

# The active involvement of young people in the Connexions Service A Practitioners Guide

# 2



## KEY PRINCIPLES FOR GOOD PRACTICE IN THE ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Getting the active involvement of young people in the Connexions Service is more likely to succeed when:

**Active involvement is seen as a key element of accountability and especially when**

- The Connexions Service embraces the notion that it must be accountable to the young people whom it serves.
- The Connexions Service and young people recognise that their active involvement is key to the service achieving accountability.

**The diversity of young people is recognised**

- Active involvement reflects the needs, hopes, ambitions and interests of all young people, and takes account of diverse community and individual interests and needs.
- Young people have equality of access to opportunities for involvement.
- Active involvement allows young people to become involved in ways, at levels and at a pace appropriate to their capacities and interests but taking into account the capacities and constraints on the Connexions Service/partner organisations.
- Involvement is underpinned by formal and informal capacity building and training.

**Young people are valued**

- They are listened to and actively involved in the development of the service.
- They receive swift and clear feedback about the impact and value of their contribution.
- The partnership between professionals and service users:  
recognises young people's competence and potential.  
helps young people to become a resource to their own development and to that of their peers, the Connexions Service and the community.
- Communication with young people is honest and does not raise false expectations for active involvement and service delivery.
- Those responsible for providing the service are directly informed by the dialogue with young people.

**Involvement is underpinned by adequate resources of expertise, time, money and organisational systems and processes, including**

- Clear, widely communicated policy statements.
- A Charter of services and values – highlighting what is on offer.
- Staff recruitment, and development policies aimed at building a team with the qualities, attitudes and skills required to involve young people.
- Clear boundaries around what is possible in the areas of involvement and service delivery.
- Transparent and accessible procedures for suggestions, compliments, complaints and appeals.
- Clear policies on confidentiality and data collection / storage / dissemination.
- Structures to secure the representation of young people's interests and concerns.

**There are systems and processes for evaluating and continuously improving young people's involvement**

- Monitoring and evaluation should be undertaken – both by Connexions staff and independently (in both cases involving young people in the process) – and the lessons used to shape future planning.

This guide is for all Connexions staff working directly with young people, whether as service 'users' or service 'shapers'<sup>1</sup>. It aims to provide an insight into key issues, as well as practical guidance in implementing 'active involvement'. However, you will need to supplement it with professional training, background reading and hands on experience of working with young people.

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## The best start in life for every young person

The guide will act as a valuable tool for practitioners in highlighting methods for the active involvement of young people. The guide provides various methodologies, the benefits and drawbacks of these methods, key issues to consider (e.g. anti-oppressive behaviour) and up to date case studies and good practice examples on involving young people in service design and delivery.

The guide is not intended as a cover-to-cover read but more a tool that practitioners will dip in and out of for relevant methods and examples they wish to use with and for young people.

All practice will need to be set in the context of national legislation and local policies on such issues as health and safety, child protection, benefits regulations, equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice.

The Connexions Service National Unit<sup>1</sup> (CSNU) will continually review this publication. For further information about the guide or to provide updated practice on involving young people, contact the Active Engagement policy team at DFES on 0114 2593756.

<sup>1</sup> A companion guide (Active involvement of young people in the Connexions Service: Guidance for Managers) has been written for senior managers and board members – covering the values, strategy, systems and resources required to support active involvement.

# Introduction

## What is active involvement?

The term active is used to indicate a feeling, on the part of the young people, that they have a real stake in the service. There should be no room for the attitude, 'Nobody ever takes any notice of what I say, so why bother'. This should apply to those who are involved as service 'users' as well as to those who are involved as service 'shapers' (actively involved in the planning, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of the service).

There are three key dimensions to active involvement:

1. Involvement at different levels of the organisation – for example, young people can take part in:
  - a group defining quality standards (strategic level).
  - designing a newsletter (operational level).
  - planning their personal development – (service user level).
2. The power dimension – whatever level of the organisation they are working at, there are opportunities to be involved at a variety of levels of power and responsibility. For example, in designing a newsletter, young people could be (in order of decreasing power and responsibility):
  - personally responsible for particular aspects of newsletter design and production.
  - part of a working group deciding on a new look for the newsletter.
  - 'shadowing' an adult on a particular aspect of newsletter design or development.
  - taking part in a survey about the appearance of the newsletter.
3. The active-passive dimension – some methods of involvement, for example focus groups, are more active and intrinsically engaging than others, such as completing questionnaires.

Not all young people will want to be involved at the highest level, but it is important that those who want to do so can get involved in ways that match their current skills, interests and time commitments. This means that the service needs to provide a wide variety of opportunities for active involvement and to manage them effectively.

It also requires strategies to reduce blockages to active involvement. These might include some young people's perceptions of the service as a place where they are not given full respect and where certain service policies and practices discriminate against marginalised groups.

## What are the benefits of active involvement?

Active involvement of young people can help the Connexions Service to provide a more effective and user-friendly service, develop the skills and self-confidence of the young people who get involved and enhance the local community. These benefits, along with others for each of these three main groups, are described in more detail below.

### Benefits for young people

By becoming actively involved in the 'shaping' of the service – and having their opinions taken seriously – young people acquire opportunities to:

- learn more about themselves, about taking responsibility, about working with others and about how organisations work.
- develop a range of new skills – including communication skills, team-player skills, negotiating and influencing skills, in addition to the practical skills learnt in service delivery tasks – and have support in applying them to new situations.
- have their new knowledge and skills accredited.
- increase their confidence, self-esteem and aspirations.

Their efforts should have spin-offs for all young people using the service, since the service is more likely to be responsive to their needs and interests.

### Benefits for the Connexions Service

The more young people are actively involved in the service, the more likely you are to acquire accurate and up-to-date information about local young people, including:

- their changing needs, attitudes and interests.
- their views of what constitutes 'quality' in service provision (and whether Connexions is meeting these criteria).
- the key barriers that young people face in gaining access to learning and development opportunities.
- the services that young people do use – and the reasons why these are attractive to them (or not, as the case may be).

Armed with this information you are more likely to ensure that the service is designed, delivered, monitored and evaluated on the basis of young people's identified – rather than presumed – needs and interests. This can help staff to target resources more effectively. By involving young people in decision-making structures, you can benefit from their fresh perspective on the tasks that face the service and innovative ideas for its development.

*"Lessons from the Double Take Project meant that the company had to address some major aspects of the work including the location of advice and guidance services, the welcome the clients were given, and the appropriateness of some of the ways the service was being offered. Listening to how young people viewed the service was so salutary that a policy decision was taken to involve them formally in steering groups, working groups, staff training days and other relevant meetings."* (Double Take Project, Warwickshire Careers).

*"Active involvement works very well when you tell people what the facts are and where the boundaries lie. These scaremongering stories that young people will ask for the earth and be unrealistic are just not true in our experience. We've found they make intelligent and inventive contributions which either help us confirm that we're on the right lines or point things out that we've missed."* (Connexions Manager)

Access to young people's informal networks can increase the service's potential to make contact with all young people in the 13-19 age group. In addition, once young people have started to make a difference – and news of their impact gets out – the service can acquire credibility and 'buy-in'. Involving young people in service delivery tasks may further enhance this.

Active involvement builds the knowledge, skills and aspirations of young people – helping you to achieve this key goal of the service and deliver accountability to CSNU.

## Benefits for the community

Young people who have benefited from active involvement are better prepared for learning and employment – adding to the skills base of their local community.

Addressing low self-esteem is also likely to decrease anti-social behaviour (given that low self-esteem is one of the most common denominators in youth offending).

Poor participatory methods train young people in non-participation in other areas of their lives. Conversely, positive experiences of involvement in Connexions – generating a belief that young people can make a difference – may also lead young people to become more involved in their local community, for example through voluntary work or, eventually, taking a more active part in the democratic process.

*"They impressed me not only because of their wish to improve services and facilities for themselves but also because of their awareness that initiatives could benefit the whole community."* (Leader of a Local Authority)

*When considering young people's participation in local government, we must caution against seeing their primary role as being 'to advise councils on how to make their services better'. This underestimates their capacity to engage and take part in many other functions of local government, enabling the community to fulfil its true potential, speaking out on behalf of that community – and encouraging people to speak for themselves."* (Willow 1996:6).

## Which Young People?

Young people are not a homogeneous group – they do not stay the same and are a continually changing group of people. They can be profiled in many ways, for example: by age, gender, ethnicity, locality; by issues such as homelessness, drug-users, offenders; by personality; or by socio-economic and psychological characteristics. Connexions will make every effort to involve young people in service design and delivery. However, not all young people will want to be involved at the highest level, so it is important to have a wide variety of opportunities for involvement, catering for the diversity of young people's interests, talents and needs. Young people must also have the right not to get involved in the design and delivery of Connexions. However, this must be through informed choice rather than a lack of creative engaging opportunities for involvement.

## How the guide is organised

This guide is not prescriptive about the process of active involvement in Connexions.

There are no hard and fast rules, because:

- active involvement of young people is a new venture for many organisations.
- Connexions itself is a new service.
- each local area has its own characteristics, which must be taken into account in any local 'active involvement' practice.
- the world of young people, education, employment and training changes rapidly.

This means that, individually and collectively, it will be important for you to 'build your own theory' about what works, through reflective practice (see page 29).

**Section A** of this guide describes some of the key issues facing you at each stage of the 'Plan – Do – Check – Review', reflective practice cycle.

**Section B** describes the features, benefits and drawbacks of the main mechanisms for involvement, which fall into three main groups:

- Mechanisms for acquiring information that will help in the planning, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of the service (including informal schemes such as suggestion boxes, formal surveys and more active methods such as focus groups and creative workshops).
- Service delivery activities including project development, inspection, quality assurance and evaluation.
- Involving young people in decision-making structures.

**Section C** provides more detail on some of the principles raised throughout the guide.

**Section D** provides a few checklists to help in the planning of involvement activity.

**Section E** includes some case studies of active involvement from the Connexions pilots.

Much of the work in this guide has been based on the books listed on page 68.

Acknowledgement is also due to the many report writers, practitioners in different services, young people, steering group members and all those who have commented on drafts of this guide.

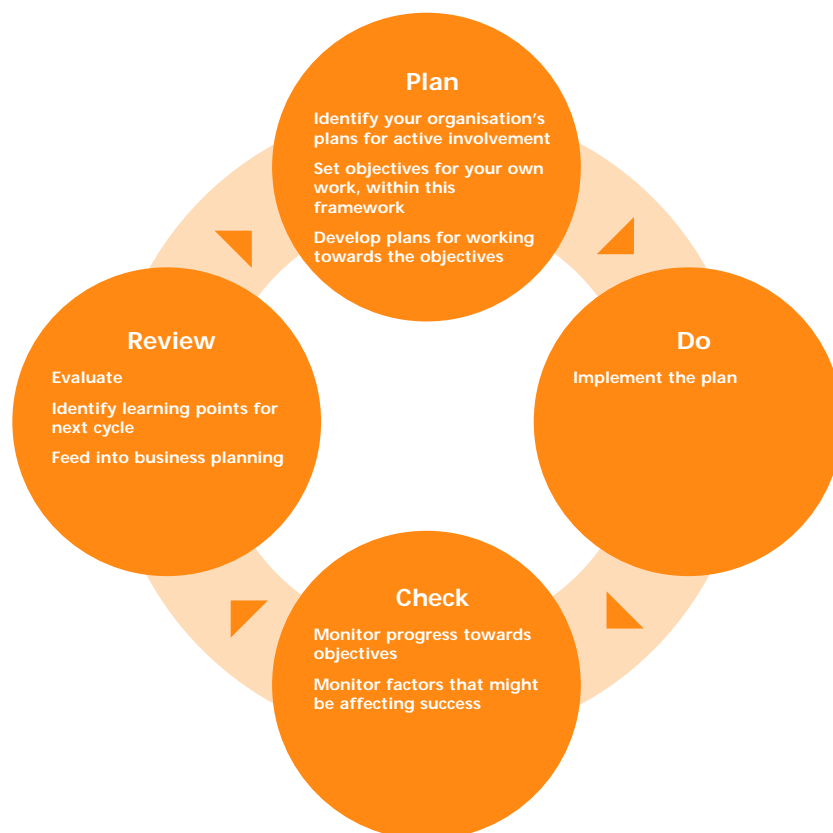
## Section A

# Organising for active involvement

### Section aims

- To review briefly the four main stages of reflective practice in the field of active involvement
- To outline some of the key issues in encouraging and enabling active involvement.

The main stages of the 'reflective practice' cycle, starting from the planning phase, are outlined below and described in more detail on the next few pages.





## Plan

Identify your organisation's plans for active involvement.

All active involvement work will have to be undertaken in the context of the strategy for active involvement as determined by the Board. The Board will decide, for example, what methods of active involvement are to be used for what purposes and these will have been outlined in the Business and Delivery Plans.

The matrix on page 48 of this guide, Checklist D1, has been supplied in the complementary Managers Guide. Managers are asked to plot the mechanisms currently being using to involve young people and the ways in which they plan to extend involvement activity – to new tasks, new methods and new groups of young people.

For practitioners, the same matrix – once completed – will help you to see your work in context and to plan your objectives for active involvement accordingly. Case study E2, page 56, reproduces Cheshire and Warrington's Plan for engaging young people.

Set objectives for your own work, within this framework.

All staff need to plan strategically and operationally:

- Whether your main active involvement work is one-to-one as a Personal Adviser, on projects related to service development, or taking an overview of active involvement across an area, you will need to decide: 'Where does my/our work need to be with this young person, this project or this theme in, say, 18 months? So where will I/we need to be with it after a year? And in 6 months? By the end of next month?'
- Then, more specifically: 'What do we need to achieve in this next phase and how do we go about it?'

Section B will help you with planning for the various mechanisms of involvement. However, there is another element to the 'How?' of active involvement, which is 'How do we encourage young people to become involved?' Theory has it that people are more likely to get involved in a task if they:

- know what is expected of them and why it is important
- are able – or enabled – to get involved
- can see 'What is in it for me?'

The following table provides a summary of the ways in which you can meet these conditions in the Connexions Service, to increase the likelihood that young people will get involved. Expansion notes on these topics are covered in Section C, as indicated in the third column of the table.

