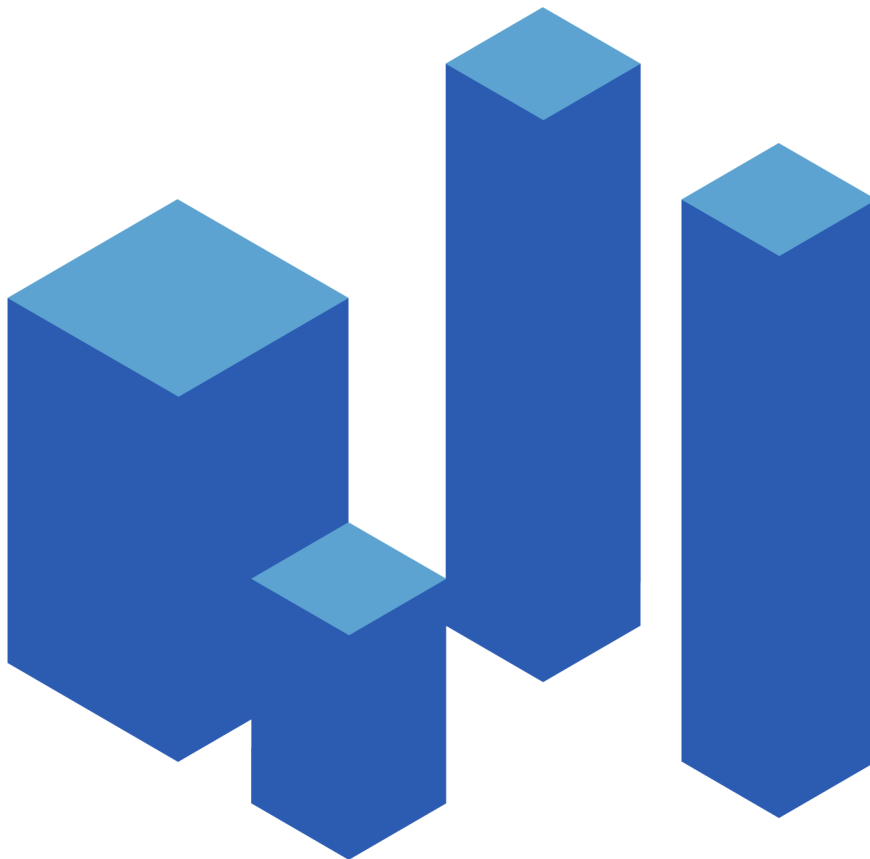


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## Raising aspirations and smoothing transitions

The role of Careers Education and Careers Guidance in tackling youth unemployment

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## The Missing Million Programme

The Missing Million is a two-year, solutions-focused project with the aim of increasing the employment prospects of young people in the UK. It is sponsored by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service, Barclays, Trust for London and the Private Equity Foundation.

The project will answer two key questions:

-What measures can be taken now to address the problem of youth unemployment?

- How can the UK move to a longer-term model with lower levels of youth unemployment?

In the first year we will produce a set of reports that will consider the growing structural unemployment problem, the employer's role, international lessons and solutions at a local level. We will also host a major conference, The Youth Unemployment Summit, to find solutions to these important issues.

This report is part of a series of 'policy snapshots' that stem from and elaborate on issues raised in the main Missing Million research reports.

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## Executive Summary

School-to-work transitions are increasingly challenging for young people. Changes in the occupational landscape and reduced demand in the economy mean that choices are becoming more complex and opportunities more competitive. Young people need greater support to navigate pathways to employment and/or further training.

**Together Careers Education and Careers Guidance can improve transitions.** The evidence shows that good provision of careers education makes a difference in the long run by raising aspirations and encouraging academic achievement. When combined with careers guidance in the lead up to transitioning from school-to-work, it can minimise the risk of young people becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training). Face-to-face guidance plays an integral role in smoothing this transition.

**However, changes to Careers Education and Careers Guidance that will come into effect in September 2012 are likely to compromise the quality, and availability, of provision.** The Education Act 2011 ends the statutory requirement for local authorities to deliver a universal careers service for young people. Schools have instead been placed under a duty to secure independent and impartial careers advice, but have not been given any additional funding to do so. There is concern that ambiguity within the Act may allow for schools to fulfill their obligations by simply referring young people to the new National Careers Service (NCS), despite that those under 19 will only be able to access an adviser online or by telephone rather than face-to-face.

**The statutory requirement to provide careers education has been removed, reversing the progress made towards establishing a long-term process of guidance.** Without careers education, careers guidance is reduced to an abrupt and isolated intervention. Careers education should be embedded in the curriculum as early as primary school and expanded on with age in an effort to prevent young people from becoming NEET later on in life. Preventative measures like careers education are preferable for addressing young people at-risk of being NEET. If fewer intensive interventions are needed greater resources can be freed to help all young people as they attempt to make transitions post-16.

