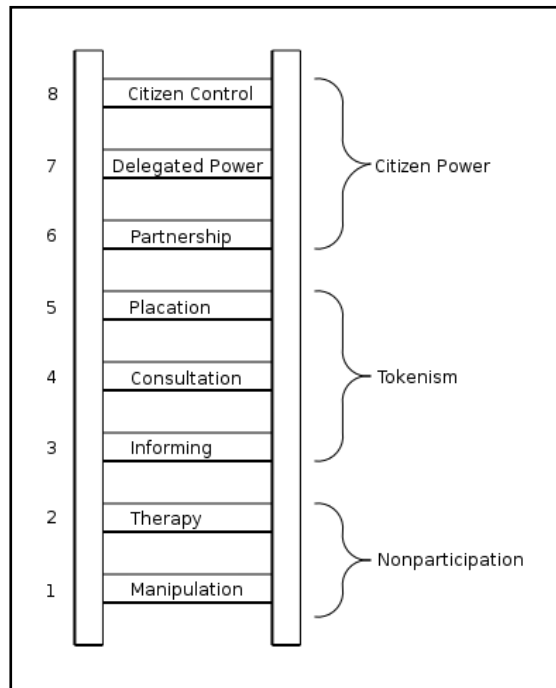
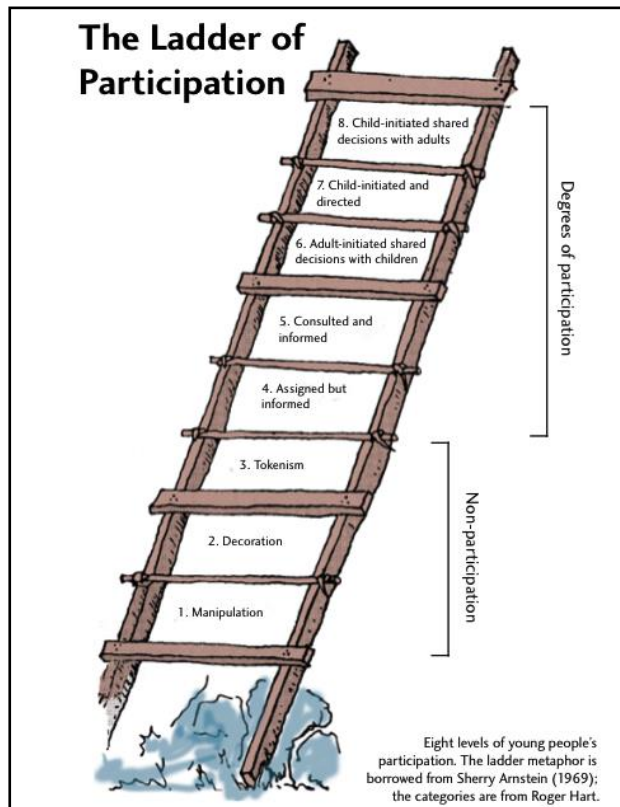


Figure 2. Hart's (1992, p.8) ladder of participation.



Both Arnstein and Hart's models are relevant to my study as they highlight two main points: that partnership is part of a power relationship where, particularly relevant for diploma partnerships, partners do not necessarily have equal status; and that active participation is expected regardless of the status of the participants.

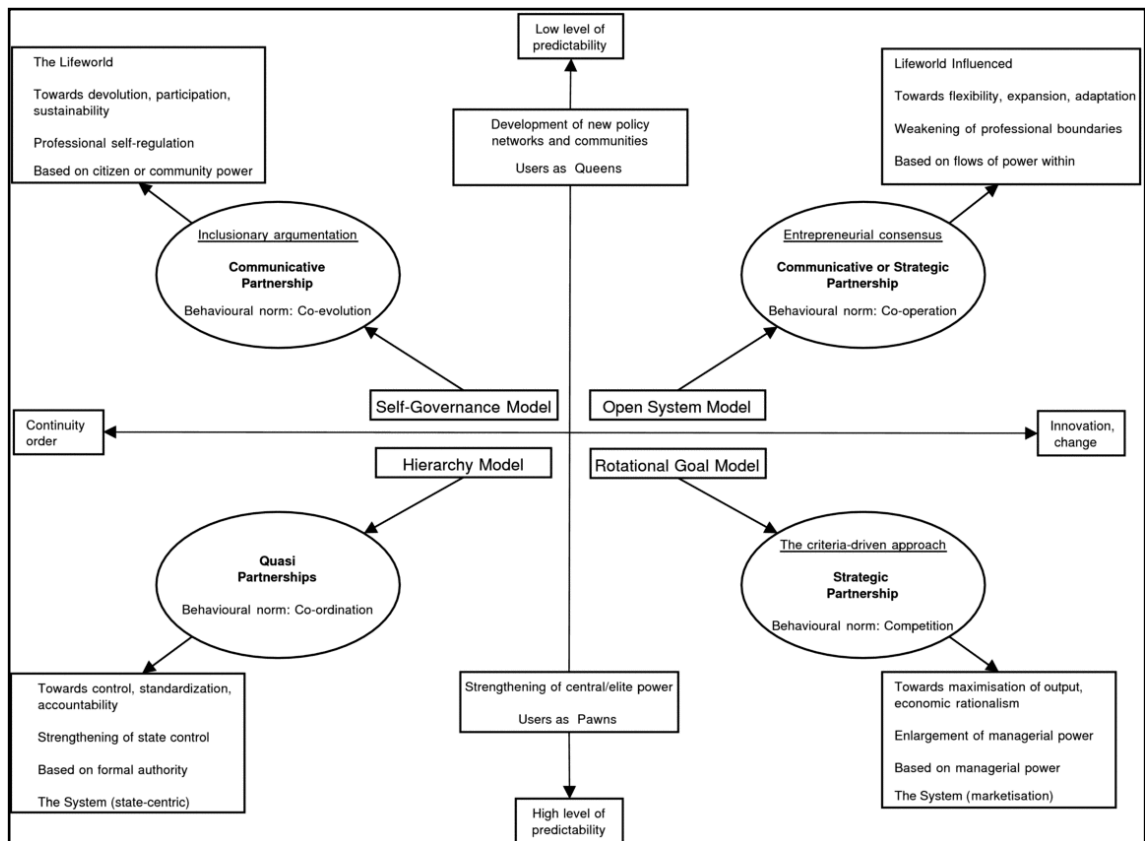
More recently, McDonald (2005) explored partnership in relation to governance, highlighting the scarcity of academic research and theoretical models relating to partnership, and commenting that existing research is often undeveloped, biased or dismissive of the benefits. Many of the issues McDonald considered have relevance to how diploma partnership was envisaged and implemented, particularly how the models change according to the individuals and groups involved in the partnership.

McDonald's (2005) model promotes, but does not explicitly acknowledge the ideals originally proposed by Arnstein (1969), and uses these to differentiate his theory of partnership. McDonald contradicts Arnstein's assertion that partnership embodies user involvement, but explains that although user involvement may be part of partnership, it is not a key factor in relation to governance (2005, p.580). This is an area of dissonance between McDonald's model and diploma policy which emphasises learner involvement as central to diploma development and delivery. Consideration of McDonald's model is worthwhile, particularly after exploring the way in which meanings of partnership are used and understood (above) as this brings into question the purpose of the partnership in the example if user involvement was not a key factor.

Partnership can be seen as embodying perceptions of equality. For example, Kamiya (2011, pp.17-19) considers how 'partnership' is often translated as inferring an 'equal and collaborative relationship', while noting that equality and equitable status are not synonymous with partnership. Neither Arnstein (1969) nor Hart's (1992) models indicate equality, but rather the ability to 'engage in trade-offs with traditional power holders' (Arnstein 1969, 2.0). It is possible that equality, either of status or contribution, could be inferred by those involved in partnership work as a result of that involvement. However, it is important to recognise that within the diploma partnerships, as elsewhere in local and national government, that equality within partnership working is not always possible to achieve or necessarily desired by all of the participants (McDonald 2005). In addition, the perception of partnership as equality has been described by Todd and Higgins (1998, p.228) as damaging to the very core of

partnership working as the ‘discourse of equality in a partnership obscures such power relations by talking as if they do not exist’. Consequently care must be taken to express partnership ideas in such a way as to ensure that inherent issues of power can be recognised and addressed.

Figure 3. McDonald’s (2005, p.589) models of governance and partnership.



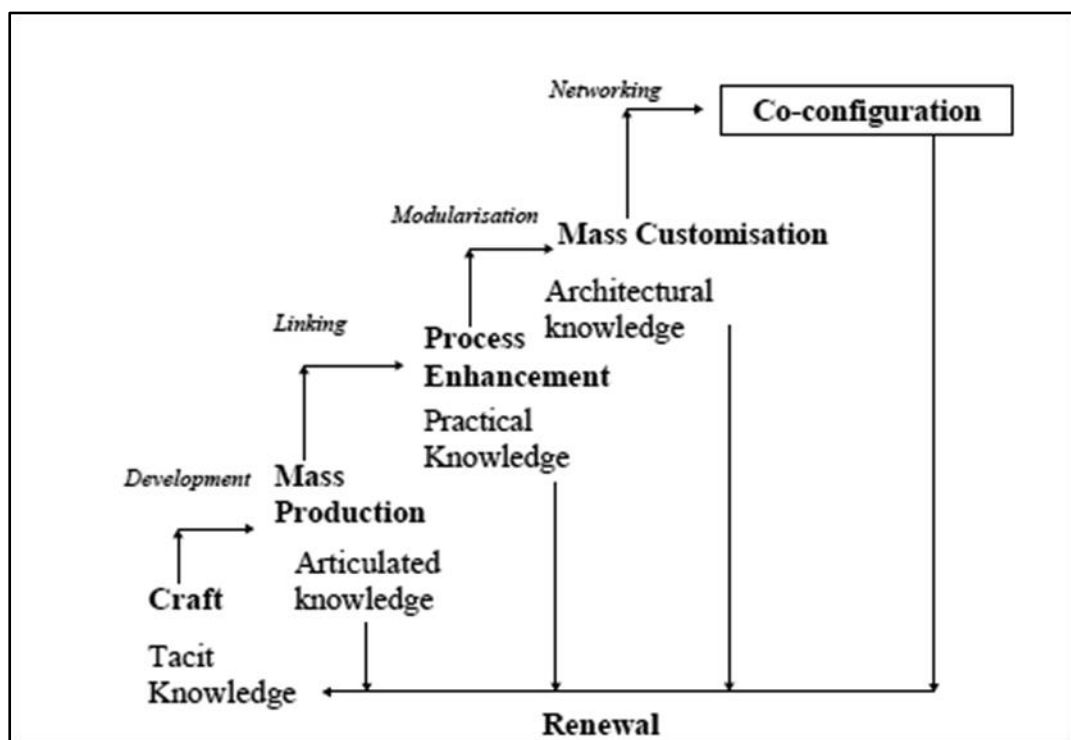
McDonald (2005) critiques models which include hierarchical ideas of governance and partnership, such as Arnstein (1969) and Hart’s (1992) as traditional and slow, while presenting other models with some hierarchical elements, including ‘rational goal’, ‘open systems’, and ‘self governance’ as distinct, enabling different types of partnership to be demonstrated (McDonald 2005, p.588-589). Although none of the models presented appeared to fit the considerations required for partnership working in the diploma it was appropriate to consider these models. For example, governance is relevant to diploma partnership in terms of the devolution of power and the appearance (and disappearance) of organisations such as One North-East (ONE), the regional development agency, and local authorities. McDonald then presented a model (figure 3) based on governance models including Habermas’ communicative action theory,

discussing each route through the model in relation to how each partnership model functions (McDonald 2005, p.589). This model divides partnership into four quadrants – communicative, communicative/strategic, strategic, and quasi-partnership, presenting a clear pathway for typological mapping which can be explored in greater depth (*ibid.*). Several aspects relate clearly to my study, for example, the self-governance model that McDonald terms ‘communication partnership’ encompasses ideals and characteristics ‘towards devolution, participation and sustainability’ with ‘professional self-regulation’ (*ibid.*) that would make it a useful approach for diploma partnerships. The problem was, however, not how to theorise the ideal, but how to achieve this in practice (*ibid.*). The Open System Model represents ‘communicative or strategic partnership’ and differs from self-governance by being more influenced by change and more conscious of internal power (*ibid.*). This model also has relevant characteristics, particularly in its focus on development of new policy and in the recognition of its users and participants. However, the rate of change, although appropriate during development and implementation, may become problematic during established diploma delivery. The Hierarchy Model, or ‘quasi-partnership’ (*ibid.*) is probably the example which best describes the way that policy and diploma documentation envisaged diploma partnerships. The higher precedence accorded to control or elite power illustrates the formal governmental authority and the top-down management of the diploma through education policy. Partnership members had less control and although the model is more predictable, the external control is more rigid. Finally, the Rational Goal Model, described as ‘the criteria-driven approach’ or ‘strategic partnership’ (*ibid.*), is another possible reflection of the then-current system of partnership for diploma development and delivery. This model combines structured management with innovation. This approach incorporates the potential for marketisation, which was important to the diploma in terms of ensuring that the diploma remained attractive to the stakeholders while addressing learner needs and filling a gap in the 14-19 portfolio. Whether this was actually the case in practice is partly what my research seeks to address. These models were useful to explore the different aspects and make-up of approaches to diploma partnership in a more systematic way.

I also explored the model of partnership working created by Daniels’ (*et al.* 2007) of partnership working which drew on Victor and Boynton (1998) to identify five different types of work with distinct related knowledge and learning requirements (figure 4).

Recently, this was used to illustrate and discuss UK education strategies, particularly in relation to 14-19 education and the desire for mass training (Daniels *et al.* 2007). I felt this resonated with the diploma which was designed to enable a ‘mass’ of learners to pass through a ‘mass’ education system, echoing a Foucauldian perspective and continuing to the trend of the massification of education that was started in the 1970s by Margaret Thatcher and maintained by subsequent governments (Chitty 2004; Lumby and Foskett 2005).

Figure 4. Historical forms of work (Daniels et al. 2007, p.524).



Exploring the Historical Forms of Work model (figure 4) in relation to the massification of 14-19 education showed partnership working in 14-19 education as a manifestation of the desire to move from ‘mass customisation’ to ‘co-configuration’, to enable growth, networking and development (Daniels *et al.* 2005, p.524; Victor and Boynton 1998, p.195). In 14-19 education, this meant development and networking between the learner, the education system and individuals and organizations, exemplified by knotworking (Daniels *et al.* 2005). This approach to living networks and knotworking needs to be considered in relation to working in partnership to evaluate the skills, services and knowledge involved. The knotworking model allows for the movement of diploma partnerships in terms of changing members and the development of new

relationships, while reflecting a more fluid approach to working and acknowledging that there are ties and structure, for example education policies, that have to be adhered to.

As part of analysing models which may be useful to my study, consideration of Hodgson and Spours (2013a) high and low opportunity eco-systems is relevant. Their research builds on earlier work on the 14-19 education sector, on partnership working, and the diploma to present two versions of what are described as ‘local learning ecologies’: ‘low opportunity progression’ and ‘high opportunity progression’ (*ibid.* p. 211). Partnerships identified as low opportunity progression equilibrium (LOPE) are described as ‘introspective’ with a ‘narrow or problematic relationship with the community’, meaning that an LOPE partnership may remain ‘under developed and weakly collaborative’ (*ibid.* p.219). The influence of external factors, such as education policy, governmental change, and socio-economics is also of significant interest to my research as these factors contribute to make the way in which different partnerships approach the diploma unique. Hodgson and Spours’ model divides these factors into ‘Exo 1’, ‘Exo 2’ and ‘macro’, to categorise potential influences into groups allowing their influence to be considered more specifically (*ibid.*). The discussion and application of this model is more complex than space allows to present here, however, the basic elements have been explored in relation to how they may benefit this research.

Considering the range of partnership models has helped further my own thinking about how partnership is defined and implemented. This clarified my own understanding and informed my thinking towards refining and producing terms to use during the data collection, and also how I framed my research questions and discussion, which is considered within the methodology (Chapter 3 below).

2.3 Partnership and education

Partnership working is not unique to education or 14-19 education. However, some pertinent aspects require exploration to better understand how partnership has been defined within education. Of particular relevance to this research is an overview of partnership working in education. Partnership working and 14-19 education and developments in this sector will be considered to provide an understanding of the situation leading to the development of the diploma and its focus on working in partnership.

2.3.1 Partnerships in education

Partnership working in terms of education has famously been described as ‘the indefinable in pursuit of the unachievable’ (Powell 2006, p.305), however, despite this, partnership has become an almost compulsory *modus operandi* across all education sectors. This has grown as a concept in education in recent years taking schools away from being isolated institutions and enabling inter-school relationships with other educational institutions and organisations, businesses and charities. Even before the diploma was implemented, partnership working was viewed as a need within education and was written into legislation and policies governing the operation and practice of schools (Briggs 2007a-b; Lumby 2009; Dyson *et al.* 2009). The Children Act (DfES 2004b) and the 14-19 Education and Skills Implementation Plan (DfES 2006a) both highlight the importance of educational partnership, and partnership is currently seen as the best way of providing more opportunities and services for young people (Arnold 2006; Dickinson 2001; Todd 2007; Lumby and Morrison 2006).

This focus on partnership has resulted in a plethora of organisations and agencies working with schools and colleges, such as other schools, universities, external training companies and agencies. In addition to this most schools will now have worked in collaboration or with partnerships as part of some of the following national initiatives: Every Child Matters (ECM: National College for School Leadership 2008), Early Years Foundation Scheme (EYFS), Extended Schools (DENI 2011), Federations, School improvement partnerships, Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs), Learning Partnerships, Networked Learning Communities, Education Business Link Organisations (EBLOs: FEBL 2011), Education Business Partnerships (EBPs), Pathfinder projects (now concluded: Cummings *et al.* 2003; 2004; Higham *et al.* 2004), extended schools, and university widening participation projects or service learning programmes such as the Career Development Module (Newcastle University 2014a). Most schools have experienced working with an external agency or institution and have engaged to some degree in collaborative work.

Governmental guidance was commissioned to examine collaboration in education, particularly focusing on Learning Partnerships and how the ways in which they worked could be developed as new ways of working in other contexts (DfES 2003b). The guide (*ibid.*) is a substantial document which provides examples of best practice and evidence

of successful collaborative working practices in Learning Partnerships across the country. The guide stated that ‘Collaboration is no longer a social nicety, it is expected from providers of services: everyone has a role to play’ (*ibid.* p.3). It also emphasised the significance of the partnership work that was already taking place and of the government policies and directives that had led to this way of working together. The recognition of the benefits of collaborative working is particularly relevant to my research. A case study relating to Tyne and Wear identified qualitative outcomes indicating that effective collaboration and partnership working in education had been undertaken in the region for a significant period:

With the ‘Learning Place’ as a continuing testimony to the success of partnership, further ventures followed. It encouraged people, providing evidence that collaboration works, “On a day to day basis, we can say ‘Yes, partnership is working here’, and, ‘a key factor in developing effective collaborative working processes has been partners’ conscious efforts to achieve equity and commonality, highlighting shared issues and needs (ibid. pp.44-48).

The more recent findings of the Lamont and Atkinson report on the ECM agenda (National College for School Leadership 2008) summarised the need for shared leadership, partnership for delivery and work beyond school boundaries, engaging all stakeholders, including parents and pupils, and providing the knowledge and skills to work in partnership. This type of educational partnership model was also explored by Briggs (2008) who examined leadership in partnership and the particular requirements of working collaboratively in education.

A fundamental part of the Blair government policy-driven regeneration were initiatives for public-private partnerships (PPP). In education, these required schools and businesses to work together under the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) Building Schools for the Future (BSF). This scheme used money from private businesses as investment capital to improve school buildings, rather than the government providing complete funding (Treasury 2010). Although these PFI partnerships were created with the intention of improving schools and the ethos of learning across the country the programme was beset with problems and was scrapped in 2010 by Michael Gove who

replaced the scheme with a new private finance initiative (The Guardian 2011; BBC 2011).

With these experiences of partnership working it is not surprising that there has been some overlap in theory, application and modes of partnership working between business and education. For example, many schools have been built and created as part of PFIs, and within the area of study there are EBPs to create and facilitate partnership between local businesses and education. However, there is currently little literature which explicitly relates to partnership working in the way in which it has been envisaged by the government for the development and delivery of the diploma (DCSF 2008a; DCSF 2009) as it is a more recent working concept relating to a new qualification. Briggs (2008) and the University of Bristol (2014) offer definitions of educational partnership, but while these are useful they are not universally applied or accepted, and others such as Pring *et al.* (2009), Hodgson and Spours (2006; 2013a-b), and Hayward *et al.* (2006) have offered alternatives. The situation is similar regarding both communication and working relationships, as there is a wealth of information relating to these in the contexts of business and education, but much less so relating specifically to the 14-19 sector.

Todd (2007, p.13), however, presented a voice of caution in the midst of the enthusiasm for partnership, noting that:

Partnership is an over-used term in education and other services for children – so much that its meaning is in danger of becoming lost. Indeed, it is likely to have a range of meanings.

Concerns that partnership was being introduced for its own sake were raised by others who viewed partnership as a model of working promoted by a New Labour government (Glendinning *et al.* 2002; Powell and Dowling 2006). Despite these questions as to the operational motive and the conceptual use and meaning, the progress of partnership both as a model and/or a description of collaborative working has continued. Further research would be required to investigate these concerns, particularly to determine whether specific partnerships operate like parasites on a host, or whether the arrangement is beneficial to all those involved, and this research should focus on how and why those involved in partnerships worked together.

2.3.2 Issues in partnership in education

The increasing requirement for schools to be seen to work in partnership and the promotion of benefits for those involved, means that partnership working can be a difficult construct for schools to adapt to. While schools are used to working with external agencies as partners or in multi-agency arrangements, or with other schools, for example in learning alliances, clusters or pyramids, they frequently remain in competition with each other (Briggs 2008). Historically schools have worked in structures with clear lines of leadership which assumed single-organisation working with (more or less) vertical routes of communication. New ways of schools and other organisations working together required more expansive organisational models to take into consideration more complex multi-organisation and multi-professional ways of working, requiring vertical and horizontal communication within and between organisations. The increase in partnership working within the education sector and with individuals and organisations from other sectors means that leadership in schools has become increasingly complex. There is demand for new models of leadership and organisation to enable functional partnerships as consideration of where both power and accountability are held within the working arrangement is required (*ibid.*). I will explore the implementation and interpretation of partnership and some of the issues surrounding models and partnership working, however, although concerns relating to leadership and communication will be considered insofar as they bear on modeling partnership, they not be explored in depth as they are significant areas for research and commentary in their own right.

2.3.3 Development of 14-19 education

The background to the diploma is inseparable from the recent history of 14-19 education and educational policy. This connection needs to be explored to enable a full consideration of why formal partnership working was adopted in 14-19 education, and to provide a basis for examining the perceived need for and approaches and resistance to partnership working.

The reports into developments in 14-19 education which partly inspired this research identified the need for different models of leadership and organisation in relation to the requirement for partnership working in this sector (Briggs *et al.* 2007a; 2007b). The government also commissioned its own reports into 14-19 education which reviewed

the systems and policies, the most significant of which in the past 20 years include; the recommendations of the *National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education* (Dearing 1996, the ‘Dearing Review’) which made original proposals for a framework-based qualification system; the *Inquiry into A-Level Standards* (Tomlinson 2002, the ‘Tomlinson Report’; DfES 2004b) which initially defined diplomas; the *14-19 Education and Skills White Paper* (DfES 2005a) and the *14-19 Education and Skills Implementation Plan* (DfES 2005b) which both focused on collaborative provision; and subsequent documents were produced to manage the implementation and delivery of the diploma, including the 2006 Education Act which included the entitlement for young people to study a diploma (DCSF 2006). I have consulted Academic and professional commentary on these publications, most significantly, the Nuffield 14-19 Review and associated issues papers (2007a-b; 2008a-d) which were independent reviews of government policy on 14-19 education and provided an extensive background to the current 14-19 education situation (Hayward *et al.* 2006; Nuffield 14-19 Review 2007a; Pring 2009). Further literature which challenges the Government reviews and proposals has stimulated my thoughts about why partnership had become so prevalent in 14-19 education. Critics whose work has influenced and informed this enquiry include; Hodgson and Spours (2003, 2006, 2011; 2013a-b), Chitty (2004), Lumby and Foskett (2005), Ogunleye (2007), Raffe and Spours (2007), Pring *et al.* (2009) and Higham and Yeomans (2005, 2006, 2009), whose contributions will be examined in more detail later in this chapter. However, to fully understand these issues and to situate this study within the context of the evolution of 14-19 education a summary of the key issues of this history is useful.

The move towards the current education system for 14-19 year old learners can be considered to have begun with reforms of educational policies at the end of the 1970s as the Conservative government led by Margaret Thatcher instigated radical changes to an education system which had been relatively stable for more than 30 years (Hodgson and Spours 2003; Lumby and Foskett 2005; Mackinnon 1999). This period also saw the intensification of a theme that has become a familiar part of the educational development cycle: employers complain that young people leaving school are poorly-prepared for work and blame the government for failing to provide appropriate education (Chitty 2004).

The Major government provided a break from reforms. There were still changes to education policies and agendas, but not at the previous rate, and the Major administration mainly continued policy implementation that had originated from the Thatcher government (Thatcher 1992). Significantly, however, the closing months of the Major government saw the publication of *Learning to Compete: Education and Training for 14-19 Year Olds* (DfEE 1997). This was the first White Paper on 14-19 education and was widely expected to recognize the strategic importance of 14-19 education (Young and Spours 1998; Ogunleye 2007), particularly considering the results of the consultation *Equipping Young People for Working Life* which had highlighted the lack of appropriate vocational provision for young people (DfEE 1996). *Learning to Compete* (DfEE 1997) was also significant as the first of a series of reviews of 14-19 education that would eventually lead to the development of the diploma (Ogunleye 2007).

The election of the Labour Government in 1997 saw a change to the intensity of reform for post-16 and 14-19 education as the new Labour government saw an opportunity to use education to strengthen the economy and global market positioning of the UK and began a period of intense educational reform (Riley 1998; Ogunleye 2007). The concept of using education and training as a means of economic regeneration has its basis in the reforms of the Thatcher years and is a key part of the ethos of current changes to 14-19 education:

A captive audience of 14-19 year olds is perceived as a simpler and cheaper way of training the workforce than training or re-training adults... and also avoids having to take responsibility for the deficiencies or otherwise of the workforce (Lumby and Foskett 2005, p.10).

The first education policy of the new government was *Schools Achieving Success* (DfES 2001) which outlined the position of new Labour on issues the Conservative white paper, *Learning to Compete* (DfEE 1997), had identified, and on proposed developments such as introducing vocational GCSEs (Ogunleye 2007). The *Opportunity in Excellence* white paper (DfES 2003a) built on *Schools Achieving Success* (DfES 2001) to develop plans for 14-19 education, such as changes to the National Curriculum, and the development of 'hybrid' (applied and vocational) GCSEs (Ogunleye 2007, p.73). This was significant as these new qualifications were supported

by the Increased Flexibility Programme (IFP) which funded delivery via partnerships between FE colleges, schools, local education authorities and employers (*ibid.*; Ofsted 2004). This represented the first time that collaboration and partnership had been a formal requirement of funding and delivery for a qualification and was another step towards the sort of working relationship required to develop and deliver the diploma.

2.3.4 Policy and the pathway to the diploma

The 2006 Education Act (DCSF 2006) followed the *Education and Skills* white paper (DfES 2005a), and gave young people an ‘entitlement’ to study a specialist diploma which would be available from September 2008 (DfES 2006a; Allen 2007). Following the pattern of education reform begun more than 30 years previously, *Education and Skills* (DfES 2005a) also sought to address socio-economic contexts for changes to education, in particular the ongoing concerns of employers regarding the lack of relevant skills in school leavers (CBI 2006; Rikowski 2006; Chitty 2004). The 14-19 pathfinder scheme was established to address perceived gaps in the skills and knowledge of school leavers as a result of the Green Paper *Extending Opportunity, Raising Standards* (DfES 2002), which has been described as being set up ‘to test how local partners collaborate to deliver 14-19 education and training in a variety of settings’ (Ogunleye 2007, p.74). Thirty nine pathfinder schemes were set up, and the evaluation of their progress gave a clear indication of the purpose and how those involved worked together, as well as indicating what could be improved for similar schemes in the future (Higham *et al.* 2004; Higham and Yeomans, 2006; 2005). The positive outcomes from this programme may well have influenced the decisions to include this sort of collaboration or partnership working in the diploma.

The government then published what would become one of the most significant reviews of education during this period, the *14-19 Curriculum and Qualifications Reform, Final Report of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform*, known less formally as The Tomlinson Report (DfES 2004a). The purpose of the Tomlinson Report was to evaluate the educational options on offer for 14-19 year olds, the related testing methods, and to produce recommendations for how the system could be improved; the resulting proposal was:

...a unified framework of diplomas which: provide a ready-made, easy to understand guarantee of the level and breadth of attainment achieved by each young person, whatever the nature of his or her programme; offer clear and transparent pathways through the 14-19 phase and progression into further and higher learning, training and employment; are valued by employers and HE; and motivate young people to stay on in learning after the age of 16 (DfES 2004a, p.5).

The suggestion was that the current vast array of qualifications would become components of an overarching diploma which would unify the overall qualification achieved by learners and be recognised at levels appropriate to the age and stage at which they were being undertaken (*ibid.*). This change followed economic arguments against seeing educational investment as a 'general good', instead it proposed that investment should be linked to outcomes through financial incentives to performance to allow government to maximize any economic benefits from education (Riley 1998 p.79). However, although the government agreed with the findings and recommendations of the review it became apparent that the suggested changes would not affect GCSEs and A-Levels which would remain protected as 'cornerstones of any future 14-19 qualifications framework' (Ogunleye 2007, p.75; DfES 2005a).

Given the opinion of successive governments towards A-Levels and GCSEs, it is worth considering why they are so highly prized - since their inception in 1951 the A-Level has been heralded as the flagship qualification for UK Education and is the main pre-requisite to gain entrance to University (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee 2003; DfES 2005a). More recently, A-Levels have suffered from high rates of failure and pupil drop out (Ofsted 2003) and substantial year on year increases in pass rates have led to debate about the value and academic content of the qualifications – applying to GCSEs as well as A-Levels (Lightfoot 2008; Murphy 2004). This apparent obsession with this particular classification and examination in has been noted in other research (Bowring-Carr and West-Burnham 1997; Lumby 2009; Lumby and Foskett 2005), and has been compared with Foucault's (1977) theory on examination systems as 'providing surveillance and punishment, ensuring and restricted entry to the elite and penalties for the remainder' (Lumby and Foskett 2005, p.8). The Nuffield 14-19 Review (2007a, p.3) suggests that:

...the retention of GCSEs and A-Levels, which have historically been accepted as the most prestigious route of study for 14-19 year olds, may mean that the most able learners (and their parents) will continue to opt for these qualifications...

However, as schools will continue to offer those qualifications this would also have an impact on both the position of the diploma as a qualification, and on the numbers of learners able and willing to select the diploma.

Returning to the Labour policies, the suggestion in the *14-19 Education and Skills* White Paper (DfES 2005a) of the diploma as a separate qualification appeared contradictory to the suggestions made by Tomlinson (Tomlinson 2002; DfES 2004a) as although it presented an option which combined both academic and vocational learning it would increase the number of qualifications on offer. The White Paper also outlined the timeline for implementation and the phase-in of the different subjects that would be offered, clearly presenting the diploma as a planned qualification for the first time (DfES 2005a). This was followed by the *14-19 Education and Skills Implementation Plan* which clearly defined the steps for the introduction of the diploma as set out in the White Paper (DfES 2005a; 2005b). A subsequent white paper, *Further Education, Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances* (DfES 2006b) was aimed at examining and developing Further Education (FE), however, there was much of the content that was relevant to the 14-19 sector, and in particular to the modes of partnership working that would be expected for the diploma. In particular it had, 'significant implication for LEA and FE colleges in terms of collaboration; the arrangement, organisation and delivery of 14-19 provision' (Ogunleye 2007, p.76). It also built on earlier examples of collaborative working between schools and colleges to facilitate the completion of other qualifications (*ibid*). The progress towards the implementation of diplomas was completed in 2006 when the Education Act detailed the creation of 14-19 partnerships which would work to deliver the diploma with the government and Local Authorities (LAs) which meant that diploma provision had become law (DCSF 2006).

Following the period of policy creation under Tony Blair which had seen the pathway established for the diplomas, 14-19 provision faced further challenges when Gordon Brown assumed leadership in 2007. Despite this period being one of increasing partnership activity within education, one of the first actions of the new government

was to reorganise the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) into two separate areas which split 14-19 education between them, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) (Briggs 2008, p.3). The renaming of the Department for Education and the splitting of the age remits had a significant impact on 14-19 education, considering positioning, morale and publicity as it had publicly been divided and education removed from public office. Mainly because this meant that there was no joined up provision in government across the age range of the diploma.

2.4 New Labour policy context

2.4.1 Competition and public service delivery

Partnership working in education was explored above (2.3), with a focus on collaboration and the diploma. However, tensions in working relationships arising from government policy and partnership requirements were observed as well as benefits. This section considers these tensions to explore contemporary government policy under New Labour and its relationship to the requirements for competition and collaboration in public service delivery, education, and the diploma.

New Labour enthusiasm for using partnership in policy development and competition as a driver for change in public sector delivery more generally have been discussed (2.3), but its impact on public sector working is worth further consideration. Partnership working was promoted as a progressive form of governance (Ellison and Ellison 2006, p. 337), but it has also been interpreted as providing ‘ideological figleaves’ for dominant power (MacDonald 2005, p. 579; Newman 2001, p. 1). Higham and Yeomans (2009, p. 4) identified this use of partnership as ‘public sector managerialism’ which ‘highlighted tensions between strong regulation from central government and opportunities to exercise institutional autonomy and local responsiveness’ (*ibid.*), indicating that local delivery of policies promoting partnership could not be met as easily as anticipated. Lester (*et al.* 2008) considered these tensions in the healthcare sector, arguing that New Labour viewed partnership as a way of integrating fragmented and complex organisations; this had some benefits, but difficulties around merging working cultures and commitment affected the efficacy of the relationships. Higham and Yeomans (2009, p. 4) observed that New Labour emphasised collaboration within policy, but ‘strengthened... the framework of institutional competition introduced by

the previous Conservative government', which further reinforced tensions and complexities between organisations and individuals expected to work in partnership (Newman 2001, p.104). This dissonance between policy requirements for partnership working and the use of competition as a driver for improvement within the public sector raised questions about how this was addressed on a local basis and within particular sectors; something more was required to enable a partnership-based collaborative utopia to be delivered in the regions, addressing different geographical, socio-economic and institutional requirements (Higham and Yeomans 2009, p.4).

The implementation of government policy to facilitate partnership working needed to recognise local requirements for delivery and organisation was described by Pratchett (2004, p. 358), as 'local autonomy', without which 'it is almost impossible to discuss the relationship between central and local government', and which may improve 'community control' and democracy (Bleas 2003 in Pratchett 2004, p. 359). However, Pratchett (2004, p.358) acknowledges the problematic fluidity of both place and politics and examines tensions between local autonomy and the 'control freakery' of New Labour policy. These tensions can also be seen to exemplify McDonald's (2005) discussion of a partnership model based on a hierarchical structure of governance (2.2, above). The motives of New Labour's emphasis on partnership and devolution have also been questioned, particularly the impact on public services, and the paradox that increasing local democracy emphasised the lack of local autonomy (Avis 2009, p.634). Avis (2009, p. 640) summarises localism as having, 'embryonically re-established local democratic accountability through the current emphasis placed by the state on the local', while also addressing wider issues of local democracy and acknowledging 'user voice' in local public service provision and delivery. Further work on localism in education (Hodgson and Spours 2013a-b; Higham and Yeomans 2009) is considered in more depth below.

2.4.2 Competition in education policy

New Labour policies in education, particularly the 14-19 sector, specifically developed competition and marketization as drivers for quality enhancement while expecting engagement in partnership and collaborative working (Higham and Yeomans 2009; Hodgson and Spours 2006). Hodgson and Spours (2006, p.325) noted that government policy makers and education practitioners presented 'aspirations for the development of

a 14-19 phase of education', but that 'historical, institutional, curricular and organisational features' were not compatible with these ideals of a unified and inclusive system envisaged by Tomlinson (Hodgson, Spours and Wickenden 2012, para.3). New Labour's policy rhetoric initially promoted collaboration, but subsequently privileged 'contestability' and 'competition' (Hodgson and Spours 2006, p.325), which were applied to education in the same way as to other areas of the public sector (as discussed above). Partnership working was viewed as a way of improving 'economic competitiveness and social inclusion' within education through new initiatives - particularly new qualifications and curriculum change (Higham and Yeomans 2009, p. 2). The reality was that the benefits of collaboration were disrupted by complex working arrangements within the 14-19 sector, and further complicated by other policy requirements such as funding and testing (Hodgson and Spours 2006, pp.325-6; Higham *et al.* 2004). The complexity partnership relationships and the influence of differing factors, however, meant that it was difficult to evaluate performance or collect data, making it impossible to establish whether government objectives had been achieved (Hodgson and Spours 2006, p. 327). Hodgson and Spours (2006, pp.329-330) described this government approach to the organisation of an emerging 14-19 phase as 'weakly collaborative', with 'relatively weak policy levers and initiatives working against a deeply embedded and historical set of competitive institutional arrangements' which did not naturally encourage collaboration, but reinforced competition. Significantly, Higham and Yeomans (2009, p.6) highlight that 'partnership can only be understood in relation to local and institutional contexts and circumstances', meaning that mediation is required to translate national policy into local delivery, just as localism and increased local autonomy are required to enable public sector organisations to meet policy requirements. Hodgson and Spours (2011) identify this use of partnership by the Labour Government as 'centrally managed localism', where the drivers for reform were given primacy over empowerment over local autonomy. This conflict between the centre and the local created by New Labour policy required mediation to address local needs while maintaining discourses of devolved governance and centralised power.

2.4.3 Competition and the diploma

New Labour demonstrated their commitment to the development of 14-19 education with a campaign of policy reform and initiative creation, including the launch of the diploma as their flagship qualification (Higham and Yeomans 2009, p.2). Education,

and specifically 14-19 education, was viewed as a way of addressing social and economic problems, and the development and implementation of the diploma reflected this (2.4 above; Lumby and Foskett 2005; Higham and Yeomans 2009; Hodgson and Spours 2006), using increasing attainment, choice of programmes, and the requirement for learners to remain in education for longer as means of addressing governmental issues rather than to necessarily benefit the learners.

In terms of policy requirements for collaborative behaviour, the *14-19 Education and Skills White Paper* (DfES 2005a) had enshrined partnership as the working model for the diploma, while the *14-19 Implementation Plan* (DfES 2005b) detailed how this was to be undertaken by the stakeholders. The *Education Act* (DCSF 2006) made these collaborative requirements law, marking the beginning of significant developments in implementing partnership working across the diploma, with specific guidance provided in the *14-19 Education and Skills Update* (DCSF 2007a; 2.4, above). The diploma brought much greater pressure from central government for schools and other education providers to work in partnership, as ‘partnership working became imperative in order to comply’ (Haynes and Lynch 2013, p.426). Prior to the diploma, partnerships had been formed on a primarily voluntary basis to meet specific local needs (Haynes and Lynch 2013, p.426; Hodgson and Spours 2006, p.330; Higham *et al.* 2004). The new diploma partnerships were characterised by Haynes and Lynch (2013, pp.440-441) as ‘enacted’ partnerships to describe their formation in response to policy requirements in contrast with the pre-existing locally ‘negotiated’ partnerships. Further documentation was produced, including *14-19 Partnerships and Plans* (DCSF 2008a), *Delivering 14-19 Reform: Next Steps* (DCSF 2008c), and *Partnerships and Planning* (DCSF 2009), which provided specific guidance on how stakeholders should work together to deliver the qualification. Working together was generally presented as beneficial for both the learners and the organisations involved in the diploma. The government, however, simultaneously reduced related services, dividing the DfES, raising the learner participation age, and making significant cuts to education funding, which all increased tensions for those engaged in diploma delivery by increasing competition for resources and funding, which ‘highlighted the fragility of the enacted partnerships’ (Haynes and Lynch 2013, p.441; also Briggs 2008; Hodgson and Spours 2006; 2.4 above). Enforcing partnership on organisations whose existing relationships were based on

competition for results, students and funding was fraught and created tensions which remained throughout the life of the diploma.