YOUNG PEOPLE NEED TO	WHAT DOES IT MEAN	SECTION
Know what you expect of them – and why it is important.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finding ways to reach young people – particularly those who tend to be marginalised.</li> <li>• Providing information that will appeal to young people.</li> <li>• Agreeing a 'contract' and/or ground rules for involvement.</li> <li>• Giving and receiving feedback to clarify expectations.</li> </ul>	C2 C3 C4
Be able to get involved.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Removing obstacles to involvement – for example: skills development. helping those with language and/or learning difficulties. helping those with physical or psychological barriers to accessing Connexions services.</li> </ul>	C5 C7
Want to get involved, having identified 'What is in it for me?'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employing anti-oppressive practice.</li> <li>• Providing incentives to make the task an attractive proposition – for example: making the involvement fun – working on their terms rather than your own. making it worthwhile – providing appropriate rewards. combating feelings that 'nothing ever happens' by: promising only what you can deliver. working on some 'quick wins'. monitoring practice (using young people as monitors) to generate evidence that young people really can make a difference. arranging publicity about successes – in places where young people naturally congregate or would look for information – so they can see that young people make a difference.</li> </ul>	C8 C9

## Your objectives might cover

- what you intend to achieve – for example, recruiting a certain number of representatives of particular target groups to a creative consultation.
- what personal resources you intend to put in – for example, contributing a certain percentage of your time to a particular project.
- the skills you intend to develop – including, for example, the skills needed to implement particular methods of involvement (see Section B) or the skills required to work in a more equal way with young people.

## Do and Monitor

'Do' relates to implementing your action plan. However, the pace of life in Connexions Services will be fast. It is important not to fall into the 'action trap' – spending all the time 'doing' and not enough time in checking where you have got to and gathering the evidence to inform progress. Without this reflection-on-action, considerable energy might be directed into the wrong channels and key elements of active involvement might be undermined.

As you put your plan into action, monitor

- progress towards your objectives.
- the factors that might be affecting the success of your initiative including:
  - factors internal to the organisation (for example, quantity and quality of resources, quality and quantity of support from colleagues, changes of key staff, changes to the premises, incidents on the premises).
  - external factors that might affect the quantity and quality of involvement (for example, school closures or bus route changes, bullying and serious incidents in the lives of young people, family breakdowns, new jobs or activities taken up by the participants).
  - discrimination factors on the basis of race, gender, disability, etc might be preventing young people becoming involved (for example, role models, access, language, etc).
- your contract with participants – How are we doing? Is everyone still on board and active? Contact any who have disengaged, to see where the problems lie and how they can be re-motivated, or how the contract might be modified.

Make sure your findings are fed into future organisational planning.

## Review

This stage requires you to evaluate what you have achieved, analyse why it worked to the degree it did and build your learning into your own future action plans and into organisational planning. It is useful to:

- share experiences with colleagues to tease out: 'What did they do? How did they go about it? How did they feel? How would they evaluate the experience? How would they evaluate the contribution made by young people? How did their perceptions change over time? What have they learnt about themselves, about young people and about the process of involvement?'
- ask the young people involved to evaluate their experience 'Do they think they had real influence over what happened? Did they get what they wanted out of the experience? How could things be made better next time / for other groups? What have they learnt about themselves, about adults and about the process of involvement?'
- compare the two sets of views and identify reasons for any discrepancies.
- link back to the purposes and benefits. To what extent has active involvement met its objectives?

When you have completed your evaluation, you should:

- **celebrate successes** – and make sure these are publicly displayed so that young people who are not yet involved can see that young people really are taken seriously and do make a difference.
- **acknowledge mistakes** and to make it clear how you are learning from them. Attempts to hide mistakes or ignore discontent will frustrate young people. The key is honesty: young people are remarkably tolerant when adults admit their mistakes – in fact it can have a positive impact on the relationship.
- **Ensure open and effective complaints procedures** and involve young people in this process from start to finish.

## Section B

# Different mechanisms for involvement

### Section aims

To review the features, benefits and drawbacks of three main groups of involvement mechanisms, as listed below, and to give some information about and examples of their use.

#### B1 Mechanisms for acquiring information and ideas, including:

- a) Informal schemes, such as telephone hot lines, web sites, suggestion boxes, graffiti walls, soft information gathering on a one-to-one basis.
- b) Formal methods of canvassing opinions – for example, through interviews, questionnaires and computer programs.
- c) Focus groups – a more personal and spontaneous approach to information-gathering.
- d) Creative approaches to consultation – including, for example, role-play and drama, video and photography, open days and residential.

#### B2 Involving young people in service delivery.

#### B3 Involving young people in decision-making, including:

- e) Membership of youth decision-making bodies (e.g. youth forums, steering groups, panels).
- f) Membership of main decision-making bodies (e.g. management committee, staff selection panel, special interest groups and inspection panels).

#### Notes:

1. Although involving young people in service delivery and on committees will also help you to acquire information, this is not their primary purpose and they are therefore considered separately.
2. The methods are listed in order of increasing potential for taking on power and responsibility (though each method can provide differing levels of power and responsibility as mentioned on page 18).
3. In most cases, the benefits to staff and to young people are listed separately, because in some cases, your aims and objectives may be oriented more towards one group than the other.

Overview comparison of the various methods of acquiring information and ideas

	Quantitative or qualitative information	Ease of development	Ease of administration	Ease of analysis	Ability to track trends	Skills required by young people
Creative approaches	Qualitative	Medium	Medium	Difficult	Difficult	Creative
Focus groups	Qualitative	Relatively easy	Relatively easy	Difficult	Difficult	Oral
Interviews	Quantitative	Skilled	Relatively easy	Medium	Yes	Oral
Computer-based surveys	Quantitative	Skilled	Relatively easy	Relatively easy (usually built into development)	Yes	Few
Questionnaire surveys	Quantitative	Skilled	Relatively easy	Medium	Yes	Literacy (unless someone interviews them with a questionnaire)
Informal methods of information collection	Qualitative	Easy	Easy	Difficult	Difficult	Few

## B1(a) Informal schemes for getting feedback from young people

### Examples

Suggestion boxes, graffiti walls, web site/chat groups, telephone hot lines and soft information gathering through one-to-one chats. (these chats might be in one-to-one Personal Adviser sessions or in any face-to-face work with service 'shapers').

### Purpose

To allow young people to raise issues of their own and/or suggest creative ideas and/or give feedback about the service, in their own words and on topics of their own choosing, rather than simply responding to questions asked by management.

Benefits and drawbacks of the various schemes		
	Benefits	Drawbacks
Suggestion boxes	Cheap, simple, confidential (don't have to give a name), require few skills from adults or young people.	If confidential, it is hard to quantify the findings, identifying how it relates to different groups No direct feedback on whether their suggestions are being considered. The respondents are self-selecting – you have no idea whether how representative they are of groups you wish to reach.
Graffiti walls	As above, plus offers the additional advantage of visibility – allowing people to build on others ideas.	As above.
Web site/chat groups/ 'bulletin board' facilities	Builds on young people's fascination with computers. GHK research indicates that the internet was the second most favoured means of access to information, for those who had access. In this case, then it may also be a favoured means of providing feedback and information if the site is well designed and marketed. A 'bulletin board', like the graffiti wall, allows young people to build on others' ideas.	Some young people may drop into chat rooms with the aim of disrupting the session. This is not so easy to take care of in cyberspace as it is in face-to-face work. Expensive to design and maintain.
Telephone hot lines	GHK research indicates this is popular with young people. The personal touch may be an advantage – assuming the member of staff was good at building rapport. Does not require literacy skills.	The expense of staffing a line, with no guarantee that it will be used, could be an issue. One option might be to publicise specific times when the line would be available for feedback calls (and to ensure it was manned by trained staff).
Soft information gathering	Again, the personal touch is the 'hook' for engaging young people.	

## Issues and tips

- It is crucial that any suggestions or feedback – wherever they are posted – are checked regularly and that everyone who does leave contact details receives a reply.
- Providing a reward for any suggestions that are implemented – particularly those that do lead to improvements in the Connexions Service may encourage people to take part. For example, you might have a 'Suggestion of the month' poster on public display.
- To track any emerging trends, it is necessary to record the findings in a systematic way.

The Cheshire and Warrington Connexions partnership has a simple system of A4 books in their Careers Centres, to collect data. One result has been the setting up of a workshop about nursing as a career, in response to notes that 10 people had been discussing this in informal chats.

## B1(b) Canvassing opinions

### Examples

Face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews and paper-based or computer-based questionnaires

### Purpose

In the Connexions Service context they might be used to:

- Obtain information about:
  - the needs of young people.
  - other factors in the lives of young people that might affect the extent and/or success of their involvement in Connexions.
- invite comments from young people using the Connexions Service – about (for example):
  - their experience of the partnership organisations (Careers, the Youth Service, Schools, Addiction agencies, Housing providers, Employment agencies, Minority ethnic group agencies and so on).
  - the way in which the service should take into account their needs and interests and how, when and why they want to access the service.
  - when and where the Connexions base should be sited, when it should be open, when courses and/or meetings should be run.



### General benefits and drawbacks of surveys

Compared with, say, listening to the views of young people who are members of a management committee, surveys offer the opportunity for staff to learn about the views of a much larger – and more varied – group of young people.

The more structured the questionnaire or interview, the more easily you will be able to analyse and compare responses. You will also be able to compare responses over a period of time – to identify, for example, whether attitudes towards the service are changing.

Peer group pressure is less likely to affect the results of surveys than it is to affect any of the methods which follow this – methods which involve young people speaking in the presence of their peers. Questionnaires may also decrease the inclination to give answers that the participant believes will please the interviewer/focus group leader (or perhaps thwart her/him!) though this is not necessarily the case, (How many times have you been less than honest in completing questionnaires?).

An additional advantage for young people is the relatively low levels of commitment required.

However, there are also drawbacks for all parties:

- The information you acquire is mainly quantitative, rather than qualitative – particularly in questionnaires and computer based questionnaires. A simple yes/no or multiple choice answer says less to us than open-ended, face-to-face communication.
- The young people do not get immediate feedback – they cannot tell whether their views have made a difference – which hinders motivation.

## Section B - Different mechanisms for involvement

Comparative benefits and drawbacks of the three main methods		
Method	Advantages	Drawbacks
Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More likely to gain participation than paper-based questionnaire – particularly if young people have good rapport skills.</li> <li>• Questions are usually prompts rather than strait-jackets - more rounded answers than questionnaire – more qualitative as well as quantitative data.</li> <li>• If the young person does not understand the question the interviewer can rephrase it.</li> <li>• Do not require literacy skills.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The less structured the interview, the more difficult and time-consuming it is to analyse the results.</li> <li>• The less structured the interview, the more opportunity there is for bias to creep in to the questioning or interpretation of the answers.</li> <li>• Young people may try to give interviewers the answers they think are wanted rather than their real opinion – particularly face-to-face.</li> </ul>
Paper-based questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relatively cheap to design and distribute</li> <li>• Can cover more people, relatively easily, by circulating more copies.</li> <li>• Structured – so answers directly comparable /easier to analyse.</li> <li>• People may be more inclined to answer personal questions because of anonymity.</li> <li>• Shy people more likely to answer.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specialist knowledge is required to develop effective questionnaires and analyse results.</li> <li>• Work best with simple factual questions.</li> <li>• Cannot rely on honest answers (no verbal or non-verbal cues as in interview).</li> <li>• May be seen as boring – low response rates common</li> <li>• Requires literacy skills.</li> <li>• Some young people find it difficult to concentrate for the time required.</li> <li>• Harder to follow up if anonymous.</li> <li>• It may be hard to get rid of cultural bias in the questions.</li> <li>• If the young person doesn't understand the question the answer will be flawed data.</li> <li>• Expensive to develop from scratch.</li> </ul>
Computer-based questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young people tend to be attracted to computer programs</li> <li>• Increases access – particularly if voice operated or touch screen operated rather than relying on reading skills/ ability to type.</li> <li>• Motivation can be enhanced through the use of graphics and music and/or by interspersing survey questions with games to refresh participants' concentration levels.</li> <li>• Rapid analysis of results, since this function is usually programmed at the same time as the questions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There may be a tendency to concentrate on the look and feel of the instrument, to the detriment of its content. The validity of the information obtained still depends on the way in which the questions are phrased.</li> </ul>

## Issues and tips

- Keep the number of questions as small as possible, to increase the likelihood of response.
- Do a pilot survey before starting the real thing – to help remove difficulties in phrasing – working with young people representative of those you are trying to reach.
- Having people to distribute the questionnaires (rather than posting them out) increases the likelihood that they will be completed. The person handing them out may be able to help with difficulties in understanding the questions and/or fill in the answers if anyone has literacy problems.
- You can reach a wider audience and increase the number of people who reply by thinking carefully about how you distribute the questionnaires – thinking of both where you take it and who asks young people to complete it.

In South Yorkshire, researchers went to one of the local nightclubs on its young teens night (when there might be 1800 to 2000 young people present once a month). Qualified youth workers were the questionnaire distributors in this case, on the basis that they would be able to chat with the young people. They had a queue of people waiting to fill them in.

In Case study E4, on page 59, you will see that Enterprise Careers used young people as researchers for the same reason. In this case, they interviewed service users at the careers centre and non-users on their own turf – in the streets and through youth clubs, schools, colleges and other places frequented by young people.

- You need to be aware, though of the possible skewing of response if you choose particular places to distribute them. Football followers are likely to have different responses from a theatre group and/or a clubbing group. You should be aiming for a representative sample.

The Lincoln Connexions pilot is using Viewpoint – an interactive software package – to collect and understand the views and opinions of young people and their families. It was developed because of the perceived attractiveness to young people of computers and quotes from those involved seem to back this up:

*"Using a computer can be easier than talking to a social worker, you can say what you mean without having to explain yourself, you don't have to bend the story all the time."*

*"Using computers is a really good idea. All young people are into computers"*

Quotes from managers:

*"The kids seem to enjoy it."*

*"This seems a more interesting and easy way of gaining information than some of the meetings we have for young people."*

## B1(c) Consultation – Focus groups

### Purpose

Focus groups are 'sounding boards', used for finding out what young people think about particular issues and/or services. Small groups of about six to ten young people, led by a trained facilitator, can be asked to debate open-ended questions on the chosen topic. In the Connexions context, these issues may have been raised by the young people themselves or by groups making decisions about the management of the service.

It is important to make the focus groups as representative of the group you are trying to reach as possible. However, since they tend to work best with groups from similar backgrounds, this diversity can best be achieved by consulting a large number of different groups (for example, young people from rural areas, ethnic minority background, etc).

### Benefits and drawbacks for young people

#### Benefits

- Focus groups are not an ongoing commitment, which may encourage more young people to take part (though this only holds if the focus group members are not taken from existing groups – which often cannot be avoided).
- The personal attention given to their views – and the opportunity to air them – can provide a 'buzz'.
- They can bounce ideas off each other and appreciate different points of view.
- The process can help young people to develop their ideas and fluency of expression.
- Focus groups can provide an insight into the decision-making process – which could help young people in their own decision-making.

#### Drawbacks

- They can be daunting for all but the more confident and talkative young people.



