Developing Connexions

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Developing Connexions – Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities

Young people with disabilities, mental health needs or autistic spectrum disorders

Nic Rowland-Crosby
Alison Giraud-Saunders
Paul Swift

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A two and a half year project evaluating the support offered by the new Connexions Service to young people with learning difficulties, young people with physical impairments, young deaf people, those with visual impairments, young people experiencing mental health problems or those with autistic spectrum disorders.

For further information about this project, newsletters, web based materials and past interim reports please contact fpld@fpld.org.uk or telephone 020 7802 0300.

For further information about the work of the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities, please visit our website www.learningdisabilities.org.uk email: fpld@fpld.org.uk or telephone 020 7802 0300
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Glossary

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<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APIR</td>
<td>Assessment, planning, information and review framework</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASD</td>
<td>Autistic spectrum disorder</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAMHS</td>
<td>Child and adolescent mental health services</td>
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<td>CSNU *</td>
<td>Connexions Service National Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>DDA</td>
<td>Disability Discrimination Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>DfEE</td>
<td>Department for Education and Employment</td>
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<td>DfES</td>
<td>Department for Education and Skills</td>
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<td>DH</td>
<td>Department of Health</td>
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<td>DRC</td>
<td>Disability Rights Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>DWP</td>
<td>Department of Work and Pensions</td>
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<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>Local authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>LDD</td>
<td>Learning difficulties and/or disabilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>LEA</td>
<td>Local education authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>LSA</td>
<td>Learning support assistant</td>
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<tr>
<td>LSC</td>
<td>Learning and Skills Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>NEET</td>
<td>Not engaged in education or training</td>
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<td>NVQ</td>
<td>National Vocational Qualifications</td>
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<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Personal Adviser</td>
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<td>PCP</td>
<td>Person centred planning</td>
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<td>RNIB</td>
<td>Royal National Institute for the Blind</td>
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<td>Royal National Institute for Deaf People</td>
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<td>SEN</td>
<td>Special Educational Needs</td>
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<td>SENCO</td>
<td>Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator</td>
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<td>SSAFA</td>
<td>Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association</td>
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</table>

* Throughout the report ‘Connexions Service National Unit’ (CSNU) has been used when referring to the central government body responsible for supporting local Connexions Partnerships. Recently the unit merged with other departments within the Department for Education and Skills. The new unit responsible for supporting Connexions Partnerships is called the ‘Supporting Children and Young People Group’ (SCYPG).
Acknowledgements:

Most importantly of all, thank you to all the young people who participated in this project. There are too many of you to mention. Your input has been fantastic.

To all the hardworking Connexions people who have supported the project, organised meetings, sent out agendas, and identified people to take part, especially: Claire Bradley, Julia Copping, Debbie Farthing, Elizabeth Filmer, Deborah Huggons, Sue Hughes, Gary Longden, Joanne Parker, Martin Patrick, Amanda Payne, Jane Riley, Rosemary Robbins, Jackie Sanders, Lee Tether and Elaine Thomas.

Thank you to the Department for Education and Skills, the Connexions Service National Unit and the national Learning and Skills Council for funding this project. Thank you to all the people who attended or participated in the national Steering Group and the local Steering Groups.

A special thanks to Pat Donlan for his support in the early stages and a valuable critical eye throughout the project.

With special memories of Jenny, a committed and person centred Personal Adviser who listened to young disabled people and made them feel very important.

Symbols, pictures and photographs have been used throughout this report. All permissions for use of photographs were given by those appearing in them. Acknowledgements to CHANGE Picture Bank, People First Picture Bank, Somerset Total Communication and WIDGIT Symbols.
Chapter 1 - The Project

Easier to Read Summary

An evaluation of the Connexions Service and the support that it offers to young disabled people

The Department for Education and Skills funded this project, with extra money coming from Connexions Service National Unit and the national Learning and Skills Council.

The project started in February 2002 and ended in July 2004.

The project set out to find out about the new Connexions Service and the support they offered to young disabled people.
The project covered five Connexions Services across the country. Each area had a group of people who listened to what the project found out.

There was a national steering group with people from the Department for Education and Skills, the Valuing People Support Team, the Connexions Service National Unit, the Learning and Skills Council and people from different voluntary organisations.

The project produced three early reports. The final report is available to download from the internet and has lots of information about supporting young disabled people to take part in consultation and in the development of children’s services in the future.
The Final Report

This report has a number of key tasks:

- To provide Connexions Services with an easy-to-use evidence base.
- To enable Connexions Services to use this information as their service undergoes further development in integrated service delivery.
- To provide partner agencies and professionals with an understanding of the key learning from this project and how a multi-agency approach (as highlighted in the Green Paper and the Children Bill) should be supporting young people.
- To provide evidence and practice guidance on involving a wide and diverse group of young people in ongoing service development and one-to-one.

This report and the accompanying web-based resources develop this evidence base and will help to enable ‘every young person to get the best start in their life’.

The report presents the learning and findings of two and a half years’ work. It has been split into four sections to ease navigation. Each section begins with an easier to read explanation of the contents of the chapter and highlights the key learning.

- **The Project** – An explanation of Connexions, how the project was set up and how young people were identified to take part.
- **The Evidence** – A detailed account of all the evidence that was gathered through the work of the project from many sources and individual learning points that accompany each piece of evidence.
- **The Learning** – Exploring all the evidence and learning from the previous chapter to identify clear learning points that need to be shared with all participants.
- **The Future** – Applying the learning to a discussion about future directions in children’s services and the role of independent advice and guidance within those developments.
What is the Connexions Service?

**Summary**

Connexions offers information, advice, guidance and opportunities to think about what you want to do in the future and in your spare time.

You can talk about school, going to college, getting a job, getting involved in voluntary activities and what support you need to help you do this.

Any young person between the ages of 13 and 19 can talk to someone at Connexions. Sometimes Connexions Personal Advisers can support young people up to the age of 25.

The support is offered by Personal Advisers. Personal Advisers work in schools, youth clubs and other places where young people meet.
You can also talk to Connexions Direct by phone, text messaging, webchat and e-mail. Connexions Direct is open all year round between 8am and 2am. The service is confidential and easy to use. It offers advice on lots of things like learning, careers, housing, money, health and relationships.

Connexions have offices – mostly near the centre of town - which are open to all young people.

You can find out about your local Connexions by asking a teacher at school, your tutor at college or a social worker or nurse or logging onto www.connexions-direct.com

(Extract from Connexions Direct and SSAFA¹ leaflet designed by the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities. SSAFA, 2004)

Evident from both the reference section in this report and by visiting the national Connexions website (www.connexions.gov.uk), there is an immense amount of information about the service, methods of delivery and examples of practice. There is a detailed explanation of the Connexions

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¹ SSAFA – Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association
Service in Appendices 1-5. In addition to the extract above from an information leaflet, here is a brief introduction to the Connexions Service.

Central to the Connexions Service is the Personal Adviser (PA). The Personal Adviser is charged with delivering advice and guidance to young people at a school, college or other setting. Their work and the work of the service is enshrined in these eight principles:

- Raising aspirations – setting high expectations of every individual;
- Meeting individual need – and overcoming barriers to learning;
- Taking account of the views of young people – individually and collectively, as the new service develops and as it is operated locally;
- Inclusion – keeping young people in mainstream education and training and preventing them from moving to the margins of their community;
- Partnership – agencies collaborating to achieve more for young people, parents and communities than agencies working in isolation;
- Community involvement and neighbourhood renewal – through involvement of community mentors and through personal advisers brokering access to local welfare, health, arts, sport and guidance networks;
- Extending opportunity and equality of opportunity – raising participation and achievement levels for all young people, influencing the availability, suitability and quality of provision and awareness of opportunities;
- Evidence based practice – ensuring that new interventions are based on rigorous research and evaluation of 'what works'. (Department for Education and Employment, 2000).

The work of the Personal Adviser is further underpinned with six key values as outlined in the Code of Practice for Personal Advisers published by the Connexions Service National Unit (CSNU) in October 2003:

- Personal Advisers must work in the best interests of young people, placing the young people’s needs, welfare and interests before their own beliefs and values.
- Personal Advisers must work to establish and maintain the trust of young people, providing an appropriate and agreed level of confidentiality in all their dealings with young people.
Personal Advisers must promote the rights of young people when working with other voluntary, statutory and community organisations, advocating on young people’s behalf and ensuring there is a coherent approach to support for young people.

Personal Advisers must, wherever possible, engage parents, carers and families in supporting young people, upholding their trust in the service.

Personal Advisers must uphold the integrity of the profession at all times.

Personal Advisers must be responsible for reflecting on their own professional practice and for taking steps to maintain, improve and update their own knowledge and skills so they are able to continually deliver a quality service. (Department for Education and Skills, 2003).

In the first years of delivery Connexions Personal Advisers were identified as holding one of three roles. This distinction is particularly important with reference to learning identified later in this report. The three roles were:

- Universal or generic Personal Adviser
- Targeted or personal support Personal Adviser
- Special educational needs Personal Adviser.

When supporting a young person with special educational needs, the Personal Adviser has a certain number of tasks that must be completed (see Appendix 2). These include:

- Attending the school Year 9 transition review and ‘co-ordinating and overseeing the delivery of the transition plan’.
- Completing a Section 140 assessment of any student identified as having learning difficulties and or disabilities in the last year of their compulsory schooling or when they leave sixth form provision.

The past two years have seen a concerted national drive towards a ‘fully differentiated service’, i.e. a service able to offer a differentiated response to an individual young person. Alongside this has been a rapid and often seismic period of development for the whole service.
Description of the Project

This was a two and a half year project funded primarily through a Section 64 grant from the Department for Education and Skills (formerly the Children and Young People’s Unit at the Department of Health). Extra funding was given by the Learning and Skills Council and the Connexions Service National Unit to support specific work with young people with autistic spectrum disorders.

The project proposal set out three key aims for the project:

- To evaluate the impact of the Connexions Service and the access of young people with disabilities to education, training and employment choices;
- To monitor the Connexions partnerships’ compliance with key objectives of Connexions;
- To provide real comparisons of young disabled people along with non-disabled peers with regard to accessibility of key services.

A project co-ordinator was appointed in February 2002. The project was carried out by staff from the Institute for Applied Health and Social Policy, King’s College, London, who relocated to the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities at the Mental Health Foundation in November 2003.

A national steering group, whose remit was both to steer the project in line with the three aims and to learn from and share the findings as they emerged, oversaw the work of the project. Members included representatives from: the Department of Health, the Valuing People Support Team, the national Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Development Team, the Department for Education and Skills, JobCentre Plus, the Learning and Skills Council, Connexions Service National Unit and representatives from voluntary organisations (including the Council for Disabled Children, the National Autistic Society, the Royal National Institute for the Blind, the Royal National Institute for Deaf People and Young Minds. Three interim reports were presented.

The project set out to identify four project sites through contacting Connexions Services that had been part of the initial 12 to go ‘live’ in 2001.
A fifth site was added after the start of the project; there the work focused on young people with autistic spectrum disorders. The services were confirmed as:

- Black Country Connexions
- Cornwall and Devon Connexions
- Humberside Connexions
- Nottinghamshire Connexions
- South London Connexions.

The project followed an ‘action research’ methodology with the emphasis being on sharing learning through the project. This enabled the local areas and national representatives to take learning from a very early point and start using it as part of the new service’s development.

**Example:**
During interviews with Connexions Personal Advisers in the summer of 2003 it was clear that there was little or no knowledge in local Connexions Services about adult protection as outlined in ‘No Secrets’ (Department of Health, 2001). This was shared with the Connexions Service National Unit and the project team assisted in writing an insert in the Code of Practice for Personal Advisers (CSNU/Department for Education and Skills, 2003).

Three interim reports were written and shared with both the national steering group and the local steering groups. The local groups asked for individual local reports and where this was appropriate they were provided.

The reports were also shared across an informal network of other Connexions Services and linked professionals; the learning was widely shared from early in the project with a large number of people.

The final product of the project focuses both on the evaluation and on ways of involving young disabled people both in the work of the project and in the development of local Connexions Services.

**Example:**
The project supported eight young disabled people in becoming involved in the work of the local Youth Boards or Connexions Young People’s consultation forums.
Making the Project Work

Looking at the three aims for the project as quoted earlier, the project team set out to investigate and explore them in the following ways.

Aim 1: Evaluate the impact of the Connexions Service and the access of young people with disabilities to education, training and employment choices:

- Through following groups of young people over a two year period where all of these young people were going through one or more transitions in learning environment or training provision.

- Meetings were held at the end of academic year 2001 - 2002, in the winter and spring terms of 2002-2003, at the end of the academic year 2002 - 2003 and in the autumn term 2003.

Aim 2: Monitor the Connexions partnerships’ compliance with key objectives of Connexions:

- Through consultation and questionnaires sent to the five participating Connexions Services and through interviews with Personal Advisers and Team Managers.


Aim 3: Provide real comparisons of young disabled people along with non-disabled peers with regard to accessibility of key services:

- Through interviews with young people who use the Connexions Service and through interviews with Personal Advisers and Team Managers in local Services.

Finally each participating area identified a specific geographic area within which they wanted the project to focus. This resulted in two services focusing on rural areas and three on urban areas that included diverse populations and areas of high and low income.
Recruiting Young People

The project set out initially to identify groups of 10 young people in each area, representing each of the four following groups:

1. **Young people with learning disabilities or difficulties:**
   These young people are likely to demonstrate mild, moderate or severe intellectual impairments and consequent learning difficulties, and they are likely to have had special educational services designed to help them achieve aspects of the national curriculum.

2. **Young people with physical disabilities:**
   These young people are likely to have physical disabilities that moderately or severely limit their ability to participate fully in educational or employment activities without special care programmes or equipment.

3. **Young people with sensory impairments:**
   These young people are likely to experience diminished or no vision or hearing in a way that limits their ability to participate fully in educational or employment activities without special care programmes or equipment.

4. **Young people with mental health problems:**
   These young people are likely to have experienced psychological disorders that leads to behaviour toward themselves or others that curtails their ability to participate fully in educational and employment activities without special care programmes, medication or equipment.

Soon after the start a new group was added: those with autistic spectrum disorders, as it was felt by all concerned that their needs were identifiably distinct from the other groups. This work attracted the extra funding already mentioned and the addition of one new fieldwork area.

5. **Young people with autistic spectrum disorder:**
   These young people will have a clinical diagnosis that places them within the autistic spectrum, for instance Asperger’s syndrome, autism, semantic pragmatic disorder. They are likely to have had or need
specialist support services designed to help them achieve aspects of the national curriculum, further education or work and related training.

**Definitions**
Different agencies use different definitions to identify these client groups.

The Connexions Services and the Learning and Skills Council define a person with ‘learning difficulties and/or disabilities’ (LDD) as:

Someone who ‘has a greater difficulty in learning than the majority of persons of his/her age, or
He/she has a disability that either prevents or hinders him from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided by institutions providing post-16 education or training’

(Learning and Skills Council, 2002)

In some cases the phrase ‘special educational needs’ (SEN) is used. This phrase does not only include those with statements, but also those young people who require ‘extra’ or ‘specialist’ support that enables them to participate in learning and education.

**Language**
The language used in this report follows the Disability Discrimination Act language and reflects the preferred language of the ‘disability movement’. Hence the word ‘disabled’ precedes the word ‘person’ or ‘people’ as this reflects the fact that the person is disabled by society. When describing different young people, the word ‘impairment’ is used to describe a medically diagnosed condition or illness. This is the case for both young people with physical and/or sensory impairments. The exception to this is the use of the word ‘deaf’, which the ‘deaf’ community prefers to ‘sensory impairment’. The project has tried from the outset to use the preferred language of the ‘disability movement’ as opposed to government definitions.

This is reflected in the use of the phrase ‘learning difficulties’, the preferred words of the self-advocacy movement, as opposed to ‘learning disabilities’, even though this may include a much larger group of young people.
In order to enable the project team to focus on outcomes for the young people and the work of the local service, decisions were taken about which age groups should be included and how this could be done.

These decisions were made based upon both the project team’s knowledge of the work of Connexions and the long standing problems with the transition process identified by ‘Bridging the Gap’ (Heslop et al., 2002) and other pieces of research including ‘Hurtling into the Void’ (Morris, 2000).

There are two key transitions within the age span covered by Connexions: from 16 into post-16 learning and at the age of 18-19 covering the move into both the adult world of work and support from adult social care. Bearing in mind Connexions’ responsibilities for promoting learning and work, young people chosen as the focus for the project were those experiencing:

- The move from Year 11 into further education or sixth form
- The move onwards at 19.

This was done by asking each area to identify, through negotiation with other areas, which age range they wished to work with:

- either those aged 15 to 17 (school years 10 - 12)
- or those aged 17 – 20.

The project team could then follow cohorts of young people, meeting with them four times over the period of their move from either Year 10 to Year 12 or the move from their second year post-16 onwards.

A smaller group of young people with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) were recruited and less emphasis was put on their age, although it was hoped to follow them through one move during the two years.

