

Into the Future:

Young people's and teachers' views on career advice

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Executive Summary

Sources of career advice:

- The most common way for young people aged 14-15 to learn about careers is when a teacher talks to the whole class about education choices, jobs and careers (86%), followed by talking to their parents or carers (77%).
- Young people anticipating at least 10 GCSEs (Grade A* to C) or equivalent are more likely to have experienced a teacher talking to the class about educational options and careers advice, a business person/local employer coming in to school, and to have used the internet, than those young people anticipating fewer than 5 GCSEs at this level or equivalent qualification.
- Around half of young people use the internet to search for advice on careers and training.

What young people want from careers advice:

- Young people who aren't sure about their future career value the opportunity to have personalised discussions with a trusted adult, who knows them well.
- Young people anticipating at least 10 GCSEs (Grade A* to C) or equivalent are less likely to have received advice about vocational options such as apprenticeships, whilst those anticipating fewer than five GCSEs or equivalent are more likely to have received advice about vocational options. Young people feel that all students should receive information about possible options, regardless of their background at school.
- Young people want advice they are given on further education options to be impartial and include a range of alternatives.
- If young people have an ambitious aspiration they don't want this dashed by a career adviser, but a range of other options presented as well.
- Young people want the person advising them to have up to date knowledge of the world of work.
- Young people say they want to hear directly from employers, and value meaningful work experience highly. They also want to hear from, and network with, other young people who have recently entered careers.

What young people think about the advice they receive:

- When asked to rate how useful the information they received from different sources, parents/ carers and schools were nominated as the most useful sources.
- Eight out of ten respondents to our questionnaire found the advice they received in schools useful, leaving a small minority – just under a fifth – who did not find it useful. Those that valued the advice they received viewed it as a good way of getting the basics, and said they want more specific advice on top.
- Around two-thirds of young people feel the advice they receive in school covers the options they are most interested in. However, opinion was divided as to whether it gives them all the information they needed (52% agree; 48% disagree) and whether it is

personalised and relevant to them (50% agree; 50% disagree).

- The young people who said they find career advice delivered in class settings useful view it as a good way of getting the basics. But many feel there should also be the offer of more personalised advice in smaller groups or one-to-one.
- Websites giving career information are seen as a useful addition but not a replacement for face to face advice.

Teachers' views of giving career advice:

- A fifth of teachers say they have received training to support them in the provision of careers-related advice.
- Less than half of teachers feel well supported with regards to providing advice. Where teachers do feel well supported this comes from Connexions and colleagues at school, rather than their local authority or union.
- Two-thirds (68%) of teachers are confident about providing advice, whilst 14% are not confident. Confidence is higher about academic options, such as A-Levels, (84%) but much lower for vocational courses such as NVQs (49%).
- Four-fifths (82%) of teachers are confident that the advice they provide is impartial.
- Nine-out-of-ten teachers (88%) state that alternatives to staying in school are discussed with all students.

2. Introduction and background

This report presents the findings of a National Youth Agency (NYA) research project carried out as part of its work with the Local Government Association (LG Association), supported through top-sliced funding for local authorities. The research will be used by the LG Association to inform their support to local authorities.

In September 2010 the National Youth Agency published research from a small qualitative study conducted in London and the south-west of England into the provision of information, advice and guidance for young people. This research highlighted views held by young people on the provision of career guidance in schools and colleges. The theme has been explored further in this extended piece of research. The purpose of this research is to provide a voice for young people to contribute to the ongoing debate about how best to deliver career guidance to them, in a time of changes to structures.

Ensuring young people have a voice in everything that affects them is a core value of the NYA. This research provides a means for young people to raise their voice on issues relating to career guidance, and this is further demonstrated by the methodology adopted. Young people were themselves involved in the facilitation and analysis of the focus groups which provide part of the fieldwork for this study.

This report presents the views of nearly 1 000 young people aged 14 to 18 years (but mainly 14 and 15) and around 500 teachers from across the country. The views were gathered through an online questionnaire and online and face to face focus groups from October 2010 - February 2011.

3. The Findings in Detail

3.1 Aspirations of young people

Who is doing diplomas and young apprenticeships?

Around 17% of young people in our questionnaire were studying for a diploma and 3% were involved in a young apprenticeship.

There was a higher proportion of young people studying for a diploma or involved in a young apprenticeship in the following groups¹:

- aged 15 (rather than 14)
- described themselves as having a disability
- were living in care
- had a caring responsibility
- were parents

In addition, BME respondents were more likely than white respondents to be involved in a young apprenticeship.

Anticipated GCSEs grades

When asked how many GCSEs respondents anticipated getting at Grades A* to C, around two-fifths (39%) of those responding to our online questionnaire expected to get at least 10; a half (49%) expected to get between 5 and 9 and one-in-ten (10%) anticipated getting between 1 and 4. Approximately 1% anticipated they would not get any GCSEs at Grade A* to C and a similar proportion (c.1%) stated they were not studying for GCSEs.

A much higher proportion of respondents from black, Asian and minority ethnic groups (BAME - 59%) than white (37%) anticipated getting at least 10 GCSEs (A* to C).

Aspirations at 16 years old

When asked what they would like to do at age 16 the majority of respondents (70%) to our questionnaire wanted to do A-Levels. Around one-in-ten respondents (9%) wanted to do a vocational course such as an NVQ, whilst 6% wanted to do an apprenticeship and 6% an advanced diploma. Around one-in-twenty respondents (5%) wanted to be in full-time employment at age 16.

A higher proportion of females and those from BAME groups wanted to do A-Levels, whilst a higher proportion of males wanted to do an apprenticeship or to be in full time employment (at age 16). Respondents who described themselves as having a disability were more likely to want to be doing a vocational course at age 16 (19%) than those without a disability (9%).

Aspirations to go to university

Around eight-out-of-ten respondents to our questionnaire stated that they would like to go to university (79%), with significantly higher proportions

¹ Results are based on two-sided tests with significance level 0.05.

of females and those from BAME groups stating this aspiration. This concurs with similar findings for aspirations to do A-Levels at age 16.