The wealth of guidance did not fully consider local contexts for diploma delivery. The concept of localism had already been recognised within policy and in academic discourses on education, but needed further development to enable effective partnership working for diploma delivery (Higham and Yeomans 2009; Hodgson and Spours 2011). This was not addressed directly by the government as the diploma was intended to address wider political needs. A greater focus on learners and education was outlined by Hodgson and Spours (2013a-b) who suggested building ‘high opportunity progression eco-systems’ to develop the concept of localisation in order to address some of the key issues in 14-19 education (2.2 above). How this debate on localism would have influenced the development of diploma policy was never fully realised following the withdrawal of the diploma.

2.4.4 New Labour and competition

New Labour policy renewed and enforced ideas of competition and collaboration as a form of power and government control, even though these ideas conflicted with the stated ideal of partnership working, a theme apparent across public sector, education, and diploma policies. The development of localism as a concept resulted from the need for the mediation of government policy to enable local implementation. New models of education delivery and education policy development are needed to strengthen and increase the efficacy of partnership working to enable practitioners to deliver the diploma (and other qualifications) in this time of educational and socio-economic change, and my research contributes to this by exploring ways in which diploma stakeholders engage with partnership working in the North East.

2.5 Partnership and the diploma

The links between the introduction of the diploma and the history of 14-19 education are inseparable, and reasons for change at this time are conceptually similar to the reasons for educational change at the end of the 1970s, although the diplomas were introduced at the beginning of a major global economic recession and period of social change, rather than as a response to these conditions. This ‘desire’ for education to solve both social and economic problems through education policy and strategy was a

key component of Labour's 'third way' manifesto, and considering education as a catalyst for social justice and economic growth was aligned with the original aims of the Thatcher government (Lumby and Foskett 2005). Other key factors which influenced changes to 14-19 education include:

- The position of the UK in the Global Economy ("UK PLC")
- Government desire to increase the UK knowledge economy
- Governmental popularity and unpopularity
- The need to reduce perceived youth crime (linked to increased school leaving age)
- Ongoing policy generation
- The target to increase participation in HE to 50% by 2010
- Reducing unemployment
- Improving links with pupils who are Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) target groups and apprenticeships.

From September 2008, 14-year olds could undertake one of five diplomas as defined in the 2006 Education Act (Allen 2007; DCSF 2006). The diplomas were designed to occupy a position between the dominant A-Level qualifications and the 'much maligned' vocational options, a position which has held mixed results for previous qualifications (Nuffield 14-19 Review 2007a, p.2). Despite the Labour government's confident promotion of the diploma as 'the main mechanism for raising levels of post-16 participation' (*ibid.* p.1), doubts and arguments were voiced in relation to the new qualifications;

... the latest set of 'middle track' qualifications that have failed in the past... the diplomas will only succeed if the government reverts to the original Tomlinson strategy of bringing all qualifications for 14-19 year olds within a single comprehensive diploma framework (ibid. p.1).

This review highlighted the government's lack of clarity on the issue – although the fact that this was recognised could be seen as development (*ibid.*).

The diploma had the advantage that it had most Universities 'on board' to accept the qualifications as a valid entry route to HE. Critique of the new qualification related mainly to the management and curation of 'gateways' to HE (Lumby and Foskett 2005, p.12), both in a practical sense and in a broader conceptual sense, as presented by Deleuze (1992) in his consideration of Michel Foucault's understanding of 'historical societies', where the school is presented as a further step in the society of control. Diploma qualifications in science, languages and humanities, subjects traditionally associated with routes into universities, were planned to be introduced later, initially decreasing the popularity of the qualification relative to GCSEs and A-Levels (Nuffield 14-19 Review 2007a). Indeed, development of these diploma lines ceased in May 2010 before they had been rolled out (Darlington 14-19 Partnership 2010). The diploma was also designed to strengthen links with employers, training agencies and employment agencies from relationships which had been initiated in qualifications in the 1970s, and this was reflected throughout the diploma policies and literature. However, following the election of the Conservative-Liberal coalition government in 2010, the extent of the diploma implementation was curtailed, reduced and finally withdrawn in 2013.

2.5.1 Putting the partnership in diploma partnerships

Once the Education Act (DCSF 2006) had paved the way for the creation of diploma partnerships involving LAs, Learning and Skills Councils (LSC), schools, colleges and other providers, policies and guidance documents were produced to detail how the diplomas should be developed and delivered and how those involved should work together. In considering how partnership is understood and engaged with in diploma provision it is essential to explore these to determine how partnership was defined within the diploma and what expectations there were of diploma partnerships.

The *14-19 Education and Skills White Paper* defined partnership as the working arrangement for the diploma, and introduced key concepts, such as 'putting employers in the lead' and describing the qualifications as 'academic and vocational', showing links to stakeholders even at this developmental stage (DfES 2005a). *The 14-19 Implementation Plan* which followed detailed how the 14-19 partnerships would be set

up by the government and led by LAs and LSCs to ensure inclusion of stakeholders and provision of services and qualifications for learners (DCSF 2008a; DfES 2005b). This included reflection on lessons learned from previous initiatives, including the Pathfinder and IFPs and detailed how Diploma Development Partnerships (DDPs) would develop content, while local 14-19 partnerships would focus on delivery (DfES 2005b). The main point, however, was that partnership working was highlighted and recognised as ‘fundamental to the delivery of the reforms’, and the implementation plan provided specific guidance on how this would be managed (*ibid.*). *The Education Act 2006* (DCSF 2006) made these proposals law and further enshrined the language and mode of government defined partnership working for diploma delivery. More specific guidance was produced, significantly, the *14-19 Education and Skills Implementation Update* (DCSF 2007a) which detailed the progress towards delivery, the brief for the marketing campaign, as well as more specific partnership guidance. This included instructions on Managing Information Across Partners (MIAP) which concerned appropriate information-sharing regulations and processes, and highlighted a range of available additional guidance such as the *Professional Development Directory* (DCSF 2007a), guidance for the exams office (*ibid.*), and *14-19 Curriculum Development Guidance for HE* (*ibid.*). This guidance contributed to the outgoing messages which set out government aspirations about how partnership working should be used to make the diploma a success and provide the best possible experience for the learners.

The use of partnership as a mode of working and delivery was specifically explored in *14-19 Partnerships and Plans*, which recruited volunteers from established diploma partnerships to ‘clarify the status and definition of a 14-19 partnership’ which had been defined as a priority (DCSF 2008a, p.2). Through the use of case studies and discussion points this document defined key partnership issues, including who partnerships should include as members, detailed what the specific function of the partnership should be, and provided three suggested models for partnership working based on how different areas planned to work (*ibid.*). The models suggested in *14-19 Partnerships and Plans* presented a hierarchical model of partnership working and related to basic vertical and horizontal leadership and communication structures and clearly defined the position of the known members of the partnerships such as local authorities and schools (*ibid.*). *14-19 Partnerships and Plans* also highlighted the widespread differences in terminology used in discussing and naming partnerships (*ibid.* p.4). The terms used by the

contributors to the *14-19 Partnerships and Plans* research included ‘networks’, ‘fora’, and ‘strategic partnerships’, and while a definition of 14-19 partnership was not set out, due to ‘wide variations in local governance structures’, there *was* guidance provided regarding the role and composition of the partnerships’ (*ibid.* p.4).

Following *14-19 Partnerships and Plans* (*ibid.*) the government produced *Delivering 14-19 Reform: Next Steps* (DCSF 2008c) which focused on delivery, but contained further guidance and key messages for promoting and managing partnership work. In this, the first three chapters focused on qualification delivery, the fourth and fifth chapters considered how collaboration would be used for delivery, and how local delivery systems could be established (*ibid.*). This reinforced the key messages about ‘pooling of resources... to deliver economies’, and highlighted how partnerships would need to plan carefully to ensure ‘the collaborative infrastructure necessary’, and stated that from an initial 144 partnerships in 2008, that there would be 335 delivery partnerships from September 2009 (*ibid.*) requiring significant local and national management. The recommendations determined the importance of the inclusion of the ‘student voice’ as the most important stakeholders of the diploma and exhorted that they should be involved as contributors to the partnership, and also suggested strong links with employers, HE and universities as these would also be significant in the future of the diploma (*ibid.*). Concepts within partnership guidance were also included, such as development and vision to extend the life and benefits of working relationships, accountability which makes partnership members committed and responsible for their actions and contributions, and funding which is an essential building block to facilitate practical development and delivery across the partnership (*ibid.*). The purpose of this was to set out how the government intended the diploma to operate and to ensure a standard of national conformity despite the differences between local areas and larger regions.

14-19 Partnerships and Planning (DCSF 2009) was built on the findings of *14-19 Partnerships and Plans* (DCSF 2008a) and provided more detail on government expectations for the management and monitoring of 14-19 education, but specifically the plans for launching and developing the diploma. The vision presented within *14-19 Partnerships and Planning* stated that partnership is the ‘key to ensure there is a coherent, locally owned strategy that meets local needs, has the buy in of all partners

and that will deliver the 14-19 entitlement for all young people' (DCSF 2009, p.4). This was significant in terms of the management of 14-19 responsibilities that LAs had to adjust to during a period where the government made significant changes including the reduction of the Connexions service, the introduction of the entitlement to the diploma, and the raising of learner participation age, alongside year on year cuts to funding.

The policies and legislation that facilitated the development of partnership working were a core component of the diploma agenda. The study of policy documents is a foundation of educational research, and although there are few examples of research specifically investigating education policy and the diploma there has been a significant amount of work on its development as a qualification and on the 14-19 curriculum (Hayward *et al.* 2006; Nuffield 14-19 Review 2007a-b; 2008a-d; Glendinning *et al* 2002). For example, Powell and Dowling (2006) examine New Labour's partnerships to look at how models of partnership serve the policies that they were planned to address, and find that the idea and the ideal do not always correlate, borne out by Haynes and Lynch's (2013) study of diploma partnerships. Studies by Hodgson and Spours (2006, 2013a-b) and Higham and Yeomans (2009) identified similar issues within educational partnerships. Ogunleye (2007) reviewed government policy papers on 14-19 education and concluded that although there are challenges and imbalances that the 14-19 would continue to be of specific interest to the government. Lumby and Foskett provided an in-depth review of the history of 14-19 education and evaluated potential future developments (2005). This policy analysis has been important to helping me to recognise the power and impact that the way in which the development and implementation of the diploma has been framed, phrased and presented within education policy. My thesis aims to understand how these partnerships have been taken from the pages of the guidance policies discussed above and established locally to support the delivery of the diploma.

2.5.2 Diploma partnership and employers

Partnership with employers has been a particular focus of the diploma since its inception, with employer input into the design and curriculum of the diploma included in education policy and high-profile examples of employer involvement with the qualification in promotional literature (e.g. NEBP 2008). The complex nature of

diploma partnerships and the potential for the different ways in which employers might contribute or develop working relationships to contribute to the diploma made this an interesting aspect of diploma partnerships to explore.

The practice of partnership between education and industry has been well documented and there are examples of partnership from within the education sector which have developed over a several decades, with some of the most significant being from other third strand, vocational education and training, such as the GNVQ and BTEC (Huddleston and Laczik 2010, p.1). In these qualifications employers are actively involved with the training and often involved in the development and teaching, as well as offering work placements and in some cases even offering employment at the end of the course. The Centre for Education and Industry produced a list which detailed more than 40 different ways in which employers engaged with schools and education providers on a voluntary basis, and discussed how this had increased over the past 35 years (*ibid.*). Within the region of this study employers have also had opportunities to become involved with schools through other routes such as the EBLOs which help to facilitate work experience arrangements and promote links between enterprise, businesses and schools at a local level within regions. The in-qualification work experience was one of the unique selling points for the diploma and a further important reason for employer partnership. This training strand of the diploma cemented the third strand positioning of the qualification as offering something between the ‘academic’ GCSEs and A-Levels and the vocational BTECs. In diploma promotion and language the ‘vocational’ tag had been clearly avoided, as Allen (2007, p.300) highlights:

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) material now plays down the direct vocational relevance of the diplomas... at a general level, there is also an issue about whether concentrating on one vocational area will help the ‘employability’ of young people... young people must expect to work across several employment sectors during their working lives... rather than looking into a narrow specialisation at 14, a good general education and development of a wide range of personal skills would seem more appropriate.

Furthermore, the intention of partnership between the diploma providers and employers was not just to improve the experience available to the learners, but to respond to the

changing socio-economic situation by highlighting the importance of education to employment and industry within policy (DCSF 2007a-b) with the key message that the government wants the diplomas to ‘put employers in the driving seat’ (Raffe and Spours 2007, p.35; Allen 2007). This appears to reprise the pattern of previous governments to use education and business to address contemporary social issues and dissatisfaction for learners, employers and society. It would also appear to answer what Rikowski (2000; 2006) refers to as the long moan of history, which can be summed up as the ongoing employer dissatisfaction with the skills of school leavers. This has been commented on most significantly in recent times by the Confederation of British Industry (CBI 2011), as well as by significant industrial leaders, including Sir Stuart Rose, executive chairman of Marks and Spencers, and Sir Terry Leahy, chief executive of Tesco, who have all made statements to the effect that learners leave school without sufficient skills to be able to fully contribute to the workplace (Jameson 2009; Goodman 2009). Addressing these issues was one of several concerns of the development of the diploma and government literature has been enthusiastic about promoting employer contributions (Laczik and White 2009; DCSF 2008a; 2008b).

Diplomas were the first qualifications to have employer input from the start of the design and contributions through both consultation and direct involvement with 14 out of 17 diploma subjects clearly related to industry sectors (Huddleston and Laczik 2010, pp.1-7). Involving employers in qualification design is not a new phenomenon, but the diploma appeared to differ in the scale and the scope of the expected involvement. The way in which this was required by policy during the qualification development and delivery was also a new approach (Laczik and White 2009; Huddleston and Laczik 2010). The requirement for partnership working with employers and the level of engagement demanded was described as ‘arguably the most sophisticated manifestation of employer engagement to date’. This, paradoxically, may also have been a peak for employer involvement due to the demands and the complexity (Laczik and White 2009, pp.401, 411), and was in contrast to the position of the QCA who preferred the qualification to be seen as more ‘academic’ and less ‘vocational’ (Allen 2007, p.300).

Despite encouraging signs of engagement, the employer contributions appeared to mainly be ‘voluntary’, or as ‘consultation’ rather than systematic or embedded. The benefits to employers appeared to be through being able to advertise their contribution

to education and promoting social responsibility, and the promise of gaining future employees with enhanced skills and knowledge. This lack of engagement, despite the keen promotion of employer relationships and in-course work experience, became a focus for research to explore why this should be the case (Laczik and White 2009; Keep 2005; Huddleston and Laczik 2010). There were also different reactions to the types of employers involved with different diploma lines, and concerns about the type of employers involved as the engagement strategy appeared to exclude Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) due to the way in which employers were asked to contribute (Huddleston and Laczik 2010; Laczik and White 2009; Payne 2008). Employers *were* consulted in the development of the diplomas and this included regional events, focus groups and market research to establish their opinion on the qualification (Ertl *et al.* 2009), however, the extent to which this was then represented was questioned by Huddleston and Laczik (2010). For example, insufficiencies in the process of employer engagement were highlighted, and in particular the small number of employers involved meant this group was never truly representative of employers nationally (*ibid.*). Voluntary participation also added a further level of self-selection or de-selection to the process as engagement became contingent on whether employers could afford to be involved (*ibid.*). It was suggested that the diploma was '*relying... on voluntary activity by a coalition of the willing*' which would not provide either an appropriate or a sustainable mode of employer contribution to the qualification (*ibid.* p.14). This situation makes employer involvement in diploma design appear to be a quick and cheap fix in response to the criticism of the skills of school leavers by employers, rather than a sustained campaign involving a genuine cross section of industry and organisations. Ertl (*et al.* 2009) provided a thorough review of the employers engaged with the diploma which raised questions of whether the diploma was an appropriate way of addressing the skills deficit and preparing young people for work and at the level of employer engagement, despite the measures undertaken by the government.

Employers did what they could, given the conditions for contributing, the time allowed and the government conditions (Huddleston and Laczik 2010), but there was 'a possible mismatch between policy makers' expectations from employers at the macro level, and what in fact happens at the local, micro level', with further suggestions that the goodwill may have run out and that incentives may be needed for further and sustained

involvement (Laczik and White 2009, p.412). Those employers who were involved faced additional challenges because of the newness of the qualification and the changes from familiar BTEC, A-Levels and GCSEs (Huddleston and Laczik 2010). Significantly, despite the effort from the government, the practitioners and the employers, the amount of employer contact time available to diploma learners did not appear to change despite the fanfare with which links with employers were heralded (Allen 2007). The prevailing economic situation also represented a double-edged sword in terms of employer involvement in extra-business activities. While there was an understanding that employers needed to contribute to the system in order to ensure that their requirements for skills were addressed, there was also a growing reluctance to spend money outside of areas that directly contributed to the businesses themselves. Allen (2007, p.302) further comments that:

Employer representatives have been present on bodies like BTEC and City & Guilds that have been delivered for full-time vocational education courses, but their input has been ad hoc. Rather than developing real employment skills, vocational qualifications, despite being promoted as new style 'competences', have continued to be used to manage changes in the composition of the secondary school population, and as a response to behaviour problems and disaffection; in short, as a new form of social control.

This indicates a purpose other than to be of maximum educational benefit to the learners, and reflects more on Deleuzian and Foucauldian visions of a society of control (Deleuze 1992; Foucault 1977) rather than an egalitarian Frierean educational utopia (Friere 1970).

Employers in the region of the study had also voiced specific concerns. The employer engagement strategy from Newcastle Education Business Partnership (NEBP 2008) presented key issues, such as inclusion, meeting attendance and contributions, and looked at how to work with employers to ensure that these were addressed. Strategies that were adopted included holding breakfast meetings and dedicated employer liaison to ensure that everyone was able to contribute. Minutes of the North-East Chamber of Commerce Tyne and Wear (NECC 2008, p.2) addressed some of the issues of its members regarding the diploma and employer engagement,

The Chair discussed diplomas being delivered under the 14-19 Partnership and raised concerns for the lack of effort being made to engage and involve employers in the project. Success in their delivery depends heavily on employers being engaged in this partnership and LW would like to know whether NECC has a policy to ensure employers are involved with schools, trainers and independent organisations within the sector. Though AS confirmed NECC did not have a policy to ensure employer engagement with educational sectors, he did acknowledge that it was something the organisation could improve on.

Concerns regarding these issues were also raised on a national basis within the annual report of the Nuffield 14-19 Review (Hayward *et al.* 2006), summarised by Mansell (2009) who reported that:

...education policy may be based on a misunderstanding of the truth behind employer-school relationships. Ministers talk about education, training and skills being important to business success, and say these are essential to developing the 'knowledge-driven economy'. The implication is that employers are willing to devote large amounts of time, energy and resources to improving young people's skills levels. The reality, says the report, is that they have generally proved reluctant to do so.

This is a concern in terms of the content and delivery of the practical element of the diploma, as well as the curriculum design. The reality described above of a reluctance to engage is a significant concern for partnership working and the way in which employers contribute and engage or not is a consideration which requires inclusion within this thesis.

2.6 Partnership and working relationships

Partnership and partnership working has been a fundamental component of governance, and particularly favoured by the New Labour government (2.4 above; Newman 2001; McDonald 2005), as well as being central to government policy and direction in relation to education, but specifically the diploma (Briggs *et al.* 2007a-b). This trend has been evidenced in the proposals, reviews and reports produced during the consultation and initial stages of the qualification which demonstrate the significance of partnership

working to its implementation (DCSF 2007a; DCSF 2008a-e; DCSF 2009) but is, however, problematic.

2.6.1 Competition

There is precedent for partnership working in education and those required to be the main stakeholders in the partnerships, such as schools and businesses, generally have some partnership experience, but are mainly used to 'working independently and being independently accountable' (Briggs 2008, p.1). Demands for partnership working have been seen to increase tensions between organisations who need to work together to ensure delivery of the diploma. Briggs (2008, p.3) while focusing on leadership in partnership working, discussed relevant issues in terms of conflict:

Schools, colleges, work-based learning providers, voluntary agencies and employers each have their own culture, operational systems and professional focus, and within each provider group there are notable differences in organisational purpose and leadership style. There are historic areas of ignorance, rivalry and suspicion between the groups, generated partly by their hitherto parallel existence, by Government policy based upon competition, and a policy-induced focus upon institutional outcomes rather than on longer term progression and achievement for young people.

This is just as relevant to this research as it was to that undertaken by Briggs (*ibid.*) as the issues are current and schools and colleges remain in competition for learners, funding and staff, as well as reputation, and all of which add to the complexities of working together. In addition to these, it is important to recognise the many and significant changes that took place across the LAs, the LSCs and Local Learning and Skills Councils (LLSCs) and the Connexions service, highlighting the 'state of flux' engendered by the review of the LSCs and the termination of the Connexions service (*ibid.* p.3). This did not improve over the final years of the Labour government which saw the DfES torn apart across the 14-19 age divide with the creation of the DCSF and DIUS which formally separated universities from children schools and families and left the upper end of 14-19 education detached.

Further issues related to the 'high stakes' nature of collaboration in education arose from the competition inherent in the attainment culture and are fostered by the continued measurement of educational success by recruitment and league tables:

Each young person brings funding to the educational provider who recruits them and successful (and unsuccessful) learning outcomes affect the 'score' of the provider on the national league tables. Educational leaders are accountable for the success of their own individual organisation: there are currently no league table scores or funding prizes for collaboration. Under what conditions, therefore, would organisational leaders subcede the interest of their own organisation to the interests of the learner and the partnership?' (Briggs 2007a, p.4).

This competitiveness of educational organisations and institutions is also noted in the 2005-06 Annual Report of the Nuffield 14-19 Review (Hayward *et al.* 2006) which discusses how the use of government funding allocated on the basis of attainment is not a productive incentive, and that it is exactly due to these issues that it continues to encourage competition rather than collaboration.

Despite these difficulties there are reasons for partnership in this type of qualification as it is a method of enabling people and organizations to come together, engaging both schools and employers in a common purpose. Partnership was also a fundamental part of government rhetoric and has been a requirement for educational funding. In the case of the diploma, and particularly within the region of study, schools, colleges and other learning organisations could not provide the full diploma offer unless they had partners.

2.6.2 Working together

Although the situation was challenging, evidence suggested that where practitioners had previously worked together partnership working was likely to succeed. Many education providers and other organisations involved in diploma delivery had previous experience of working together to deliver other projects or programmes, meaning that the structure outlined by the government for the diplomas did not introduce integrated partnership working as completely new idea. For example, Oxfordshire Learning Partnership had demonstrated high level collaborative working and a range of models were developed as a result of this by Munday and Fawcett (2002), and examples from within the region of

my study exemplified how education providers and other agencies had worked together to support and facilitate 14-19 learning (Clark *et al.* 2008). Working together to deliver the diploma and redefining previous relationships provided the starting place for the development of effective models of partnership working. Hodgson and Spours (2006) highlighted the need to move on from ‘weakly collaborative arrangements’ to much stronger working relationships, which Briggs (2008, p.3) summed up succinctly as ‘addressing disaffection among learners to reform secondary education, pooling local resources efficiently, and reducing social segregation which is exacerbated by funding differences’. Tuckman’s (1965) examination of the ways in which teams progress through formation and stages of working together can equally be applied to the working relationships between diploma practitioners, learners and other stakeholders. This model addresses the manner in which the stakeholders came together during the forming and storming stages while concerns were addressed, before enabling progress within the model to develop familiarity and learning to work together towards performing as a team to deliver the diploma. As with Tuckman’s (*ibid.*) original model, there is scope to repeat the cycle as required as working relationships evolve and new members are added to the partnership or move on to other things. This evolution facilitates change within the partnership arrangement and is reminiscent of the flexibility within the ‘knotworking’ concept presented by Daniels (*et al.* 2007, p.526 citing Engestrom *et al.* 1999).

Allen (2007) identified reasons why those involved in 14-19 education may or may not choose to work together but particularly acknowledges inhibitors to working together. For example, concerns applicable to schools and their pupils have been identified and include funding and lack of preparation;

Many students, however, may not want to ‘travel to learn’ for part of the week and opt for the vocational courses their schools currently offer. This would suit cash-strapped schools and avoid them having to hand over resources’ (ibid. p.302).

Research... shows many schools and LEAs unprepared for the diplomas, not convinced about their potential success and unclear why they are needed at all. The speed at which the diplomas are to be introduced – final syllabus details are still not available, the lack of input from teachers and lecturers

and the absence of professional development has worried both the University and College Union (UCU) and the NUT (ibid. p.302).

Other concerns have been voiced that a partnership approach to education may be providing a superficial way of addressing socio-economic concerns than focusing on investigating and solving the actual social needs, in particular that,

Educational values are forfeited as the priority is to maximise added-value. For example... the public sector manager is faced with the same changes as a commercial employer – to get ‘more for less’ from employees as market, not educational, priorities prevail (ibid. p.34).

Despite these concerns, the benefits to working in partnership have also been widely recognised which has led to partnership working as being seen by many, successive governments included, as a desirable way of working (Briggs 2007a). There have been some examples where partnership has worked well, in addition to previous examples of programmes and projects (2.3, above) Learning Partnerships have provided evidence of successful collaborative work (Rodger *et al.* 2003; Briggs 2007a, p.7). Briggs (2007a, p.7) listed some of the reasons for their success in this as:

- a strong management and coordination team;
- clear vision and strong will to get things done;
- effective structures for internal communication; and
- an ethos of inclusiveness.

In the region of this study this good practice was identified within the Tyne and Wear Learning Partnership,

14-19 provision was identified as ‘a key area where we’ve all worked together.’ Success was attributed to the partners’ conscious efforts to achieve equity and commonality, which ‘contrasts with the hierarchical and positional power-based roles and relationships so often in evidence’ (DfES 2003b, p.45).

These outcomes are significant both in highlighting some of the issues inherent in working in this mode, but also in identifying some of the factors for success and effective partnership working for delivery.

2.6.3 Perceptions of power

Following the exploration of how and why individuals and organisations work together, it is also important to recognise and explore the power relationships within partnership, and how these are realised and acknowledged. As a basic definition, this includes power as a recognised concept, a natural force or state of being, and as present in hierarchical control. In accordance with Foucault (1977), power can be seen as neither good nor bad, but what constructs things and makes them what they are. In relation to partnership and the diploma, it is important to recognise the power dichotomies between practitioners, parents, learners and other stakeholders.

More generalised studies of power relations and control (Foucault 1977; Faubion 2002; Lukes 2004) have been used to inform understanding of power relations in education, for example by Derkzen (*et al.* 2008) who have all provided differing views on this complex subject. These perspectives on power have also influenced other educational scholars, for example Bastiani (1987) and Friere (1970) in their writing on social and cultural capital and educational development and freedom, and more recently Todd and Higgins' (1998) exploration of power within school and parent relationships, and McDonald (2005) in addressing issues of power, partnership and governance.

One of the initial considerations of power within partnerships relates to perceptions of power, for example recognising who has the power, whether anyone feels powerful and whether those who have the power know that they have it. This is relevant to considering benefits and impediments within partnership working as to whether having or lacking power affects the perceptions of power, for example their position in league tables, the results of Ofsted, and the qualifications offered can all influence internal and external perceptions of status and influence. Similarly, looking at whether diploma learners and their parents feel empowered or powerless in relation to their interactions in the partnership, Todd and Higgins (1998, p.229) noted that 'professionals and parents are both powerful and powerless in different ways', but that both groups differed in their perceptions of power in terms of their own agency and the agency of others; neither

group fully recognised the extent of the agency that they possessed. Bastiani (1987), in his exploration of home-school relationships, had previously recognised that 'participation' or partnership between parents and professionals had been the least visible of all models (Todd 2000, p.48). This is less directly related to partnership as envisaged in diploma policy, but is significant to themes of learner and parent inclusion, as it relates to both Arnstein's ladder of participation and Hart's adaptation, highlighting the provision of information to parents rather than inclusion and participation. McDonald (2005, p.582) specifically considered the recognition of power in his more recent work on partnership and governance, stating that government agendas on partnership focus on presenting partnership working in a positive manner. These agendas highlight the benefits for all involved, and include 'strategic recommendation to less powerful groups on how to make 'actually existing' partnerships operate more effectively'. The success of these recommendations, however, relies on those within the partnership recognising and acknowledging the power relationships and hierarchical status of themselves and others. Todd (2000) and McDonalds' (2005) work demonstrate that perceptions of power are transient and subjective, depending on the position or viewpoint of those in the partnership.

Derkzen (*et al.* 2008, p.459) state that partnerships can be thought of as 'distinctive arenas of power where the emphasis on participation and consensus shapes power relations in particular ways', despite opposing perspectives that would view these notions of power and 'exclusionary mechanisms', and that as an extension of this, power is an 'essential feature of collective decision-making which deals with differences in interest and preferences'. This is similar to the position of McDonald (2005) as discussed above, but also relies on the assumption that both power and position are recognised and respected. McDonald (*ibid.* p.279), argues that a fixed discourse of existing power relationships does not allow the 'differentiated nature of partnerships' to be fully understood, and although partnership working may be the key to new modes of working collaboratively, it may also provide 'ideological fig leaves for dominant powers', masking the traditional hierarchy and undermining the purpose of working in partnership. McDonald (2005, p.581) further clarifies this by citing Rummery (2002, p.243) to argue that rather than being beneficial, partnerships are potentially factors in 'reproducing existing inequalities and power relations', and that:

Partnership working does not benefit users of welfare significantly - in some cases it makes it worse... they divert resources away from the core business of welfare service delivery and they do relatively little to empower users or local communities. Yet who could possibly object to partnership as a concept? (Rummery 2002, p.243).

McDonald's (2005, pp.581-2) own assessment of power within partnerships concluded that:

Many of the 'critically pragmatic' accounts of partnership fail to fully address the discursive terrain upon which partnerships are constructed and therefore do not examine the 'deep structures' of power.

This superficial engagement with power relations in partnership working has also been my experience in this review, as many of the proponents and models of partnership discussed have focused on the notional benefits of partnership working, whether actual or perceived, rather than providing a holistic assessment of the power relationship, position and processes involved.

Derkzen (*et al.* 2008, p.458) argues that power is a 'widely used governance instrument', implying that power is a factor within partnership working that can be and is frequently wielded to hierarchical advantage. Conversely, Newman (2001, p. 58) had earlier interpreted how concepts of power within partnership had been used by the Labour government specifically as:

In terms of governance theory, such fragmentation is associated with a style of policy based on policy networks and a style of delivery based on partnership. The role of the state becomes that of steering and co-ordination, and state power is exercised through leadership and influence rather than direct control (ibid.).

This was identified as a deliberate tactic to exert control, and despite the profession of the benefits of partnership working:

The initial assumptions of co-operation and partnership between government and public sector professionals were short-lived... Such

representations were closely linked to the proliferation of control measures designed to ensure that 'agents' (organisations in the dispersed field of service delivery networks) delivered what the 'principal' (government) intended. This cut across the language of partnership in rather uncomfortable ways (ibid. p.86).

Partnership working could be used and viewed as a Machiavellian vehicle for the manifestation of control, instead or in addition to a productive method of individuals and organisations working together, and example of New Labour's perceived 'control freakery' (Avis 2009). This was also reflected in McDonald's (2005) models of partnership working where hierarchical governance was clearly identified within the theory and notions of power openly addressed.

I have briefly considered some of the issues relevant to power and partnership working within the diploma. The discussion of governance has been relevant to the hierarchical arrangement of diploma working as set out in diploma policy determined by the Labour government which announced the diploma (2.3.4, above). There are several further aspects that were identified that have not been individually explored due to the limitations of the thesis format, but which would be interesting topics for further research, for example concepts of power in relation to government policy design, and an examination of power and social capital in relation to the diploma and its learners.

2.7 Summary

Considering the different aspects of and the diploma raises many questions about the ways in which people work together to achieve set aims. These include understanding why the diploma was established and what it was meant to achieve, and to establish what the costs and benefits might be for those involved. It also provokes consideration of who is in and who is outside of specific groups, who stakeholders view as one of them, and what qualifies individuals or organisations to belong. In order to address this I looked at what partnership meant and how partnership work has been modeled considering more general definitions and models of partnership. I then looked to understand how partnership work was practised within British education and particularly looked at how the diploma had evolved to include a greater element of partnership work and the factors and pressures which had influenced this development,

including massification, meeting the perceived needs of industry and governmental discourse. I considered how competition and collaboration had been used in contemporary New Labour policy discourse and the consequences on public service delivery, education policy and the diploma. I then looked at the relationships within the partnership which are fundamental to understanding how people and organisations work together within a formalised partnership structure. My review of these concepts sought to address thinking around partnership working and has raised several areas that merit further investigation.

The development, implementation, delivery and eventual withdrawal of the diploma was an often contentious issue which could be approached from a number of different methodological and theoretical perspectives. I have chosen to focus on partnership relations because these provide an opportunity to further explore how partnership working is practised.

It would also be impossible to consider any research into the diploma without mentioning the extensive media and popular debate in the press on the diploma and its working methods. Examples of press coverage included scaremongering by the popular press, ‘GCSEs and A-Levels facing the axe’ (Clark 2003), concerns that no-one would be convinced by the new qualifications (Harris 2008a; 2008b), and general broadsheet despondency, ‘Tension mounts as diploma doomsday looms’ (Whittaker 2007), or ‘Diploma fears as regulator raises doubts over new qualification’ (Paton 2009). Press reports were generally sceptical about the potential success of the diploma, with positive articles restricted to official government information and press releases (DCSF 2007a; 2008). While I have not looked at popular and political discourse regarding the diploma, it is clear that these were important influences on the form, scope and practices of the diploma, as well as its eventual demise.

Despite the withdrawal of the diploma, partnership working remains an important mode of working in education development and delivery. My study sought to understand the implementation of partnership working and the ways in which people and organisations worked together and consequently remains relevant to current and future education practice.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction to the methodology

I begin the methodology by considering the epistemology and ontology that underpins this study, then reflecting on objectivity and the biases inherent in my role as researcher. The methods I have chosen to further explore the issues identified in the literature review are then explained and examined, and the chapter concludes with an overview of the ethics and feasibility of the study. In this methodology I seek to establish appropriate techniques to develop the existing information and build knowledge to fill gaps in current conceptual understanding.

3.2 Research rationale

3.2.1 Epistemology and ontology

In relation to my research, consideration of ontological and epistemological positions is essential as these determine how I will identify what I would like to find out, how I approach finding things out, and what I believe constitutes knowledge and valid outcomes of the research (Grogan and Simmons 2002; Morrison 2007).

I considered two epistemological approaches, interpretivism and positivism. I initially investigated an interpretivist approach, where knowledge is viewed as an experiential condition, considering that we know what we know as we experience it (Cohen and Manion 1994; Kaplan 2006; Hookway 2006), and positivist, where knowledge itself is considered objective and existing independently (Grogan and Simmons 2002). Of these approaches, aspects of positivism initially appeared attractive to me, particularly its objectivity, scientific approach and relationship with quantitative data collection (Bryman 2008; Cohen and Manion 1994). The approach I preferred, however, was more closely aligned with an interpretivist paradigm, where 'life is experienced and constructed from a subjective perspective' (Morrison 2007, p.27), and the broader social, educational and historic context was considered to provide 'rich and deep description' (*ibid.*). Interpretivism appeared more appropriate in the context my research as the research participants and their practices cannot be seen outside the partnership context to examine them in a value free environment. As a researcher, I also found an interpretive approach appealing to value the contribution of qualitative data, but without the complexities of approaches such as lifeworld, ethnography or

discourse analysis. The complex social and professional relations within partnership working require consideration both holistically and according to their individual constituents and their contributions, and an interpretivist approach also facilitates consideration of this complexity (Briggs *et al.* 2007a; Land 2011). This alignment of my research with an interpretivist paradigm was also desirable as it supports the use of quantitative methods alongside qualitative methods and would allow the potential benefits of a mixed methodology to be explored (Morrison 2007). Additionally, an interpretivist approach would intrinsically identify the altering effect of the role of the researcher and the effect of the inherent biases on data collection and interpretation (Lincoln and Guba 1998).

In terms of ontology, an approach to my thesis based on objectivism appeared attractive. This objective approach would allow discussion of an organization, such as a partnership, as a tangible object (Bryman 2008; Cohen and Manion 1994), where social actors would not influence operation or existence. This would notionally remove the potential for any impact from personal or professional bias by the researcher, and superficially make the process of conducting research appear more straightforward. I also considered constructionism, another ontological position, where social actors influence interpretation and engagement (Bryman 2008; Cohen and Manion 1994). In relation to my research, a constructionist approach would recognise that the researcher was presenting a particular view of the subject and that social situations, such as partnership and partnership working, are in a constant state of flux as a result of social interactions and reactions (Bryman 2008). The knowledge that is then engaged with in constructionist approaches can be then both 'indeterminate' and 'created' as the researcher limits and defines data collection according to their position and beliefs, and then analyses and discusses results based on the potential for creating new knowledge and comparisons with existing theory and research.

In recognising the importance of ontological and epistemological approaches, and having identifying which of these align most appropriately with my preferences and research needs it was also important to recognise that these approaches are not limited to opposing positions. Research strategies can be designed to adopt a mixed methods approach, combining elements of interpretivism and positivism, and constructivism and

objectivism, to facilitate the collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative research (Bryman 2008).

My evaluation of ontology and epistemology has significantly influenced the methodology for my thesis as interpretations of reality and knowledge have defined both my study and my research questions. The ontological and epistemological influence can be observed throughout my thesis, but is particularly evidence in relation to my stance as a researcher, the theoretical basis, data collection instruments, approach to the participants, and analysis of the results.

3.2.2 Considering the researcher position, stance and reflexivity

As a researcher I have my own views and opinions which have been influenced by my background and personal beliefs, and it is important to consider how these influence my research design, data collection and interpretation (Denscombe 2003). This reflexivity is particularly significant where research involves emotive or politically sensitive subjects, such as education (Bryman 2008). I have adopted a mainly interpretivist approach in that I have sought to understand partnership working through an appreciation of the experiences of the participants in diploma partnerships. What could be seen as bias actually provided opportunities for individual experiences to be acknowledged and used to contribute to a theoretically-grounded research process. The political and emotive nature of the research material have influenced my experiences and understanding of the subject matter and those of the research participants. Beliefs and opinions also affect how research is structured and undertaken, how participants respond, and how data is collated and interpreted. Therefore it is important that rather than seeking to avoid ‘casting a shadow’ onto the work (Harré 1972), my influences were recognised, acknowledged and validated as an integral part of the context and experience.