The nature of autism, in particular the difficulties experienced by people with autistic spectrum disorders around social interaction, mean that many find it difficult to accept new people in to their lives. New people, change and interaction are skills which many people with ASD find difficult. Respecting this, and by restricting the size of the group, the project hoped to release time to build relationships with individual young people through increased interaction.
This approach enabled a much more diverse group of young people to participate in the project.

Once it had been decided which area was working with whom, the five local Connexions Services set out to identify young people to take part. They did this through involving the specialist SEN/LDD Personal Advisers who had a reasonably up to date knowledge of who to invite to take part. The project developed various versions of an introductory explanation, in some cases using symbols or photos dependent upon which group of young people it was for. The local service would then send this out to young people, or the Personal Adviser would take it along to a school group and ask if any of that group would like to be involved.

Each young person participating was paid a £10 gift voucher as a ‘thank you’ for his or her time and expertise. The young people were also assured that their names would not appear in any reports, either local or national. Photographs were only used after permission had been given. Every young person was asked to share the information about the project with their parents, who were provided with a consent form (again some of these forms were adapted to include symbols and/or photos).

There were particular difficulties in some areas around identifying young people with mental health problems who would be interested in taking part and a number of additional ways of contacting and inviting this group to participate were tried. This included the project team contacting local CAMHS teams directly. It also proved quite difficult to identify young deaf people or those with visual impairments to take part in two of the areas. The reasons for this formed some valuable early learning for the project around the storage of information, how it was shared within local Connexions Services and the relative invisibility of certain groups of young people.

- Management information systems should identify young people on their database with specific information about their impairment or difficulty.
- Not identifying them means that they are less visible to the service as a whole (so their needs may not be met) and work undertaken by a Personal Adviser may duplicate work undertaken by another.
- Links between Connexions Services and the local CAMHS were poor or non-existent at this early stage of Connexions Services (this finding related to the first/second year of service delivery).

In total 125 young people have taken part in the project; some stayed with the project all the way through from start to finish, whilst others took part in one or two consultation meetings or completed questionnaires covering the topics discussed at consultation meetings. The target for the project had been approximately 170. The main reasons for the shortfall were low take-up generally in some areas, and particularly amongst young people with mental health problems and those with sensory impairments. In order for the project to consult with at least some people within the Connexions age range who had experienced mental health problems, two meetings were held with two groups at an educational facility that was part of a mental health residential unit for young people. There were also a number of older people (20 – 28) who took part in one area; they provided invaluable guidance and feedback on how Connexions could work and what sort of support they felt would have helped earlier in their lives.

Table 1: Numbers of young people taking part in the project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Learning difficulties</th>
<th>Physical impairment</th>
<th>Sensory impairment</th>
<th>Mental health problems</th>
<th>Autistic spectrum disorders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First round</strong></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6 (22+ years )</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Second round</strong></td>
<td>53</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8 (20+) 13*</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Third round</strong></td>
<td>52</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8 (20+)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fourth round</strong></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14* 2</td>
<td>4 (20+) 10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Questionnaires

A number of parents were interviewed, mainly in one rural area where some meetings were held at home. One parent support group was also interviewed. The parents added a useful perspective and provided key issues that are included within this report.
Involving and Consulting with Young People

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) as main funders of the project were clear that they wanted a key outcome of the report to be examples of different ways of involving young people both on an individual level and in the development of local services.

Most participating Connexions Services have Youth Boards and often had representatives of the Youth Board on their management committees. When the project started there were few disabled young people taking part in the Youth Boards and other consultation methods used by the services. The work of the project forms the basis for the learning highlighted later in the project and informs good practice on involving young people locally in service development.

In order to have some level of consistency across the whole group of young people taking part, the questions used to develop discussion and interaction had to be easily accessible and understandable to include both those who were very skilled at communicating and those who found communication, especially with new people, extremely difficult. The project followed a ‘total communication’ approach using relevant tools such as symbol cards, photographs, drawing and sign language where appropriate for the individual or group. How people chose to communicate was established either through consultation with the group or by talking to professionals and family members who knew the young person best.

For some young people, especially those with autistic spectrum disorders, there were additional considerations to be taken into account. For many young people with ASD, meeting and spending time with new people is very stressful and difficult. In order to respect this, the project worker spent time with those participating in the project during activities at their school; this included going swimming, doing some cooking, sharing lessons and sharing lunch. This proved both an exceptionally good way of including a wider group in the consultation and also valuable learning for the project in
terms of skills required by Personal Advisers if they are to support each and every young person in an appropriate way.

The questions were designed to capture information enabling the project team to look at the outcomes for the young people by the end of the project; these would include the ‘distance traveled’ and the changing perception of adult life and the future. Questions were also asked about Connexions, including about the young person’s knowledge of their local Connexions Service, what support had been offered and how Connexions had helped, if at all. There were questions about good and bad support and how young people felt Connexions could offer a better service. The answers provided by the young people were heavily influenced by the newness of the Connexions Service and how widely awareness and knowledge about it had been spread locally.

Key topics for interviews were:

- What do you want to do when you grow up / leave school?
- What do you know about Connexions and Personal Advisers?
- What makes good support and bad support?
- How could Connexions do a better job for young people?

For some young people these questions were much too complex; where this was the case, the emphasis was on making it relevant to the young person. So for some the questions focused on their favourite lessons at school or the best things they were doing at college. In another example, rather than investigating how much people knew about Connexions, some young people were asked to name their Personal Adviser and explain what they did or if they had met them.

The emphasis was very much on including the most diverse group possible in the project and modeling good practice in consultation. Thus people were met on their terms as opposed to having to fit in to certain ability groups who could then take part in a prescribed process. This may run counter to established methods of evaluation or research, but the input from young people proved useful, appropriate and enlightening.
Consulting with Connexions Services, Personal Advisers and Partner Agencies

Connexions Services are between one and three years old. At the time of the beginning of this project, and in particular when the consultation with Connexions Services and their partner agencies took place, the ‘newness’ of the service was reflected in both the responses to questionnaires and the overall understanding of what Connexions do.

Each of the five Connexions Services were given a questionnaire which covered areas of work, their responsibilities, key principles and partnership working. All the services completed and returned their questionnaires.

A similar questionnaire was sent to representatives of partner agencies as identified by local Connexions Services. These included CAMHS teams, learning disability services, children’s social services, health professionals, local Learning and Skills Councils, JobCentre Plus and community and voluntary groups.

The development of the role of the Personal Adviser was one of the highest profile developments and, as so many were new to the role, the consultation exercise with these local Personal Advisers was not carried out until the second year of the project. The interviews with Connexions Service workers followed a set questionnaire that included space for discussion. Interviews were completed with a number of different Connexions Service workers, including Team Managers, Personal Advisers and specialist advisers.
Chapter 2 - The Evidence

Easier to Read Summary

This chapter explains all the evidence gathered throughout the two years of the project.

The evidence is split into four sections:

1. What young people said.

2. What parents and carers said.
3. The Connexions Service and Personal Advisers.

4. Partner agencies.

The chapter includes many individual learning points that are then explored in further detail in the following chapter, ‘The Learning’.
The focus of the project was the views of young people using the Connexions service, their parents and carers. Their involvement in interviews, consultation and discussions at various points in the life of the project produced an immensely rich and informative body of evidence about the development of Connexions in the five sites.

This chapter presents that evidence under sub-headings that represent key themes emerging from the testimony of the young people, their parents and carers:

- The experience of growing up and leaving school
- What people know about Connexions and Personal Advisers
- What makes good help and support
- How Connexions could do a better job for young people.
What young people said

*The experience of growing up and leaving school*

Thinking about the future: aspirations and dreams

As with any group of young people asked about what they want to do when they grow up and leave school, those in the project expressed a range of individual aspirations for the future. These included working on a building site, being a hairdresser or beauty therapist, racing motorcycles, joining the army, being a body-piercer or tattoo artist, learning about agricultural engineering, working on ‘my dad’s farm’, working at a leisure centre and being a cartoonist. This selection goes some way to demonstrating the extent of their expectations of adult life, especially their hopes for finding work that interests them. Distinction can be drawn between work employment and occupation as highlighted by Grove (2002):

- Work - something you do for other people
- Employment – work you get paid for
- Occupation – anything you do to pass the day, including things you do for yourself.

In this case young people were speaking about earning money; this was their prime reason for looking for work/employment.

Aspirations and dreams were not just focused on work and employment; often the young people’s comments included where they wanted to be living, what they could do in leisure time and their social circle. Young people spoke of where they wanted to live, who they wanted to live with, some of the things they liked doing in the holidays or at the weekend. This was often important information in relation to the work of a Personal Adviser as it gave insight into favoured activities or pastimes, friendship...
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groups and things that would need discussing with other professionals or family members supporting the young person.

For some, thinking about the future was difficult or stressful due to the nature of their impairment or disability, e.g. autism. Where this was the case, the focus of the interview was shifted to less threatening subjects: what the young person did during the day, their favourite subjects or lessons and what they did away from school or college. This approach meant that these young people could talk about their interest in cooking, involvement in tasks such as mowing the lawn, and activities like watching trains or shopping.

Despite their difficulties engaging with the project, it was clear that these young people had many aspirations for their future, whether linked to education and work or in other parts of their life. The main lesson here related not so much to raising these aspirations or expectations, but more to the ways in which young people can be consulted, and how their views and comments should be respected and acted upon by the people supporting them.

Learning point:
Young disabled people are excited about the future. They want to find a job, make money and have a full and exciting adult life.

Thinking about the future: concerns and fears

A significant number of young people felt there was little chance of them getting even an interview, let alone holding down a job in the future. Many believed employers did not want to employ disabled people, either because
they felt this would be more troublesome than employing a non-disabled person, or the disabled person would not be able to do the job. In one young woman’s experience:

‘Employers don’t want deaf people, it makes it too difficult for them, it’s going to be hard to get a job…especially if you’re deaf.’

In addition to this, some young people were clear that, although they were enjoying their college course, the absence of appropriate training and skills work (for example, in the areas of travel, interviews and presentation) from the curriculum meant they did not feel adequately prepared for the world of work.

**Learning point:**
Many young disabled people do not think they have much chance of getting work, because of their disability or impairment.

**Work experience**

Work experience was an important issue for the young people in the project and was discussed at length. Those undertaking work experience at school or college felt that it had really helped, although it had been a bit scary at first. For pupils at special school this was a particular issue as many had not been able to take part - either through lack of opportunities, or because the school had been unable to release the young person’s Learning Assistant. This latter reason is of particular concern since the funding attributed to a young person because of their statement of special
educational needs should include support from a Learning Support Assistant for the individual to attend a work experience opportunity. If support is dedicated to an individual pupil, the question must be asked why schools cannot release the member of staff to provide the support outside the school. An example of this was where a sign language interpreter was required to enable a young woman to take up a week long work experience opportunity. Similar issues were experienced by young people if they needed any sort of personal care support during the day.

Besides work experience, practical learning experiences of the world of work and link courses run by colleges were regarded as most useful by young people, as illustrated by this young man’s comments during a discussion about thinking of going to college: ‘Thinking about going to college makes me worry … visiting the college helped’. Visits and presentations by college tutors were also valued.

**Learning points:**
Young disabled people want the same access to work experience as their peers. This is especially important for young people at school. Link courses help young people not to worry about going to a big local college.

**Transport**

Amongst issues that young people felt would restrict their ability to choose a college and when thinking about work possibilities was ‘transport’. This included both transport to and from college and using public transport.
Example:
One young man was two-thirds through his college course when, upon reaching his nineteenth birthday, his local education authority-funded transport was withdrawn. He faced an uncertain summer whilst his Personal Adviser and others appealed against this decision, highlighting the fact that the young man would be unable to complete his course and gain a qualification that would enable him to look for employment. Eventually the Local Education Authority (LEA) relented and he was able to undertake his final year at college, which needless to say he was very happy about. This issue of LEAs setting age boundaries for funding transport was often quoted by those participating in the project as being a real issue for students who might be attending a local college for three or more years. The young man in this example lived in a very rural area, but this was a common complaint in many urban areas as well.

Some young people, echoing comments made by their parents and carers, talked about their personal safety whilst using public transport. They had experienced bullying, abuse, extortion and theft from both their peer group and members of the general public.

Learning point:
Transport arrangements frequently impact both upon the young person’s ability to complete their college course and on their ability to get around their home community/town.

Opportunities and choice

Young people were clear that one of the most restrictive barriers to exploring their dreams for work and the future was a paucity of
opportunities available to them locally. They identified three components to this barrier: access to vocational courses, disclosure of problems experienced by the young person, and information about career options.

**Learning point:**
The same variety and range of opportunities open to non-disabled young people is not available to young disabled people.

- Access to vocational courses:
The academic entry requirements for some courses often disqualified young people with disabilities from pursuing a chosen career.

  ‘I want to learn about electrics and being an electrician but I'm not clever enough … you have to have a lot of GCSEs’

This was considered to be unfair because some of the young people believed they could succeed in a given career if their special needs were recognized – for example, being given more time to complete such courses.

Others complained about offers of places on courses being based upon impairment or disability rather than the young person’s aspirations.

**Example:**
Out of a class of five young people at one special school, three expressed an interest in photography as a career option. Yet none had been offered a course incorporating this preference and instead had been offered college placements based upon their physical impairments and support needs. The importance here is the fact that the students’ preferences for areas of study were not seen as the primary factor when identifying appropriate further education opportunities.
A further source of dissatisfaction for some was the lack of appropriate courses at local colleges. Having to go away from home to study was not viewed with enthusiasm by many young people. One young woman lamented the fact that:

‘I have to go away to college so that I can learn about looking after horses… I’d like to stay at home but there is nowhere near enough…’.

Indeed, when offered a choice, most young people preferred to either stay at home or attend a weekly residential school in their home community.

**Learning point:**
Qualification barriers stop young disabled people pursuing their chosen field of work.

The availability of local opportunities means that some young people have to go away to college whether they would choose to or not.

**Disclosure:**
Disclosing a disability or mental health problem could have a negative consequence for young people pursuing a college course or job. This was particularly the case for the young people with mental health problems who felt that if they told a future employer that they had had difficulties in the past they were much less likely to be offered an interview or get a job. Several told stories of being approached in the street by teachers from their school not directly involved in their education, who nevertheless asked if they were ‘feeling better’. They were most unhappy to think that they and their problems were being talked about in the staff room.
Learning point:
Young disabled people expect personal information to be treated as confidential and with respect.

• Information
Information about vocational and other opportunities was often requested by young people in the project, but was not always available to them. In particular, they wanted information that was easy to understand and which could be taken home and shared with family members and carers. They spoke of wanting to be able to take information home, and finding a lot of the information given to them difficult to understand; one young woman spoke of how angry all this information made her feel. She felt it showed how little people understood how difficult this was for her.

Learning point:
Information is often complicated, multi-coloured and not presented in a way that enables young disabled people to make good use of it.

The young people taking part in the project had clear dreams and aspirations for their future, in relation to education, work and other aspects of their lives. But at times they were also distressingly pessimistic about their chances of achieving them. They were vocal about some of the barriers they faced in attempting to access a college course or follow a career path of their choosing. Their suggested remedies were simple -
they wanted: to be treated in the same way as their non-disabled peers; to access opportunities that would enable them to move towards their aspirations for work; to have a place to live; and to have their views and opinions treated with the same respect as comments made by the people who supported them.

What young people know about Connexions and Personal Advisers

At various points during the project, young people were asked what they knew about Connexions and Personal Advisers. To begin with the general level of knowledge was low as none of the services in the five areas had been established for more than a year: young people were rarely able to name their Personal Adviser and if they knew anything at all about Connexions it was as ‘the new name for the careers service’.

Knowledge about Connexions and the identity of their Personal Adviser grew between the first and second periods of consultation, by which time most young people were able to name their Personal Adviser and recall a meeting they had had with him or her. When questioned about what Connexions do, however, the overwhelming response continued to centre on its role as a careers advisory service, with a general lack of appreciation about the extended role of Connexions.

This was especially true of students attending special schools and of those undertaking discrete\(^1\) courses at a further education college, while those attending a mainstream school were likely to have a better understanding of what Connexions offered in terms of a holistic service. But there were exceptions, most notably where ‘targeted’ Personal Advisers were deployed.

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\(^1\) Discrete – term used by college and further education to describe separate provision for students within mainstream colleges or learning provision.
Example:
At one school there was a noticeable difference in young people’s knowledge about the extended role of the Personal Adviser. At this school there was both a ‘careers’ focused Personal Adviser and a ‘targeted’ Personal Adviser. The young people knew they both worked for Connexions and the different roles that they held. Four of the students talked about spending time with the ‘targeted’ Personal Adviser at a time of crisis in their life. This example is referred back to later in the report as an example of good practice.

Only a small number of young people had visited their local Connexions office; where they had done so, it was usually at the request or with the encouragement of the Personal Adviser. Yet using the local office could be a significant factor in young people’s perception of the service.