**While we are concerned about changes to provision of Careers Education and Careers Guidance, now represents an opportunity to reinvent provision, particularly for those from disadvantaged groups.** Policy should consider the following principles: **From Connexions—formerly the primary provider of careers guidance for young people—we learn that we should value diverse outcomes.** Guidance should be as much about developing young people's self-confidence and ability to manage transitions over time as it is about influencing destinations. By integrating guidance with careers education, young people can learn career management skills from an early age and work towards becoming self-sufficient. This

is important if young people are expected to access and utilise resources on their own, such as the growing number available online, but also if they are to remain resilient in spite of multiple barriers to employment. **Face-to-face provision is essential – particularly for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.** Young people prefer face-to-face guidance over all other sources<sup>1</sup> because they are more likely to trust personalised support. Access to face-to-face guidance should be guaranteed onwards from age 13 at the very minimum. The lack of funding is likely to be the main barrier for schools in contracting independent advisers, and for those able to buy-in services there are further concerns about quality of provision. Greater standardisation and regulation of the careers guidance market is needed to ensure quality across the board.

Young people should still be able to access other resources; however, these **resources must be user-friendly.** The internet is a medium of information that young people know how to use well, but the way in which the information is presented is failing to engage them. Presentation needs to be improved, along with young people's ability to understand and interpret labour market information (LMI) found online.

**Collaboration is key to achieving impact.** The delivery of Careers Education and Careers Guidance needs to be widened to go beyond careers advisers and seek to include schools, employers and the third sector in engaging young people. Involving other key players will ease the pressure on careers advisers and above all, create a more engaging, interactive and healthy system of support. Just as tackling the problem of youth unemployment is a collective responsibility, so is Careers Education and Careers Guidance.

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance: Joyce, L. and White, C. (2004) *Assessing Connexions: Qualitative Research with Young People*. London: Department for Education and Skills.

# Contents

## Executive Summary

1	Introduction.....	4
2	Current provision and its implications for youth unemployment .....	6
3	Improving transitions: lessons from Connexions.....	9
4	Policy recommendations.....	18
	Contact details.....	22

# 1 Introduction

The transition from school to work is increasingly complex. Changes to the occupational landscape have meant that young people are now confronted with more choice than any generation before them, yet slowing economic growth is limiting their opportunities.

Knowledge-intensive sectors have been emerging in importance since the 1970s when manufacturing first entered decline. The shift has become more pronounced over the last decade; between 2001 and 2007, managerial, professional, associate professional and technical occupations accounted for more than three-quarters of employment growth, whereas administrative and secretarial, and process, plant and machine operative occupations continued to wane.<sup>2</sup> The trend towards these highly skilled occupations requires more decision-making about transitions and the completion of qualifications, further complicating pathways into employment for young people.

Knowledge of what the current labour market looks like and how it operates has escaped many young people. Studies have shown that young people's aspirations do not accurately reflect the local labour market, and are often stunted by a lack of awareness regarding the diversity of jobs on offer and the sectors in which they exist.<sup>3</sup> This relates to differences in the visibility of career options; informal sources such as parents, peers and the media can heavily influence a young person's perception of what is possible.

An integrated approach to Careers Education and Careers Guidance is especially useful to young people in clarifying options and the practicalities involved in pursuing a career. Careers education in particular has been proved to raise aspirations and in tandem academic achievement.<sup>4</sup> Quality provision can build confidence and develop the decision-making capabilities<sup>5</sup> that are needed later on in life; for example when course selection begins to define progression towards certain lines of work. Providing access to careers guidance by year nine can resolve any misconceptions young people have about the world of work as careers advisers are able to discuss specific labour market information (LMI) that may not otherwise be easy to access or interpret.

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<sup>2</sup> Sissons, P. (2011) *The Hourglass and the Escalator: Labour market change and mobility*. London: The Work Foundation.

<sup>3</sup> St. Clair, R et al. (2011) *The influence of parents, places and poverty on educational attitudes and aspirations*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation; Norris, E. (2011) *Not Enough Capital: Exploring Education and Employment Progression in Further Education*. London: Royal Society of Arts.

<sup>4</sup> Hooley, T., Marriott, J., and Sampson, Jr., J.P. (2011) *Fostering college and career readiness: How career development activities in schools impact on graduation rates' and students' life success*. Derby: International Centre for Guidance Studies; Nicoletti, C., and Berthoud, R. (July 2010) *The Role of Information, Advice and Guidance in Young People's Education and Employment Choices*. University of Essex: Institute for Social and Economic Research.

<sup>5</sup> OECD (2004) *Career Guidance and Public Policy*. Paris: OECD.

Employers also benefit from the delivery of strong Careers Education and Careers Guidance. Providing insight into the labour market and the needs of employers enables young people to equip themselves with the right skills for work. If young people are better positioned to respond to areas in which there is demand, this could help minimise skills shortages. Many skills shortages could be avoided to a large extent by teaching ‘soft skills’<sup>6</sup> or employability through early employer engagement, for instance, through curriculum input or work experience placements.<sup>7</sup>

Access to provision, however, is soon to be compromised by a number of changes made by the Coalition government in the past year. Most notably, the statutory requirement of local authorities to deliver a universal careers service has come to an end, and subsequent cuts have been made to Connexions. Under the Education Act 2011, schools are now assuming responsibility for delivery of careers guidance, but are not being granted any additional funding - this may mean that face-to-face guidance for young people under 19 will not be universally available. In addition, the removal of the duty to provide careers education from the Act will surely complicate matters for careers advisers later on, considering the effect of poor decisions made early on young people’s level of aspiration and ensuing motivation.