## Section B - Different mechanisms for involvement

**Benefits and drawbacks for Connexions Staff****Benefits**

- Quick feedback on a range of issues.
- Rich, anecdotal, qualitative information (rather than the simplified but quantitative information of surveys).
- The group process can lead participants to reveal more than they might otherwise do about their thoughts and feelings (which is useful information, but may also present issues of sensitive handling and regrets over disclosure).
- More direct and visible involvement than surveys. This may help to 'sell' the outcomes to those involved and other young people. Effective feedback should also encourage more young people to get involved in the service (whether as 'service users' or 'service shapers').

**Drawbacks**

- It may be difficult to recruit young people unless you use existing groups, but:
  - the people who join groups are often different from those who do not – which may bias your findings.
  - if you always use the local youth council, or a particular school, 'consultation fatigue' may creep in.
- Peer pressure – conforming to what other people in the group are saying – may bias your findings, particularly with a group of varied make-up. Those who perceive themselves as different from other group members may be reluctant to give their real views in public.
- You cannot guarantee confidentiality, even if you ask everyone to keep confidences. For sensitive issues, you may be better off with surveys.
- It is important (for the young people as well as the validity of your evidence) not to use the same focus group of young people.

## Issues and tips

Facilitators need to:

- make sure there are no unrealistic expectations about the final outcomes – explain the other factors involved in decision making.
- be active listeners – summarising the key points, regularly, so that the young people can hear that they have been listened to accurately (and clarify any misunderstandings).
- record key points on flip charts. This has a similar function to the above and, in addition, makes the points visible – which allows participants to build on what has gone before and allows the facilitator to sum up the variety of views at the end.
- attend to group dynamics – bringing out the quieter members of the group and reining in the more talkative ones.
- revisit the group and explain the final decision, if the group is to be seen as more than tokenistic.

A special case scenario of the focus group is a 'citizens' jury' in which a representative sample group of around 12 - 18 people investigates a specific issue, over a period of several days. The process involves calling witnesses and hearing evidence, with the support of a trained facilitator. The jury produces recommendations for action to the council. This method aims to create a more informed way of arriving at opinions and generating new ideas.

Citizens' juries may be a next step for young people who have developed their skills in this arena (or, if you have a citizens' jury in your area, a potential recruitment pool for young people to involve in your own decision-making forums).

The citizens' jury approach allows the group to:

- become better informed about the topic under discussion.
- develop information gathering and analysis skills.
- develop their own conclusions and recommendations.

On the other hand, it takes longer and requires more staff time.

## B1(d) Creative approaches to consultation

### Elements

A 'creative consultation event' might include any or all of the following: role-play and drama, video and photography, games and activities, art, audio work, literature, music, songs and poetry.

Facilitators in 'participatory appraisal', another form of creative consultation (described below, under Purpose), employ a wide variety of techniques including brainstorming, continua, participatory mapping and pie charts.

### Purpose

To widen the range of young people willing and able to express their views, talk about their needs, or give feedback on the service.

Video and photography may be used to document the role-play and drama – but are also valid forms of expression themselves. They may be semi-structured (making a video of interviews with young people rather than using written questionnaires), or unstructured (young people may video their local area, for example – to express their feelings about the way they live and campaign for improved facilities).

Participatory appraisal began as a tool for professional researchers to get information from people in simple/highly participatory ways. It has developed into an 'empowering process' – encouraging communities (in this case the local youth population) to examine their own situations and develop their own solutions. Facilitators use a wide variety of techniques – all highly pictorial and/or verbal and/or practical and easy on literacy requirements – so that they can cross-check findings.

### Benefits and drawbacks for young people

Benefits	Drawbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They are fun and yet useful avenues for personal development – learning to see things through others eyes, developing communication skills, learning to perform in front of an audience.</li> <li>• Some young people find that acting in role frees them from the embarrassment associated with talking about themselves in public.</li> <li>• Some young people are very strong on creative expression – this may provide them with an opportunity to be praised for something they are good at – building their self-esteem.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For those who are not naturally confident that they have the skills needed, it could provide another demoralising experience – or simply a turn-off.</li> </ul>

### Benefits and drawbacks for Connexions Staff

Benefits	Drawbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some groups are more relaxed using oral rather than written communication, so this extends the groups you can appeal to.</li> <li>• These methods provide more insight into the emotions of the young people.</li> <li>• Role-play and drama may allow young people to speak more freely about a situation being role-played – pretending to be someone other than themselves.</li> <li>• They are useful skills development activities, as well as providing data for responsive decision-making.</li> <li>• They can be fun to watch.</li> <li>• They may encourage further participation, because people have fun taking part.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resource-heavy: Requires a skilled facilitator, working with a small group of young people.</li> <li>• They can be threatening for staff used to more formal methods of acquiring information, unused to the emotional expression that may be aroused.</li> <li>• Validity of data – You can never be sure how genuine the opinions expressed through role-play and video are – the young people might over-play an issue for dramatic effect.</li> <li>• Quantity of data – small groups are involved.</li> <li>• Difficulties of data analysis.</li> <li>• Time – it is quicker and easier to scan a report than it is to watch a play or video.</li> </ul>

## Section B - Different mechanisms for involvement

## Issues and tips

- Again, it is important to be clear about what can and cannot be achieved – not raising false expectations.
- For complex projects, you need to develop an action plan in which you break down the project into constituent tasks – each with its timescales and named person to be responsible for that task/stage. For example, in making a video diary to highlight the needs of young people in the area, the stages might be:

Stage	Person(s) responsible	Completion Date
Discuss issues that might arise – and how to handle them. Consent forms to parents/carers. Nominate key players (for example; camera person, director, interviewers). Develop storyboard. Consent forms from parents/carers. Film. Edit. Public showing of video, answering questions. Identify lessons from experience and record them for future reference.		

- Findings from such activities are best presented at an event to which decision-makers are invited. They might, for example, be invited to attend the final session of a residential. Being able to present their findings and question decision-makers directly gives young people a powerful message about the importance of their viewpoint.
- It is important, though, that if adults are invited, they are able to interact effectively with the young people. If this is not feasible, it may be better to present the findings in a more traditional format.

*“One organisation employs a ‘writer-in-residence’ in its residential facilities to help residents express themselves; another employs social animateurs to work with residents to plan activities.”*



## Techniques used in participatory appraisal

### Brainstorming

This technique is used to generate ideas – or to identify solutions to a problem – in a non-critical environment (on the basis that the expectation of criticism tends to stifle ideas generation). It is particularly useful when trying to find new and different ways of doing things.

There are two main phases – creative and evaluative.

#### The creative phase

The purpose of this section is to generate ideas as quickly as possible – to inhibit the natural tendency to screen and censor ideas before voicing them. Stop when the ideas begin to dry up, have a break and then move into the evaluative phase.

There are four basic ground rules, which are usually written on a flip chart and placed around the room. You should also discuss them, for the benefit of those who find reading difficult:

1. No criticism or discussion of ideas.
2. Offer as many ideas as you can think of – it is quantity not quality that counts in this first session.
3. Be outrageous – say the first thing that comes into your head, even if it sounds silly. There may be something useful that you, or someone else, can get from it.
4. Combine and improve on ideas that have already been suggested – often the best solutions are combinations of others.

#### The evaluative phase

In this phase, the purpose is to select the most promising ideas or combinations of ideas from the list generated in the creative phase. This can be done by voting or by giving out coloured dots which young people can stick next to their favourite suggestions. It is helpful to select by different criteria: for example popularity, feasibility, economy, efficiency, effectiveness.

Brainstorming sessions, run well, help to generate enthusiasm and commitment. Even if no workable ideas are generated, team commitment is often a useful outcome. On the other hand, some people just don't take to them – particularly those who don't have confidence in their creativity (which can include staff as well as young people!). This can risk alienation. You may also have to handle carefully the people whose ideas don't get beyond this second stage.

Example from C4Y (Coalition for youth)

*"In the graffiti workshop we used the 'Teenager' figure to brainstorm what adults think of young people and what young people think of themselves. This helped us to bring out the positives and negatives about young people, and start discussions about the issues arising."*

## Continua

These can be used to help people decide where they stand on key issues, to measure changes over time and to see where other people stand.

Draw a line on the floor and put markings on it ranging from 1 to 10. This continuum might represent 'a little' to 'a lot', from 'love' to 'hate', from 'always acceptable' to 'never acceptable' and so on. For example, if the issue were:

- 'How useful are the leaflets about the Connexions Service?' The scale might run from 1 (useless) to 10 (very useful).
- 'How effective is the anti-bullying provision at school?' The scale might run from 1 (totally ineffective) to 10 (very effective).
- 'To what extent does this organisation discriminate against some young people on the basis of their race, class, ability or gender?' The scale might run from 1 (discriminates on all areas) to 10 (little sign of discrimination).

Each time the facilitator calls out the topic, people rearrange themselves in the area of the spectrum that fits their position on the issue.

In an extension of this, people may be asked to give their reasons for their position and, after everyone has spoken, they may take up new positions, based on what they have heard.

An alternative method would be to ask people to put sticky dots on a paper version of the continuum. This has the advantage of providing a more permanent record for future comparison.

### Participatory mapping

Participants draw a map to represent the main issues facing them in the area where they live. They are a stimulus to discussion about the issues.

In **South Yorkshire**, a group of young people at a workshop helped to define local needs by pinning symbols onto a map of their area – showing where (for example) transport or lighting were an issue. They then moved into brainstorming groups to discuss the primary issues.



## B2 Managing activities

### Elements

With training, young people can be allocated responsibility for many of the activities involved in the methods of active involvement described thus far – stepping into the tasks of service delivery staff. For example, they can take part in delivering surveys or in scoring them, rather than simply participating; they can help to devise and run focus groups and creative workshops. Young people can also take part in mainstream service delivery activities, such as:

- peer mentoring and support.
- brokering/advocacy work with the various partner organisations, such as schools and colleges, housing providers and employment agencies.
- research work.
- input to staff development policy and provision.
- the writing, editing, design or production of 'young people friendly' information materials.

One Leaving Care team has – with lots of advice from care-leavers – produced inserts for a loose-leaf diary. This gives young people – in a clear and attractive form:

- local information that care leavers have said they want and need, in moving towards independence.
- planning charts to help with decision-making on common issues.

The diaries are currently being piloted but have been seen as 'a good friend' for some, becoming a mixture of appointments, planning lists and reflections.

As mentioned in Section A, you can create opportunities for different levels of power and responsibility – depending on the interests and stage of readiness of the young people concerned. Examples include:

- working alongside adults (shadowing).
- joint decision-making with adults.
- activities run by young people, with adults offering advice.
- activities delegated to young people, with adults giving advice only when requested.
- activities chosen, planned, implemented, monitored and evaluated by the young people.

### Purpose

To capitalise on the skills and experience of young people, in attracting their peers to participate more fully and to develop young people's skills more fully.

### Benefits and drawbacks for young people

#### Benefits

- Handled well, these activities can be a boost to self esteem and a true learning experience – if the young people have:
  - enough 'rope' to engage and develop their skills but not enough to 'fail'.
  - opportunities and support to engage in reflective practice – to build on their successes and reduce the reoccurrence of mistakes.
- Possible accreditation for their work, once accreditation procedures are in place.
- Payment, whether in cash or kind (see page 38).

#### Drawbacks

- Heavy time and responsibility commitment.

## Section B - Different mechanisms for involvement

**Benefits and drawbacks for Connexions staff****Benefits**

Young people:

- may be more aware of the difficulties faced by their peers and relate more easily to their interests and ideas. This can help in recruitment, peer tutoring, or the organising of focus groups or residential courses for example.
- usually speak the same language as their peers, which can help in the production or editing of publicity and information materials (However, young people do not all speak the same language – they are not a homogeneous group. You may not get it right to suit all groups).
- reinforce the message that young people are taken seriously and can make a difference, which may help to break down barriers with some hard-to-reach groups.
- provide good role models for other young people.

**Drawbacks**

- Some staff may:
  - find it difficult to work alongside young people.
  - decide there is little incentive to change their own ways of working, to better meet the needs of young people.
  - find the competence of young people threatening to their own standing.
- Over-use of young service deliverers may further alienate young people from adults.
- Some of the young people who get involved have very clear agendas of their own, which may not be challenged if they are the only ones who volunteer. Some young people may be intimidated by other groups of young people.

**Issues and tips**

It is essential that young people are not set up to fail. Those organising the work need to be fully aware of the skills and experience of the young people concerned and either:

- allocate them to tasks which they are already capable.
- train them to do the work in which they are interested.
- it is important to get a representative sample, eventually, although this may not be feasible in the short term – better to start and get better, than not to start until everything is perfect.

**Example of advocacy work**

In one service, a regular review meeting of Personal Advisers, set up to examine young people's experience of different training providers, found a pattern of difficulties with one particular organisation. The link PA for this organisation seized the opportunity to write a welcoming letter to a new training manager who had just been appointed and due to start soon, suggesting an early meeting.

- At the meeting the PA sounded out attitudes to young people in the organisation and felt it right to propose an informal meeting with some trainees – some currently in the training organisation but being actively supported by Connexions and some who had moved on – to discuss their experiences. The training manager was enthusiastic.
- The PA met with these trainees to share experiences and see how they could put some criticisms and suggestions, constructively, to the training manager. After two pre-meetings – with a lot of discussion about how to get across their points and issues such as fears of victimisation and so on, the training manager was invited down to the centre.
- The PA had alerted him to the fear of victimisation, and he came prepared with a 'confidentiality contract', which they first discussed and agreed. Over hot and cold drinks and snacks, both 'sides' started fairly nervously but they soon seemed to gain sufficient trust to open up some of the key areas. The training manager was very respectful of the young people. He explained his newness in post and his need to consider their points along with lots of other information, but offered to return soon.
- They fixed a time for him to drop by the following week. Some young people were sceptical – thinking he was fobbing them off. However, he kept the meeting, clarified a few points with the young people and came up with action that he would like to take on two issues.
- The real lift came when, two weeks later, two current trainees reported to the PA that things had changed for the better on those two issues.
- The training manager now drops in regularly every three to four weeks for a coffee and chat. There is talk about formalising the contact into quarterly young people's advisory group meetings but both sides are assessing the pros and cons of such a formal process.

## B3(a) Membership of youth committees (forums/steering groups/panels)

### Purpose

Youth committees can be set up to provide the main committee with regular access to the views of young people on topical issues. The groups may:

- run in parallel with the corresponding adult committee, often meeting just before the main committee and discussing very similar items.
- have their own agenda and raise their own issues for the main adult committee to consider.

There are various ways in which the main committee might come to take account of the youth committee's findings. Representatives from the youth team might attend the main committee, or vice versa (representatives from the adult committee might come to the youth committee). Whichever route is taken, the process must be clear. There should be no potential for accusations of 'tokenism'.

