

Post 16 Learning

Summary

- ***Most centres have qualification entry thresholds. These vary between centres and are applied flexibly.***
- ***There is a wide variety of approaches to induction activities, usually reflecting local circumstances.***
- ***Centres vary in the degree to which they establish expectations in the first term and how they monitor all students in this period.***
- ***All centres stated that for a number of students, the transition between GCSE and Level 3 was very demanding, both academically and in expectations it placed on personal organization. A number of centres are seeking to deal with this in a very structured way.***
- ***The role of Connexions post 16 is limited. Involvement usually involves a referral of those students who are struggling.***
- ***There is considerable variation in the retention rate in different centres.***
- ***Frequently Connexions report that they are not made aware when a young person has left a course.***
- ***A total of 139 young people were identified as leaving full time learning before completion of course in 2007-2008 and 2008-2009, 92 from A level courses and 47 from other courses. Of these, only 8 became NEET.***
- ***The fact that so few NEET emerge from uncompleted courses of study emphasizes the importance of ensuring as many young people as possible transfer into full time education and training at age 16.***

6.1 The heads of all sixth forms in the area were interviewed:

- to develop an understanding of the nature and ethos of each sixth form and the curriculum offer.
- to look at the processes of transfer and induction.
- to look at how IAG post 16 was structured.
- to discuss retention and reasons why students left the Sixth.

In addition, there were meetings in the College with the manager responsible for A level provision at the College, the foundation learning manager, the head of 14-19 partnerships and the student support manager. The purpose of this approach was to look for any reasons within provision which might lead to disengagement and young people becoming NEET.

6.2 For most centres the Head of Sixth is heavily involved in the majority of interviews, supported variously by assistant heads of sixth and/or senior tutors. An interesting variation on this process came from one centre where all applicants are asked to complete an "aspirations" questionnaire. This deliberately looks beyond the immediate for long term ambitions. Two examples where it had been effective was with one young person with an ambition to study veterinary sciences but was predicted C/B grades for science; another example was an aspiring primary teacher with a predicted C grade for English.

6.3 Centres were asked about their entry thresholds for Level 3 courses. In most, 5 A-C grades were required, in two, there was a requirement for either two or three B grades, in one there was a requirement for a GCSE B in an A level subject studied at GCSE. In most centres there were specific grades for certain subjects, in all but one, a B at GCSE was required for A level maths. Four centres required a B in science at GCSE. One centre has now taken the view that although a distinction on a BTEC course equates to 4 As, they will only count it as one grade A. Another centre differentiates between level 3 programmes. A programme that has primarily vocational A levels has 5 A-Cs as its threshold. If the programme is 75% AS level, then threshold is 2Bs/3Cs. Only one school explicitly stated it expected at least a C in English whilst another stated "some subjects require C in both maths and English". In all cases, centres agreed there is flexibility around these thresholds. One Head of Sixth felt that historically, the centre had been too flexible. In another, the threshold had recently been changed for science with the requirement that all AS level applicants for science must have studied science to a higher level at GCSE.

6.4 There is a wide range of approaches to induction and support over the first term. Several centres host events in July with taster lessons and a

barbecue with outgoing Year 12. In one centre, AS level teaching actually starts in the summer term. One centre explicitly mentions the very great care it takes in building its tutor groups. In another centre, the first week, attendance is restricted to new students. A whole week is then used for students to learn the geography of the centre, work with their group tutor and new members of their group and experience sample lessons. The time is also used to check all GCSE certificates and ensure the student is on the appropriate course. In another, there is a very structured transition process. It begins with two days being set aside in September for intensive interviews in the light of GCSE results and student aspiration to confirm that the student is on the appropriate course. The first half term is a probationary period for all students in Year 12. Progress is monitored closely and attendance at tutorial sessions every day is compulsory. This process is supported by an induction evening for parents. The head of sixth is convinced that this process is instrumental in the centre's high retention rate. In another centre where progress is rigorously scrutinized, students who are not meeting the expectations in terms of attendance and work ethic are placed on a programme where they are required to report to a study area in non contact time and their progress is checked weekly. In several other schools the onus is placed on subject teachers to report to the head of sixth any concerns about students, or students are put on probation only if a subject department requests it. There was no evidence in these centres that there are agreed thresholds which trigger such actions. With its varied programmes, the College is in a very strong position to make alternative provision, such as switching a student from a level 3 course in a particular area to level 2, or facilitate a student moving to an entirely different course within the first few weeks of the autumn term, although this flexibility decreases as the term progresses.