This report will look at the role of Connexions in improving the prospects of young people and the lessons that can be learnt to promote effective practice. In addition to the methods used by Connexions, this report will examine how careers guidance can be improved through expanding the partnership model and increasing employer and third sector engagement.

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- **Section two** – considers how changes to provision will impact on youth unemployment
- **Section three** – reflects on lessons from Connexions for improving transitions
- **Section four** – sets out our recommendations for policy-makers

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<sup>6</sup> The National Employers Skills Survey 2009 found that after technical and job specific skills the most common skills shortage vacancies in UK were softer skills of customer handling, problem-solving, and team working skills.

<sup>7</sup> Davies, B., Gore, K., Shury, J., Vivian, D., Winterbotham, and Constable, S. (2012) *UK Commission’s Employer Skills Survey 2011: UK Results*. London: UKCES.

## 2 Current Careers Education and Careers Guidance provision and its implications for youth employment

This initial section sets out the most recent changes to careers education and careers guidance provision and considers the implications for tackling youth unemployment.

### Definitions: Careers Education and Careers Guidance<sup>8</sup>

**Careers education** refers to programmes and activities of learning which help people to develop the skills necessary to manage their career and life pathway. These include accessing and making effective use of career information and guidance.<sup>9</sup>

**Career guidance** refers to services and activities intended to assist individuals of any age and at any point throughout their lives to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers. Such services may be found in schools, universities and colleges, in training institutions, in public employment services, in the workplace, in the voluntary or community sector and in the private sector. The activities may take place on an individual or group basis and may be face-face or at a distance (including help lines and web based services).

This definition for careers guidance has been used in international reviews conducted by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), the European Commission and the World Bank.

The Education Act of 2011 is transforming Careers Education and Careers Guidance provision. Prior to the Act, local authorities were required to provide a universal careers service (widely delivered through Connexions), but they have since been relieved of this duty.<sup>10</sup> They still have to secure provision for the most vulnerable young people under the age of 19, or those that qualify under the age of 25, including NEETs<sup>11</sup>. Local authorities are now supposed to identify and connect with young NEETs by maintaining close links with Jobcentre Plus. It is unclear how young people who have disengaged from education and are not actively seeking work will be reached by local authorities without the same level of coordination or support from schools.

Funding for Local Government across England is set to shrink by 28% over the next four years, primarily as a result of cuts to the Area Based Grant (ABG).<sup>12</sup> Connexions was mainly funded by the ABG, but now falls under the remit of the Early Intervention Grant, which was also reduced by 10.9% to £2,212m in 2011/12 (but will then increase

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<sup>8</sup> Sultana, R. and Watts, T. (2004) *Career guidance: A handbook for policy makers*. Paris: OECD.

<sup>9</sup> Institute of Careers Guidance - Careers Education Committee definition

<sup>10</sup> HM Government (2011) *Education Act 2011*.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> TUC (2011) *Impact of cuts in London*. London: Trades Union Congress.



marginally by 3.8% to £2,297m in 2012/13).<sup>13</sup> Since local authorities must make significant savings to cope with reductions across the board in grant funding, and are no longer legally bound to provide a universal careers service, this has meant that Connexions has been adversely affected in most areas. The response from local authorities has varied, with only a small number (approximately 15) deciding to completely retain the service despite pressures to their budget.<sup>14</sup> Others have decided to rationalise provision and have reduced staffing levels. This has occurred in 105 local authorities, while a further 50 have made the decision to close all of their centres.<sup>15</sup>

Schools are now required by the Act to provide pupils in years 9, 10, and 11 with access to “independent and impartial” guidance. This stipulates that schools look beyond their current staff to supply their students with information on post-16 pathways, including options available for 16-18 education or training, such as apprenticeships and other work-based education and training alternatives.<sup>16</sup>

The duty to secure independent guidance was assigned to schools in order to strengthen their partnerships with external providers, with the hope that this would lead to an improved careers guidance service.<sup>17</sup> However, this is unlikely to be realised given that schools will not be allocated any additional funding, forcing them to renegotiate their spending and draw from the Dedicated Schools Grant to cover costs of provision.

A clause in the Act discussing face-to-face guidance gives schools the discretion to decide which pupils are most in need. The lack of regulations, while perhaps being perceived as less bureaucratic, may allow schools to fulfil their legal obligations by simply referring students to the new National Careers Service (NCS), although the effects of these changes remain to be seen until the requirements are enforced in September 2012.

The NCS was introduced in April 2012 in response to appeals that services should be joined up to create a single all-ages careers programme. Next Step, the guidance service for adults, was dissolved in favour of the NCS that includes provision for young people. Unfortunately, NCS fails to offer young people under the age of 19 with any face-to-face guidance, leaving people to remark that it is simply a “rebranded Next Step service for adults, with an all-age online and telephone service.”<sup>18</sup> Young people

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<sup>13</sup> Hooley, T. and Watts, A.G. (2011) *Careers Work with Young People: Collapse or Transition? An analysis of current developments in careers education and guidance for young people in England*. Derby: International Centre for Guidance Studies.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> HM Government (2011).

<sup>17</sup> Watts, T. (2011) *Careers England Policy Commentary 15: The Coalition's Emerging Policies on Careers Guidance*. Northallerton: Careers England.