Future careers

In our focus groups, about half of the young people we spoke to said they had a clear idea of the career they were interested in doing. These included a wide variety such as: teacher, dentist, architect, motor mechanic and singer. However half said they weren't sure, or expressed preferences for subject areas rather than specific careers.

3.2 Sources of advice and guidance about education, jobs and careers

Summary

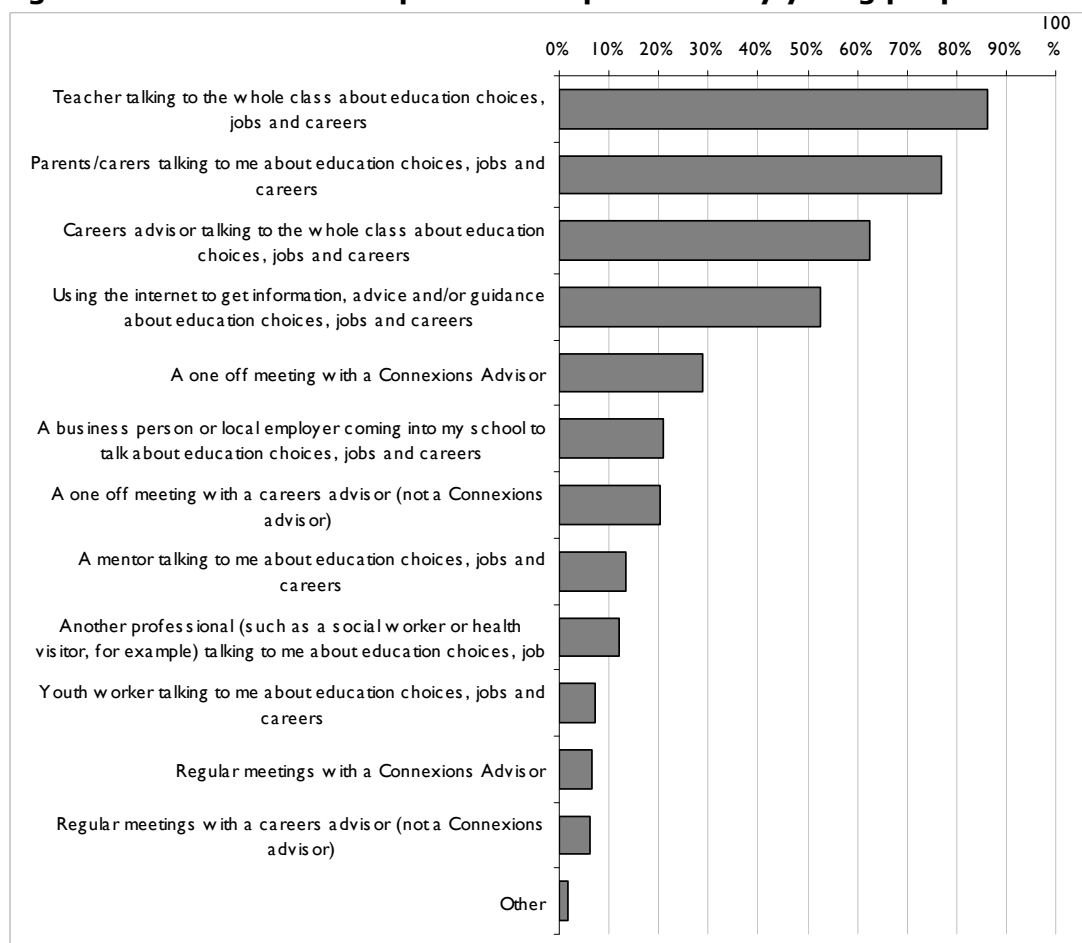
- The most common way for young people aged 14-15 to learn about careers is when a teacher talks to the whole class about education choices, jobs and careers (86%), followed by talking to their parents or carers (77%).
- Young people anticipating at least 10 GCSEs (Grade A* to C) or equivalent are more likely to have experienced a teacher talking to the class about educational options and careers advice, a business person/local employer coming in to school, and to have used the internet, than those young people anticipating fewer than 5 GCSEs at this level or equivalent qualification.
- Around half of young people use the internet to search for advice on careers and training.

Just over two-thirds (69%) of all respondents in our questionnaire had received advice about education/ learning options and careers. More females than males had received advice but those with a caring responsibility were less likely to have received any advice.

Type of advice provision experienced by young people

Figure 1 (below) shows that the most common methods of advice are in group setting or through parents/carers.

Figure 1: format of advice provision experienced by young people



The format of advice provision most commonly experienced by respondents to our questionnaire was a teacher talking to the whole class about education choices, jobs and careers (86%). This was closely followed by parents/carers talking to young people (77%). Around six-out-of-ten young people had experienced a careers adviser talking to the whole class (62%) and a little over half had themselves used the internet to get advice (53%). Around a fifth of young people had experienced a business person or local employer coming into school to talk about education, jobs and careers.

Under a third of young people had had a one-off meeting with Connexions (29%), whilst around a fifth (20%) had a meeting with a careers adviser who was not from Connexions. Only 6% of young people had regular meetings with a Connexions adviser and the same proportion (6%) had regular meetings with a careers adviser not from Connexions. (It is important to note, however, that the young people taking part in our questionnaire were in Years 9 and 10 and many career interviews are not offered until Year 11.)

This variation in contact with Connexions was developed in our focus groups, where young people explained that it depended on school implementation. Some students had routine, one on one interviews with a Connexions adviser. Some were told the adviser was available for them to

speak to, if they wanted to make an appointment (usually during lunchtime). Some had a Connexions adviser come into particular lessons and still others had to visit a Connexions office outside school.