Example:
One Personal Adviser set up all the annual Connexions reviews for a Year 11 class at the town centre office and the young people felt very ‘valued’ and important walking into town and visiting the office. This also helped demonstrate the fact that the Personal Adviser was independent from the school and thus encouraged students to visit the office more frequently, especially during the school holidays.

Over the two years of the project knowledge of Connexions and the service they provided improved noticeably. However, there continues to be a lack of knowledge about the extended service that Connexions offers and the support available through the work of what were historically called ‘targeted’ or ‘intensive’ Personal Advisers.

Learning points:
Young disabled people were learning about the new Connexions Service and the help they can get.
Small-scale ideas can have a great impact on how young disabled people feel about themselves and their experience of mainstream services. They did not know much about the ‘extended’ support available to them from Connexions.

What makes good help and support

The purpose of asking young people about the support they receive was to explore how Connexions might use consultation to inform their service development. Placing the answers alongside the input from Personal Advisers would also help managers understand both how the present role of the Personal Adviser is working and how it might be developed further.

This proved a particularly challenging question for some of the young people in the project, possibly because (although they were being encouraged to talk about the future) they were rarely asked to comment on the support they received. Nor was it easy to find ways to include as many young people as possible in the discussions it provoked. Several approaches were used, including ‘social stories’ or analogies, sometimes suggested by the young people themselves, to illustrate the concept of support.

Example:
In one school the analogy of restoring a motorbike was suggested as a way of helping the young people there to think about all the different assistance they might need to accomplish the task. In another school we drew a picture incorporating the essential qualities required of the ‘perfect PA’ (pictured on the next page) – apparently he or she would be characterised by unfeasibly large ears for listening, a welcoming smile and a big heart for caring for all the young people!
The exercise produced feedback filling many pages, from which the key qualities a young person might look for in a good Personal Adviser have been distilled:

- An approachable person, who smiles and has a good sense of humour;
- Someone who looks at me when they are talking to me and speaks clearly and slowly;
- Someone who is not patronising and treats me like a grown-up;
- Someone who is an expert and knows what they are talking about – understands the disability or difficulty I have;
- Someone I have known for some time, who knows about what kind of support I need, who knows what I want to do when I grow up and whom I can trust;
- Someone from outside school, whom I can meet at different times;
- Someone I can call at the weekend or in the holidays if things are getting difficult.

Some of the young people were able to extend the discussion to think about the Connexions Service more generally and the support they received from it. Again, the key to receiving good support was grounded in their relationship with a Personal Adviser:

‘[PA’s name] is not from the school, it doesn’t feel like talking to someone from school. [PA’s name] is just there for me, that’s really good.’ (Young man in Year 11.)

‘Being able to just drop in has been really good, it helped get used to this school.’ (Young man, Year 10, who had just transferred to mainstream school from a special school.)
‘I can visit [PA’s name] in the holidays.’ (Young man about to leave sixth form.)

‘Thinking about the future is scary’ – ‘Being able to talk to [PA’s name] has helped. It has helped me not worry about the future and college.’ (Young woman at college.)

However, the experience of working with Personal Advisers was not always so positive. During these discussions a number of concerns were expressed about the support young people had received:

- Young people with autistic spectrum disorders and those with mental health problems often felt that the Personal Adviser had little or no knowledge of their specific difficulties.

- For most young people, being able to develop a relationship based on trust was very important, but they did not always have long enough with their Personal Advisor to do this.

- Young people with mental health problems in particular talked about having access to a phone number or contact with whom they could talk outside normal working hours.

On the whole young people were clear about what made good support and many were able to develop this discussion to include the support offered to them by the Connexions Personal Adviser. Their comments about the qualities required of a ‘good support worker’ are relevant to the wider debate about the role of key workers, lead professionals and the development of integrated children’s services. The project has also highlighted a need for these questions to form the basis of ongoing consultation with young people about the support they want, and from whom they want it.
Learning points:
Involving young disabled people means being innovative and flexible in the way that young people are asked questions and supported in contributing. Young people have a clear understanding about what makes for good support.

The input from young disabled people will be central to future developments in the Connexions Service and local integrated children’s services.

How Connexions could do a better job for young people

Wherever possible, the young people in the project were asked to say how the Connexions Service could do a better job for them. This was perhaps the hardest question for them to answer, given that the Connexions Service was so new and its users were only beginning to find out about its work, the support on offer and how to access it. Nevertheless, the comments that were forthcoming served to reinforce the themes that had emerged in response to other questions about the young people’s aspirations and what constituted good and bad support. Moreover, the views of the young people responding to this question were generally grounded in positive dealings with the Connexions Service.

First, they suggested Connexions should prioritise the provision of clear and accessible information and paperwork for meetings and planning. One young woman said, ‘I would like to have some information about meetings with people beforehand, otherwise I can find it difficult’, while another asked for ‘information that I can take home’. A young man of 15 simply wanted ‘a
plan that I can understand’, because ‘I can remember my meeting, but I can’t remember my plan’.

Second, young people stressed the importance of listening to and acting on behalf of them, especially when other services were not doing so. A young woman recalled that ‘Connexions listened to me, not other people, they helped me do what I want to do, not what other people want me to do, I don’t have any criticisms to make.’

Third, they felt it was important for Connexions to appreciate what a young person was going through – in particular when someone was experiencing mental illness. A young man aged 21, who had received support from a voluntary organisation, ‘felt pressured to fill in forms and apply for jobs that I didn’t want – I think Connexions should work at my pace, I was really ill.’

Conclusions

Young people attached certain values to the support they received and wanted to receive from the Connexions Service. They generally had a clear idea about the future and, if asked, were able to identify the type of support they were likely to require to achieve their dreams and aspirations. This set an agenda not just for the project in its evaluation of the Connexions Service, but also for Connexions Services in their development of their role.

Finally, young people showed their willingness and ability to participate in a dialogue about Connexions when their communication needs were taken into account. For example, the project has demonstrated that a formal and fairly complex discussion may be possible using symbols and photos for people to choose from. As Connexions Services continue to develop, they will need to ensure that the young people they consult are fully representative of local populations and not limited to those with advanced skills in talking about complex and abstract themes.
What parents and carers said

Information was gathered from parents and carers in a variety of settings: at home, at a group meeting arranged by a local parents’ support group, and through telephone interviews. The evidence gathered through working with parents and carers is laid out under the headings used in the previous section. It is worth noting, however, that many, if not all, parents of disabled sons or daughters live with a high level of concern, worry and pessimism about the future. Accordingly, whilst the evidence presented here is framed around the headings, the consultation exercise also provoked a great deal of discussion around linked themes, ranging from information about direct payments and individual service design to individual problems with a teacher or other professionals.

Feelings about children growing up and leaving school

While many parents could talk of an ideal future for their son or daughter, they were constantly aware of the need to be ‘realistic’ and understood that their preferred future was unlikely to happen. In the absence of any specific ambitions for their sons and daughters, parents would always articulate a desire for them to be safe and happy. For parents of younger people within the cohort (i.e. those in Year 11), concerns about what the future might hold stemmed from a lack of knowledge and information about possibilities for the future.

There was an identifiable link between those parents who had few if any real ambitions for their child for the future and those parents who had had
bad experiences of services and agencies that were meant to be supporting them.

**Example:**
One parent had not received any support since they had moved home to a new area (because her son was so badly bullied). Her son refused to leave the house for most of the day as he continued to suffer bullying, and would often spend hours in his room. Despite repeated referrals from the parents, no health professional had visited or made contact with their son.

The parents and carers involved in this consultation wanted to think of their children’s future with excitement and expectation and yet few, if any, could do this. Instead they saw a future of problems, battles and worry.

**Learning point:**
Many parents had little faith in services supporting their son or daughter as they moved into the adult world. This caused them a great deal of stress and worry.

**Transport**

As was the case for young people, transport featured as a major concern for parents and carers. ‘Transport is the biggest problem for us’ said one mother, who spoke for many of those who contributed.

Personal safety when using transport was cited by one parent group as the biggest factor when thinking about sending their child to a residential learning provider at 16. For some parents the only transport ‘option’ involved them spending four hours a day driving their son or daughter to a special school because the LEA did not provide appropriate transport. In
some cases the young person’s autism meant they found it difficult to cope with constant changes in their taxi driver, and in the same way the changing of escorts could cause distress and worry.

For other parents the concerns around transport arose from their rural location where their children were dependent either on what little public transport existed, if any, or LEA-funded transport that would be withdrawn when they reached the age of 19. In one case, already cited earlier, the Connexions Personal Adviser supported the family in appealing against the LEA’s decision and the young person was able to complete their course at college, but another case had a less fortunate resolution.

Example:
Following a severe seizure, the young man/woman was unable to attend college for two or three months. By the time he/she had recovered sufficiently to resume college on a part-time basis, his/her transport had been withdrawn. As the young person was only able to attend on a part-time basis, there was no reinstatement of transport funding and, although the situation was eventually rectified, it left the young person and his/her family unwilling to return to college to complete the course.

Learning point:
As highlighted by young people, transport can have a disproportionate impact on young people’s ability to take part in post-16 learning. Parents and carers were particularly concerned about safety and bullying when their sons or daughters used public transport.
Work Experience

There was one specific example that clarified many of the issues faced by young disabled people who were looking for work experience. This example in particular related to young people in Years 10 and 11 whilst still at school, although the learning is transferable when put alongside other people’s comments.

Example:
A father wanted to help their daughter to find a work experience placement close to the family home, rather than one in the locality of the residential school she attended. He identified an opportunity and informed the school. The young woman was profoundly deaf and relied on the support of a sign language interpreter. The father organised and booked an interpreter for the week – the school was not prepared to do this and would not have done so even if they had been able to organise a placement for her near the school, saying that they usually just introduced a young person and let them get on with the week’s work. As a consequence a dispute arose about payment for the interpreter.

The issue here is that, unless the interpreter had been present, it would have been impossible for the young woman to complete the week’s placement. Support for young people attending a work experience placement was cited frequently as a barrier to many young people in the project being able to take up these opportunities. Even when the school had employed an individual Learning Support Assistant (LSA) who was solely there to support the young person, the school was either reluctant, or refused, to release the LSA to support the young person. The key issue is ‘who is funding the support’? For a school away from home, the LEA pay the school to provide a service and from this particular LEA’s point of view this included support to attend a work experience opportunity. This issue needs clarifying urgently as it is likely to lead to a continuing lack of work experience for young people who require support whilst at work.
Learning point:
Echoing young people’s comments about work experience, there are not enough opportunities and too many problems put in the way of young people participating in work experience.

Opportunities and choice

For most parents, the question of opportunities and choices regarding post-16 learning for their child revolved around their safety and happiness, with only a few referring to ambitions or favoured subjects. There was a mix of views about their child going away to residential college or learning provision and the desirability of retaining links with their home area. In one inner-city area most parents advocated for residential provision because of concerns for their son or daughter’s safety. Connexions Personal Advisers and others were working hard to show that local provision was suitable and could provide the young person with good outcomes. This contrasted with the views of parents in a predominantly rural area, who were less likely to seek residential provision.

Learning point:
Parents based many of their decisions about the future on concerns about safety and happiness. Parents of young people living in inner-city or urban environments were more likely to advocate for residential learning provision post-16.
What parents and carers know about Connexions and Personal Advisers

The general lack of knowledge about the new Connexions Service and the confusion about its role and functions that characterised the testimony of the young people taking part in the project was also reflected in the responses from their parents and carers. Ironically, a mother desperate to identify any help for her son had not heard about Connexions. Having received the letter asking if her son would like to take part in the project, she hoped that the project might be able to help or support him. From this low baseline, parents’ and carers’ knowledge increased as the project progressed and Connexions became better established. Typical was the experience of another mother:

Example:
She knew a little about Connexions when we first spoke to her and found it difficult to understand what the service could offer someone like her daughter, who had complex learning difficulties and physical impairments. Like many of the young people we talked to, she thought that Connexions was simply a re-branded careers service and as such would have little of relevance to offer her daughter. However, during the first and subsequent interviews she and her husband came to realise that Connexions did have an important role for her daughter: not only were Connexions staff able to refer her daughter to the local Person Centred Planning Co-ordinator, but they provided information about direct payments and the Independent Living Fund and went through some of the different options that would be available to their daughter when she left school the following year.
Example:
The mother of another young woman described how she had approached Connexions seeking a mediator and advocate because, ‘things have got so bad between college and me ……perhaps Connexions could help sort some things out’. She felt that Connexions could help in liaising between the college and herself after a breakdown in communication and issues that had arisen about the support being offered by the college to her daughter. Connexions were able to assist by helping the mother and daughter identify a different college, which required out-of-area funding from the local Learning and Skills Council.

Troubleshooting and advocacy roles were particularly appreciated by parents and carers who felt overwhelmed by ‘the system’.

Example:
One set of parents was unaware that their son had been allocated a place at college until Connexions clarified with the college that this was the case. Connexions also put them in touch with other agencies, to explore future options for him. The mother’s relief was evident when she spoke to us. Her comment that, ‘Connexions helped sort out next year, I didn’t know what was happening’, illustrated the value that may be added to the service provided by Connexions where it is built upon longer-term relationships with parents and young people. In this instance, the Personal Adviser had known the family for sometime and knew that the parents both had difficulty with reading, a fact that had not been known by the college when it sent a letter to the family confirming the son’s place for the coming year. When the Personal Adviser eventually read the letter to the family, it relieved a lot of stress for the mother in particular.

Other parents were similarly keen to stress the value of maintaining a relationship with a professional during their child’s transition to adulthood. The mother of a young woman with physical disabilities appreciated the continuity of support offered by her daughter’s Personal Adviser:

‘[PA’s name] is the only person we know who we can contact. We don’t know anyone from any other service, even though [Young person’s name] gets support from lots of people. Connexions are the only people who stay in touch with us.’
As awareness of the role of, and support offered by, Connexions grew where parents had had direct contact with the service, they became increasingly positive about the support they had received. It was clear, however, that Connexions Services needed to include parents and carers to a much greater extent than they had previously. This was clearly displayed early on in the project where Personal Advisers had met with a young person more than once but their parents had no knowledge of this, or where the first time a Personal Adviser met with parents was at the Year 9 review, even though guidance for Connexions Services highlights as good practice a meeting with parents before the Year 9 review.

**Learning point:**
As parents’ knowledge of Connexions grew, they could see real benefit in the support offered. They would appreciate more involvement in the work of Connexions when a Personal Adviser is supporting their son or daughter.

**What makes good help and support**

Parents’ and carers’ comments reflected those made by young people, with a particular focus on maintaining contact with someone they knew well over a period of time. They identified a number of key ingredients of good help and support:

- A service that is easy to contact.

- Parents spoke about wanting to be sure that Personal Advisers had the best interests of the young person in mind and that this was
based upon a good understanding of their disability, illness or impairment.

- A priority for many parents and carers was to work with someone they could trust, having been let down in the past. When questioned about this, they responded by talking about needing someone who knew them and their child, who they felt would fight for them rather than the service, and someone they could contact easily.

- Parents appreciated Personal Advisers being independent from other statutory agencies, again emphasising the importance of the Personal Adviser as an advocate for the young person.

Some questioned the knowledge base of Personal Advisers. This may have been due to the Personal Adviser raising the aspirations of the young person beyond what the parent or carer deemed realistic – though whether this constitutes a positive or a negative quality in a Personal Adviser perhaps depends on one’s standpoint. Yet the biggest compliment paid to Connexions staff by parents was about their skills in providing information and expertise when thinking about post-16 opportunities.

Learning point:
The role of the Personal Adviser has a great deal of potential for supporting parents, in addressing issues causing worry and concern and being a point of contact.

How Connexions could do a better job for young people
The conversations with parents and carers led quite naturally on to some consideration about those aspects of the Connexions service that could be improved. Two key suggestions were made:

- **More information about benefits.** Parents in the project said they found the benefits system confusing and wanted up-to-date and easy to understand information about what they could claim and how this affected their son’s or daughter’s ability to look for work or receive help with their social care.

- **Flexible working hours.** Parents and carers wanted to be able to meet with their son’s or daughter’s Personal Adviser, yet often this was not possible when a Personal Adviser worked the same hours as they did. They felt that Personal Advisers should be able to work in the evenings so that they could meet with them.

**Conclusions**

The more that parents learned about the role of the Personal Adviser, the more they wanted to make contact and build some sort of relationship with their son’s or daughter’s Personal Adviser. It was clear during the life of the project that many of those parents whose sons or daughters were taking part benefited from an increased knowledge and an increase in access to the support offered through the local Connexions Service.
The Connexions Service and Personal Advisers

Having heard from young people, parents and carers, this report moves on to look at the evidence gathered through working with the participating Connexions Services and the Personal Advisers who work for these services.

The five Services participating in the project - the Black Country, Cornwall and Devon, Humberside, Nottinghamshire and South London - represented a mix of rural, small town and urban environments, affluent and not-so-affluent areas, and served young people from different ethnic groups. Black Country, Cornwall and Devon, Humberside and South London were amongst the first group of Connexions Services to go ‘live’ in April 2001, while Nottinghamshire went ‘live’ in April 2002. The focus in Nottinghamshire was primarily on supporting young people with autistic spectrum disorders, although some meetings were held there towards the end of the project with young people experiencing mental health problems. The services represented two different models of delivery, i.e. transmuted and sub-contracted (see Appendix 1). The sub-contractors included Prospects, CfTB and The Humberside Partnership.