In some cases, the youth group may have functions of its own, rather than simply advising the main decision-making body, in an overlap with 'service delivery' activities as just discussed. For example:

In Cornwall and Devon, there is an existing infrastructure of youth forums supported, in many cases, by Youth Participation Workers. It is from this network that participants on management committees and focus groups are drawn but the principle is 'inclusiveness': if young people additional to formal representatives want to attend, they are welcomed.

- 45 young people involved through this 'mix' are attending a residential co-ordinated by Youth Participation Workers at which Connexions managers will be working with them to develop a Youth Charter and to design a publicity and marketing strategy.
- specific focus groups have also been set up: one, of young people who are or who have been homeless, and another one involving looked-after young people. Both of these, incidentally, have dual functions. Not only did the former, run by the Devon and Cornwall Housing Association, inform Connexions policy but also foyer development. The latter, while addressing Connexions issues also spoke directly to the Director of Social Services.

The forum structure is inundated with requests from many services for consultation with young people. Managers are attempting to systematise this process by saying to requesting services: "if you'll all help us by funding the structure, we'll do the consultation on your behalf." Funding would enable the representative base to be widened. One possibility being explored for staffing is the development of young people engaged under the Modern Apprenticeship scheme being attached to the youth forum structure.

### Benefits and drawbacks for young people

#### Benefits

- There is likely to be a 'buzz' from such involvement – debating important issues, but meeting on their own terms, in their own space and providing each other with help and support (compared with the more formal atmosphere of the main committee for example).
- It is a good training ground for team-player and committee member skills, equipping them for operating in the more formal atmosphere of the main committee in due course, should they wish to do so.
- Providing the mechanisms for feeding outcomes to the main decision-making group are perceived as fair, then they build self esteem when their views are seen to have had an impact.

#### Drawbacks

- Demanding of time, commitment and skills.
- Some may feel this is 'second best' to involvement on the main decision-making group.



## Section B - Different mechanisms for involvement

**Benefits and drawbacks for Connexions Staff****Benefits**

- Where some members of the committee are still resistant to young people's direct participation it can provide a safer way of debating young people's opinions – for all concerned.
- Contact with this group of people should open up relationships with others.
- You have a regular contact with a primary source of information, which can help to indicate trends.

**Drawbacks**

- Heavy on resources, with the need for briefing and debriefing sessions for the young people and investment in training and support.
- Information comes from a relatively small number of young people, who may not be representative of the views of their whole peer group.

**Issues and tips**

- Be clear about what can and cannot be delivered.
- When the young people's point of view is not the one carried by the committee, the reasons must be explained clearly, to show that their opinions were not discounted but that other factors were overpowering.
- Make sure the young people can meet at a convenient time and location for their own needs and for ease of access to the main committee, where relevant.
- Agree ground rules (see page 33).
- Help make the meetings fun, worthwhile, interesting and manageable for people from all walks of life.

Connexions example – Young people in Oldham are proposing plans for a Borough Youth Forum, which allows for participation based on:

- **Community** (Six Area Youth forums will shadow the Area Committees and elect representatives onto the Community Forum).
- **Interest** (young people from interest groups – sports groups, arts groups etc – send representatives to the Interest Forum).
- **Association** (young people from different associations such as scouts, churches, schools – send representatives to the Association Forum).
- **Issues** (young people from issues-based groups such as environmental forums, health forums, housing forums, crime forums and so on send representatives to the Issues Forum).

Representatives from these four different forums will be elected onto the Borough Youth Forum.

From a youth-focused Bradford-based SRB project, reported in Oldfield, 2000

This project supports a partnership body for young people aged 16 to 24, which shares in the management of the programme and nominates up to four SRB board members. There are currently twenty one young people involved, most aged 17 to 19, recruited through local youth and volunteering organisations – particularly Millenium Volunteers and local schools. The SRB project provides staff, resources and an ongoing training programme to enable members to carry out their roles effectively.

Young people's influence on the main group has increased since their involvement in drawing up the original bid in 1997-8. The SRB Board has now decided to give the youth partnership the leading role in the management of its community development and capacity building fund, allocating grants of up to £25,000. In the long-term, the SRB Board aims to move to a position where the youth partnership takes on the main responsibility for running the programme.

## B3(b) Membership of main decision-making bodies

### Purpose

To have direct input from young people to decision-making bodies, including management committees, special interest groups, staff recruitment and selection panels, staff development advisory groups, monitoring and inspection panels.

This input may be provided by young people acting as full members of the group (with equal voting rights to the adult members) or as sounding boards (representing young people, but with no voting rights). Either way, it is important that there is no opportunity for accusations of tokenism – their views must be taken seriously and be seen to be taken seriously. There should be clear feedback mechanisms.

### Benefits and drawbacks for young people

#### Benefits

- Decisions that affect young people are more likely to be carried out in ways they approve of.
- It is a real learning experience – learning to communicate with a range of people and gaining awareness of decision-making issues and procedures.
- Being taken seriously is a valuable boost to self esteem.
- Young people, representatives or not, can see that their views are important and are being taken into account.
- A successful experience can help sway adults who are not committed to participation and increase the opportunities for participation in other areas.

#### Drawbacks

- It is a high risk activity and can be very uncomfortable (particularly if some of the adults are uncommitted to youth participation and are disrespectful to them).
- If there are no adaptations to the traditional meetings format, it is likely to be experienced as very boring.
- It can be more of a time commitment than a young person really wants to give – particularly for those who also need to take part in skills building exercises.
- It can be difficult for young people to argue effectively against adults who often have the advantage of a clearer understanding of the wider context.

### Benefits and drawbacks for Connexions staff

#### Benefits

- Young people can provide a new slant on issues – allowing adults to see things from a fresh perspective.
- Adult decision-makers hear, first-hand, the concerns and opinions of young people (helping them to ensure that the service is user-sensitive, more effective and more likely to meet its targets).
- The youth representatives become more aware of the real world of decision-making and the factors that make action difficult in some cases. This may help to break down 'Us and Them' attitudes (It is not that they don't want us to have X or Y, it is just that ...) both in the youth representatives and, when they feedback to their peer group, among the peer group too.
- The skills and insights developed by young people will improve their employment potential and could also encourage them to become involved in other Connexions tasks such as peer mentoring.
- Increasing young people's motivation, skills and employment potential are all key aims of the Connexions Service.

#### Drawbacks

- Heavy on resources. To engage a representative sample of the population, including those often marginalised, you need to allow for:
  - more time in preparing materials, such as agendas and minutes, in a more engaging format and in running meetings in a more informal interactive way.
  - the costs of a facilitator.
  - confidence and skills building sessions for young people, for example in assertiveness, active listening, presenting a case and decision-making.
- It may be uncomfortable – you may get more straight talking than you anticipated.
- You may have to compromise – for example finding times and venues that suit the young people as well as staff.

**Connexions example** – Reflections on the involvement of young people in Local Management Committees: 'The chair's role is crucial in including and involving young people. On a broader point, some of our LMCs initially went through quite a period of introspection, thinking about their role. In some ways it might have been better to ask young people to get involved later in the process when the committees were becoming more outward-looking. It's difficult for young people to find a role between meetings. Most of the adult members were there because of their jobs and took away tasks related to action in their own organisations. This wasn't the same for the young people and we need to explore their potential role more specifically.' Head of Youth Service.

## Issues and tips

- When you first start, it may be useful to bring the young people into a committee gradually – perhaps inviting them to observe first, then practising a presentation, gradually breaking down mutual stereotypes. If you have resistant adults on the committee it may also be a good idea to choose skilled young people first, rather than a group who might ‘rattle cages’. This allows you to break down stereotypes gradually and build on success.
- Make sure that everyone is clear about the ground rules (see page 33) including, for example, ‘Are places on the committee person-specific or may the youth representatives be drawn from a pool?’ This may help to combat potential obstacles such as rapid turnover and/or busy lives of young people that may lead to timetable clashes.
- It is not safe to assume that, because someone has served on a youth committee, he or she is adequately prepared for working on a committee alongside adults. More training to operate in this new environment may be required.
- Provide supporters who can help young people to prepare, present and debrief. (For example, help them to research/debate the facts; take account of the views of committee members in the way they phrase what they have to say; practice speaking assertively and learn from the experience). This will build their own skills but also strengthen their authority and help to convince adult doubters.
- Provide ‘champions’ to break down any resistance among adults on the committee and ensure that they don’t overturn every suggestion that young people make.
- Reflective practice – adult members should keep asking themselves ‘Are the young people with us?’ and, if the answer is no, then ask ‘What can we do to get them back on board? Find out why they are dropping out, what their needs are and how you can make things better.

And finally, try to make participation easier – catering for a wide cross section of young people’s interests, backgrounds, commitments, issues and neighbourhoods – by:

- providing clear simple guidelines about expectations.
- holding meetings in convenient locations (or providing transport) and at convenient times. You could also have a ‘youth slot’, so that young people don’t have to sit through the whole meeting but can simply be there for the bits that are relevant to them. However, it is important to check with young people that they know what is going on in the rest of the meeting and they do not want to be present for it, rather than making assumptions.
- making sure the room set-up is informal and inviting.
- providing appropriate drinks and food, catering for different diet requirements and cultural sensitivities.
- allowing a big enough group of youth members to attend, so that they are less likely to be intimidated by an adult majority. Separate voting rights from attendance, if necessary.
- offering rewards of various kinds for attendance. Ask the young people what would make attendance worth their while.
- having a mix of talking and practical activities. For example, you could use diamond ranking for decision-making or participatory ‘mapping’ when talking about area facilities.

Coventry and Oldham have both had positive experiences of involving young people as part of the recruitment and selection process for Personal Advisers. Their experiences are recounted in Case study E6.

The management group initially invited two young people to attend their meetings but four young people decided they wanted to attend together. After the first meeting they decided they did not like the atmosphere and the way the meetings were run. They felt unable to contribute and were particularly aware of the tensions and competitiveness between the different groups of professionals. Despite this initial bad experience they decided to keep going and worked closely with those adults they felt would help them change the way the group operated and make sure their voices were heard. Many groups of young people might have decided that it was not worth the effort and the opportunity for them to influence decisions would have been lost.

Cohen and Emanuel (1998)

# Section C

## Further information about key issues

### Section Aim

To provide an additional layer of information on key topics raised in Sections A and B, for people to dip into as necessary.

### Contents

1. An introduction to 'Reflective practice' and 'The learning organisation'.
2. Hard to reach young people.
3. Providing information that will appeal to young people.
4. Agreeing a contract or ground rules for involvement.
5. Helping those with language and/or learning difficulties.
6. Helping those with physical or psychological access barriers.
7. Anti-oppressive practice: ten key principles.
8. The use of incentives.
9. Skills and qualities required for active involvement.
10. Emotional literacy.
11. Equal Opportunities Best Practice Principles.

## C1 An introduction to 'Reflective practice' and 'The learning organisation'

### Reflective practice

There are four main contributory elements to any learning<sup>2</sup>.



You can start this cycle at any point but all four stages need to be worked through for effective practice – and learning from that practice. In the main text you will be working through this cycle starting from the planning phase. This resource starts from the experience phase of the cycle and describes two types of learning from experience – 'Reflection on action' and 'Reflection in action'.

### C1.1 'Reflection on action'

This involves using the reflection and analysis to learn from an experience and to use that learning to inform future practice.

- Reflection helps you identify the key features of the situation. The main questions to ask are 'What?' 'Who?' 'How?' Because learning involves a combination of doing, thinking and feeling, the questions might run – 'What exactly did I/she/he do?' 'Who said what to whom?' 'What was I thinking about, at the time?' 'How did I feel when that happened? How did I feel afterwards? What else was going on?'

<sup>2</sup>Reference Kolb (1984)

- Analysis involves taking a step back and trying out tentative hypotheses about 'Why?' things happened the way they did. Sometimes you will come up with your own ideas, sometimes you will consult others and sometimes you will read up about it. The questions here might go – 'Why did that go well?' 'Why did that not work?' 'Why did I feel like that/do that/think that?' 'Is there a pattern in the way I act in these situations – and, if so, why?'

'Sonia is an experienced group worker, let's see what she thinks might have been going on.' 'I think the Connexions team in Wessex are working on that – I'll get in touch with them.' 'I'd better read that article on anger management that Joe was talking about to see if that can throw any light on things.'

As a result you will be 'building your own theory' with the help of others and so gaining confidence that you can think well in new situations as they arise.

- In the Action planning phase you look for ways to alter events that you recorded in the reflective phase, based on the theories you came up with in the analysis phase. The key words now are 'If' and 'Then', as in: 'If I do this... then perhaps...'. You might try to alter the outcomes of a similar situation in the future, or to transfer your learning to a new situation. (And an important part of action planning is taking steps to make sure you implement the action plan!)

The next time you're heading for a similar experience, you can call on this action plan to direct your thoughts, actions and feelings in a different way. (You then reflect on what you did differently, how you thought and felt about it, and how this affected the outcomes, before analysing why to complete another learning cycle).

This process is important, because it helps us to:

- become more systematic – basing decisions on evidence about 'What works' rather than jumping to conclusions without processing an experience.
- develop our capacity and self-confidence as workers, so that we feel more competent and capable in our decision-making.

## C1.2 Reflection in action

Developing an ability (through 'reflecting-on-action') to pick up clues about the situation we are working in, allows us to start making adjustments as we go along or, indeed, to say 'This isn't working for any of us, is it? Let's look at what's happening.', rather than soldiering on 'I've started so I'll finish.'

Connexions as a Learning Organisation. A 'learning organisation' is one that learns from collective experience. There is not enough room to explore this in detail, but you will find references below. The important thing to note is that the managers need to:

- endorse – through the organisational policies and practices – the importance of making time for systematic learning from experience.
- develop a culture of openness in which mistakes can be admitted and learned from.
- use meetings to review learning not just to carry out administrative business. This might include learning about individual young people, about working with particular providers or about following a particular method.
- ensure the feedback loop is closed and that lessons from experience are implemented.
- encourage peer supervision and 'listening partnerships' between staff. In regular sessions of 15-30 minutes each way, each person takes a turn at reviewing recent experience while the partner helps her/him use the reflection-on-action cycle.
- encourage the use of reflective practice with individual young people – and groups – to help them make sense of and learn from their experience and develop their self-confidence as learners.

## Further reading

Schon, D *Educating the Reflective Practitioner: towards a new design for teaching and learning in the professions* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987).

Garrett, B *Creating a Learning Organisation* (London: Director Books, 1990).

## C2 Hard to Reach Young People

Some young people may have been alienated from officialdom in all forms – following negative experiences at school, at work, or with other government/local government agencies, on the grounds of race, ability, class, etc.

Others may not receive your publicity materials – for example, young homeless people may be sleeping rough, or moving between friends and other temporary accommodation. The Connexions Service has to be responsive to the needs of these young people. It will be useful, then, to have representatives of this group to help in planning and managing delivery to them.