Some interesting statistically significant differences emerge for different groups with regards to the type of advice provision they have experienced:

- **gender** – a lower proportion of females experienced the teacher talking to the whole class and had used the internet for advice
- **age** – fewer 14 yr olds had experienced the teacher talking to the whole class or their parents/carers talking to them about advice. Conversely, a higher proportion of 15yr olds had regular meetings with a careers adviser (from Connexions and from other providers) and had talked to a youth worker about advice.
- **disability** – a higher proportion of young people without a disability had experienced their teacher talking to the whole class and had used the internet for advice. A higher proportion of those with a disability had had one-off and regular meetings with a Connexions Adviser.
- **ethnicity** – a higher number of young people from a BME background had talked to a youth worker for advice.
- **in care** – a lower proportion of young people living in care had talked to a parent/carer about advice or had received it from a teacher talking to the whole class. Conversely, a higher proportion had had meetings with Connexions (one-off and regular meetings) and had talked to a mentor and youth worker for advice.
- **caring responsibilities** – a higher proportion of those with a caring responsibility had had regular meetings with Connexions and had talked with a youth worker for advice.
- **Pupil referral units** – a lower proportion of young people at pupil referral units had received advice from a teacher talking to the whole class or from a parent/carer.

Differences were also evident when comparing responses about anticipated GCSE grades and the type of advice provision experienced. Those young people who anticipated getting at least 10 GCSEs at grade A* to C or equivalent were more likely to have experienced a teacher talking to the whole class about education choices, jobs and careers. They were also more likely to have used the internet to get information and to have experienced a business person or local employer coming in to school than those anticipating getting fewer than 5 GCSEs at A* to C or equivalent.

Variations in school/ college policy were an issue highlighted by our focus groups. Some students were encouraged to attend careers fairs and work experience, and there were school events arranged on these lines. Other colleges did not encourage this as there was a clash with curriculum time. One group of students we spoke to had not been able to attend a recent career event at their school because it clashed with an important lesson. They expressed concern that this could put them at a disadvantage when it came to applying to universities and jobs.

3.3 What young people want from careers advice

Summary

- Young people who aren't sure about their future career value the opportunity to have personalised discussions with a trusted adult, who knows them well.
- Young people anticipating at least 10 GCSEs (Grade A* to C) or equivalent are less likely to have received advice about vocational options such as apprenticeships, whilst those anticipating fewer than five GCSEs or equivalent are more likely to have received advice about vocational options. Young people feel that all young people should receive information about possible options, regardless of their background at school.
- Young people want advice they are given on further education options to be impartial and include a range of alternatives.
- If young people have an ambitious aspiration they don't want this dashed by a career adviser, but a range of other options presented as well.
- Young people want the person advising them to have up to date knowledge of the world of work.
- Young people say they want to hear directly from employers, and value meaningful work experience highly. They also want to hear from, and network with, other young people who have recently entered careers.

Young people in our focus groups told us that the most important thing they want from careers advice is to know how to access their chosen careers, for example what qualifications/ courses are needed

"Pointing in the right direction and know the qualifications I would need to get a certain job" Male, 14, North West

But they also want the honest truth rather than just the theory, for example, whether certain A levels are worth more than others to employers, and what employers look for in a CV. They would like a chance to hear this direct from employers.

"I want them to be truthful about my chances in making it there" Female, South East

Young people are focused on financial issues, particularly how much it will cost to go to university, and whether this will be a good investment for their future. They would like to know earning potential, costs, and availability of jobs in different careers so they can weigh up the investment.

"...especially with the price of university going up... I would like to know whether I would be able to live on my own, work and have time to study" Male, South East

Young people are aware that the world of careers is fast moving and are concerned that the information they get is out of date. They want to hear from people actually working in the career they are interested in,

preferably current employers and other young people who have recently entered that career so they can ask for their story.

"If my career is not viable for me I want to know now, not after I have been to university and there is no one to employ me" Male, 14, South West

Young people are ambitious. They don't like being pigeonholed according to how they are perceived at school. They want to be offered the full range of options that could be open to them.

"When I went to see my careers advice woman, she wasn't very good as she didn't encourage me to achieve my goals. She said to me "it's very hard to do...and normal people can't do that"... she wasn't very helpful 😞" Female, 14, Yorkshire

Many young people don't have a fixed idea of what they want to do when they leave school/ college. They would like time to talk through the available options with someone who allows them time and space to explore different ideas and personalise information for them. Preferably this would be with someone they already know and have a good relationship with, and they feel they can talk to and be open with.

"It could be more face to face instead of just looking at a booklet. I think it's more helpful if a person explains it to you" Male, 14, South East

3.4 What young people think about the advice they receive

Summary

- When asked to rate how useful the information they received from different sources, parents/ carers and schools were nominated as the most useful sources.
- Eight out of ten respondents to our questionnaire found the advice they received in schools useful, leaving a small minority – just under a fifth – who did not find it useful. Those that valued the advice they received viewed it as a good way of getting the basics, and said they want more specific advice on top.
- Around two-thirds of young people feel the advice they receive in school covers the options they are most interested in. However, opinion was divided as to whether it gives them all the information they needed (52% agree; 48% disagree) and whether it is personalised and relevant to them (50% agree; 50% disagree).
- The young people who said they find career advice delivered in class settings useful view it as a good way of getting the basics. But many feel there should also be the offer of more personalised advice in smaller groups or one-to-one.
- Websites giving career information are seen as a useful addition but not a replacement for face to face advice.

Young people responding to our questionnaire were asked to rate the advice they had received from different sources. Figure 1 (below) shows how useful respondents found advice around education, jobs and careers was (combined net of 'very useful' and 'fairly useful').