The interpretivist approach which I adopted embraced ‘bias’, ensuring that subjectivity was recognised in my study, by including a personal statement enabling readers to judge the extent of my influence on the content (1.5, above). I also used techniques which are more frequently associated with positivist approaches where the avoidance of perceived bias is important. For example, my questionnaires were designed to be semi-structured to facilitate a more natural conversation and allow participants to express their

experiences and opinions (Denscombe 2003). I undertook personal reflection on the basis of my ontological and epistemological position and stance as a researcher, and concluded that while neutrality was neither possible nor even helpful for me to achieve, I could design my data collection strategies to be as neutral as possible within my own limitations. The reality, as it appears in my research is that,

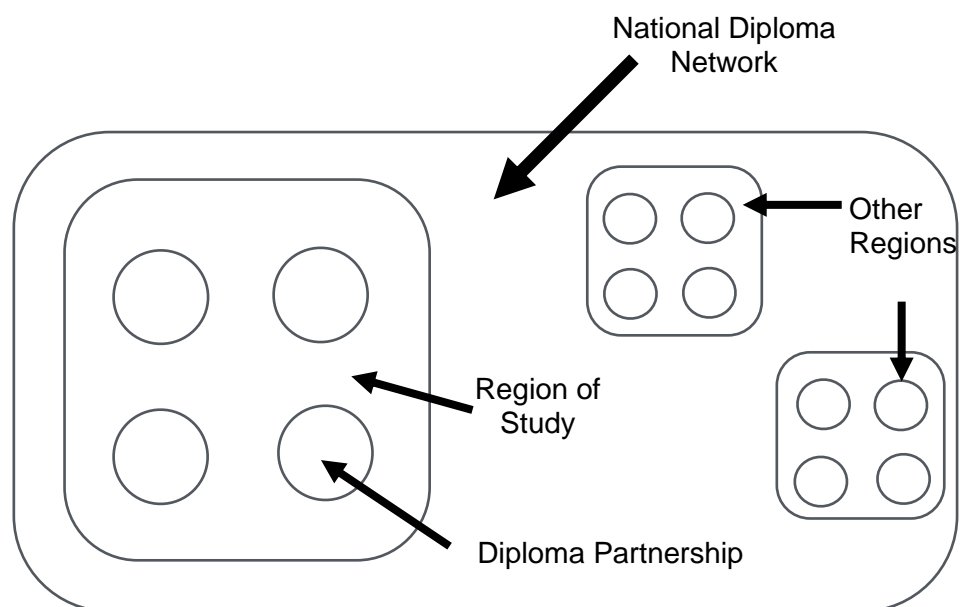
There are limits to the extent that researchers can disguise their 'self' during interviews. We bring to interviews certain attributes which are 'givens' and which cannot be altered on a whim (ibid. p.170).

While biases in research cannot be removed, they can be recognised (*ibid.*; Bryman 2008, pp.485-488), and this need to recognise bias influenced the research methods that I chose, as well as how I engaged with the participants.

3.3 Types of research

The research was planned to investigate partnership working within the development and delivery of the diploma within diploma partnerships across one region within England (figure 5) as informed by both my interests and the literature review (as above), and to use a range of research instruments and techniques to gather appropriate empirical data.

Figure 5. Diploma partnership distribution.



The research plan was to collect a combination of quantitative and qualitative data to enable analysis of both statistical and more in-depth textual data, using a mixed methodology, enabling the research questions to be addressed by focusing on identifying whether partnership was taking place and how it was being implemented.

3.3.1 Quantitative and qualitative research

In approaching the research design for my study, evaluating the strengths of qualitative and quantitative research was an initial consideration. Quantitative research enables data to be more easily processed and tested, meaning that it has often been viewed as more 'scientific' and 'reliable'. Qualitative methods provide 'rich' data, allowing research to consider personal and humanistic responses (Denscombe 2003; Blaxter *et al.* 2002; Henwood and Pigeon 1993), which better suit the partnership relationships which are the subject of my study. These relationships cannot be easily quantified and are best investigated in cultural and sociological terms rather than by statistical analysis. A qualitative approach would fit better with my interpretivist ontological views, as a quantitative approach would not provide the depth of information required. As a result, the research instruments for this study comprised semi-structured interviews and electronic questionnaires. I used a research journal to collate personal notes and observations, enabling a more personal, reflective and individual approach to the study.

Quantitative methods were not entirely disregarded, but used alongside qualitative data to enable statistics to be generated and analysed, and the results to be represented numerically and graphically, and specifically to better understand the representation of the participants within the region (Denscombe 2003; Blaxter *et al.* 2002). This also increased the range of data collected and facilitated triangulation of the evidence to explore the research questions in greater depth (Bryman 2008; Morrison 2007; Denscombe 2003; Blaxter *et al.* 2002).

The conceptual framework for data collection considered the influences identified in the introduction to the thesis, particularly the personal background to the study (1.1) and the context (1.2) as well as the literature review (Chapter 2). The introduction to the thesis outlined my personal views as a researcher and provided an overview of the study. In particular, the personal background to the study (1.1) and situating the researcher have

influenced how I approach undertaking the research for the thesis holistically and contribute to how the data collection is undertaken. The context (1.2), research aims (1.3) and research questions (1.4) had a more direct influence on my choices for the literature review, and will also help to inform my research design in terms of topics and areas of focus for the data collection. Following on from this, the literature review (Chapter 2) evaluated the main areas of focus for the research identified in the Introduction (Chapter 1) and explored key theories and texts in relation to these. This exploration was then used to help inform and refine the questions for the research participants to enable data to be obtained that advanced research into partnership working in education.

3.3.2 Case Study Approaches

In determining the methodology for the data collection I considered the use of a case study approach to facilitate exploration of the diploma. I had initially identified the North-East region as the area of study and local partnerships as a focus within this region, which meant covering a large and diverse area. A case-study approach appeared attractive as the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context were complex and a case study approach required a clearer focus with the definition of explicit boundaries to specifically establish the scope of the research (Yin 2003). In addition, I was aware that diploma delivery and practice was developing and would evolve over the course of my research, as engagement with the qualification progressed and the diploma itself evolved. As a result, I wanted to be open to using a range of methods and approaches and to develop the research plan in response to these changes and a mixed-methods case-study appeared to provide an appropriate framework for this (*ibid.*).

The complexity of the large research area and potential for multiple organisations and individuals to contribute meant that a multiple-case design appeared to be the most appropriate approach in relation to my research plan, as this would enable each organisation contributing to the study to be viewed independently, while the research as a whole considers the contributions of several organisations holistically. Yin (*ibid.*, p. 56) considers multiple-case designs to be within the same methodological framework as single or classic case studies, rather than being of a separate nature as some authors have suggested. It must be considered, however, that multiple-case studies have particular issues and advantages; Yin (*ibid.*, p.57) states that the evidence from multiple

case studies is often considered more compelling and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust, but that exceptional or non-standard cases are less likely to be addressed using multiple cases which may limit the application of this method. A nested case study analysis, in the sense discussed by Lieberman (2005) was also considered. Lieberman's approach favours a methodology where an initial hypothesis is tested through selected case studies, and typically involves large sample populations, and displays a more positivist influence (*ibid.*). My research, however, involved all of the available cases rather than a selection, and I drew my conclusions from the case studies, rather than using them to test a hypothesis. In addition, my interpretivist approach meant that I wanted to acknowledge local differences and local aspects which could become lost in the large scale model building of a nested approach.

Critics of case study approaches have focused on a perceived lack of rigour and definition of the method, while other problems identified with case study approaches appear to result either from academic practice which can be avoided by more careful research design, or from inappropriate use of case studies for teaching or record keeping, rather than as a specific research tool (Yin 2003; Bassegy 2007). Despite these issues, the use of case study approaches for research has remained popular among students, researchers and academics as a focused means of determining research approach and organization (Yin 2003, Bassegy 2007). This is relevant to my research design as the context can be seen as the development and implementation of the diploma in the North East Region, while the multiple cases are the different partnerships within the region. This allows for replication of the methodology across the cases, facilitating the use of multiple case-study design as determined by Yin (2003, p 57) and will allow the results to be contrasted across the different cases while contributing holistically to the exploration of the issues identified in the context.

3.3.3 Mixed methods approaches

My research has been influenced by the desire to collect both quantitative and qualitative data to explore how and why participants engaged with diploma partnerships. A mixed methodology enables my interpretivist values to be considered (Greene 2008). Torrence (2012, p.111) also notes that mixed methods research has 'increasingly been exerting itself as something separate, novel and significant', having previously been viewed as the proper way in which to conduct research. Pring (2000)

discusses how rigid distinctions between qualitative and quantitative research are not helpful and demonstrates how space exists for a range of different positions.

These discussions have all been important in furthering the conceptual basis for applying a combination of research methods as a distinct methodological approach. Despite the evidence for the benefits of adopting a mixed methodology, there are also caveats to this approach to research, in particular: how far it is possible to truly combine different research approaches, and whether I have the skills to effectively use the research instruments and the resources available (Morrison 2007, p.31).

3.4 Research design

The research strategy was to survey individuals involved in partnership working in the delivery of the diploma, and my research methods included an electronic questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. I used a literature review and documentary analysis to support and inform the primary research, and other methods such as observations and the use of a research journal were also included in the final study as a method of contributing to the triangulation of the findings (table 1; Denscombe 2003; Cohen and Manion 1994). The research plan was created to enable an achievable timeframe to be established for the study and to allow a planned campaign for data collection and analysis (table 1; Anderson and Arsenault 1998; Blaxter *et al.* 2002).

Table 1. Research Plan.

Method	Timescale											
	Year 1 Semester		Year 2 Semester		Year 3 Semester		Year 4 Semester		Year 5 Semester		Year 6 Semester	
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
Research journal notes												
Literature review												
Questionnaire plan												
Questionnaire pilot												
Questionnaire launch												
Questionnaire close												
Interview plan												
Interview pilot												
Interview launch												
Interview close												
Contingency time												
Analysis of results												
Writing up												

3.4.1 Pilot of the survey tools

As a part of the research design, I included a pilot of the research tools in the research plan (table 1; table 2). The pilot tested the preparation and reliability of the research instruments to ensure their quality, and ease of use for the participants. The pilot of the instruments was separate to the data collection and the results from the pilot testing were not included in the final study (Bryman 2008). The electronic questionnaire and the interview questions were piloted by selected individuals selected to identify specific problems (table 2). As a result of the pilot, several changes were made to the questionnaire, including minor typographical corrections and editing questions to improve clarity. Changes were also made to the interview proforma, including; reducing the number of questions from 22 to 18 to decrease the length of the interview; and re-ordering the questions to ensure clarity and improve the ‘flow’ of the interview. This was useful and helped to ensure the quality of the data collection instruments.

Table 2. Pilot of the research instruments.

Role (number of people)	Specialism
PhD student (1)	Proofreading
IT specialist (1)	Functionality and technical errors
Research associate (1)	Likert scale numbering
EdD supervisors (2)	Content in relation to the wider study
Partnership members (2)	Usability for practitioners

3.4.2 Validity, replication and generalisability

The use of reliability, replication, generalisability and validity as conceptual measures of research are commendable in principle, and are part of the accepted discourse of educational research, even though they may not necessarily convey how all research is viewed and enacted. These concepts need to be considered in the light of the ontological and epistemological aspects of the research and their relation to a mainly

interpretivist approach, as it has been previously suggested that this terminology is more related to quantitative methodologies (Bryman 2008; Briggs and Coleman 2007).

Validity can be defined in many ways with differing layers of complexity, but concepts of truth and reality are most relevant to my research (Bryman 2008; Briggs and Coleman 2007; Cohen and Manion 1994). Cohen and Manion (1994) consider how researchers know whether participants are telling the truth, and how the interactions of the researcher can affect this, either consciously or subconsciously. Consideration is made of how researchers manage their own biases and the effect of this on participant truth, as anything else would not be ethical,

...the more the interviewer becomes rational, calculating, and detached, the less likely the interview is to be perceived as a friendly transaction, and the more calculated the response also is likely to be (Kitwood 1977, in Cohen and Manion 1994, p.281).

My own reflections on this discussion resulted in a vicious circle where increasing measures to increase reliability then decreased the validity and the openness of what the participants could contribute, which in turn led to consideration of how far these concerns can actually be addressed within an interpretivist research framework. There was also a need to understand perceptions of what truth is and what knowledge is, and how messages and information are sent and received between the interviewer and the participants (Berlo 1960; Shannon and Weaver 1949). Given the limitations of this study and the nature of the subject, my research has been undertaken on the assumption that the participants are telling 'the truth' in that they are accurately reporting their understanding of the situation.

My research can legitimately claim 'face validity', as the method is demonstrably appropriate to the subject (Bryman 2008, p.152). Face validity is more complex than this, and although direct comparison has not been made to categorise the types of validity from the list provided by Bryman (*ibid.*). My research includes the use of comparative measures by way of the mixed method approach, and considers the influence of researcher bias and position, within the research design. However, all of the interpretations relating to validity are subjective relative to how truth is viewed and

interpreted within the research by the researcher, the participants and by other audiences of the work.

Perceptions of validity also include a presumption of reliability (Briggs and Coleman 2007). This is generally defined in terms of the 'consistency of measurement' of a concept, with factors including *stability*, *internal reliability* and *inter-observer consistency* (Bryman 2008, p.149). The unique nature of the subject of my thesis and the mainly interpretivist approach made these difficult concepts to apply and evaluate. However, by using interviews as well as questionnaires I was able to cross reference the reliability of questionnaire responses against responses in the interviews, and the use of a set list of questions in both methods ensured that there was consistency of data gathering. Similarly, obtaining data from different stakeholders on the same concept could be viewed as a measure of reliability, as although it is subjective, according to participant perspective, this provides a measure in terms of views on a shared focus. Concepts of validity are important to understanding how the perceptions of myself as a researcher and others as research participants must be considered alongside other sources to ensure that the study is robust.

Consideration also needs to be given to the concept of generalisability (Blaxter *et al.* 2002; Anderson and Arsenault 1998). There are limitations to how far my research could be generalised beyond the subjects of my research, as there were wide variations in involvement and role in diploma delivery and development within organisations. For example, the specific nature of the sample group for the data collection comprising members of partnerships within the region, meant that the elements of the research relating to the diploma were not designed to be generalised to a general population. Some findings are applicable, for example, the findings regarding partnership working could be applied to different contexts in education. The variance across partnership areas nationally in terms of geography, partnership membership and stakeholders, politics and organisation also limits the wider application or revisiting of this study in relation to the diploma, however, it offers opportunities to test broader engagement with partnership working. In addition, during the course of my research the withdrawal of the diploma limited the direct generalisability to this qualification, but the understanding of partnership working gained from my research could be applied to other areas in education where partnership is practised. Lincoln and Guba (1985) have

queried the extent to which any qualitative study could truly be generalisable. In relation to the data collection methods I have chosen, the generalisability is limited by non-responders and by allowing anonymous participation (Denscombe 2003; De Vaus 2002; Groves *et al.* 2002). These factors limited generalisability as the original target sample could not be tracked meaning a percentage return rate could not be calculated (Fogelman and Comber 2007), respondents gained by the ‘snowball’ effect could not be monitored, and non-responders could not be contacted to establish why they did not contribute which could then be used to inform future research (Denscombe 2003; Groves *et al.* 2002). Despite these concerns, useful considerations about partnership working could be extrapolated both to the wider diploma population and to other applications of partnership working in education. Furthermore, the way in which the data has been kept would potentially allow the source data to be revisited, although there are further issues of consent, interpretation and replication to be considered. Although all research projects face many of these issues, it is only in considering the potential limitations that I can understand the wider application of my research.

The issues that affected generalisability also affected potential replication of the study. The unique nature of this study and the way it was designed meant that replication was not intended. My ontological and epistemological position and my personal beliefs and biases contribute to the research, how it is conducted and analysed and therefore the extents to which this, and indeed any other, study could be replicated.

The triangulation of data would usually involve using other research methods, data, and data analysis to enable research methods and results to be evaluated and confirmed (Bryman 2008). The nature of my study and my engagement with both positivist and interpretivist research stances though the inclusion of qualitative and quantitative data was that the research was designed to be unique and provide unique results. This confirmation of the data was therefore not sought directly in a ‘scientific’ manner, but some measure of confirmation was gained from natural correspondence in the results between participant responses and multiple observations (Denzin 1970).

Moving forward from issues of validity, generalisability, replication and triangulation, and considering further concepts relevant to my thesis, Bryman (2008) presents an alternative approach for qualitative methodologies, using the concept of trustworthiness, which he then broke down into further descriptors (table 3).

Table 3. Definitions of methodological concepts, after Bryman (2008, pp.34, 377-378).

Concept	Definition
Credibility	How believable are the findings?
Transferability	Do the findings apply to other contexts?
Dependability	Are the findings likely to apply at other times?
Confirmability	Has the investigator allowed their values to intrude to a high degree?

These concepts appear to have much greater relevance and application to my research, allowing for broader definitions of related concepts such truth to be considered. The findings in relation to my research are credible, relating to the participants at an appropriate time and place and to the issue being studied. The findings can be applied to other contexts and other times, both within the diploma and within the broader education sector as a focus on how people work together and how partnership is interpreted and used can be more broadly extrapolated. I also explored confirmability within my reflections on my own biases and stance, which enabled me to demonstrate how my research had been carried out in good faith (*ibid.*). During this reflection I also considered and subsequently excluded other concepts. For example, I excluded a naturalistic stance, as although I could see how this would be applicable where research methods included more ethnographic approaches (*ibid.*), I felt that this was less applicable to my research as I did not have *immersion* in the study, but I remained an *outsider* as I was not able to gather data in its naturally occurring environment (*ibid.*).

This range of qualitative and quantitative concepts, whether phrased as validity, reliability, replication and generalisability, or credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, were considered to ensure that the research design, methodology, and data analysis adhered to the quality expected for educational research. These are not the only indicators of quality, and other considerations including ethics and data management are discussed in more depth (3.8, below).

3.4.3 Limitations of the study

The research was limited geographically to one region of the UK, the North-East of England, which influenced the potential for research participation as the variety of available agencies and organisations within the region were limited. The potential for variance was further influenced by the existence (until its closure in 2011) of the regional development agency ONE, by other funding constraints, and by other inherent regional biases, including politics and culture which may influence both organisations and individuals and their agendas and beliefs.

The research participants included individuals and groups who were identified using a range of methods including snowball sampling, random sampling and self-selection - all of which present their own limitations to the research. As a result there was an uneven distribution of organisations and participant types within the sample, and not all organisations involved in regional diploma partnerships were represented. In the context of the region the size of the sample was relatively small which had implications for the results of the study as it meant that generalization was difficult. However, the findings are interesting, allowing the perspectives of the contributors to be heard and giving an idea of how stakeholders in other regions may respond to working in partnership.

The broad geographical area of the study and the time available for research increased the limitations, particularly in relation to the timing of the research in addition to wider considerations of distance and availability of participants. This meant that observations were taken from the research participants rather than having complete researcher immersion and a micro approach to details. This also influenced the choice of research instruments, for example the inclusion of electronic questionnaires and structured and semi-structured interviews. These methods could be seen as inherently biased, as despite the best efforts of the researcher to lessen bias, how questions were phrased and structured, and how the results were interpreted and presented all affect the evidence (Bryman 2008). Additionally, the relationship between the researcher, the research and the research participants had to be considered (Silverman 1993) as there were many different dynamics and power relationships to consider, for example, the difference between speaking to a pupil about their experiences of the diploma, and talking to senior management. Many of these aspects could provide further studies in their own

right, for example, in relation to power dynamics within the interview situation where I had taken additional notes recording the differences in one to one interviews in terms of seating arrangements, language and conversational tone which would be interesting material to investigate further.

Despite these limitations there were also a significant number of strengths. Independent research and self-funding enabled the research to be undertaken with a greater degree of freedom than may have been possible from funded research or research that had been commissioned by a particular agency, and may have reduced some of the potential biases through not having those ties. Although the research was geographically limited to one specific region, this included the most rural 14-19 partnership, as well as a partnership identified by diploma guidance as being one of the most successful early adopters of the diploma (quote from interview with diploma manager, pers. comm. Recorded in research journal, March 2009), which meant that there was a wide range of representation within the study area. The research also included a broad range of partnership members and welcomed contributions from all levels of involvement. The research instruments were prepared and used solely by the researcher, which meant that although the interviews were structured and some semi-structured, there were opportunities to allow participants to speak freely, to sometimes go off-topic, and to make genuine contributions, all of which even allowing for concerns of validity, truth interpretation and self-fulfilling prophecies (Denzin 1970) added to the quality and interest of the information collected.

3.5 The research participants

I used a number of different research methods to investigate different stakeholder groups involved in the diploma. The reasons why specific methods were used in specific contexts is discussed at section 3.9 (below). Table 4 presents a summary of the sample size and response rate for specific stakeholder groups and research methods.

Table 4. The research tools and participants.

Research Participants	Method	Sample Size	Response Rate	Male/Female
Practitioners	E-Questionnaire	67	0.3	21/37
Practitioners	Interviews	16	1	10/6
Learners (School A)	Group Interview	12	1	11/1
Learners (School B)	Group Interview	10	1	10/0
Parents (School C)	Interviews	6	1	4/2

3.5.1 Diploma practitioners

The initial phase of the research used an electronic questionnaire followed by semi-structured interviews to ask diploma practitioners working across the region about their experiences of working with others (table 4; appendix a; appendix b). This participant group was chosen to explore the perceptions of the way in which the diploma was developed and delivered during its implementation, and the role of the practitioners during this phase of the diploma was of particular relevance to addressing the research questions. The questionnaire was distributed to 220 individuals who had been identified by my online research and from information provided by local EBP staff. The questionnaire was also distributed across diploma networks by the local Government Office, ONE North-East, who had offered their support to the research. Sixty seven completed responses were returned, 20 notifications of recipient email faults were received, and 13 emails were not sent by the system. Those who completed the questionnaire comprised 25 men and 42 women working in a range of roles related to the development and delivery of the diploma across the North-East region. To better understand the composition of the sample the questionnaire included questions on job roles, employers and experience of partnership working.

Understanding the roles of the participants was more difficult as there appeared to be a lack of clarity and uniformity regarding job descriptions and titles. A wide range of responses were given by the participants, which made categorisation more challenging and direct comparisons increasingly difficult. Figure 6 shows the range of employers with whom the participants identified, while figure 7 and figure 8 show a summary of the roles both in terms of the participants employment and within the diploma partnership.

Figure 6. Principal employers of diploma practitioners (questionnaire results).

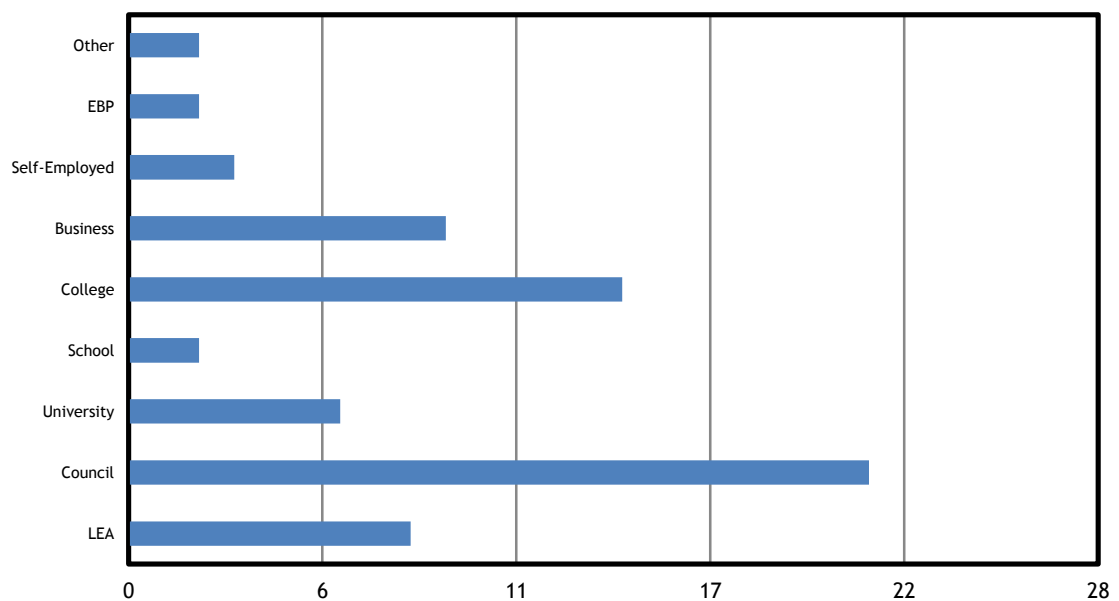


Figure 7. Diploma practitioners' current roles (questionnaire results).

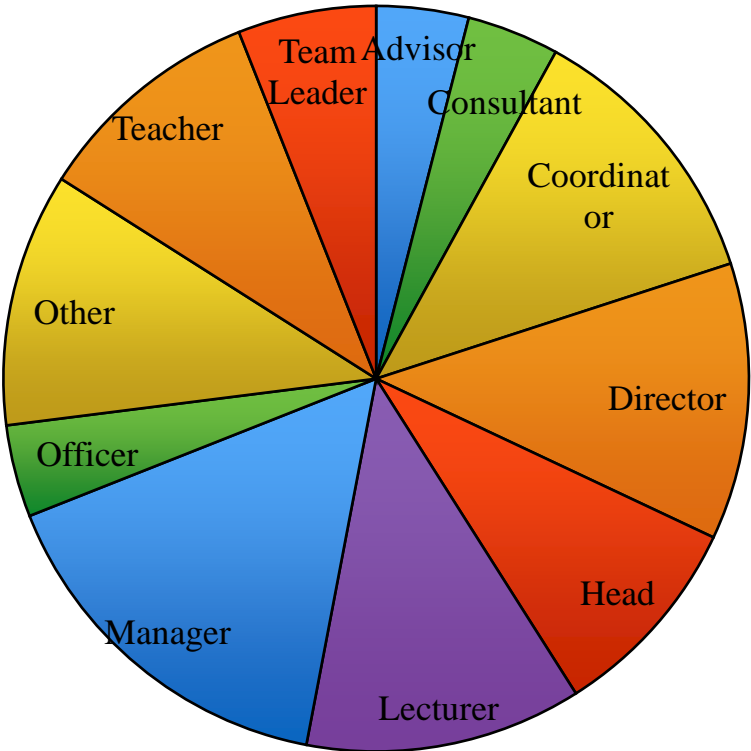
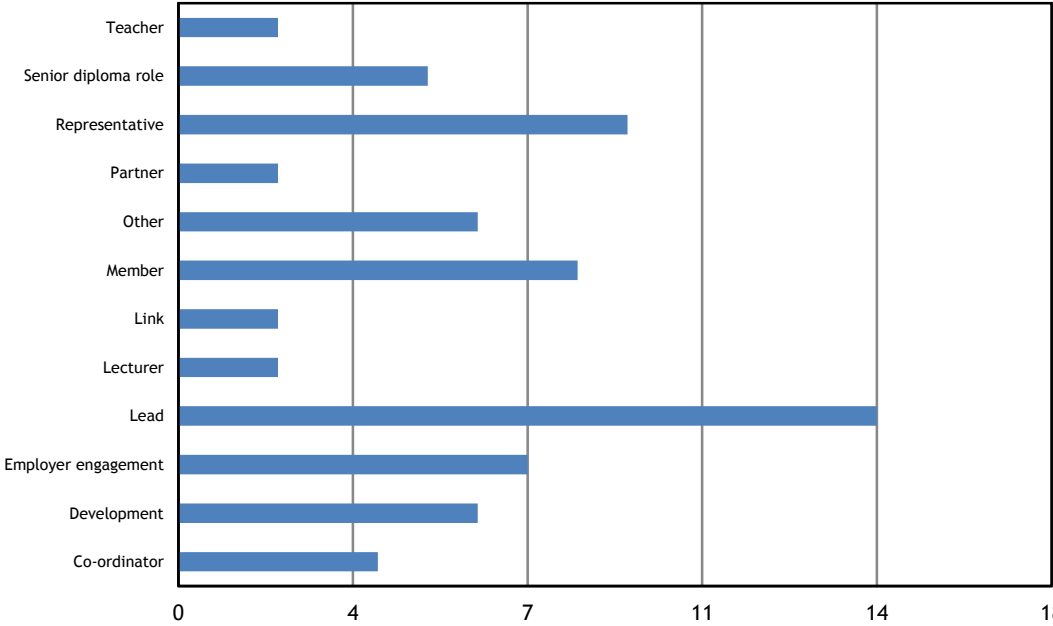


Figure 8. Practitioner role in the diploma consortium (questionnaire results).



The majority of questionnaire participants (78%) had been in their post for two years or more, and almost a third (30%) had worked for the same employer for more than five years. The participants were also asked how long they had been a member of the diploma consortium, and for the majority (85%) this was two years or fewer, with this correlating to the timeframe for the diploma being implemented and developed at the time of the data collection. What was interesting, with specific relation to partnership working, is that more than half (58 %) of those currently working in diploma partnerships also indicated that they had previously worked in partnership with the same or similar groups of people. Furthermore, of those who indicated previous work in the partnership, the majority (62%) had worked together for three years or fewer, a third (32%) had worked together for up to five years, and the remainder (6%) had worked together for a period of up to ten years, indicating that a significant minority of the sample had experience in working in partnership together before the implementation of the diploma. Changing education policies and the introduction of strategies such as the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI), Education Action Zones (EAZs) and EBPs has meant that working with other organisations and external agencies has been part of the education agenda for more than thirty years, and so experience of partnership working in the region was not surprising.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out to allow trends emerging from the questionnaire responses to be explored in more detail. The interviews were scheduled so that the participants who had volunteered via the questionnaire were contacted after the closing date for submission of the questionnaires, ensuring that everyone who had participated had been given the same opportunity to participate in the interviews. Participants were obtained by three routes from a population of diploma practitioners who had either completed the questionnaire or contacted me directly. Some participants who received the questionnaire responded independently volunteering to be interviewed, and some responded to the request for interview participants within the questionnaire. The third route comprised participants who I had identified by purposive sampling and contacted directly. These approaches helped to ensure that the sample represented a range of individuals across the region (Fogelman and Comber 2007). All participants were initially contacted by email with some telephone contact to finalise dates and times for interview appointments.

3.6 Interview Participants

3.6.1 Practitioners

The interview participants were made up of 12 men and six women (figure 1 above). Almost half of the participants (40%) had volunteered to participate via the questionnaire, while the remainder came through recommendation from other contacts or were approached directly and opportunistically by the researcher. The sample of work roles and organisations represented by the interview participants were partially defined by self-selection, while others were contacted by the researcher on the basis of their role to increase the range. Of the participants who self-selected, six were male and one was female. The roles were all senior positions and included managers, directors, assistant principals and learning coordinators. A further eleven participants were approached by the researcher, and comprised six men and five women, from similar roles, including an assistant principal, a headteacher, managers, directors and teachers. Specific details of roles and employers of the interview participants have been withheld to ensure confidentiality.

3.6.2 Learners and parents

Preliminary analysis of the data from the questionnaire and the interviews with practitioners enabled me to reflect on the preliminary results which informed the development of the research methodology. I realised that I could include learners and parents who were also key stakeholders in the diploma, and consequently amended the research plan to include these groups. I undertook interviews with learners at a City Learning Centre (CLC: referred to as School A) and a High School (School B), and with parents of learners at a Futures Centre (School C). These interviews were designed to enable learners and parents to contribute their opinions on the diploma and partnership working. These groups may have had less frequent or easy access to computers, due to either school-based access or socio-economic factors relating to computer ownership (Office for National Statistics 2010, p.3), which may have made completing an electronic questionnaire more complicated. Parents and learners were difficult to access due to ethical considerations including confidentiality, age of the learners, and access via teacher gatekeepers, however, despite this, their contributions to the research has been invaluable.

I interviewed 12 learners from School A who were a mixed set of year 10 pupils undertaking the Media and Performing Arts diploma, working on different aspects of the qualification, including animation, garage music and a range of IT programmes (table 4). The learners were approached as seven groups, with some overlap of participants between the groups. One of the learners communicated using a foot-operated keypad, and consequently tended to give very brief responses, and in several instances their learning support assistant responded to the questions, which provided more comprehensive responses, but was not the voice of the learner. Learners at School B comprised male year 10 pupils undertaking the Engineering diploma. At the time of the interview the learners were 'off timetable' for an employability skills session. School A and School B were very different learning environments, each delivering the diploma. Each had a differing educational ethos and institutional requirements, different socio-economic mix of learners, and different catchment areas. I have not expanded on this description here as the distinct nature of the two schools meant that further detail would enable them to be identified.

I interviewed a sample of parents attending a parents' evening at School C where their children studied the diploma; for clarity, these were not the parents of the learners who I had interviewed. I was only able to include a small sample of parents (table 4), but meant that there had been some contribution from a sample of these stakeholders, allowing a broader range of experiences to be considered and highlighting the importance of evaluating and including the full range of stakeholders involved in the diploma.

3.7 Regional areas overview

To provide an overview of the areas within North East England that I considered, I provide brief geographical and socio-economic descriptions of each area. I have accompanied this with qualitative information obtained in the interviews with practitioners describing their roles and how they viewed the role within the diploma partnership of the organisation for which they worked for. The areas within the region have not been directly identified as details that could be used to identify the practitioners have been anonymised.

3.7.1 Area A: Interview 7

Area A has a population of over 100,000 (Sage Gateshead 2013 a). The Ofsted Annual Performance Assessment (APA) of 2008 rated 14-19 provision as ‘Good’, noting a high proportion of young people achieving Level 2 or 3 qualifications by the age of 19 and productive partnership working which had raised retention and aspiration in the 14-19 age group. There were, however, a high proportion of 14-19 year-olds who were either not engaged in education, employment or training or whose current status was not known (Ofsted 2008). The diploma partnership was a sub-group of the Children’s Trust and comprised 14-19 education providers and employers, as well as the LA and the LSC, supported by the LA 14-19 Team ([deleted] 14-19 Partnership 2009, 2).

I interviewed a head teacher from Area A, who gave the following overview of their role:

I’m primarily working on the diplomas, we’ve got four diploma groups working to start in September and then we’ve got another eight groups working... I’m working on protocols to support the diplomas and I’m also doing employer engagement and safeguarding in relationship to 14-19 development... We have a 14-19 partnership... which is also made up with head teachers, college principals, work related learning providers and other partners. (Area A, Practitioner 7).

3.7.2 Area B: Interview 12

Area B is a historic county with a population of over 500,000 (Sage Gateshead 2013) but, until 2009, comprised seven unitary authorities which were subsequently abolished. The Ofsted APA of 2008 rated 14-19 provision as ‘Good’, identifying key strengths in rapidly improving levels of attainment at Level 2, effective partnership working and comprehensive post-16 provision. Weaknesses included relatively high levels of 16-19 year-olds not in education, employment or training, particularly among those with learning disabilities or difficulties (Ofsted 2008). Diploma provision in Area B developed gradually. The first consortium to pass through the DCSF Diploma Gateway comprised a school of science and engineering and the FE college, with extension of diploma provision in some lines over the course of 2009 ([deleted] 14-19 Partnership 2008).

The contribution to this study from this area is by a headteacher:

A great part of my role is ensuring that we are ready for all of the changes of 14-19 reform... We are part of a [deleted] 14-19 partnership... we also obviously are partnered in a number of organisations in terms of 14-19 reform within the county... we have got a lot of experience in this area, a lot of expertise... (Area B, Practitioner 12).

3.7.3 Area C: Interview 4

Area C has a population of approximately 200,000. The Ofsted APA for 2008 rates 14-19 provision in Area C as ‘Outstanding’, pointing to strong and effective partnership working, a 14-19 curriculum recognised nationally as best practice and effective review and delivery of advice to young people, although the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training remained above regional and national averages (Ofsted 2008). This 14-19 partnership was one of six involved in a national pilot of the scheme before the wider rollout of the diploma in 2008. It was based in the LA and coordinated diploma delivery through local schools and the local FE College. From the beginning, however, diploma take-up was below predicted numbers and diploma offerings did not reach the breadth of provision originally envisaged ([deleted] Children and Young People’s Partnership 2010 p. 36).

I interviewed a 14-19 coordinator within the LA:

That involves me in sort of facilitating the partnership, firstly between secondary schools and secondly between secondary schools and other sectors including work-based learning and FE... The role of the local authority is to facilitate partnership and to build the partnership (Area C, Practitioner 4).

3.7.4 Area D: Interview 10

Area D is a city with a population of almost 140,000. The Ofsted APA of 2008 rated 14-19 provision in Area D as ‘Good’, noting good partnership working, increasing post-16 participation, and increasing numbers of learners achieving higher-level qualifications by the age of 19. However, participation in post-16 education remained below neighbouring local authorities, particularly among learners with learning

difficulties/disabilities (Ofsted 2008). The 14-19 Partnership was based in the LA and reported through the LA Learning Partnership. It was intended to function as the Diploma Partnership to deliver Diploma lines, commencing with Engineering and construction, with delivery of diploma lines intended through secondary schools, academies, FE and sixth-form colleges, training providers, third-sector providers, Connexions and employers ([deleted] Council 2009).

I interviewed a digital education manager in Area D:

...I'm responsible for education and community, and it's about raising awareness, aspirations and skills... it's about helping those in education, especially teachers and maybe SNTs or those who are responsible for the curriculum to equip them with the industrial or the industry related skills..., that's about raising aspirations and helping people understand that you know, they can actually access informal learning and that can go on to formal learning within creative digital media (Area D, Practitioner 10).

3.7.5 Area E: Interviews 5 and 9

Area E is a city with a population of around 280,000 (Britannica.com 2015). The Ofsted APA for 2008 rated 14-19 provision in Area E as 'Good', highlighting a consistent decline in the number of 14-19 year-olds not in education, employment or training, above national average proportions of learners achieving level 2 qualifications and above regional average proportions of learners achieving level 3 qualifications, excellent FE provision, especially in vocational subjects and the implementation of a coherent 14-19 strategy (Ofsted 2008). The 14-19 partnership was part of the local Education Business Partnership (EBP) and reported through the LA Children and Young People's Partnership Executive ([deleted] 14-19 Strategic Partnership 2008).

I interviewed a training provider manager (5) and a senior teacher within a secondary school (9):

I work with the schools and local authority and the college on behalf of work-based learning providers... (Area E, Practitioner 5)

I'm responsible for the implementation of the diplomas in the college... I've been involved in the consortia for... the bids for sport and active... it's been

really a case of working with people from schools, colleges, UXL, all those sort of things, to try to make the bids the best we can. My role in college is basically disseminating the information that I pick up, doing the leadership team, of which I'm a member (Area E, Practitioner 9)

3.7.6 Area F: Interviews 15 and 18

Area F has a very diverse range of socio-economic and cultural contexts. The area has a population of over 300,000 (Britannica.com 2015). The 2008 Ofsted APA rated 14-19 provision in Area F as 'Good', with higher proportions of learners achieving Level 2 and 3 qualifications than similar councils, increasing post-16 participation in work-based learning and education and significantly above-average rates for completion of apprenticeships. Weaknesses included above national average proportions of young people not in education, employment or training (Ofsted 2008). The diploma was delivered in Area F by a Virtual College, comprising high schools, a Further Education College, work-based learning providers, charities, and other agencies including Connexions and Job Centre Plus ([deleted] Council 2008).

Interview participants were a manager within the LA (18) and a high school teacher (15):

I'm the joint line lead for the engineering diploma... Our organisation is the lead school for engineering. So as far as that role goes we are responsible for delivering the vast majority if not all of the teaching with regard to the engineering diploma (Area F, Practitioner 15)

I've got a few different roles. I am the Education Business Partnership manager... and a member of the 14-19 team... the way it works is we take responsibility for a range of different Diploma lines and it's principally 3 members, 4 members of the team and we take a geographic responsibility so I look after the [deleted] area for all of the diploma lines that they are developing and I also have a range of diplomas that I kind of look after... Our role is to gather best practice from around the country to support them. We offer a lot of support with the Gateway process, in getting them permission to deliver... (Area F, Practitioner 18)

3.7.7 Area G: Interviews 1 and 6

Area G covers 32 square miles and the 2011 census recorded its population as just over 200,000 (Britannica.com 2015). The Ofsted 2008 APA rated 14-19 provision generally as ‘Good’, with improving success rates for over-16 year-olds at Level 2, high post-16 participation in learning and education and a lower proportion of 16-19 year-olds not in education, employment or training than similar councils. Set against this, performance at Level 3 had remained static and was still below the national average (Ofsted 2008). The 14-19 Diploma Consortium was based within the LA and was nominated as ‘Consortium of the Year’ in the Delivering Diplomas Award 2010 ([deleted] 2010).

I interviewed a CLC Manager (Practitioner 1; also Manager of School A) and a manager at the local EBP (Practitioner 6).

