

Student views

Summary

Year 11

- ***Students who are potentially NEET know the progression routes in general but are not confident about detail.***
- ***Sources of information about post 16 routes were varied but students:***
 - ***wanted more visits to providers.***
 - ***were positive about the convention at Lynnsport.***
 - ***welcomed well structured activities in school integrated into the curriculum.***
- ***Students were negative about the role of form tutors.***
- ***There was strong support for Connexions Pas.***
- ***Students are wary of on line application.***
- ***Support and guidance needs to be more personalized, and target Sixth Form.***
- ***Students naturally gravitated to their own school where it had a Sixth Form with appropriate provision.***
- ***The proportion of students studying A level who had had a Connexions interview in Year 11 was very low.***
- ***With one exception, no sixth former had had their application reviewed other than at the stage of interview.***
- ***In most centres the Head of Sixth was seen as the main source of support and guidance.***
- ***Students are positive about learning which:***
 - ***has a variety of learning styles.***
 - ***where support is given in how to create notes.***
 - ***where lesson plans are available on a learning platform.***
- ***Students are negative about learning which:***
 - ***relies excessively on note taking.***
 - ***relies heavily on Powerpoint presentations.***
 - ***fails to give specific guidance on tasks.***

7a Year 11 Students

- 7.1 Schools were asked to put together a group of Year 11 students for whom the transition was proving to be difficult and who were at risk of becoming

NEET. In total, over 60 students in Year 11 were interviewed. In addition, one school provided a group of Year 10 students and a second school provided a group of high ability students. The responses were those that came first to students and reflect those aspects of the IAG process which they most remember.

7.2 Students were firstly asked about what they saw as the options available to them in Year 12. Almost without exception students were aware of sixth form provision, vocational courses at COWA and apprenticeships. When asked about more course levels or more specific vocational courses, students were less sure.

7.3 When asked about the sources of information, responses were varied. Presentations in school assemblies were mentioned on three occasions; most groups valued the input from Connexions; the internet was referred to by four groups; two groups remembered the impact of DVDs produced by a school and COWA. Almost all prospective sixth formers had visited the Sixth Form Open Evening and many had visited either COWA or City College. Peers, siblings and parents were also mentioned. Several threads were fairly consistent. The first was the value of visits and the opportunity to talk to staff who could talk with experience about a course. Whilst most remembered booklets being given out, few students referred to booklets about institutions as a major source of information. Secondly, almost all students were positive about the careers convention at Lynnsport. On two occasions, students commented about it opening their eyes to possibilities they had not considered. Thirdly, with the exception of one school, students were almost unanimous in their negative feelings about the contribution of tutors and PSHE to the process. Where very targeted actions had been undertaken, e.g writing CVs in English, looking at on-line resources connected with Lynnsport through ICT lessons, these were remembered and commented on positively. In two schools, students remembered positively the work of the Impact Theatre. Finally, in all but one school, students were clear in their own mind about the careers coordinator as being a source of information and someone they could turn to should they be unsure or need support.

7.4 The role of Connexions was strongly supported. Almost without exception, Connexions interviews were seen as useful, either on a 1:1 basis or

through group work. Negative comments saying that Connexions did not tell a student what career should be chosen were discounted! There was, however, a very worrying aspect of student perception of Connexions. It was a widespread view that Connexions exist to provide advice for the transfer to a post 16 route. Very few students were aware of Connexions being there to provide support post 16. This would of course be remedied post 16 when students would be aware of the continuing role of Connexions in their new learning centre, but such a perception in Year 11 must be a cause for concern. In several schools, students responded negatively to a question asking if they were aware of a Connexions office in Kings Lynn.