Each area recruited (with varying degrees of success) a local steering group, which included a number of partners alongside representatives from the Connexions Service. A local Connexions Service representative supported the work of the project in each area by organising meetings, providing addresses and contact details, and supporting the identification of young people.
The views of Connexions Service providers

The input from each of the five services was gathered for discussion with local steering groups along with the responses to a questionnaire sent to service managers for each area in December 2002. The questionnaire explored:

- how the Connexions Service links with other agencies and organisations
- the workforce
- the role of Connexions
- and the outcomes achieved.

Linking with other agencies

In the early stages of the life of a Connexions Service, links to other agencies were focused predominantly at a strategic level, through membership of the Connexions Partnership Board and Local Management Committees. Some features of these strategic arrangements were:

- The Connexions Service usually provided a service across a number of local authority areas.

- The Connexions Partnership Board consisted of a number of senior or lead managers for local authorities, police, voluntary organisations and representatives of the area business forums.

- Each local authority area covered by a Connexions Service had a Local Management Committee, co-ordinated by the local Connexions service manager. This might draw its membership from the police, children’s services, youth offending teams, the Children’s Fund, local teenage pregnancy units and voluntary or community organisations.
The structures of the Connexions Services incorporated modes of working between individual Personal Advisers and social care professionals inherited from existing relationships between social care agencies and the old careers service. There were examples of Personal Advisers being placed in social care teams, specifically around certain ‘client groups’, particularly in youth offending teams. Links with the local CAMHS Team were less strong, an area mentioned by respondents as requiring further development. There was a general understanding that collaborative working practices needed to become more embedded in the culture of the services, although generally it was felt that a ‘good start’ had been made.

In many cases, links with different partners, whether at an agency level or school level, were formalised through the signing of ‘partnership agreements’ with schools, education welfare departments, youth offending teams and voluntary organisations. A partnership agreement set out the duties of the Personal Adviser and how the partner organisation will ‘accommodate’, support and work with the Personal Adviser and their Connexions Service. Most partnership agreements followed a standard format; however, these could be individualised to suit specific groups of young people or provision (this is explored later in the report).

**Learning point:**
A good start had been made in building links with other agencies and professionals. There was a long way to go to see these new relationships bear reward.

**Important characteristics**

Personal Advisers working with young people represented in this project came from a number of backgrounds. This service was typical in summarising its workforce:
'About 60% are ex careers service. Rest come from LA (Local Authority) youth service, education welfare, social services, Mencap, health, teachers, drug workers etc.'

The ‘backbone’ of Connexions were the Personal Advisers who came from former careers advisory services and had been complemented by professionals from other backgrounds, including social and health care, education welfare services, voluntary organisations, youth offending teams, speech and language therapy assistants and administration workers. One Service noted that it had gained:

‘Specialist knowledge and experience gained through the following previous professions: careers advisers, specialist careers advisers (LDD), disability employment adviser, social worker, voluntary and community sector, youth service, specialist training provider, NCH, residential special schools, speech and language support assistant.’

All of the Services regarded the attendant skill mix of staff drawn from such a diversity of backgrounds as a strength, enabling them to offer a more flexible and well-informed service. In particular, a number of areas valued the contribution made by people previously employed by specialist voluntary organisations.

‘Our ex Mencap PA has been a great asset bringing skills previously absent.’

More details about the employment histories and skills of Personal Advisers are provided later in this report.

**Learning point:**
A good mix of both careers guidance workers and those from other specialist backgrounds offered a better service to young people in the area.
Connexions Services were asked to explain their role both in supporting young people and in terms of being part of a multi-agency environment. Services described themselves variously as:

- Conduits, builders of links between partners, and a ‘catalyst to facilitate partnership working’;
- The ‘lead agency for provision of information, advice and guidance for 13-19 year olds, with aim of enabling them to remain, or return to, learning’;
- Leading on transition planning;
- Having holistic view of young people and being ‘proactive in a PCP (person centred planning) sort of way’;
- Advocates for young people.

While there was a perception that more joined-up working was taking place as the role developed, there was also a feeling that other agencies could be doing more to support the agenda set by Connexions Partnerships.

Example:
Early in the development of Connexions there was an expectation from central government that local services would, through their involvement in Connexions Partnerships, make both commitments and financial contributions to the delivery of the Connexions strategy locally. In the areas covered by this project there were few if any examples of this happening, a fact that seemed to be mirrored in many parts of the country. However, there was an example in Somerset where the Learning Disability Partnership had allocated resources to co-fund specific Transition Personal Advisers who worked for Connexions but were based with the local authority.
One respondent recommended specific developments that partner agencies could make to improve collaboration, including agreed eligibility criteria, a shared focus, criteria for joint working, and synchronization of reviews (e.g. social services with SEN/transition reviews). The predicted benefits would be ‘time saving for all, including parents.’

The central focus for Connexions Services then, was allying themselves with young people – ‘(we) advocate for young people, particularly in relation to progression and provision’ - and translating this into the arena of strategic planning.

Learning point:
Other local agencies need to work more closely with the local Connexions Service and the delivery of the Connexions strategy.

Outcomes

The overall activity and outcome of Connexions interventions was the increase in participation in learning of young people between the ages of 16-19; hence their concerted effort in decreasing the number of young people in the ‘Not Engaged in Education or Training’ (NEET) category (see below). In terms of the young people represented in this project, there was no single concrete outcome measured by the Connexions performance management system. Only where young people risked becoming ‘disengaged’ from learning would there be an impact on outcome related activity. This meant that particular energy would be devoted to preventing young people with mental health problems or those with moderate learning difficulties from dropping out of learning. For the majority of the young people in this project this would not happen due to the complexity of their
impairment and support needs. When asked directly, the only sort of outcomes mentioned by Connexions personnel were to do with participating in learning. The questions under this heading asked for examples of good and bad practice and any explanations of why this was the case.

Systems such as the SEN Code of Practice (Department for Education and Skills, 2002a) place upon Connexions Services an expectation that they will monitor and ‘flag-up’ positive and negative outcomes of their interventions for both individual young people and the service itself. Criteria to support performance assessment that were generally felt to be useful included Best Value processes, locally developed performance management strategies, regular reviews of both local and service-wide partnership agreements, and inspections from the education inspectorate, Ofsted.

Most importantly, the Connexions Service had one key outcome that did include many of the young people represented in this project – but not all. This target aimed to lower the number of young people falling into the category ‘Not Engaged in Education or Training’ (NEET). In addressing this target, each Service had endeavoured to make contact with every young person in its catchment area, to identify what they were doing and focus energy and resources on supporting those ‘not engaged in education or training’ back into mainstream services, often with specialist support. As noted above, this target did not include all young disabled people; on the whole it excluded those with more complex needs for support, who thus missed out on the extra energy and attention devoted to young people at risk of falling into the NEET category.

The national Connexions Service asked each service to complete an annual assessment of their position, which included information about the number of young people that they were not in touch with and the number of young people in their area falling into the NEET category. As identified in the National Audit Office’s report on the Connexions Service (2004), there had been a noticeable drop in the number of young people that services were not in contact with and a drop in the number of young people in the NEET category. According to the National Audit Office, the Connexions Service was on course countrywide to achieve its target of reducing the number of young people in the NEET category, with an 8% reduction up to November 2003.
One area where the Services had failed to achieve good outcomes was that of choice and opportunity available for young people. This had a direct impact on the ability of Services to deliver on their second key principle:

‘Meeting individual need – and overcoming barriers to learning.’ (Department for Education and Employment, 2000).

Significantly, from the service providers’ perspective, the other theme highlighted was what one respondent termed the ‘unrealistic expectations both strategically and with individual clients with the existing resource’. This referred in particular to the early marketing and publicity introducing the Connexions Service, and the expectations raised amongst partner agencies regarding the duties of the local Connexions Service and the support they would be able to offer.

The second part of the questionnaire focused on collating some feedback from the services following the sharing of the first project interim report. This is included later in the report under the section headed ‘The Learning’.

Learning point:
There was no single outcome measure for the work of Connexions in the support they offered young disabled people. The ‘NEET’ group did not include many of the young people represented in this project.
Talking to Personal Advisers

Interviews were organised with 28 Personal Advisers across the five areas, but did not take place until the second year of the project to allow newly appointed Personal Advisers time to become accustomed to their role.

The interviews were designed to explore four aspects of the Personal Adviser role:

- Background information
- Working practices
- Outcomes
- Training.

The 28 participants represented the full range of Personal Advisers (including those focusing predominantly either on mainstream, intensive/personal support or with an SEN specialism) and team leaders/managers.
Background information

Table 2: Personal Advisers’ backgrounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How long have you worked for the Connexions Service?</th>
<th>What did you do before this?</th>
<th>Make-up of the group (main role)</th>
<th>Have you completed or are you doing the Diploma for Personal Advisers?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20 since the start of the local service</td>
<td>21 worked as careers advisers</td>
<td>11 worked as ‘mainstream’ Personal Advisers</td>
<td>14 are completing or have completed the PA Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 have started in the last year</td>
<td>4 worked in education and post-16 learning</td>
<td>5 worked as ‘targeted’ Personal Advisers</td>
<td>8 have either completed or are completing the NVQ* in Careers Guidance, or already hold the Diploma for Careers Guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 worked in social care services</td>
<td>8 worked as Specialist SEN Advisers</td>
<td>6 answered ‘No’ to this question and did not mention any other qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 was an ex-graduate</td>
<td>3 held the role of team leader or manager</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 worked as a Learning Gateway Personal Adviser</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* NVQ – National Vocational Qualification

The size of caseloads varied across areas due to the differing focus of the Personal Advisers’ work. In mainstream work most Personal Advisers had a ‘potential’ caseload of 1,000+ (all Year 9, 10, 11 and sixth form students) within which they carried between 40 and 180 students with special educational needs. Those carrying a ‘targeted’ or ‘intensive’ caseload had an average of 20-25 and the caseloads of those solely supporting students with special education needs varied between 150 and 320.
Examples:
Caseloads of specialist SEN Personal Advisers involved in interviews:
- 170 approximately, all SEN or mental health problems
- 800 potential, 160 with statements (at specialist centre 8-12 others)
- All students with statements – 150 approximately
- 10-20 very closely (personal support) and another 40+
- 10 visual impairment, 10 physical disability, 30 severe learning disability, 100 moderate learning disability, 20 out-of-area attending three to four residential colleges
- 200 – actively about 30-40 all SEN
- 10 seen regularly – 16 ‘life skills’ two-monthly reviews (targeted support)
- 300 all SEN, most with statements
- 380 all SEN, most with statements
- 119 – 90% SEN
- 1,500 potential (20% SEN or School Action Plus)
- 200 – all SEN
- 320 all SEN
- 2,000 potential (+ duty), 20% at one school 33% at other with SEN

Defining ‘caseload’
‘Caseload’ in this case means the ‘potential’ number of young people that a Personal Adviser could see, i.e. in mainstream schools this is a large number as it includes every student in a year group. For a specialist SEN Personal Adviser this means the number of young people with special educational needs they are responsible for supporting. What form that support takes is discussed throughout this report.

Of those interviewed, a majority of PAs were based in one or more schools and also contributed to the duty rota at their local Connexions Office. Appointments were made with some young people at the local office as opposed to the school for a number of reasons, including exclusion or suspension of a pupil, or, on a more positive note, to encourage young people with learning difficulties to visit the office and identify it as a base for Connexions independent of school.
It is important to note that during the period of the project, the title ‘Personal Adviser’ was subject to much debate. First, the title denoted a number of similar, but differentiated posts within the service. The three key roles held by Personal Advisers across the five areas - ‘mainstream’ or ‘generic’, ‘targeted’ or intensive personal support’, and the ‘SEN specialist’ – attracted 25 different titles all with slightly different remits and job descriptions.

Second, Personal Advisers expressed concern about future development of the role. There is a continuing programme of development across all Connexions Services and during the lifetime of the project this was in the direction of a ‘single’ or ‘fully differentiated’ role as described by the Connexions Service National Unit. Both concepts imply the training of Personal Advisers in a number of skills including ‘careers guidance’, ‘personal support’ and counselling, and increasing the number who are experienced and trained in supporting young people with special educational needs. This approach was designed to lead to the development of a multi-skilled workforce, which, though perhaps focusing on a particular group of young people using specialist skills and knowledge, would be able to intervene and identify a range of problems or issues for an individual and respond appropriately.

This trend caused a great deal of concern, particularly for those PAs qualified as Careers Guidance Advisors who felt strongly that their professional qualifications were being devalued through this process. As one put it:

‘I didn’t do this job to be a social worker.’
Learning points:
Personal Advisers were organised and worked in very different ways in the five areas covered by the project. These differences were echoed across the country.

The ongoing development of services included a move towards a ‘single role’ or ‘fully differentiated role’ for Personal Advisers.

There were very different feelings held by Personal Advisers about this development.

Working practices

Personal Advisers were asked about specific and general working practices including their attendance at transition reviews, involving parents, knowledge of legislation such as ‘No Secrets’ (Department of Health, 2001) and their involvement in the development of local person centred planning initiatives.

- Personal Advisers with responsibility for a young person who had a statement for Special Educational Needs all knew about their responsibility for attending the Year 9 transition review. However, attendance was often difficult due to head teachers not informing the Personal Adviser until a few days before the meeting, having to visit a number of schools whose Year 9 Reviews were held on the same day, and lack of sick cover.

Practice regarding preparation with the young person and the parents varied across areas. Most Personal Advisers recognised the benefit
of being able to meet with the young person and their parents or carers, but often this was not possible due to workload. PAs sent letters to parents and carers introducing themselves and explaining their role at the meeting. One or two Personal Advisers visited a personal, social and health education class or held a careers lesson for young people at the beginning of Year 9, when they introduced themselves and discussed jobs, the future and some of the things young people wished to discuss.

Both head teachers and the Local Education Authority were seen as having a sizeable influence on how the Connexions Service was able to organise their Personal Advisers and enable one to be present at every Year 9 transition review.

- Section 140 assessments (see Appendix 2) formed a large part of any Personal Adviser’s workload, especially those with a large number of young people who had learning difficulties and/or disabilities on their caseload. Practice in the completion of these varied both across areas and within teams, including which young people were eligible for an assessment under Section 140 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 and then what happened with the information once the assessment had been completed.

After the interviews had taken place, Connexions published a revised guide to the whole Section 140 process, including examples of good practice in the setting of criteria and guidance on who should receive one, the links between the Connexions Service and the local Learning and Skills Council and formats for the assessment. Each area across the country had developed their own paperwork, which varied from as little as a couple of sides of paper up to a whole 15 page detailed assessment and action plan.

There were few if any formal links established with the local Learning and Skills Council in terms of sharing the information gathered through this assessment process, which was contrary to the original intention of the assessment as outlined in the Learning and Skills Act 2000.
'For the purposes of Section 140 of the Learning and Skills Act, an assessment of a person is an assessment resulting in a written report of:-

(a) his educational and training needs, and

(b) the provision required to meet them.’ (CSNU/DfES, 2004).

The key function of this process is to gather information that can then be shared with the local Learning and Skills Councils, which will enable them to plan more appropriately for the rising population of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Of the participating services at the time of the interviews with the Personal Advisers, only two had a formal procedure for sharing information. The other services were at different stages of development. However, engagement with local Learning and Skills Councils remained a real issue for Connexions Services in terms of learning provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

- As highlighted by both young people and parents, Connexions role as provider of information was central to their work. They were confident about having information about all post-16 options and knew where to get hold of information about specialist provision and support if they needed it. They often met with parents, at parents’ evenings at school or during reviews, and they sent information on if it might be of use.

There was some discussion about individual schools where historically students had been encouraged to stay on to the sixth form and the offering of information about non-sixth form provision was discouraged and even ‘banned’. Although infrequent, there were still examples of this, often in special schools because the school wanted to keep their sixth form or post-16 provision open rather than see its students leave to attend a local college.

- Time allocation was explained as being set down in the ‘Partnership Agreement’ between the local Service and the school. Time was divided up via ‘interview’ slots – however, when pressed, most
Personal Advisers felt that the overall time available to individuals was ‘needs-led’ as opposed to allocated per student at the beginning of the year. Some services were clearly trying to use rough time allocations in order to gain a picture of workload and size of caseload.

There were few examples of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) being able to access ‘targeted’ support similar to the support on offer to their non-disabled peers. This was especially the case at special schools where the support tended to focus primarily on careers and guidance work. This issue was raised through discussions about the offering of ‘open’ drop-in time with no need for appointments. One Personal Adviser commented that they had started off offering such time but that students had not used it.

28 Personal Advisers took part in the interviews.

14 offered drop-in time – many during their lunch hour.

Of the eight SEN specialist Personal Advisers, one offered non-appointment ‘drop-in’ time.