...the CLC is essentially charged with being innovative working in partnership with all of the schools in [deleted] and also working in partnership with other CLCs across the whole of England... I was asked if I would head up the new diploma in creative and media and run it and get it off the ground here, so I have also been doing that in addition to my main job... the concept behind doing it here was two-fold, one, the ICT and other equipment and expertise we've got which it was felt wasn't in schools, but secondly it was a neutral venue so you have students coming from different schools without that sense that they have to walk into a foreign environment and feel very sort of threatened by it all... Initially the role was to get the creative and media diploma off the ground.... I've basically created the scheme of work for the year, pushed it through and represented that to the schools, and represented that to the other diploma lines... I have pushed on the whole VLE side of things, because one of the aspects of a diploma is with it being delivered at a different venue to their normal schooling... (Area G, Practitioner 1)

My particular areas of responsibility at the moment include the diplomas, it also includes the area prospectus and working closely with Connexions.... I support the employer engagement side of the diplomas for the council, but I also run the regional networks for five of the ten that we currently have for

the learning skills network..., we just deliver whatever support the students need. I would interpret the local council position within the 14-19 agenda as very much providing leadership and direction and support... The culture is very much to support schools and providers to implement not only the statutory reforms, but the reforms that are necessary and properly tailored to [deleted] to fit in with the strategic mission... (Area G, Practitioner 6)

3.7.8 Area H: Interview 14

Area H has an area of 25 square miles and a population in 2011 of almost 150,000 (Britannica.com 2015). The 2008 Ofsted APA rated 14-19 provision in this area as 'Good', with a high rate of learners remaining in education post-16 and a declining rate of young people not in education, employment or training, although this remained above the national average (Ofsted 2008). The 14-19 Consortium submitted bids to deliver all ten diploma lines available at the roll-out of the diploma and directly engaged employers in addition to education and training providers ([deleted] Council 2008).

The interview participant was a development coordinator within the LA:

My role involves supporting the 14-19 manager in terms of diploma, gateway bids and I deal with the common application process... I also lead on the key stage 4 engagement programme... designed for disaffected young people just to reengage within education... I'm not actively involved in the diplomas, it's the partnership manager... it's difficult because adult community learning obviously offer what the name says... we don't really deal with a lot of 14-19 year olds... I find it a bit weird how 14-19 team is situated within ACL... at the moment it's basically 14-19 is based within ACL and we get on with it with direction and support (Area H, Practitioner 14)

3.7.9 Area I: Interview 8

Area I is a unitary authority with a population in 2011 of just over 190,000. The 2008 Ofsted APA rated 14-19 provision in the area as Outstanding/Excellent, with above national average performance at Level 2 and improving performance at Level 3. A 'strong partnership' was making progress on 14-19 education to deliver a broad range of curriculum offerings. The number of young people not in education, employment or

training remained above the national average and above that of similar councils, however. 14-19 Diploma provision was provided through a consortium working to coordinate LA provision more widely across a wider sub region. Each LA retained its own 14-19 Partnership, providing collaboration on a local level and across the sub region.

I interviewed a manager within the LA:

Until summer of last year I was head teacher of an 11 to 16 school.... I retired from that job last summer and the authority asked me to work for [deleted] local authority with key areas to do with school improvement and the 14-19 agenda.... A lot of that work was meant to increase and widen provision across the borough... within this authority is a curriculum progression group which is made up of deputy head teachers, vice principals, Connexions... and they have become the operational group, they make it happen across the borough... (Area I, Practitioner 8)

3.7.10 Area J: Interviews 2 and 3

Area J is a city, covering 53 square miles with a population of over 275,000 in 2011. The city has a two-tier education system, with relatively few school sixth-forms and the majority of 16-19 education being based in a single FE college, which comprises a number of separate sites. The 2008 Ofsted APA rated 14-19 provision in the city as 'Good', identifying specific strengths in the range of educational and training opportunities and coordinated working between the Council and its partners. However, the proportion of young people attaining Level 3 remained below that of neighbouring authorities and national averages (Ofsted 2008). The 14-19 Partnership piloted the Diploma before its formal roll-out, and working through local schools and learning centres, planned to create two skills centres to deliver the diplomas ([deleted] 2007).

I interviewed the local Education-Business Partnership (EBP) manager (Practitioner 2) and the Assistant Principal of an FE college (Practitioner 3).

...we've got very good links with the secondary schools in [deleted] and that's very much linked in with the fact that we are part of the Connexions service, so we benefit from those links and so we do a lot of work, mainly

with Key Stage 3 and 4 pupils... the other part of my role is traditional Connexions... we're back in the local authority, but we're not fully structured back in yet, so, there are changes afoot, but this is all linked in with children's services and locality based working in the regeneration teams... there's two specific ways in which we've got involved with the diplomas. First of all, we're linking in with the 14-19 partnership and [deleted] University and we're organising a program of placements for teacher trainers actually in industry. We did this first last autumn with the first three lines of the diplomas, so that was engineering, construction and creative media. It was a lot of work, but it was successful... The other way was as a pilot for the construction diploma line this year... (Area J, Practitioner 2).

I have responsibilities for coordinating the 14-19 curriculum and given that there are well-established partnership arrangements and [deleted] University and we're organising a program of placements for teacher trainers acting on various governing committees, because for each of those centres... we now have a what we call a joint committee, which is a sort of governing committee, so I work with those teams and try and coordinate that work. That work has grown from just setting up and running the centres, to working on a range of projects now, because across the city the partnership ethos is we think particularly strong... the last few years, we've been working on the diplomas as a citywide consortium and that's where most of the time is taken... so there's very active, proactive partnership... 14-19 partnership had to be more formally recorded in more detail on my job description, so that there was a post holder that had that responsibility, because they all recognise now that the partnership is so deep-seated, that if it were to break up or fracture, then there could be problems for the college (Area J, Practitioner 3)

3.8 Ethics

Ethical considerations were required to ensure that no harm was caused to the participants in my research (Bryman 2008; Briggs and Coleman 2007). Contact with people was a significant part of my research and all participants were treated with

respect regardless of age, sex, race, religion, political beliefs, and other differences (Bryman 2008; BERA 2004; Oliver 2003; Busher and James 2007). The research plan took account of ethics throughout, but particularly during the data collection, data management, and dissemination of the results (Oliver 2003; Busher and James 2007). In relation to my thesis, guidance was taken from the British Education Research Association (BERA) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), and Newcastle University ethics committee to ensure that the research was undertaken according to appropriate ethical guidelines (Newcastle University 2014c; BERA 2004).

3.8.1 Consent, protection and confidentiality

Consent required particular consideration, as although some studies may be undertaken without the prior consent of participants, it is best practice to obtain the informed consent of research participants (BERA 2004). Access to research participants was primarily via identified contacts, such as EBPs, although some practitioners were contacted directly. Where participants were under 18, access was strictly via a gatekeeper (i.e. the teacher), and due to ethical and safeguarding requirements, in both School A and School B the data collection was undertaken in the presence of the gatekeepers. To minimise any influence on the interview responses, I ensured that the gatekeeper was not within hearing of the interviews (Oliver 2003). The interviews with the parents were also undertaken in the presence of a gatekeeper, but this was more due to the particular format of the evening to which I had been invited, rather than for any overt screening purposes. In terms of the data collection for this thesis I voluntarily submitted both the participation/consent document and the list of questions to the gatekeeper for their prior information before conducting the interviews.

All participants were invited to participate and informed of the scope and purpose of the research, and what they were consenting to by an information sheet attached to the questionnaire or provided and discussed before the interviews (appendix a; appendix c; appendix e; appendix g; Oliver 2003; BERA 2004). This outlined plans for dissemination of the research, and provided contact details for the researcher in case of questions or further contributions. This information also outlined that the contributions would be anonymous, as well as detailing how to withdraw from the study, which respected participants' rights and ensured their treatment as partners in the research, rather than 'subjects' (Oliver 2003; BERA 2004).

3.8.2 Incentives and harm to participants

Other issues which can affect the integrity of educational research include providing incentives to participants and the potential for harmful impacts on those involved (BERA 2004). In relation to my research, no incentives were offered and there was no anticipated predictable detriment to participants.

3.8.3 Data storage and management

Data collection requires particular ethical considerations and I decided a strategy for the management and curation of the records that I created. This was required to protect participants from harm and ensure their anonymity was protected, including provision for destroying data where participants have agreed to its use for a specific research purpose (Bryman 2008; Briggs and Coleman, 2007).

The electronic questionnaire was deleted from the source once the results had been downloaded both as raw data in a spreadsheet and as a statistical report. The spreadsheet and the report were both saved electronically in a secure folder on my personal computer and printed copies were made and saved in a research archive. These copies will be destroyed after the completion of my thesis.

The interview recordings were identified by date and time rather than by name, and were held in a password protected folder on my computer, with an additional copy stored in a protected folder on a personal external hard drive. The only other person to have access to the recordings was the research assistant who undertook the transcription and these were deleted once the transcription was complete. The recordings will be destroyed once the thesis has been completed. The transcripts that were produced have been stored both as electronic files on my computer, and as paper files within my research archive. These documents were also coded with date and time rather than participant name to ensure anonymity, and will be destroyed following the completion of the research.

The data collected from the parents was solely documented on paper questionnaires which I have curated with the other research documents, these are anonymous by their nature as no identifying data was recorded. These documents were coded by date and time and will be destroyed once the research has concluded.

My research journal which I used to record both practical and personal notes, reflections on the research, and notes on the research process contains a range of data and records, including the key to identifying the research participants and the dates and times of the interviews and other interactions. After the conclusion of the research any pages containing information which identifies individuals will be removed and destroyed, however, the personal reflections and reflections on the process will be retained.

3.8.4 Research participants - subjects or objects?

How the people contributing to the research are identified can have a significant impact on how they participate and how their contributions are viewed by others. Oliver (2003) considered the terms ‘participants’, ‘subjects’ or ‘respondents’ and looks at how different terminology affects the contributions and attitudes of the respondents, which may at first appear relatively unimportant, but ‘carry implications for how we view people and their role in the research process’ (Oliver 2003, p.4).

The individuals completing my questionnaire can be seen as ‘respondents’, as there was little opportunity for them to enter into correspondence or discussion, and their contribution was restricted to completing the questionnaire (*ibid.*). However, the terms ‘participants’ or ‘research partners’ appear more appropriate for those involved in the interviews, reflecting that they contributed to and participated willingly in the research, compared with ‘subject’ which would imply that the research was ‘done’ to them.

Considering how I presented myself as a researcher was a further ethical issue. Oliver (*ibid.*) highlights the importance of reviewing and defining the role of those who collect the data, stating that;

This public perception of the researcher operating in a rather ethereal realm also brings values such as truth-telling, accuracy of reporting findings, trying to make results understandable, and being honest about both the successes and failings of a research project. In short, the public respect for researchers brings with it certain responsibilities (Oliver 2003, p.4).

The role of the researcher has been considered in more detail in both the introduction (section 1.5) and earlier in this chapter (section 3.2.2, above), but to summarise, my interpretivist stance and my interest in understanding interaction within partnership

working meant that I considered myself to be as much as participant in the research as my research 'subjects'.

This section has explored ethical considerations related to my research. Ensuring that my study is completed in a responsible and ethical manner is not just a requirement of the thesis, but part of a wider responsibility as a researcher which underpinned my planning and completion of the study.

3.9 Research instruments

I designed a mixed-methods approach for my study including a range of research instruments. This section considers each of the research instruments and their rationale for inclusion in the research design.

3.9.1 Research journal

I used a research journal to collate miscellaneous forms of information related to this research, and included observations from meetings, analysis of websites, documentary analysis prior to the literature review, information and notes from launch days, as well as other sources from individual organisations and local policy documents (Appendix j; Basse 2007). This was important to me as a research log to record evidence, such as discussions and meetings, as well as personal notes, thoughts, reflections and ideas in relation to the study (Gillham 2000; Smith 2006). I used this material to help interpret and substantiate other forms of data that were collected.

The main disadvantage of this method for me was that it was essentially private, and although there is scope to provide access to the document, particularly in the case of the examination of thesis and validation of research, it would be difficult to provide access to the relevant information to a wider audience. Further to this, the very nature of the research journal is a very personal record of the research which fits my interpretivist and mixed methods approach, with reflections and thoughts provided as part of my ongoing process. Although some researchers have been reluctant to share such personal reflections with a wider and often critical audience (Smith 2006) I did not feel that this was a reason to avoid engaging with this method, but more an issue to be aware of in my use of this technique.

3.9.2 Electronic questionnaires

I used an electronic questionnaire as the primary research instrument to enable efficient sampling of a broad range of participants, and to allow other lines of investigation to be identified (appendices a; b). The electronic questionnaire format had a range of advantages, including complementing an iterative research design, convenience and accessibility for respondents, and enabling structured analysis (Meckel *et al.* 2005; Madge and O'Connor 2002; Blaxter *et al.* 2002; Denscombe 2003; Cohen and Manion 1994).

As a lone and unfunded researcher a further advantage of this method was that data could be processed and analysed without having to transcribe responses from printed questionnaires (Fox *et al.* 2003). Online questionnaires were also more accessible for participants with increasing internet use in the home and workplace (Madge and O'Connor 2002; Denscombe 2003). The link to the electronic questionnaire for this research was emailed directly to named individuals and published in online regional diploma practitioner forums; invitations were also included in printed communications and given by telephone (Meckel *et al.* 2005). The electronic format also enabled participants to complete the questionnaire where and when they felt most comfortable, whether at work or at home (Denscombe 2003; Office for National Statistics 2010), and to personalise the font size, colour, or use screen reader software if required, increasing the ease of use for the participants (Meckel *et al.* 2005). Offering the questionnaire in alternative formats, for example printed on paper, would probably not have significantly enhanced the response rate or quality (Denscombe 2003; Meckel *et al.* 2005), not least because the target sample for the questionnaire were people in roles which required computer use. Participants in other stages of the research who were less likely to have free access to computers were targeted using other research strategies.

The electronic questionnaire was designed to lead the participants from more structured questions regarding diploma delivery to more personal thoughts and observations related to partnership working and interaction with other consortium members. The first page of the questionnaire explained the purpose of the research, the confidentiality agreement and other ethical information (appendix a). Each section covered identified objectives and included a combination of multiple choice questions with Likert scales, open questions where participants could provide their own responses, and space for

participants to comment freely. The final section thanked participants and provided contact details for any queries about the study.

To ensure that questions were appropriately designed, a range of principles were followed to ensure clarity of language and layout and make completion straightforward for the participants (Denscombe 2003; Anderson and Arsenault 1998; Cohen and Manion 1994; Weisberg *et al.* 1996). The number and types of questions were limited to keep the questionnaire short and the questions were divided into sections to lead participants through different areas of information and maintain their interest (Denscombe 2003; Anderson and Arsenault 1998). The variety of question styles ensured a range of information was obtained, that the participants had some variety in the questions, and that the questions were restricted to those directly relevant to the research (Denscombe 2003; Cohen and Manion 1994). Likert scales and closed questions were included in the design as they allowed the use of pre-determined and/or pre-coded responses which enable data to be collected in a structured manner, reducing the time spent coding and analysing results (Denscombe 2003). A five-point Likert scale was chosen as this allowed participants to be undecided, or to select graduations of defined viewpoints, while recognising that the middle ground is valid. The choice between using a four or five-point scale included consideration of whether forced decision making would be a true reflection of opinion. A seven-point scale was considered, but the additional extremes of scale would not have provided any additional information. SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com) was chosen from a range of available online questionnaire programmes, as it was clearly presented and produced professional looking results, and is commonly used within professional and academic practice. Further quality measures were designed into the research plan, including piloting the questionnaire and reviewing the feedback prior to distribution to the sample group (as discussed above; Denscombe 2003; Cohen and Manion 1994; Anderson and Arsenault 1998).

After the closing date for the survey the responses were collated and the data coded, cleaned and examined. Collation of the data was undertaken by generating a report in SurveyMonkey which generated basic statistical information from the results and presented open responses in full (www.surveymonkey.com). This data was also exported into a spreadsheet which enabled further processing of the responses. Due to

the relatively small size of the dataset, I decided not to use a statistical package such as Nvivo or SPSS for information management. Consistent with my interpretivist stance I preferred to engage more personally with the data.

3.9.3 Interview structure and design

Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain rich qualitative information to complement and enhance the data collected from the electronic questionnaire. The interviews were intended to provide access to situations where I had not been present, and to obtain information in more depth than permitted by the electronic questionnaires (Burgess 1984). However, both face to face and telephone interviews provided me with an opportunity to develop a working relationship with diploma stakeholders and to humanise the data collection. This was aligned with my mixed methods approach and my interpretivist stance. The construction of a relationship with the participants subsequently revealed participant opinions and views on the subject, and in some circumstances these were more candid than had been expected.

The semi-structured interview approach enabled a flexible use of prepared questions and helped to maximise the contribution from the participants while ensuring that the interview remained focused (appendices d; f; h; Bryman 2008). This also helped to strengthen the potential for comparing responses on similar topics to provide a level of internal validity or truthfulness and explore differing perspectives on specific issues.

Despite the quality and relevance of the data gathered, the choice of semi-structured interviews also had some disadvantages. The participants were spread over a wide geographical area and undertaking the interviews required significant effort to arrange in addition to the time required to conduct the interviews. The quantity of data generated was also significant, which had further implications for how it was managed, interpreted and stored (*ibid.*). The final complication worthy of note were the responses of the research participants, which were often unpredictable and ranged from diploma practitioners who spoke for twice the anticipated time to learners who hardly spoke at all. All of the interviews, whether face to face or by telephone, were digitally recorded with the participant's permission and transcribed at a later date to avoid the need for writing during the interview (appendix i).

The design for the interviews followed similar good practice processes to the design for the questionnaires (3.9.2 above). The interview questions were designed to address the subject areas identified by the research questions and areas of further interest that were identified in the questionnaire responses. The questions included a small number of closed introductory questions to ascertain specific information combined with open questions and space for participants to freely contribute their views. This approach allowed important or interesting areas to be followed in more detail, while numbering the questions enabled me to have flexibility in conducting the interview and following the flow of the conversation with the participant while still enabling the recordings to be transcribed and coded. This does create some issues around validity and reliability in that the research instrument was not applied in an identical and repeated manner to all of the participants, however, in terms of this research the qualitative data that was gained was valuable and the research respected my interpretivist and positivist approaches and contributed to the unique nature of this work.

As with the questionnaires (3.9.2 above), I briefed participants as to the nature and the purpose of the research (appendix c), my contact details of the researcher, and how to withdraw their contribution if this was required (appendices c; d; g; e). For the interviews, I also informed participants that the interviews were being recorded and that these would be transcribed and stored by the researcher, but that these would be coded and anonymised to ensure that confidentiality was maintained.

Good question and interview design was important to facilitate communication between myself and interviewees (Bryman 2008; Silverman 1993). This enabled me to establish a good rapport with the participants, who then felt able to contribute freely in response to the questions. The importance of the interviewer-interviewee relationship influenced the design of the interview questions, and particularly in making appropriate changes to the questions that the learners and parents were asked.

Some of the interviews were not conducted face-to-face as intended. One of the potential interview participants withdrew from the research while two others were willing to be interviewed over the telephone. The same prepared questions (appendix b) were used as for the face to face interviews and the participants were read the consent information (appendix a) before the interview was conducted. The benefits of telephone interviews were that I gained information which would otherwise not have been

accessible, and practitioners were able to contribute their views to my study. The telephone interviews were also an efficient use of time and no travel costs were incurred (Bryman 2008, p.198). The telephone interviews were not without their own problems. The rapport gained during face to face interview situations could not be replicated as visual communication was not possible. Consequently, the telephone interviews were shorter than the face to face interviews and the responses were less detailed.

The interviews for the learners followed the same design processes as for the diploma practitioners, but different questions were prepared (appendix e; appendix f). The learners were asked fewer questions and these were focused on their experience of undertaking the diploma rather than perceptions of partnership. The approach to interviews was also slightly different due to the access via a gatekeeper, the nature of the classroom setting and the age of the participants. These interviews were conducted in small groups to encourage the learners to talk about the questions together rather than being asked questions by the researcher which they may have found intimidating.

Like the learner interviews, the questions for the parents were also designed to be brief and to engage with participants who agreed to speak to the researcher during waiting time at a parents' evening (appendix g; appendix h). The parents were interviewed either singly or in pairs depending on how they had come to parent's evening, however, the setting and timing for these interviews would not have allowed for all of the parents to be interviewed individually before their appointments. The sample of parents interviewed was also small, but their contribution was useful to further understand partnership working and the diploma.

3.9.4 Collation and coding

Once the interviews had been completed, the recordings were transcribed by a research assistant (example, appendix i). The recordings were anonymised before transcription so that the research assistant was not aware of names or locations of the interviewees to ensure their privacy. I read through the transcripts while listening to the recordings to check for errors and to ensure greater familiarity with the data. The transcripts were then coded following a grounded theory approach of identifying and labelling relevant themes and concepts that occurred in the data (Bryman 2008; Strauss and Corbin 1990).

These themes were then analysed in relation to the research questions and the results and analysis are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

3.10 Summary

I began this section by considering my position and role as a researcher and my beliefs about the way in which knowledge is created, measured and observed, and I reflected on how my own position could influence the way in which I conducted my research. In order to address my specific research questions I identified a mixed methodology which was designed to consider my interpretivist and constructionist stance while providing the internal validity, consistency and robustness of data which enabled me to draw wider conclusions from the results. I consulted ethical guidance to ensure that the range of research participants, practitioners, learners and parents, would be appropriately informed and engaged with. My research design and choice of research instruments enabled the research questions to be addressed while approaching the subject in the most appropriate manner to elicit data from all of the research participants to further explore how and why individuals and organisations worked together.

4. Results

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explore the outcomes of the data collection in relation to the research questions, examining how partnership was defined and identified by those involved, and how partnership working had manifested itself in the development and delivery of the diploma. I also identify some of the different themes emerging from the data as the research questions are considered. I use the responses from the electronic questionnaires to present summaries of the themes and trends that I have identified, and then explore these in more depth using the narratives provided from the semi-structured interviews with practitioners. Later sections include quotes from the interviews with learners and parents to explore their opinions on partnership.

I explore definitions of partnership as defined by the research participants holistically across the areas, how they understood partnership and partnership working in the context of the diploma. To investigate how partnership was interpreted and demonstrated, I asked participants about partnership working and their experiences and the differing roles of the participants were explored. I also consider how and whether local issues have manifested themselves in each area. This experiential approach elicited participants own views of partnership, exploring who was involved in the diploma consortia and their wider networks.

I conclude this chapter by considering what is different about partnership in education, and how the issues identified by the practitioners affect partnership working. These issues will then be explored in more depth in the following discussion (Chapter 5).

4.2 What is understood by partnership?

As a starting point, it was important to define how practitioners understood 'partnership' as a concept, what they meant when using the term and how this related to its use. Definitions and uses of partnership were explored in the literature review (2.2 above), and some assumptions were identified, including:

- that it was variously understood as a concept;
- that it could be used interchangeably with other terms; and

- that it was inherently positive or beneficial.

The literature review further demonstrated that:

- the concept of partnership could be confusing to define and difficult to achieve;
- its understanding and use was shaped by language and implementation;
- there were different levels of involvement, leadership and governance; and
- in reality understanding and undertaking partnership was not always straightforward or beneficial.

Following this, I aimed to establish a working definition of partnership for use in the research tools. This was inherently problematic as I needed to define partnership in some way to express to the participants the subject for discussion, for example, by using my definition of partnership as a beginning to open up how others might view and interpret this. During the data collection phase, I used the terms ‘partnership’ and ‘partnership working’ in the research instruments to describe *how* individuals, organisations and businesses worked together, while ‘consortium’ and ‘consortia’ were used to refer collectively to those involved in developing and delivering the diploma.

The data collection began with the practitioner questionnaires which included asking the research participants about their own understanding of partnership. One of the first questions asked about partnership working was what terms participants would use if they ‘couldn’t use ‘partnership’ to describe this sort of work’, and although participants provided a range of a range of other suggestions the majority preferred to continue to use ‘partnership’. The terms chosen by the practitioners can give some indication as to how they viewed partnership working in that context. It could be expected that respondents who preferred definitions including ‘collaborative’, ‘collaboration’, ‘working-together’, and ‘team’/‘teamwork’ were identifying mutually beneficial relationships in the consortium; those who used ‘schools’, ‘schools-united’, ‘commissioning’, and ‘commissioners’ appeared to be more task-focused; while others conveyed less positive emotions in their descriptions, such as, ‘necessity’, ‘putting-stuff-in’ and ‘group-of-fellow-sceptics’. The responses were analysed by term chosen and contributor, but no specific pattern emerged and the responses are more likely to

have been determined by personal attitudes and experiences rather than any common organisational or sector influences.

The practitioners who were interviewed were also asked what terminology they would use if they could choose a different word to describe diploma partnership work they were engaged in. The majority suggested collaboration, but some flagged up other terminology suggested by working practices or personal experience:

... I'll have to think about that one, all the familiar ones, partnership, collaboration... Partnership's the one that's commonly in use here, I mean the big drive for local authorities at this point in time is they don't just convene as a partnerships who are trying to bring coalition to the willing or unwilling to a certain point, they'll actually be commissioners as well, which may have some connotation of favouring one member of the partnership at the expense of another... (Area C, Practitioner 4).

I think partnership has to be the only one... it's got huge gaps in it and lots of weaknesses, but that probably is the best way to describe it (Practitioner 5, Area E).

Erm, a group of fellow sceptics, or, I think, a group of like-minded people... you think that you're the only one that really thinks that you want the best for your school, whereas everybody's the same, they all want the best for the kids in their institution (Area E, Practitioner 9).

Collaboration, cooperation, necessity (Area E, Practitioner 11).

Because we've got this decentralised 'partnership' ... our government office have told us not to call them that as they don't want to confuse them with the main partnership. They quite liked clusters, which I don't think we did... We're tending to home in on collaboratives, which is a bit of a mouthful. I'm personally not as hung up on the terminology as a lot of people, I'm quite happy to use collaborative, and partnership is fine by me (Area F, Practitioner 18).

I think collaborative is a good one, and in some ways I would prefer it to partnership, because... partnership is about divvying up the spoils, whereas

again a partnership is, I think almost a sense of, 'what are we getting out of it?' I may be reading too much into that (Area G, Practitioner 1).

I don't know what other word I would use to be honest because it is what it is and it is a partnership... if it wasn't a partnership, I don't know what else it could be... I mean it's not quite there yet in terms of the positive atmosphere and climate we would like but it is doing the job (Area H, Practitioner 14).

Collaboration is a one that springs to mind quickly, a common way forward, a common known and agreed to, way forward, something that there's a sense of ownership of (Area I, Practitioner 8).

I suppose its key stakeholders working together, we're all stakeholders... (Area J, Practitioner 2).

...teamwork is a fairly key theme... people working together as schools united or something like that... (Area J, Practitioner 3).

Within the practitioner interviewees, although a variety of terms were given, this was based on the shared action of delivering the diploma. This use of a wide range of terms reflects the diverse terminology used in practice as discussed in the literature review (2.2 above).

These participants were also asked what working in partnership *meant* to them. Responses were varied, but displayed a common emphasis on the need for accountability, good communication, clear aims and working together. The majority of participants focused on the role of building consensus and common purpose as part of partnership working, but other themes were identified within this, including how diverse organisations work together, and how organisational involvement in collaboration differs between institutions:

Working with other people who want to go in the same direction and therefore want to collaborate and work together for the common aim of providing a better service for young people... when you talk to other organisations they don't always have the same view and sometimes there are other variables which will affect whether somebody wants to work in

partnership... what we want to do is to take the best parts of the reform and work with people who are like-minded that want to be involved and we make that pretty clear to partners (Area B, Practitioner 12).

It's finding common ground for me, for education and for the employers that I represent... (Area D, Practitioner 10).

...working in partnership for me is very much about having clear and concise lines of communication between partners and for partners to be quite clear about what it is that they are bringing and needing from the partnership. It's about treating all partners as equals no matter what people are bringing to the table and it's about having a common set of aims and objectives... it's about trying to find that common ground so that people are working together (Area E, Practitioner 11).

I think working in partnership is a case of playing to different partners strengths... it's about finding common ground.... So it's about trying to put a team of people together where you have within that team all the skills you need to do a job (Area F, Practitioner 18).

It means that you are answerable to and accountable to a partnership of people and organisations, and that there is some sort of contract, verbal rather than particularly written down, I think, in terms of expectations, communications and join up that we try to achieve in order to do the best in whatever format we're doing (Area G, Practitioner 1)

Working in partnership to me means you have a positive spirit of collaboration where partners are willing to commit their time, willing to go the extra mile really to get things done on behalf of the young people (Area H, Practitioner 14).

If you were to work with our 14-19 partnership board, you'd get a really good sense of what partnership means in [deleted]. It has some good foundations in that the [deleted] head teachers have worked in partnership for a number of years... so we've had some major issues to form their partnership work on... Different institutions have been more able, more

willing and more suited to moving forward with diplomas than others, so there is a back drop of long standing collaboration and partnership, at the same time there is the autonomy of schools and colleges to move at their own pace (Area I, Practitioner 8).

...partnership working I think, is about stakeholders getting together and planning in a joint combined way, rather than everybody just going off and doing their own thing and in many respects competing with each other..., I think that in [deleted] we've got quite a good history of partnership working... (Area J, Practitioner 2).

By contrast, one practitioner identified the role of individual organisations working in competition within partnership relationships, noting this as a positive aspect of the working relationship.

Working in partnership means partly that organisations work in competition most of the time, so it's a vehicle for exploring the boundaries of what's possible in a single organisation as opposed to a partnership and you do that by encouraging people to be open and transparent and honest and realistic about the opportunities created by partnership working and the limitations imposed by being a single institution that has to remain viable and competitive (Area C, Practitioner 4).

Some practitioners discussed their observations of other institutions, commenting on the specific practical requirements that were needed for partnership working, or more tangible outcomes in terms of diploma delivery:

I work in with all the different diploma groups... with all the different institutions across the authority and trying to find new partners... you know for example the environmental land-based have had to go outside the authority to actually get partners in (Area A, Practitioner 7).

I think that working in partnership means that we are acting collaboratively to deliver a diploma to students in the best possible way. It may be that some of the institutions can't offer, for reasons of rooming or resources, the full range of diploma choices, so by acting collaboratively we are able to

make all of the facilities across all of the four schools in the consortium available to all of the students across all of the four catchment areas... (Area F, Practitioner 15).

In addition to explaining what partnership meant to them, the practitioners that were interviewed were also asked whether they felt they were currently working in partnership within the arrangements to develop and deliver the diploma. All of the participants identified that they felt they were working in partnership:

...the links that we have with schools are very good and a lot of it comes down to people relationships and how you work with other people, and for me that is absolutely key to this that you build those relationships, that there's a good deal of trust and when people see what you do, because they do not always understand beforehand they realise that you've got common aims and that actually the partnership will have (Area B, Practitioner 12).

Oh undoubtedly so, yes, no problem with that (Area C, Practitioner 4).

Yes definitely... I know where the diplomas fit in our option boxes because that sort of conversation's gone on, I mean for instance we all know that the high school is not involved at all (Area E, Practitioner 9).

Yeah, very much so, we've had a series of meetings in place under the guise of the consortium, and we've met up regularly throughout and although the responsibility has largely been borne by me and this school. Which it should do as we are the lead school, we have acted collaboratively throughout really and there has been support from the other teachers and input from those on a regular basis and so things have worked quite well like that (Area F, Practitioner 15).

I think we're working more and more in partnership as the weeks go on, and if we charted success in terms of working in partnership six months ago to now there is a very different feeling this year to have skills change curriculum, schools change timetabling, and schools changing acceptance of diplomas widely... so there's been quite an almost seismic shift between where collectively we were and where collectively we are now (Area I, Practitioner 8).

Within these responses, however, some practitioners recognised that there were more complexities involved in working together, particularly around issues of engagement in partnership working:

It's working in partnership, but whether what happens at partnership meetings is actually partnership, and back at individual institutions is a different matter really (Area A, Practitioner 7).

The government say not one institution can deliver the diploma by themselves and in actual fact that's not true. Some of the schools can and the college certainly can, so partnership costs money, so if you can get a school or a college who can deliver the diploma by themselves they will do that so they don't need partners, that's the way it is at the moment... (Area E, Practitioner 5).

Yes, but, I think the percentage of effort being put in is somewhat differentiated... and so there is an element where we have a view about what needs to be done and it's very much in the forefront of our mind, but people in the schools with 15 or 20 other things going on that we know nothing about, sometimes miss out on things that perhaps they ought to have told us about, or don't give the full push that perhaps we'd like in order to achieve things (Area G, Practitioner 1).

I think we are working in partnership, but I think some institutions are there because they want to get something out of it, obviously everybody's there to get something out of it, but I think some of them are there for the wrong reasons and I don't quite think that the positive collaboration partnership working that we would like is quite there yet (Area H, Practitioner 14).

In addition, one participant was more concerned with strategies being implemented to ensure that partnership working was effective:

I think if you'd asked me this question yesterday, I would have said no, it's very much one sided, it's very much what education wants... we're having to consider putting in service level agreements and the commitment sometimes doesn't fit, if we're asking for commitment from educational groups, sometimes that commitment isn't there, but on the other hand, when they're wanting

something from us, you know, there's always very short deadlines and it's quite immediate. After today, it's reassuring to know, that there's at least one local authority that's looking at a strategy to have an even-handed approach to employer engagement and that's good... (Area D, Practitioner 10).

One practitioner identified geographical concerns specific to their particular partnership area which were constraints to partnership working:

I think we're doing as well as we can. One of the problems is... it's a very small team so it's been hard to operate as effectively as we would like to do. We have a dispersed model... it's a big rural area, we have five local 14-19, and we've been told we haven't got to call them partnerships, 14-19 collaboratives, and getting partnership working across places where you could be 100 miles apart vertically.... So I think we've done really well but it isn't perfect (Area F, Practitioner 18).

Within many of these responses other issues began to emerge as respondents highlighted their own priorities and concerns, including competition, leadership, and self- and organisational interests. These are important themes within partnership but also indicate the evident tensions within a grouping of individuals and organisations brought together to work as a consortium. These themes were raised by participants across the range of contributions and contributors and were not attributable to particular organisations, groups or individuals.

4.3 Partnership language

The diploma practitioners were presented with a series of Likert statements related to the existence and effect of vocabulary and language specific to partnership working (table 5).

Table 5. Existence and effect of vocabulary and language specific to partnership.

13. Existence and effect of vocabulary and language specific to partnership and partnership working								
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A	Rating Average	Response Count
Partnership language is used to comply with government policy	6.9% (4)	44.8% (26)	39.7% (23)	8.6% (5)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.50	58
The use of partnership vocabulary is necessary to obtain funding	8.6% (5)	63.8% (37)	24.1% (14)	3.4% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.22	58
Specialist vocabulary has been useful to communicate within organisations across the consortium	5.2% (3)	44.8% (26)	39.7% (23)	10.3% (6)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.55	58
Specialist vocabulary has made government policy difficult to decipher and implement	0.0% (0)	20.7% (12)	50.0% (29)	29.3% (17)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	3.09	58
There is no specific vocabulary of partnership	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	55.2% (32)	32.8% (19)	5.2% (3)	6.9% (4)	3.46	58

Practitioners were asked whether they felt that partnership vocabulary was used to comply with government policy and to obtain funding; in both cases, the majority felt that this was the case. This may reflect unfamiliarity with diploma policies and language or a feeling that policies and policy decisions are not significantly affected by the terminology. Whether this indicates a genuine use of demonstrating partnership or merely encourages lip-service and adherence to partnership rhetoric remains open to debate.

There was some evidence of specialist language supporting partnership work as practitioners mainly agreed that specialist vocabulary had been useful in communicating with other organisations across the consortium. Although some participants felt that specialist vocabulary had impeded their engagement with and implementation of government policy, the majority either indicated that it had not, or neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. Finally, a significant number of the participants agreed that there was a specific vocabulary of partnership. This is an area which would benefit from further exploration, for example in identifying and defining the specific terms used within a common vocabulary of partnership language, and whether there were similarities in language and terminology between those delivering and receiving services.

The use of partnership language within diploma policy and strategy was commented on by all of the participants in some way. It is possible that the notions of a partnership vocabulary, or at least a shared understanding of terminology may have helped this

process, even if the practitioners are approaching and using the concept of partnership in different ways. Only one practitioner, a director of educational partnerships within HE, took the opportunity to contribute their own specific comments about partnership language, suggesting that it was necessary to gain funding and was part of the partnership process, but was not as important as working *in* partnership, highlighting a discursive tension between conformity and being seen to do things whether or not they have actually been done.

The practitioner questionnaire and interview responses regarding the use of specific partnership language and terminology demonstrate a difference between the language that those working to develop and deliver the diplomas perceive as required to engage with policy, and the language which the same practitioners use to describe their work. Policy requirements and funding applications locally, regionally and nationally required a more formal uniformity of language, while day to day working was expressed and understood in a variety of ways.

4.4 Policies and processes - practitioner results

Government policies form the core of the diploma partnership, and although not everyone agrees on purpose and execution there has to be broad acceptance and conformity for the diploma to function and be universally delivered across the country, as well as within the region of the study. Practitioners were asked for their thoughts and opinions about diploma policies and given a range of statements to consider. The responses to the provocations were varied, but indicated how practitioners regarded some of the main policy issues (table 6).

Table 6. Policy implementation and embedding.

12. Policy implementation and embedding								
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A	Rating Average	Response Count
Bureaucracy within the consortium gets in the way of achieving the consortium goals	12.1% (7)	36.2% (21)	17.2% (10)	29.3% (17)	5.2% (3)	0.0% (0)	2.79	58
External policy decisions impede the work of the consortium	8.6% (5)	37.9% (22)	32.8% (19)	20.7% (12)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.66	58
Government policy prevents collaborative working	6.9% (4)	25.9% (15)	29.3% (17)	34.5% (20)	3.4% (2)	0.0% (0)	3.02	58
Government 14-19 Diploma policy has been fully embraced by the consortium	8.6% (5)	51.7% (30)	19.0% (11)	19.0% (11)	1.7% (1)	0.0% (0)	2.53	58
The consortium has been able to implement Government 14-19 Diploma policy	6.9% (4)	53.4% (31)	24.1% (14)	12.1% (7)	1.7% (1)	1.7% (1)	2.47	58
Government 14-19 Diploma policy has been fully embedded by the consortium	5.2% (3)	27.6% (16)	36.2% (21)	25.9% (15)	3.4% (2)	1.7% (1)	2.95	58

The first of these statements concerned whether bureaucracy gets in the way of achieving goals. The responses to this question suggested that partnership bureaucracy was a real barrier to working together for some consortium members, while for others this was not the case. Consideration was then made of whether *external* policy decisions impede the work of the consortium – the largest group agreed, while some disagreed, and a significant number favoured neither position. This meant that although many considered that external policy decisions impeded their work, the majority of respondents indicated that they thought it either did not or did not indicate a preference. This relationship between policy and practice is a key theme which occurs throughout the research results and is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Views were also divided over whether Government policy prevents collaborative working; one third agreed, slightly more disagreed, and the remainder indicated ‘neither’, suggesting that these participants felt that policy was no barrier to working together. A majority of participants agreed that Government 14-19 policy had been embraced by the consortium, while only a minority disagreed. This is particularly interesting following the responses to the previous statement where participants indicated that government policy prevented effective collaborative working, as this may have indicated that there needed to be change to government policy, and to partnership working practices to increase the efficacy of the consortium, or that it was possible to fully embrace government policy while not working effectively as a partnership.

Following this, most participants expressed broad agreement that Government 14-19 policy was being implemented, compared with a small number who disagreed. Opinion on the statement regarding whether Government 14-19 policy had been fully embedded, with one-third agreeing, a third disagreeing and the remainder giving neither response indicated that although government policy appears to have been implemented, it had not been fully embedded across consortium activities at that time.

The policy section then concluded by giving the practitioners the opportunity to comment freely about these issues. Several practitioners identified a comparative absence of guidance, but one comment in particular appeared to sum up the general feelings:

Although it is clear that every Consortium is different, it seems as if there is a lack of guidance with regard to delivery compared to an overload of policy (Area B, Practitioner, Questionnaire 32).

From the policy documents examined in the literature review it was clear that partnership was an expectation of diploma delivery and a central part of diploma policy. This expectation appears to have arisen to address government policy and facilitate shared working as the data collected from the participants clearly indicates that although this policy requirement was viewed and interpreted just as that - a policy requirement - there was partnership being undertaken and that this was furthering and strengthening existing partnership working.