<sup>18</sup> Nicholls, A. (2012) *Uncertain futures: The impact of cuts to the careers service on the futures of young people*. Stourbridge: Institute of Career Guidance.

have voiced their preference for face-to-face provision (more so than adults have)<sup>19</sup>, which is understandable given many of them have only a limited understanding of LMI and evidence suggests that they need to form a sense of trust with advisers.<sup>20</sup>

The lack of funding is likely to have an impact upon availability, and quality, of provision because schools will have fewer resources for contracting external services. They are also affected by the erosion of not only Connexions, but the loss of support from Aimhigher and Education Business Partnerships.<sup>21</sup> Some local authorities have managed to absorb what remains of Connexions and are negotiating contracts with schools to continue offering services, albeit in some cases a more affordable scaled down version.<sup>22</sup> In those areas where neither was possible, local authorities are making an effort to develop a local school-centered market in careers services that will be served by educational agencies and other private providers.<sup>23</sup> However, the quality of provision expected from such a careers market has been called into question because no national standards for guidance have been issued. There are also concerns that because schools are likely to be restricted in their ability to pay much for services, the career support market will not be very competitive, again flagging the possibility of diminished quality.

Moreover, it is likely that provision will be undermined by the removal of the statutory requirement to deliver careers education. The degree to which quality and availability of careers education provision will be compromised is likely to vary from school-to-school; whilst prior to the introduction of this legislation there was a mandate for careers education there was no statutory programme of study—schools were free to develop it as much, or as little, as they preferred. John Hayes, the Minister for Skills and Lifelong Learning, has expressed a wish for schools to continue offering careers education in spite of changes to legislation<sup>24</sup>, but it is doubtful that this will occur because the removal of the requirement to provide careers education in the Act de-emphasises its importance for schools.

It is likely that the new mandate for guidance as opposed to careers education will mean that one-off “activities” or “sessions” will take precedence over ongoing learning as part of the curriculum. This is problematic because, as career experts have pointed out, careers education “supports the decision making process and development of career management skills that cannot be achieved in a ‘one-off’ careers guidance interview.”<sup>25</sup> Honing such skills is critical is when young people are under pressure to make the right choices to get and keep work.

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<sup>19</sup> Joyce and White (2004); Hibbert (2010)

<sup>20</sup> Hibbert (2010)

<sup>21</sup> Hooley, T. and Watts, A.G. (2011)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Department for Education (2011). The Education Bill – changes to the delivery of careers guidance.

<sup>25</sup> Barr, S., Chubb, P., and Higginbotham, S. (2011) *Careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) in schools in England*. England: ACEG; ACSL; Careers England, and The Institute of Careers Guidance.

## 3 Improving transitions: lessons from Connexions

This section presents an overview of careers guidance models used by Connexions and what impact these have had on reducing the level of NEET young people. It gives an account of what the successes and setbacks of these models were from the perspective of both young people and providers or experts in the field. The section closes by identifying lessons from Connexions for easing school-to-work transitions.

### 3.1 Models of IAG provision

The Labour government identified a need to create a support service for young people as they transitioned from compulsory schooling to post-16 learning and to the world of work.<sup>26</sup> Connexions was introduced in 2001 to meet this need. Its stated aim was to “enable all young people to participate effectively in appropriate learning – whether in school, FE college, training provider or other community setting – by raising their aspirations so that they reach their full potential.”<sup>27</sup> It was to do this through employing both targeted and universal approaches that would merge youth, career and educational welfare services.<sup>28</sup>

#### Targeted vs. universal guidance

Connexions was originally designed to be both a universal careers service and a targeted service. It was to provide support for all young people as well as targeted support for those most at risk.

Personal Advisers were introduced by Connexions in 2003 with the aim of offering targeted support to young people at risk.<sup>29</sup> Personal Advisers were also part of a holistic strategy that allowed Connexions to function as a one-stop shop where young people at-risk could seek advice on personal issues in addition to careers. By addressing personal problems, Personal Advisers hoped that young people could then be free to focus on pathways to employment and/or further training.

Although Connexions embraced a targeted approach towards NEETs, they continued offering universal provision. Universal provision in schools is in fact the face of Connexions that most young people have encountered. The interactions Personal Advisers had with young people in universal provision tended to be brief and much more constrained and narrowly preoccupied with education, employment and training

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<sup>26</sup> Department for Education and Employment (1999) *Learning to succeed: A new framework for post-16 learning*. London: The Stationery Office (Cm 4392).

<sup>27</sup> Department of Education and Employment (2000) *Connexions: The best start in life for every young person*. Nottingham: DfEE.

<sup>28</sup> Watts, A. G. (2001) “Career guidance and social exclusion: a cautionary tale”, *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 29 (2).

<sup>29</sup> Hoggarth, L. and Smith, D.I. (2004) *Understanding the Impact of Connexions on Young People at Risk*. London: Department for Education and Skills.

needs.<sup>30</sup> Support was typically minimal, usually offered in a single session. Universal provision was viewed as necessary in order to reach all young people; however because it took the form of a one-off intervention its impact was limited.

Conversely, targeted provision was restricted to smaller numbers of young people because the support was more intensive, and can thus be costly. Personal Advisers were able to build a relationship with clients over time and cover a broader scope of issues pertaining to personal development because it was possible to meet on a long-term and ongoing basis.