*"We could easily recruit ten articulate young people from sixth form college – but they would not be fully representative of the diversity of young people's needs and interests. (In any case, these young people are fully stretched by the demands on them, from all directions, by people wanting 'the young person's point of view'.)" – Youth worker.*

To reach socially excluded young people, you should:

- **Learn from others.** Some staff within the Connexions Service partner agencies will have experience of working with marginalised young people, their communities and linked agencies. Think about the values underlying relationships as well as the skills of relating to young people. A youth worker, for example, suggested that:

*"The whole point about (youth) work with (isolated) young people is that we proceed on their terms. Whether they engage with us – and on what issues – is up to them. It is a voluntary relationship, which may take six months to build and could be jeopardised by trying to direct them into Connexions".*

- **Develop contact networks and work collaboratively** with individual community members and specialist agencies representing the interests of particular groupings of young people where necessary and when appropriate. For example:

letters to young people with learning difficulties may not reach them – mail may be intercepted by a carer who is used to making decisions on the young person's behalf. You may need to work out alternative tactics for the initial contact, such as home visits or phone calls.

staff with specialist knowledge of traveller communities include Traveller Liaison Officers based in local authorities and Traveller Education Teams in some local education authorities or voluntary agencies.

to reach homeless young people, make contact with specialist agencies to identify, the places to which these young people naturally congregate – for example night shelters, emergency accommodation, amusement arcades, some cafes and pharmacists (for those using prescription drugs) – and develop relationships with staff there.

working with young people from ethnic minority backgrounds, develop similar staff profiles so that young people have staff from their own background to talk to.

It is important to distinguish between 'getting involved' and 'remaining involved'. You cannot expect young people to serve long-term on any group, because at their time of life, their interests and responsibilities are constantly changing. Be realistic and plan a steady recruitment drive.

## C3 Providing information that will appeal to young people

There are three main factors here:

### C3.1 Make the right first impression

The way in which you contact young people – through leaflets, personal visits, letters or telephone – makes a big difference. GHK research indicates that:

- young people prefer information delivery through, in order of priority, helplines, the Internet, speaking to someone in person and mainstream magazines, books and leaflets. 53% have access to the Internet at home and 72% through school. (However, very few unemployed young people have access to internet or e-mail facilities).
- young people are attracted to printed information if it:
  - is brightly coloured (silver, primary colours, luminous and shiny card were very popular).
  - is pocket sized.
  - contains cartoons and humour.
  - has a range of fonts and type styles.
  - is written in their own language or a language they understand and/or identify with.

### C3.2 Get young people involved – for example, they might:

- comment on current presentation and wording – saying what is good, what could be improved.
- produce videos and/or 'talking newsletters' (audio-taped items – particularly for those with visual impairments, but useful, too for those with poor literacy skills) which put across your message in a user-friendly way.
- organise the library of information materials in a way that young people find most helpful.
 

If you are targeting a particular group of young people, your volunteers would ideally come from a similar background (for example, Bangladeshi young people, young people with visual impairment, young people excluded from school, young people from the Sixth Form, etc).

### C3.3 Develop the use of peer mentoring

For some young people their peers are often more accessible and effective sources of support and information than adults are. This may be particularly appropriate when trying to reach young people from different cultural backgrounds, particularly those who have arrived recently from overseas. These young people may not have the cultural information to make sense of some of your materials; they may come from a country with very different traditions of public service. It may help to train and support young people from similar cultural backgrounds to make contact.



## C4 Agreeing a contract and/or ground rules for involvement

Developing a 'contract' or a working agreement applies to all aspects of active involvement work, including working relationships between Personal Advisers and individual young people and group sessions with those young people who are involved in consultations, service delivery or decision-making bodies.

At a general recruitment level, publicity material should be specific about what active involvement might entail – including:

- what you expect to get out of it and what they might expect to get out of it.
- what you expect to put into it and what they might expect to put into it.

Early meetings with any individual or group should be used to:

- clarify mutual expectations, hopes and fears.
- agree objectives and methods of working.
- explain boundaries – issues that are outside the control of individual staff, such as the limits of the group's decision-making powers and its relationship to other groups. Being open about the boundaries ensures you do not build, then dash, young people's hopes. (Though this should not mean that you regard the boundaries as permanent or stop looking for ways in which you could devolve more power and responsibility, once you are more confident of each other's abilities and intentions).
- agree issues that are open to negotiation – which might include:

time boundaries – for example, 'How frequently will meetings be held? On what days? At what times? For how long?' And where?

voting rules and the criteria on which decisions are made.

ground rules of behaviour towards each other – these might cover the use of language (jargon, swearing for example), oppressive behaviour, confidentiality, equal opportunities, etc. NB: although it is acceptable for young people to decide on the content of issues, the issues themselves should not be up for negotiation.

### Example of a list of ground rules agreed by a group called Coalition 4 Youth (C4Y)

No exclusion or snobbery.	No jargon.
Challenge the opinion not the person.	Listen, hear and communicate.
Pull your weight – have some input.	No unnecessary boring formalities.
No racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, disability-ism.	
Respect for each other.	
Respect for other people's right to give their opinion, even if you disagree.	
No action just for the sake of it – or because its trendy – but let's do something.	

### Key points about the 'ground rules' session

- Developing a contract at the first meeting of a new group may load power in the hands of the group leader. It may be better to focus on ice-breaker and team-building activities in Session 1 and develop the ground rules in Session 2, reflecting the collective experience of Session 1.
- If it is done at the first meeting, precede it with group-building activities, so that people develop confidence around speaking in the group. Working in small groups first – before meeting as a whole group – can also help.

At the end of discussions, it is important to come to a public decision about the 'contract' and to record it. You might also build in a review date. One of the key advantages of making a contract is that it provides a reference point, which can be returned to if any party acts in a way contrary to the contract.

## C5 Helping those with learning difficulties

Young people who have learning difficulties will need access to appropriate resources and practitioners to enable their full and active involvement. Managers may need to build into their plans time and resources to develop:

- induction sessions for signers – to ensure that such provision is culturally sensitive, age-relevant and covers Connexions terminology and practices.
- a register of voluntary and learning difficulty organisations, for quick reference.
- a monitoring sheet on which staff and young people can note any preferences for – or difficulties with – the various providers (information which would then be used to update the register).

Young people with learning difficulties may not wish to get more directly involved in service planning or provision until they are more comfortable with their own skills – but do not simply assume this. In fact, since social isolation may be as much of a concern as their learning difficulty, you should consider developing plans for peer mentoring and support, to allow them to take part in these wider activities.

Supporting young people with learning difficulties consider the need to:

- extend the variety of formats in which information is provided, to simplify the communication process, (For example, for surveys, the Lincoln Connexions pilot is using computer software with a speech facility, minimising the need for literacy skills).
- provide training in communication methods that promote self-learning and move these young people away from 'learned helplessness'. Sometimes, young people become so used to other people – such as parents, carers or teachers – making decisions for them, that all concerned find it hard to move to a situation in which the young people move towards some independence. Increasingly, those working with young people with learning difficulties are being encouraged to move from a position of 'caring and doing for' to one of 'enabling, empowering and doing with'. Of course, there are boundaries and you need to be realistic about what can be achieved. A strong support role may be necessary. The approach, though, is to emphasise what service users can do rather than assume what they can't.
- use peer supporters – despite the challenges, there are positive examples of young adults with learning difficulties participating successfully with such help (and the peer supporters also benefit from the experience).

In a Mencap scheme, mainstream young people trained in TSI (instruction methodology for working with young people with learning difficulties) work alongside Mencap young people who have been placed in real jobs. Mencap pays these young mentors as a way of getting young people with learning needs into real jobs. See Case study E5 for publicity material and training schedule. It may be that a similar scheme could be used within Connexions.

In Somerset, the 'Getting Equal' project has been doing similar work for two years. It recently held a conference in which service users were centre stage and used a variety of ways including presentation and role play to highlight how they experienced services. People with learning disabilities (some of whom were aged 18 and 19) helped organise the event.

## C6 Helping those with English language difficulties

Young people who have limited or no English language will need access to translation and interpretation resources. Managers may need to build into their plans time and resources to develop:

- induction sessions for interpreters – to ensure that such provision is culturally sensitive, age-relevant and covers Connexions terminology and practices.
- a register of such agencies, for quick reference.
- a monitoring sheet on which staff and young people can note any preferences for – or difficulties with – the various providers (information which would then be used to update the register).

Young people with limited or no English language may not wish to get more directly involved in service planning or provision until they are more comfortable with their language skills – but do not simply assume this. In fact, since social isolation may be of as much a concern as their linguistic isolation, you should consider developing plans for peer mentoring and support, to allow them to take part in these wider activities. The approach is to emphasise what service users can do rather than assume what they cannot.

Consider here the possible need to:

- extend the variety of formats in which information is provided, to simplify the communication process, (For example, letters, information and leaflets translated to the language needs of young people – and very often, their parents).
- use peer supporters – despite the challenges, young people with English as an additional language can participate successfully with such help (and the peer supporters also benefit from the experience).
- put in place a staffing profile – that reflects the community in which the service is operated. The use of outreach workers with linguistic skills necessary to communicate with young people in their communities is often a useful method for involving these young people.

## C7 Helping those with physical or psychological access barriers

Physical access barriers might include:

- transport issues for those without access to a convenient bus service (particularly those living in isolated rural areas), or for those unable to afford the transport.
- appropriate and adequate facilities for certain groups of young people, for example, crèche facilities, parent/baby room, comfortable seating for pregnant mothers, etc.
- obstacles for those with physical impairments.

Psychological access barriers relate to those who have had negative experiences of a particular organisation/venue. For example, Connexions activities based in schools or training centres could put off young people who have failed there.

Different groups of young people may face different psychological barriers (for example, there are three types of barriers young people from minority ethnic groups might experience: fear of racial harassment on the way to the Connexions base, because of the area in which it is situated; concern about discrimination within the organisation; and the feeling that 'this is not my kind of place').

Young people with access problems may decide that the effort of involvement makes it not worth their while. Plans to counter these difficulties might include measures to:

- take the service to places where young people congregate naturally and/or arrange home visits and/or stage involvement activities such as surveys, consultations, meetings, forums and training sessions, for example – in places convenient to them. Use existing provision targeting certain groups of young people such as Surestart for young parents.
- develop other forms of communication such as telephone or e-mail (many young people have 'Hotmail' addresses at school).
- develop a supplementary local transport scheme – working in collaboration with other agencies who want to include isolated or alienated young people – providing cheap and convenient transport for those who need it.
- improve the 'user-friendliness' of facilities. How far are you prepared to go in making the venue welcoming? How much say do young people currently have in determining the atmosphere – for example, decor, furniture, music, food and drink? Who makes the rules about tolerable behaviour and so on?
- change the ways in which, say, management committees and special interest groups are run or surveys are organised.
- develop a staff profile so that young people have staff from their own backgrounds to talk to.

Research messages from GHK indicate that:

- for over 90% of young people, establishing a close personal relationship with their Personal Adviser was paramount.
- although the majority were happy to see their PA in school, several raised the issue about not wanting their peers to know they had seen a PA, especially if the meeting was to discuss personal or sensitive matters. In these cases, they felt another venue would be more appropriate.
- specific barriers raised by young people living in rural areas included lack of finance, lack of transport and lack of a dedicated place to call their own locally.

## C8 Anti-oppressive practice: ten key principles

There is a lot of evidence that many young people experience some adults and adult institutions as oppressive. Oppression stemming from 'ageism' may be compounded by issues of gender, race, class, ability or sexuality. Some young people may also have adopted the oppressive practices of adult society and be acting them out on their peers.

If Connexions is to reach those young people who consider themselves on the margins of society, they will need to feel welcome, fully respected, and safe. They will need to feel that Connexions is on their side in challenging oppressive practice whether at an interpersonal, cultural or structural level. One perspective on anti-oppressive practice is given below:

1. Recognise that we all have limitations and that we are always subjective, however objective we aim to be. Recognise the elements of your socialisation that colour your thinking and be open to change.
2. Recognise the power that you hold:
  - as a worker representing an agency with resources to be allocated.
  - as an individual representing your class, gender, race, sexuality, and so on.
3. Learn to recognise – and challenge – the ideas and processes (in yourself, other people and institutions) that contribute to oppression including stereotyping, marginalisation, scapegoating, labelling, denial and inaction.
4. Recognise the mental processes used by the powerless, rather than blaming them for these responses – including passivity (accepting the dominant norms) and revolt (accentuating the differences).
5. Challenge abuses of power, whether intentional or unintentional, overt or covert.
6. Create new sources of power wherever possible – for example, by:
  - setting up self-help or common interest groups.
  - harnessing the power of the Internet and other resources that are needed for people to make informed choices.
  - moving policy and procedures towards more involvement and participation by those who tend to be discriminated against.
7. Help individuals from oppressed groups to deal with their feelings of pain and devaluation (for example through counselling), to increase their self-esteem and to build a new repertoire of response (e.g. through assertiveness training).
8. Recognise the strengths, insights and survival skills developed by oppressed people and value the diversity of approaches to life.
9. Practise in a way that does not stigmatise or disadvantage people.
10. Monitor and evaluate the outcomes of your work, because good intentions are never enough.

(Based on a lecture given by Gurnam Singh at De Montfort University in 1999).

## C9 The use of incentives

Many young people live very complicated – and often very chaotic – lives, with school, relationships, work, leisure activities and the transition from child to adult life making great demands on them. With enough headaches already, why should they be expected to take on other commitments?

Building flexibility into the way in which Connexions Service facilities and services are run will go a long way towards attracting young people (or at least not alienating them) whilst developing 'young person friendly' communication skills and clear ground rules will help to retain them. But what else can you do?

There are two main types of motivational technique – you can:

- make participation interesting or fun so the young people enjoy being involved.
- provide incentives so they feel that contributing their time, ideas and/or skills is worth their while. However, this is not as simple as it might appear. (For example, you could reward them in cash or kind – if there is a budget available, and taking into account the benefit regulations). However, money may attract them to attend but not necessarily to become involved in the true sense of the word.

The best way is to form good personal relationships with members of the desired target groups and staff in the organisations they naturally affiliate with. As you learn more about their interests and enthusiasms you will be better prepared to devise more personal 'hooks' to draw them into Connexions.

### Examples of motivational techniques, from South Yorkshire

#### Completing surveys

A group of young recruiters wanted young people to complete a questionnaire. They discovered that their chosen venue (a training centre) was considered 'boring' by the target group – who were not entering the building. The recruiters hired a 'bucking bronco' and placed this outside. To get a free ride on the bronco, the young people had to fill out the questionnaire. The recruiters developed this further by taking photos of the people riding. There were to be prizes for the person who stayed on longest, the person with the most style and so on. However, to collect their photo and their prizes, the young people had to go to a meeting.