Given the timing of the data collection in relation to the 2010 General Election and the influence of New Labour policy on the inclusion of partnership working in the development and delivery of the diploma, the practitioners that engaged in the interviews were asked how they felt a change of government might affect the 14-19 diploma. All of the participants expressed a degree of uncertainty about the future of the diploma and its funding, with some being concerned that the diploma might not be supported by a Conservative government:

I'm not sure really... I think it all depends really on what happens over the next year or so as the Gateway One Centres will just have come just to the end of their first year for teaching, and the Gateway Two Centres are about

to come online, and I suspect it will depend on public opinion and the quality of those learners and how they are feeding back to the wider community about those experiences, so I think if they've had positive experiences, then I suspect that the shadow government will probably be inclined to keep it, but I can't think that they feel particularly strongly either way (Area F, Practitioner 15).

The Labour party has been very much control-free in education for most of the time they've been in government and that's not been good, I think in terms of the effect, on the other hand I think the Tory government's instincts would be not to be like that, but in not being like that to almost let local control occur and that local control would be in small letter, conservative like, because they're less likely to want to take bold steps in education, because that's not where they come from, they come from much more the culture of the traditional way of doing things, so the biggest issue I think will be that experimentation and the chance to really take something and do something different, I think those opportunities are going to close down and it's a shame because a year ago, I really was thinking, this is probably the most exciting thing I'll have done in my career (Area G, Practitioner 1).

We just don't know if there's a government change just what sort of policies would come in... I just don't know what a Tory government's view would be towards the diplomas for example, they might just pull the plug (Area J, Practitioner 2).

Some practitioners felt that too much, in terms of time and money, had been invested in the diplomas for a new government to allow them to fail, although they anticipated changes in the nature and administration of the diploma:

I don't know. Conferences that I go to seem to think that it'll still carry on even if there's a change of government. There's been so much money spent on it, which is unbelievable. I've never seen a qualification that's had so much money thrown at it, but not necessarily in the right place (Area A, Practitioner 7).

I suspect a lot of the reforms are so embedded in the systems of the department now, that they're unstoppable... I suppose the big issue is how far advanced those things are... for them to stop coming in terms of the amount of money I've seen spent on the diploma program. I say, 'you know just throw money at it and see what happens', has been the approach hasn't it? Would withdrawing some of that money actually, which is inevitably going to happen in my opinion, whatever the political outcome of the next election, would it stop those things happening and I think, we're probably at the point where, certainly with the diploma, it probably is unstoppable now (Area C, Practitioner 4).

...I don't think the diplomas will go. I think the people would be up in arms if suddenly the diplomas were no longer going to be there after all the energy that's been put into it, all the money as well, so I think the diplomas are probably here to stay and you can't argue against people who are not in educational employment or training... the discussion may be framed in different ways, but I think it'll still be there... it's actually changing the framework for delivering these things... so all of these things will change politically with a small 'p' regardless of change of national government (Area E, Practitioner 11).

Further changes anticipated by other practitioners included the loss of the three 'subject' diplomas, and a focus on the more 'vocational' aspects of the qualification:

The other thing I think..., is that certainly in terms of the 17 lines, the Conservatives are not keen at all on the three what you would call subject diplomas, rather than vocational diplomas and they would be lost (Area B, Practitioner 12).

I've tried to find what the Conservative view of Diplomas is on the internet and I'm not finding much. I think a lot of people are hiding behind the election, saying let's not bother to do anything as there might be a change of government and it might all go away. I don't think that will happen. I think there's too much political capital invested in the diplomas for a Conservative administration to sweep them away... I think it's quite

possible that we may lose languages, humanities and science if there's a conservative administration simply because they haven't got as far forward as the others. I don't think you can argue that there isn't a need for a qualification like the diploma, and I think there's been so much invested in them (Area F, Practitioner 18).

We're approaching the stage where we might be doing diploma bids for awards that might be scrapped by the next Conservative government, if you put your money on the Conservatives getting in... They are for 14 but not for the three "academic" ones, which are Gateway Four and they say they would scrap those at the moment, unless there's a change of policy (Area G, Practitioner 6).

Other practitioners discussed the potential practical implications of diploma policy change:

I really don't know, I know the Labour Government, it's been their baby and they've ploughed a lot of money into it... and I've been to a number of conferences where the key speakers have said the Government will not let this fail. I think that the Conservative Government will have to take this on board, because I actually really feel for those students that have taken up this qualification within the first gateway, because if the Conservative Government don't carry this on, you know, these children have already embarked, committed themselves to the new qualification for maybe the next two years or the year and they're going to come out with a qualification and their employers go, 'Oh yeah, diplomas, that was the one that nobody wanted', and it shouldn't be a political game (Area D, Practitioner 10).

I think we all hear versions... of them [diplomas] being sidelined. I don't think we're allowing ourselves to think that way, it's almost like putting money on a horse, it's not totally appropriate. We shouldn't be planning because of guesswork, we should be planning because of what's on the table now, and if three of the diplomas are sidelined, then we'll cope with that when it happens... So we are dealing with as it is now until we're told by law that it's different (Area I, Practitioner 8).

I think there is a concern... I think that they [the Conservative Party] will go for a maybe more traditional approach in the more sort of sixth-form and be less interested in the idea of 14-19... under a Conservative government would be further tightening of public expenditure, just how much that feeds its way through down into educational delivery of, I know it's one of the last things they want to tackle but you couldn't see it not being touched by cuts in public expenditure... I think also where we stand, I mean the college at the moment is caught up in problems with the LSC and the new bill program that we, this campus where we're having the interview is scheduled, we've bought the land on [deleted] about a mile down the road and we've got a very large campus, we've got plans, but we've got no money now to build, and so there are issues like that... because there's a lot of us now left wondering where the money is going to come from (Area J, Practitioner 3).

There was significant uncertainty expressed by the participants throughout the interviews. There was a broad consensus that diploma policy would change, although the nature and implications of those changes was largely a matter for speculation. These contributions have enabled the differing views on partnership of the participants to be evaluated and to form part of the basis of my definitions of the concept of partnership and its meaning to those working together to develop and deliver the diploma.

4.5 Perceptions of roles

To understand how the participants interpret and enact partnership it is necessary to understand how those involved view their own roles (and/or that of their organisations) and how they perceive the involvement of others. This was investigated from the point of view of all of those involved in the research, and the roles of the practitioners, the learners and their parents and myself as a researcher will be considered.

4.5.1 Practitioners

There is evidence of a number of years of partnership experience across the practitioners involved in the region, with primarily governance-based models of partnership (top-down leadership and management), from experience of working in a

range of other partnerships such as EAZs, and EBPs. Practitioner responses highlighted that working in this way is complex and despite positive partnership experiences, there are tensions, particularly in relation to finance and funding, travel distance and differing consortium area sizes. Other issues such as competition and league tables were also highlighted. Differing practitioner feelings about the diploma implementation and delivery, and overarching issues around socio-economics and politics need to be recognised as these influence how the consortia are managed, and how the practitioners engage with other stakeholders. These issues are considered in more detail at Section 5.4 below.

Practitioners were asked how they viewed their own role in the diploma consortium. Their responses outlined a range of interpretations of roles and organisations and demonstrated that diploma delivery was complex and not uniformly applied or interpreted by those involved. There was some commonality around diploma management, as many practitioners perceived themselves or their organisation as being 'in the lead'. This is significant as it demonstrates some consideration of notions of power within the consortium which needs to be recognised in terms of governance and organisation as well as in conceptual terms of power.

It became apparent that the views regarding the nature of partnership working were not straightforward, possibly due to the nature of relationships between the organisations and individuals involved, socio-economic changes or many other factors. The dynamic was that although schools, colleges and other providers were required to work together and expressed the rhetoric of partnership, they still competed for students, league table positioning, reputation and a range of other factors, meaning that tensions existing in relationships were a result of competition and inequalities rather than collaboration, which I consider further in Chapter 5.

Analysis of the questionnaire data explored how the practitioners worked with individuals, groups and organisations to develop and deliver the diploma. Practitioners were initially asked about consortium membership and their perceptions of the individuals and organisations involved (table 7).

Table 7. Responses to ‘How many people do you think are involved?’

17. How many people do you think are involved in the consortium?									
Approximate number									
	Less than 50	51-100	101-200	201-300	301-400	401-500	More than 501	More than 1000	Response Count
Please choose one answer from the drop down menu	57.7% (30)	23.1% (12)	9.6% (5)	3.8% (2)	1.9% (1)	1.9% (1)	0.0% (0)	1.9% (1)	52














The results indicated that consortium membership was perceived as extensive, with estimates of those involved varying between 50 or fewer participants, suggesting that only other practitioners were considered as stakeholders, to 1000 or more members, which may be closer to the actual total where the learners and their parents are considered as stakeholders.

When asked how they felt about the number of members in the consortium, most respondents felt that the numbers were appropriate, indicating that in general most participants felt that consortium numbers were not impeding their partnership work. However, these conclusions are subjective to the responses to the previous question where participants considered how many stakeholders they perceived to be involved as well as being influenced by their thoughts on how partnership should be delivered.

Participants were asked how they felt that the number of consortium members affected partnership working, although again, this is subjective to their perceptions. The results indicated that the majority of participants felt broad involvement by a range of individuals and organisations created a supportive network, but many indicated that more involvement from businesses and employers would be useful. These contributions also highlighted issues which had been identified from the literature that participants felt were also important factors for them in partnership working, including; communication; leadership; employer engagement; trust; collaboration; and commitment, all of which were identified as requirements for the success of working together, and were recurring themes throughout the results.

Further to considering the numbers of consortium members, participants were asked to identify the organisations they thought were represented (table 8).

Table 8. Responses to the question ‘Who is involved in the consortium?’

16. Who is involved in the consortium? Please select all that apply.			
		Response Percent	Response Count
11-16 schools		55.8%	29
13-16 schools		21.2%	11
11-18 schools		80.8%	42
Academies		32.7%	17
Sixth form colleges		50.0%	26
FE/Tertiary colleges		67.3%	35
Universities		46.2%	24
Learning and Skills Council		46.2%	24
Local Authority		80.8%	42
Connexions		65.4%	34
Training Providers		57.7%	30
Work Based Learning Providers		69.2%	36
Other Employers		59.6%	31

The results indicated a broad expectation of involvement from across education and business sectors, with 11-18 schools and the LA unsurprisingly being the most frequently identified participants. The options for identifying who was involved were provided as a list in the questionnaire. The questionnaires also included questions on consortium participation, while the opportunity for exploring non-participation was provided during the interviews where the practitioners were asked if they felt anyone had been left out of the consortium and why this might be the case. This question elicited a range of responses, identifying who may have been excluded and why. A small proportion of the practitioners felt that no-one had been excluded, although some of these indicated that there were some participants who could be more involved. The remaining responses identified a range of stakeholders, including work-based learning providers and members of other sectors, such as private schools and special schools which they felt had been excluded. At the time of the research, however, there was no requirement for these to be part of diploma consortia. The main groups which practitioners felt were missing from diploma consortia, however, were learners, parents and employers.

The interview participants were asked to consider whether they felt anyone had been left out of the consortium. Around half of the practitioners did not feel that anyone had been left out, although some of those who expressed that opinion felt that members who were already committed to the partnership could be more involved.

I don't believe anybody has been left out. I suppose there's the odd sector like, I don't know, the voluntary sector perhaps they might feel they could have more of an input (Area B, Practitioner 12).

No... everybody was included. I think people excluded themselves in those groups, not because of the want for the group, it was because these people didn't want to be engaged (Area D, Practitioner 10).

No, everybody was invited and institutions made their own individual choice, whether they get involved or not, down to the fact that we decided, everybody's picked which diploma line they wanted to be involved in, as an institution, as I said before, [deleted] have said they don't want to be involved at all until they've seen people fail with it, or succeed with it and then they'll make their own decisions after that (Area E, Practitioner 9).

I don't think so. We're in quite an odd geographical position in that there are only four schools in [deleted] and all of those four schools are involved... I do wonder how much parental involvement there has been because when I think about when I was talking about this to parents on parents, like initially at parents evenings, they weren't really aware of what it was and it was up to me to kind of sell it to them (Area F, Practitioner 15).

I think we've got a varied representation in the partnership, we've got schools, we've got higher education institutions which could be a lot more... we could involve them a lot more... We involve employers, which we could probably improve on as well, we've got the [deleted] business forum, we've got the manufacturing forum, which is heavily involved in the partnership, but the [deleted] business forum isn't, so they probably need to be a lot more involved... I think there's scope for involving PCT a lot more. I think their name is on the partnership list somewhere, but they don't attend and

that's again no fault of their own, I think we need to be a bit more proactive and invite them in and let them know the benefits of being involved in such a partnership... the problem is, if you open it up to too many organisations you get a meeting room full of different organisations and no decisions get made... (Area H, Practitioner 14).

I'm not aware of anybody that's significantly left out, but there will be, because there always is (Area I, Practitioner 8).

I don't think left out as such... I suppose what it's been is that maybe some people have got more than others out of it, some people inevitably bring more to the table and sometimes they take more away from the table. I can think of some schools that contribute a lot and they also take a lot out of it. How you sometimes, can't always measure these things neatly and tidy, but I think that's been the issue rather than somebody's not taken part, that's not been the case (Area J, Practitioner 3).

Some participants identified employers and WBL organisations as being excluded from diploma partnerships:

...they haven't fully engaged the employers in the process. It's very hard because, you know we have lots of meetings and you can't seriously expect an employer to come to every meeting, they just don't have the time... They haven't really involved the voluntary sector, so, that's something we need to do (Area A, Practitioner 7).

It's hard to say who's been left out if I don't know what's out there, but for sure, employers, work-based learning providers have been, they haven't been used the way they could, their strengths haven't been brought into the table on most of the diploma (Area E, Practitioner 5).

Work-based learning providers... they haven't been left out, you know, they're around, but in a very peripheral way. I don't think their role has been explored as fully as it could be... And I don't think we've found the right way to engage with employers yet, and I don't mean in terms of work experience, I mean in the planning and stage... (Area F, Practitioner 18).

Others felt that specific organisations within education had been left out of the process, in particular special schools and private schools, and that even though had not been included in the focus of the diploma that including them in the partnerships might have been useful:

It has been quite difficult to... engage special schools fully in the agenda, firstly because they're actually dealing with a very much smaller number of young people and secondly, the programs that these young people are going to follow aren't the glitzy ones like the diplomas and the young apprenticeships... we've reached a point now where we're managing to feel that we're engaging them better and they're saying we actually have a voice in the wider partnership (Area C, Practitioner 4).

We still need to bring private schools in, which is probably a next stage. They have the opportunity to come to us of course, but they are outside the fold at the moment (Area G, Practitioner 6).

Few practitioners considered how parents and learners were included or not in the diploma partnerships. One of the participants who felt no-one had been excluded did consider whether parents could have been included more (Area F, Practitioner 15, above). Only two of the participants specifically identified the learners as not having been fully included in the partnership:

Kids have been left out of it, which is a shame... the kids on the diploma have a legitimate view of the diploma which should be part of that process and we've got no mechanism for that at the moment... (Area G, Practitioner 1).

I don't feel we have, rather than specific organisations, I would say are parents as key stakeholders as fully represented, I'm not sure and young people themselves, I think we're aware of this, but whether we're doing as much as we could to make sure their voice is heard, I'm not so sure (Area J, Practitioner 2).

The responses gave an illustration of the different groups and organisations who were involved, as well as those that the practitioners felt could have had more involvement or

could have been directly included. The consideration of the involvement of learners and their parents was interesting as it was not established at this stage of the data collection whether the practitioners who felt no-one had been excluded specifically included the parents and learners within that, or whether they had not considered the learners and parents as being stakeholders. This led me to further reflect on this thesis as discussed in the methodology (Chapter 3), during which I reviewed the research design to include a sample of learners and parents in the data collection to broaden the range of stakeholders that I had included.

I evaluated involvement in diploma development and delivery partly by looking at government policies to establish which groups should be part of the consortium. I discovered that membership of regional diploma consortia is more complex to determine as local arrangements required schools, colleges, business and other consortium members to opt in.

4.5.2 Employers

It was difficult to contact participating employers as individuals and organisations within the diploma consortia such as EBLOs and local government officials would not provide access to their employer partners. Consequently, I could not directly involve employers, which made diploma engagement with employers challenging to research and discuss. This is understandable as organisations wanted to protect their contacts, especially in a competitive business and educational marketplace. This highlights problems associated with working relationships based on individual links rather than an open or corporate approach where a system of relationship management would be beneficial for everyone involved which I consider further below.

...we've got our database of employers, work-based learning providers have got their database of employers and in theory, we'd all like to work together and share but in reality, I'm not telling them who we have... (Area J, Practitioner 2).

I identified some employers from promotional materials for the diploma, while others self-identified in the questionnaire. Despite this, progress was limited and although I attempted to include employers in further data collection, none volunteered to be interviewed. The issue of employer engagement was discussed with diploma managers

at the Government Office for the North-East (GONE) during the early stages of the research design, who summarised their perspective as:

Employers want school leavers to be employable, but then they don't engage when invited. The CBI and chamber of commerce stress they want this but local employers are not so keen – there are different messages locally and nationally. There is a lot of high level rhetoric – the government is responding to what employers have said they want, but employers are not yet fully engaged (Interview with diploma manager, Area E, pers. comm. Recorded in research journal, March 2009).

I observed some evidence from interviews with parents and learners that employers were engaged with the diploma, as both learners and parents gave examples of work experience that had been undertaken. It was very difficult to investigate this much further, however, as I was not able to explore this with employers.

Opinions of the research participants on employer engagement with the diploma were mixed, and the paucity of data suggested that more could be done to engage employers in all aspects of the diploma and its stakeholders. There appears to be some engagement in terms of providing work experience and talks to learners, but the lack of open engagement means that practitioners have appeared to view employers more as service providers than partners.

4.5.3 Learners and parents

I initially focused the data collection on diploma practitioners but as the study progressed, the importance of the learners and their parents in relation to both the diploma consortium and the research became increasingly apparent from participant responses and my personal reflection, and I expanded the scope of the study to include these groups. I asked learners and parents about their understanding and experiences of the diploma, and I expected them to use different language and have different perspectives to the practitioners. Had there been more time and opportunity for engagement I would have established more clearly what terms learners and parents used, how they defined partnership, and how their views differed those of the practitioners.

I asked the learners why they chose to study the diploma. The intention was to explore their rationale for choosing the diploma and their prior knowledge of the qualification. Their responses varied, and there was a clear division across the two institutions that were surveyed, with the learners from School B indicating that they appeared to have had more freedom of choice, whereas the learners from School A appeared to indicate that they fewer options available to them and stronger guidance or steer from others:

Originally I didn't want to do this... I just wanted to do the BTEC in my school, but they were gonna charge, but my school was just persuading us to do it, saying all of the good points about it and it just went from there (Area G, School A, learner interview group 1).

...we had like a day where you go and see what you're actually doing and stuff (Area G, School A, learner interview group 1).

These quotes illustrate how the learners interacted with others in the consortium, for example practitioners and parents, and how decisions were discussed and expressed with them.

The learners at the two different schools appeared to have different experiences of working with others in the consortium. Those at School B had only worked with their own teachers, in their own school and with their classmates with whom they had progressed through the school. In comparison, the learners at School A worked with FE lecturers, teachers and industry professionals who were new to them, had travelled to a different building in a different area and worked with other learners from a combination of local schools. These contributions provided greater depth to my understanding of who was included in the consortium. They also represented the learner's personal feelings about such a complex and personal change in the way in which they were educated and the move to a new and different way of working. They were asked their feelings about this directly in the research; and overall they expressed some nervousness but a general willingness to work together:

Scary – I didn't know how people were gonna like be like (Area G, School A, learner interview group 1).

...I didn't know like what to expect. But it's worked fine, but I think everyone has like stuck to their school though... (Learner, School A, interview group 1).

Like at the start everyone just stuck to their own school and like didn't really speak to anyone, but now everyone speaks so everyone, although they mostly still sit with their own school we all speak to each other (Area G, School A, learner interview group 1).

The learners provided responses to all of the questions, reporting what they were currently working on and in direct relation to their current experience of the diploma.

When asked whether they felt they had been included in decisions about the diploma, most felt that they either had not been given enough information or that their choice had been limited:

They didn't tell us enough about it, like that we would be doing functions or skills or stuff like that that they have in our assessment, so we never knew about that (Area E, School B, learner interview group 1).

They've never like left it up to us, they've just said right you're doing this, you're doing that now (Area E, School B, learner interview group 4).

The perceptions of the learners regarding how others worked in partnership were more positive. When asked if they felt people worked together well to enable them to study the diploma, responses were mainly positive, as learners felt that the teachers and professionals worked together well.

Yeah because when we were behind with one of the assignments we used the other teachers' lesson to catch up with that assignment (Area E, School B, learner interview group 2).

The learners who responded to these questions were a small sub-sample of those interviewed and their experience appears to be varied. Although responses indicated they felt that the information they had been provided with could have been improved, they did also state that the teachers and other staff were working effectively together, which I took to indicate that they perceived some kind of partnership was taking place.

The learners demonstrated awareness of their participation in the diploma as a qualification and in consultation regarding their future choices. They were enthusiastic in contributing their feelings and opinions to the research. Learners' responses indicated that they felt they could have been more included in decision making, and provided with clearer information regarding their choices about further qualifications. Many of their comments also indicated a need for further support in terms of the practical aspects of the diploma. These included: meeting and working with learners from other local schools; managing coursework; and finding their way through the introductory phase of a new qualification where a more open approach from practitioners within the institution may have increased the clarity of content, timing and submissions. The contributions the learners made to this research will feed into the recommendations in terms of suggesting greater inclusion in diploma consultation and development, as well as recommending future research with learners to enhance knowledge and develop practice relating to learner inclusion.

The learners were asked why they had chosen to take the diploma. Their responses mainly stated 'steer' from others, including diploma professionals, school teachers or family members, rather than their own active participation in decision making;

...my school was just persuading us to do it (Area G, School A, learner interview group 1).

...my stepdad came with me and he said that he thought that this was the best course for me (Area G, School A, learner interview group 1).

The responses appeared to demonstrate a lack of informed and independent choice by the learners, and although this sample was a small number of learners in a single cohort in one school, this is a significant issue which will be considered later in terms of how learners were engaged. Learners were also asked about their engagement with the national advertising campaign for the diplomas, for example whether they had seen or heard any of the adverts, and if so, what they thought about them:

We did in year 9 when we were doing our options (Area E, School B, learner interview group 6).

Just on a bus, a big sign, and on the radio (Area E, School B, learner interview group 6).

Yes – bringing learning to life (Area E, School B, learner interview group 4).

Engagement with the advertising depended on the learners seeing or hearing the adverts as these had not been used to promote the qualifications in school, and the responses from those that had seen or heard them conveyed that learners did not feel that the adverts adequately represented the diploma. Although learner inclusion is not the same as partnership, this appeared to make the learners feel more excluded rather than included as – on the whole - they did not feel the national advertising related realistically to them or their experiences:

They haven't got a clue what it's like (Area E, School B, learner interview group 3).

False advertisement (Area E, School B, learner interview group 4).

I don't think it's the same as what it is advertised as (Area E, School B, learner interview group 1).

...if I'd looked at that on the television I would have thought that it was an easy option, and I kind of don't like that about it, because I think that I've taken this and I know it's vocational and not really academic, but that doesn't mean that the people on it aren't academic (Area E, School B, learner interview group 1).

Interviews with the sample group of parents included questions on how they felt the diploma was working and whether they felt they had been included in the process. The questions the parents were asked were similar to the learners in content and structure, but focused more on their involvement with the diploma in terms of partnership, rather than exploring the working relationships of those delivering the qualification.

Parents were initially asked how well-informed they felt about the diploma by the school/place of education, responses were mixed, and ranged between 'they went through it thoroughly' (Area J, School C, Parent interview 2) to 'No, there hasn't been

much information' (Area J, School C, Parent interview 5) and more serious concerns, such as:

At first I didn't realise that it would reduce his options of what to do next... We got the wrong information and were told the wrong thing, although it may be us not understanding properly (Area J, School C, Parent interview 6).

One parent mentioned that parents had been able to attend school information meetings, while several other parents said that they had attended a school meeting and/or been given a brochure about the diploma, although whether this was solely provision of information rather than active participation and inclusion in partnership was not explored. This demonstrated that even for parents from the same institution there were different perceptions and experiences of provision.

Inclusion was explored as a part of partnership; parents were asked whether they felt included in decisions about the diploma. Again the experiences were mixed, including yes and no responses as well as 'I'm a little vague about what you get at the end' (Area J, School C, Parent interview 1), and 'I'm still confused about the next step' (Area J, School C, Parent interview 3). This indicated that although some felt that they were well informed, the majority felt that discussions about the diploma were not as useful or inclusive as they could have been.

The parents, however, like the learners felt that everyone involved was working well together to deliver the diploma. There are a range of possible explanations for such mixed responses including parental involvement and understanding, clarity and timing of information from the school as well as translations of messages and information by their children, or non-communication about options, participation and possibilities, all of which could affect the ways in which information was perceived, received or experienced by parents.

When asked how they had first heard about the diploma, all parental participants responded that the school their children attended provided the information, although there were mixed responses regarding how this information had been provided.

Participants were then asked how they felt about the diploma being a new qualification, and after initial concerns most parents felt that the diploma was a positive choice:

It sounded very good, but we're not sure now if it will continue as we have heard reports that it wouldn't (Area J, School C, Parent interview 1).

It was worrying at first... We had concerns about whether it would be recognised, but were reassured that they are around to stay (Area J, School C, Parent interview 3).

A little against it to start with, but we were persuaded that this was the way forward and most learners at the school are doing the diploma or BTEC... (Area J, School C, Parent interview 5).

The parents were also asked whether they talked about the diploma with the learners to elicit discussion about parent/learner partnerships and to explore how inclusion and partnership was being demonstrated in this relationship. This was mainly positive as only one of the participants stated that their child had not told them anything about the diploma, whereas the others provided a range of responses:

He tells us everything he does – mainly the coursework as he brings it home. He talks about it all the time as he finds it interesting (Area J, School C, Parent interview 2).

He doesn't tell us a lot, but he does tell us about the practical things he has done (Area J, School C, Parent interview 4).

What he comes home and tells us it that it's a good thing. It's given him an insight into the full thing, more than you would get in French or something and it's an insight into things he's interested in (Area J, School C, Parent interview 6).

This was not a broad or comprehensive sample from which to draw conclusions, but these contributions did provide an indication of the sort of conversations that parents and learners were having about diploma learning and working.

Throughout the research, responses to questions exploring whether partnership working was taking place generally indicated that this was the case, and that this was how the development and delivery of the diploma was facilitated in the institutions involved. Although practitioners, parents and learners had different views and opinions on how partnership was being demonstrated, it was apparent in all strands of the data that everyone surveyed believed that both individuals and organisations were working together in partnership.

In considering the research participants, it was important to include their words – this has been true for the other sections of this chapter and in many places the quoted information is powerful and says more in its own right about their feelings and the situation than it could if it was coded and translated. The learners and the parents in particular were important to the research, as it became evident at the beginning of the data collection that they had often been neglected in the development and delivery of the diplomas in terms of communication and involvement. The parents were of particular importance, as, in addition to the teachers and careers advisors they were in a unique position to advise and support their children in terms of choosing to study the diploma and supporting them while they study. However, the information collected indicated that they were not as informed as they could have been to provide their children with information on the options available to them and to be personally informed about the qualification and the different options, and this came through in different ways in the information that they provided.

4.6 Power

I explored concepts of power within the questionnaire and the interviews as it was important to recognise the presence of power and ownership within partnership relationships. Issues of power were also implicit and explicit in responses from across the range of participants to questions which were not specifically intended to investigate power relations.

One of the question areas to investigate power was around consortium dynamics, and participants were asked how the members of the consortium worked together and why (table 9).

Table 9. About consortium dynamics.

23. About consortium dynamics								
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A	Rating Average	Response Count
The consortium members have common objectives	8.5% (4)	61.7% (29)	14.9% (7)	14.9% (7)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.36	47
The work of this consortium is strategic	14.9% (7)	51.1% (24)	23.4% (11)	10.6% (5)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.30	47
The rewards for consortium working are real and tangible	8.5% (4)	59.6% (28)	21.3% (10)	10.6% (5)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.34	47
There are rewards for working as a consortium for the members	12.8% (6)	55.3% (26)	19.1% (9)	12.8% (6)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.32	47
There are benefits to working as a consortium for the young people who will take the qualifications	44.7% (21)	51.1% (24)	2.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	2.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	1.64	47
There are rewards for working as a consortium for the individual members involved	12.8% (6)	59.6% (28)	17.0% (8)	10.6% (5)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.26	47
My loyalties lie with my organisation, not the consortium	8.5% (4)	29.8% (14)	40.4% (19)	12.8% (6)	2.1% (1)	6.4% (3)	2.68	47

Results showed that consortium members agreed that common objectives facilitated strategic working, and that almost all respondents believed that working together was beneficial to the young people taking the qualification and rewarding for the individuals and organisations involved. This highlighted the common purpose of the consortium for its members and indicated that as a starting point everyone was broadly agreed on what they were doing and why. When asked about loyalty to the consortium, just over a third of the participants agreed their loyalties lay with their employer organisation, while few disagreed, and almost half did not commit to a specific response. This was interesting as the anticipated response was for loyalty to the employer/organisation, but for over half of the participants, this was not the case. This was explored further in the interviews and participants were asked to explain how they felt their loyalties were shared between their organisation and the consortium. Almost half of the practitioners that were interviewed saw no division between their loyalties to their organisation and the diploma consortium:

...for me there's not an issue around where your loyalties lie because the way that things are changing will mean that we have to have an extremely good relationship with our local authority... having said all of that one of the things that came out of my discussion is that when you take the lead on a

lot of initiatives you often can ensure that things are directed in a way that your organisation is going to benefit (Area B, Practitioner 12).

I actually sit halfway between, coming from education as a teacher, I had to, and delivering the ABC, I had to engage a lot of employers in delivering, because that's what business studies, so businesses within business studies is essential really for the students to carry out their work... Where my loyalties lie, they're equal really and I tend to be devil's advocate for both (Area D, Practitioner 10).

With a majority of these explaining their impartiality as a function of their role within their own organisation, or as a specific aspect of their job:

I think it's probably easier for me to be loyal to the 14-19 ideal, because my income doesn't depend on recruiting (Area E, Practitioner 5).

I don't think I see any sort of conflict, between my role, because I work for the [deleted]... the [deleted] kind of leads on 14-19 and the diplomas and I see it as an integral part of my job to do this work, so I don't see it in terms of divided loyalties (Area F, Practitioner 18).

I'm in an unusual situation in that this organisation only has any legitimacy if it is serving a partnership of schools anyway, so I have far less loyalty issue than I think many colleagues have, who are school based... I couldn't afford for this organisation to be seen to be anything other than totally loyal to the partnership because if they start to say, hang on you've been partial as a CLC, we can't exist (Area G, Practitioner 1).

Well, I don't have divided loyalty because I'm working for the local authority and I work in support of that agenda and if you ask me to second guess how a school might think about divided loyalties I suppose I have already alluded that, there's still the mindset that you know it is their organisation that they're thinking about and we still have some way to go to say, put the learner at the heart of learning rather than put the organisation at the heart of learning (Area G, Practitioner 6).

I think I would struggle to answer that really, we are the local authority and we are driving this agenda forward and that is our job (Area H, Practitioner 14).

There were some practitioners who felt the opposite of this, and indicated that their job or role in their organisation meant that they would feel a stronger loyalty to their employer or organisation than to the diploma partnership:

I can't answer that. I think the schools and the people will always be loyal to their own individual institutions first and foremost. And it's where you're being paid from isn't it, you know it's who you are answerable to (Area A, Practitioner 7).

I think your first loyalty is always going to be to your organisation... but after that you do feel a loyalty and commitment to the partnership (Area J, Practitioner 2).

I think there's an assumption that we act within the interests of the partnership, but sometimes that can be demanding if it goes in direct conflict with your own organisation, but sometimes it is difficult to keep that balanced view, particularly if something might react adversely against your own organization (Area J, Practitioner 3).

Further to this, there were two practitioners who felt that their loyalties were to the learners that they worked with within their institutions:

My loyalties are to the school and to the kids at the school, but I use the partnership to try to make sure that whatever's developing in the partnership, our kids can be involved... (Area E, Practitioner 9).

I think our loyalties are principally to the students that we teach... I think with regard to us as a lead school our loyalty to the students is to deliver the highest quality principal learning that we can (Area F, Practitioner 15).

The responses given illustrated some of the division in loyalties experienced by the practitioners as there was a combination of those who felt loyalty to their employer organisation, those who felt it is to the "partnership" or consortium, and those who

appeared uncertain on how to define and divide their loyalties. This was interesting as given the often transient nature of partnership working and the range of individuals and organisations involved it could have been assumed that the majority of participants would indicate loyalty primarily to their employer, as they would still continue with this work if the consortium did not exist.

Themes of leadership and control of the consortium occurred throughout the responses. This was particularly evident when participants were asked how they viewed the role of their organisation in the consortium, with several participants indicating that their organisation was ‘in the lead’, or taking a leading role. During the course of the research it emerged that perceptions of leadership and organisational roles were important and this was explored in more depth (table 10).

Table 10. The division of roles and responsibilities between consortium members.

24. About the division of roles and responsibilities between members of the consortium and how this is decided.								
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A	Rating Average	Response Count
The division of roles and responsibilities is equally shared between members	0.0% (0)	12.8% (6)	31.9% (15)	42.6% (20)	12.8% (6)	0.0% (0)	3.55	47
The division of roles and responsibilities is shared according to role in the home organisation	2.1% (1)	48.9% (23)	31.9% (15)	14.9% (7)	2.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	2.66	47
The division of roles and responsibilities is shared according to expertise	4.3% (2)	51.1% (24)	27.7% (13)	14.9% (7)	2.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	2.60	47
There has been no formal division of roles and responsibilities	6.4% (3)	6.4% (3)	40.4% (19)	29.8% (14)	8.5% (4)	8.5% (4)	3.30	47

Participants were asked how the roles and responsibilities were divided between consortium members. Only a few felt that roles and responsibilities had been equally shared, while over half indicated that they did not think that allocation had been equal. This is an important factor to consider as attitudes of consortium members can influence their engagement with the consortium and its work and the impact of inequality of opportunity in relation to role and responsibility could have a significant effect on engagement and during delivery. When discussing *how* roles and responsibilities within the consortium had been allocated, around half of the participants agreed that division had been by role of the organisation, and a similar number felt that this was based on expertise, while some participants felt that this had not been the rationale, which was important as the consortium structure was not just functional, but also a more formal

indicator of leadership and power within the consortium. This understanding of structure appeared to contradict the previous results by indicating that the division had been made by organisational role and expertise; it depended on the definition of an equal share as although larger organisations may have more expertise, they may not have more responsibility. There was broad agreement in terms of how roles and responsibilities had been organised, with only a small number of participants stating that no formal divisions had been made, while more indicated that roles and responsibilities had been allocated to participating individuals and organisations. In each example, a proportion of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statements provided. This may indicate either a lack of awareness of how roles and responsibilities were decided.

Progressing from roles and responsibilities, the questionnaire included questions about power and decision making to begin to establish how members felt about consortium organisation and decision making (table 11).

Table 11. About power and decision making in consortia.

28. About power and decision making in consortia								
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A	Rating Average	Response Count
Power within the consortium is not shared as it should be	4.3% (2)	19.1% (9)	42.6% (20)	34.0% (16)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	3.06	47
Dominant members are a barrier to more collaborative working	2.1% (1)	36.2% (17)	31.9% (15)	29.8% (14)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.89	47
Some members have higher status than others	4.3% (2)	61.7% (29)	21.3% (10)	10.6% (5)	2.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	2.45	47
Competitiveness between organisations creates real problems for the consortium	6.4% (3)	29.8% (14)	38.3% (18)	25.5% (12)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.83	47
Difference in status prevents collaborative working	6.4% (3)	27.7% (13)	27.7% (13)	38.3% (18)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.98	47

From the responses, while some felt that power, in terms of leadership and decision making, was evenly shared, others felt this was not the case, and the largest group chose not to provide a definite answer. In the questions that followed, dominant consortium members were seen as a barrier to working together, although only marginally, and a majority of participants generally agreed that some members were perceived as higher status. Issues of competition proved interesting, as although schools and colleges use competition to attract students and maintain their reputation, as well as generating

funding, the expectation for diplomas that schools and colleges will work in partnership with each other as well as businesses and learning providers has been a curious policy condition and one that was noted by the participants,

Competitiveness between organisations creates real problems for the consortium (Practitioner, questionnaire 1).

Although collaborative working arrangements have previously existed and been successful for many participants, some felt that competitive elements were evident between members despite the existence and development of working relationships, while others felt that this was not the case. The results were similar regarding whether differences in status of partners prevented collaborative working, as the responses were evenly divided between those who felt that status did make a difference, those who felt this was not the case, and those who neither agreed nor disagreed. There was a clear tension between the need to work in partnership and the pressures that created competition within the consortium. This potentially had a significant effect on how the diploma was implemented and how partnership working was interpreted and was something that the practitioners in the interview sample commented on at length when asked if they felt there was competitiveness between members of their partnerships. All of the practitioners interviewed felt that there was competition both between members and within the partnership and commented on how they felt this had affected how they could work together to develop and deliver the diploma. The majority of the participants initially focused on the way in which competition was identified within their partnership relationships and between organisations:

Well there's competition between secondary schools for young people, admissions policies mean that schools have to be distinctive, do compete with each other for learners, do take advantage of any tricks that they can to fill their schools as opposed to other schools which results in highly popular schools and less popular schools and some schools being full, some schools being two thirds full and so on and so forth and some schools having better examination results than others, that's one aspect of competition (Area C, Practitioner 4).

It's very... knowing you are in a partnership and we are there as part of the partnership, but you still have your organisational head on when you're there, so you're always thinking, 'what are we going to get out of this' and I think it's wider than the diploma, it's a case of well we can get something out of that so we'll be part of it and if we can't we won't... we're all competing for the same learners, so you know, I'm not going to do anything that would lose us learners (Area E, Practitioner 5).

Yes I think there is [competition], if I was given a choice and I could swap ten of my kids that I've got in year ten this year, for ten of the kids at [deleted], you know, I would do that, because we've got ten kids who are real behaviour problems etcetera, and I wouldn't mind swapping those ten for ten of [deleted] top kids, that would make it a much more even playing field. It would guarantee our thirty per cent and get the DCFS off our back... There are partnerships that exist in the city, which are good, but they're pre-existing partnerships... so that barrier had already been broken down prior to diplomas... I'm yet to see a diploma created partnership swapping of students in the city between schools (Area E, Practitioner 9).

It's very much about where everyone's fishing in the same pond for students... for some partnerships it will be a single provider for maybe a subject area or a sixth-form college but in other areas there could be a sixth-form college as well as an FE college so there can be competition for students, there can be competition for resources and people who may not naturally have worked together are now having to (Area E, Practitioner 11).

Yes definitely, because I think it comes down to funding, because if we have one organisation who is dependent on funding and the amount of young people that that organisation takes in, then they're obviously going to be greedy to take every young person they possibly can because without that funding, that organisation won't be there and there can't be a sound reason, overheads and things like that, so there is a competitive kind of atmosphere within [deleted] and I think, for example, if you keep the college, they run every single diploma, because they know that the schools send the kids there, they'll get the funding for it and that's more income for them and

they're acting more like a business, rather than an educational organisation establishment... so there is a very high competitive atmosphere (Area H, Practitioner 14).

If I was head of a school I would have been lying to you if I said I didn't look at league tables and I would be lying to you if I didn't say I was pleased if we were reasonably high up in the league tables, and disappointed if we weren't very high up, so there is an element of competition even though we won't always admit it. I've got to say that the support in [deleted] between heads and principals far, far outweighs any competitiveness. I mean there's still a bit of a numbers game in terms of pupils going to different schools... I don't think there's any greater sense of competition now than there was before, so when we talk about an individual school fronting and reading in a diploma, there's nobody saying, you can't do that, we are going to do it instead, we have conversations where for a diploma line three schools have said we would like to lead it, well that's great because that's collaboration, that's partnership and that's what diplomas are about getting the best facilities, the best teaching, the best model for people from all schools to go to, so there'll always be elements of competition for different schools and different people for different reasons, but not in a way that's blocking or barring any progress (Area I, Practitioner 8).