Figure 2: Percentage who thought the advice they had received on education jobs and careers was useful/not at all useful (by source)

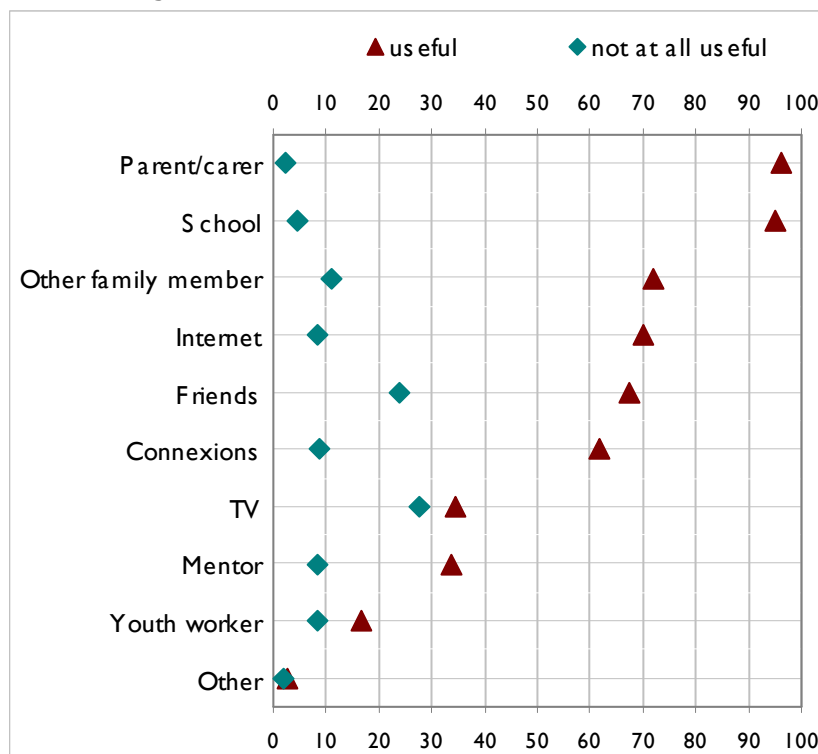


Figure 2 shows that, overall, more respondents found advice from a parent/carer (96%) and from school (95%) useful than found other sources useful. There was then a marked drop down to the next most useful category of 'other family members' and the internet, which just under three-quarters of respondents found to be a useful source of advice (72%, 70% respectively).

Around two-thirds of respondents thought friends were also a useful source of advice but, interestingly, a fairly high proportion – just under a quarter (24%) – of respondents also felt that friends were not at all useful as a source of advice.

Statistically significant differences in response were observed by gender and by ethnicity. A higher proportion of females thought that advice from a parent/carer, other family member, mentor and the internet was *not at all useful*. A higher proportion of those from a BME background found that advice from friends, other family members, youth workers and from TV was *useful*.

Most and least useful advice provision experienced by young people

Respondents were asked to pick the most and least useful type of advice provision from the list of options shown in Figure 1 (p8): a very mixed picture emerges here. Those options which few respondents had

experienced (as shown in Figure 1) received correspondingly low numbers picking this as the most and least useful.

The types of provision that more young people had experienced were more likely to be picked as the most/least useful type of provision. However, as shown in Figure 3 below, there is no clear overall pattern for what is the most and least useful type of provision. For example, a similar proportion of respondents thought that the teacher talking to the whole class was the most (19.7%) and least (23.4%) useful way of providing advice.

Figure 3: most and least useful type of advice provision (%)

	most useful	least useful
Parents/carers talking to me...	26.3	10.9
Teacher talking to the whole class...	19.7	23.4
Careers adviser talking to the whole class...	16.0	8.5
Using the internet...	9.8	12.8
A one off meeting with a Connexions Adviser	9.7	5.5

The finding that individual requirements and expectations around advice vary greatly was reinforced by our focus groups which highlighted a range of views on how effective the career advice received by young people was.

Teacher / career adviser talking to the whole class

Some students in our focus groups reported that careers lessons taught as part of the citizenship/ PSHE curriculum were not useful as they were taught by a teacher who did not have relevant recent experience in this area.

"I think brilliant, teachers know how to get into teaching, but do they know how to get into youth work, or [becoming a] vet? Male, North West

Others felt that although these lessons were useful for learning some of the basics, they were not able to get specific information on particular careers or what they needed to do next, because of the large group setting.

"It wasn't specific enough and focused more on the students that wanted to be doctors, lawyers etc" Girl, South East

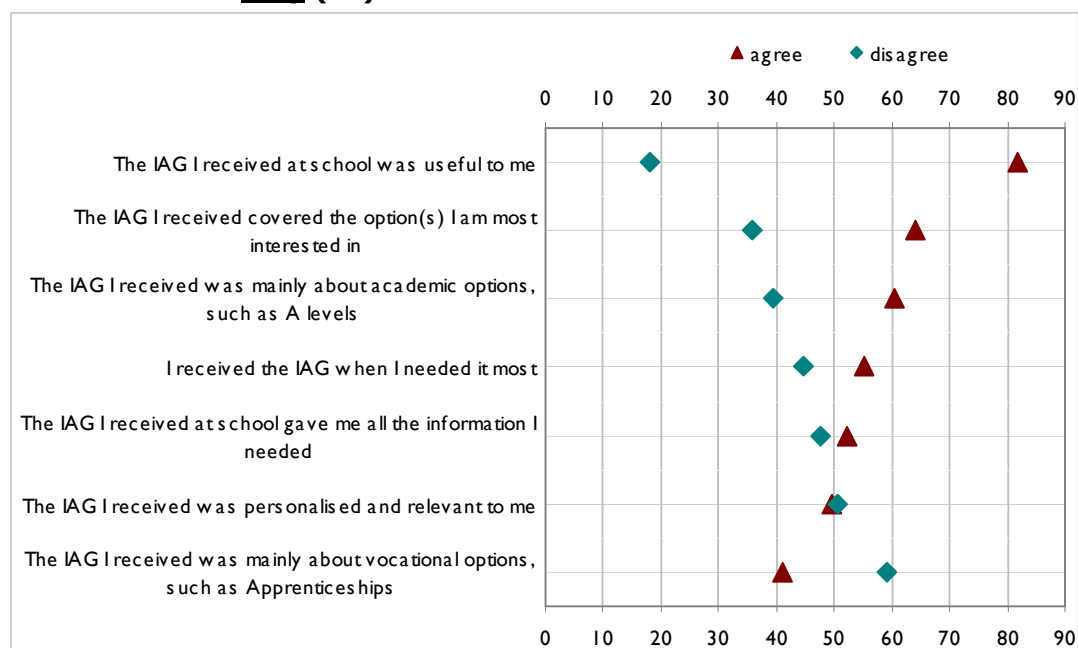
"[it should] be more focused on you, looking at your grades and what you want to do" Female, South East

"The Connexions people did a lesson with us in year 9, but all they did was give us tonnes of random sheets" Female, 14, North West

Figure 4 (below) is a dot-plot showing whether respondents to our questionnaire agreed or disagreed with various statements about the information they had received from a teacher or schools careers adviser. Larger gaps between the two points show bigger differences between

'agree' and 'disagree'; whereas where the points converge opinion is divided.