Both approaches have their drawbacks, which is why Connexions staff were often divided on the matter of which to champion. Over time face-to-face guidance formed the core of targeted support for working with young people at-risk of becoming NEET. Whilst it remained a feature of universal provision, it was in a much weaker form and was supplemented with other resources of the online and telephone variety.

### **Web-based services**

In autumn of 2010, Connexions Direct was launched. The initiative was an on-line moderated chatroom that was intended to help young people make informed choices by prompting them to consider familiar career ideas and expand on these.<sup>31</sup> Moderators encouraged young people to identify and research options that they expressed an interest in. The chatroom provided a space for young people to order their preferences, examine the likelihood of being able to enter their desired careers, and then access resources for planning a pathway. Connexions Direct was intended to be more interactive than the generic websites local authorities used to promote Connexions.

## **3.2 Impact on NEET young people**

When compared with single-stranded interventions, a holistic approach was found to be more effective in supporting young people at-risk of being NEET.<sup>32</sup> However, determining impact is complex because measures of success are contested. Personal Advisers have argued that a reduction in the percentage of young people who are NEET is only a partial indicator of success. For a more comprehensive picture, it is important to distinguish between “soft” outcomes and “hard” or “final” outcomes: Even if a young person does not directly enter into education, employment or training a young person is likely to have made steps along the journey to work or training which should also be recognised as positive outcomes.<sup>33</sup>

There are a variety of areas in which Connexions can make a difference to a young

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Parsons, D.J., Barry, J., Bysse, S., and Foster, P. (2003). *Evaluation of the Connexions Direct Pilot*. London: Department for Education and Skills.

<sup>32</sup> Hoggarth and Smith (2004)

<sup>33</sup> Joyce and White (2004)

person's life that fail to be contained within a standard list of tick boxes. Personal Advisers defend the success they've had with young people in addressing personal problems and feel that this should be considered when evaluating the impact Connexions has had.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, it has been pointed out that success can often only be measured by looking at immediate or short-term impacts, so unless a linear path of progression is chartable failure is assumed. In reality destinations can change over the intermediate or long-term course.

In attempting to assess the impact of Connexions, it was noted that need and support were not perfectly or consistently matched. In some cases, assessment mechanisms worked well, but there was not always the capacity to respond. Overall, loss of impact appeared to be unavoidable and occurred throughout the process of provision. This typically arose from failures to identify risk early and prioritise prevention, although, on the other hand, it could also be said to be the result of assessments that were initiated too early and without sensitivity.<sup>35</sup> Another attributed reason was poor management of relationships; there were instances of Personal Advisers being unable to deal with urgent needs, present a range of exit strategies, or cease contact in an appropriate manner.<sup>36</sup> Measurements of success were further complicated by pressure from central government to meet nationally set targets to reduce NEET levels.<sup>37</sup> The ensuing pressure on advisers and young people alike has on occasion culminated in EET options being taken up purely to satisfy a target, with little regard of suitability.<sup>38</sup>

One of the biggest challenges facing advisers was maintaining contact with NEETs following referral or after the age of 19, especially with those most disaffected. It was very difficult for Personal Advisers to follow up on these young people without the support of management or partners, such as schools or voluntary sector organisations. However, a young person's NEET status can fluctuate, so a longer term perspective is needed to gauge success in smoothing transitions. Given that this isn't feasible, it would be most honest to conclude that the impact of Connexions on reducing the level of NEETs has not been clear-cut.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Hoggarth and Smith (2004)

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

### 3.3 Successes

Although the quality of service varied between areas, Connexions excelled at certain elements of provision, particularly the following.

- **Prominence.** Connexions was a widely recognisable, highly visible brand. The majority of centres could be easily located on the high street and were accessible to most young people. That being said, while nearly all young people had heard of the service, a significant number were not aware that Connexions operated outside of schools and only a small minority of young people reported knowing about or using the Connexions website.<sup>39</sup>
- **Impartiality.** Connexions was valued more highly than other in-school guidance because advisers were perceived to be less biased than those acting on behalf of the school.<sup>40</sup> Schools have often been reproached for pushing their own agenda on students, particularly if they are associated with a sixth-form college and are hoping to retain a cohort.
- **Rapport with vulnerable young people and NEETs.** Young people who had systematic and close contact with Connexions were less critical of the service, and in fact many viewed the relationships they had built with advisers in a positive light.
- **Personal impacts.** When Personal Advisers made an impact, they often did so by increasing levels of self-confidence; refining communication skills; changing behaviours or attitudes; and improving personal circumstances.<sup>41</sup>
- **Strong partnerships with schools.** Some schools forged strong relationships with their local Connexions service, typically in deprived areas. These schools were more likely to need the support of Connexions to nurture aspirations and an appreciation for learning. In other areas, Connexions could be perceived as superfluous to what schools needed, considering that many affluent parents were more involved in their child's educational development.

### 3.3 Setbacks

For the schools that are able and willing to buy the services they require, usually from the old Connexions, they will encounter issues that they need to be aware of:

- **Insufficient resources.** An assessment by the Department for Education and Skills (now the Department for Education) determined that Connexions had insufficient resources to meet the demands placed upon it for targeted

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<sup>39</sup> Hibbert (2010)

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Joyce and White (2004)

provision and intensive support<sup>42</sup>. Despite this they were still expected to deliver a targeted service, and use the same pot of money to cover universal provision. Balancing the two evidently posed a struggle for Connexions.