I think there's bound to be competitiveness... I think I've mentioned how it can be demonstrated again to the employer engagement that people are quite open to the principal of sharing, but in practice, and I'm as guilty as anyone, if you came in today and said, 'who's on your data base for business ambassadors', I would say, 'get lost'... everybody's wanting to make sure that they get more than their fair slice... but overall, I think we've been fairly successful in keeping the lid on that, there's been no major sort of fallings out I don't think, not yet (Area J, Practitioner 2).

I think there is competitiveness, I think naturally, I think it sometimes presents itself positively and sometimes negatively... there has been a bit of a competitive element and I think that's developed an excellence and I think

perhaps if you weren't working in the consortium, perhaps you wouldn't have had that, so that's been a good thing... sometimes it can work the other way, where sometimes people don't, they want to take a bigger share of the cake, money is always an area of tension inevitably (Area J, Practitioner 3).

Other participants focused on the benefits that working collaboratively had brought to them and to the diploma, despite or sometimes because of the competition between themselves and others involved in the partnership:

I think at the actual curriculum delivery level, there isn't [competition] and I find if I'm working with a group of teachers, they see the benefit of working together and even if we don't get some of these diplomas off the ground for a while, I can see that they've already... benefited because they've got links that they wouldn't otherwise have, but I think it's at a higher level that it stops and that's where it is until you get the heads on board with the benefits of collaborative working (Area A, Practitioner 7).

Their competitiveness, ah you know I thought that there would be, because within this region... there are five areas... I thought there would be a lot, but in actual fact, it seems as though they're now working and sharing good practice and I think that's evident through the diploma support organization (Area D, Practitioner 10).

No, I don't think so. We're in a, quite an interesting position, in that we, [deleted], was [sic] the old secondary modern school in the valley. And about 5-10 miles up the valley west, East, I beg your pardon, is the old grammar school, and there has always been a historical bit of competition between the two schools. But that's not actually detectable in any of our partnerships, or any of our partnership dealings with regarding to the engineering diploma, and so it doesn't feel that there's any competition between us, no... if you look at [deleted] College and the high schools, there's clearly, as all of our high schools have sixth-forms, a bit of competitive tension between them, and between some of our high schools there's equally some competitive tension as some of the towns in [deleted]

have two high schools in, so you have to kind of acknowledge that that's there and work together, and I have to say it generally works pretty well in [deleted] (Area F, Practitioner 15).

Yes there is, and it's pointless pretending that there isn't...I think that's about acknowledging that there are things, you can't pretend that things aren't there and I think that you just have to confront that, and accept that, yes, there are competitive tensions between the players. But it's I guess, it's trying to get to a position where you can all see that you are gaining some benefit, so you know, by collaborating, we all get more business (Area F, Practitioner 18).

Within our group, so we have met with our steering group and everyone that sits around that are all the partners our key stakeholders, I think we all bring something different to the table, so it's hard to be competitive (Area G, Practitioner 6).

One practitioner expressed more negative feelings about both the competition between organisations within the partnership and the way in which they felt this had influenced collaborative working:

...it's going to be quite difficult to remove the sort of competitive nature between different institutions particularly when you know, demographics are such that some schools... are in direct competition for learners... it depends really what the emphasis is going to be in terms of reporting in the future... People are working together because you've had your hand forced to work in collaboration to get through the gateway, but I'm not sure after you've been through the gateway whether anyone's going to be particularly bothered as to whether learners are receiving teaching from other organisations or not (Area B, Practitioner 12).

These contributions had provided an interesting overview of the feelings of the practitioners about competition and how this had impacted on them and their working practices within the partnership. Personal, institutional, local and political influences on this were also presented, some of which will be reflected on in more depth later in this

thesis (chapter 5 and chapter 6). To develop this further participants were asked more specifically to consider whether there is competitiveness between partners and how this is demonstrated:

Well, schools... live in a competitive environment. They exist on the basis of how well or badly they have done on their place in the league tables, and... There is always an underlying current which (a) says 'I've got to keep my results better than that school because that means I'm a better school', and everything that goes with that... Now if you then put that into the partnership role it's not competitive at all in the sense of some sort of dogfight going on over resources or whatever else... but when you get meetings of the partnership people there is a desire on their part to make certain that they look the best, so they will be very keen on minimising any bad things from their point of view that could reflect upon themselves and maximising the good things (Area G, Practitioner 1).

I think there's bound to be competitiveness... there's a limited pool of young people, so there's bound to be some competition (Area J, Practitioner 2).

Probably always going to have it [competition] if you are measured by the performance of your own institution. Ultimately you're going to have that in mind clearly, because that's going to be the way that you're measured. If that's the case then it's going to be quite difficult to remove the sort of competitive nature between different institutions particularly when you know, demographics are such that some schools are fighting for young people to join their school and are in direct competition for learners (Area B, Practitioner 12).

These comments illustrate a range of ways in which competitiveness affects their work as a partnership and as an individual or individual institution, with consideration of the positive and negative aspects of this both for themselves and those with whom they worked, as well as the consortium. This also illustrated that some practitioners felt that best practice could be better shared across the diploma partnerships. Issues around competition and competitiveness will be considered further in Chapter 5.

I then considered how partnership dynamics were affected when practitioners work with other consortium members at different stages of diploma development and delivery. Interview participants were asked how this would affect the consortium, and although there were one or two responses which expressed concern or negative thoughts towards the situation, the majority of the comments were positive and expressed the feeling that those not delivering diplomas in the first round would benefit from the experience and knowledge of those that had:

...those involved in development and delivery of the first round of diplomas are able to share the expertise created in this forerunner activity and delivery... It's much clearer and easier for those following behind!
(Practitioner, questionnaire 9).

The preparing organisation is encouraged to take an active part in the development of the diplomas and benefits from the early experiences of those involved in delivery (Practitioner, questionnaire 59).

This potential to learn from others' experience was generally viewed as positive by the participants as it would have enabled learning across organisations and consortia, although some were concerned that future consortium members would benefit from their efforts without having contributed to the process.

4.6.1 Leadership

Leadership was not a specific focus within the research questions, but a question on leadership was included in the questionnaire due to the close links with the research subject. It was clear from the results of questions on this issue that leadership was an important issue for the participants (table 12).

Table 12. Responses to statements on leadership.

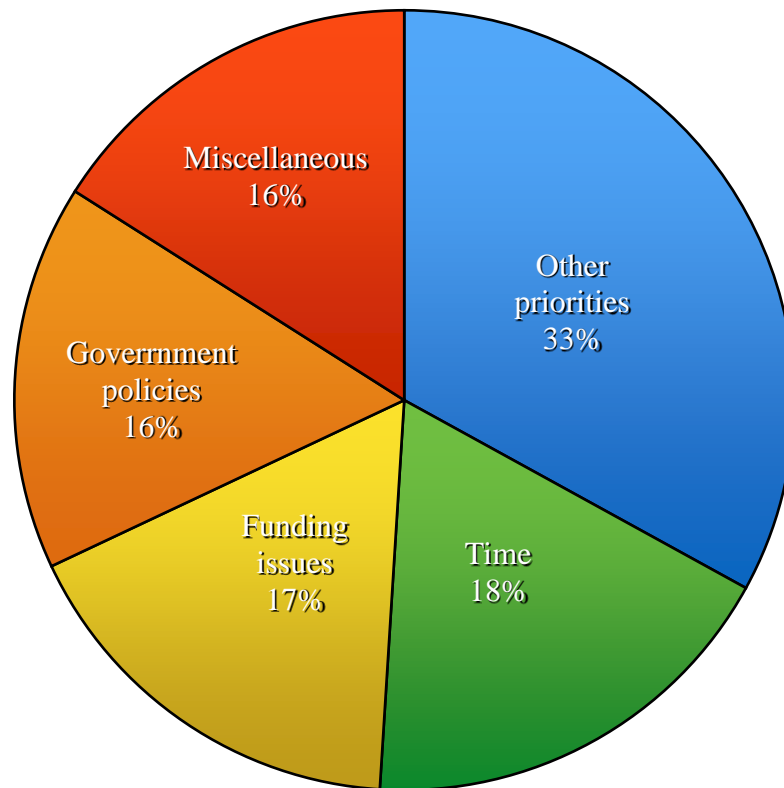
29. Leadership								
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A	Rating Average	Response Count
Leadership of our consortium rotates between members	2.1% (1)	6.4% (3)	21.3% (10)	57.4% (27)	8.5% (4)	4.3% (2)	3.67	47
Leadership of our consortium is mainly carried out by one person	8.5% (4)	55.3% (26)	14.9% (7)	17.0% (8)	4.3% (2)	0.0% (0)	2.53	47
A clear leadership structure helps the consortium to succeed	21.3% (10)	59.6% (28)	14.9% (7)	4.3% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.02	47
Accountability is not clear within the consortium	4.3% (2)	29.8% (14)	31.9% (15)	34.0% (16)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.96	47
No-one dominates our meetings	2.1% (1)	31.9% (15)	36.2% (17)	27.7% (13)	2.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	2.96	47

The research participants were given five Likert statements regarding leadership. From the responses it has been possible to establish how leadership of the diploma consortium is viewed. It was generally agreed that a clearly defined leadership structure was important. Asking whether a clear leadership structure helps the consortium may appear simplistic, but the responses indicated that there may be room for other leadership models, enhanced communication, or inclusion of opportunities for other models of shared leadership. Two areas of consideration divided the opinions of the participants. In considering whether there was clear accountability in the consortium, one third agreed that there was, one third neither agreed nor disagreed, and the remaining third disagreed, indicating that accountability was *not* clear to the majority of the participants. This is significant to the consortium as clarity of communication was identified by participants as a key factor and not knowing who is accountable represents a communication failure. When asked whether anyone dominated consortium meetings, responses were also evenly split three ways and did not provide a conclusive outcome, suggesting that there remained no apparent focus of leadership.

4.6.2 External influences

Having considered leadership issues, interview participants were asked to comment on external influences on partnership working (figure 9).

Figure 9. External influences on partnership working.



The responses given could be divided into six basic categories. The most commonly identified factor was ‘other priorities’ which hindered contributions to diploma activities. ‘Time’ was the next most common influence, with participants citing a lack of time for meetings and development work. This was followed by ‘funding issues’ and ‘government policies’ which were both viewed as having significant impact on how partnership working was interpreted. The final category consisted of the comments that could not be otherwise classified; these included job security, change, and the wider context of 14-19 education. Transport was also mentioned as an external influence, as some participants were based in large rural areas which made even the basic need for learners to attend lessons increasingly challenging; this was not commonly cited, but when it was identified it was considered to be a very important factor.

4.7 Equality and competition

Equality arose as a strand within some of themes explored during the literature review, and was identified in the initial research plan as a further strand to be considered. As a result of this I specifically asked about equality in one set of questions in the questionnaire and in two questions in the interviews. It became apparent in the responses that this was a significant issue for the research participants, with three-quarters of respondents completing the questions in the questionnaire relating to equality and organisations. All of the interview participants felt that there was not equality between organisations and provided their opinions on these issues during the interviews. The responses relating to equality can be considered within three main themes. The first of these themes is organisational equality, the way in which organisations and members of the consortium relate to each other and the perception of their roles. The second, financial equality, relates to how funding for the diploma was distributed, in addition to the assets and finances held (or perceived by others to be held) by the organisation. Finally, I considered equality for the learners in terms of considering how they were included or excluded from decision making.

4.7.1 Organisational equality

To explore organisational equality the survey participants were presented with a range of statements about involvement and participation (table 13).

Table 13. Responses to statements on equality.

32. Equality								
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A	Rating Average	Response Count
There is broad involvement of each organisation within the consortium	6.4% (3)	51.1% (24)	21.3% (10)	17.0% (8)	4.3% (2)	0.0% (0)	2.62	47
Frequent efforts are made to involve all consortium members	17.0% (8)	63.8% (30)	8.5% (4)	10.6% (5)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.13	47
I am satisfied with the level of co-operation within the consortium	6.4% (3)	42.6% (20)	23.4% (11)	21.3% (10)	6.4% (3)	0.0% (0)	2.79	47
There is a lack of commitment from some consortium members	6.4% (3)	46.8% (22)	27.7% (13)	19.1% (9)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.60	47
There is clear ownership of the process by the members	4.3% (2)	42.6% (20)	29.8% (14)	23.4% (11)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.72	47

When participants were asked whether there was broad involvement of each organisation within the consortium, the response was clearly positive, with over half

indicating that they felt this was the case, while the remainder were divided equally between those who disagreed and those who were undecided. While some participants evidently did not feel involved, a clear majority agreed that frequent efforts were made to involve all consortium members, which demonstrates that the participants believed that efforts were being made for inclusion, even if this was not how the consortium was currently working. As well as feeling involved in the consortium, half of the respondents indicated that they were satisfied with how the consortium co-operated, and although some felt that cooperation could be improved there were also those who indicated clear response. This is an area which would have benefitted from further probing to discover why the cooperation was unsatisfactory and why some participants felt able to offer a specific opinion. Further concern about the cooperation of some members was further confirmed as over half of the participants indicated that they felt a lack of commitment from some members, while less than one-fifth felt there was commitment. Almost half of the participants felt there was clear ownership of the diploma process by members, while the remainder thought there was not, or offered no preference, highlighting that over half of the participants were unable to agree to the clarity of how the consortium was organised and operating which is of concern both conceptually and operationally.

In the interviews, the participants were asked whether they felt that there were 'inequities between partners'. As their responses followed the pattern from the questionnaires, the general consensus amongst participants was that inequities were present between partners. Exemplifying this, one respondent observed that, 'partnership arrangements don't present magical equality for everybody' (Area J, Practitioner 3). These inequities were then discussed in greater detail by the participants and their responses highlighted the areas where they felt inequality as particularly evident. The consideration of inequalities elicited responses which were both diverse and complex. A range of themes and contributing factors were identified within all of the responses by the participants which has made these more difficult to discuss. A common theme among some participants was the way in which the relative size of an institution, for example the differences between schools and colleges involved in the partnership, influenced what they could contribute, the facilities they had, and the funding they were able to access or obtain:

There's definitely inequalities, because you can see that the schools that aren't achieving as well are much keener to deliver the diplomas, but having said that, I mean our sixth-form college has gone the extra mile to make sure that there's two diploma lines running and they didn't have to. I don't think there's an incentive for them, but it's also about facilities, you know, we've got several schools that are waiting for building schools for the future money and if you haven't got the facilities, that's another reason why you can't offer, isn't it. I think it's more inequalities between authorities, for some seem to have had a lot of money pumped into them and you know, we haven't, so it does make it more challenging to put them on (Area A, Practitioner 7).

Yes, I mean in any group you're going to get inequalities... the college is a huge provider, you know so obviously they carry some power. They also have the structure that allows them to get staff out there and get stuck in, whereas the schools... struggle to get staff free because they've got other jobs to do... whereas the college seem to have a wealth of people who can attend, you know whenever you go to a meeting, if there's six tables, there will be six representatives from the college (Area E, Practitioner 5).

I think there are inequities between them... I don't think they understand each other, so school doesn't understand FE and FE doesn't understand school as well as they understand themselves, so I think that leads to some inequity... I think the schools see them as some sort of not inferior, but they don't see them as an equal partner, so, I think we're missing a trick there in terms of picking up some new ways of doing things (Area F, Practitioner 18).

I think there's bound to be inequalities by virtue of the size and I think other factors come in, I'm thinking of the youth and voluntary sector where they're not like statutory organisations, so financially, they're always on a much sort of less secure footing I would say than the college, so it builds up inequalities there... I think it's managed by people getting together and talking things through and disagreeing and then resolving those disagreements, gets a bit tense at times, particularly when you're bidding

for money, things like set bids, that's when it really shows, everybody's so much for their own (Area J, Practitioner 2).

I think there are inequities, because I think nothing's exactly equal in all of the city... a lot of the schools have got big BSF now and some are waiting and like us, they're waiting in a queue, so there's that issue of concern about buildings, which becomes a real issue and can translate then into pupils voting with their feet... The new campus at [deleted] College and [deleted] college are attractive and understandable, so they draw away from us, so inequitably the whole building is a very big issue for us... if your immediate catchment school is a school that doesn't perform as well, it's how do we measure performance... but if you had to go to a school that maybe doesn't achieve as much as another school sometimes it can be a trap and that can be a problem, so yes, the partnership arrangements don't present the magical equality for everybody, no there isn't, there's still always an element of inequality (Area J, Practitioner 3).

The recruitment, retention and abilities of learners were presented as further inequalities between institutions, with practitioners recognising that there were often significant differences:

Yes, I think there are inequities... There's no doubt that if you're a school, bigger is better, because you can have more curriculum diversity in your own right and therefore you're less vulnerable to the need to create entitlements... probably have fewer problems with disengaged youngsters, can feel a little bit more insulated from some of the reforms than, or the need to collaborate than other schools and there's been a bit of fence sitting and cherry picking by those schools and let's wait and see, how far the reforms take us, and yes we'll pick the bits that are useful to us and then we'll just hedge our bets, sit comfortably until we find out what's actually happening (Area C, Practitioner 4).

I think the biggest one is the differential between so many of schools in terms of the calibre of the kids they've got and the need of the kids they've got (Area E, Practitioner 9).

The influence of local factors was recognised in many of the responses, as participants identified how the position of their institution and the area they were located in affected the inequalities they identified. Particularly, in terms of learners' socio-economic background and their expectations and abilities:

The simple answer is yes there are. What are they? Different levels of numbers of students is one, different parental involvement is another. The willingness of the school to take on board that this is different... There was a potential inequity here in that we had a parent from the school turn up to ask for an appointment at parents' evening for one of the diploma team, her daughter's perfectly legitimate request, but that happened to be because we were on the same site as them, but what happens about parents' evenings and things elsewhere and nobody's asked us... What happens in terms of students who are coming from [deleted], where some of their parents do not have a car and do not have the wherewithal to get here? Do we go there, how does that work? So there's the sort of geographical stuff as well comes into play (Area G, Practitioner 1).

No two schools have the same intake, no two schools are the same size, no two schools have the same pupil profile and so different schools are bound to have different priorities. This is a very, very crude statement, but the young people you get to come in to work with you are massively, massively different around this borough, and we are a very small borough. Two of our political wards in [deleted] are two of the ten most deprived wards in the North East of England. Other political wards are very, very advantaged indeed and that would mean the priorities of the school might need to be refined, there might need to be different drivers in different schools for different reasons and there are all sorts of inequalities and because of different adding points (Area I, Practitioner 8).

Aspects of leadership and power were also highlighted by practitioners as contributing to inequalities between partnership members:

I think, by definition, there are. Because of us as the lead school we've taken on much, much more work... and I as joint line lead have taken on far

more joint responsibility and far more planning and diploma trip planning and principal learning planning than any of the other diploma team members. But, I suppose the reciprocal arrangement of the other lines of learning kind of counters for my time, although I don't see that return I suppose (Area F, Practitioner 15).

I don't think that our role in the partnership is very equal at all... some diploma lines have a very supportive head, the money is clearly going to diplomas in areas where it's supports actual diploma delivery... it's everything the diploma's supposed to be and then other lines, the money's gone God knows where, and the students are turned off, demotivated, it's a primary school mode of delivery, they're in a room all day long and... diploma students on different lines aren't getting the same quality of delivery, to me that's a real inequity (Area G, Practitioner 6).

Local training providers are willing and have got the specialist skills to be a part of the diplomas in the partnership. I think they think they haven't got a strong enough voice within the partnership... schools have sort of taken over the whole conversation of everything, so I think there are inequalities within the partnership... we do need a positive working culture within the partnership... but at the moment to be frank there isn't (Area H, Practitioner 14).

The participants discussed a number of aspects of inequality within partnership working. Local factors appear to have been a major contributor to inequalities whether in terms of catchment areas affecting learner intake, funding issues, historical partnership relationship between institutions, and support from specific local authorities.

4.7.2 Financial equality

Financial equality, in terms of funding allocation for the diploma, was also discussed with interview participants when considering whether there was inequality between partners. This appeared to be a significant issue for partnership working with concerns including inequalities between members within consortia as well as differences between consortia.

I think it's more inequalities between authorities, for some reason some seem to have had a lot of money pumped into them, and you know, we haven't (Area A, Practitioner 7).

The one that springs to mind unfortunately is the funding discrepancies and they are real, so you've got issues where FE lecturers teaching 14 to 16 year olds are not paid on the same rate as school teachers, you've got issues post 16 where there's a 3 per cent differential between what school sixth-forms get based on the national funding rate compared to sixth-form colleges and FE colleges. There are also issues around if you have QTS status you can teach anywhere... but if you have is it QTLS now you can teach in colleges and work-based learning providers but you're not able to teach in schools even when you get what seems to me being an unusual situation where a school might decide to offer more engineering themselves but somebody who's qualified to deliver engineering in FE wouldn't really be able to teach in the schools. Yes, it's very odd all of that isn't it and then you could talk about all sorts of other things to do with you know capital funding and building schools for the future, you could talk about the differences between different types of schools, we've got academies, trust schools, studio schools, I believe are coming on stream now and unfortunately inherent in those will be inequities so there are things to do with finance obviously, there are things to do with structures and how things are organised and also in terms of what is expected of people who are delivering and so there are lots (Area B, Practitioner 12).

...so financially they're [youth and voluntary sector] always on a much sort of less secure footing... so that builds up inequalities there (Area J, Practitioner 2).

Funding has been affected in different ways, including the withdrawal of BSF funding, localised (school, LA or business-based) cutbacks as a result of the current socio-economic climate, and differences in funding and finances between different organisations and institutions.

The existence of inequities between consortium members and how these were managed was also considered and participants listed a range of factors in relation to funding that they felt affected partnership working, including size; staffing; calibre and needs of learners; consortium members; how funding was spent; variation between organisations and competition and competitiveness.

The responses given indicated a range of opinions regarding inequity in terms of both delivery and development of the diploma, consideration of differences between a diploma stakeholders, and self-awareness of their own position and actions. These responses represented a small amount of the actual comments given by the participants on what was clearly an important and emotive issue for many.

4.7.3 Equality for learners

The diploma practitioners had been asked about who they felt had been excluded (discussed in more detail at 4.5.1 above), and as the majority felt that learners had been excluded I felt that this should be explored in more depth. I considered equality for the learners in terms of their inclusion in diploma processes, and asked all of the participants their opinions on inclusion.

The learners were asked whether they felt that they had been included in decisions about the diploma. Responses were divided between those who felt that they could have been better informed or more fully involved (some of which have already been cited at 4.5.3 above),

Yeah – if they'd told us from the start then we probably would have been more organised a bit (Area G, School A, learner interview group 4).

The learner responses also included those who felt that they had been included at some level,

Yeah we're choosing what project we're doing for next year – we don't just get given a set project we get to choose wer [sic] own (Area G, School A, learner interview group 1).

Got a leaflet about it, about like what would happen (Area G, School A, learner interview group 1).

However, even where the responses indicated some inclusion this tended to be the provision of information, rather than participation in discussion about decisions and delivery.

The parents were asked if they felt they had been included about decisions about the diploma. The sample group was small, and the responses were split between confusion and feeling that they had not been properly informed.

This is the first time we've been to discuss it in two years (Area J, Parent 4).

At the start the children were given the choice to do the diploma or GCSEs (Area J, Parent 5).

Yes, we discussed it, and he discussed it and wanted to do it (Area J, Parent 6).

These responses indicate how the parents had been engaged with by the school, and also what parental expectations were for the involvement of themselves and their children in decision-making.

4.8 Why do people work together: benefits and impediments

The results chapter has so far established that partnership work was happening, both in terms of the government requirements for diploma delivery, and in maintaining and developing existing working relationships. Consortium members were asked to share their thoughts and feelings about partnership and their opinions on who they were working with, to identify other stakeholders, and to consider how they were working together to deliver the diploma.

One of the ways to explore partnership was to look at why people were working together. To begin to explore the benefits and impediments to working together, the practitioners were asked to identify a choice of predetermined motivations for their involvement in developing and delivering the diploma (table 14).

Table 14. What motivates people and organisations to be involved with the diploma?

19. What motivates people and organisations to be involved with the 14-19 Diploma?								
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A	Rating Average	Response Count
Government funding	15.4% (8)	48.1% (25)	17.3% (9)	17.3% (9)	1.9% (1)	0.0% (0)	2.42	52
Job continuity	5.8% (3)	36.5% (19)	34.6% (18)	23.1% (12)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.75	52
Belief in better qualification	7.7% (4)	61.5% (32)	15.4% (8)	11.5% (6)	3.8% (2)	0.0% (0)	2.42	52
Belief in better system	3.8% (2)	59.6% (31)	23.1% (12)	9.6% (5)	3.8% (2)	0.0% (0)	2.50	52
Support for government initiative	3.8% (2)	50.0% (26)	32.7% (17)	11.5% (6)	1.9% (1)	0.0% (0)	2.58	52
Want to make a different to young people	42.3% (22)	51.9% (27)	1.9% (1)	3.8% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	1.67	52
Part of job role	13.5% (7)	69.2% (36)	17.3% (9)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.04	52

It was apparent from the results that the practitioners were highly motivated by wanting to provide the best experience for the learners with whom they worked while adhering to government policy requirements.

Having established some of the motivations for participant involvement in the diploma, the next step was to explore the motivations for why consortium members worked together (table 15).

Table 15. What motivates people and organisations to work as a consortium?

20. What motivates people and organisations involved with 14-19 Diploma policy to work as a consortium?								
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A	Rating Average	Response Count
Government funding	26.9% (14)	46.2% (24)	13.5% (7)	13.5% (7)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.13	52
Job continuity	9.6% (5)	36.5% (19)	36.5% (19)	17.3% (9)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.62	52
Belief in better qualification	9.6% (5)	59.6% (31)	21.2% (11)	7.7% (4)	1.9% (1)	0.0% (0)	2.33	52
Belief in better system	7.7% (4)	55.8% (29)	28.8% (15)	5.8% (3)	1.9% (1)	0.0% (0)	2.38	52
Support for government initiative	5.8% (3)	57.7% (30)	26.9% (14)	9.6% (5)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.40	52
Want to make a different to young people	30.8% (16)	63.5% (33)	1.9% (1)	3.8% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	1.79	52
Were already working together	9.6% (5)	57.7% (30)	21.2% (11)	7.7% (4)	1.9% (1)	1.9% (1)	2.33	52

The participants were asked to rank a choice of motivations for working together as a consortium to deliver the diploma. The desire to make a difference to the lives of young people was the most common response. The next most popular choice as a motivation was government funding. This was interesting as the most popular choice appeared to be a more personal motivation, whereas the second most popular choice may have been

influenced by individual feelings regarding the impact of the requirement for compliance with government requirements in terms of rhetoric and action as practitioners had identified in their responses to other questions on this area. Other motivations beneficial to working in partnership that were particularly related to the participants included: believing that the diploma was a 'better' qualification; existing working relationships; belief in creating a better education system; and job continuity. This was comparable to the participants' responses to identifying motivations for being involved in the diploma where the majority wanted to make a difference to young people, with part of job role in second place; and then belief in a better qualification.

Similarly, the interview participants were asked what they felt the benefits of working in partnership were for themselves and their organisations, and a wide range of responses were provided. The majority of the participants identified benefits for the institution of the organisation that they worked for:

You can be part of the process to make sure that it fits your institution and it gives you the benefit... It's also broken down some of the barriers, like, you go to a meeting and the head teacher that you only knew as a name, will come up and say, "Are you alright?", so people aren't just inward looking... I think that's been a real benefit... it's been quite good to be part of teams that have been successful and there has been emails and vocals and get in, well done, we got through that one, you know so, in that respect it's created a bit of a team ethos between the schools, that hadn't previously existed (Area E, Practitioner 9).

I think three benefits: one, it is very clearly demonstrable that we have done something that is new that is different and therefore we have fulfilled a major part of our remit... secondly it has increased our profile and our relationships with other schools... thirdly I think it's been a massive- not always pleasant learning curve... we've had to meet a lot new things and in doing that's created a lot of development within an organisation (Area G, Practitioner 1).

I think some of the benefits of working in the partnership with large organisations like SSCs and the LSCs have been that you're involved at a

regional level with developing the diplomas working with all practitioners, working with employers, which is good, from one point of view, say of raising your profile nationally, because we've had you know the cameras, BBC and everything, we've had filming and we've got a national profile, you also get to work with Who's Who, and I think working sub regionally is always good, because you learn from other local authorities and you can share the best practice. From a local authority point of view, just within [deleted], I mentioned actually it's another opportunity to work with colleagues from different departments, which has been good and helpful, looking at progression, and sort of moving into an area that traditionally were all about work related learning and enterprise (Area G, Practitioner 6).

Being part of Connexions and being represented on the 14-19 partnership gives us a much stronger voice than if we were just totally isolated, I think as an EBP, we'd be very vulnerable, particularly in terms of funding... I think that there's clear benefits that when you come together collectively, you're more influential (Area J, Practitioner 2).

Many of the participants discussed the benefits of partnership in terms of the importance of benefits for the learners:

I think an offer in an accredited qualification the students wouldn't pick up otherwise and I think there's going to be great benefit for trying to put the diplomas together because you can see common elements across different diploma lines (Area A, Practitioner 7).

There are many. One is working close with schools is good for a college anyway because ultimately all of the schools feed us in terms of learners progressing... expanding those relationships is only going to be a good thing... one thing that hopefully the learners will get out of being involved in the partnership is that they get a better deal... they will get access to types of learning that they couldn't possibly get anywhere else (Area B, Practitioner 12).

Through working in partnership to deliver the engineering diploma the reciprocal arrangement... is that learners from our school will be able to access leisure and tourism, or construction and the built environment, all of the other diplomas that are coming on stream in other centres, so that's the benefit for our learners (Area F, Practitioner 15).

Well for us, it's a case of generating access to qualifications for youngsters where they wouldn't otherwise get them... there's conversations now about sharing resources and sharing teachers... so it's not about my organisation getting a benefit, it's about learners getting the benefit (Area F, Practitioner 18).

Two of the practitioners appeared to view the partnership process as a 'box-ticking' exercise, with benefits primarily in terms of meeting external targets or complying with policy:

The benefit is that for my organisation, that local authorities get judged on the extent to which they promote and succeed in developing partnerships... You'd hope as well that it has some philosophical benefit and practical benefit for learners (Area C, Practitioner 4).

Well we don't really benefit, we just have to do it, that's my job and that's our job to do it really... we can promote that positive climate of collaboration... People will obviously think, yeah we've got the support of the local authority there and it sort of promotes that positive atmosphere again (Area H, Practitioner 14).

The results indicated that although some participants did not perceive any advantages to partnership working, the majority felt that there were real and tangible benefits to working together and that this benefitted the individual members, the partnership, and the learners.

The importance of working relationships to furthering the diploma as a qualification and in relation to government policy was also identified in the results, which again while not surprising, affirmed the status of regulation and governance for the practitioners. Contributions made as free comments by participants on this topic identified mixed

views towards working in partnership. While many saw the benefits of partnership work some felt that they had been forced into partnership as a requirement of the diploma, while others felt that partnership was difficult to truly achieve while they remained in competition with those with whom they worked.

Participants were then asked what they felt helped them to work with others successfully (table 16).

Table 16. Enablers to working successfully as a consortium.

26. About enablers to working successfully as a consortium								
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A	Rating Average	Response Count
Agreement on the purpose of the consortium helps the consortium to succeed	36.2% (17)	61.7% (29)	2.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	1.66	47
By working as a consortium we are more effective than we would be separately	36.2% (17)	55.3% (26)	8.5% (4)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	1.72	47
The consortium shares common objectives	10.6% (5)	70.2% (33)	12.8% (6)	4.3% (2)	2.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	2.17	47
All consortium members contribute to the work	6.4% (3)	48.9% (23)	10.6% (5)	27.7% (13)	6.4% (3)	0.0% (0)	2.79	47
There is ownership of the consortium by the members	10.6% (5)	55.3% (26)	21.3% (10)	10.6% (5)	2.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	2.38	47

In each case, a majority indicated a consensus that the purpose of the consortium helped them to work together successfully, that working together was more effective than working individually, and that consortia shared common objectives. There was some disparity regarding whether all consortium members contributed, as although just over half agreed, an equal number either disagreed or expressed no opinion. There was some agreement that there was ownership of the consortium by its members, however, some participants disagreed and others were undecided. Some of the results, however, indicated a lack of structure and transparency in the consortium. There appeared to be a need for greater cohesion to facilitate a uniform approach for partnership working in the consortium and for clearer communication between consortium members.

The practitioners were clear throughout the interviews regarding what they perceived to be the motivation for working in partnership to develop and deliver the diploma. The ethos of wanting to do the best for the young people with whom they worked was a strong and unifying thread in the responses along with meeting the requirements of their

own roles and policy requirements. The results of working in partnership to deliver the diploma that were recognised appeared to be appreciated by the practitioners despite the less positive issues related to working together that they identified. Most of the participants discussed mutual benefits for themselves and others involved in the diploma partnership:

Well, some of them can genuinely see that it's for their benefit, some of them have got quite an altruistic motive I think, because we've got one of our outstanding schools that's very much involved and was determined to be involved in diploma delivery and really, it's not going to be of great benefit to them... [others] do it because they've got to, or because it will help them... (Area A, Practitioner 7).

There are advantages, there are win-win situations that you can create by encouraging them to act collaboratively and part of the knack of partnership working is to say that there's some kind of partnership premium that arises as a result of taking some collective actions to resolve a problem (Area C, Practitioner 4).

I think if we're honest, perceived mutual benefit. I don't think a partner is going to join a partnership if they don't see something that's in it for them... I think it's a case of we're all driven by our own organisation and our own jobs priorities, that's human nature, I know what I have to achieve... but if I can achieve that by working with people or through working with people it's all the better (Area F, Practitioner 18).

...there has to be a motivation in terms of them seeing the point of it for their students... either that they felt the organisational changes that are necessary to achieve it could be done without the massive drag of doing it, or they felt so strongly that this was educationally a good thing to do, and that that outweighed the pain involved... perhaps some cases there's a competitive motivation in terms of heads in particular feeling for one reason or another that they want to have a flag flying that says 'we're doing this', and some people want to get in on the ground first because they think that

there are benefits that people coming in later on won't gain (Area G, Practitioner 1).

It comes back to that cost benefit analysis... in the short and medium term you've got to be able to demonstrate what the benefits are... benefits might be just a better understanding, improved progression, improved achievement, might be better staff development for their team, might be the opportunity to trial and pilot issues... and to share good practice... (Area G, Practitioner 6).

I think there has to be something for them, I think there has to be something for that organisation because no organisation would put their time and effort in, if they're not going to get anything out of it... (Area H, Practitioner 4).

I think there's a recognition that everybody can benefit by working together rather than competing with each other... we make better use of resources and a good example of that is the [School C]... that's an example of partners actually working together and I think that the fact that the schools were prepared to commit some of the budget to it has been a demonstration of a commitment... (Area J, Practitioner 2).

There were, I suppose, demonstrably better outputs with the partnership than without the partnership... participation has increased significantly over the last ten or so years... as the partnership becomes established, we can work with our schools and tackle some of the issues... in the last few years we've been able to see that as a partnership we've been able to bid and gain several millions of pounds worth of investment from DCSM and other agencies on diploma development... that's a very tangible thing that the individual schools recognise that they would not have been able to get (Area J, Practitioner 3).

I think first of all it's a sense of loyalty and a sense of joint thinking that benefits all... provided schools and colleges realise that throughout the borough there's something in it for every school and college and every

learner... It's important[?] to develop a sense of ownership... nobody can say that this plan in [deleted] is being dumped on them, they're putting it together themselves and have a clearer vision now of what's needed in 14-19 planning than perhaps they did back in 2007 when the last plan was written (Area I, Practitioner 8).

Two of the practitioners, both from the same area, felt that there was a compulsion to work in partnership to conform to government policy requirements for diploma delivery, although they also recognised benefits from this:

I think at the outset, everybody was forced to get involved... in terms of the local advisory people, I think they realised that they got a really good team, whichever one you went into, I mean the groups I was in were very focused... there was a lot of talk and a lot of clear thinking within the consortium... everybody was there as a developer of the diploma... I think it's fair credit to [deleted] who's been the coordinator, he's encouraged people and he's always had people involved to a greater degree and said, 'you come and contribute, even if you're talking negative about it, we want to know, you know', and so, it was always quite an open and frank discussion (Area E, Practitioner 9).

In terms of the 14-19 agenda they have to, it's as simple as that... In relation to the development and delivery of the diplomas, one of the fundamental issues is that no single institution can deliver it by itself... they're all going to have to work together... they may still not be able to meet the entitlement at local authority level and actually what they're now beginning to think about is where there's cross-boundary partnership working and again for them that's quite a big step... I think the 14-19 agenda particularly in relation to the 14-19 partnerships at local authority level, has just forced the issue and formalised it a bit more (Area E, Practitioner 11).

A further two participants commented on the involvement of businesses within the diploma partnership, and both found it difficult to identify a benefit to the businesses from their involvement:

How do I get my businesses involved in that partnership work? I actually pay them to do that... through the ERVF funding... They're getting an understanding of education of which some of them have been out of the education system for a long while... it's that feel good factor as well, yes they're getting paid, but... actually, the amount I pay them isn't enough really in my humble opinion, but they feel that they're contributing (Area D, Practitioner 10).

There's the driver of offering a more diverse curriculum which I think is what encourages schools to work in partnerships. Businesses I think is a little bit more unclear... there is some element of PR, I suppose, and from setting up a partnership with a school there is obviously a kind of positive associations with that in the local community and it's good for the business to do that. But other than that I don't think there's something that's really tangible (Area F, Practitioner 15).

One participant identified the need to adapt to future government policy and societal changes:

A lot of the current provision that we have in a college could ultimately be replaced by diplomas, so there's a survival factor there in terms of colleges... I think the better schools understand that the key aspects of things like diplomas and foundation learning tier have to be done working in partnership... working with people who are able to offer other aspects to the programs... such as hair and beauty, engineering, where clearly the practical components would have to be done by areas where there's both physical resources and human resources, so the better organisations in terms of schools are forward thinking enough to realise that they've got to make allowance for that in the future... you look to buy in new staff who have got the skills, or you send young people elsewhere... (Area B, Practitioner 12).

The majority of the participants stated that their motivation for working in partnership was to progress their diploma delivery within a mutually beneficial working relationship. It was not from the responses what motivated business to be involved in

diploma partnerships, as the practitioners interviewed conveyed little benefit for the contributions that they made.

Factors that impacted negatively on partnership working were less clearly expressed (table 17).

Table 17. Impediments to working as a consortium.

27. About impediments to working as a consortium								
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A	Rating Average	Response Count
Lack of shared purpose is a barrier to collaborative working	14.9% (7)	40.4% (19)	19.1% (9)	23.4% (11)	2.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	2.57	47
There is too much conflict between organisational loyalties and consortium loyalties	10.6% (5)	29.8% (14)	25.5% (12)	29.8% (14)	4.3% (2)	0.0% (0)	2.87	47
Lack of funding is an impediment to working successfully	17.0% (8)	48.9% (23)	19.1% (9)	14.9% (7)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.32	47
There is a lack of commitment from some members	19.1% (9)	42.6% (20)	19.1% (9)	19.1% (9)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.38	47
The consortium is too large for partnership working to be successful	0.0% (0)	6.4% (3)	34.0% (16)	55.3% (26)	4.3% (2)	0.0% (0)	3.57	47

Just over half of the participants agreed that a lack of shared purpose adversely affected working in partnership. This lack of shared purpose appeared to derive from a lack of policy direction or clarity on development and delivery, and tensions existing within the consortia relating to leadership and competition. Consideration of conflict between organisational loyalties and partnership loyalties split participant opinions, which is important, as although the diploma had to be delivered across a range of organisations, stakeholders were still employed by their own organisation to which they demonstrated loyalty, which had the potential to create conflict as individuals looked to their own organisational interests rather than those of the diploma. Other impediments included funding and commitment, which may also have been related to partnership loyalties as well as government policy and organisational structure. Respondents mostly agreed that their consortia were not too large, indicating that whatever other impediments there may be to partnership working, the size of the consortia involved was not seen as a significant factor.