Figure 4: statements about information received from a teacher or school careers adviser only (%)



Eight-out-of-ten respondents found the information they received in schools useful, leaving a small minority – just under a fifth – who did not find it useful. Around two-thirds (64%) felt that the advice they received at school covered the options they were most interested in and just over half felt they received the advice when they needed it most (55%).

The majority of respondents (61%) felt the information they received at school was mainly about academic options, such as A-Levels, with a lower proportion stating it was mainly about vocational options, such as apprenticeships (41%).

Overall, opinions were divided as to whether the advice received in school gave them all the information they needed (52% agree; 48% disagree) and whether it was personalised and relevant to them (50% agree; 50% disagree).

Responses varied for different groups of young people:

- **Gender** – A lower proportion of females agreed that the information they received in school was personalised and relevant to them and a lower proportion of females stated that the information they received in schools was mainly about vocational options, such as apprenticeships.
- **Age** – Proportionally more 15yr olds (than 14yr olds) had received information in school about vocational options.
- **Disability** – a higher proportion of those with a disability stated that the information they had received in schools was mainly about vocational options.
- **Regional differences** – compared to London, a lower proportion of respondents from the north east agreed that the information they

received at school was when they needed it most or was personalised and relevant to them.

- **Anticipated GCSEs** – young people anticipating at least 10 GCSEs were less likely to have received information about vocational options such as apprenticeships whilst those anticipating between one and four GCSEs were more likely to have received information about vocational options.

Other advice received from a teacher or school careers adviser/ Connexions adviser

In the focus groups, feedback on the value of advice from careers advisers varied. Some, especially those who had routine one on one interviews, were very positive about the advice they had received from careers advisers and Connexions.

"Connexions is a great place, they helped me sort out which options to take and how they would help me in later life" Male, Yorkshire

The young people who were most positive about advice from a careers adviser were those who had had time to work in a more intensive way with the adviser and had been able to build up a relationship.

However those young people who came from colleges where students had to make their own appointments with a careers adviser (often during lunchtimes or limited opening hours) were more critical of the service provided. Some were intimidated by the idea of making an appointment, or did not really understand the service that could be provided for them.

"We can only see them in our lunchtimes, and we don't have the space, we should do that in careers lessons, after all that's what it's about" Female, 14, Yorkshire

In the focus groups, many young people said that they valued highly the more informal advice they had from trusted teachers – often their form tutor. This advice was seen as honest and tailored to them, as their form tutor (or a trusted teacher) knew them well, and is motivated by a concern for the best outcome for the individual young person.

"... form tutors say what they think, Connexions people say what they should say ;)" Female, 14, North West

"My form tutor has given me the most down to earth explanation in how I should go about getting the career I need", Male, 14, South East

However good the relationship, young people are concerned that teachers' knowledge of different careers should be kept up to date:

"[I would like to speak to] a form tutor, with all up to date information on careers. During school" Girl, South East

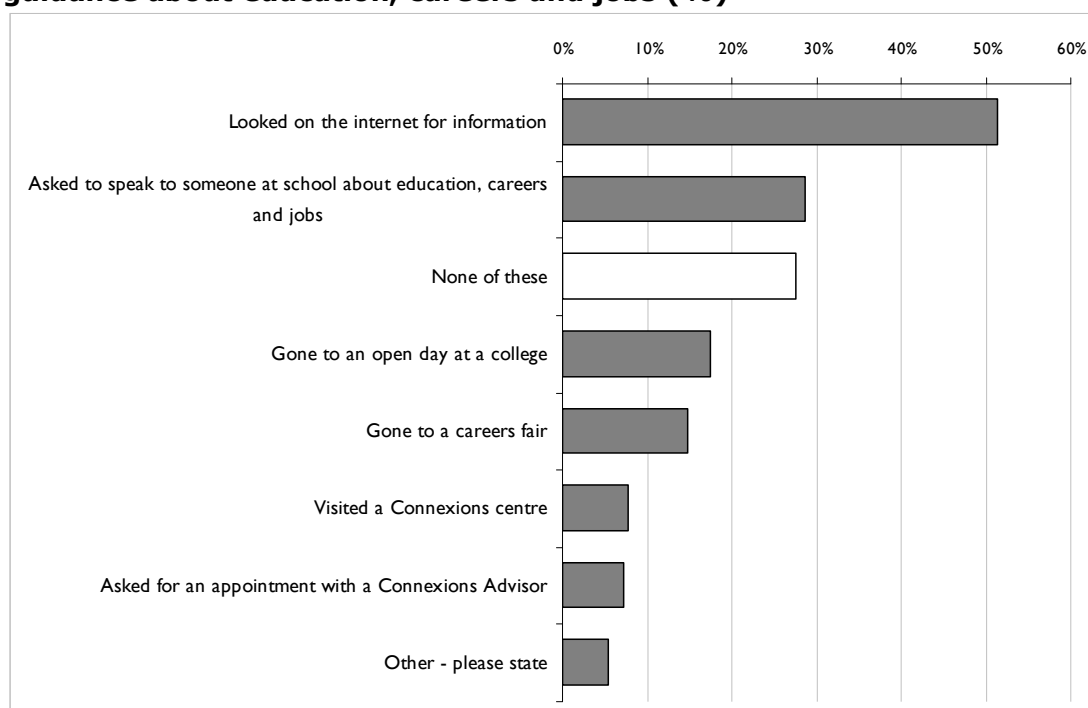
Activity undertaken by young people to find careers related advice

Figure 5 (below) shows that over a quarter of young people had not sought out any careers related advice (28%).

