

# Face-to-face

What young people think about information, advice and guidance

Tessa Hibbert







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Getting it right for young people

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## Executive summary

This qualitative study provides young people with a voice in the ongoing debate about the provision of information, advice and guidance (IAG) around careers and other issues relevant for young people. The fieldwork for this study consulted 79 young people through eight peer-facilitated focus groups across London and the South West. Focus groups took place in schools, a pupil referral unit and special school and with a third-sector provider of IAG.

Young people said that good IAG was important because ...

*“you can’t go through life alone and sometimes you need help to see things objectively and to make the right decisions”*

Young people who participated in this study were clear that they valued ‘good’ information, advice and guidance (IAG) on a range of areas in their lives. They know that IAG that is timely, relevant and accurate is essential in helping them overcome a range of issues, from those facing them now, such as education choices and money worries, to concerns about the future, including careers and health issues.

Parents/carers were the most common first point of call for IAG: around half the young people who participated in this research said they would turn to parents/carers or family first for IAG on a difficult problem.

*“I would ask my mum because she is always looking out for the next best health tip”*

*“[I would ask] ...my sister – she knows a lot and relates to me”*

However, the remaining half of participants said they would not seek this support from their families. Some young people felt that times have changed so much that the older generation simply cannot understand the pressures that they face today and may not be informed about all the choices they have to make.

‘Youth workers’ and ‘teachers/school’ were most commonly referred to as the *best* place or person to get IAG, rather than ‘an expert’.

Young people valued talking to their friends about problems but identified that their immediate peer network may not be the best source of IAG because they were not likely to be any better informed, and might not always keep things confidential.

Young people were unanimously very positive about peer mentoring schemes, providing mentors received the necessary training and support and could ensure confidentiality. For careers IAG specifically, young people were keen on the idea of young people who were a few years older and already in work coming back into schools and telling them about jobs and careers.

Many young people felt let down by the formal sources of IAG set up to support them. Some reported that the IAG available from Connexions is not tailored enough to their personal circumstances, and that Connexions services can be difficult to access.

*"Connexions ... don't respect a person's opinions and don't treat young people as an individual"*

*"[The Connexions adviser] read out from a piece of paper information that I already knew"*

Young people also felt that provision was targeted at more vulnerable young people, rather than offering a universal service.

*"If you're doing okay, then you're just left to get on with it"*

However, those young people who had systematic and closer contact with Connexions were very positive about the service they received.

Whilst many of the younger students we spoke to (13 to 16 years) could think of someone at school they could approach with their worries, many others we consulted, particularly older young people, did not have trusted relationships with any adults at school.

The majority of young people wanted to access all the information, advice and guidance they needed through a well-developed relationship with a trusted adult, rather than an 'expert' in a particular field. Commonly the trusted adult would be a parent/carer or alternatively a teacher or youth worker. This was primarily so that the IAG young people received is from someone who knows them personally and who they can trust.

*"If I feel comfortable with someone, I can open up and talk about what I am interested in and really enjoy. I would like someone to take time to get to know me and find out what I am good at. Then make some suggestions about future options"*

Whilst most young people in the study were comfortable using the internet to search for IAG on a problem, very few were aware of websites they could trust, and many simply turn to search engines. There was also divergent feedback on existing dedicated internet services. For example, although there was good awareness of the Connexions 'brand' almost none of the young people in the study were aware that Connexions operated outside the school context and only a few had heard of and used the Connexions Direct website. Similarly, there was little awareness of other generic services, like NHS Direct, but there was very positive feedback for the *Talk to Frank* campaign. Ultimately, most of the young people we spoke to said they would prefer to access IAG 'face-to-face' rather than over the internet or email.

## Section 1: Introduction

'Information, advice and guidance' is an umbrella term which covers a range of activities and interventions that help young people to become more self-reliant and better able to manage their personal and career development, including learning.

IAG includes:

- the provision of accurate, up-to-date and objective information about personal and lifestyle issues, learning and career opportunities, progression routes, choices, including where to find help and IAG, and how to access it
- the provision of activities that help young people to gather, understand and interpret information and apply it to their own situation
- the provision of impartial guidance and specialist support to help young people understand themselves and their needs, confront barriers, resolve conflicts, develop new perspectives and make progress

From a young person's perspective, IAG can be offered in a wide variety of different settings and from a number of different sources. Written materials, the web and new media, along with face-to-face contact, may all provide the setting for IAG. The source of IAG may be teachers, Connexions workers or other significant adults (such as youth workers) in addition to their peers, family and friends.

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.

The scope of this research was developed in response to a lack of current work focusing on young people's views about the IAG they receive on wider life issues – such as financial management, health, relationships – as well as career-based IAG. This research covers a broad range of IAG issues relevant to young people, including, but not limited to careers-related IAG. The over-riding purpose of this research is to provide a voice for young people to contribute to the ongoing debate about IAG.