When asked to comment on these issues, the interview participants highlighted what they felt were the key factors which inhibited individuals and groups from working together:

...the logistics of everybody coming together is just difficult... (Area J, Practitioner 2).

I think it can be the time and commitment because you've got to work out do you incur extra costs for this time... (Area J, Practitioner 3).

Where there can be competition, sometimes it's difficult to put the competitive nature aside and think about collaborative working (Area E, Practitioner 11).

The opinions of the practitioners on the impediments to partnership working included costs (financial and organisational), competition, and practitioner understanding of the diploma:

One of the concerns, talking to head teachers is that diplomas are very expensive to run and what they're also concerned about of course is that the expression they would use is student leaking out of college or leaking out of school to go elsewhere ultimately will reduce their income because potentially depending on the movement, more learners could leave the school than come in (Area B, Practitioner 12).

The way the funding is... encourages all providers to compete against each other. Talk about collaboration of partnership, but the way it's set up, it's set up for competition (Area E, Practitioner 5).

I don't know whether encourage is the right word... everybody was forced to get involved because it was a new education initiative (Area E, Practitioner 9).

...schools have either said it's too much of risk, it might not work, or, the critical mass of numbers isn't anything like sufficient for us to change the culture and practice and organisation of the school in order to accompany this, to accomplish this... you have to re-organise your whole timetable in a school (Area G, Practitioner 1).

..that teacher, probably, is the first point for any kind of advice and guidance, there's about one in five could articulate clearly the curriculum

pathways with any sense of confidence and that'll be the route they came through GCSEs or O Levels through to A Levels onto a degree and they have no confidence or knowledge outside that (Area G, Practitioner 6).

The impediments considered were a formal recognition of some of the issues faced by individuals and organisations involved in partnership work. Further discussion of impediments and other limitations occurred organically within discussions and these have been included where possible. Following this, the participants were asked what they felt external impediments to partnership working were, and 'the Government' and 'organisations' own agendas' were frequent responses, and 'funding issues' and 'lack of time' were also rated highly, while further comments included:

Lack of time to attend and contribute rather than lack of willingness are the major barriers (Area E, Practitioner 9).

...rural areas have specific issues... especially transport and associated costs (Practitioner questionnaire 52).

In addition to the motivations and impediments to partnership working, the cost of participation was also considered; participant expressed concerns regarding financial, human or material resources. The participants identified the financial costs as a significant impediment, whether in terms of capital costs for buildings and equipment or project resourcing in terms of publicity:

The cost is me, because all of the providers contribute financially for me to represent them on all of these scholarships, so yes, there is a cost to it (Area E, Practitioner 5).

With regard to a cost for setting up the diploma to us, we're already set up to deliver the BTEC first in manufacturing engineering anyway, so we haven't had to do any essential capital spends to be able to deliver the engineering diploma. So the actual cost, although I can't put a figure on it, would be quite small I think (Area F, Practitioner 15).

I think there has been a huge time cost. I think if you divide looking at the actual numbers of youngsters, if you look at the time, which does equal

money, which has been invested in diplomas per learner the cost is huge. I received in the post this morning another highly glossy pack of diploma materials, from somebody, probably the government, I don't know. Which I'm sure it's important to do that, so I think the cost has been massive... things don't suddenly mainstream overnight, so I guess you've got to make that investment, and ultimately... in business terms, the unit cost once things are up and running will be reduced... and I suppose whether it's worth it or not we'll see once things are really rolling how many students this involves (Area F, Practitioner 18).

A massive amount. Resource wise I did originally think that we would actually make some money... you've always got to be looking for ways of bringing in a new revenue so I did think initially by effectively charging out my time which is quite legitimate and other people's time for the delivery of this- that would make us a bit of money for the old cash fund. It hasn't worked out that way in fact we've used all the budget up without there being any spare to come back to us so it has become a fantastically expensive course and I think a lot of people generally are looking at that and saying is this sustainable and the answer is probably no... in physical wear and tear on the building it has produced some requirements because we've got kids there all the time doing things so that certain areas of the building are a lot more run down than they were simply because of the usage... In terms of my time and the delivery teams time it has taken over almost everything I do and again that isn't sustainable... (Area G, Practitioner 1).

I don't think anyone is significantly addressing the costs, the delivery costs of the diploma... It's alright pump-priming activities as they are at the moment with government funds, but that doesn't address sustainability issues... there are some major issues there with regards to the delivery model and how that will be sustained... I don't think it's sustainable... simply from the amount of time it takes for the staff point of view and there is no money coming in to support it (Area G, Practitioner 6).

For a number of managers I would say it's quite a significant amount of their time... We're not arguably wasting money on commercial radio

advertising and all, because we're able to get to the market via the school, so there are actually some tangible financial savings because of that... if we're all just doing our own thing back in the college, would we get a better return. I think the view is generally no, I think we can see sufficient partnership returns that there is this sort of economy of scale back by being in the partnership (Area J, Practitioner 3).

The cost of staff time, particularly teaching time, was identified as a further important cost, both in terms of the human resource and the finances required to fund this:

In terms of schools it's teacher time, keep going out to meetings and in some cases finding resources, because I don't think the actual funding of the diploma will cover what we need to do (Area A, Practitioner 7).

I say it [the cost] can only be time, I'm thinking of some of the inset days that I've provided that develop understanding and skills of teachers that are preparing to deliver and up and coming events that we've got. That's been time and there's been money attached to it actually and I have paid for employers to be guest speakers, so yes I guess there has been financial implications as well (Area D, Practitioner 10).

Well certainly my time in terms of other people have had to cover my lessons, I think that's one of the down sides... I need members of staff to be responsible, so it's humped quite a heavy workload on me. I could have been out three afternoons last week on different diploma stuff and I had to knock them all on the head... because at the end of the day [deleted] pay my wages and I can't be going out (Area E, Practitioner 9).

In terms of cost, we're not really losing out because my role is funded by funding providers really... we haven't got an admin structure in place for the 14-19 partnership... so that could be a cost, in terms of time, being taken away from their normal jobs they're having to do minutes and photocopying... I would probably say something like we are committing a lot of time to this partnership and what are we actually getting out of it (Area H, Practitioner 14).

I think there are first of all costs in money and I know that's just one element of cost. The 14-19 team in this area has been enlarged... so there are a range of people that are needed to provide a team strong enough and skilled enough to move all of these developments forward. There's certainly a cost in terms of time... an enormous cost in terms of time (Area I, Practitioner 8).

One practitioner identified training as a specific cost within considerations of staff time:

We've invested a lot of time both in terms of managers like myself and also in terms of curriculum teams... schools haven't been able to invest the time and they often haven't got the expertise actually to develop the actual lines of learning so the cost to us in terms of resourcing people to make sure that it happens and make sure that we're successful at getting through gateway ready to deliver and everything, obviously there's a financial cost in terms of people's time as well (Area B, Practitioner 12).

Institutional autonomy and independence was identified as a cost by one practitioner who felt that organisations might want to remain independent:

I don't think we have to sacrifice anything... Maybe there would be a cost to a participating organisation, such as a school and it might actually have to some point cede some part of its autonomy to the centre in order to accrue a benefit elsewhere, but that's not quite the same for the local authority is it, because in a sense the local authority is driving (Area C, Practitioner 4).

Despite the enthusiasm of the participants for working in partnership and as a consortium, the responses above highlighted that participants identified significant costs in human resources and finances, and concerns that the relative expense may have made the diploma unsustainable in the long term.

Overall, for the practitioners who participated in the research, the benefits appeared to be worthwhile along with high levels of motivation to support and enhance education for the learners with whom they were working. Impediments to working in partnership to develop and deliver the diploma were identified within the research instruments and

discussed by the participants, although some further areas of research arose organically within discussions.

4.9 Summary

The research plan facilitated the collection of a large amount of data. The research participants were generous with their time and the contributions they made. This data collection elicited not just data that was anticipated, but also gained a broader range of opinions and thoughts on partnership working and how the participants have worked together. These results will be discussed further in the next chapter.

5. Discussion

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I outlined the results and considered the participants' responses in relation to directly addressing the research questions. The responses were varied, interesting and elucidated how participants interpreted and engaged in partnership working within the context of diploma development and delivery. This chapter initially sets out an analytical summary of 14-19 diploma partnership in each of the ten areas considered within the study, to examine how the implementation of national policy aims has been influenced by local contextual factors.

This chapter then explores the results to examine how partnership was happening and what arose from discussing how people work together as a range of other themes and issues were identified within participants' responses. Some of these other themes are considered in terms of their impact on partnership working and how they occurred in the discourse with the research participants. Discussion of these themes will include consideration of what is different about partnership in education, and the creation of the phenomenon of collaboration and a conception of partnership working, and in particular, this chapter will discuss

- Partnership Working;
- Competition;
- Power; and
- Collaboration.

5.2 Analytical Summary by Area

5.2.1 Area A

The practitioner interviewed for Area A, an advisory head teacher within the LA, contributed their view of the implementation of the diplomas. They identified that their role was complex and involved undertaking a range of responsibilities and working with a range of different organisations, including employers and learning providers across LA boundaries. Many issues were identified with working in partnership, but

particularly trying to find new partners, encouraging attendance and contribution to meetings, and the reliance on people's good will. They specifically stated that there was,

...a history of schools competing against each other and that's what the government have encouraged and now you're asking people to work in collaboration so I don't think people necessarily see all the advantages of doing so (Practitioner 7, Area A).

The participation and commitment of other institutions was a particular concern, especially those which appeared to have no intention of engaging with or offering the diploma. Other difficulties that were expressed regarding competition included parental pressure for learners to attend schools that were achieving well, the reluctance of learners to attend other institutions, and the perception by schools that if they were higher in the league tables that there was little advantage to partnership working. These concerns may reflect the issues of engagement within new 'enacted' partnerships discussed by Haynes and Lynch (2013). Further to this, barriers to collaborative working in this area were identified as including transport, as although the region is compact, there were still costs involved in learners studying across multiple sites as the diploma partnership was serving a larger area than its LA boundaries would initially suggest, an issue that appears not to have been specifically addressed in policy. In addition, there were timetabling issues between schools and organisations with extended hours, and an imbalance between who could offer different parts of the curriculum as there was one large size which was capable of offering a range of diploma lines, but many that were too small to be considered as viable providers by the partnership. These concerns illustrate ways in which local needs were not being addressed within the issued policy and guidance (Higham and Yeomans 2009; Hodgson and Spours 2011). Despite these issues and challenges partnership working was viewed as being beneficial as it brought in other providers and improved the curriculum that could be offered to a wider range of learners, particularly those who did not engage well with the mainstream qualifications. This observation appears to be borne out by Ofsted's (2008) positive view of partnership within the area.

5.2.2 Area B

The contribution for Area B came from a headteacher in a college within a 14-19 partnership in the county (Practitioner 12). The area covered by this partnership was large, and the practitioner identified specific problems caused by the size of the area and the insularity of local communities which influenced factors such as their willingness to travel to partner institutions. The LA was described as nominally having the coordinating role for the regional administration of the diplomas, however, the practitioner perceived that the key partnership was ‘the level below, between different organisations that have come together as clusters and consortia for the different lines of learning’, they then clarified that their position was driving forward the 14-19 reforms in the area and being recognised for this due to the relative size of the institution and their experience in collaborative working. It was also recognised that many of the partnership relationships had been established before the diploma was implemented, and that these had helped to address some of the issues of insularity, a benefit of the long-established ‘negotiated’ partnerships identified by Haynes and Lynch (2013). Further concerns around competition in relation to monitoring and quality were also expressed in terms of reluctance to offer the diploma as the practitioner perceived that it was difficult to achieve at higher levels and that this may have deterred institutions from engaging in order to protect their league table positions. Issues of competition were specifically identified in relation to how schools and organisations were ‘monitored, measured and reported on’, and how this influenced learner and parental perceptions of quality, and league table positioning, explicitly identify tensions discussed by Haynes and Lynch (2013), Briggs (2008), Hodgson and Spours (2006) and Higham and Yeomans (2009). However, the participant felt that diploma practitioners in general should be able to look beyond narrow institutional self-interest and focus on the outcomes for the learners. Collaboration and partnership working for diploma delivery was viewed by the practitioner for this area as generally being a good thing as it improved opportunities for young people, widened educational choices, and could raise the educational expectations and aspirations of learners within the wider rural communities. This learner-centred approach demonstrated a desire to establish what might be characterised in terms of a high opportunity progression eco-system (Hodgson and Spours 2013 a). Although complexities around funding, travel and the attractiveness

of the offer were identified as being problematic to working in partnership, the benefits of collaborating were viewed as outweighing these concerns.

5.2.3 Area C

The 14-19 coordinator for Area C described long established partnership working arrangements in 14-19 education in the area and highlighted the complexity of a mixed tertiary sector where schools sixth-forms co-existed with FE colleges. Collaboration was viewed as being beneficial to the LA and benefiting the stakeholders involved in the diploma in a similar manner to how a chamber of commerce works to benefit its members. However, the political drivers for collaboration were also recognised as a collaborative learning agenda was described as being the result of specific funding and accountability regimes, rather than being the result of a desire to create philosophical and practical benefits for the learners. This structure suggests a greater complexity of partnership relationships than identified in Haynes and Lynch's (2013) discussion of 'enacted' and 'negotiated' partnerships, identifying elements of both types of partnership. Competition was a significant theme throughout the contributions to the interview made for this area. This included recognising how working in partnership meant working in competition, and that this was an opportunity to 'explore the boundaries' of what was possible within individual organisations, and examine how practitioners had to develop their own practice or offer in order to remain competitive. This aspect of competition fits well with the identified policy intention to use competition as a driver for quality (Higham and Yeomans 2009; 2.4 above). Issues of competition between institutions were identified in terms of recruitment, admissions, league tables and funding, which was then developed to explore how the locality and character of different institutions affects how they engage with the diploma and how they compete. For example, a larger college within Area C offered broader curriculum diversity and wider range of resources than a smaller school, and was somewhat buffered from any negative impacts of disengaged learners by being able to recruit higher numbers. Despite the concerns that were raised, the Area C practitioners had a very positive view of the potential benefits of developing partnership work to develop and deliver the diploma, in particular they perceived that there were:

*...win, win situations that you can create by encouraging them
[stakeholders] to act collaboratively and part of the knack of partnership*

working is to say that there's some kind of partnership premium that arises as a result of taking some collective actions to resolve a problem
(Practitioner 4, Area C).

The way in which this area used partnership working reflected many characteristics of successful partnerships discussed by Hodgson and Spours (2006; 2011; 2013a-b) and the depth of partnership working may reflect a long-established 'negotiated' partnership (Haynes and Lynch 2013). These positive aspects of collaboration were recognized in the Ofsted APA for 2008 which recognized strong and effective partnership working in an overall 'outstanding' rating (Ofsted 2008).

5.2.4 Area D

In Area D the practitioner (Practitioner 10) identified that the diploma partnership had developed and improved working relationships between a range of schools and other organisations, and they also described working with neighbouring LAs to reflect how learners were engaging with curriculum choice by crossing area boundaries to attend different institutions, similarly to Area A, and reflecting a local engagement with an issue that was not adequately addressed in policy and guidance. There was less specific local context given by this practitioner on Area D as they were very focused on the tensions that had arisen during the development of their employer engagement strategy for the diploma, reflecting tensions arising during the formation of 'enacted' partnerships in response to policy requirements (Haynes and Lynch 2013; also compare Higham and Yeomans 2009). These issues were also reflected in discussing collaborative working the issues around bringing employers to the table within a competitive environment, along with ensuring that specific contacts were protected while endeavouring to work with others. However, the practitioner also outlined the benefits to the learners of these relationships with local employers, particularly within the emerging industries in the area. The competition for contact with employers that the Area D practitioner had experienced within the LA meant that they had a higher expectation of competition between different diploma partnerships. They expressed that this had not been the case, however, and that in their experience working across local authorities and diploma partnerships had worked effectively, although they also suggested that some groups and schools had deliberately excluded themselves from the partnership. In terms of partnership working, in the experience of the Area D

practitioner, there appeared to be great benefit for the learners as engaging employers in local diploma delivery provided learners with opportunities that they would not otherwise have been able to access. This positive outlook on partnership suggests that better consideration of local concerns in policy would have offered significant benefits to its implementation, concerns reflected by Higham and Yeomans (2009).

5.2.5 Area E

The first practitioner questioned from Area E (Practitioner 5) described a complex variety of partners within the LA, including a clearly dominant FE college and a range of training and work-based learning providers. Collaborative work was observed as being more frequently engaged with by smaller providers as they were unable to deliver the diploma on their own, while larger organisations were envisaged as having the capacity to deliver without having to engage in partnership with other organisations. For the practitioner themselves, in this case, they perceived no direct impact to their organisation as a result of working in partnership, but also no benefit. Issues of competition were seen as permeating all aspects of partnership and diploma delivery, as with competition for learners between institutions, and a funding system which disincentivised collaboration between learning providers the system appeared to be set up to encourage competition. The contribution from this practitioner indicated that they felt that the way in which the diploma partnerships had been set up was not about collaboration, but facilitated the maintenance of a competitive education environment, echoing wider concerns about how competition was experienced in some partnerships (Higham and Yeomans 2009). This partnership was established before the introduction of the diploma, and while this view reflected the inclusion of competition with diploma policy (2.4 above), it highlights the difficulties of a simplistic reading of Haynes and Lynch (2013), and suggesting that their characterisation of ‘negotiated’ and ‘enacted’ partnerships needs to be seen in a local context to be fully understood.

The second practitioner for Area E was based in a secondary school (Practitioner 9). They focused particularly on considerations for the learner and the ability of the learners they worked with in relation to the requirements of the diploma. In terms of collaboration they expressed a positive attitude towards partnership working, and in particular recognised the benefits of building relationships with other institutions, both for delivery and for the learners, but specifically in terms of how these relationships

would improve their own offer and facilitate opportunities for their learners which their school was not currently able to provide, better reflecting Haynes and Lynch's (2013) understanding of the 'negotiated' partnerships. The school context was expressed in terms of how the learners engaged with the current educational offer from the school, and the preference for explicitly practical qualifications such as the BTEC was addressed. In addition, the practitioner was very clear about the social and cultural issues relating to the learners that they worked with, the catchment area they were from, and how this impacted on their current education and the longer term life and work opportunities. These views expressed a recognition of social and cultural issues which is discussed in terms of high opportunity progression learning eco-systems by Hodgson and Spours (2011; 2013a-b). A strong element of competition was also recognised, reflecting national policy (Higham and Yeomans 2009; 2.4 above), the history of the school and the way in which measurement and league table positioning had influenced its most recent development and affected its reputation across a number of years. The diploma was viewed in general as potentially a very positive thing, and they felt that there had been good quality collaborative work between institutions in the area, although the development of the diploma towards being a more academic rather than vocational qualification was a concern.

5.2.6 Area F

One contribution for Area F came from a practitioner working in a specific diploma cluster within a wider area (Practitioner 15). They described partnership with other organisations as being pre-existing and positive strong relationships for those involved. In terms of collaboration, the existing relationships meant that many of the structures for the development and delivery of a new program were already in place. Competition appeared to be less of an issue because of the way that the programme was managed in splitting roles and responsibilities across the organisations involved, reflecting a much closer accord with Haynes and Lynch's (2013) characterisation of a 'negotiated' partnership than some other areas in this study. It was clear, however, that this participant felt that their school had taken the lead role. The practitioner expressed a very positive view of how the partnership working was in place in the area, and although reservations were expressed regarding the nature of the diploma, the collaborative work benefited learners and institutions alike.

The second practitioner in Area F worked for the EBP (Practitioner 18). Area F covers a large geographic area, which includes both rural and urban contexts, as well as affluent and economically deprived catchment areas. The institutions involved in diploma delivery within the area are diverse and widely spread, including FE colleges, high schools with sixth provision, and schools where learners are boarders as a result of the distances travelled to attend. Despite highlighting the challenges posed by the size of the area and the logistical issues involved, the practitioner expressed the view that collaboration was worthwhile and provided benefits for both the learners and institutions involved, again reflecting the positive view of partnership that could be expected in an established partnership relationship (Haynes and Lynch 2013). This enabled the sharing of resources and teaching to enable learners to access a more complete curriculum offer than would otherwise have been the case from individual institutions alone. There was also recognition of partnership working with institutions and organisations outside the LA area, and the practitioner stated that while this was a very informal relationship that it was something that they were looking to develop. Competitiveness between the members of the partnership was clearly identified as a problem, however, there was little other discussion of this throughout the contribution.

The wider context of Area F was the main focus of the contribution made by this practitioner and the way in which the geographical and socio-economic factors impacted on diploma delivery and relationships between the organisations involved. Interestingly, the Ofsted APA made no specific mention of partnership within this area (Ofsted 2008); this may be the result of the rather localised nature of the partnerships within a geographically expansive area; partnership appears to have been effective where it was in place, but there appear to have been many areas where diploma partnerships had not been established

5.2.7 Area G

The first practitioner interviewed for Area G focused on the diploma development and delivery quite generally, and spoke broadly what this had meant to them (Practitioner 1). Their institution was described as bringing together learners from different schools, as well as from the institution itself, and specific challenges were identified both for the learners and the teaching in relation to these differences in culture and approach. Partnership working and collaboration was discussed in very broad terms and described

general benefits across the area. Issues of competition were recognised between institutions, in terms of learner recruitment and retention, league table positioning, and funding, but again this was more generally presented. Partnership working was viewed as being beneficial for the learners and institutions involved, despite the challenges that arose. These responses suggested that diploma partnerships were operating as envisaged in policy (2.4 above), with a focus on the local needs of learners that might be expected of a high opportunity progression learning ecosystem (Hodgson and Spours 2013a-b).

The second contribution to the research regarding Area G was from two practitioners working for the LA who were interviewed together (Practitioner 6). They recognised that Area G was small geographically and did not face the same challenges as some of the larger areas within the region, and they indicated there were different socio-economic factors that needed to be considered, although they flagged issues of mobility as being significant concerns. In discussing collaboration, they stated that there were good working relationships with other organisations, institutions, and employers involved within the diploma partnership, but that these were historic relationships that were being further developed to enhance diploma provision, as noted as a positive element of an established ‘negotiated’ partnership by Haynes and Lynch (2013). Questions on competition were addressed by the practitioners in terms of collaboration, and competition was not directly recognised as an issue between organisations within the area as the practitioners felt that working together allowed stakeholders to manage tensions. Overall, both practitioners gave a very positive view of collaboration and partnership working. The format of this interview was not typical and left the researcher with a strong impression that a specific organisational message was being projected. The participants set out how they were investigating developing this further within Area G.

Working in partnership for [deleted] of course is geographically quite small, so it's got circumstances that are different for example from [deleted]... you've got quite diverse areas, so you've got an area that's particularly affluent, the North East cluster, and you've got other areas which are still sort of in those high areas of deprivation, so working in partnership across means that I guess there are different speeds of progress

towards the diploma specifically that represent the interest in the young people in those cluster of areas (Area G, Practitioner 6).

5.2.8 Area H

In Area H, the local context was outlined by the practitioner in terms of the differing range and levels of institutions involved in the diploma partnership, and in the diversity of learners and their ability to undertake this level of qualification, which the practitioner perceived had impacted on learner engagement with the diploma in this area (Practitioner 14). In terms of partnership working and collaboration the practitioner felt that they beginning to establish the right procedures and relationships, but that there was still work to be done in order of this to be effective – particularly around the involvement of the local training providers and the relative power of the schools in driving the diploma agenda. These issues reflect tensions identified in ‘enacted’ partnerships studied by Haynes and Lynch (2013). Issues of competition were expressed in terms of the concerns around recruitment and retention of learners, league table positioning, and funding allocation, although competition appears not to have been seen as a driver of quality in the manner envisaged by policy (2.4 above). There were particular issues around the uncertainty of the longevity of the diploma as other stakeholders had expressed a reluctance to invest both time and money into a qualification they perceived as unlikely to survive beyond the next change of government. The practitioner was generally positive about the potential benefits of working in partnership to develop and deliver the diploma, but expressed concerns about whether these would actually be realistically achievable. The partnership displayed a number of characteristics of weakly collaborative working relationships (Hodgson and Spours 2006).

5.2.9 Area I

The practitioner for Area I described the local context in terms of the area itself being small but including polarities of political wards from high levels of deprivation to very advantaged areas, which in turn influenced differences between schools and institutions, as well as the motivations of the learners (Practitioner 8). The influence of these socio-economic factors was not discussed further by the practitioner, however. The LA serving the area was commended in the interview for having two main bodies to oversee the development of the diploma - a 14-19 partnership board with engagement and

inclusion of a comprehensive range of stakeholders who had worked in partnership for a number of years, and a strategic group who were responsible for the overall strategy and practical operations of implementation, reflecting the positive characteristics of ‘negotiated’ partnerships discussed by Haynes and Lynch (2013). Collaboration was identified as being engaged in at different times and to different extents by the stakeholders involved, as it was recognised that different institutions within the area were more suited to earlier implementation of the diploma than others. There were also times when people prioritised their own institutions, and reported that there were periods of addressing major issues within the partnership which have also presented challenges, but that there had been progress more recently with strengthening working relationships. Issues around competition were addressed, however, in this area the practitioner felt that this was too strong a word, and although recognised tensions around learner numbers, league tables and funding preferred to focus on the differences between institutions as a positive factor and discuss the ways in which collaborative working and support between stakeholders has outweighed competitiveness in the area. Additionally, it was felt that there was no more competition than there had been across the previous years of working together, and that there would always be elements of competition due to the nature of the work, but that this was not particularly a barrier to progress with the diploma. There was a very positive focus on collaboration and partnership working and how this was used to overcome the issues of competition, and the practitioner for this area was very clear that the core value for the diploma partnership as well as the wider LA was to recognise that ‘if you’re not doing it for the learners, their enjoyment, their success, their engagement, their progression, their futures, it’s all a waste of time’. This positive view of partnership working reflects characteristics discussed by Hodgson and Spours (2013a-b) in terms of high opportunity progression learning eco-systems.

5.2.10 Area J

The first practitioner for Area J worked within the EBP (Practitioner 2) and described recent significant changes to their organisation which had moved from broader regional delivery to more localised arrangements according to LA areas. The EBP was small, but engaged in a broad range of work across the education sector in Area J and the diploma partnership forms part of that. Partnership working to facilitate the diploma is based on pre-existing relationships within the LA area which were developed to support

successful implementation of the diploma, in Haynes and Lynch (2013) analysis a 'negotiated' partnership. Collaboration was best exemplified in the description of how the schools had been organised around specific centres for diploma delivery which encouraged learners to work together in a neutral environment and enabled schools and other stakeholders to share resources and funding to facilitate this, presenting a clear response to the requirements of diploma policy. This particular arrangement was also noted within other practitioner interviews for this research as an example of good practice. Competition was discussed as a concern, particularly in relation to competition for learners and the management of employer relationships, with the practitioner admitting to unwillingness to share employer contacts. In general, the diploma was viewed as a good thing for Area J, although the practitioner was concerned about the longevity of the qualification and its acceptance by universities and employers, reflecting the wider concerns about policy churn under the Labour Government discussed at 2.4 above.

The second practitioner for area J was based in a large FE college with multiple centres and described strong established relationships with all of the 11-16 schools and other stakeholders, describing the college as a complex and diverse organization (Practitioner 3). The partnership was described as mature, reflecting working relationships developed before the diploma was established, and was enthusiastic about the potential for partnership to deliver the diploma and provide better results than individual organisations working in isolation, reflecting positive aspects of established partnership working discussed by Haynes and Lynch (2013) and Hodgson and Spours (2006; 2013a-b). Tensions within the partnership working deriving from a number of sources were recognised, including difference in organisational culture, competition between partners. One of the main challenges was that partnership objectives could be seen in opposition to those of individual organisations. When questioned about competition, the participant felt that an element of competitiveness helped to develop excellence, although competition could also hinder effective partnership working, showing an awareness of the policy intention as well as concerns raised by Hodgson and Spours (2006) and Higham and Yeomans (2009). Pressures of funding were particularly evident, and it was felt that some diploma partners contributed less in terms of effort. The participant's own institution had suffered from the withdrawal of BSF funding, meaning that the campus was dated and less attractive to learners than more modern

facilities in other colleges, despite a strong curriculum offer. The participant recognised the importance of partnership working to address local and regional issues around learner attainment and aspiration and to provide greater opportunities and more effective delivery of the diploma.

5.3 Partnership working

I found that the majority of research participants stated that partnership was happening, both in terms of compliance with policy requirements, and in continuing and developing pre-existing partnership arrangements with other stakeholders (4.2 above). The participants had indicated that although they were mostly experienced at working in partnership with others including many of the other stakeholders, it was the way in which diploma partnership had been defined and required that was new. This was one of a number of factors which I considered in terms of evaluating how the practitioners worked together. Regional diploma consortia comprised a complex range of stakeholders, including employers, practitioners, government offices and departments, schools, colleges, parents, learners and other individuals, all of whom related to and contributed differently to partnership working. In addition, the consortia were subject to different factors and agents such as government policy, socio-economics, funding, geography and logistics, all of which affect how the stakeholders were able to interact.

The existence and use of partnership language, or a specific vocabulary of partnership, was identified in the data (4.3 above). Practitioners discussed how they felt that specific language was required to engage with diploma policy, although this vocabulary had little effect on their practice and interactions with other stakeholders, but existed as a function for reporting. This suggests that partnership language was primarily used as a means of demonstrating conformity with policy, rather than any deeper engagement with the partnership work. The use of partnership vocabulary was not consistent across stakeholders, which was to be expected, as the literature review had identified differences in how people viewed and interpreted partnership as a term (2.2.1 above), and the results showed how the stakeholders defined and interpreted partnership in practice (4.3 above). Because of the inconsistent use of diploma language it was particularly important to look at how partnership working could be conceptualised.

In relating these results to the literature, I found that as a basic beginning, the Kamiya (2011) model was relevant as it highlighted the importance of the relationship between the consortium members, the context and the act of partnership working. This importance of the working relationship can be related back to the diploma in terms of how the inclusion of partnership working within diploma policy was recognised and valued by the practitioners, even though they identified some aspects as problematic, such as relationships with employers (4.5.2 above). This can be seen as illustrating Kamiya's model demonstrating how participants worked in partnership to achieve the desired outcome of developing and delivering the diploma.

I also felt that the influence of Arnstein's (1969) 'ladder of participation' and Hart's (1992) subsequent development could be observed within the results. Arnstein recognised partnership as part of a defined process and identified the power of 'active participants', recognising that in an ideal situation all of those involved in partnership should be 'active participants'. Active participation in diploma consortia had been desired in government diploma policy from the initial stages of *Partnerships and Plans* (DCSF 2008a). Active participation was demonstrably not always the case in this study, as practitioners identified parents and learners as not being fully included, and parents and learners recognised their lack of participation in the consortia (4.7.3 above), while the practitioners also identified that some of the other consortia members were perceived as being more active than they necessarily needed to be, to the detriment of effective partnership working (4.6.1 and 4.7.1 above). This active engagement is recognized as a key differentiating factor between 'negotiated' and 'enacted' partnerships by Haynes and Lynch (2013) and is highlighted as an element in more successful educational partnerships (Higham and Yeomans 2009). Hart's (1992) model, although taken from a different context, related more to encouraging the inclusion of the learners as it specifically applied Arnstein's (1969) model to children's participation in life-changing decisions rather than partnership working more generically. Hart's model may be more useful in future iterations of partnership working in education to help to address some of the perceived and actual occurrences where learners have been omitted and improve learner inclusion and empowerment. Despite the small sample of learners consulted in my research, it was clear that there were significant differences in the way in which learners from the two different institutions had been involved in deciding to study the diploma (4.5.3 and 4.7.3 above). In terms of the definitions discussed in

Chapter 2, this application of Arnstein (1969) and Hart's (1992) models can be viewed as both cooperation and collaboration in action, but depends on the investment of the participants and the benefits received for their engagement. This also reflects Friierian (1970) notions of increasing learner agency in education which was also echoed in the discourse, if not the application of partnership working in the diploma. The importance of this active engagement in partnership working is highlighted by Hodgson and Spours (2006) who note the educational benefits for learners of active engagement in partnership working.

The models produced by McDonald (2005) are particularly relevant to a more holistic view of partnership working and the diploma. Both the hierarchy model and the rational goal model are relevant to the modes of working engendered by diploma policy. The hierarchy model characterises the top-down management of the diploma consortia manifested by diploma policy and observed by the practitioners. The definition of this as state-centric and the notions of control, standardisation and accountability accurately reflect the requirements of the diploma policy and the experiences of the practitioners which were collected in the data. This model reflects Foucauldian (1977) and Deleuzian (1992) concepts of the use of education for control which are borne out by increasing direct involvement of central government in setting detailed diploma policy. This is relative to the creation of policy and the need for governmental control, although the requirement for the overt inclusion of partnership throughout was new to the practitioners (4.4 and 4.6 above). The rational goal model followed a similar pattern, but included a recognition of competition as a working norm and this, as became clear from the data collected, was both a significant issue/concept and part of working in partnership in education for the practitioners (4.4 and 4.6 above). The consortia have a clearer strategic remit in this model and managerial power is enhanced, rather than the formal authority of the hierarchy model, and there is a clear recognition of marketisation. This highlighted manifestations of competition within the system and how this was then related to both of these models in the creation of policy and in the perceptions of the audience for the qualification in terms of the parents and the learners. This was specifically important for the launch and promotion of the diploma at a time when the socio-economics of education and the 'buy-in' of parents and learners considering what may yield the best returns on the time/money/effort invested was an essential consideration. The needs of the economy and the need to develop the future

workforce were also relevant, on a regional level these were driven by employers and expressed through conduits such as ONE and NECC, and at a national level by long standing government policy aims (2.3.4 and 4.4 above). The observed manifestation of diploma development and delivery could be spread equally between these two models.

I felt that the Hodgson and Spours concept of ‘high opportunity progression ecosystems’ (2013a) was particularly relevant to my results both in terms of how stakeholders can work together to provide high-quality learning opportunities and experiences to young people, which was identified by the practitioners involved in the research as being a high priority (4.8 above), and in providing some measure of quantification for the other factors which can affect how consortia work. This model was significant to the concepts around competition and how this was influenced by internal and external factors, and to recognising how the practitioners worked within these pressures as it provides an analytical scheme through which the less tangible influences on partnership can be addressed.

The local learning ecology model suggested by Hodgson and Spours (2013a) develops their earlier theories of weakly and strongly collaborative 14-19 learning systems (2006) and aimed to theorise a multi-faceted model which is applicable at different levels to benefit a broader range of learners in differing circumstances. This may also provide some influence on this study in terms of progress towards negating Foucauldian and Deleuzian notions of control systems (Deleuze 1992; Foucault 1977) and increasing learner empowerment. As in developed strongly collaborative learning ecologies learners would have access to a wider range of resources and opportunities and issues of marketisation and competition would become less influential, allowing the diploma aims of increasing learner agency and opportunities to be more fully realised. In addition, this would enable existing consortia to build on their relationships and develop their strengths to deliver at different levels identified by Hodgson and Spours’ model (2013a) as stakeholders would be able to better understand the factors affecting their relationships and the effect that these had on their practice.

The way in which Hodgson and Spours (2013a) explain this ecological framework is also useful, as this provides a structured manner of quantifying and categorising the other influences on areas ranging from policy to delivery. This is discussed in terms of micro, meso, exo and macro, which they identify as being based on Bronfenbrenner’s

(1979) ecological settings. In relation to my study the key issues are centred on the meso and exo settings, which relate to individual institutions and their relationships within the consortium. I considered the macro, the wider scenario, to understand the wider context in which the consortia operates. This provides a useful framework which could be used in future work to begin to categorise the other issues identified by the participants to allow a more in-depth examination of the influences on their partnership working, which would potentially allow the influence of issues around competition and collaboration to be qualified within the data collected.

Investigating partnership models has been useful in terms of comparing the regional diploma partnership activity with existing recognised definitions of partnership. However, the nature of partnership working in relation to the development and delivery of the diploma was evolving with different stakeholders, different understandings of partnership and different working values, which meant that regional diploma consortia did not easily map onto existing models. This problem was addressed to some degree within the diploma partnership guidance (2008), but the extent to which there would be differences and tensions and the effect of these was not fully recognised. Additionally, there remained tensions between the stated intentions of diploma policy and the way in which working relations were defined and implemented which meant that diploma practice struggled to achieve the aims set out in policy (Higham and Yeomans 2009).

The literature review had highlighted the complex nature of education, particularly within the 14-19 sector, and its relationships with government, employment and socio-economics. Hodgson and Spours (2006; 2013a-b), Pring (2000), Hayward (*et al.* 2006) and others convey the complexities involved in defining, updating and defending the education choices available to the stakeholders in this particular sector. The results from the data collection further support these notions of complexity. For the practitioners, not only was it insufficient to be passionate about wanting to provide the best education for the learners at the placement, but diverse issues from the very bricks and mortar of the school building to the intellectual property rights of the teaching had to be considered and managed. Additionally, school league table positions had to be maintained, and sufficient learners recruited to make courses viable (4.6.2 above). From the employer perspective the best learners had to be recruited, but only if they had the qualifications and the skills to do the job. The learners not only had to learn but had

also be able to decide which qualification will best suit their needs, and in the case of the diploma learners faced choosing a new qualification and divergent opinions on whether both they and the qualification would succeed or fail (2.6 above), while their parents are expected/anticipated to advise and inform their choices from a position of knowledge which they did not always have (4.7.3 above). The difference with education partnerships and partnership models presented as abstract concepts is that extraordinarily complex manifestations of multiple issues have to be engaged with in order for stakeholders to work together. This is where Hodgson and Spours (2013a), and McDonald (2005) have been particularly useful in providing a framework to conceptualise external influences on partnership working. In relation to the diploma, there are further complications with regard to the speed at which the qualification was developed and introduced, and the controversy surrounding its introduction and its deliberate placing into a historically unsuccessful third-strand categorisation, while appearing to sweep existing educational offerings such as the BTEC out of the curriculum with its inception.

There are historic working relationships between stakeholders, many of which have been successful across a number of years and a range of education initiatives (compare Haynes and Lynch 2013). However, it is important to recognise and address the issues involved, whether these are national factors regarding governance and implementation or socio-economics or more localised concerns, such as geography, region or transport facilities (Higham and Yeomans 2009; Hodgson and Spours 2006). All of these concerns matter and deserve recognition as they affect the way in which the stakeholders are able to function as a partnership.

5.4 Competition

The concept of competition arose within many of the results as practitioners discussed competition explicitly, as well as alluding to it within responses to questions on other topics (4.7 above). Within the broader concept of competition, issues within partnership, such as power, leadership, and social capital arose as tensions and dissonance between consortium members were displayed. This was interesting in terms of the research as competition had not been specifically identified within the research design which had focused on the practitioner aspects of delivery (3.4 above). Although competition and its use in education policy was well-recognised more broadly within

education literature (Higham and Yeomans 2009; 2.4 above), the recurrence of themes related to competition within practitioner responses illustrated its importance to the practitioners, and reinforced their concerns regarding how issues of competition could affect partnership relationships and the delivery of the diploma (4.7 above).

The learners and parents involved in the research were also not directly asked about competition. Some of the learners expressed that they had felt nervous about attending a different institution where they knew that there would be learners from other schools where there had been shared rivalries, however, this appeared to be more closely related to the newness of the situation and being out of individual comfort zones rather than any notions of institutional competition (4.5.3 above). Competition identified between practitioners can be more clearly related to the marketisation of education with testing and competition for the necessities such as learners and funding now a norm (2.4 above). This affects how schools are perceived - both internally and externally as well as how they function, and how they can function in consortia (2.5 and 4.7 above). The guidance produced by the government on working as a partnership to develop and deliver the diploma provided a range of suggested models for delivery (DCSF 2008a; 2009), and while this did not appear to cater for a broad enough range of concepts or eventualities in relation to competition, its promotion of competition as a mechanism for enhancing quality appeared to maintain and promote existing organisational hierarchies and power relationships. This is demonstrated in my research by practitioners identifying issues such as selective engagement with the diploma, league table position and exam results, learner retention and specific social issues within catchment areas and more generally in Haynes and Lynch's (2013) discussion of partnerships formed as a direct result of diploma policy.