The most common action taken by young people to find careers related advice is looking on the internet (51%). This is broadly consistent with the earlier question about the type of advice young people have experienced. However, it could be argued that this figure might be expected to be even higher with almost half of all young people (49%) not using the internet for this purpose.

Over a quarter of all young people had asked to speak to someone at school about education, careers and jobs (29%). A small but, given the proactive nature of these activities, not insignificant minority of young people also reported attending open days (17%), careers fairs (15%) and Connexions (7-8%).

Figure 5: activity by young people to find information, advice and/or guidance about education, careers and jobs (%)



Males were more likely than females to have *not* done any of these activities to find careers-related advice. In particular, females were more likely than males to have looked on the internet for information. Those aged 14 were also significantly less likely to have undertaken any of these activities than those aged 15.

Those with a disability, young carers and young parents were all more likely to have requested an appointment with a Connexions adviser. Those with a disability and those in care were also more likely to have attended an open day at a college.

There was little significant difference by region but respondents from the south west were more likely to request an appointment with a Connexions adviser than those from the south east.

*"I got told about the Connexions website through school... it's ok... although I prefer to get information by speaking to someone"
Female, 14, North West*

In terms of improvements to careers advice on the internet, young people mentioned wanting them to be more interesting and interactive and also more personalised, e.g. blogs written by people in different occupations and being able to contact and speak to experts in particular fields, possibly through some sort of online chat mechanism:

*"That would be good because you could get advice and info from people who are actually working in the jobs I am interested in"
Male, 14, North West*

Generally, young people reported that they don't like emailing for advice as it is too slow.

3.5 Teachers' views on providing careers advice

Summary

- A fifth of teachers say they have received training to support them in the provision of careers-related advice.
- Less than half of teachers feel well supported with regards to providing advice. Where teachers do feel well supported this comes from Connexions and colleagues at school, rather than their local authority or union.
- Two-thirds (68%) of teachers are confident about providing advice, whilst 14% are not confident. Confidence is higher about academic options, such as A-Levels, (84%) but much lower for vocational courses such as NVQs (49%).
- Four-fifths (82%) of teachers are confident that the advice they provide is impartial.
- Nine-out-of-ten teachers (88%) state that alternatives to staying in school are discussed with all students.

Type of advice provision by teachers

Most teachers – around nine-out-of-ten (87%) – provided some form of information, advice & guidance to young people, either formally or informally, in relation to their careers, education and/or job choices. There were no significant differences across different groups.

The majority of teachers provided advice by speaking informally to individual students (89%). Around half facilitated sessions with their form group (47%) and just over a third facilitated whole class sessions as part of the curriculum (35%). Around 30% held formal one-to-one sessions with students to discuss their careers, education or job choices and a similar proportion (29%) organised for outside bodies or professionals to come into school to talk to students.

Teachers aged 50 or older were less likely to facilitate sessions with their form group than those aged 35 or under. Those who had been teaching less than 2 years were less likely to speak informally to individual students

about their careers, education or job choices. These differences may be a reflection of different roles and responsibilities of teachers at different stages of their career.

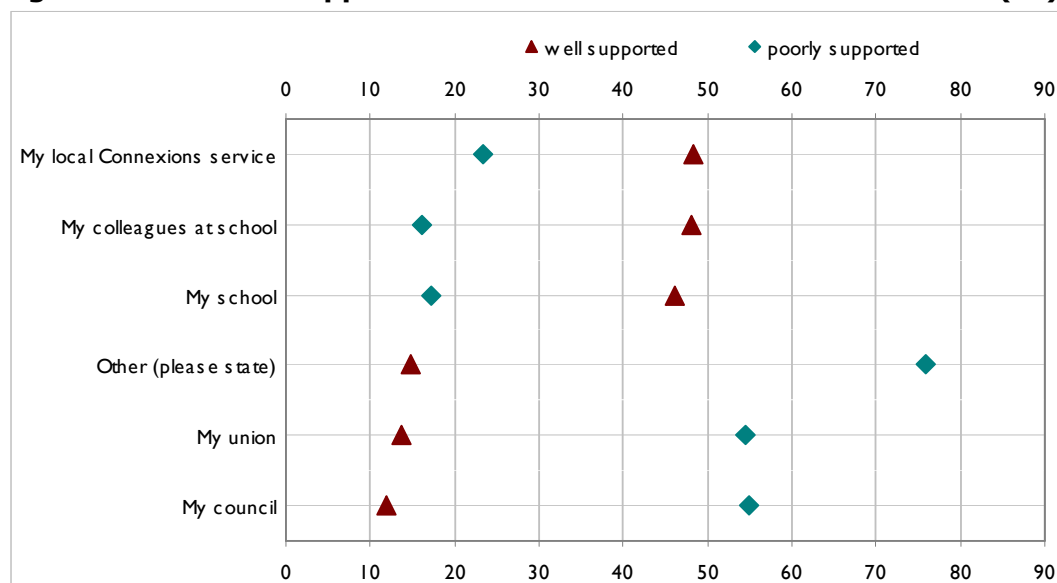
Teachers in the south east and London were less likely than those in the East region to facilitate whole class sessions on careers, education or job choices as part of the curriculum.

Training and support for teachers

Only a fifth of teachers (20%) had received any training to support them in the provision of advice in relation to careers advice. This held true irrespective of gender, ethnicity, age or time in the job, across all regions.

Figure 5 (below) shows that less than half of teachers felt well supported from any organisation with regards to providing advice. Most support came from Connexions and from colleagues at school, where 48% of respondents felt well supported, with similar figures for 'my school' (46%). For all three of these categories more people felt well supported than poorly supported. The converse was true with regards to the other three categories of 'other', 'my union' and 'my council' where a large proportion of respondents felt poorly supported. These findings reflect a combination of whose role it is to provide support as well as the perceived quality of the support provided.

Figure 7: how well supported teachers feel from different sources (%)



A higher proportion of male teachers, compared to female, felt well supported by their school. A higher proportion of teachers from BME groups felt well supported by their council.