#### Attending meetings

To make the meeting more inviting, this was run on very interactive workshop lines – so that it was fun to participate rather than a chore. They had lots of 'Move if...' scenarios and brainstorming groups, for example.

In another venture, young people were given a free ticket to go ice-skating if they took part in a Question Time event.

IT has also been used as a hook – young people were encouraged to go onto a Health Action bus by providing a computer-based drugs quiz.

## C10 Skills and qualities for active involvement

GHK research indicates that the key qualities that people would look for in a PA (and, by extension, any adult with whom they come into contact in their involvement activity) are:

- someone who is able to listen to them.
- someone they can trust.
- someone with a sense of humour.
- someone who knows about jobs and training.
- someone who can relate to them.
- someone who is honest and reliable.

In several focus groups, young people highlighted a wish to be 'listened to, rather than done to' and to be treated fairly as individual young adults. They also valued 'hand-holding', and 'advocacy' – someone on their side, working for them.

Another classification of the necessary skills for staff working in active involvement projects includes:

- Communication skills, including active listening, giving feedback, etc. (Young people can play a useful part in staff development courses around these areas).
- Team building.
- Conflict resolution.
- Emotional literacy – the ability to recognise and register one's own emotions and to 'read' those of others, in order to respond in a balanced way, rather than being 'swept along' by one's own emotions or 'triggered' by those of others.
- Reflective practice.
- Anti-discriminatory practice.

## C11 Emotional literacy

### What is emotional literacy?

The ability to recognise and handle feelings in ourselves, to read emotional situations accurately, and to respond with empathy and social skill. It is not about the elevation of the emotions above thinking, nor about the broadcasting of our emotions to those around us. Emotional literacy is taking responsibility for understanding our personal emotions.

Emotional literacy is an everyday need for all of us, if we are to function effectively as human beings, so it is an essential element of the 'personal development' agenda.

Additionally, there is an emotional dimension to our daily lives in organisations. When organisations fail to find ways of acknowledging this emotional dimension, feelings often 'leak out' anyway, contaminating and distorting organisational activity in an unhelpful way. There are particular factors affecting your work in Connexions:

- Some of the young people you want to involve will be quite damaged, emotionally, and others will be at risk because of difficulties in handling their feelings. Their behaviour may bring up quite a lot of feelings for some staff.
- The pursuit of the active involvement of young people in decision-making can itself raise feelings for staff who are used to adult control of situations. This high level of feeling can be quite explosive if handled clumsily but, handled well, can enhance the quality of relationships, of mutual learning, and of the involvement itself.

### The implications for youth work organisations:

1. Developing emotional literacy: Provide opportunities for young people and staff to enhance their emotional literacy through developmental activity, including active listening, communication skills, sensitivity training, values clarification, autobiographical work (making sense of experience), working with and in groups, handling anger, managing conflict, giving and receiving support, and peer counselling skills. Much of this can be handled through the informal processes of your project, but some will be enhanced by specific development and training activity.

2. Developing your project as an emotionally literate organisation:

It is important to:

- develop a common language and a shared value around emotional literacy.
- prioritise capacity-building for young people and staff development.
- recognise the importance of 'emotional shock absorbers' both to individuals and to the organisation as a whole if responsible risk-taking is to be a policy successfully pursued, and developing a culture of collaboration. These shock absorbers could include maintaining time for personal recreation and developing a set of organisational practices such as those outlined below.

### Organisational practices

- time out, by which any party – in a situation in which emotion is getting the better of reason – can call 'time-out' for, say, ten minutes. During that period both parties are encouraged to find someone to listen to them well, so that they can explore their feelings, handle them, and return to the dialogue.
- celebrating success frequently but not ritually.
- encouraging 'listening partnerships' by which two people split the available time equally between them and take it in turns to listen and to 'get listened to'. It is not a conversation but rather 'two intelligences thinking about one person's material'. The 'listener' has to pay full attention to his/her partner, creating a feeling of safety to enable them to explore feelings and thoughts uncensored. They will need to avoid the tendency to interrupt with their reactions, ask questions to satisfy their own curiosity, try to tell their own story. Getting regularly listened to in this way helps individuals to think better. Occasionally, when an individual has strong feelings e.g. before a tricky meeting or after a nasty incident, one-way time may be appropriate.
- occasionally starting meetings with a round of 'What is going well in individuals' working lives and in the organisation?', but recognising the potential for such situations to be manipulated.



- ending meetings in which there has been substantial difficulty, with a round in which people are invited to say 'What has gone well and what I would like to have gone better'. The convention is for such a round to be the last activity of the meeting, so that comments made during it should not be debated. However difficult it may be for some people to hear what is said during such a round, this practice often helps the temporary closure and medium-term resolution of a difficult episode. Such a practice can also indicate to the group leader where support may be needed after the meeting.
- 'closing the day': developing practices e.g. listening partnerships or simply looking out for each other, to help unwind at the end of a tough day and seek to bring some form of resolution to events so that recreation time is not unduly contaminated.

### Further reading:

Orbach, S (1999)       Towards Emotional Literacy (London: Virago).

Goleman, D (1998)     Working with Emotional Intelligence (London: Bloomsbury).

Sharp, P (2001)       Nurturing Emotional Literacy : a practical guide (London: David Fulton).

Antidote (The Campaign for Emotional Literacy) 5th Floor, Beech Street, London EC2Y 8AD.

E-mail [antidote@geopoptel.org.uk](mailto:antidote@geopoptel.org.uk).

## C12 Equal opportunities best practice principles

(This is a new supplement to section Q of the Connexions Business Planning Guidance)

### Introduction

Extending opportunity and equality of opportunity is one of the eight key principles that underpin the new Connexions Service. It cannot be treated as a one off project or a series of activities that can be grafted onto the Connexions Service's functions. It is something that must permeate the whole of the Service – that is, it must be part of each organisation's culture and core practice.

Equality of opportunity applies not only to the areas covered by the Race Relations, Sex Discrimination, Disability Discrimination and Human Rights Acts. It links to the responsibility that each service will have for its local community, an issue that will be encompassed in the proposed changes to the race relation legislation to place a duty on all public bodies to promote equal opportunities. However, the Connexions Service will be asked to do more than merely comply with legislation. The 7th principle set out in "Connexions: The best start in life for every young person" is "Extending opportunity and equality of opportunity". This means that the Connexions Service's equal opportunities responsibilities go much wider to cover all areas where an individual or group of individuals is disadvantaged by virtue of their appearance, status or background. This ranges from individuals who experience bullying behaviour to those who have had to care for a relative on a long-term basis and as a result are subject to discriminatory action. It also extends, for example, to those who are disadvantaged because their religion or sexuality does not conform to the views of others.

Of particular concern are those individuals who are affected by multiple disadvantages such as disabled people who are from a black and minority ethnic group. The Connexions Service must be sensitive enough to be able to identify and address the needs of these individuals.

Each Connexions Service will have to demonstrate that it meets the five broad equal opportunity principles set out below. These have been identified, in consultation with a number of organisations including the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) and the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) as encompassing the totality of Connexions Service operation and activity.

These five broad areas will inform the development of the equal opportunities dimension of the Connexions quality standards as expressed in the Ofsted Inspection Framework and Quality Management Framework. It is against these frameworks that each Connexions partnership will be inspected including an evaluation of individual policies and plans. These areas will also be a key element in the internal quality assurance processes of each Connexions partnership.

Work will take place during the 1st year of the operation of the Connexions Service to identify and publish best practice.

## 1. Management and Business Structures & Policies

Principle – Every Connexions Service will need to establish management structures, including senior and board level accountability, policies and an implementation plan to deliver their equal opportunities obligations. A best practice approach would encompass the following elements:

- a. The organisation has a discrete equal opportunities policy document for outside publication covering strategy and implementation. In particular it includes a summary in a form that young people and their parents/carers can understand and which sets out their rights and responsibilities, and a summary that can be used for reference by its staff. The document:
  - takes into account a local area's requirements.
  - incorporates a baseline assessment of equality related issues.
  - highlights activity for each aspect of equality (gender, race, disability etc.) which is based on the assessment of the local situation.
  - sets out the service's equality aims and objectives.
  - is endorsed by the Chair and Chief Executive.
- b. The organisation's business plan:
  - identifies a board member and a member of the senior management team to actively promote and take responsibility for equal opportunities in the service's activities and internal arrangements.
  - identifies resources to be allocated for the implementation of the organisation's equal opportunities plan.
  - specifies equality training including general awareness and in respect of its advocacy role in promoting equal opportunities. It also highlights training opportunities for members of the board and senior management team.
- c. The organisation conducts equal opportunities audits on a regular basis with follow up action on the findings.
- d. The organisation's Annual Report includes an account of their activity on equal opportunities.

## 2. The Service

Principle – Every Connexions Service will need to set up and monitor systems to ensure the complete range of services offered, including those delivered outside the service premises, are consistent with and promote equal opportunity objectives. A best practice approach would encompass the following elements:

- a. The organisation conducts:
  - an initial baseline audit of company products including information, publications, systems as well as a disability audit of access to premises and services.
  - regular reviews to identify and highlight both positive and negative aspects of the full range of services, policies and procedures. This includes information systems, guidance, interaction with young people (e.g. through the reception, phone web, printed material, outreach contact etc.), access to premises, resources and materials, and referral to learning opportunities/jobs etc.
- b. The organisation's complaints procedures is able to address discrimination issues, covering complaints about the service itself and outside providers.
- c. The complaints procedure also includes appropriate referral mechanisms to organisations such as the EOC, CRE and DRC for access to expert support and guidance while ensuring confidentiality – for example for advice on legislation such as the Disability Discrimination Act.
- d. The organisation's business plan includes action to "equality assure" existing and new resources and material, and take action on any shortfalls.
- e. The organisation adopts a variety of delivery methods to reach all young people such as access through local community radio and voluntary groups.

- f. The organisation ensures that:
- it has adequate advocacy and support mechanisms for those considering "non-traditional" options.
  - its communications systems reach and encourage participation from all sectors of the community.
  - all resources and material, including those produced 'in-house', reflects the local population and promotes positive messages and images on gender, ethnicity, disability and other areas of potential discrimination.
  - its service equips young people themselves to recognise and counter discriminatory and stereotypical behaviour.

### 3. Management Information and Data Systems

Principle – Every Connexions Service will need to establish client record, management information and tracking systems to monitor the effectiveness of action to counter stereotyping and discrimination. This is essential to enable an organisation to establish where it is and the progress it makes to meet its responsibilities for countering bias and stereotyping. A best practice approach would encompass the following elements:

- a. Part of this process involves the setting of targets and performance measures. This covers all five areas.
- b. The organisation's data systems, including monthly reports and activity surveys, are designed to capture and process ethnic, gender and disability information so that all desegregated information is fed back to the Board (summary information to be passed back to DfEE). Action is taken on the information gathered including using MI to set local targets and performance measures.
- c. The information collected is consistent with national definitions and data headings to enable national comparisons to be made.
- d. The organisation conducts surveys, including sample surveys, to monitor and inform the business planning process – ensuring feedback is available to young people.

### 4. Work with Other Organisations

Principle – Every Connexions Service will need to work with outside organisations, local networks and communities to develop and take forward strategies which promote equality of opportunity and challenge stereotyping and discrimination including organising events, exchanging information and sharing good practice. To do this each service will need to have a comprehensive 'map' of the relevant local and national organisations. A best practice approach would encompass the following elements:

- a. The organisation:
  - takes advantage of existing material – e.g. DRC and EOC material; CRE ethnic monitoring guide etc.
  - ensures it works with the full range of community groups.
  - involves the local community in the drawing up of the organisation's discrete equal opportunities policy document as well as other policy documents.
  - works closely with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and employers to ensure in particular that provision and opportunities are available which enable young people to follow their chosen path.
  - works with Learning Partnerships to exchange information with others and to draw up or co-ordinate a strategy and targets for work in this area which can be shared by all those, including schools, etc. working to support young people.
  - includes equal opportunities as a theme in their regular consultations with young people, parents and local community and voluntary organisations.
  - includes equal opportunities as an aspect of the events and activities that are organised to 'capacity build' in the community to enable groups etc. to be consulted, to participate and to act as leaders or agents for change.

## Section C - Further information about key issues

- b. Equality of opportunity is an integral part of all partnerships and relationships include:
- work to promote equal opportunities and challenging stereotyping - e.g. through work experience placements, the provision of positive role models, provision of INSET for teachers and lecturers; mentoring schemes; adoption of quality standards.
  - mechanisms for feedback and the exchange of information such as the production of joint reports on activity, highlighting successes to be shared with partners, Learning Partnerships etc.
- c. Consultation is carried out through events targeted at specific groups of people, as well as involving them in mainstream activities.
- d. The service is able to demonstrate that it has the support and confidence of the local community, and that it has taken steps to enable local groups to participate fully.

## 5. Internal Personnel Practice

Principle – Every Connexions Service will need to ensure equal opportunities and promoting diversity is at the heart of the organisation's personnel policies including establishing equal opportunities as an essential element of their training and development plan, and increasing the number of employees from under represented groups. A best practice approach would encompass the following elements:

- a. The organisation:
- conducts a regular audit of the pattern of staff, including board members, to assess representation by all local groups.
  - adopts positive action with appropriate targets to ensure that its staffing more fully reflects the local population.
  - includes equal opportunities in the appraisal of all staff.
  - ensures all staff at every level are equal opportunity aware and proactive.
  - gathers and share good practice – e.g. by collaborating with other services, seeking advice from national bodies such as the CRE, EOC and DRC.
- b. The organisation's recruitment procedures promote diversity. The advertising of jobs take account where adverts are placed and the language in them, job descriptions and the real needs of the jobs, recruitment literature and the verbal and pictorial imagery. Applications are able to be returned in alternative and accessible formats by disabled people such as e-mail and audio tapes. In addition, the terms and conditions of posts are flexible enough to encourage and maintain diversity in the organisation's workforce.
- c. The organisation has policies that encourage diversity in career progression so that there is a culture of opportunity for advancement for all staff. This is evidenced through career development opportunities and training, and through the way interview panels are trained and managed.
- d. The organisation's training plan includes equal opportunities both as an integrated part of the overall training and as a discrete topic for all staff – not just the Personal Adviser. It:
- is based on a training needs analysis using all available intelligence in gathering information about equal opportunities training wants and needs – from the staff members, from line management and from customer and community feedback (which may need to be proactively gathered).
  - equips staff with an understanding of and skill to tackle institutional racism and other forms of discrimination as well as bullying and harassment.
  - enables staff to access, understand and apply message from management information and other sources of data.

## Section D

# Checklists

### Contents

D1 A checklist for identifying your organisation's current involvement practice and plans for future developments.

D2 A checklist for considering new types of involvement.

D3 A checklist for organising a consultation.