- **Narrow focus on NEET young people.** Theory within the field of careers guidance stresses an open-access approach, noting that advisers should be mindful of the fact that able people are also in need of support as they attempt to navigate a complex system.<sup>43</sup> The number of options available to a young person pursuing A Levels or a route into higher education (HE) can be daunting, and in recognition of the number of people later dropping out of HE it would appear they could benefit from impartial input as much as any young person classified as NEET.<sup>44</sup> The narrow focus on individuals as a result of central government's targets may therefore have been at the expense of young people who are more able yet still in need. For instance, one respondent to the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions' Young People Survey remarked:

*"I had career advice from school with a Connexions career adviser, although I felt it was designed for those less academic and it was not very useful at all."*<sup>45</sup>

The Panel concludes that "its [Connexions] focus on the minority of vulnerable young people is distracting it from offering proper careers advice and guidance to the majority of young people."

- **Impersonal service.** Connexions was often criticised by young people for its generic approach to careers guidance and a failure to listen to and consider the needs of individuals.<sup>46</sup> When asked about their experience with Connexions, young people reported feeling that the IAG they received was not personalised.<sup>47</sup> For example, one young person interviewed by The Work Foundation described advice with Connexions as:

*"just a big booklet and off out the door"*

Many evaluations<sup>48</sup> support these assertions, highlighting the considerable variability in the quality of provision.

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<sup>42</sup> Hoggarth et al. (2004).

<sup>43</sup> Bowes, L., Bysse, S., Neat, S., and Howe, P. (2012) *Complex needs, complex choices: The role of Career Learning, Information, Advice and Guidance in the Further Education and Skills sector*. London: Centre for Enterprise.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions (July 2009) *Unleashing Aspiration: The Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions*. London: Cabinet Office.

<sup>46</sup> MacDonald, R. and Marsh, J. (2005) *Disconnected Youth? Growing up in Britain's Poor Neighbourhoods*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

<sup>47</sup> Hibbert (2010)

<sup>48</sup> Foskett, N. (2004) *IAG (Information, Advice and Guidance) and young people's participation decisions 14-19*. London: Nuffield Foundation; (2009) *Quality, Choice and Aspiration: A strategy for young people's*

- **Weak communication and trust.** Some advisers could also better communicate with young people by seeking to close the gulf in language that exists between professionals working in the sector and the clients they serve. The jargon used by professionals working within Connexions, but also local authorities, third sector or college-based services, walls them off from the very people they are trying to reach, particularly those for whom English is a second language.<sup>49</sup> When asked about his experience with careers advisers, one young person shrugged, replying:

*“They just tell you stuff.”*

Providers of guidance need to deliver their services in a more accessible manner, so young people can retain the advice rather than dismissing it as just “stuff” said. In doing so, they might be able to build the trust necessary to engage young people and spurring follow-through. The majority of young people are looking for guidance from a trusted source, so in order to compete with informal sources such as parents, peers, and media, advisers should work to strengthen their approachability.<sup>50</sup>

- **Inadequately trained staff.** Inconsistencies in service may relate to the degree of educational attainment and training undertaken by careers advisers. It previously took up to two years to train a careers adviser, but now all that is required is an NVQ that can be completed in a mere three months.<sup>51</sup> The two main qualifications for careers advisers are the Qualification in Careers Guidance and the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in Advice and Guidance, which have both been criticised as inadequate, in particular the NVQ.<sup>52</sup>
- **Outdated information.** Too few people working in this field update their knowledge about occupations and the labour market, to the detriment of delivery.<sup>53</sup> Careers advisers need to sharpen their LMI; stay up-to-date with the full and evolving range of qualifications on offer and the wider programmes

*information, advice and guidance.* London: Department for Children, Schools and Families; Centre for Enterprise (2012)

<sup>49</sup> Gracey, S. and Kelly, S. (2010) *Changing the NEET mindset: Achieving more effective transitions between education and work.* London: Learning and Skills Network.

<sup>50</sup> Hibbert (2010)

<sup>51</sup> Gracey and Kelly (2010)

<sup>52</sup> Donaldson, Hugo. (April 2008) *Inspiration and Aspiration: Realising our Potential in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.* London: Skills Commission.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.



available locally in order for youth to benefit. It may entail a process of simplification in the gathering and distribution of local and regional LMI.

- **Eleventh-hour interventions.** Some young people have voiced that Year 10 was too late for their first formal interaction with Connexions. By the time of their interview they had already started making GCSE/Diploma choices that would affect their future educational choices and careers.<sup>54</sup> While some of the youth recalled that Connexions were present at Year 9 options evenings, the onus was still on youth to make the first move and approach an adviser for information, which many found too intimidating a task.<sup>55</sup> There was also limited access to Connexions outside of planned sessions, and a fair number of young people were unaware that this meant they would first have to request an appointment and then wait for one to become available.
- **Lack of wider support system.** Employers and the third sector were often isolated from the process of careers education and careers guidance provision, so the burden to improve NEET rates or communicate the breadth of options available post-16 rested primarily on Connexions. This was especially the case in areas where careers education was weak in schools.