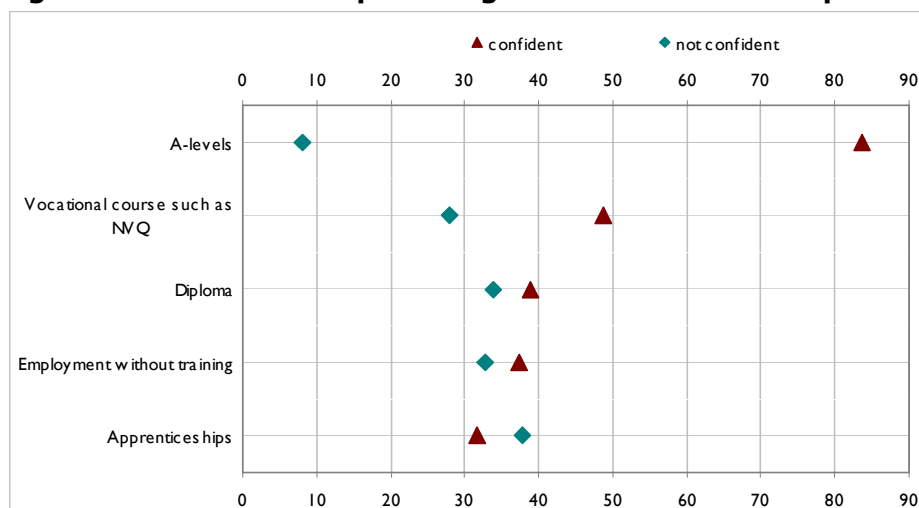
Teachers' confidence in providing advice

Just over two-thirds (68%) of teachers were confident about providing advice, of which 11% (around one-in-ten) were very confident. Around one-in-seven (14%) of teachers were not that confident. Very few (1%) were not at all confident and 18% were unsure. There were not many variations to this pattern but, proportionally, more male teachers than

female were 'very confident', whilst a higher proportion of those in the youngest age group (up to 35yrs) were not that confident compared to both older age groups (35 to 49yrs and 50yrs+).

Distinct differences are evident with regards to the confidence of teachers providing advice for different options available to young people, as shown in Figure 8 (below).

Figure 8: Confidence in providing advice for different options (%)



Confidence is high amongst teachers with regards to providing advice for the main academic option for young people – A-Levels – with 84% confident of this. This proportion then drops to below half (49%) confident about providing advice on vocational courses such as NVQs and drops further for the diploma (39%) and employment without training (37%). Apprenticeships are the only category where there is a higher proportion of teachers not confident they could provide advice on this option (38%) than those who are confident they could (just 32%).

The main statistically significant variation for this question was that fewer female teachers were confident about providing advice on apprenticeships, employment without training and vocational courses compared to their male counterparts.

Impartiality of information, advice & guidance from teachers

Just over four-fifths of teachers (82%) were confident that the advice they provided was impartial with 12% unsure and 6% not confident about the impartiality of the advice they provide. Those aged 50 or older were more confident about impartiality than those aged 35 or under. Similarly, confidence about impartiality was higher for those that had been teaching for 11 years or more than for those teaching for 6 to 10yrs.

Conversely, in our focus groups many young people expressed concern that the advice they received at school about career and educational options was not impartial. There was a feeling from students that teachers push students into taking their own subjects as option choices, and that they are biased towards academic options. This could be because this is the academic career path they took themselves, or because it was in the school's interests to do so.

"I think that subject teachers tried to help but sometimes it was just like they were selling their subject" Girl, North West

Some felt stereotyped by school based on their past academic performance and weren't free to make a wider choice of careers or future options. Young people expressed concern that academic 'high fliers' were only offered advice about A levels and university, and non academic students were only offered information about vocational options. This was perceived as unfair and limiting, and young people felt that a wide range of options should be offered to all students.

"When these people came into our school they were called Aim Higher and they had us in little groups and they did questions about uni and how it would help, this would be helpful if it was available to everyone else" Male, 14, Yorkshire

"I had a meeting with the careers advisor, but he just said to get the type of job I want that I had to go to university, he didn't give advice or costs" Female, 14, Yorkshire

Staying on at school beyond the age of 16, e.g. in a sixth form or similar

Students had the option of staying on at school beyond the age of 16 in the schools of around two-thirds of respondents.

A little over two-fifths (43%) of teachers stated that staying on at school was recommended for all students, compared to 57% who stated this was not the case. Male teachers were more like than female teachers to say this was the case.

Around nine-out-of-ten teachers (88%) stated that alternatives to staying on in school are discussed with all students, with 12% saying this was not the case. Those who had been teaching for the shortest time (up to 2yrs) were more like to say this was not the case.

4. Conclusion

This report is based on research with nearly 1,000 young people aged 14-18 years in England on their views of career advice. It also includes research with about 500 teachers on their experiences of giving career advice.

Young people are in no doubt as to the importance of career advice, particularly in the difficult financial and economic climate. Around two-thirds of the young people taking part in our questionnaire felt the advice they had received in school covered the options they were most interested in. However, opinion was divided as to whether it gave them all the information they needed and whether it was sufficiently personalised and relevant to them.

In the focus groups, young people said they wanted the opportunity to receive advice one-on-one or in small groups, that was tailored to their skills and areas of interest. They want this to be given by someone they know and trust, or they have time to get to know. They want the person giving them the advice to be well informed and to have up to date information. They are happy to use the internet for more information but don't want this to replace the option to have face to face advice.

They want to hear directly from employers, and value work experience highly. They also want to hear from other young people who have recently entered careers.

Young people feel that students should be offered a wide range of future options, rather than being stereotyped according to background or past performance at school.

Whilst confident in advising young people on academic options for further study, teachers have less confidence in their ability to provide information and advice relating to vocational qualifications. This is picked up by young people who have concerns about receiving the full range of advice.

Appendix 1 –Methodology

The focus of this research is to understand, and give voice to, the thoughts and opinions of a range of young people and teachers on career advice.

An online questionnaire was conducted in October 2010 with a random sample of young people from across England. Respondents were drawn through opportunity sampling using a database of over 37,000 young people, and around 900 took part. A further questionnaire was conducted with a random sample of teachers from across England. Respondents were drawn through opportunity sampling using a database of over 6,000 teachers, and around 500 took part. See more details of the respondents at Appendix 1.