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 IAG and this is further demonstrated by the methodology adopted. Young people were themselves involved in the design, facilitation and analysis of the focus groups which provide the fieldwork for this study.

A review of relevant literature in preparation for this project highlighted a range of existing research looking at young people's views of IAG in relation to career guidance and educational choices, but a dearth of evidence around IAG in relation to personal and life issues – financial management, health and relationships, for example. Existing research<sup>1</sup> also suggests that the majority of young people are unsatisfied with the 'formal' IAG (that is, from Connexions, or careers guidance in schools) they receive. Alongside issues around young

people's perception of the IAG available to them, concerns have also been raised about the quality of and variation in this provision<sup>2</sup>, and its impact on young people's aspirations<sup>3</sup>.

The NYA's research, carried out through a series of focus groups with young people in two regions of England, set out to address this gap. The research found that young people have similar concerns about the quality and accessibility of IAG they receive from formal sources on 'life' issues as they do on careers guidance.

## Section 2: Methodology

The focus of this research was to understand, and give voice to, the thoughts and opinions of a range of young people with regards to IAG – including careers-based and IAG around life issues. A qualitative approach was adopted based on eight focus groups. The focus groups were convened with young people between the ages of 13 and 21 in April and May 2010. In total, across all eight focus groups, 79 young people were involved with more females (62 per cent) than males (38 per cent) participating.

The focus groups were spread across two regions: London and the South West. Two focus groups were held in secondary schools. Two were held in alternative education provision: a pupil referral unit – for young people with additional medical needs – and a school for young people with disabilities. Three groups were held with young people in a youth-group setting. One group was held with young people who use a third sector IAG centre.

This is the first phase of the NYA's research around young people's perceptions of the provision of IAG. Further research is planned in 2010-11 which will broaden the geographical scope of the fieldwork to other regions of England, particularly in the north and midlands.

The students who took part in the focus groups in the four school-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 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.

Each focus group was facilitated by the lead (adult) researcher and at least one young associate<sup>4</sup>. The focus groups lasted around an hour and were held at the school or youth group. The school 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).

Each focus group comprised an introduction and warm up, group and individual exercises. A questionnaire 'storyboard' developed with young associates was used as a key research tool to support the capture of data (attached at Appendix 4). Focus group participants were asked to feedback their experiences of IAG as depicted on the storyboard.

## Section 3: Focus group findings

### *Key messages*

- Overwhelmingly, young people want access to information, advice and guidance (IAG) from a trusted adult with whom they have a good relationship.
- For around half of young people in this study, parents/carers were their first and preferred choice for IAG. However, a significant number of young people do not seek IAG from parents/carers, in part due to perceptions of cultural and societal changes since they themselves were young.
- Young people in this study identified their peers as potential sources of support, but were concerned about them being no better informed and about a lack of confidentiality. Related to this there was much support for peer mentoring schemes where mentors receive training and support.
- Many young people in this study felt let down by the formal sources of IAG set up to support them. This was primarily because some young people felt the IAG available from Connexions was targeted at more vulnerable young people and was not tailored enough to their personal circumstances.
- Young people want careers IAG (particularly) from someone who has taken the time to get to know them and who has asked them about their preferences.
- Young people lack awareness about dedicated IAG websites, including Connexions Direct and NHS Direct. In the absence of knowing where to look, young people are turning to search engines to look for (potentially unregulated) information.

### 3.1 What are the issues that matter to young people?

The first exercise in the focus groups involved participants identifying the issues they believed to be of most concern to them and their peers. All focus groups came up with similar lists of issues; however the lists from groups containing older young people (17 and over) were more detailed.

The issues that were of most concern to the young people participating were those which required decisions to be made imminently, and related to points of transition: all groups highlighted finance and jobs, and education/options/exams as being of most concern. The majority of focus groups (six out of seven) also cited relationships, alcohol and drugs as major current concerns.

The younger groups focused more on the age-specific choices that were facing them right now, such as sixth form, Diplomas, Apprenticeships and university, and personal issues such as weight/size and mental health.

The groups with older young people participating also raised concerns around independent living, specifically health, diet, cooking and hygiene, as well as issues around housing and benefits.

### 3.2 What are young people's preferred sources of information, advice and guidance?

Participants in the focus groups were then asked about preferred sources of IAG.

In school settings (counted here as the two secondary schools and one special school), the two most favoured sources of IAG were school staff or teachers, and parents or family, which were both cited by around a third of respondents.

The positive responses to teachers as a source of IAG may be explained in part by the methodology: the schools who agreed to take part in the research had an interest in promoting young people's voice, and were actively addressing their needs around IAG. It may also be that the young people who attended these focus groups had been selected by the schools as positive achievers, with a good relationship with teachers.

Further, the young people taking part in the school-based focus groups were generally younger than those in the non school-based groups: this research suggested a link between positive school relationships and age.