### 3.4 Lessons

Little appears to have been learned from the successes and setbacks of Connexions. Apart from making changes to who is responsible for the delivery of careers guidance provision the proposed offer mirrors that of Connexions but with far less resourcing available.

Poor resourcing is a recurring issue, and a more severe one at present. Reassigning the duty to provide IAG to schools – but without transferring any funding– will mean that availability and quality will depend on each school’s ability to locate funding and their dedication to comprehensive careers education and careers guidance services. The outcome of this could be a patchwork of provision, whereby in some schools a full and universal package of support is accessible whilst in others there may be only partial and limited support. To ensure this does not happen, the Coalition government should consider, at the very least, subsidising the costs of face-to-face provision for all young people.

By only obligating local authorities to provide careers services for vulnerable young people and allowing schools to do so based entirely on their own discretion, there is a risk that many young people will lose out on support at a time when it is most needed. In a period when youth unemployment is high and morale is low, all young people should be given the opportunity to discuss their options with an adviser in-person and receive individualised support in post-16 planning.

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<sup>54</sup> Hibbert (2010)

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

In cases where schools decide to contract provision – either via Connexions or from the wider careers support market – an impersonal service may continue to be an issue for those who aren't identified as at-risk. Although it is difficult for careers advisers to build a rapport with young people who are only in need of occasional and infrequent assistance, the impression of personalised support could certainly be improved. For instance, advisers could make an effort at being more relatable by using less formal terminology when communicating. Appearing more approachable may put young people at ease during initial, one-off visits so they feel they can open up and trust their adviser.

The issues relating to how qualified advisers are will be exacerbated by any growth of the careers support market. Although the Matrix standard used by Connexions is still in existence, in addition to Investors in Careers and Career England's newly launched 'Quality in Careers Standard', careers services are not actually required to adhere to these.<sup>56</sup> While some careers advisers have suitable vocational and/or professional qualifications, there are still incidences of qualifications being flagged and other advisers (for example, those from a youth services background) not being able to decipher LMI appropriately. Standards need to be enforced so as not to erode the quality of services.

Furthermore, measures for determining the success of face-to-face guidance need to be reconsidered. Hayes has suggested that employment and learning destinations should be used to measure the success of careers services<sup>57</sup>, but looking back at the impact of Connexions on NEETs this measure appears to be overly simplistic and unreliable.

It makes evaluation of this type of guidance challenging if we wish to truly embrace best practice. In the past it may have been somewhat fairer to judge success based on destinations because advisers were tasked with bringing young people back from the brink of being NEET. However, advisers were only resorted to when it became clear that a young person was feeling bleak about their future and at-risk of slipping through the system. For better results, they should be given an opportunity to reach young people at an age when they are able to offer more preventative and early intervention support package. This should be integrated into a long-term process of guidance, one that begins with a foundation of careers education initiated in primary school that can later be built on and augmented by advisers, employers and the third sector from year 9 onwards.

If we want to measure how successful the provision is, we should be looking at quality and therefore instating standards. Employers and the third sector should play a greater role in designing and developing the guidance young people receive. Emerging

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<sup>56</sup> Riley, T., Finnegan, L., with Davies, M. and Lane, P. (2012) *The Careers Guidance Lottery*. London: London Skills and Employment Observatory.

<sup>57</sup> John Hayes in Education Bill Committee, 29 March 2011.

evidence from Britain finds that statistically significant positive relationships exist between the number of employer contacts that a young person (between the ages of 14-19) has and: their level of confidence in progressing towards their goals; the likelihood of whether they are NEET or non-NEET; and, their future earnings.<sup>58</sup> After controlling for the highest level of attainment, the survey made the startling revelation that the 7% who recalled four or more employer-related activities while at school were five times less likely to be NEET and earned, on average, 16% more than peers who recalled no activities.<sup>59</sup> This should come as little surprise, considering that meaningful exposure to workplaces facilitates the development of skills and puts young people in touch with what an employer wants.<sup>60</sup>

The third sector can contribute through organisations that bring together volunteers for alumni visits or mentors for young people. These types of activities will also put young people in touch with people they can relate to and are willing to seek careers advice from. This eases the pressure from services like Connexions, and the combined effort will have a greater impact on reducing the likelihood of young people becoming NEET.

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<sup>58</sup> Mann, A. (2012) *It's who you meet: Why employer contacts at school make a difference to the employment prospects of young adults*. London: Education and Employers Taskforce.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> (2010) *Learning for jobs: Synthesis Report of the OECD Review of Vocational Education and Training*. Paris: OECD.

## 4 Policy recommendations

The labour market is changing. Economic change, recession and recovery and 'rebalancing' of the economy towards the private sector are making school to work transitions harder. Careers education and guidance is increasingly important – and need to reflect changes in the labour market.

We have established that rather than delivering IAG through a scattering of in-school appointments at 16 or via stand-alone internet resources, provision should be re-conceptualised as a process. The changes to Connexions will create labour market difficulties for young people but they are – at least – an opportunity to reconsider how guidance should be done. We now suggest a course of action to facilitate such a process.