Of the four ‘targeted’ Personal Advisers, all offered non-appointment ‘drop-in’ time.

Of the 10 mainstream Personal Advisers, nine offered non-appointment ‘drop-in’ time.

- Most Personal Advisers involved in the interviews had some contact with professionals from other agencies. For some this meant attending a monthly multi-agency meeting at the school, being part of the transition sub-group of the local Valuing People Learning Disabilities Partnership Board or working on individual cases alongside others from different agencies. Particular difficulties were experienced in building links with the local CAMHS Teams and specialist health professionals.

Personal Advisers’ knowledge of formal arrangements included relevant ‘partnership agreements’ between their service and the agency. However, there were few formal agreements around transition work, leading to great variance in the support offered. Personal Advisers felt that this was a clear need as an area of
development, as they were often unclear about what everyone was doing and who was responsible for specific pieces of work.

Many comments were made about the proliferation of planning, assessment and reviewing processes across the agencies and Personal Advisers felt strongly that it would be much easier if there were a single framework that everyone could use.

Personal Advisers’ knowledge of developments in other agencies varied widely. Person centred planning was often misconstrued as a different means of assessing the support needs and aspirations of a young person. However, in two areas specific Personal Advisers had taken on a role as one of the professionals co-ordinating person centred plans for young people they were supporting. Knowledge of the ‘No Secrets’ legislation and the local ‘Protection of Vulnerable Adults Policy’ was very low and led to immediate action on the part of the Connexions Service National Unit with an additional sheet outlining ‘No Secrets’ and essential knowledge for Personal Advisers as part of the Code of Practice for Personal Advisers published for Connexions Partnerships in October 2003.

These findings relate to how things were in the summer of 2003. Much has changed, a theme consistent throughout the report, and joined up working has seen visible development. In one area the MENCAP project ‘Trans-active’ was introduced by Connexions Services to develop more joined up and accessible transition planning. In another, there were Connexions-funded developments around person centred planning and in another the specialist SEN Personal Adviser attended a monthly meeting of a multi-agency children’s team, led by social care.

- There was a great deal of uncertainty about decisions taken as to whether a young person qualified for continuing support once they had reached 19. This was backed up with real concern about what this meant for caseloads, which would continue to increase as young people progressed through to age 25, continuing to receive support from the Personal Adviser. In one area there was a formal hand-over as the young person left school to go to college and in another the Personal Adviser continued to support the young people whilst they were at college. However, in other areas transition to college or other
learning provision after school was less clear and relied on established links between individuals.

Learning points:
The speed of development in the delivery of the Connexions Service’s support to young people is reflected in the widely varying knowledge and working practices across the country.

There were specific areas of concern around ability to attend every Year 9 review, adult protection, person centred planning, moving on from college at 19 and the ‘knock-on’ effect on caseloads of supporting some or all young disabled people through until their 25th birthday.

Outcomes

There was universal agreement amongst Personal Advisers that the young person’s ‘happiness’ was the best indicator of a successful move on from school or college. There was no formal measure for this; it was generally acknowledged that this meant that there were no complaints from the young person or their family/carers. Respondents said they happily challenged other agencies if young people were unhappy with either their placements or the plans being made for them.

Formal outcome measures that impinged upon the work of PAs related to the young person being placed and then attending a place of learning and not falling into the ‘NEET’ category.
Learning point:
Personal Advisers saw it as their role to ensure that the young person was happy with the plans outlining future directions and saw it as their responsibility to advocate on the behalf of any young person who was not happy or satisfied with these plans.

Training

Most Personal Advisers had had basic awareness training around special educational needs, one area had provided training about dyslexia (albeit some time ago), while another had accessed a three-day training programme about mental health problems provided by a local early intervention service. (Personal Advisers praised this training highly and commented on how it helped them at work).

There was little evidence (as yet) of training around communication with young people who had communication difficulties, although individual workers often brought with them some skills in using ‘Makaton’ or sign language.

Training opportunities in mental health and autistic spectrum disorders were consistently listed as the priority areas that Personal Advisers wanted. Others listed were information about specific disabilities, communication, legislation and ‘what everyone else does’.
Learning point:
There was both a clear demand and a lack of training opportunities for Personal Advisers to develop their skills in supporting specific groups of young people. These include young people with autistic spectrum disorders, those with communication difficulties and those experiencing mental health problems.

Conclusion

The contributions of both the managers of the five Connexions Services and the Personal Advisers reflected the ongoing development of a new service, much of which had already changed since this project started (particularly in light of the Green Paper ‘Every Child Matters’ and the subsequent Children Bill published in February 2004). The key issues emerging from it for Connexions and their partners at local and national levels will be explored in more detail in the section entitled ‘The Learning’.
What Partners Said About the New Connexions Service and the Work of Personal Advisers

Much of the feedback from partner services illustrated how new the Connexions service was and how the message about the work of the Connexions Service was only just beginning to get out to the wider world.

One hundred and eight questionnaires were sent out to partner agencies in November 2002, of which 41 were returned. The addresses and contact names were supplied by the participating Connexions Services, following a request by the project for names of agencies the Connexions Service were either already engaging with or hoping to engage in the near future.

Respondents were asked to comment upon the profile, purpose and working links of their local service, its modes of working, and outcomes achieved.

A majority of partners continued to see the new Connexions Service as a re-branded careers service and were not aware of the ‘value-added’ service that Connexions were providing. Some themes coalesced around the different partner types.

**Colleges**

All the responses that were returned by representatives from colleges highlighted a number of problems with the working relationship between Connexions and themselves.
• The information provided to the college by the Connexions Personal Adviser about each individual student before they joined the college course or provision.

• There were concerns about an ‘over-expectation’ of students, particularly those with ‘challenging behaviour’, starting courses beyond their ability at that point in their lives. The concern from colleges was neatly summed up by one representative as ‘setting students up to fail’.

• Access to support from Connexions whilst students were at college was sporadic – a fact borne out in consultations where whole groups of students had never met a Personal Adviser from Connexions.

• Arrangements for moving on from college were raised by a number of respondents. Often this had been left to college staff to initiate and lead; this included organising final year reviews.

Some factors temper these comments. First, use of the Section 140 process was still in its infancy and was only just beginning to be used as a means for passing information about individual students on to the college of their choice.

Second, ‘moving on’ from college should involve not only the Personal Adviser, but also JobCentre Plus staff and, where appropriate, social care and health professionals.

Third, while the Personal Adviser could continue to support some young people until they were 25, this practice varied widely. It might include only those young people still engaged in learning, and the role could be taken on more appropriately by a social care professional, an employment adviser or someone other than the PA.
Learning point:
Colleges were particularly concerned about the move on from college and who would take responsibility for organising this.

CAMHS/mental health professionals

Although there continued to be problems with the numbers of young people with mental health problems taking part in the project, some of the most informed answers came from professionals working with this group. There was a clear understanding about how Connexions Services could complement the work of mental health professionals. This was borne out through feedback obtained from internet forums for CAMHS professionals asking for examples of practice between Connexions Services and CAMHS. One practitioner related how ‘support [from Connexions] in finding courses etc. raises self-esteem and morale of clients and so greatly helps their mental health’. There were several replies highlighting the development of joint working practices, including Connexions Personal Advisers as advocates alongside other professionals supporting young people and close informal links with an assertive outreach team. It was surprising therefore to discover that this same assertive outreach team was based in the area taking part in the project where there had been the greatest difficulties linking to CAMHS teams and finding young people to take part.

Learning point:
Mental health professionals saw real potential in the support that could be offered by the Connexions Personal Adviser to the young people they worked with.
Overview of feedback from other partners

Overall, agencies could see the benefit of working together and, while this remained in its infancy, there was a high level of optimism running through the replies about improving joint working practices. This was demonstrated by some of the actions undertaken by members of the local steering groups. For example, one Connexions Service received monies from the social care CAMHS development fund to employ two specialist mental health workers as Personal Advisers. These professionals supported other Personal Advisers by acting as ‘points of reference’ and by giving training across the whole workforce about mental health and the support available from specialist services.

Learning point:
Partner agencies viewed Connexions as still very new, as having some potential, but with much to do to reach that potential.
‘The Evidence’: Conclusion

The process of consultation, and the evidence generated from it, was flavoured by the newness of the Connexions Service. This meant the project had to take a step back and start from an ‘earlier’ point of reference, i.e. by focusing on what young people, parents and partner agencies knew about Connexions and their potential rather than focusing on how the service could be improved based on longer term experience of receiving support and working alongside the Service. Where discussion was had about improvements to service delivery, these focused more on past experience of support from professionals such as teachers, careers advisers and social care workers. This proved useful to the Connexions Service in terms of providing early indications about how young people expected the service to work with them. However, this affected the ability of the project to evaluate the Connexions Service against their eight key principles. Indeed, when asked about them, few if any representatives of partner agencies were able to pass judgement or comment.

The evidence gathered does, however, provide a good base from which to extract key learning points and developments that need to borne in mind as the Connexions Service prepares for another phase of development with children’s trusts, local safeguarding children boards and single assessment frameworks being developed across the country.
Chapter 3 - The Learning

Easier to Read Summary

What did we learn?
There were 4 important things we learned about.

1. We learned that Personal Advisers can do a very important job. But there were not enough Personal Advisers with the necessary skills to support all the young people in this project.

2. We learned about how Connexions tried to involve young disabled people in their service. Many young people in the project used different ways of communicating their thoughts. We found that there was very little communication training or training about autism or mental health problems.

3. We found that the new Connexions Service and other people including Social Services were collecting a lot of information. This information was not always shared. This led to more assessments, plans and work being done than was necessary. All these assessments and plans were confusing for many young people.
4. We found some good examples of people working together to support young people. We also found that there is a lot of work to be done by Connexions and other services if they are to give ‘every young person the best start in life’. These include important things like work experience, leadership in local services and making sure there are good opportunities available for all young people.

Here we explain why we are saying these are important things for Connexions and others to do if they are to support individual young people in getting the future they want.

In brief, the learning from the project shows the value of a local Connexions Service and the work undertaken by Personal Advisers, including examples of good person centred practice. The learning discussed here relates to four key issues:

- The role of the Personal Adviser
- Involving young people
- Information
- Working with partners.

As these have relevance not only for the future direction of Connexions Services but also national developments around children’s trusts, the learning is presented along with the implications for integrated children’s services.

There is one theme that runs through all four issues: the delivery of a fully differentiated service.
The Delivery of a Differentiated Service

As outlined in the introduction and Appendices 1 to 5, the Connexions Service had been moving to both a ‘fully differentiated’ model of service delivery and a ‘fully differentiated’ role for their Personal Advisers. Drawing all the learning together from ‘The Evidence’ and ‘The Learning’ makes it clear that this was not available to most young disabled people. Some of the distinction came from whether the young person attended a mainstream school or a special school. Connexions Services often countered this criticism by saying that special schools only wanted part of the service Connexions could offer and made it clear that they (the school) wanted to take responsibility for other parts of the service on offer from Connexions. This meant that the young person missed out on the support of an independent person at times of crisis in their lives and was reliant on school personnel for support, even if the issue or problem was an ‘out-of-school problem’ or indeed a problem with the school.

The second contributing problem was the lack of training delivered to Personal Advisers to enable them to build relationships and interact with young people who often find communication difficult.

This issue for Connexions Services of delivering a ‘fully differentiated’ service’ is clear in the first three of the issues listed above and is also important in clarifying their role further in terms of ‘working with others’.

Learning points:
Connexions Personal Advisers did not offer a fully differentiated service to all young people.

To do this would require training, time and resources.

Being able to offer this support would clarify their role within a multi-agency environment.
The learning in this project is based upon the evidence gathered and the individual learning points identified in the previous chapter. It runs alongside and often relates to issues previously raised by transition-focused work, much of which has examined the transition process for young people with learning difficulties. For example, a study that informed the project from an early stage was ‘Bridging the Divide’ (Heslop et al., 2002). This large scale project, based predominantly on following and interviewing young people and their parents/carers through the transition process, identified 10 key points, which mirrored some of the findings of this project:

- A fifth of youngsters had left school without a transition plan.
- Almost half the young people had little or no involvement in the planning for their future.
- Lack of planning led to uncertainty and stress for some families.
- The quality of transition planning varied widely; in some cases it was ad hoc, confused and uncoordinated.
- The topics covered in transition planning were often quite different from those families considered to be important.
- For many young people, key issues (e.g. transfer to adult health or social services) had still not been addressed by the time they left school.
- Whether or not youngsters had received transition planning made little difference to what happened to them after they left school.
- There were few post-school options available to young people, particularly in relation to housing and employment.
- There was a lack of easily accessible information for parents and young people about what the future possibilities might be.
- Concerns raised by young people and their families (about personal safety and risk, money matters including benefits and transport) inhibited greater independence. (Heslop et al., 2002).

Much transition-focused research and development directed at young people with learning difficulties includes young people with autistic spectrum disorders. Two statistics convey a clear message around both the difficulties faced by young people with ASD and the lack of necessary support available to them, particularly in mainstream education:
- Children and young people with autistic spectrum disorders are 20 times more likely to be excluded from school than any other identifiable group of young people. (Barnard et al., 2000).
- A National Autistic Society report found that only 28% of learning support assistants had received any training in autism. 22% of schools had no assistants who had received any training in autism at all (National Autistic Society website helpsheet, undated).

These difficulties not only affect the work of Personal Advisers, but give further weight to the findings of this project about PAs’ needs for relevant skills and training - both generically and for those with a caseload that includes young people with ASD in the special school system.

Increasing prevalence, developments in diagnostic techniques and improved identification have led to clearer statistical evidence about young people who experience mental health problems. Data compiled by Young Minds suggests that as many as one in four young people experience mental health problems, whilst one in ten access specialist mental health services (whether residential or in the community). Against this background and the development of a national programme for CAMHS, backed up with £140 million of Government investment, local services have grown rapidly.

The Connexions Personal Adviser, as a frontline worker and often the one independent and approachable person in a young person’s life, offers a valuable resource for developing these services. One of the first evaluations of the Connexions Services (Grove and Giraud-Saunders, 2002) suggested that the Personal Adviser was often the first person to support a young person in making a disclosure about life outside school; the reason given by young people was that a PA was the first person who they felt was there for them.

This is just some of the work, research and evidence that has been drawn upon during the project. Additional evidence, in particular recent evaluations of the Connexions Service by the National Audit Office (2004) and a DfES evaluation carried out by MORI (DfES, 2004b), provides further validation of the key learning points identified in this report.

This body of evidence puts the development of the Connexions Service into the context of long-standing problems associated with young disabled
people’s transition to adulthood. It also clarifies many of the issues that face Personal Advisers in their day-to-day work. The ‘Developing Connexions’ project has thus charted the development of a new service whose ‘brief’ includes many of the problems and issues affecting young people in transition: the skills, ability and support they require to find somewhere of their own to live, to take part in the life of their local community (as headlined in the five outcomes in ‘Every Child Matters’), and to make a positive contribution to society.
The Role of the Personal Adviser

The project illustrated the value of the PA role from the perspective of young people, their parents/carers and professionals from partner agencies. Young people and their parents/carers identified three key qualities in the Personal Advisers they had dealt with:

- **Expertise and information-giving.** Many young people and parents complimented specialist Personal Advisers about their knowledge and the fact that even where the PA had not been able to answer a particular query, they had been able to refer the questioner on to someone who could help.

- **Support in speaking up.** Advocacy was central to Personal Advisers’ understanding of their role, and young people and their parents/carers frequently highlighted the skills of advocacy in a PA.

- **Independence.** As one young man, answering the question ‘what is good about Connexions?’ put it: ‘It’s really good to be able to talk to someone not from school…you know they are there for you.’

Partner agencies identified some similar qualities and some less obvious ones. Like young people and their parents/carers, partner agencies appreciated PAs as an information resource for both the young person and the agency, and as ‘signposters’ to other services. They also valued the PA as the one person who was likely to be in regular touch with a young person and hence able to update others about their situation. In this way, the Personal Adviser had begun to fill a gap in support identified by parents, young people, carers and other professionals. But their ability to continue to develop their role will hinge on continuing support from their own service and from their partners. There were insufficient resources
directed at the work of Personal Advisers who were supporting young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. If Personal Advisers are to continue to support young people into adulthood, there is a clear need for investment in their role and acknowledgement by Connexions that they need to be able to offer a service in an individually appropriate way to all the young people in their area.

**Example of practice:**
With caseloads of 250+, it is unlikely that PAs will have the time they need to build relationships with the small number of young people who have autistic spectrum disorders in their area. To address this problem, one of the participating areas set a maximum caseload for specialist SEN/LDD Personal Advisers of 180. They then negotiated individual partnership agreements identifying the particular support and time allocation from the Personal Adviser to the young person. At one school for young people with autism and learning difficulties the focus was moved to supporting those young people in the last two years of schooling (16-19 years). Time released from working individually with younger pupils enabled the Personal Adviser to focus on establishing relationships with individuals and their families, including time spent with the family outside the school day and during the summer holidays.