In contrast, the students at the pupil referral unit (PRU) felt very differently. Although based on a smaller sample, a much higher proportion – just over half – felt by far the best place or person to go to for IAG was parents and family, with friends the second most popular choice. This group was extremely unwilling to approach teachers for IAG as they felt they could not trust them. This group drew a distinction between teachers at their previous secondary school and the staff at the PRU, with whom they have good relationships. This highlighted the important role of a trusted adult, irrespective of whether that relationship is developed within a school or other setting.

The groups held in youth work settings gave a wider range of answers, but again parents/family were the source of IAG cited most often, followed by friends. The importance of youth workers was stressed, particularly by the group of young people who use a third sector IAG organisation in London. They felt that the workers at their organisation provided them with exactly the type of support they needed on a range of issues and that they were providing a really important service. It was their 'one stop shop' for IAG and, if necessary, signposting them to further sources of support. They had a good personal relationship with the workers there, who they could trust.

For the out-of-school focus groups, there were around twice as many references to 'youth workers' as the best place/person to get IAG as there were for 'school/teachers'. Across all focus groups there were marginally more mentions for youth workers than teachers and very few mentioned 'an expert/someone who can tell me the facts'. It is evident then that young people prioritise IAG obtained through a trusted source, where a relationship has been established over time, rather than from 'an expert' with whom there is no established link. The trusted person could be someone in a variety of roles depending on the individual circumstances of the young person – parent, teacher, youth worker, other.

When asked about who they turn to in practice for IAG, 'parents/carers' were consistently the most common response from young people across all settings used in this study. Further, just under half (46 per cent) of the participants in this research agreed with the statement: "I can trust my parents/carers and always ask them anything". This was borne out in the discussion that followed, with many young people saying that the most

important thing about turning to family for IAG was that you can trust a family member, and they are always there for you.

*“I would ask my mum because she is always looking out the next best health tip”*

*“(I would ask) ... my sister – she knows a lot and relates to me”*

However, this leaves just over half of participants who did not agree with this statement. This, and other discussions in the focus groups, highlighted that there is a significant proportion of young people who do not seek IAG from their parents/carers and prefer to seek IAG from elsewhere.

When asked whether they agreed with the statement “my parents/carers have life experience and always know what to do” only a third of young people agreed (35 per cent), with two-thirds disagreeing or unsure. This was explained by some of the young people who said that times had changed so much since their parents were young that it is hard for adults to understand the pressures young people now face at school and in competition for jobs and higher education places.

Many of the young people whose parents had grown up in different countries said that their parents were used to a different culture, had a different upbringing and found it hard to relate to young people’s issues today.

Some young people also felt that today’s jobs and careers are so different from traditional career paths that parents simply don’t have the information to pass on. Where experiences were in common though, the young people participating in this study did value IAG from a family member, in particular their mother.

### 3.3 What do young people think about information, advice and guidance from friends?

A large proportion of young people taking part in focus groups said they talk to friends about their problems. However, when asked whether they agreed with the statement “my friends understand me and I can always talk to them” nearly half (48 per cent) of young people participating agreed, with just over half (52 per cent) either disagreeing or unsure. Despite this, during focus group discussions, young people expressed that the best people to talk to about a problem were those who were a similar age because they would not be judgmental and they may have been through similar problems.

However, when young people were asked whether they agreed with the statement “my friends give useful IAG” only just over a third (37 per cent) agreed, whilst nearly two thirds (63 per cent) disagreed or were not sure.

This was explained by the young people who were quite sceptical about relying on friends for IAG. They felt that friends might not know any more than they do and could be led solely by their own experiences. In addition, some young people felt that friends could not be trusted to keep the problem confidential.

Consequently, this research calls into question traditional assumptions about young people prioritising friends

as sources of advice and support. Whilst the young people participating in this study clearly valued being able to talk to and discuss problems with their friends, when it came to IAG about specific issues, the majority of young people felt that this would need to be sourced from outside their peer group.

Interestingly, many young people said that they found the structure of a peer mentoring scheme a useful way of talking to other young people about problems (this issue came up spontaneously in the first focus group and was then raised in all the subsequent focus groups). Most young people had experience of taking part in peer mentoring schemes at schools. Such schemes were essentially described as those where older students are trained and supported in providing IAG for other, usually younger, students. Often the students are one or two years apart.

Young people were unanimously very positive about peer mentoring schemes in theory. The primary benefit of mentoring schemes for IAG was perceived to be through the training received by mentors, which meant they are more informed and able to signpost as appropriate, whilst still being able to easily relate to people of a similar age. Some of those who had had experience of mentoring schemes in practice were more cautious. The two main concerns they gave were that the peer mentors relay too much information back to teachers, and that sometimes young people find it difficult to put aside peer group relationships and trust other people of their age with their problems. Young people felt that addressing these two issues would be crucial to the success of a mentoring scheme.