## **Checklist D1 – A checklist for identifying your organisation's current involvement practice and plans for future developments**

Successful models of active involvement of young people have seen them participate in a variety of circumstances. Different groups of young people and different issues will need different approaches. It is not always going to be an easy or a quick task. It can take time and effort to ensure that young people and others are fully able to participate. In particular hard to reach groups such as vulnerable young people, young people with disabilities, young people from ethnic minority backgrounds will require support to help them participate. At a recent conference when staff were asked what roles young people could not play in the Connexions service – assuming the necessary training, support and information were available – the answer was 'none'.

With the right support from a Connexions Service, young people can be involved in a huge range activities. With effective training and support for young people and management/practitioners, young people can be actively involved in tasks in: planning and organising; doing and delivering; and checking, reviewing and learning. The table on page 48 illustrates the wide range of possibilities.

## The active involvement of young people in the Connexions Service, a Practitioners Guide

Involvement of young people Y / N		Informal suggestions schemes	Canvass opinion surveys	Consultation Focus groups	Consultation creative approaches	Managing activities (e.g. service delivery)	Membership of young people's decision-making bodies	Membership of main decision-making bodies
	<b>Planning and organising</b>							
	Identification of needs of local young people							
	Investigation of current provision							
	Definition of critical success factors for the service							
	Development of strategy, activities, objectives, plans							
	Development of organisation							
	Definition of indicators of 'success'							
	Definition of quality dimensions and standards							
	Design of specific involvement activity							
	Staff recruitment							
	Staff development							
	Negotiation of finance and other inputs							
	Assessment of suppliers							
	<b>Delivering and Doing</b>							
	Development of promotional materials, doing promotion							
	Facilitation of access and outreach work							
	Information services							
	Advisory/guidance services							
	Tutoring services							
	Mentoring							
	Brokering and linking services							
	Individual advocacy services							
	Advocacy for improved policy and provision							
	Research and development of innovative approaches to involvement							
	Dealing with comments, compliments, complaints							
	<b>Checking</b>							
	Gathering information on performance and impact							
	Measuring achievement against objectives							
	Staff appraisal							
	<b>Reviewing and Learning</b>							
	Analysis of performance data							
	Evaluation of performance and outcomes							
	Accounting to various stakeholders							
	Identification of learning points							

The table above is in line with work carried out by National Youth Agency for Local Government Association on developing standards for active involvement.



## Checklist D2 – A checklist for considering new types of involvement

- What exactly do you want to achieve?
- What role do you want the young people to take?
- Is the product of the involvement (for example the quality of the decision) more important than the process (e.g. personal/organisational growth) or vice versa?
- Do you have any clear boundaries or are you prepared to negotiate these? For example:
  - Are there time constraints – when does the task need to be completed?
  - What are the current voting rights – and how were they decided?
  - How much power are you willing/is it feasible to hand over?
- What messages might your boundaries give to the young people?
- Who can help?
  - Which local organisations have formal and informal contact with targeted groups?
  - Which organisations and people have worked in this way before (actively involving young people in this task, using this method)? Network (with both young people and adults) to identify key learning points.

### Young people

- What skills and attitudes would they need to participate in this way?
- Which might they already have (and how can you find out)?
- What training/coaching/mentoring/support might you need to provide? (And do you have a budget/ the resources for this?)
- Alternatively, are there any ways in which you could adapt your method of operation so that young people can get involved without the skills?
- What additional support might be required? (Could this be provided by peer supporters?)
- What are participants likely to get out of the experience?
- What might they want to get out of the experience – and can you arrange this?
- How could you alter your usual way of working to increase the likelihood of participation? Could you make it easier, more enjoyable, or more worthwhile for the participant?

### Resources

What resources will you need – and is there a budget? Each method has different resource implications including, for example:

- equipment and materials (for example video equipment and art materials used in creative approaches to involving young people, or design and analysis costs for questionnaires).
- the amount of time required to recruit and support young people, particularly those:
  - from socially excluded groups.
  - working at high levels of the organisation.
  - taking on high levels of power and responsibility.
- the level of skill required by the staff (comparing, say the costs of buying in external facilitators with ensuring enough in-house facilitation skills).
- the costs of transport home (on dark evenings or in rural areas, in particular), interpreters and other expenses that you may incur in making it easier for young people to participate.

## Checklist D3 – A checklist for organising a consultation

### D3.1 Set objectives for the consultation:

- Who do you want to consult and why?
- What data do you need, for what purposes? Do you need quantitative or qualitative information? (Usually a combination is best, requiring a combination of methods) What data already exists?

*“Don't keep asking when you know the answers. Don't consult for the sake of it.” (Wigan Youth Service)*

- Write SMART objectives – Specific, Measurable, Agreed (by all involved), Realistic and Time-limited. For example:

### D3.2 Plan how you are going to achieve those objectives (Involve young people in the decision-making):

- Choose the most appropriate consultation method.
  - Which is most appropriate for your purposes ('representativeness', rapid information collection, skills building).
  - Which is most appropriate for the skills, needs and interests of your target group?
  - What are your resource limitations (for example, time, staff skills, equipment, materials)?
- Identify how to access a sufficiently large (at least 1% of potential users of the service) and representative sample – for example:
  - develop/use contacts in existing youth forums/councils.
  - develop/use contacts in community groups and organisations to which various groups belong (including, for example, minority ethnic group voluntary organisations, hostels, traveller sites, asylum seeker projects, Youth Offending Teams).
  - visit locations where young people gather.
- Plot the main steps – work back from the target date setting time frames for each step (or re-negotiate the target date if you need more time to manage the chosen consultation type):
  - Designing (the event, questionnaire, interview checklist, or other means of consultation. Survey design is a specialist skill and you would need to recruit someone to do this if you do not have in-house skills).
  - Piloting the first design with a group of young people (to make sure it covers the key issues, is easy to understand and is likely to motivate different types of young people to take part) and refining it.
  - Collecting data (Remember that the people you use to give out questionnaires, to interview people or to help with computer-based surveys may affect your results. For example, if the survey is about the qualities of a PA, you would not use PAs to administer the survey).
  - Analysing data (Again, this is a specialist skill, which you may need to buy in. There are some computer packages available but they are expensive. You can set up a spreadsheet facility on your own computer, if you have the expertise).
  - Presenting findings.
- Decide who should be involved in each stage and identify availability.

Groups might include professional questionnaire/web site designers, management committee members, Personal Advisers, service users, members of a local youth council, other interested adults and/or young people, depending on the nature of the consultation.

**D3.3 Implement the plan and monitor progress:**

- Collect the information.
- Analyse the data.
- Present your findings.
  - Identify the target audience(s) for presenting the findings.
  - Identify key messages you want to get across.
  - Design/write with the audience in mind.

You might need more than one output – for example, events or videos for young people, reports for official bodies.

Remember the maxim ABC – Accurate (and Attractive), Brief and Clear.

Young people might be involved in the development of such presentations – particularly ones aimed at their peers.

**D3.4 Make sure your findings can be acted on swiftly** (or that there are clearly-identifiable action points along the way) and give swift feedback. In this way, all those involved (both consulters and consulted) can see that there really was a point to being involved, which will help to motivate them next time they are asked to participate.

**D3.5 Review the process and feed findings into the next consultation.**

**NB:** Module 3 of the Personal Adviser Training focuses on exploring the wants and needs of young people through action planning.

## Section E

# Case studies of active involvement

### Section Aims

To provide examples of the ways in which the Connexions pilots have been organising for active involvement.

The case studies are presented in what is most likely to be the chronological order of development – from strategy to youth charter to implementation and evaluation. The final two case studies concerns the thoughts of a personal adviser on active involvement as it relates to service users and then to young people about this Guide and what active involvement means to them. These thoughts are also pertinent to the ways in which staff need to interact with ‘service shapers’.

The case studies may be used as discussion points for your own projects. Additionally, you could talk to the projects named about any further learning from the work.

### Contents

1. Strategy for involving young people in design and development of the service – Cornwall and Devon.
2. Example of a Delivery Plan for Engaging young people – Cheshire and Warrington.
3. Young People’s Charter – Cheshire and Warrington.
4. Peer research project – Enterprise Careers Service – London and the South East.
5. Peer supported employment – South Yorkshire / Mencap.
6. The recruitment and selection of personal advisers – Oldham and Warwickshire/Coventry.
7. Investors in Young People – Oldham.
8. One Personal Adviser’s view of his role at service user level.
9. Feedback from Young People about Active Involvement.

## Case study E1 – Strategy for involving young people in design and development of the service

### (Cornwall & Devon Connexions)

#### Introductory note:

In June 2000, the Connexions Co-ordinator for the Devon and Cornwall Partnership set up, as a priority, a working party to develop a strategy paper on the involvement of young people in decision-making. It was seen as an important early task because such a strategy should influence all activity in the pilot Connexions Service. The group consisted of senior Careers and Youth Service personnel and representatives from the voluntary sector including young workers. The initial draft, drawn up by the Principal Youth Officer of one of the four authorities, was distilled from the considerable experience of practice in involving young people which existed in the region. The working group discussed and amended this draft which then went to the Partnership Steering Group where two minor amendments were incorporated. By October 2000 it was being discussed in all the Local Management Committees within the Partnership, each of which included young people. It was also beginning to be used in all elements of the pilot service.

#### Rationale for the strategy

The strategy is designed to assist the Connexions Service in achieving its aim of involving young people in all aspects of the design and delivery of its work. It draws on the experience of partner organisations in involving young people in their own services and decision making within communities, and it is hoped that the principles and methods it advocates will be adopted by partner organisations for other aspects of their work. It is based on the belief that young people have valid opinions about the services they use, and are able to make an important contribution to the development of such services. It views young people as equal and important partners in the design and delivery of the Connexions Service.

The strategy recognises that involving young people in decision making and delivery will have an impact on how decisions are made and how services are delivered. In order for the strategy to succeed, Connexions and its partner organisations will need to rise to this challenge and test out new methods of working. This will not always be a comfortable process, but the long term benefits of young people's full engagement will outweigh the challenges presented in the short term.

#### Aims of the strategy

1. To ensure that the Connexions Service is informed by a rights-based, holistic approach to work with young people.
2. To ensure that the views of young people are taken into account and acted upon in the design and delivery of the Connexions Service in Cornwall & Devon.
3. To ensure that young people are actively involved in design and delivery at all levels of the service (i.e projects, Local Management Partnerships, strategic developments).
4. To build on existing good practice in involving young people in projects across Cornwall & Devon.
5. To ensure that a wide range of young people from different cultures and backgrounds are involved in the design and delivery of the Connexions Service.

#### Achieving the aims

1. To ensure that the Connexions Service is informed by a rights-based, holistic approach to work with young people:
  - Policies and practices of the Connexions Service will recognise young people's rights and assist young people to achieve them.
  - The Connexions Service will focus on young people's whole life experience, rather than specific problem areas.
  - Young people's own expressed needs will be at least as important to the Connexions Service as externally determined targets.

2. To ensure that the views of young people are taken into account in the design and delivery of the Connexions Service in Cornwall & Devon:
  - The Connexions Service will actively collect information from young people across Cornwall & Devon about their needs, aspirations and the kinds of services they believe will help them achieve these. A range of different methods will be used to collect information, including questionnaires, individual and group discussions and using information gathered by partner organisations and young people themselves. Information will be collected and updated on a regular basis.
  - All Connexions initiatives will ensure that the views of the young people at whom the initiative is aimed are incorporated at the design phase of the project.
  - Feedback from young people who use the Connexions Service will be sought on a regular basis, and used to inform changes in the design and delivery of the service.
  - The Connexions Service will encourage the development of peer-led projects to collect and disseminate the views of young people.
3. To ensure that young people are actively involved in design and delivery at all levels of the service (i.e projects, Local Management Partnerships, strategic developments).

#### Project level

- Where specific projects are proposed, young people's views should be sought at the design stage.
- Young people who could use the project should be consulted and involved in deciding the aims of the project, methods to be used and level and type of resources needed to implement the project.
- Young people should be encouraged to take on worker/delivery roles in Connexions projects.
- Representatives of young people should be involved in Steering Groups for the project.
- Young people should be involved in the recruitment and selection of project staff.
- Young people who use the project should be asked to give feedback on the project at regular intervals.

#### Local Management Partnerships

- Young people should be directly represented on the LMP.
- LMPs should establish a 'Connexions Users Forum' in their area as a regular point of contact with young people. The Connexions Users Forum should send delegates to the LMP meetings.
- LMPs should regularly seek the views of a broad cross-section of young people in their area.
- LMPs should ensure that young people in the area receive regular, young people friendly, information about Connexions and related services and initiatives.
- LMPs should ensure that young people who could become involved in decision making receive good quality briefing and training about the issues involved.
- LMPs should make links with existing forums for young people in their area.
- LMPs should ensure that young people are actively involved in the design and development of any initiative undertaken by Connexions in their area.

#### Cross-region strategic planning and initiatives

- The Connexions Partnership will establish a young people's Consultative Forum, drawing on representatives from the Connexions Users forums in the LMP areas.
- The Consultative Forum will be directly represented on the Connexions Partnership.
- The Connexions Partnership will ensure that the views of young people have been sought on any proposed Connexions initiative, prior to implementation.
- The Connexions Partnership will encourage the development of peer-led projects to contribute to the aims and priorities for the Connexions Service.
- The Connexions Partnership will develop mechanisms to monitor the extent and effectiveness of young people's involvement in the work of Connexions, and include this within key targets.

## Section E - Case studies of active involvement

4. To build on existing good practice in involving young people in projects across Cornwall & Devon.
  - The Connexions Partnership will map the involvement of young people in local decision making forums, peer-led projects and project management amongst partner organisations across Cornwall & Devon.
  - Examples of good practice will be identified, publicised and promoted across the Partnership and beyond.
  - Guidelines for good practice in involving young people in design, delivery and decision making will be developed and circulated to Connexions staff and partner organisations.
  - The Connexions Partnership will make resources available to continue the development of good practice where it exists, and to replicate this practice elsewhere in Cornwall & Devon.
  - The Connexions Partnership will ensure that it supports existing young people led forums and does not duplicate or undermine existing opportunities for involvement.
5. To ensure that a wide range of young people from different cultures and backgrounds are involved in the design and delivery of the Connexions Service.
  - Local Connexions Users forums will take account of the cultural diversity of their area, and ensure that young people from a range of backgrounds are involved. Outreach work will be necessary in order to reach some of the more marginalised groups. LMPs will seek assistance from peer-led groups and specialist organisations in their areas in order to involve the widest possible range of young people.
  - Where services provided through Connexions are targeted either geographically or at particular groups of young people, the Connexions Service will ensure that young people from the relevant area or group are involved in design and development of the service.

The Connexions Partnership will monitor the ethnic origin, gender and ability/disability of young people involved in decision making at project, LMP and cross-county level, to ensure that this reflects the composition of the population in the area concerned.