The notion of ‘available time’ links in to the more ‘intensive personal support’ offered by those Personal Advisers who deliver a ‘targeted’ service over a shorter time period to young people experiencing problems. The project found this was not generally offered within special schools, despite the fact that young people attending special schools were just as likely to experience crises at home, mental health problems, stress and bullying as their peers in mainstream education. Indeed, according to a recent review of services for young people with learning difficulties who experience mental health problems (Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities, 2003), this group experiences a higher incidence of mental health problems than its peers.

During consultations with young disabled people from minority ethnic groups, further skills and knowledge required by a Personal Adviser were made clear. There were obvious differences both between young people’s aspirations for the future and those of their family, and between the family’s expectations and Government guidance about continuing into learning
provision post-16. There is no criticism here of the Personal Adviser, but a recognition of both the skills and knowledge required to be able to negotiate between family and young person. The recently completed Aasha project (Maudslay, 2004) illustrated these issues very clearly.

An extract from ‘From Welfare to Well-being’ explains the key development of the role of the Personal Adviser as a new tier of the workforce supporting young people:

‘A major realignment of professional boundaries will be required in future and ultimately the creation of new professions. For example, a new professions combining youth and community work, social work, adolescent mental health services and careers services could emerge to provide holistic services for young people’ (Kendall and Harker, 2003).

This new tier is replicated across Government policy, so that police forces now deploy uniformed ‘community safety wardens’ and new highways department staff have taken over some police responsibilities at the scenes of road traffic accidents. In schools teaching assistants are supporting qualified teachers, while in the health service nurses now do many tasks once the remit of the doctor, including some limited forms of prescribing. Children’s services must now grapple with the problem of the fit between existing social work roles and the new tier of ‘frontline’ workers. The response to consultation on the Green Paper ‘Every Child Matters’ (DfES, 2004a) indicated an expectation that Connexions’ budgets would be pooled with those of local agencies such as the education department, health trust or social care. If this direction is followed through, it will directly impact upon the structure of the new service and the responsibilities held by each professional grouping. The value attached to the work of the Personal Adviser identified in this project and confirmed by the National Audit Office report (National Audit Office, 2004) and the MORI evaluation (DfES, 2004b) should not be lost in the process of integration and the redistribution of responsibilities.
**Learning points:**
The Personal Adviser fills a gap in a way valued by all those working with them.

The role will be central to future services delivered to young people.
Involving young people

The project drew out a number of lessons about involving young people in the work of the Connexions Service. These included the time allocated to meet young people, the ways that young people were involved in the development and consultation around the new Connexions Service, the provision of accessible and meaningful information and ways of including a wider group of young people in future development and consultation work. The lessons should be used to inform the development of local integrated children’s services as outlined in the Children Bill (DfES, 2004c).

Communication

The diversity of communication skills across the broad group of young people involved in the project meant that different communication approaches and skills were needed to engage them: from working alongside a British Sign Language interpreter to building a relationship with young people with ASD in the course of a swimming trip. The project was continually challenged to involve more diverse representatives of young people with LDD, culminating in a series of final ‘sharing events’ (completed in May 2004) that brought together a diverse group of attendees including young people and senior management representatives.
Learning point:
Communication skills are central to the ability of Personal Advisers to build relationships with the young people they support. The training and support available did not encourage the development of these skills and hence the service received by any young person with more complex communication difficulties was less likely to be based upon what the young person defined as ‘good support’.

Accessible information

Local Connexions Services need to ensure that their communication strategies address the communication skills of the whole local population of young people. In so doing they need to ensure that information produced and distributed by the local service reaches the widest possible audience, using a variety of approaches from Braille to symbols, pictures and photographs that would support reading and discussion.
Example of practice:
A participating area arranged for a training day for both specialist Personal Advisers and their publicity/information department in the use of a total communication approach to both one-to-one work and as a more general approach to information being published by the local service.

Example of practice:
Two local services were participating in a trial of the ‘Transactive’ pack developed by Mencap and the University of East London. The main focus of this pack was the construction of computer-based photographic and pictorial records of a young person’s favourite things, their hopes for the future and important people in their life. They were supported in doing this themselves by another young person from a mainstream school. The young people who had used the pack expressed pride in what they had produced and demonstrated a clear understanding of how to use it to tell people about themselves.

Examples of practice:
Information Leaflets
Example: SSAFA Leaflet – What is Connexions? – Contact Heidi Dudley - Heidi.D@ssafa.org.uk. Black Country Connexions Information leaflets - Claire.Bradley@Prospects.co.uk
Plans I can understand
Examples – My Life, My Plan – Accessible assessments and interactive plans used in schools, Contact Kirsty Mayhew, kirsty.Mayhew@torbay.gov.uk
The Big Picture – West Midlands, contact Chris Sholl - CSholl@worcestershire.gov.uk

Learning point:
‘I want a plan I can understand.’ (Young man)
Consultation

From the outset the delivery of the Connexions strategy to a local area was to be built around a partnership between young people and the local service. This had happened to some degree in all areas; however, the sorts of young people represented in this project had been almost non-existent within the ‘youth board’ or consultation group.

This project provided an opportunity for young people to demonstrate how they might play an active role at these forums. The contribution of young people at the ‘sharing events’ towards the end of the project, including several as keynote presenters, was so impressive that it prompted the recruitment of at least 8 young people to local Connexions Youth Boards.

Example:
At one of the five local sharing events the local steering group wanted to focus on post-16 provision and was particularly keen on involving both young people and senior representatives from Connexions and their partner agencies. Accordingly, each of the six tables laid out for the event seated young people alongside senior managers and a skilled facilitator. The questions to be addressed by the groups were written in much the same way as they were for the project (described in Chapter 1), starting with one that everyone could answer and then offering follow-on questions for those wishing to develop their answers more fully. Each table recorded answers on flip chart paper by drawing pictures and using simple text, while some young people chose to cut and paste pictures from a box of leaflets, prospectuses and booklets collected by Personal Advisers. Each person was able to participate in a way that was equal to his or her skills and ability. The end result was not only colourful, but also represented more accurately the views of the group than might have been the case has they relied on words alone.
The second issue facing Connexions Services exploring ways to involve a more diverse range of young people was how to move away from traditional group meetings, with set agendas and a focus upon speech, as the main way of participating. Valuing People Partnership Boards have faced a similar dilemma in bringing together a diverse membership of disabled people, professionals and members of the public.

The key to reaching out to this non-professional group is for Connexions to be flexible about meeting young people on their terms; to recognize, for example, that many young people ‘don’t like going to meetings with lots of people’. Indeed, for many people in this project the thought of meeting in a group caused stress and tension, whereas one-to-one meetings for which there had been a chance to prepare were more likely to be welcomed and prove less stressful.

Example:
In the process of identifying young people with ASD to participate in the project, a young woman was contacted who agreed to take part because the letters of invitation and the briefing sheet had been prepared using WIDGIT and Rebus symbols, along with a photo of the project worker. The young person was happy to meet with the project worker and it became clear that this was solely due to the information sent, which had not only been accessible but had given the young woman a chance to prepare for the meeting. She frequently refused to meet new people, even those who had supported her for some time, if they had not given her prior written notice of their visit and what they wanted to talk about.
I would like to talk about going to college, or school.

I would like to talk about the things you are good at and what you enjoy doing.

I would like to ask you about what you would like to do when you move on from college. You may have spoken to people at [XXXXXXX] about this.

It can be exciting or worrying to think about these things. If you don’t want to talk about the future please tell me, or a member of staff. We can talk about what you are doing at [XXXXXXX].

I would like to ask you about the support you would like from people to help you at college or school and when you think about the future.

Thank you for your time.
[photo and name]
**Examples of practice:**
Wyre Forest Self-Advocacy group for young people, Contact Rachel at wfsa@btopenworld.com
Just Say (co-funded by local Connexions Service in Dorset, Contact Dawn McCadden at jusysay@fsmail.net

**Learning point:**
Local strategies for communication and consultation must acknowledge that young people choose to communicate in diverse and varied ways. These strategies must also acknowledge the need for Connexions to be flexible in the way they consult with the range of young people using services.
Information

This section explores how information is collected by Connexions Services, how it is shared both within the service and with outside agencies, and how it is used.

Collecting information

The Connexions Service and the LEAs

The LEA must send the Connexions Service a list of all pupils in their area who will require a Year 9 review no later than two weeks before the start of the school year. The list must include all pupils whether or not they are educated in a school and indicate any schools that the children specified attend. This information will help Connexions Services to plan attendance at Year 9 reviews. (DfES, 2002a).

Although not relating directly to the work of this project, the DfES guidance on Year 9 reviews does affect the time a Personal Adviser has to spend with pupils in older age groups and the ability of Connexions Services to identify the specific needs of individual young people. In turn this affects identification of the training needs of Personal Advisers supporting those young people.

Whether the guidance was followed or not, and the quality of information transferred to the Connexions Services where it was followed, varied from area to area. Some services had built strong relationships with one or more LEA, while in others the guidance was ignored, leaving Personal Advisers waiting to be told the dates of meetings by individual head
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teachers. The lack of coordination between schools often meant that the condition of grant placed upon Connexions Services was broken because Personal Advisers were unable to attend transition reviews that clashed. The quality of information was sometimes poor, giving no more than a name, necessitating meetings with head teachers or special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) to clarify specific needs or impairments. At an individual level this could be accommodated within an introductory process, but might place time pressures on Personal Advisers. The question of the most efficient way to collate and share information in the absence of a central database (with the local Learning and Skills Council, for example) still remained in these areas.

Learning point:
LEAs must make information available to local Connexions Services in line with DfES guidance. They should provide as much information as possible about each young person in terms of the category of ‘need’ (both primary and secondary) identified on their statement. This must happen at least two weeks before the start of the school year.

Connexions Services and the local Learning and Skills Council

‘Due to the statutory nature of the Section 140 assessment and the duty placed on the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to have regard to this, it is vital that Connexions Partnerships and local LSCs work together to agree an appropriate format for the Section 140 written report that meets all needs.’ (CSNU/DfES, 2004).

‘To ensure a young person’s needs can be met, Partnerships will, through the local Learning and Skills Councils, need to have a mechanism in place for influencing future service provision if services are not there.’ (CSNU/DfES, 2004).
These extracts from the recently published guidance emphasise the importance of a partnership approach to the completion of Section 140 assessments by local Connexions Services and the Learning and Skills Council and subsequent planning of appropriate services to meet the identified needs of young people. During the life of the project these arrangements were still being put into place nationally. Unsurprisingly therefore, the participating areas were at different stages of development in this process, with three of the five lacking any formal link between the Connexions Service and the local Learning and Skills Council. In the areas where formal links had been established, information gathered during assessments was only just beginning to be used as a tool to highlight the need/demand for service provision amongst learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

**Example of practice:**
Eastern Region SEN Partnership – 7 Principles of Transition Planning
Contact: Maragret Palmer – margaret@palmerconsulting.net
Plymouth Transition Pathway – downloadable from:

**Learning point:**
The Section 140 process provides a means for establishing levels of future demand upon post-16 provision and possible impacts on the out-of-area placement funding administered by local Learning and Skills Councils. The potential of this process, but especially the potential for greater information sharing at an earlier stage (as highlighted by the 2004 Eastern Region SEN Partnership Guidance for Good Practice) is yet to bear rewards.
Storing information

As highlighted at an early stage in the work of the project, there were great difficulties in three areas in identifying young people with mental health problems. In the fourth (Nottingham was not participating in this part of the project at the outset) the local Connexions Service was not able to put the project directly in touch with any young person with mental health problems.

However, by referring the project on to a local early intervention service, the participation of young people with mental health problems was made possible. The main reason for this difficulty came down to the management information system that in most areas did not store any coded information about mental health problems in the same way that it stored information about a statement for SEN. The statement documentation prompted for an abbreviation to indicate the ‘primary need’ of the young person, such as ‘AUT’ for autism or ‘ASP’ for Asperger’s syndrome. This meant that the only place for information about mental health to be stored was on the ‘notes’ pages of a young person’s electronic record. As a consequence, Nottingham appeared to have very few young people with a mental health problem. Similarly, the system in another area would log a learning difficulty, but would not allow further coding for additional sensory impairments.

Further difficulties were observed in the sharing of information internally, especially where one or more sub-contractors provided the Connexions Service locally.

Example:
In one area a sub-contractor delivered the universal careers/guidance service, while another delivered the ‘targeted’ service. The latter knew about the young people in the area with mental health problems, but the universal service provider did not because there was no single central information sharing point accessible to all Connexions personnel.
Concerns were raised by both Connexions Personal Advisers and partners about data protection.

Example:
A Connexions Personal Adviser completed a Section 140 assessment and identified a local college, which the young person wanted to attend. (The sharing of any information gathered through the process rests on the consent of the young person.) In this case the young person refused to sign the consent form and important information relating to the young person was not passed on to the college. Soon after starting at the college the young person was excluded for reasons identified in the completed Section 140 process. The misunderstanding came from lack of knowledge of one key part of data protection practice: information will be shared unless if the professional has concerns that the person is at risk of hurting themselves or being hurt by others.

Data sharing protocols signed by Connexions and their partners as part of the work of their Partnership Board should deal with the issue of data protection, but the evidence would suggest that this guidance was still not clearly understood by practitioners.

Example of developing practice:
5 Connexions Service co-funding information storage systems – contact Elaine Thomas, Connexions Cornwall and Devon for further information - Elaine.Thomas@connexions-cd.org.uk

Learning point:
Management information systems must be accessible to the relevant agencies and staff that support young people locally, consistent with data protection principles. A key objective for collecting information should be the accurate assessment of the totality of need for support.
Strategic use of information by Connexions Services and their partner organisations

As the previous section implies, the use of information for the purposes of strategic decision-making was patchy. This derived in part from duplication in the collection of information and the planning process. For example, more than one professional may undertake similar tasks for a transition plan detailing the role of adult social care services once the young person turns 18. Information collated through such work can provide a picture of future demand for adult social care and education.

Moreover, teams such as CAMHS and youth offending teams routinely collect data about young people supported by both services. The sharing of this information requires strategic leadership to support planning and allocation of resources. This may mean the targeting of specific resources to support Personal Advisers in particular work or to develop resources more appropriate to the rising school leaver population.

Example:
In one participating area the local Learning and Skills Council provided funding for ‘home’ Personal Advisers to visit young people during the last year of their schooling at out-of-authority residential schools. This ensured that at least one local representative was present at the last review, enabling them to begin planning for the young person’s return home. This was an example of strategic information being used at a senior level to ensure individual support for a young person.
Example:
In another area the local Learning and Skills Council became concerned about the number of young people attending learning provision out-of-area and the impact this was having on their budgets and the learning experience of the young person. Most young people, if offered the choice, said that they would rather stay near home. In response, the local LSC asked Connexions to provide a clearer picture of the rising school population, and then used this information to develop local small scale post-16 learning services.

Example of practice:
In one of the participating areas a partnership of Connexions, social services, learning disability health specialists, CAMHS and the youth offending team provided short-term funding to design an initial single assessment that recorded baseline information upon which further work (if needed) could be planned. This initial assessment was then used routinely by social care services and Connexions, while the children with disabilities team used the assessment for children of any age referred to them.

Example of practice:
Connexions East London, East London LSC and adult social care – shared set of data jointly developed by the three partners, alongside a web-based transition and personal action plan
Contact Gill McCaughin - gill.mccaughin@prospects.co.uk
Learning points:
There was a great deal of information being gathered through the work of the Connexions Service, but the potential use of this information had yet to be realised.

The complexity of sharing and using information needs a strategic steer from the Connexions Partnership Board. Thus the combining of person centred information with cruder statistical information relating to numbers and specific needs could be drawn together for the benefit of all those supporting young people. For this to happen requires better partnership working.
Expectation versus reality

The publicity that surrounded the launch of the new Connexions Service highlighted the commitments made within early guidance and in the revised Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs (DfES, 2002a) to achieving a certain level of service to the young people represented in this project. These commitments had not been fully met. However, Connexions was a new service that had undergone an intense period of development and this project identified a number of examples of how services had striven to meet the standards laid down by central government. Nevertheless, there are some major barriers to overcome. The large caseloads and the amount of time available to Personal Advisers to spend with individual young people hindered their ability to ‘establish and maintain the trust of young people’ (CSNU/DfES, 2003).

A major problem for Connexions was balancing their services across a large and diverse client group and it would appear that the commitments made at a national level were not fully thought through or adequately resourced. The expectations placed on local services set against the reality of the service that can be provided within present resourcing from central government had affected the relationship with local partner organisations. This had also led to a number of problems within the initial development of the Connexions Service, for example the responsibilities as quoted in Appendix 1 relating to overseeing and co-ordinating the delivery of the transition plan.

Interviews and discussions with local Connexions personnel revealed a perceived lack of leadership from Connexions nationally with regard to the support being offered to young people with LDD. For example, guidance
failed to explain how the needs of young people with more complex problems were to be supported alongside those of young people in the NEET category, where this latter group were afforded a high priority.