For careers IAG specifically, young people were keen on the idea of young people who were a few years older and already in work coming back into schools and telling them about jobs and careers.

### 3.4 What do young people think about information, advice and guidance from Connexions?

Although brand awareness of Connexions was high (nearly all young people had heard of the service and recognised the logo), many of the young people participating in focus groups did not know that Connexions operated outside the school context and only a handful of young people had heard of or used the Connexions website.

The majority of young people participating in this study saw Connexions as an agency giving advice about careers, primarily focusing on work and jobs (just over half of participants) rather than about higher education (only around one in six participants). In discussions, young people seemed to have a limited understanding of the other areas that Connexions could advise them on.

In the focus groups, many young people who had had an interview with a Connexions adviser told us that the IAG they received was not personalised.

***"Connexions ... don't respect a person's opinions and don't treat young people as an individual"***

Those that had even a cursory idea of what they wanted to do in the future felt that they were told nothing new. Those that had no idea at all felt that they were not asked enough about their preferences or interests for the information they were given to be relevant to them.

*"It was someone I didn't know, who didn't take the time to find out any more about me. She read out from a piece of paper information that I already knew"*

Some of the young people said they felt that Year 10 was too late for their first meeting with Connexions as by the time of the interview they had already started making their GCSE/Diploma choices which would have an impact on future educational choices and careers. Some reported that Connexions did have a presence at Year 9 options evenings, but advisers present did not make direct contact with young people and their families; young people had to approach the Connexions advisers themselves and many found this intimidating.

Some of the young people reported that they did not routinely have an appointment with a Connexions adviser; they had to request an appointment and there were limited times when an adviser was available. This group felt that Connexions was very focused on those young people perceived as more vulnerable. They felt that if a young person appeared to be "doing all right", they were left to "get on with it".

Interestingly, these criticisms of Connexions were not reflected in the groups of young people who had systematic and closer contact with the service. Young people in the PRU and in the special school, and young people from across the focus groups who had had a lot of contact with Connexions, were very positive about the service they received. This potentially reinforces messages about the focus of the Connexions service being on more vulnerable young people, but also reiterates the importance of building longer-term and trusting relationships with whoever is providing IAG.

### 3.5 What do young people think about information, advice and guidance from school?

Just over half of the young people taking part in focus groups said that they could ask teachers for IAG on school related issues, for example around coursework, exams, exam stress, options, further education and situations arising in school. Around a third further indicated that they felt teachers offered good IAG on a range of life issues such as friends and relationships, careers, finance, coming out, depression, and personal life.

Younger students were generally positive about their relationships with teachers or other staff in school. They said that there was at least one member of staff they had a good relationship with and who they felt comfortable talking to. At one school this was the student adviser, a non-teaching pastoral role, with whom the students had a good relationship. At another school the students felt that they would start with their tutor or Personal and Social Development (PSD) Teacher. They acknowledged that not all students had a good relationship with their tutor, and this was seen as a significant factor in whether an individual could get access to the IAG they needed. For those that did, there was recognition that tutors are probably someone who knows you really well, which is helpful when talking about a problem.

There were mixed feelings about the help received through school careers lessons. Young people said that what they wanted from careers IAG was concentrated time, one-on-one with an adviser who took the trouble to get to know them and gave relevant IAG. Some young people felt that school careers lessons offered them this as they had made relationships with the teachers concerned; often the subject was taught by a PSD teacher.

*"If I feel comfortable with someone, I can open up and talk about what I am interested in and really enjoy. I would like someone to take time to get to know me and find out what I am good at. Then make some suggestions about future options"*

Others, however, were critical, saying that the subject had been taught by someone who was 'going through the motions', and did not know much about it themselves. The young people were particularly critical of computer programmes which they worked through to come up with a list of potential careers – young people in this study stated that they do not find this in any way useful.

Older young people had concerns about talking to teachers about their problems. In particular they were concerned about teachers not keeping information about their situation confidential. Students were aware that teachers share information in the staffroom and felt that their problems could become common knowledge. There was also concern that teachers could take independent action without consulting the young person concerned, for example talking to other young people or family. A significant minority of young people participating in this study (around one in ten) stated that they could ask teachers 'nothing', largely due to a lack of trust on behalf of the young person.

Young people also expressed a concern about talking to teachers about situations in school, for example, problems with another teacher. They felt that teachers would 'close ranks' to defend each other.

Sometimes teachers will be the first professionals to notice a problem, such as a mental health problem, and will often give out contact numbers for agencies but then it is left to the young person to follow these up. Teachers do not check to find out if the young person has been helped and it was felt that this type of follow up should be part of the process.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, the young people we spoke to in a PRU, who had had negative experiences in school, were very critical about the role of teachers. However, they were very positive about the help and support they had received from staff at the PRU with whom they had developed better relationships.

The disabled young people we spoke to, who were receiving intensive one-to-one support through staff at their school, were extremely positive about the IAG and support they received from teaching staff.