7.5 Students discussed the processes of application. There were mixed responses to questions about the on line applications. Clearly there were issues about the stability of the online system. However, students preferred to complete applications by hand and then send them off themselves. When asked about final checking of the application, responses were mixed. Where the school insisted on all applications coming through the school before being sent off, this was remembered. Tutors at the College were praised by students from several schools about the help they gave to Key Stage 4 students in the completion of the College application forms. Other responses include parents, friends and siblings as people who read the final application. Students rarely spoke positively about the role of form tutors. "Tutors do nothing". "Tutors are a waste of time". "Nothing happens in tutor time". This is disconcerting as in some schools, the application strategy places considerable emphasis on the role of the tutor as the first line of support in helping students with applications.

7.6 Students were asked what could be done to improve IAG for them in Years 10 and 11. The most common response was a request for visits during a school day to post 16 institutions and the chance to experience at first hand what the course entailed, with the opportunity for real "hands on" activities. In three schools, students commented about the limited value of Open Evenings in what they could convey about the reality of studying and learning in an establishment. However, on a few occasions, the value of the Open Evening as a means of gauging the friendliness and openness of staff was recognized. There was a request for better teaching of IAG in

schools as well as more support for help in completing applications and writing CVs. (This latter request did not come from students in those schools where there is a structured approach to applications).

7.7 The experience in the school which provided two groups of students was illuminating. The group of able, motivated and self confident students was able to speak in detail about the work of the school in preparing them for transition, referring to assemblies, employer visits, college and Sixth Form visits, and so on, in total contrast to the negative views expressed by the other group of students. This underlines the need for schools to recognise that in dealing with potential NEET, it is not sufficient to hope that the usual school processes are sufficient. They may work for able and motivated students but there is a need for differentiation and personalization. It was also in this school that there was the only reference to Year 11 students having a mentor. They recognized and valued highly the work of a personal mentor.

7.8 Recent work in Cambridgeshire confirmed the Norfolk student views that Connexions' advisers are friendly and supportive. There were some negative comments in Cambridgeshire about Connexions relating to difficulties in relationships, changes of personnel at short notice, insufficient time for in depth discussion and the view that work with easier to place young people is prioritized. The messages support the views of NEET research elsewhere that young people who are potentially NEET need to be identified early, and establish stable relations with an adult who will provide support and guidance beyond that which is needed for the majority of young people.

7b Sixth Form Students

7.9 In all schools with sixth forms, a group of students was interviewed. In total, over 40 students were interviewed. Schools were asked to put together a group of students who were finding the sixth form challenging. They were asked

- why they had chosen that particular institution for their post 16 learning.

- what role the IAG in Years 10 and 11 had played in their decision making and what other influences there had been on their decision making.
- whether the sixth form and its provision matched the messages from IAG during statutory education.

7.10 The range of reasons quoted as having influenced choice were

- closeness to home.
- staff having prior knowledge of the students.
- nature of course provision.
- academic reputation.
- provision for student with learning difficulties.
- older sibling.

The first of the reasons was the strongest. Assuming that the courses were available, then students saw no need to travel elsewhere for sixth form based learning. The second strongest reason was that staff knew the student from Key Stage 4. In several cases, a sixth form was chosen because of a very specific course. In four cases, it was a course linked to the school's specialism. In another instance, it was a course rarely offered in school sixth forms. The student found out late in the year that the course would not run owing to lack of demand. By then, the student was emotionally committed to that sixth form and chose another course in that centre.

7.11 Only a small number of students were seen who had come from a different statutory school. For them, the reputation of the Sixth form was the strongest reason for choice but closely followed by the impact that had been made on the Open Evening.