The resources to ensure that ‘every young person’ got the support they needed in an appropriate manner were not available. Where Personal Advisers were supporting an average of 250 young people there was insufficient time available for building the sort of relationships, built on trust and understanding, desired by young people and their parents.

The newly created Connexions Service was advertised as a support service for some young disabled people through to the age of 25. However, there was a lack of national guidance on who was eligible for this continuing support after the age of 19. The response given was that it was up to local services, but the existence of different local policies could disadvantage those who moved home at this critical stage in their lives.

There was also an issue of capacity as Personal Advisers juggled expanding caseloads due to young people who had passed 19 and required continuing support from the Connexions Service. For example, there could be a marked difference between provision of services at a mainstream school and at a special school. At a mainstream school both guidance and personal support would be available through the local service, whilst at special schools ‘personal support’ from the Personal Adviser was unlikely to be offered. This was due to a number of factors, including the lack of time available to train Personal Advisers and for them to carry out this role, poor resourcing, and the fact that Personal Advisers in special schools generally had a background in careers guidance.

These factors could affect relationships with other local partners, as their expectations of Connexions, gleaned from the literature and conferences, were not met in local practice. An example could be found in the involvement of Connexions in the implementation of person centred planning (PCP). Local implementation groups, encouraged by ‘Valuing People’ (Department of Health, 2001), had identified Personal Advisers as a key resource in the production of plans for young people in transition. Yet in many areas the Connexions Service had not engaged in the implementation process at all or had committed to it partially. One area in the project agreed to jointly fund the local PCP implementation plan, but then failed to release staff for any of the subsequent training. The local
perception was that the Connexions Service had committed to PCP tokenistically.

Learning points:
The local Connexions Services were unable to live up to some of the commitments made on their behalf nationally due to lack of resources and priority assigned to supporting young disabled people.

There was a clear priority attached, and lead given, to local services working with young people in the NEET category. The same priority needs to be given to working with young disabled people at both a local and national level. The profile of Connexions’ work with young disabled people must be heightened alongside more appropriate resourcing.

Connexions Services have to be clear about what they can provide and about what work they can no longer undertake. The project suggests that the role of the Personal Adviser has a very positive effect on individual young people’s lives and has filled an identified gap in support. There is a danger that this support might be withdrawn in the drive to reduce young people in the NEET category.

The last point of learning applies to the apparent lack of understanding of the holistic nature of support required by many young disabled people. Young disabled people and their families often require a great deal of support simply to enable the young person to attend learning provision. The failure to provide time and resources to address this issue will jeopardise the potential for real change and improvement in the support and longer-term outcomes for these young people.
The Connexions Service

The project identified some of the organisational developments required of the Connexions service if it is to meet its responsibility to provide appropriate support to disabled young people. There are three principal dimensions to this. First, promulgation of an organisational culture that acknowledges Connexions’ role in supporting this group of young people, is responsive to their needs, and values the work of its frontline staff. Second, structures designed to facilitate the delivery of the service locally. Third, mechanisms that will allow for the proper governance (see the section on the inclusion of young people and their carers) and management of local services.

During the lifetime of the project it was apparent that national leadership had not always been commensurate with the commitments made during the launch of Connexions in 2001/02. There needs to be a reiteration from Connexions nationally about their priorities for the service to this client group, a commitment to adequate resourcing for it, and an expectation about local performance management. (In a multi-agency environment it may be more beneficial to set a target for overall outcome and then a set of responsibilities for each of the main services involved).

The findings of the third interim project report, for example, questioned the priority CSNU afforded to ‘building meaningful, supportive and long-term relationships between Personal Advisers and the young people with special educational needs they work with’ (Rowland-Crosby et al., 2003). The lack of clarity around this point, as reported by Personal Advisers, illustrates the difficulties experienced by local services in translating into practice the policy of their national contracting body.

The project demonstrated the need for local Connexions Partnerships to identify a senior representative to champion SEN/LDD issues: someone willing and able to use his or her influence to promote the needs of this group of young people within Connexions and beyond. The roles of senior managers in the participating sites were defined by the model of local delivery (transmuted, sub-contracted or contracted – see Appendix 1). With
the recent imposition of VAT on sub-contracted services, there was a clear move apparent to either the consortium or the transmuted model. This will have a consequent impact on the roles of senior managers. It was noticeable that, where there was a commitment from senior managers to attend local steering groups, developments in local service delivery were more evident compared to those areas where SEN/LDD work was not led by senior managers or afforded a high profile within the service.

Example:
A deputy chief executive took responsibility for supporting the work of the local project steering group through its early stages, identifying potential members and taking action as and when learning points arose. As a result, decisions made by the steering group had a direct impact on service delivery and were disseminated amongst other groups that the deputy chief executive sat on, such as the local Education and Business Partnership (see example referring to work experience on page 33).

There needs to be an acknowledgement about the services that can be offered within existing resources, and that for services to respond in more individually appropriate ways may require increased resourcing and creative thinking about the organisational structures to support Personal Advisers.

For example:
There are differences in the ways that the SEN/LDD support is structured within the Connexions Service. In one service, over the two years of the project, this support oscillated between a central SEN/LDD team, local area teams, and then back to a central team. This cycle of centralising and then delegating was repeated in another area and in both cases the specialist Personal Advisers struggled to work with generic local managers who had little or no knowledge of their specialist caseload. Whilst acknowledging the inevitability of such experimentation during the early life of a new service, central priorities or objectives about the expectations for service delivery might have ameliorated the worst effects of it.

CSNU had a role to play in promulgating best practice in this regard, although so far there was no clear evidence that one model produced better outcomes than another. Nevertheless, many areas seemed to be
moving towards adoption of generic teams that incorporated specialist Personal Advisers. If this trend continues, it will be important for Connexions Services to ensure that these specialist advisers have access to appropriate support and supervision. Most Connexions Services are split into areas, with a generic team of Personal Advisers supporting all the young people in that area. The local area manager is answerable to both the Connexions Service and the local management committee (soon to be combined with the local safeguarding children board).

Clearly first line managers need to have a good understanding of the nature of specialist advisers’ work and the particular demands that will be made upon their time compared to that of their generic colleagues. However, the project showed that specialists working in generic teams sometimes felt isolated by the reality of their specialist practice and welcomed peer support that allowed them to reflect upon their work, learn from each other’s experience and seek practical solutions to common problems.

For example:
Nottinghamshire Connexions invested a great deal of time in the development of clear communication pathways between senior management and front line Personal Advisers with specialist caseloads. These pathways led to an increased profile for SEN/LDD issues in senior management meetings and a well informed and supported front line team of Personal Advisers. Nottinghamshire Connexions felt the investment in developing a clear structure had had a positive impact on their service delivery and Personal Advisers commented that they felt well supported by their immediate manager and by the service as a whole.

Example of practice:
Work experience and college links developed by Rosehill School and Connexions Nottinghamshire
Contact Fiona Spiers finioni@yahoo.co.uk
Learning point:
Clear leadership, backed up by an achievable expectation of service delivery, is essential if Connexions Services are both to continue their development of support for young disabled people and to be able to plan for the future allocation of resources. The project suggests that increased resourcing for this area of work will be essential if the good practice identified is to continue and to be made available to a larger group of young people across the country.
Duplication – Working together to cut individuals’ workloads

Duplication of work, particularly around assessment and planning, continued to be a key issue affecting the development of multi-agency support for young people. Although headlined in the Green Paper and in the Children Bill, the issue of a common assessment framework had been confused by Connexions making use of their own assessment, planning, information and review framework (APIR - see Appendix 5) compulsory ahead of agreement about a common framework (CSNU, 2002a). This would not have helped services in the process of developing local single frameworks, especially when the new national framework was soon to be published. (The Children Bill envisaged a multi-agency approach replacing the existing requirements for social and health care professionals and the judicial system to use assessments and information based upon the Framework for Assessment of Children in Need and their Families whilst Connexions used the APIR.) This lack of ‘joined up thinking’ at a national level did not support local services in building ‘joined up’ working processes. Transition plans, formerly the responsibility of LEAs and now reliant on the lead of a head teacher or school SENCO, illustrate the point.

Example:
Paragraphs 9.53 - 9.54 of the DfES Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs state that ‘the Connexions Service is responsible for overseeing the delivery of the transition plan and the Connexions Personal Adviser should co-ordinate its delivery. In order to ensure coherence for the young person, there should not be a separate transition plan and Connexions action plan (DfES, 2002a). The project found there was not a single transition plan being overseen and co-ordinated by a Personal Adviser, in any of the five areas taking part. Interviews with Personal Advisers revealed a system whereby they would forward an action plan to college and the young person and the school forwarded the transition plan.

(NB This highlights confusion over use of the words ‘transition plan’. In this example and throughout the report this refers to a transition plan as...
outlined in Chapter 10 of the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfES, 2002a).)

Reasons for this are numerous and often dependent on the degree of local ‘joined up’ working. However, the fact that more than one agency would contribute to a transition plan, using different methods of collating information and different planning systems, militated against the coherence advocated by the guidance.

Learning point:
The drive towards integrated services for children needs a clear lead from the centre that both encourages and helps services to work together.
Other services need to do their jobs too

For Connexions to meet a key principle of its service – to meet individual need and overcome barriers to learning - requires partner agencies (especially local Learning and Skills Councils and colleges or post-16 providers) to undertake work that supports both the raising of aspirations and the removal of barriers to learning. The project identified issues for the partner agencies that need to be addressed to support both the young person with LDD and also the work of the Connexions Service.

*Work experience and linking with college*

Young people interviewed for the project were clear about the value of real and practical experience when it came to thinking about the future and about work and finding a job in particular. The two items most frequently mentioned were ‘work experience’ and ‘links with the local colleges’. One of the groups of young people presenting at the end-of-project local sharing events focused solely on the importance to them of the link scheme with a local college.

Link schemes to college varied across the five areas. With the introduction of the new 14-19 curriculum, more students were visiting colleges and taking part in taster sessions, yet in one area the local education authority had withdrawn the funding for link schemes. Link schemes were important because they helped young people feel less nervous about the future, helping them to stop worrying about getting lost or not being able to cope with a large number of students (many colleges had 10,000-15,000 students).

The availability of appropriate work experience also varied and proved to be a major issue for young people with physical or sensory impairments.
whose opportunities were restricted by a dearth of one-to-one support and poor access to buildings and facilities such as toilets. Education and Business Partnerships, which are responsible for arranging work experience opportunities for young people, need to acknowledge this and develop appropriate opportunities for young disabled people.

Example:
In one area (previously highlighted) where the local Connexions deputy chief executive sat on the project steering group and also chaired the Education and Business Partnership meeting, funding was made available specifically to develop flexible opportunities for young people with ASD. This flexible provision was predicated on the fact that for many of these young people a week in a new environment could be a very challenging experience, whereas a two hour visit once a week over a term would give them an experience that they could usefully draw on when thinking about favoured activities and possible work in the future.

Learning points:
Simply offering a range of opportunities for work experience to a wide and diverse group of young people precludes many disabled young people from participating. Education and Business Partnerships need to work towards a more flexible selection of work experience opportunities, with support that can be accessed by a wider group of young people.

Link schemes are a valuable way for young people to think about and experience college or work-based learning from an earlier age and will help them think about the future.
If Personal Advisers are to raise the aspirations of young people and encourage them to pursue a career and adult life of their choosing, then it follows that those opportunities need to be available. The young people in the project offered diverse and widely varying views of their chosen occupations: from nail technicians, tattoo artists, motorcycle mechanics and personal shoppers to hairdressers. Although the project did not contain a control group of young non-disabled people, it is possible to speculate that such a group would express interest in a similarly diverse array of career options. However, the difference between a disabled and non-disabled cohort is that the same array of opportunities to pursue those careers would not be available to both. For example, the ‘Success for All’ strategy (DfES, 2002b) set a desired outcome of learning as a level 2 qualification, a target that would automatically preclude many of the young people represented in this project.

**Examples:**
A young man with a learning difficulty had worked at his parents’ stables all his life, yet despite being highly skilled he was precluded from any local courses as these required qualifications that he was unable to attain. Instead of attending college, he left school at 16 and started work at the stable.

Another young man in this group had worked alongside his father, a builder and electrician. He had become skilled at working on a building site, helping out in an appropriate way and earning a small wage. He was unable to develop these skills through further education, as he was unable to acquire the qualifications needed to join a course. He left school and continued to work for his father.
There is a considerable amount of evidence gathered through the work of the project to suggest this is a national issue. It raises real concerns over the reality of the drive towards ‘inclusion’ in all realms of life for all young disabled people. The ways that qualifications and hence employment are set up mean that, although many parts of the job can be done by a more diverse group of people, they require certain more complex skills to complete part of the course or a job.

Example:
A project developing employment opportunities for people with learning difficulties in rural settings illustrates this well. Using skills checklists for both the jobs at a small business and for the person, they were able to take parts of a number of jobs and make them in to a single job that a person with learning difficulties could hold down as permanent employment (‘job carving’). In other words, they carried out a skills assessment across a whole company and then, by re-assessing the skills list, they created specific employment opportunities that suited both people with learning difficulties and the company. This same flexibility needs to be built into the development of courses and employment opportunities as a matter of course (Estervig, 2003).

The project also came across isolated examples of how positive outcomes might be achieved through the further and higher education systems.

Example:
A young woman with physical impairments was offered post-16 learning that meant that she would remain at home and attend a local special school with a view to moving on to ‘discrete’ provision once her schooling had come to an end. The young woman did not want this and by the end of the project was in her second year at a university, doing a degree in dance and choreography.

However, this was outweighed by the numerous cases where the young person was not supported onto a course of their choice, but instead directed to ‘discrete’ post-16 provision or encouraged to go away from home to attend residential learning provision.

The project also found evidence of a lack of supported employment opportunities relating to an area of interest for the young person. For
example, one young man was passionate about trains and frequently visited stations to pursue this interest, yet on leaving college he was offered a place at a day centre. No approach was made to enquire about a possible job related to this interest; he spent one morning a week sorting out clothes in a charity shop. He enjoyed this, but would have preferred to work closer to trains and stations. This was not an experience shared with many of the young person’s non-disabled peers, who were able to choose courses that matched their interests and look for jobs that would give them the satisfaction and wages they wanted.

Example of practice:
Developing a 24 hour curriculum resource, West Cumbria Contact Anna Waugh – annawaugh@aol.com
Norfolk Learning and Skills Council, ‘What can I do when I leave school?’ – Contact Ruth Daly, Ruth.Daly@lsc.gov.uk

Learning points:
Organisations need to raise their expectations for this group of young people. In general young disabled people want to be economically active and to make a positive contribution. It appeared that the ‘system’ and the agencies participating in the system did not pay attention to this and resource/support the development of appropriate opportunities in the same way that they did for other groups of young people.

College principals, for example, noted that the national drive for level 2 qualification, driven by central Government, was likely to have a negative effect on learning provision for those that found level 2 beyond their abilities.
The project team suggest that this approach continues to reflect a historical attitude to people with disabilities not as active participants in the local community, but as people in need of care or special treatment, unable to hold down employment. There was reluctance amongst many learning-focused agencies to afford young disabled people the same priority as other groups of young people and to tailor their provision accordingly.

In some respects the issue of educational attainment around the level 2 qualification threshold mirrors the earlier debate about Connexions’ prioritisation of young people ‘not engaged in education or training’. Both initiatives affected both the support and the learning opportunities for many of the young people represented in this project. Learning and Skills Councils and local learning providers were ‘driving’ for level 2, Connexions were focused predominantly on the NEET group, and as a result development resources and time were not being given to the issues facing the majority of the young people represented in this project. ‘The best start in life for every young person’ needs to be backed up with the resource and leadership required if this aspiration is to be applied to all groups of young people, including those represented in this project. As a consequence, there continued to be a sizeable group of young people who were not benefiting from the increase in funding and direction given to supporting young people into work and a valued adult life.
Transport

‘Transport is the biggest problem for us.’ (Parent)

Getting around continued to affect seriously young people’s ability to take part in learning and in the life of their local community. Parents in one focus group felt that it was the most important reason for them in deciding to ‘push’ for a residential learning establishment for their son or daughter, citing both safety or bullying concerns and availability as the key issues. Many parents spoke of the vulnerability of their children to bullying, theft and verbal abuse from peers when using public transport while on the way to school or college. Where LEA funded transport was available, in many areas it was withdrawn at the age of 19 (though some areas extended the service to 21). The withdrawal of funding, sometimes in the middle of a course, not only caused stress and unhappiness for the young person, but could also hinder their ability to complete a course (especially those individuals referred to earlier in the report who, for one reason or another, were not able to attend college full time).

**Learning points:**
Safety and bullying on public or college transport needs to be addressed by the community safety committee of the Local Strategic Partnership.

Responsibilities for the funding of transport and the development of flexible transport plans needs both a national lead and local action from those who hold this responsibility.
Moving on after college

In all five participating areas the issue of what should happen after college was characterised by confusion, lack of clarity and misunderstanding. Colleges in these areas felt totally responsible for this as no other agencies attended reviews or developed plans with the young person. Connexions attempted to address this issue; however, as many young people were receiving support from social care, this attempt often fell down due to the lack of involvement of social care professionals. Social workers in most areas did not attend reviews whilst the young person was at college and only became involved after the young person had left.