### **3.6 What do young people think about information, advice and guidance on health problems?**

When young people were asked in the focus groups where they would go for IAG relating to a health problem, nearly every young person said they would visit their GP. Many also said they would discuss the problem with their parents or carers, unless it was a very embarrassing problem.

Many of the younger students we spoke to (13 to 16 years) went on to say that they would be unlikely to make an appointment with a GP without their parents. However, on further discussion, it became evident that this response was perceived to be the 'correct' response that participants should offer: young people participating in this research provided this initial response as they perceived that was what they should do.

On further questioning, none of the young people in this study had actually done this, nor could they imagine doing so. The qualitative methodology used for this research was helpful in unpicking this distinction.

Some of the young people said they had access to a health clinic in school and there were certain times that the school nurse was available for them to talk to. However, some young people felt that there was a stigma attached to visiting the school health clinic. There were also some concerns about how confidential young people's problems were kept in a school setting, even by the school nurse.

Several young people in different groups mentioned youth groups or mobile youth provision (such as the 4yp bus in London) as a good place to get IAG as you could drop in when it suited you, it was confidential and the staff were easy to talk to. There was generally a good awareness that youth clubs offered IAG on sexual health.

Other young people felt that a model of several services operating alongside each other, for example, Connexions, mental health services and the school nurse co-located on the same site, was a good idea because this would make your visit, or at least the purpose of your visit, more anonymous.

Many young people said that for an embarrassing problem, they would like to use a confidential phone line or website/email to access IAG (see section below for further details).

### 3.7 What do young people think about information, advice and guidance from the internet?

Young people taking part in focus groups were all comfortable and familiar with using the internet. However few had used it for practical sources of IAG on problems, and few knew of any specific sites that were trusted sources of IAG.

Amongst participants in this study, there was almost no awareness of IAG websites such as [TheSite.org](http://TheSite.org) and there was no knowledge of more specific websites – eg for IAG around health issues. Young people in this study were unaware of the NHS Direct website (and of the accompanying phone line), nor were they aware of the Connexions Direct website. The notable exception to this was a very positive response from young people regarding the *Talk to Frank* campaign because it was funny, they could relate to it, and it was perceived to be 'for them' (that is specifically targeted at young people). It was also felt that the *Talk to Frank* website had been well marketed to young people, including in schools, which helped raise awareness. Most of the young people stated that they often use search engines to address health concerns, rather than going to specific sites, which raises some concerns about the subsequent signposting.

When young people were asked to discuss what issues they would use the internet for in relation to IAG, they gave two main answers: embarrassing/personal problems and careers. This was largely because young people thought that they may want to 'speak to' someone completely anonymously if they had a very personal or embarrassing problem.

Many young people had used computer programmes/websites as part of careers lessons (such as the *Streets Ahead* programme) and many others have done their own research into further education and jobs using the

internet. Use of the internet independently to find out information was more prevalent amongst older young people in this study.

Interestingly, a small minority of around one-in-ten young people expressed that they would not want to use the internet for any aspect of IAG. In discussions, this was mainly because they preferred to speak to someone face-to-face, preferably someone that they had a good relationship with and could trust – rather than an anonymous expert.

## Section 4: Conclusions

A number of key findings emerged from this research:

- Overwhelmingly, young people want access to information, advice and guidance (IAG) from a trusted adult. For around half of young people in this study, parents/carers and family were their first and preferred choice for IAG.
- However, a significant number of young people do not seek IAG from parents/carers, in part due to perceptions of cultural and societal changes since they themselves were young. This may mean that parents/carers do not know more about educational or career options than the young people themselves, and may not be able to relate on other personal issues.
- After parents, young people want to be able to access IAG from another trusted person with whom they have a good relationship. The most common reference was to 'youth workers' as the *best* place/person to get IAG, with marginally more mentions than 'school/teachers' (but around twice as many references in the out-of-school focus groups). Few mentioned 'an expert/someone who can tell me the facts'. Young people identified that there should be sources of support for these professionals so that they can give accurate and up-to-date IAG – it was important that these 'trusted adults' were informed as well as known and trustworthy.
- Young people in this study identified their peers as potential sources of support, but were concerned about them being uninformed, and about a lack of confidentiality. In contrast, peer mentoring schemes were perceived very positively where support and training is offered to the peer mentors, and where it is seen as independent from teachers' control.
- Young people want careers IAG (particularly) from someone who has taken the time to get to know them and who has asked them about their preferences. A lack of established relationship not only leads to young people feeling less able to place trust in that individual, but also to perceptions that the IAG available is impersonal and irrelevant to their situation. This was some young people's perception of the Connexions Service.
- Young people welcome the involvement of professionals already in the field supporting them in making their career choices, particularly young people who have made the transition to the workplace.
- Young people want an integrated approach to options, higher education and careers IAG, preferably delivered at the time they are choosing their options in Year 9.
- Young people want assurances that information about them is kept confidential by teachers, school staff and any other intermediaries involved in IAG in school settings (school nurses and peer mentors, for example).