7.12 Sixth formers were asked about the contribution IAG had made to their final decision about the post 16 progression. There was a sense from many students that where there was a sixth form, if suitably qualified, that would be their natural route. Several suggested that this was "assumed" by their statutory school but in only one occasion did students feel that this "assumption" was underscored by a very strong marketing drive pushing the sixth form. The students in this school were critical of several assemblies where subject heads "blagged" their subject. In one case, students said planned visits to post 16 provision elsewhere had been

cancelled owing to a lack of interest and no alternative provision had been made for those who did want to visit. In another school, students commented on the lack of information about provision elsewhere. Interestingly, one Head of Sixth Form reported that although the school had set up a Sixth Form taster day, other schools, including 11-16 schools, did not send students. One can understand a school's reluctance to release students from school during Year 11 as well as the possibility of a taster day clashing with a school event, such as mock examinations or a collapsed timetable day devoted to post 16 applications. However, given the views of students that they would prefer events of this type, there is an issue here to be worked on. In comparison with the Year 11 students, far fewer of the sixth form students had had a Connexions interview. In two schools, none of those interviewed had had a Connexions interview. Only in one school, where four students were interviewed, had all students attended an interview with Connexions. Where students had been interviewed, they were positive about the help from Connexions although in a small minority of cases, there was a feeling that Connexions tended to know more about vocational provision. A further striking contrast with the Year 11 students was that hardly any of the sixth form students interviewed attended the careers convention at Lynnsport. In one school, students were very positive about their Year 11 tutors who had read the post 16 application. In this same school, students described the whole of their IAG in Year 11 as "brilliant". All students from 11-16 schools had attended sixth form open evenings but a surprisingly high number of students had not attended the open evening in their own school. With the one exception of the school with very committed tutors, students commented that there was no discussion about their application until they were interviewed by the Head of Sixth Form.

- 7.13 Students were asked whether the reality of learning in their chosen establishment matched the information they received in Year 11. In general, students interviewed felt that the sixth form experience matched what they had been told in Year 11. Most commented on the different atmosphere in the sixth form from main school, especially staff who were generally more approachable. Students in all schools commented on the jump from GCSE to sixth form, especially AS courses. All commented on the greatly increased workload and the greater responsibility they had to take for their own learning. In one school, students greatly valued the

system whereby they are involved in giving feedback to the head of sixth on work set for them and also how they were taught. There was general support for sixth form facilities for private study and ICT access.

7.14 Students commented on the teaching styles they experienced in the Sixth. Aspects which were seen very positively were

- the teachers who vary their style so that lessons may include group work/discussion/presentations by students/planning of essays.
- in one centre students commented very favourably on the department where lesson plans are available for students on the learning platform.
- help in note taking, especially where staff provided a framework on to which they could place notes.

7.15 Students were very negative about

- lessons which relied repeatedly on note taking, either copying from textbooks or summarizing what a teacher was saying,
- "death by Powerpoint" especially where they were expected to take notes from the teacher whilst trying to read the Powerpoint display.
- failure to use new technologies. In one school where interactive whiteboards had been installed in most teaching rooms, not one of a group of 10 students had had a lesson using the interactive technology.
- homework instructions requiring students to "read up" on a topic but without guidance as to what to read and in what detail.

7.16 Students in one school spoke at length about the need to personalize support in the sixth. Whereas many students seemed to be coping with the transition, there was a feeling that the support in the lessons was not differentiated. There was huge support and recognition from students in the centre which had developed a system of non-teaching personal tutors and additional core skills/support sessions. Personal support was generally praised. In all schools, there was a strong and positive rapport between the head of sixth and students, who was also seen in most cases as the first point of call if a student was struggling or needed support. In most centres, students commented that most IAG was directed at higher education and there was an assumption that this would be a natural next step. However, in one of the centres, only 2 of the 5 students interviewed

were sure about moving on to university. One head of sixth sensed a change in sixth form aspirations and that the usual assumption of progression to university needed to be revisited.

7.17 In 2008 there was a survey of young people who were NEET in Cambridgeshire (LSC Cambridgeshire, 2008). Where engagement was high, students associated this with

- staff who promoted aspirational but realistic targets.
- group and peer mentoring.
- regular contact with parent/carers to support learning.

The negative factors which were encouraging disengagement from learning include

- attendance not being carefully monitored.
- carer responsibilities.
- fatigue linked to part time employment, carer responsibilities and long journeys.
- failure to attend controlled coursework sessions.

There is very close harmony between these comments and those made by Norfolk students.