For young people with learning difficulties the benefits of work undertaken following ‘Valuing People’ (DH, 2001) was beginning to be seen. However, there were many young people in this project who, although designated by Connexions and the Learning and Skills Council as young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, were not benefiting from this work and tended not to be given such priority.

Example:
A young woman was approaching the end of school (she had chosen to attend her special school sixth form). She wanted to develop her independent living skills alongside a possible career and was under the impression that the only way to do this was through moving on to a residential college. No-one had spent time explaining the possibilities of local supported living to her, although she had spoken about a desire to attend the local college. Supported living is not only about services and support for people with learning disabilities, but for a much wider population of people, including those with physical impairments. Information about these opportunities needs to be made available to the wider group of young people and local services need to view all cases with the same priority.
Example of practice:
Developing Employment Opportunities in Rural North America – Contact Janet Estervig: worc2102@hotmail.com

Learning points:
There needs to be a formal and clearly understandable approach to supporting young people to move on from college. Each agency must be clear about their role and what work they will and are able to complete, and the central focus must be on the best outcomes for the individual young person.

This process must be backed up with an early planning process and easy to understand information about possible next steps and who is going to be involved in supporting the young person.
Conclusions

Local Connexions Services had undoubtedly made a good start, bearing in mind they had only been operational for at most three years.

The Personal Adviser and the role they held was valued by both young people and parents where they had been able to support the young person or family through a particular step or problem. This role will be central to future integrated children’s services.

There remains a large amount of work to be done to increase the number of young people involved in local developments, especially through representation on bodies such as consultative forums or youth boards.

Communication skills, particularly for those Personal Advisers supporting young people with communication difficulties, need to be given a priority in future training plans.

The potential use and application of all the information being gathered by the local Connexions Service, the Learning and Skills Council and their partner organisations had not been realised. There is a good possibility that some of the issues raised both about information sharing and provision of appropriate opportunities will be raised within the strategic area reviews being completed by local Learning and Skills Councils, but this will only happen if provision for young disabled people is given the same priority as provision for other groups of young people.

The common assessment framework headlined in the Green Paper and the Children Bill may help local services work more closely together and stop duplication of work. However, this requires clear leadership and the establishment of priorities not solely focused on the gathering and sharing of information. Local Connexions Services in particular had been adversely affected by a lack of coherent and clear leadership on issues related to Connexions and young disabled people.

The work of the Personal Adviser and the support they are able to offer to young disabled people relies heavily on the engagement and action of Connexions’ partner agencies. This project has highlighted the fact that, for Connexions to continue to be able to ‘raise aspirations’ and ‘remove
barriers to learning’, a concerted effort and commitment is needed from all partners involved in supporting young disabled people to move into the adult world.
Chapter 4 - The Future

Easier to Read Summary

The future for Connexions is anything but certain...

In this last chapter we think about what might happen in the future to the Connexions Service.

The Government has said there will be big changes in the way money is given to Connexions to support young people.

They have said they want to see all the services that support young people work closer together.

We have looked at all the things we have found through the work of the project. We think there are some important messages for the Government.
We think it will be important for Connexions to be independent from local services, and to continue to be able to work with young disabled people until they are 25.

We think the work that a Personal Adviser does is very important. Most important of all is the support they can give to young disabled people and their families in speaking up for what they need and want in their future.

We think Connexions and all other services need to listen to young people and involve them from the very start in developing new services.
‘As signalled in the Green Paper… we want the budgets for Connexions to be aligned with, and pooled within, children’s trusts’. (DfES, 2004a).

The key principles of the Connexions Service have been referred to regularly throughout the report and most important in this chapter is the last one about the importance of evidence-based practice – ensuring that new interventions are based on rigorous research and evaluation of ‘what works’ (Department for Education and Employment, 2001). With this and the Government’s avowed intention about pooling budgets in mind, this chapter offers some important learning for children’s trusts and those supporting their introduction in central government.

This project provides a great deal of evidence that not only identifies specific issues relating to developing support for young disabled people, but points to clear directions for Connexions to take in the future if they are to continue to develop and improve the support they are able to offer. The following three points relate to the most important lessons from this project, which need to be central in the development of new ways of providing services to children and young people:

- Independence
- The role of the Personal Adviser
- Involving young disabled people and their families/carers.
Independence

‘Connexions listened to me, not other people, they helped me do what I want to do, not what other people want me to do, I don’t have any criticisms to make.’ (Young woman, aged 18)

As this young woman suggested, key amongst all the findings of the project is the fact that young people and their families valued what Connexions offered in terms of support in speaking up and advocating on the young person’s behalf. Devolution of Connexions’ budgets to integrated children’s trusts will affect the ‘independence’ of the Connexions Personal Adviser if they become funded by, managed by and professionally accountable to a local authority.

It also means that Connexions will be identified with children’s services as opposed to the existing ‘cross-over’ role (13-25 years) covering both children’s services and adult services.

Important

Young disabled people want and benefit from access to independent advice and advocacy support.

If the responsibility for the delivery of the Connexions Service is to fall to local authorities and they are no longer able to offer independent support in ‘speaking up’ and advocating for a young person, a valued role will have been lost.
Re-organisation of services risks the loss of an independent service that has shown signs of becoming more adept and skilled at supporting young disabled people and their families in making themselves heard.
The Role of the Personal Adviser

Although inadequately resourced and supported to meet the expectations of the new services, the role held by a Personal Adviser has considerable potential as a ‘front line worker’, as an ‘early identifier of problems – both health and social’ and as a conduit through which young people and services can work together.

The Institute for Public Policy Research (Kendall and Harker, 2003) argued that there might be a need for the establishment of a new frontline worker role. The Personal Adviser role not only provides good evidence and learning about how this can be achieved, but actually provides a ‘ready trained’ workforce of ‘independent advice and guidance providers’.

However, there were clear training gaps and deficits in skills when it came to supporting young disabled people with more complex impairments and, more importantly, deficits in the resourcing to enable Personal Advisers to work in more individually appropriate ways. In the ongoing development of the role there needs to be a recognition that the same support (whether used or not) needs to be available to all young people, including those with more complex support needs or impairments.

The parents of one young man could not read and did not understand the letter sent to them by the college informing them about plans for the next year and confirming that their son had a place at the college. The mother told the project, ‘Connexions helped sort out next year, I didn’t know what was happening’, as the Personal Adviser, during a home visit, was able to read the letter to the parents.

This outcome was only possible because the worker involved had developed a long-term relationship with both the young person and his family. It demonstrates the need for small but personal actions, which the
Personal Adviser is ideally placed to carry out. Throughout the report there have been similar examples of small actions, whether inviting a young man with Asperger’s syndrome to visit the main office during school holidays and thus encouraging him out of his home, or inviting students to the main office for their annual reviews.

**Important**

The role of the Personal Adviser will be a key part in the delivery of joined up and integrated children’s services.

Their full potential for supporting young disabled people has not been supported or recognised in the contractual arrangements for Connexions Services.

Connexions Personal Advisers need additional training and support to be able to offer all parts of the Connexions Strategy to all young people and be able to support young people in individually appropriate ways through improved communication skills and understanding.
Involving Young Disabled People and Their Families/Carers

The project showed through both practice and record that it is possible to involve a wide and diverse population of people in consultation. To date young disabled people had been poorly represented in consultation groups linked to local Connexions Services, as had their parents or carers. The input from these young people and their parents will need to be central to the development of integrated children’s services.

Important

Young disabled people have a lot to say about the support they receive and how they wish or need to be supported. Ongoing consultation with young disabled people must be central to future developments.

Connexions Services and their partners in the development of re-modelled services need to meet with young disabled people on their terms, at times that are convenient to the young people and often individually. Without this flexibility, more skilled and adept communicators will drown out these minority groups’ voices.
Conclusion

The work of this project over the last two years clearly demonstrates both the value of the Connexions Service in the lives of young disabled people and the impact of insufficient resource or investment in the Personal Adviser role. Connexions were set a number of targets in terms of support. Although many services were managing to achieve these targets, it could be at the cost of more individual and personal support that young disabled people need in the same way as their non-disabled peers do.

The future for Connexions lies in the hands of those charged with developing the Children Bill and implementing the Act when it is finally passed. These future developments should be based upon the large amount of evidence from this project, the National Audit Office report (National Audit Office, 2004) and more recently still, a DfES funded project carried out by MORI (DfES, 2004b) all of which identified the success that Connexions had had in building alliances with young people in their areas. Rather than Connexions funding being pooled into a single fund managed by the local children’s service, the evidence suggests that money should be specifically allocated to Connexions in the locality and that this funding should be targeted to enable young disabled people to benefit from Connexions’ support as many of their peers have already done.

The potential of the Connexions Service and the support it offers to young disabled people is yet to be fully realised. Under-resourcing this area of work risks the further ‘disabling’ of a population of young people, against a backdrop of the Government’s commitment to education and learning as the way to improve lifelong opportunities.

There are many good signs, successes and interesting developments that should be protected and sustained during and following any re-organisation of budgets and services. The role of an independent advice and guidance provider, i.e. that of the Personal Adviser, will be central to developments in multi-agency working in children’s services. If they can sustain a role crossing into the adult world, they can continue to build on the early successes described in this report. Managing information, acting as a trusted point of contact and supporting people in speaking up will all be central to the role. The Connexions Services had learned many valuable lessons regarding the involvement of young people generally and were
beginning to learn about involving young disabled people. This knowledge will be vital during the development of new integrated services and is not currently well developed in the social care, health or education fields. As an ally to young disabled people and their families and carers, the Personal Adviser has the potential to build a more person centred approach to support than that historically offered by these services.

With a growing bank of evidence from both youth offending teams and the CAMHS teams about the move from primary to secondary learning and its impact on some young people, there is considerable potential for an extended service offered by the Personal Adviser. The PA could have a valuable frontline role supporting early identification and intervention alongside building longer term alliances with young people, some of whom may find this move and future moves challenging and difficult.

In the words of one young participant in the project ‘if you want to do it, GO FOR IT!’ Connexions service providers need to support young disabled people in ‘going for it’ in the same way that they encourage all the other young people they support. This report shows that it can be done.

Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities
July 2004
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Appendix 1 – Models of Delivery

The Connexions Service National Unit provided local areas with three options for delivering the Connexions Strategy. These were:

- Transmuted – the formation of a single new company to deliver the service
- Contracted – a single company being contracted by the Connexions Service in that area to deliver the service
- Sub-contracted – where a number of services or companies came together; as a whole they delivered the Connexions Strategy to the local area.

Of the five areas involved in this project, there were three services following the sub-contracted model and two following the transmuted model. The main sub-contractor in the Black Country was Prospects, in South London it was also Prospects although CfTB provided the Connexions Service in Richmond, and in Humberside it was the Humberside Partnership.

Of the five services, four went ‘live’ in April 2001 and Nottinghamshire in April 2002.
Appendix 2 – Responsibilities for Pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs

Year 9 transition review: ‘Personal Adviser must be invited to and attend Year 9 review of a young person’s SEN statement … This is a requirement of the SEN Code of Practice’ (Connexions Service National Unit, 2002b). To date this had been upheld as a condition of grant, i.e. the annual grant to the local Connexions Service would be affected if it were found that Personal Advisers were not attending these meetings.

Section 140 assessment: ‘Section 140 [of the Learning and Skills Act 2000] sets out the statutory provision for the assessment of young people with LDD. The legal requirement is placed upon the Secretary of State. Connexions Partnerships will deliver it’. (Connexions Service National Unit/Department for Education and Skills, 2004). ‘Section 140 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 requires an assessment of the young person in the final year of compulsory schooling, where this person is likely to move on to post-16 education, training or higher education.’ (Connexions Service National Unit, 2002b). The responsibility for carrying out this assessment lies with the local Connexions Service. This project saw much development over the final year as Connexions Services developed their methods of assessment, sharing information and criteria for carrying out this assessment and planning process. This is covered in some detail in the ‘Evidence’ section of the report. (For further information, read the Learning and Skills Act 2000, Section 140).

Alongside these two compulsory elements of practice, there were other responsibilities outlined in the guidance for PAs and Connexions Partnerships in their work with young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (Connexions Service National Unit, 2002b). These included:

- ‘Personal Adviser contributes to and oversees delivery of the … transition plan as part of the wider Connexions concern to oversee and monitor the student’s progress towards adult life’ and
- ‘Continue process of review and transition planning to facilitate transfer to appropriate adult agency, starting when appropriate after the 19th birthday and in accordance with the needs of the young person.’
Appendix 3 – A Tiered Approach to Service Delivery and the Role of the Personal Adviser

Designed as a universal service to all young people, Connexions adopted a tiered approach to the support that each young person would need from their Personal Adviser:

- **Universal** – delivering the universal service to young people mainly within the mainstream system of school and college
- **Personal support** or targeted Personal Advisers who focused on working with young people mainly within the middle band who were at risk of ‘disengaging’
- **Specialist** or disability Personal Advisers who focused on supporting many of the young people in this project and whose caseload was mainly made up of young people with special educational needs, with or without statements.

The theory behind this ‘pyramid of need’ was that most young people would receive a universal service, mainly focusing on careers guidance, and those in the higher two sections would receive more in-depth and intensive support appropriate to who they were and the nature of their support needs. Young people such as those within the project featured in the upper two sections due to either being at risk of dropping out or ‘disengaging’ from learning, or having high support needs and a number of professionals involved in supporting them.

In the early stages of service development this pyramid also envisaged Personal Advisers adopting one of three possible roles. Initially the roles identified covered three areas of work (although CSNU discovered 32 different job titles):

- Universal – delivering the universal service to young people mainly within the mainstream system of school and college
- Personal support or targeted Personal Advisers who focused on working with young people mainly within the middle band who were at risk of ‘disengaging’
- Specialist or disability Personal Advisers who focused on supporting many of the young people in this project and whose caseload was mainly made up of young people with special educational needs, with or without statements.
In the autumn of 2003 the Connexions Services National Unit distributed a revised Code of Practice for Personal Advisers. This focused the work of the Personal Adviser around six key principles:

- Personal Advisers must work in the best interests of young people, placing the young people’s needs, welfare and interests before their own beliefs and values.

- Personal Advisers must work to establish and maintain the trust of young people, providing an appropriate and agreed level of confidentiality in all their dealings with young people.

- Personal Advisers must promote the rights of young people when working with other voluntary, statutory and community organisations, advocating on young people’s behalf and ensuring there is a coherent approach to support for young people.

- Personal Advisers must, wherever possible, engage parents, carers and families in supporting young people, upholding their trust in the service.

- Personal Advisers must uphold the integrity of the profession at all times.

- Personal Advisers must be responsible for reflecting on their own professional practice and for taking steps to maintain, improve and update their own knowledge and skills so they are able to continually deliver a quality service. (Connexions Service National Unit/Department for Education and Skills, 2003).

Publication of the Code of Practice followed a drive from the centre that encouraged the merging of the roles held by different Personal Advisers, the new role being termed ‘fully-differentiated’. (Although many services chose to name it something else, all were aspiring to bring the roles closer together). A definition agreed with Connexions nationally was offered in the third interim report of the ‘Developing Connexions’ project:

‘The “fully-differentiated” role of a Personal Adviser - a multi-skilled worker who can provide initial information and advice on the full range of needs expressed by young people and (commensurate with
professional background and training) more intensive support at times of difficulty. The multi-skilled Personal Adviser will be able to respond to young people in individually appropriate ways, either by supplying support directly or (where the intensive needs of the young person lie outside the PA’s specialist competence) brokering and coordinating such support.

‘A “fully-differentiated” Connexions Service is a service that responds to the needs of different groups of young people in different individually appropriate ways, i.e. the support offered to a young person applying for a place at a university will be different from the support offered to a young person struggling to attend their local school. However, the service will offer the same degree of multi-skilled support – many young people from both these groups will experience intense periods of stress; many will need guidance on applying to university or thinking about what happens when they leave school.’ (Rowland-Crosby et al., 2003).
Appendix 4 – The Connexions Service National Unit

Part of the Department for Education and Skills, the role of the National Unit was to monitor and support the work of the local Connexions Partnerships and Services. This support covered all parts of implementation and service delivery, from supporting the design and presentation of the new Diploma for Personal Advisers to monitoring Connexions Partnerships’ plans and providing funding to local services.

Recently the CSNU merged with other departments within the Department for Education and Skills. The new unit responsible for supporting Connexions Partnerships is the Supporting Children and Young People Group.
Appendix 5 – Assessment, Planning, Information and Review Framework

The key tool used by Connexions in assessment and planning was the Assessment, Planning, Information and Review Framework (APIR). The framework:

‘has been developed to assist Personal Advisers in their one-to-one work with young people, providing guidance and supporting materials to help them identify and take action to meet that need’. (Connexions Service National Unit, 2002a)

The process followed a similar procedure to that of the Assessment Framework for Children in Need and was focused on establishing a holistic view of the young person’s life and the challenges faced by the young person.