- Young people want measures taken to reduce potential stigma from visiting school based health clinics.
- Young people lack awareness about dedicated IAG websites, including Connexions Direct and NHS Direct. In the absence of knowing where to look, young people are turning to search engines to look for (potentially unregulated) information.
- Young people would like referrals to be followed up, with the referring professional checking whether young people are receiving the help they need.
- Young people want practical lessons on preparation for life delivered through the Personal Development/Personal Social Health Education lesson slot. These lessons could be delivered by a range of professionals or other young people.

The following areas for **further research** emerge from this study:

- The geographical scope of the research could be extended beyond the South West and London to gain an understanding of young people's experiences of IAG provision in other areas, particularly in the North and the Midlands.
- Findings of the focus groups could be developed by targeting: young people not in education, employment or training and those that are disengaged from their family (eg young people in care and young offenders); and older young people (up to 25). These groups are less likely to be able to turn to family for IAG.
- Findings that indicate only a few young people (those more vulnerable) have positive experiences of 'universal' IAG provision through Connexions could be further explored.
- Further research could be progressed into IAG provision through schools as experienced by different groups of young people.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1 – Literature review

Whilst there is a great deal of material covering young people's views of IAG in relation to career guidance and educational choices, little research has been carried out into young people's views of the guidance they receive on wider life issues such as financial management, health and relationships. There is also little research into disabled young people's views on IAG.

A great deal of research has been done to assess the *impact* of careers guidance on young people and learners (most recently in a report from CfBT Education Trust<sup>5</sup>). In the main, this research has taken the form of tracking learners' progression after they received careers guidance, against a control group. Research has shown what works and doesn't work in the long term, and is designed for IAG managers, schools and employers. However, a literature review undertaken by CfBT as part of their wider research indicated there is little that specifically relates to the area of 'customer voice'.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission is undertaking a wide ranging piece of work under its 'Staying On' project, which will examine ways to improve engagement in learning for all young people, with a particular focus on those who are NEET.

The 'Staying On' report<sup>6</sup> identified poor and inadequate careers IAG as one of the biggest failings, and areas for improvement, in helping to engage young people NEET and other groups that currently fail to fulfil their learning potential. An associated poll<sup>7</sup> of over 1,000 young people found that a fifth (20 per cent) felt that they had not had enough IAG to make the right choices about their future. This rose to 23 per cent of young people with a disability and 25 per cent (a quarter) of those from ethnic minorities.

Further, a recent analysis by Ofsted<sup>8</sup> looking at the quality of careers IAG delivered by local authorities, raised a concern that some schools are insufficiently impartial in providing guidance to young people about the full range of options available to them at age 16.

In 2009, the National Children's Bureau (NCB) and Young NCB in association with the British Youth Council, carried out an online survey of 500 young people<sup>9</sup>. This survey asked young people specifically about their views on career guidance. It was not designed to ask about IAG on other 'life' issues.

The survey found that only just under 20 per cent of respondents rated the formal career IAG they received as 'very helpful'. The results were fairly similar across settings, whether in school, college or Connexions.

This research also highlighted that the key influences on young people's future careers choices were parents (63 per cent of respondents), friends (60 per cent) and teachers (58 per cent). Sixty one per cent of young people said that they used job and careers websites more than they would use other family members, adverts, newspapers and magazines, or TV. In total, just over half (55 per cent) of respondents got their information on careers from the web.

Over half (58 per cent) of young people responding said that they got formal careers IAG from their school or careers advice service, with a similar proportion (54 per cent) accessing Connexions' services. Four-fifths (80 per cent) of young people said they found formal services only 'a little bit' or 'not at all' helpful.

An important message from young people through this survey is that formal services such as schools' career guidance and Connexions do not offer them what they are looking for. The NCB study notes that there are many jobs options which exist in the current labour market that parents and relatives may never have heard of, such as the fast growing area of green technologies. Parents and relatives cannot therefore be expected to understand the knowledge and skills base required to undertake them. So while parents and teachers are the preferred sources of IAG for young people, to keep on top of the information about a changing jobs market, they may need help themselves.

This concern over the role of Connexions was echoed in the final report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions<sup>10</sup>, chaired by Alan Milburn. Milburn's report argued that the Connexions service is not succeeding in supporting young people to develop and achieve their aspirations. In fact, it argued that Connexions was too focused on the vulnerable, thus 'distracting it from offering proper careers IAG and guidance to the majority of young people'.

The Edge Learner Forum is a network of young people who are working to change the face of education. Their focus is to promote practical learning and to show that there are many different ways to be successful. In 2009, the Learner Forum made a video of young people's views of IAG, focusing mainly on careers and learning guidance<sup>11</sup>. This film argues powerfully that many young people are looking as much for inspiration as information. They argue that IAG should focus on unlocking a young person's potential and recognise the range of information channels, including informal IAG from peers and social networking sites, which shape decisions. Young people want practical, hands-on experience of options.