To explore the findings in more depth, a qualitative approach was adopted based on four online focus groups with young people in January 2011. The focus groups were convened with young people of 14 and 15 years living in the South East and Yorkshire. 30 young people were involved. See more details at Appendix 2.

Additionally, four face to face focus groups were convened with young people of 14-18 years. Two were held in FE Colleges in the Midlands and North East, one was held in a youth group setting in the North East, and one was held in Connexions in the Midlands. 39 young people were involved.

The students who took part in the focus groups in the College-based settings were all selected by teachers (or other adult contacts) to take part in the group. The young people who took part in the other settings and online had all volunteered to take part and had not been pre-selected, apart from by virtue of their accessing provision. This distinction could be important from a methodological perspective with regards to interpreting the findings.

The face to face focus groups were facilitated by NYA young associates². The focus groups lasted around an hour and were held at the school or youth group. The College groups took place during school time. The other groups took place during the school holidays or in the evening. Each focus group followed the same pattern, using a discussion guide developed and delivered with young associates (attached at Appendix 3).

² The NYA works with a group of young adults, who undertake a variety of roles including development and delivery of training, specialist knowledge in participation, research and facilitation of focus groups.

Appendix 2: Survey meta data

Survey of young people

An online questionnaire was conducted in October 2010 with a random sample of young people from across England ($n=937$). Respondents were drawn through opportunity sampling using a database of over 37,000 young people. Of those completing the survey:

- 80% were aged 14yrs; 20% aged 15yrs
- 51% male; 49% female)
- 18% had a caring responsibility (164 people)
- 10% were from a Black or Minority Ethnic groups (91 people)
- 5% described themselves as having a disability (48 people)
- 10% were
- 2% were in care (18 people)
- 1% were parents (12 people)
- 1% were not in school and were in a Pupil Referral Unit (6), home educated (4) or NEET (1)

Survey of teachers

An online questionnaire was conducted in October 2010 with a random sample of teachers from across England ($n=520$). Respondents were drawn through opportunity sampling using a database of over 6,000 teachers.

Of those completing the survey, 88% were White British with the remaining 12% from a Black or Minority Ethnic group (61 people, includes 'White Other'). More females than males completed the survey (60:40) and there was good representation across three broad age ranges: 31% were 35 or under; 36% were 36-49yrs; and 33% were 50 or older.

Focus groups

4 online focus groups were held, facilitated by the online company Dubit. All the respondents were in Year 10 (14&15 years) and groups covered 3 geographical areas:

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Location	South East	North West	Mixed (3 x North West, 4 x South East)	Yorkshire
Gender	3 x female 4 x male	5 x female 3 x male	4 x female 3 x male	5 x female 3 x male
Age	7 x 14	7 x 14 1 x 15	7 x 14	7 x 14 1 x 15
Ethnicity	1 x White & Black African 4 x White British 1 x	6 x White British 1 x Indian 1 x White & Asian	5 x White British 1 x White & Asian 1 x Preferred not to say	7 x White British 1 x Pakistani

	Pakistani 1 x White & Asian			
Additional Info (Disability, in care, caring responsibilities, parents)	None	None	1 x caring responsibility	1 x consider themselves having a disability

4 face to face focus groups were held, facilitated by NYA young associates.

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Location	Midlands	North East	North East	Midlands
Gender	10 x female 10 x male	7 x female 4 x male	5 x female	3
Age	14 and 15 years	14 and 15 years	15 – 17 years	

Appendix 3 – Focus group discussion guide

What do young people think about career advice? Focus group discussion guide

The focus group will last 1 hour. There will be 5-10 young people in the group.

Resources needed: Flip chart, marker pens, recording equipment, one copy of worksheet for each young person

Introduction (5 mins)

- Introduce self and NYA
- We are doing a research project to find out what young people think about career advice and how it can be improved.
- There are no right or wrong answers – we just want to know what you think so please say whatever comes to mind.
- All your answers will be treated as confidential and although we would like to include your views in our report, nothing you say will be traced back to you.
- We will be recording the discussion so that we don't have to worry about taking notes
- The group will last for about an hour.
- Introductions around the group- first names / age

Warm up exercise (3 mins)

Opening discussion (7 mins)

- What stage are you at in terms of thinking about what you're going to do after you've finished your GCSE's? What are your plans? *Probe A levels, NVQ, Apprenticeships, Diploma, full time work.*
- What has made you want to take this route? What has influenced your decision? *Probe parents, friends, teachers, career advice*

About career advice (5 mins)

- What kind of help do you think young people need from career advice? (5 mins)

Write up ideas on a flip chart.

Sources of career advice (15 mins)

Think about your experience of getting advice on jobs or careers: where have you had advice from?

Ask how many young people out of the group had accessed each source of advice – and record this.

- Thinking about each of these sources, how useful was the advice you received? *Discuss each advice source in turn*
- How helpful were they in helping you make a choice that was right for you / or that will be right for you?
- How personalised do you feel the advice you were given was for your circumstances? Is this important?
- Did you feel under any pressure to make particular educational choices? Who from?
- Have you had a career interview with Connexions? Were you offered one? Did you have to request one? What stopped you if you haven't had one?

Worksheets (15 mins)

Introduce the worksheets. Check understanding of each picture. Emphasise we are looking for young people's own experiences, not what they think the 'answer' is. Ask young people to work through the questions with a partner, but write their own responses.

Choosing one or two pictures, ask who would be willing to share their answers with the group. Discuss.

Collect in the worksheets

Using the internet (this could be optional if pushed for time) (5 mins)

- Thinking about something a bit different now, have you used the internet for finding out advice on education and careers?
- How useful did you find these sites? Why were they useful/not useful?

Summing up (5 mins)

- How do you think career advice for young people should be improved?
- Is there anything you think should not be changed?
- Would you like to remain involved in our research? If so please put your email address and full name on the worksheet and we will be in touch.

Thank and depart