- 6.5 When asked about why students leave Level 3 courses without completing, the strong view was that it was related to student difficulty in making the transition from GCSE to AS level, both in terms of the greater academic rigour but also the greater independence of learning. There was no doubt that heads of sixth did spend a great deal of time supporting young people who were struggling. There was also a willingness on the part of centres to be flexible on their entry policy. In the case of students for whom English is a second language and they are relatively new to the country, there is a good case for flexibility. However, there is the question to be asked

whether flexibility works in the longer term interests of other young people, especially in the case of the implications for students on some A level courses who have failed to achieve a C in GCSE English. Centres should look at the retention and success rates of students who have failed to achieve a grade C in English at GCSE. This was recognized by one school where the psychology department insisted on at least a C in English.

6.6 Schools were asked about the structure of IAG post 16. Not surprisingly, there is a very strong emphasis on UCAS and application to higher education. Around this core offer, there were several examples of good practice. These include

- a student support centre available to all students from 11-18. Qualified staff can arrange referral to a variety of support services.
- in another school the school's learning support actively supports young people who are struggling in the sixth.
- a designated member of staff picking up and supporting any students who receives a university rejection. This school also continues to support students during a gap year.
- timetabled IAG lessons, held fortnightly. These timetabled lessons cover study skills, university applications, non HE routes post sixth form, budgeting, how to care for clothes and so on.

6.7 One post 16 provider developed a structure of very personalized support for students following an A level course. There is a timetabled weekly meeting with the group tutor with whom the student had spent a week on induction. The centre has developed a programme to be followed by tutors. The programme is currently being developed further as part of a broader initiative on learning how to learn. In addition, the provider employs full time non-teaching personal tutors. The case load of the personal tutors gradually increases as the year progresses. By not having a teaching responsibility, the tutors are available at very short notice to see a student and have a significant amount of time to work individually with students.

6.8 Most centres commented on the difficulties faced by some students in managing the transition from GCSE to the work loads and personal demands of A level courses. In one centre, a very targeted programme is

being developed to address this. A proportion of the sixth form budget is withheld so that from the middle of the autumn term, the centre is able to lay-on additional workshops in several subjects. These workshops are taught by the staff teaching that subject and focus strongly on any aspects of the course which students are finding difficult, such as statistical analysis or essay writing. It is also used for additional in-subject support for individuals who are struggling. It is part of a wider centre initiative which is focusing on learning styles and which embraces teaching staff and tutors. As with most other providers, this centre has regular reviews of student progress but insists targets are very specific. Thus, for example, a target such as "Read more widely" is unacceptable. There must be specific instructions as to what to read and when, and that these instructions must permeate all work set so that the student is quite clear about the expectation and how it can be achieved. This centre also uses the personal tutors referred to above. With five hours per subject plus a group tutorial once a week plus additional core skills, the students in this centre have a very full programme, but this is reflected positively in value added results and retention. The students spoke very highly indeed of this personalized system. In the same centre, students on a Level 1 course have a proportion of their time spent with staff who support them in their core course with work on literacy and numeracy. Support is also provided from the same key skills workers in ensuring coursework assignments are completed.

- 6.9 The role of Connexions in school sixth forms is limited. In most cases, schools will involve Connexions when a young person is struggling. For the most part, support for sixth formers comes from within the school. All schools acknowledged the limited time available to Connexions' PAs but there were also comments about the degree of expertise that Connexions' advisers have in guiding students into higher education. One school referred to negative feedback from students about Connexions in the sixth. Some schools admitted they did not inform Connexions if a student left and this was confirmed by Connexions. The analysis of leavers, below, illustrates the number of young people that Connexions were not aware had left. Clearly a protocol must be established to inform Connexions when a student leaves. Only two schools conduct formal exit interviews with students who are leaving. The conclusion is that the number of young people who are NEET is quite possibly higher than the published data.