The then Department for Children, Schools and Families responded to these views with "Quality, Choice and Aspiration: A strategy for young people's advice and guidance"<sup>12</sup> in October 2009, which incorporates an IAG Guarantee for young people, along with quality standards.

The IAG Guarantee set out the Government's commitment to high quality career education programmes for all young people, with an entitlement to impartial information about learning and work options, through Personal Tutors in schools, career education programmes in schools, work related learning in Years 10 and 11, and access to Connexions Direct by phone and online.

The Quality Standards for IAG<sup>13</sup> state that alongside careers and learning guidance, all young people should receive the IAG on personal wellbeing and financial capability issues that they need.

As part of user satisfaction research in 2008, Connexions Direct carried out an omnibus survey<sup>14</sup> asking 529 young people between 13 and 19 years about where they would go for IAG on personal issues such as health and relationships. The top ten sources of IAG were given (unprompted) as:

- Parents
- Friends

- Doctor/walk in centre
- Teachers
- School nurse
- NHS Direct
- Connexions
- Teenhelp.org
- BBC
- About.com

Respondents to this survey seem to have particularly noted health issues and this could be due to the way the question was phrased.

Results of the survey show that, overwhelmingly, informal sources such as parents, wider family and friends are most commonly approached for support around personal issues. The websites named had been used by less than 5 per cent of young people. In general, older young people were more likely to access IAG from friends, websites and helplines such as NHS Direct, whereas younger teenagers were more likely to ask parents, friends, teachers and school nurses.

When asked how helpful the IAG received had been, young people were very positive in their feedback on IAG from doctors, parents and NHS Direct. Teachers were found to be a useful source of IAG by 73 per cent of young people, perhaps understandably lower than relatives and health care professionals.

The ability to trust them was the main reason for parents' IAG being seen as helpful (22 per cent), and the fact they have life experience and will 'know what to do' (15 per cent). Parents were also seen to provide good quality IAG (13 per cent) and always be available to talk to and ask questions (11 per cent). Empathy given by friends was valued by respondents, with 12 per cent saying their friends understand them and that they can always talk to them and ask questions. Eleven per cent said that their friends provided 'good' IAG and that they valued it. Twenty per cent said that doctors are helpful and give 'good' IAG, and 18 per cent recognised that doctors are knowledgeable – vital for health issues.

In this survey, only 5 per cent of young people said they had turned to Connexions for IAG on a personal issue. Unsurprisingly, then, analysis of users of the Connexions Direct service<sup>15</sup> showed that over two thirds of contacts to Connexions Direct were for careers and education issues, with less than a third for personal, social or health enquiries. Of these, the vast majority were made via the Connexions Direct website rather than phone – probably due to the more sensitive nature of the enquiries. The majority of those contacting the service with personal and social enquiries were in the 13 to 15 age band.

Whilst overall satisfaction with Connexions Direct is very high (with 92 per cent of respondents either very or fairly satisfied with the service), satisfaction with the website is not quite so high, and a significant minority (13 per cent of web respondents and 8 per cent of email respondents) were not very, or not at all satisfied. The user survey analysis suggests that this is possibly because those using the website were more likely to be enquiring about a personal or social question which is less easily and quickly resolved than an issue about careers.

Disabled young people are one group for whom research has highlighted they are not receiving quality, impartial IAG. The EHRC 'Staying On' report noted that disabled young people are not receiving information about opportunities in work based learning and apprenticeships, and that the information received on Further Education options is often negative. The EHRC poll found that while the majority of young people aged 14 to 18 have had a one-to-one interview with a careers or Connexions adviser at school, almost two fifths (37 per cent) of young people with a disability had not.

Reasons for this lack of information and inadequate guidance were attributed to professionals not believing that young people could cope with certain choices as a result of viewing disability through a medical model resulting in a 'damage limitation exercise'.

It is not possible to say whether this experience extends to IAG around personal and life issues: no published research is available which specifically addresses young disabled people's views on the IAG they receive about issues such as relationships and money management, as opposed to guidance on careers or educational options.

There is a great deal of material published examining the impact of career education on young people's future life choices. Some of this material includes the voices of young people directly. The EHRC project 'Staying on' is a major initiative planned for the next few years to explore the impact of career guidance and educational advice on a range of young people's lives, particularly the most vulnerable young people.

There is, however, limited material looking at the views of young people on the IAG they receive on life issues.

Research has consistently established that 'informal' sources such as parents and friends are the most common sources of IAG for young people on personal and life issues and are likely to remain so. However, a significant proportion of young people want to be able to access independent sources for particular problems, possibly because of embarrassment or confidentiality concerns. Some young people do not have the support of their family or friends. It is essential that IAG delivered through formal sources such as school, Connexions, voluntary sector agencies and websites meets young people's needs across their lives.