### 5.1 Initiate earlier career education

- **Create a statutory programme of careers education.** Experts agree that a good careers programme has the following elements: “a planned programme of careers education, tailored to the needs of individual pupils; experiences of the world of work; impartial, independent careers guidance; the provision of information about opportunities and progression routes in learning and work.”<sup>61</sup> Careers education prepares young people to understand and later apply impartial careers guidance to best suit their needs. This programme should be implemented from primary school onwards.

### 5.2 Ensure access to face-to-face guidance for 13-19 year olds

- **Subsidise provision for face-to-face guidance in schools.** We know from evaluation evidence that young people prefer face-to-face guidance.<sup>62</sup> The earlier young people can engage in a dialogue about their future the more likely they will be to take appropriate steps to realise their career aspirations. Face-to-face guidance can be highly effective in deterring young people from becoming NEETs, particularly if a one-to-one relationship is built and sustained with their advisor.

### 5.3 Standardise quality of provision

- **Prioritise provision of Labour Market Intelligence (LMI).** Advisers need up-to-date specialist LMI. Quality LMI provides an insight into the economy—its sectors, occupations, and geographical dispersal of jobs, including at a local level. The value of formal guidance is rooted in the details, differentiating it from more ambiguous, often anecdotal advice from informal sources such as

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<sup>61</sup> Barr et al. (2011)

<sup>62</sup> Joyce and White (2004); Hibbert (2010)

friends and family. Specialised counselors have methods for assessing an individual's suitability for a particular career and what is required in terms of skills and experience if they are to pursue a particular pathway – information young people cannot easily find elsewhere. Local employers can also be drawn on to identify the sectors in which the jobs are and the skills needed to be a contender for these.

- **Upskill advisers.** The attempt to provide a holistic service – via Personal Advisers – may have weakened the specialised careers advice arm of Connexions. These Personal Advisers are unfamiliar with the technical aspects of careers provision (for example, interpreting LMI) that distinguish its usefulness from other counseling services. Regulating qualifications for advisers through standardisation and ensuring that skills are refreshed through retraining at routine intervals would keep advisers abreast of labour market trends and improving the quality of careers advice.
- **Regulate careers support market.** The government ought to incentivise the career support market to build its capacity and competitiveness; assure quality by publishing standards, and compensate for any market failures by providing guaranteed face-to-face guidance for young people from age 13 onwards. As suggested by the Careers Profession Alliance (CPA), services that meet the criteria should be listed in a register of quality assured providers for schools to choose from.

#### 5.4 Strengthen partnerships

- **Connect schools to local providers.** Local providers need to work closely with schools in order to gain access to young people and offer support. This will be increasingly of importance now that schools are responsible for procuring provision. Where schools cannot offer support in-house, they should familiarise themselves with the local provider base and what services are available so that they can make referrals.
- **Link up local services for comprehensive provision.** To address any gaps in provision, providers should work together to offer different types of support for meeting a variety of needs.
- **Encourage cooperation between schools and employers.** Employers often cite that it is difficult to gain access to students because schools make entry challenging.<sup>63</sup> If schools and employers cannot work together directly, they may consider introducing an intermediary to manage the relationship.

#### 5.5 Structure the curriculum to include employer and third sector

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<sup>63</sup> Mann (2012)

## engagement

- **Re-introduce KS4 work experience programme.** Previous attempts to deliver work experience at Key Stage 4 (KS4) have been widely criticised for failing to get young people “job-ready”.<sup>64</sup> However, given the overwhelming evidence indicating that employer-related activity can reduce the level of NEETs, the offer should be improved and reintroduced. Addressing any valid criticisms of the programme would be necessary in moving forward, but would be very beneficial for young people in exposing them to work environments.
- **Offer a range of work-related and exploratory activities.** These can include enterprise activities, curriculum-linked workplace visits and talks, sector-specific information or business simulation challenges from employers, mentoring, mock interviews, job-specific tasks, work tasters, and work shadowing.<sup>65</sup>
- **Implement an alumni mentoring programme as an addition to existing careers education and careers guidance provision.** Working members of the community could return to their former schools to relay their stories and offer advice to current students on how to get a job they enjoy. In the interests of having role models that young people can relate to young adults up to age 25 could be invited to speak or be paired with pupils to stoke aspirations.

## 5.6 Improve internet-based resources and enable capacity to utilise them correctly

- **Engage through interaction.** There are an increasing number of ways in which technology can be harnessed to stimulate critical thinking about the future. Mobile applications or games that capitalise on the theme of careers guidance could at the very least spark young people’s interest in these matters.
- **Simplify LMI.** Young people know how to use the internet and access content, but they need to be taught how to understand and interpret that content correctly and use it effectively. More work needs to be done to simplify LMI for young people and present it in an easily digestible way. “Career Cruising”, a web-based careers guidance tool used in North American classrooms is a good example for the UK in this regard. The tool allows young people to discover their learning style, identify their primary skills, and explore careers of possible interest by taking short and very straightforward quizzes. All careers are categorised by sector and job description, with details available on working

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<sup>64</sup> The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions (July 2009) *Unleashing Aspiration: The Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions*. London: Cabinet Office; Wolf, A. (March 2011). *Review of Vocational Education – The Wolf Report*. London: Department for Education.

<sup>65</sup> Barr et al. (2011)

conditions, earnings, education, sample career path, related careers, as well as links to places where young people can seek for more information.

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