6.10 Heads of sixth form provided data on the students who had left sixth forms at the end of Year 12 in 2008. From a total of 7 centres who made returns, 60 young people left A level courses at the end of Year 12, 35 male, 25 female. Centres were asked to give the reason why the students had left. Where reasons were given, they are shown below.

Table 20 Reasons for Leaving A Level courses at end of June 2008

Reason	Number	Reason	Number
Moved to course at FE	14	Army career	1
Moved to another provider	8	Left Area	1
Poor work ethic	3	Apprenticeship	2
Failed AS level	5	Home education	1
Poor attendance	3	Employment	4
Retake	2	Not known	9

These names were passed to Connexions for information about current status. Connexions were able to identify most students who left A level courses at the end of Year 12. Of these, only one had become NEET. The majority had moved in to FE but in approximately 20% of cases Connexions had not been made aware.

Table 21 Current Status of Year 12 Leavers summer 2008

Current Status	Number	Current Status	Number
Not aware of leaving	11	Private Education	1
Employment	6	NEET	1
Retaking Y12	2	Other provider	3
FE	12	Not matched	6
Non Norfolk Student	1		

Centres were asked to provide details of the AS level courses which students had been following. A total of 34 subjects were covered and the table below shows only those subjects with five or more students.

Table 22 AS subjects studied by students who left at end of Year 12

Subject	Number	Subject	Number
Mathematics	21	English	12
Biology	19	PE/Sports	10
Chemistry	13	Physics	11
Psychology	15	Art	8
Business Studies	12	ICT	6

The predominance of mathematics and science is clear. Most schools had realised this, especially in the case of mathematics, and had raised the threshold grade for entry to the course to a B. Psychology is generally popular and has the value of being a new subject. However, its predominance on this table might justify centres looking at the threshold for starting an AS course in psychology. One school now insists on a C in English for progression to AS level psychology. School sixth forms have a much smaller number of students following Level 2 courses. From the eight names provided who left before completing their course, three had moved into employment and two into FE, one was not identifiable on the Connexions system and Connexions did not know that the other two had left the sixth form.

6.11 Information was also provided on young people who had left Year 12 during the current (2008-2009) academic year. A total of 32 students leaving A level courses were identified from 7 centres, 14 male and 18 female. Three had left because they were not coping with the workload, four moved to other centres but six had left and the centre did not have a reason. Connexions were again asked to check on the current status of these leavers. Connexions were not aware that 14 had left. Of the rest who variously had moved to other providers or into employment, only one was identified as NEET. Of the subjects studied by those who left Level 3 courses, those with five or more mentions were Business (6), English (5), ICT (10), Mathematics (6), Media (9), Physics (6) and Psychology (6). Only eight students were reported as having left Level 2 courses in schools during the current Year 12, one appears as NEET although three had not been reported to Connexions.

6.12 For all other courses covered within OWN, there was a total of 39 withdrawals during 2007-2008 and 27 withdrawals within the current academic year. In neither year has there been any single course from which five or more students have withdrawn. For both years, Connexions were asked for the current status.

Table 23 Withdrawals from non A level programmes 2007-2008 and 2008-2009

2007-2008

Current Status	Number	Current Status	Number
Degree	1	Not on database	5
Other Provider	6	Part time learning	1
Employment	9	Own business	1
NEET	5	Not contactable	1
New Deal	1	Not aware had left	8

2008-2009

Current Status	Number	Current Status	Number
E2E	1	Not on database	2
NEET	5	Not aware had left	15
Other provider	4		

6.13 In the context of this research, it is quite clear that young people who are starting courses and not withdrawing are not a major source of NEET. However, the data is not accurate as Connexions are not aware of all withdrawal from courses. A total of ten NEET were identified, 5 who had dropped from A level courses and 5 from other courses. The fact that so few NEET emerge from full time educational provision further highlights the importance of ensuring young people are 'locked into' education and training post 16.

6.14 In a survey of NEET in Cambridgeshire (LSC Cambridgeshire, 2008) providers asserted that there is insufficient emphasis placed on attendance, punctuality, course completion and qualifications in families which are single parent, those with a history of long term unemployment, and those where the primary home language is not English. Providers also commented that some

parents/carers regularly give approval for young people to miss sessions, arrive late and/or leave early. Sometimes, there is a family culture which encourages absence even at post 11, let alone post 16. The reasons quoted above for leaving confirm this work.