## Appendix 2 – Participants in focus groups

Area	Type of group	Number of young people	Gender		Age range (years)
			female	male	
Taunton	UK Youth Parliament	36	17	19	12–18
Haringey	Youth Group	11	10	1	13–20
Lewisham	Third Sector Youth IAG Organisation	6	4	1	16–18
Yeovil	Secondary School	6	5	1	14–15
Swindon	Secondary School	6	3	3	14–15
Barnet	Borough Youth Board	5	4	1	14–19
Yeovil	Pupil Referral Unit	5	4	1	15–16
Yeovil	Special School	3	1	2	20–21
		78	48 (62%)	29 (38%)	

Figures allow for one participant not providing any information.

## Appendix 3 – Discussion guide

### IAG Focus Groups: Format and Discussion Guide

The focus group will last 1 hour. There will be five to ten young people in the group.

#### Introduction (10 mins)

- Explain about purpose of research – want to find out what they think about the IAG they get in order to try to improve it
- Confidentiality – everything that they say is completely confidential
- Introductions around the group – first names/age

#### Warm up exercise (5 mins)

*Format tbc, but to include something active*

#### Sources of IAG

What sorts of issues might young people your age need IAG on? (5 mins)

*Young people asked to come up with ideas of areas/issues that young people might need IAG on – these to be written up on a flipchart*

- If you had one of these problems, who would you speak to/where would you go? (5 mins)  
*Young people encouraged to come up with ideas of places/people to turn to for IAG. Prompts can be offered if necessary. Written up on second flipchart.*
- I am going to read out a list of statements that some young people have made to us. Stand in different corners of the room if you agree and disagree or in the middle if you can't decide (5 mins)
  - I can trust my family/parents and always ask them anything
  - My family/parents have life experience and always know what to do
  - My friends understand me and I can always talk to them
  - My friends give useful IAG

#### Storyboards (20 mins)

*Introduce the storyboard. The aim is to capture young people's own experiences and views on IAG.*

*Go through each picture, model the type of answers we are looking for.*

*Ask young people to work through the questions with a partner, but write their own responses.*








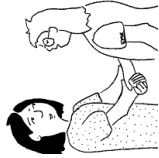

*Choosing one picture, ask who would be willing to share their answers with the group. In the discussion that follows, facilitators to draw out the following points: (10 mins)*

- Have you ever asked for IAG or information from one of the sources we talked about? Refer to flip chart.
- How easy was it to find out where to go and who to speak to?
- How quickly did you get the answer you were looking for?
- What happened if you needed more information or were passed on to somebody else?
- How helpful was the IAG you received?

Thank you and depart

*Each participant to be awarded a certificate*

## Appendix 4 – Storyboard Worksheet

	<p>Who am I?</p>		<p>In the future, I would like to ...</p>		<p>The best place or person to get advice from is ...</p>
	<p>I can ask teachers their advice about ...</p>		<p>Connexions is the best place to ask for advice on ...</p>		<p>Who I would ask about a health problem ...</p>
	<p>I prefer to use websites or texting for advice about ...</p>		<p>The thing about asking friends for advice is ...</p>		<p>Getting good advice is important to me because ...</p>

## References

- 1 *Young people's views on finding out about jobs and careers*, NCB and BYC, 2009
- 2 *Moving through the system*, Ofsted, 2010
- 3 *Unleashing Aspiration: The Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions*, Cabinet Office, 2009
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- 5 *Literature review of research on the impact of careers and guidance-related interventions*, CfBT Education Trust, 2009.
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- 11 IAG film, for download from [www.edgelearnerforum.co.uk/home](http://www.edgelearnerforum.co.uk/home)
- 12 *Quality, Choice and Aspiration*, DCSF, October 2009
- 13 *Quality Standards for Young People's IAG*, DCSF, 2007
- 14 *Connexions Direct User Satisfaction Survey, 2008*, DCSF/TNS Social Research 16 Connexions Direct User Satisfaction Survey, 2008, DCSF/TNS Research
- 15 *Connexions Direct User Satisfaction Survey, 2008*, DCSF/TNS Social Research 16 Connexions Direct User Satisfaction Survey, 2008, DCSF/TNS Research



## About the National Youth Agency

The National Youth Agency works in partnership with a wide range of public, private and voluntary sector organisations to support and improve services for young people. Our particular focus is on youth work and we believe strongly that by investing in young people's personal and social development, young people are better able to live more active and fulfilling lives.

Working with young people, we advocate for more youth-friendly services and policies. We have four themes:

- Developing quality standards in work with young people
- Supporting services for young people
- Developing the youth workforce
- Promoting positive public perceptions of young people.

We deliver our work through training and consultancy, campaigning, publishing and online communications. Through our activities we want to ensure that young people have a strong voice and positive influence in our society.

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