5.5 Power

Concepts around competition were also expressed in discussions of power. Issues of power were identified in the literature review and some were subsequently explored in the electronic questionnaires (4.6 above). The broad nature of power as a subject for inquiry, and the focus of my thesis on partnership has meant that although there were limitations to the extent to which power could be explored, it was important to recognise the presence of power and ownership within partnership relationships and in the design and delivery of the diploma. Concepts of power were discussed by the

research participants, both as responses to specific questions within the electronic questionnaire and indirectly within responses to other questions. There were also a significant number of references to which individuals, groups or organisations were ‘in charge’, who was ‘leading’ on issues or specific diploma lines, as well as comments regarding other aspects of organisational size, influence and control.

The significant concepts of power in relation to this thesis related to the national inception of the diploma and the local interpretation of diploma partnership and stakeholder inclusion. Considering concepts of power in terms of the national implementation of the diploma involves exploring the complex relationship of education with a range of other issues, such as socio-economics, employment and governance (2.4 above). At the time of the development of the diploma, the national situation in the UK echoed many of the concepts expounded by Foucault (1977) and Deleuze (1992). For the New Labour government, issues of power and control were important, and partnership was identified as a means of achieving control without appearing controlling while giving the appearance of inclusivity for all involved (Powell and Dowling 2006; Ogunleye 2007; Avis 2009; 2.4 above). This is most clearly manifested in the very hierarchical nature of diploma consortia and definitions of diploma consortia as set out in government policy (2.2.3 and 4.6.1 above). The concerns of industry regarding the quality of the skills of school leavers which had been expressed through channels such as the CBI and regional enablers of commerce could be linked to what Deleuze (1992, p.4) identified as a crisis in environments of enclosure, where, lacking the barracks and the factory to keep the masses busy and to maintain control of the lower classes, the focus was on extending education and training as the new factories. This also fitted with New Labour ideology for the output of ‘UK PLC’ as a ‘knowledge economy’. The ‘knowledge economy’ also required the massification and marketisation of systems, resulting in the explosion of education requirements including a target for 50% participation in HE and the extension of the school leaving age, further extending the governmental control of both individuals and organisations (2.3 above). Marketisation of education was manifested in the opportunities for employers to be involved in the design and delivery of the diploma, the focus on employability in the curriculum and the shifting of the responsibility for preparedness for work from the factory to the school. However, in relation to my thesis it was difficult to engage with employers to examine the extent of their engagement

with the diploma (2.4.2 and 4.5.2 above). Where I have looked in the literature review there appeared to be a lack of engagement of employers with the diploma and concerns about the representative nature of those who were actually involved (2.4.2 above). All of these factors contributed to the competition between individuals and organisations for status, funding, league table positions amongst other issues, and raised the question of what the purpose of education was and for whom it was provided (Hodgson and Spours 2006; Higham and Yeomans 2009). This question was emphasized by the debate on the existence, arrangement and positioning of the department for education itself and the way in which this debate has been presented and organised by the government. For the practitioners, this confusion manifested itself as more work, but, as indicated in the results, more of the same in terms of continuing to support and develop learners, and engaging in partnership work with many of the same partners with whom they had worked in previous partnership arrangements (4.2, 4.4 and 4.7 above). The new focus came from the central and focused requirement to engage in and demonstrate engagement in partnership to develop and deliver the diploma, as despite the rhetoric that accompanied the launch of the diploma for the learners and the parents there appeared to be little change (Haynes and Lynch 2013). Deleuze's (1992) description of the pupils as subjects of control, could also be applied here, as in School A, the learners appeared disempowered, while the parents of learners at School C who contributed did not provide any evidence of inclusion or empowerment in the process. This may reflect parents' unfamiliarity with the diploma as much as any deliberate exclusion or lack of agency (Todd and Higgins 1998).

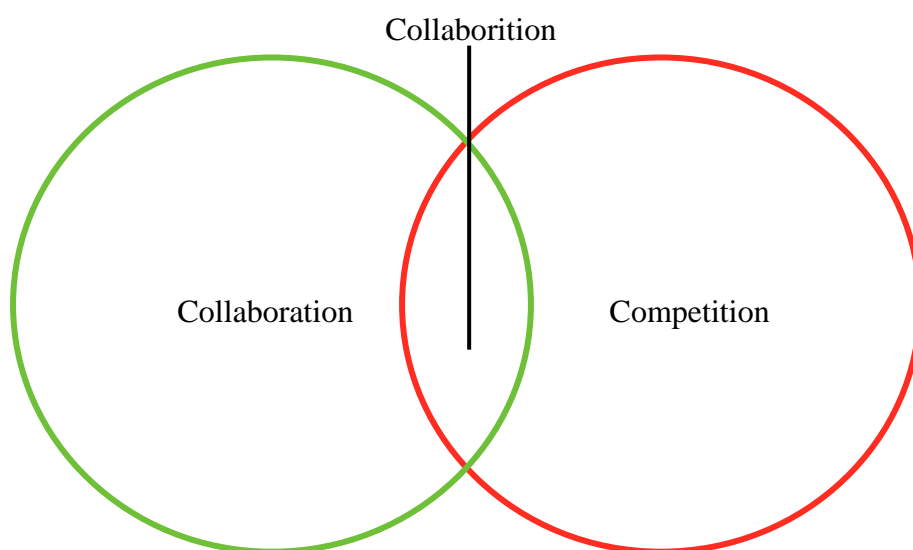
Considerations of power were important and it was clear that participants were aware of notions of power and power and relationships within the diploma consortium. It is also worth noting that because the diploma was new and because the working relationships were changing and developing the power relationships were changing and I did not observe it as a mature system, but as an emerging system as a result of planned and unplanned changes within the wider educational context (1.2 and 2.4 above).

5.6 Collaboration

The manifestation of issues of power, control and equality which arose in participant discussions of competitive tensions within partnership working was not sufficiently acknowledged in partnership literature or government policy. This influenced my

understanding of collaborative working and led to my development of specific terminology to describe this phenomenon. *Collaborition* is the area of tension where collaboration meets competition at an interface (figure 10), and is strongly influenced by the evident need for mediation between national diploma policy and local delivery, representing the area where the participants are expected to work together while being responsive to political pressures and societal change. For example, *collaborition* is different to concepts of collaboration, symbiotic relationships and symbiotic relationism, as in these examples the actors or participants are not usually in competition, but benefit from a mutual engagement or action. Similarly, inter and intra-organisation collaboration were considered, but these did not reflect the tensions, dissonances and competition strongly enough to acknowledge the different and often conflicting pressures under which partnership members were often working (2.4 and 4.7 above).

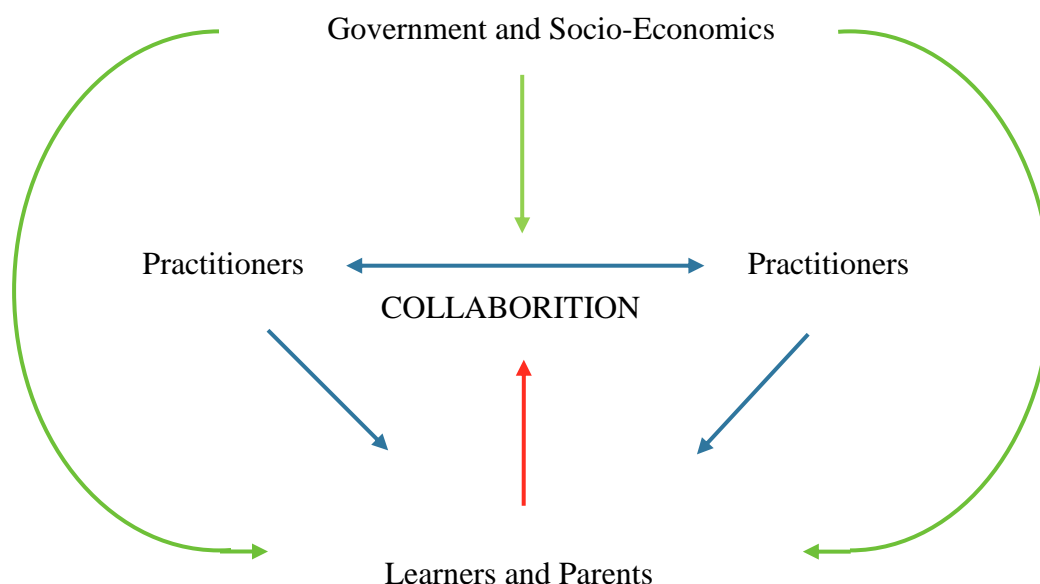
Figure 10. *Collaborition*, the interface between collaboration and competition.



Collaborition can be seen as an extended mode of partnership working requiring both greater focus and an increased effort to overcome the issues of competition. As a concept it can also be seen to embody descriptors of working together, for example, knowledge transfer, mass collaboration and co-working (Daniels *et al.* 2007; 2.5.2 above). In the model below (figure 11), the pressures of government and socio-economic factors can be seen imposing from above, tensions between practitioners

represent the stresses in the centre, while pressure and concerns from learners and their parents (who are also independently affected by the pressures of government and socio-economics) rise up from below.

Figure 11. *Collaborition, actors and influences.*



Constructing the concept of *collaborition* has provided an additional depth to how the complexities of partnership working in education can be considered. This will help to further develop both research and practice into how and why stakeholders work together by providing a central concept for consideration of the relationships between policy and practice and which can contribute to discussions on mediation and localism as a way of identifying and developing new ways of collaborative working.

5.7 Summary

This chapter required further engagement with the results and the literature review to enable the relationships between the theory and the data to be explored. I have considered partnership working, competition, power and the phenomenon I identified as specific to partnership work in education which I refer to as *collaborition*. The analysis of the results has considered a small amount of the data that was collected and a further exploration of this dataset would be both interesting and instructive for the further development of the concept of *collaborition* and other modes of partnership working.

6. Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

My research was undertaken to explore how partnership working was viewed and undertaken in the development and delivery of the diploma in the North-East of England. The research design was to include exploration of the different aspects of partnership, how it was understood and applied and how these affected the individuals involved.

The research was necessary as there were no available studies of partnership working within the context of the 14-19 diploma when I started my research. There was literature on partnership working and on partnership working in education, which had been drawn on by government policy with reference to the diploma as part of the development of the qualification. My study was the first to focus specifically on partnership working in the context of the diploma within this region. The newness of the diploma meant that the arrangement and practicalities of partnership working were still being negotiated. Partnership work had been formally linked to the diplomas in policy documents as a requirement for funding with little understanding of how or why individuals and organisations would work together to ensure the qualification was worthwhile, how it would be valuable for the learners, or how rewarding and manageable it would be for the practitioners. This was a factor that became evident in my research, that there was policy, but less guidance, as diploma practitioners remarked on the absence of detailed guidance for delivery (4.4 above). While there was research and literature on partnership working in other sectors, and there was research and literature on 14-19 education, but the diploma required the two to come together, providing a unique new opportunity to explore partnership working in this context.

The research questions for this thesis were:

- Was partnership working taking place in the development and delivery of the diploma in the North-East of England?
- What did 'partnership' mean to the stakeholders involved in the development and delivery of the diploma?

6.2 What did I find out?

The lack of previous research specifically on this subject in this region means that the process, results, and findings are significant in themselves. This study also contributes to our knowledge of partnership working.

Initial responses to the research questionnaires suggested that practitioners felt that they were working in partnership, according to their understanding of partnership work and their experience of working with others. To examine this in more depth I collected further data to develop an understanding of the views of the participants on how partnership was taking place. Initially, the participants were limited to practitioners, but following analysis of results from the questionnaire, the research design was revisited to include other stakeholders including learners and the parents of learners to provide more breadth to the responses collected (3.5.2 and 3.5.3 above).

It became clear that the participants had different definitions and interpretations of partnership and partnership working, that these terms meant different things to different people and organisations and that their meanings were not constant. The terminology of partnership working has often been understood, or misunderstood, to imply that participation in partnership working would be empowering for all of those involved. This was certainly how policy and publicity for the diploma was presented, in that the diploma would be an opportunity for all of the stakeholders to contribute and benefit (DfES 2005a). However, in exploring the concept in the literature review, it was clear that this was not always the case, that there were hierarchies and leadership within consortia and in partnership models, and that not all of those involved would gain power, have agency or be of equal status (2.2.3 above). This was also consistent with the Blair government's use of the discourse of partnership in what appeared to have been an increasingly hierarchical mode of governance (Glendinning *et al.* 2002; Avis 2009). What became clear as the research progressed was the need to establish a working definition with generalised characteristics and concepts as part of the difficulty of researching partnership working is the realisation that there is no agreed interpretation or understanding of what partnership working specifically means.

Many, though not all, new consortia to develop and deliver the diploma appeared to be older partnerships where practitioners had forged the experience of working together

across previous educational initiatives on a more *ad hoc* basis, rather than as a result of government education policy (2.4; 3.5.1 above). Regardless of the origin of the working relationship, the participants were clear that despite the challenges, the benefits outweighed the costs and risks (4.8 above). The diploma also provided a unifying factor as a common purpose which motivated the participants (4.8 above).

It was important to recognise the impact of regional socio-economic factors on the way in which the diploma consortium was able to function, and on how participants viewed their involvement and contribution (Higham and Yeomans 2009). For the North-East of England, there were a number of significant regional factors which may have affected the way in which stakeholders engage with diploma development and delivery. These factors included: high unemployment rates and low rates of progression to FE and HE, meaning that school qualifications needed to give learners their best chance of success. The North-East region also faced other challenges in delivery including a large geographical spread within the region making travel and access challenging for learners in some areas, funding issues related to regional delivery as well as the impact of the cessation of BSF money and factors related to the reluctance of many of the learners to travel away from their immediate catchment school. Despite practitioners knowing and appreciating their own regional contextual challenges, it was important that the impact of the regionality was recognised and identified within the partnership context. By considering the approach adopted by Hodgson and Spours (2013a) I identified these contextual factors, providing an opportunity to better understand these influences (5.2 above).

The potential effect of my initial focus on diploma practitioners must also be considered as the majority of the data collected was from practitioners and reflects practitioner views and experiences. My reflection on the data collected and the partnerships involved led me to reconsider the research design and to include learners and parents within the participants (3.5 above). The sample of learners and parents was small in comparison to the practitioners involved, however, the data provided remained significant reflecting the experiences of these groups and in providing a catalyst for the consideration of their needs. The literature review had outlined different aspects of how partnership working and diploma development and delivery had related to learners in different ways. Education policy and implementation documents (DfES 2005a; DCSF

2008a; 2009) had highlighted the inclusion of learners and parents in diploma design, and these groups were specifically targeted with tailored advertising and promotional literature. The learners that contributed to the research suggested that this emphasis on inclusion had not had the desired impact on their knowledge of and their decision to undertake the diploma, and that it was not reflected in their experience (4.7.3 above). The historical overview pointed to learners as political pawns who had been used by successive governments to address perceived socio-economic problems and win favour with employers (2.4.2 above). Further investigation into the current social, economic and political situation suggests that little has changed for the learners, particularly in light of the withdrawal of the diploma in 2013 by the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government.

Further to the initial data collected, of further interest were the themes that arose from the contributions of the research participants. Within the responses participants gave to the questions I had set, I identified the influence of a range of additional themes and issues, for example power, competition, and equality. The aspects of these additional concepts that I explored included how participants worked together, how they felt about this and their responses to some of the issues which they had identified such as competition. This exploration led to further consideration of what is different about partnership working in education, which in turn, led to my development and definition of the unique term of *collaborition*, defined as, partners working in a collaborative relationship while otherwise remaining in competition, and while recognising the culture of competition and constraints in which they are operating.

6.3 What did I learn?

In terms of personal progress, engaging with a long term research project has been a deep and longitudinal process of development as a researcher. The process, or journey of planning, researching and writing the thesis has required thought and analysis regarding my personal engagement and practical expression. The first considerations of what to study and reflections on why and how provided my first steps into doctoral thinking. Initial drafts of the thesis expounded learning and theories, explaining them to myself as much as to the gaze of any anticipated audience. This facilitated my development of further depth of thought as drafted and redrafted to further my thinking. As I internalized these explanations, and removed them from my thesis my writing

became more refined and focused while remaining theoretically informed. My awareness of my feelings about and use of my stance, beliefs and personal position has been both an interesting and deeply introspective journey which influenced me to consider some of my main personal influences, as well as my thoughts on engaging with the research. This self-analysis and reflection has helped me to progress the thesis and to further my research and analysis by considering my chosen stance and actions throughout the work. I found it difficult to edit down the data due to my interpretivist valuation of individual contributions and interest in the ongoing discussion, and I am very conscious of the material which I was not able to include.

In addition to these thought-led processes, theoretical and subject learning came through the literature review. With a personal background as a historian, the knowledge of the history leading up to the launch of the diploma was important for me to evaluate the lessons learned. Similarly, engagement with education policy and partnership theory was essential, both to develop my own knowledge and further my progress with the thesis. Approaching the methodology brought experiential learning in addition to theoretical development as research methods had to be designed, piloted and engaged with before being deployed, and the results had to be analysed. In between, there was practical engagement and conversation with practitioners, learners and parents and learning opportunities arose during all of the meetings and conversations.

I reflected on the methodological considerations set out by Bryman (2008; 3.4.2 above). In terms of credibility I provided a transparent methodological approach and set out my results clearly, and I have used different sources of information to provide an element of triangulation of the data. I also acknowledge the relative sample sizes and the impact of this on my interpretation of the data, and my use of this information is appropriately qualified. My research is based on observations from a specific regional context which means that the specific results would not be transferable, however, the key findings on the experiences of partnership in education appear to be more widely transferable beyond the geographic and administrative scope of the 14-19 diploma. Similarly, the dependability of my study is constrained by the changes to the education system which saw the evolution of the diploma throughout the period of my research, and its withdrawal in the closing stages of my thesis, but once again the key findings on the experience of partnership working appear to have a wider relevance for future research.

Conformability was addressed by my statements of personal biases and the way in which I approached making these explicit in my research as befitted my interpretivist stance.

I developed a range of practical research techniques (3.7 above), however, I found the most significant of the research methods was my personal research journal which provided a space outside of my head to gather my thoughts and reflections. This fulfilled many purposes and had many uses and I shall reflect on some of them here. Initially, being able to put my thoughts down on paper somewhere that was not my thesis was very useful. Having my thoughts in writing in a journal meant that they were physically together, even at times when they were not together literally or conceptually. My journal enabled me to think out loud and engage with a personal reflective dialogue. It also became a place where I grew in confidence in thinking visually and sketching or outlining my thoughts on the pages in addition to committing them to words. I engaged in a style of fluid or free writing, and often came back to add additional thoughts or code or annotate what I had written. These reflections have included thinking around the research questions, planning and considering the data collection, personal notes taken during data collection, for example on impressions of power and control during the interviews, as well as thinking through other problems such as the rationale for choices of modes of analysis. The journal also became a useful place to document supervisory conversations and to explain visually and pictorially my thinking and understanding. Because of the deeply personal and entirely subjective nature of the journal, and its size after many years of part-time study, it has not been included in its entirety, but a sample has been included as an appendix (appendix j). The research journal formed a key part of my thinking processes throughout the duration of my studies.

The conversations that I had with other researchers were a further route of reflective and personal learning, both within and outside of my formal supervision arrangements. The significant contributors to this process are identified in my acknowledgements, but I am grateful to all my critical friends during this journey as having external critique, questioning and commenting has helped me to refine and develop my own critical approach and scholarly voice.

The process of writing my thesis has been one of holistic reflection. The results, discussion and conclusions have been a developmental pathway from the literature review and methodology.

My time spent engaging with this research as a part-time EdD student has made this a longitudinal development, and has developed other skills including resilience, determination and patience. My knowledge, practical research skills and academic practice have all developed significantly and I know that I am not the same student that I was at the beginning of this experience.

6.4 What can others learn?

There is other research on partnership working and education, and with the demise of the diploma there is an expectation of formal reviews of the process, although to what extent these might specifically include partnership working is unknown. As a result of my study, practitioners within 14-19 education and others interested in partnership working can learn how partnership working was viewed and understood by those developing and delivering the diploma. This is a relevant consideration for anyone in this sector engaged in or planning partnership work and wanting to consider practitioner, learner and parent opinions and experiences. Further to this, the consideration of how partnership working takes place in education and what is different about this is relevant. There are also consideration of present and historic socio-economic factors for the North-East region which affected and influenced participation in partnership and educational and economic engagement which may be of interest. My exposition of *collaborition* is unique and may also interest practitioners and educational commentators or theorists. While new developments and initiatives come and go, central tenets and practices such as partnership working will remain important. My approach to the thesis, reflections on bias and stance, and methodological choices and rationale will be of interest to other doctoral students or academic researchers.

6.5 Recommendations

The recommendations formed as a part of this research are related to the importance of partnership working within 14-19 education, either as a policy requirement such as with the diploma, or on the basis that partnership working is an enduring mode of working that needs to be recognised and developed within education.

In the first instance, a further study into defining interpretations and meanings of partnership within the complexities of 14-19 education delivery would be meaningful and would help bring greater clarity to those working to develop and deliver all qualifications within this sector. Secondly, further work to include learners and parents more fully as stakeholders is essential, both to inform the development and delivery of qualifications, particularly whatever may be developed to replace the diploma, and to increase agency and inclusion for the learners and their parents. Thirdly, I would be interested in exploring further the notions of power, hierarchy and control in partnership working that arose in my study. Although the limitations of the thesis meant that these could not be fully explored, the concepts of power that were recognised remain of interest. Finally, I would like to undertake further study to inform and develop the concept of *collaborition* to fully explore what it is that makes partnership working in education unique and distinctive.

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Appendices

Appendix a. Questionnaire covering letter.



School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences
King George VI Building
Newcastle University
Queen Victoria Road
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 7RU

Date

Research into 14-19 Diploma and Partnership working

Dear Sir/Madam

You have received this as you are currently undertaking work related to the development and delivery of the 14-19 Diploma.

I am a doctoral research student at Newcastle University. I am currently undertaking research for my thesis which investigates partnership working in the regional development and delivery of the 14-19 Diploma. I am happy to provide further details regarding this study on request, as would my supervisor, Professor Ann Briggs.

Partnerships of this kind are relatively new, and understanding of how they work is limited. I would therefore be grateful if you would participate in this research, however great or small your involvement currently is in the partnership, by completing an electronic questionnaire giving your opinions regarding the 14-19 Diploma and partnership working. I am aiming to obtain wide coverage of the different aspects of the partnership working in relation to the Diploma and I would therefore be pleased if you would also circulate this message to colleagues working in this area.

No information that could be used to identify you or your colleagues will be obtained through this survey. This will enable you to provide confidential responses to the questionnaire: individual respondents (such as yourself), employers and partnerships will not be named in any report. In return, a summary of the results will be available by request once the research has been completed.

The questionnaire is available via this web address:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=YAZBN1HF6iDFEjE2heyxJQ_3d_3d

I am grateful for your consideration and participation, and would welcome any questions that you might have regarding this research.

Many thanks,

Gillian Mabbitt PGCAP MLitt FHEA
gillian.mabbitt@ncl.ac.uk

Appendix b. Electronic questionnaire schedule.

Section 1: About You

- 1.1 What is your age? (drop down selector – 18-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, 70+)
- 1.2 Gender (male/female)
- 1.3 Who is your principal employer? (Open box for text entry)
- 1.4 What is your current role with that employer? (Open box for text entry)
- 1.5 How long have you been in your current role? (Year selector)
- 1.6 What is your current role in the 14-19 diploma consortium? (Open box for text entry)
- 1.7 How long have you been a member of this consortium? (Year and month selector)
- 1.8 Have you previously worked in partnership with this/these groups or people? (Yes / No)
- 1.9 How long have you been involved in partnership working with these groups/people? (Year)
- 1.10 Any further comments or information in relation to any of the questions in this section? (Open text box)

Section 2: Policies

2.1 About the purpose of the 14-19 diploma (strongly agree – strongly disagree)

- *The 14 – 19 diploma provides a practical qualification to suit a range of students*
- *The 14 – 19 diploma provides an appropriate qualification option between vocational qualifications and A levels*
- *GCSEs and A levels should have been replaced by the 14 – 19 diploma*
- *The 14-19 diploma should replace GCSE / A levels in the next 5 years*
- *The benefits of the 14-19 diploma for students are clear*

2.2 Policy implementation and embedding (strongly agree – strongly disagree)

- *Bureaucracy within the consortium gets in the way of achieving the consortium goals*
- *External policy decisions impede the work of the consortium*
- *Government policy prevents collaborative working*
- *Government 14-19 policy has been fully embraced by the consortium*
- *The consortium has been able to implement Government 14-19 diploma policy*
- *Government 14-19 policy has been fully embedded by the consortium*

2.3 Existence and effect of vocabulary and language specific to partnership and partnership working. (strongly agree – strongly disagree)

- *Partnership language is used to comply with government policy*
- *The use of partnership vocabulary is necessary to obtain funding*
- *Specialist vocabulary has been useful to communicate within organisations across the consortium*
- *Specialist vocabulary has made government policy difficult to decipher and implement*
- *There is no specific vocabulary of partnership*

2.4 Length of funding and support for the 14-19 diplomas. (strongly agree – strongly disagree)

- *The funding for our consortium is secure for the next 5 years*
- *The funding for our consortium is adequate*
- *Lack of supportive funding is a barrier to collaborative working*
- *There are funding inequalities between organisations within the consortium that are a barrier to collaborative working*
- *The consortium will be able to be self sufficient after the initial period of delivery and funding*

2.5 Any further comments or information in relation to any of the questions in this section? (Open text box)

Section 3: People

3.1 Who is involved in the consortium?

(Selection list – choose all that apply)

- 11-16 schools*
- 13-16 schools*
- 11-18 schools*
- Sixth form colleges*
- FE/Tertiary colleges*
- Universities*
- Learning and Skills Council*
- Local Authority*
- Connexions*
- Training Providers*
- Work Based Learning Providers*
- Other Employers*
- Other*

3.2 How many people do you think are involved in the consortium? (scroll down number selector)

3.3 Do you think the number of people in the consortium are:

(selection list – choose 1)

- too many*
- too few*
- about right*

3.4 What motivates people and organisations to be involved with the 14-19 diploma consortium?

(selection/ranking list choose top 3)

- Government funding*
- Job continuity*
- Belief in better qualification*
- Belief in better system*
- Support for government initiative*
- Want to make a difference to young people*
- Part of job role*

3.5 What motivates people and organisations involved in the policy to work as a consortium?

(selection/ranking list choose top 3)

- Government funding*
- Job continuity*
- Belief in better qualification*
- Belief in better system*
- Support for government initiative*
- Want to make a difference to young people*
- Were already working together*

3.5 How do you feel the number of organisations and individuals in the consortium effects how it works? (open text answer limited to 100 characters)

3.6 Any comments or further information in relation to any of the questions in this section? (Open text box)

Section 4: Power

4.1 About consortium dynamics. (strongly agree – strongly disagree)

- The consortium members have common objectives
- The work of this consortium is strategic
- The rewards for consortium working are real and tangible
- There are rewards for working as a consortium for the partners
- There are benefits to working as a consortium for the young people who will take the qualifications
- There are rewards for working as a consortium for the individual members involved
- My loyalties lie with my organisation, not the consortium

4.2 There are other dynamics involved in the partnership and these are: (open text box)

4.3 About the division of roles and responsibilities between members of the consortium and how this is decided.

- The division of roles and responsibilities is equally shared between members
- The division of roles and responsibilities is shared according to role in the home organisation
- The division of roles and responsibilities is shared according to expertise
- There has been no formal division of roles and responsibilities

4.4 If one member of the consortium is delivering diplomas and another isn't how will this impact on the consortium? (open text box)

4.5 About enablers to working successfully as a consortium. (strongly agree – strongly disagree)

- Agreement on the purpose of the consortium helps the consortium to succeed
- By working as a consortium we are more effective than we would be separately
- The consortium shares common objectives
- All consortium members contribute to the work
- There is ownership of the consortium by the members

4.6 About impediments to working as a consortium. (strongly agree – strongly disagree)

- Lack of shared purpose is a barrier to collaborative working
- There is too much conflict between organisational loyalties and consortium loyalties
- Lack of funding is an impediment to working successfully
- There is a lack of commitment from some partners
- The consortium is too large for partnership working to be successful

4.7 About power and decision making in consortia. (strongly agree – strongly disagree)

- Power within the consortium is not shared as it should be
- Dominant members are a barrier to more collaborative working
- Some members have higher status than others
- Competitiveness between organisations creates real problems for the consortium
- Difference in status prevents collaborative working

4.8 Leadership. (strongly agree – strongly disagree)

- Leadership of our consortium rotates between partners
- Leadership of our consortium is mainly carried out by one person
- A clear leadership structure helps the consortium to succeed
- Accountability is not clear within the consortium
- No-one dominates our meetings

4.9 What are the external influences on partnership activities? (Open text box)

4.10 Communication (strongly agree – strongly disagree)

- Formal links and arrangements between members help the consortia to succeed*
- Informal links between members help the consortia to succeed*
- Involvement in consortia meetings is constrained by the location of consortia members*
- Agreement on the purpose of the consortia helps the consortia to succeed*

4.11 Equality (strongly agree – strongly disagree)

- There is broad involvement of each organisation within the consortium*
- Frequent efforts are made to involve all consortium members*
- I am satisfied with the level of co-operation within the consortium*
- There is a lack of commitment from some consortium members*
- There is clear ownership of the process by the members*

4.12 Any comments or further information in relation to any of the questions in this section? (Open text box)

Section 5: Conclusion

You may confirm completion of the questionnaire from this page.

Please use this space to comment on anything else you wish to add. (Open text box)

Thank you for participating.

If you would be willing to participate in a short interview to discuss these issues further please complete your email address.....

Appendix c. Practitioner interview consent document.

An investigation of partnership working in the implementation and delivery of the 14-19 Diploma

Interview Participation

This research is being conducted by Gillian Mabbitt of the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences at Newcastle University.

Purpose: This study investigates partnership working within consortia preparing to deliver or delivering the 14-19 diploma.

Participants: In order to qualify for this study, you must be involved with the preparation, development or delivery of the 14-19 diploma.

Procedure: You will participate in an interview about your opinions regarding partnership working and the 14-19 diploma. The interview consists of a combination of set questions as well as the opportunity to freely contribute. The interview will last for approximately 45-60 minutes and will be digitally audio recorded.

Risks and benefits: There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this study. The results obtained will be used as the basis of an academic thesis.

Voluntary participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The alternative to participate in this study is to not participate. What this means is that you can decide to not participate. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, at no penalty. Withdrawal from the study will in no way prejudice your future interactions with the personnel administering or supervising the study, or with Newcastle University.

Confidentiality: All identifying information obtained from this study will be kept strictly confidential, except as may be required by law. No information that could be used to identify you will be used in the study. Data files will not contain potentially identifying information. Upon written request you can be sent a summary of the results of the study. Individual respondents (such as you) and partnerships will not be named in any report.

Consent: I have read and understood the above information, have had any questions answered satisfactorily, and I willingly consent to participate in this study. I understand that if I have any questions relating to the study or participating in the study that I can contact Gillian Mabbitt.

Consent to participate is indicated by participating in the interview.

Appendix d. Practitioner interview Schedule.

An investigation of partnership working in the implementation and delivery of the 14-19 Diploma

Interview Schedule

CHECKLIST

- Introduce project briefly and state desire to know their opinion/thoughts
- Ensure interviewee has received the information sheet
- Interviewee consent form to be signed
- Demographic details to be completed before interview begins
- Dictaphone: prior to recording, interviewer records type of interviewee, recognition symbol e.g project manager, teacher, school/college location, time and date.
At end of interview, interviewer records end of interview with... time, location.
- Notepad if refusal to be recorded, identifiers as previous.

INTRODUCTION

(Note – the first two questions are to establish rapport and interviewee's role, and seek general information regarding her/his awareness about the 14-19 diploma and partnership working.)

1. To begin, it would be useful if you could tell me something about your role?
2. Can you tell me how you view the role of your organisation in the partnership?

POLICIES

3. What effect do you think a change of government might have on the 14-19 diploma?
4. What do you think is the purpose of the 14-19 Diploma?

POWER

5. Do you think there is competitiveness between members of the partnership, and if so, how is this demonstrated?
6. Who do you feel leads this partnership and how well do you think it is led?
7. What benefits do you feel there are for your organisation/workplace for working in this partnership?
8. What do you consider your organisation/workplace to have 'paid' for working in this partnership – what is the 'cost'?

9. If you couldn't use the word 'partnership' to describe this sort of work, what would you use?

10. How do you feel your loyalties are shared between your organisation and the partnership?

PEOPLE

11. What does working in partnership mean to you?

12. Do you feel that you are working in partnership?

13. What factors encourage local organisations to work together in collaborative arrangements like partnerships?

14. In your view what factors inhibit collaborative arrangements?

PROCESSES

15. What do you consider to be the mid / long term future for the partnership? Why?

16. How vulnerable do you feel the diploma processes are?

EQUALITY

17. Are there inequities between partners? If so, what are they and how are they dealt with/managed?

18. Do you feel that anyone has been left out of the partnership, and if so, why?

CONCLUSIONS

19. Is there anything you would like to add that you feel you haven't had the opportunity to include elsewhere during the interview?

Appendix e. Learner consent document.

An investigation of partnership working in the implementation and delivery of the 14-19 Diploma

Learner Interview Participation Statement

My name is Gillian Mabbitt and I am a student in the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences at Newcastle University.

Purpose: My research looks at partnership working between the schools, colleges and individuals who deliver or prepare the 14-19 diploma.

Participants: You are all studying a diploma qualification and I am interested in your thoughts and opinions as part of my work.

Procedure: I would like to ask you all some questions about your opinions regarding working together and your experiences of the 14-19 diploma. I have some questions that I have written that I would like to ask, but you will also have the opportunity to freely contribute.

Risks and benefits: There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this study. The results obtained will be used as the basis of my work for my degree.

Voluntary participation: Participation in this study is voluntary – you do not have to participate. There are no penalties for not participating – I am asking for your help with a study.

Confidentiality: All identifying information obtained from this study will be kept strictly confidential, except as may be required by law. No information that could be used to identify you will be used in the study. Records and data files will not contain potentially identifying information. You will not be named individually in any report and your parents, teachers or other school staff do not have access to the results.

Consent: Consent to participate is indicated by participating in the interview.

Thank you!

Appendix f. Learner question schedule.

Learners Question Schedule

1. Are you enjoying the diploma? (more than you previously enjoyed school)
2. How/Why did you choose to do the diploma?
3. What would you have done if you hadn't done the diploma?
4. Are you doing different parts of the diploma in different places?
 - a. What do you think about doing different parts of the diploma in different places?
 - b. Where else have you been?
 - c. What's the biggest difference?
 - d. What's it like working with learners/teachers from other schools?
 - e. What do you enjoy the most about the diploma?
 - f. What has been the biggest challenge?
 - g. Have you had to travel very far? How do you feel about that?
5. How do you feel about doing a totally new course and qualification?
6. Do you feel you have been included in decisions about the qualification?
7. Do you feel that people work together well to enable you to study the diploma?
8. Have you seen or heard any of the adverts for the diploma?
 - a. Which ones?
 - b. What do you think of them?
9. Have you got other friends doing different courses?
 - a. How do you think the diploma compares to what they are doing?
 - b. What do you tell your friends about the diploma?
10. What do you tell your parents about the diploma?
11. Is there anything you would like to say about the diploma?

Thank you!

Appendix g. Parent consent document.



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2nd February 2011

Research into 14-19 Diploma and Partnership working

Dear Sir/Madam

I am a doctoral research student at Newcastle University. I am currently undertaking research for my thesis which investigates partnership working in the regional development and delivery of the 14-19 Diploma. I am happy to provide further details regarding this study on request, as would my supervisor, Professor Liz Todd.

Partnerships of this kind are relatively new, and understanding of how they work is limited. I would therefore be grateful if you would participate in this research by spending a few minutes of your time giving your opinions regarding the 14-19 Diploma and partnership working. I am aiming to obtain wide coverage of the different aspects of the partnership working in relation to the Diploma and have spoken to a wide range of people involved in 14-19 Diploma development and delivery, including learner, teachers, industry professionals and academics. I would like to include the thoughts and opinions of parents such as you to ensure that there is representation of all stakeholders in relation to this new qualification.

No information that could be used to identify you or your child will be obtained through this survey. This will enable you to provide confidential responses to the questionnaire: individual respondents (such as yourself), employers and partnerships will not be named in any report. In return, a summary of the results will be available by request once the research has been completed.

I am grateful for your consideration and participation, and would welcome any questions that you might have regarding this research.

Many thanks,

Gillian Mabbitt PGCAP MLitt FHEA
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Appendix h. Parent question schedule.

Parents Question Schedule

1. How did you first hear about the 14-19 Diploma?
 - Info from school
 - National campaign

2. How do you feel about the Diploma being a new course and qualification?

3. Do you feel that you have been well informed about the diploma by the school/place of education

4. How do you feel about your child doing different parts of the diploma in different places?

5. Do you feel you have been included in decisions about the qualification?

6. Do you feel that schools, colleges and employers are working together well to provide the diploma?

7. What has your child/children told you about the diploma?

8. Is there anything you would like to say about the diploma and partnership working?

Appendix i. Sample interview transcript.

28/05/09 0900

What does working in partnership mean to you?

It's... It means that you are answerable to and accountable to a partnership of people and organisations, and that there is some sort of contract, verbal rather than particularly written down, I think, in terms of expectations, communications and join up that we try to achieve in order to do the best in whatever format we're doing. If it's the diploma itself, obviously the key thing is delivery for those students so they do as well as possible on it, so there is a lot of transfer of information should be going on, there is a lot of communication should be going on, there are all sorts of... defining, especially in its first year, defining of relationships and responsibilities in that process. I think as this moves into a more common experience for people, a lot of those teething problems will be sorted out, but there have been a lot of issues raised with the first year of running this in terms of communication, in terms of responsibilities, etc etc etc.

So do you feel that in relation to the 14-19 work, that you are working in partnership? Or is it something else?

Yes, but, erm, I think the percentage of effort being put in is somewhat differentiated, and if that is somewhat critical I would sort of hedge that by saying that it's our biggest focus. It's not necessarily the biggest focus of the people back in the schools, and so there is an element where we have a view about what needs to be done and it's very much in the forefront of our mind, but people in the schools with 15 or 20 other things going on that we know nothing about, sometimes miss out on things that perhaps they ought to have told us about, or don't give the full push that perhaps we'd like in order to achieve things, and that is, I think, just a fact of life.

So, what factors do you think encourage local organisations to work together in collaborative arrangements like partnerships?

Erm, that's a nice question. If we're talking local organisations, educational organisations, there has to be a motivation in terms of them seeing the point of it for their students, the point of it for their students you could unpack into a whole range of reasons why, why that is appropriate to them, but if we just leave it at the moment that there is some point to their students being involved in doing something and that requires a partnership and so there's the motivation comes into it. Now, where you move to on that is the question of why perhaps other people haven't been involved in the partnership and choose not to be involved as well. So we have 4 schools involved in the creative and media, and I don't think it's much different in the other diploma lines, and that's because other schools have either said it's too much of risk, it might not work, or, the critical mass of numbers isn't anything like sufficient for us to change the culture and practice and organisation of the school in order to accompany this, to accomplish this. Because in order to achieve the diploma working in N. T. you have to re-organise your whole timetable in a school and 4 schools, 3 schools have done that, one didn't have an issue as it's a different kind of school, and the other school said no. So, you can work backwards from that, if that's their motivation for NOT getting involved, their motivation for getting involved is either that they felt the organisational changes that are necessary to achieve it could be done without the massive drag of doing it, or they felt so strongly that this was educationally a good thing to do, and that that outweighed the pain involved. So that's their motivation, and I think in perhaps some cases there's a competitive motivation in terms of heads in particular feeling for one reason or another that they want to have a flag flying that says 'we're doing this', and some people want to get in on the ground first because they think that there are benefits that people coming in later on won't gain. Put all that together.

Appendix j. Sample page from research journal.