## Case study E2 – An example of a Delivery Plan for ‘Engaging young people’ (Cheshire and Warrington)

Objective	Key Tasks	Milestone	Completion date	Accountable Person
9.1 Develop and commit to Young People's Charter.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure it is relevant and appropriate to young people.</li> <li>Ensure commitment from Board &amp; LMCs</li> <li>Publicise.</li> <li>Staff training on the application of the Charter.</li> <li>Review by Young People's Board.</li> </ul>	<p>Responses from youth groups survey.</p> <p>Board and LMC in joint development work with young people – 4 sessions.</p> <p>Inclusion in company information.</p> <p>Posters to all schools, youth groups and partner organisations.</p> <p>Session in staff induction and foundation training.</p> <p>Regular reviews on agenda through feedback processes.</p>	<p>April 2001</p> <p>April 2001</p> <p>Sept 2001</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Youth Consultation Co-ordinator</p> <p>Chief Executive</p> <p>Director of External Affairs</p> <p>Training staff/</p> <p>Director of Community Development</p> <p>Participation Worker</p>
9.2 Establish Young People's Board.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify processes of representation.</li> <li>Establish initial Board and agree aims, objectives, roles and responsibilities.</li> <li>Link election of subsequent Board to UK Youth Parliament elections.</li> </ul>	<p>Agree processes, inc. process for selection, with existing youth groups.</p> <p>Contact with youth groups such as Youth Forums, reference, 'hard to reach groups'.</p> <p>Representatives from existing groups.</p> <p>Include in organisation of annual elections process to UKYP.</p>	<p>July 2001</p> <p>Sept 2001</p> <p>Dec 2001</p>	<p>Director of Community Services</p>
9.3 Information regarding Connexions appropriate to all young people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design with young people and agency.</li> <li>Produce and disseminate using. Written materials.</li> <li>Website.</li> <li>Posters.</li> </ul>	<p>Work with six youth forums.</p> <p>Design competition.</p> <p>Publicise to schools.</p>	<p>July 2001</p>	<p>Director of External Affairs</p>
9.4 Work with and enhance existing structures to engage young people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Map existing good practice, youth councils, youth parliament, hard to reach groups.</li> <li>Research good practice elsewhere.</li> </ul>	<p>Gaps identified.</p> <p>Mapping exercise completed.</p> <p>Information gathered and visits made, report produced.</p>	<p>April 2001</p>	<p>Director of External Affairs</p>
9.5 Create appropriate new processes to engage young people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Co-operative work with Youth Services.</li> <li>Learning Partnerships.</li> <li>Education Departments, reference, Youth</li> <li>Forum development, citizenship work and schools councils.</li> </ul>	<p>Joint Youth forums established in six Cheshire localities and Warrington in partnership with LPs.</p> <p>Protocols, school and student processes drafted, following liaison with 48 High Schools.</p>	<p>Dec 2001</p> <p>March 2002</p>	<p>Director of Community Services</p>
9.6 Explore young people's participation in the running of the LMC.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Representation to/from local youth groups.</li> </ul>	<p>Processes agreed locally between LMC and youth groups.</p>	<p>Dec 2001</p>	<p>Director of Community Services</p>
9.7 Develop training and accreditation for young people's involvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Joint development or programmes with Youth Services.</li> <li>Millennium Volunteers (Youth Federation).</li> <li>Princes Trust.</li> <li>Service planning.</li> <li>Deliver.</li> <li>Monitoring and evaluation.</li> </ul>	<p>Programmes agreed.</p> <p>Young people involved in planning.</p> <p>Initial programmes run and evaluated.</p> <p>Good practice standards identified.</p> <p>Pilot schemes developed.</p> <p>Good practice standards identified.</p>	<p>July 2001</p> <p>March 2002</p> <p>March 2002</p>	<p>Director of Community Services/ External Affairs</p>
9.8 Negotiate young people's involvement within school Connexions settings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agree appropriate approaches in different schools e.g. School Council.</li> <li>Link with Citizenship programmes.</li> </ul>	<p>Identify school staff and LEA officer involvement.</p>	<p>Dec 2001-03-11</p> <p>March 2002</p>	<p>Director of Education Services</p>



## Case study E3 – Young People's Charter (Cheshire and Warrington Connexions Partnership)



The best start in life for every young person

### Young People's Entitlement Charter

This charter explains what you can expect from us and how you can get involved in our activities.

#### Respect

- We will encourage you to develop and express your opinions and listen to what you have to say.
- Rules and regulations will be clearly explained to ensure mutual respect.

#### Access

- Our Service will be available to you through your school, college, work place and our community teams.
- We will also give you information on how you can find out about further opportunities.

#### Information

- We will offer you opportunities to get information, advice, guidance and support about careers and other issues to help you make decisions and to take part in our activities.
- You can expect help to find the information if you need it, when you need it.

#### Support and Guidance

- You may need support in approaching other organisations or services.
- You may need help with a problem or just someone to talk to who will listen.
- Our support should always be open, friendly, non-judgmental and reliable.

#### Safety

- You should expect to be safe from harm when working with our staff, and your privacy will be respected for your personal care needs.
- If you need to complain about the Service or treatment you receive, we will make it clear how to do this. We will also tell you how and when we will deal with your complaints.

#### Trust

- If you have asked that information you give remains confidential, we will respect your request unless we have told you that we are not able to do so.
- You can expect your Personal Adviser and all our staff to be committed to your best interests. In return, you will be expected to keep your appointments for individual or group work sessions.

#### Involvement

- We are committed to ensuring that all young people aged 13 – 19 whatever their circumstances, can be involved in the planning, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of our services.
- We are committed to recognising the contribution of young people to all these areas of our work.

**Do you want to be involved in helping shape the service?**

**Or**

**If you want more information or want to talk about any of these points, then please ask your Connexions Personal Adviser.**

**Freephone 0800 9809877 or  
info@connexions-cw.co.uk or  
visit our website at  
www.connexions-cw.co.uk**

**Your views count.**

## Case study E4 – Peer research project (Enterprise Careers Service – London and the South East)

This was a project developed out of the 1999 Summer University in Hackney known as the Youth Empowerment Strategy (YES) project. It involved collaboration between Youth and Careers Services and other organisations.

### What happened?

This is an extract from the young researchers' report:

#### Project Objectives

The aim of the project was to explore the image of the Enterprise careers service both for young people who use the service and those who do not. For current clients the aim was to evaluate the effectiveness of the service and in particular to identify good practice. An additional aim was to identify why some young people do not use the service and to discover how the careers service could be made more relevant to their needs and aspirations. On the basis of the findings, the project set out to elicit a range of suggestions, which would improve the image and service, provided by the careers service.

#### Research Method

The research was conducted using structured interviews. Two sets of questions were devised, one for current clients of the careers service and another set of questions for non-users. The questions included both open and closed questions. The researchers also made note of additional comments, which were not part of the set questions (see appendix for examples of both sets of questions).

Users were mostly interviewed at the careers centre. Non-users were interviewed 'on their own turf' in the streets and through youth clubs, schools, colleges and other places frequented by young people.

A peer research technique was employed in conducting the interviews. Young people acted as researchers and interviewed other young people. This was done in order to elicit more accurate and honest responses from the interviewees. As the use of the peer research technique has not been established; this piece of research will serve as a test, enabling an evaluation of the method to take place.

The researchers were a group of four young women who had gained relevant skills through participating in the Youth Empowerment Strategy (YES) research course and had all conducted a weeklong research project on estates in Hackney. An adult acted as the team leader and supervised the researchers. All of the research team were young residents living in Hackney.

#### Evaluation:

The peer research technique was found to be an effective and useful method of conducting research on young people. Large bodies of interesting findings were generated and ranges of responses were given which ordinarily may have been suppressed. The main difficulty with the use of young researchers was their school and college commitments. As the careers centre is only open during the day it was very difficult for some of the researchers to conduct interviews at the centre. As a result the actual research dates were extended by a week in order to complete the required number of interviews. In the future this could be avoided by conducting research during holidays.

## From the careers service perspective:

### What went well?

- Involvement of young people as researchers.
- Collection and collation of data.
- Relationship between the adult supervisor and young researchers.
- Outcomes.
- Recommendations.

### Why?

The enthusiasm of the young people and the self-confidence they gained from the Summer University course.

Young researchers targeted a representative range of clients/non-clients based on ethnicity and gender within the locality.

The researchers enthusiastically collated the findings, involving number crunching and drawing conclusions. They were as excited and as inquisitive as the careers service who commissioned the work to find out the results.

The supervisor was always supportive and encouraging the young peoples input.

Well presented report produced by the young people with some support from the supervisor.

Clear messages presented to the careers service about areas for improvement ranging across:- access, facilities available, guidance expectations, marketing, ICT usage, premises style.

### Main Challenges:

- Researchers relying on 'friends' as potential interviewees.
- How to progress this style of working.

### How were these overcome?

Addressing the issue from the outset, exploring the potential for bias and the impact on the validity of the research. Early on the researchers achieved a consensus on the criteria for targeting interviewees.

Involvement in the subsequent Summer University 2000 planning and activities.

This included a Careers Day where 'peer motivators' were recruited from local schools to help. They encouraged other young people to complete evaluation activities following workshops. The young people organised a ballot box approach to collecting feedback and made video diaries of the day.

There was also a Youth Empowerment Day where young people provided for their peers some careers guidance and information. This was accomplished by providing the young people with initial training in guidance and information skills plus supplying resource materials and displays to take to the event.

Evaluation of these events is underway at the time of writing this document but initial comments indicate that they were both successful, valued by young people and had a recognisable impact.

- School/college commitments meant the time scale for the research work was not realistic.

As mentioned above in the evaluation section of their report this was overcome by extending the duration of the project.



## Case study E5 – Peer supported employment (South Yorkshire / Mencap)

Included here are:

- The wording of a publicity leaflet for this Mencap funded project. You will see that it covers 'What is expected of you', 'How you will acquire the skills' and 'What's in it for you?' – three of the main considerations mentioned in this Guide. The actual leaflet was presented more attractively with graphics and large text on coloured paper.
- The training schedule for the young people employed as peer supporters.

### Support partners

#### What is the aim of the project?

The aim is twofold:

1. To give young adults who have a learning disability the opportunity to take up paid, part time work after school/college or at weekends – just like any other young adult may wish to do.
2. To broaden disability awareness among young people and encourage inclusion amongst peers.

#### What is the job?

A support partner works alongside a young adult who has a learning disability, in their new job. As well as helping them to learn the job at their own pace, the support partner also assists in encouragement of integration with staff who may be wary or nervous about working with someone who has a disability.

You will probably be required to provide on the job support for 2-4 hrs per week, on either a Saturday or Sunday or could even be after school or college.

On the job support will last until the person being supported is confident in their job role and natural support mechanisms within the workplace have taken over. This should take about 3 months but will be dependent on the individual worker.

#### What are the benefits?

The project will:

- aid your personal development and can be accredited through school or college portfolio of achievement or linked to programmes such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.
- help you develop new skills, which can be added to CV or college applications.
- broaden disability awareness between young adults – some of whom will be the managers of the future.
- give you an insight into support worker roles as a possible career.
- you may be paid the national minimum wage, currently £3.00 per hr for 18-22 year-olds.

### Training

It is important that support partners attend pre-job training to ensure they are equipped to deal with most incidents that may occur whilst supporting the individual.

The sessions will be run on Monday evenings at Elmfield House, between 7 p.m. and around 9 - 9.30 p.m.

The sessions will cover topics such as:

Disability awareness	Work ethic
Job role and responsibilities	Natural supports
Training methods	

There will be 10 - 12 people in the group and emphasis will be on group participation.

The next course starts on Monday, February 7th at 7 p.m.

Youth Supported Employment project training schedule.

Session	Content	Activities
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housekeeping, safety etc.</li> <li>• Introductions.</li> <li>• What have we let ourselves in for?</li> <li>• Why are we here?</li> <li>• Meetings – expectations and guidelines.</li> <li>• Pathway Employment Service.</li> <li>• Questionnaires.</li> <li>• Police checks on forms.</li> </ul>	<p>Ice breakers. Group discussion. Video.</p> <p>Give out questionnaires to complete at home for next week.</p>
2	<p>Disability Awareness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Types of disability.</li> <li>• What is learning difficulty?</li> <li>• Inclusion.</li> </ul>	<p>Discussion and practical exercises (e.g. tunnel vision exercise blindfolds, earmuffs). Groups.</p>
3	<p>Job roles and responsibilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job description.</li> <li>• Consequences of dropping out.</li> <li>• Consequences of sickness/absence.</li> <li>• Relief list.</li> <li>• Employer interview and induction.</li> <li>• Planning end of course get together.</li> <li>• Overview of forms and diaries.</li> </ul>	<p>Group discussion. Use of forms – dates of absence etc. Induction checklist practical exercise.</p>
4	<p>Training strategies and training analysis.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training strategy.</li> <li>• Training analysis.</li> <li>• Practical breakdown of tasks.</li> </ul>	<p>Tea and sandwich making. Mailshots. Group work.</p>
5	<p>Policy and procedures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raising awareness – inappropriate behaviour and abuse issues.</li> <li>• Work ethic – lateness, absence, appearance, hygiene.</li> <li>• Health and safety.</li> <li>• Emergency and accident.</li> </ul>	<p>Group discussions and exercises. Use of Incident reporting sheet.</p>
6	<p>Natural supports and protocols.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working culture.</li> <li>• Co-worker issues.</li> <li>• Appropriate communications.</li> <li>• Integration.</li> <li>• Starting a new job.</li> </ul>	<p>Input from warehouse manager of large distribution centre.</p> <p>Group work.</p>
7	<p>Support partners.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being an effective one!</li> <li>• Good support.</li> <li>• Good communication.</li> </ul>	<p>Group discussion. Video. Group work.</p>
8	<p>The forms: Research admin. Duke of Edinburgh. Social 'do'.</p>	
9	<p>First aid course, including epilepsy.</p>	
10	<p>Additional training needs, including child protection issues.</p>	

## Case study E6 – The recruitment and selection of personal advisers (Oldham and Warwickshire/Coventry)

### The Background.

At least two of the Connexions Pilot services have recently recruited and selected for personal adviser posts:

- Pilot A did so for PAs on at a salary of £19,000+.
- Pilot B did so for Trainee PAs at a salary of £14,800.

### Pilot A

There were two separate selection days, one involving young people from a long-established Careers Service outreach project, the other participants in a city youth council. Both groups of young people had the support of an experienced worker. While they were not involved in the short-listing – and have asked to be next time – they had substantial preparation time with their support worker identifying what to look for, how to elicit information and how to score candidates' performance. On both days the candidates had to make a prepared presentation to the young people's panel on : 'What sort of an approach must a Personal Adviser take to engage young people from across the community ?' and then answer 10 minutes of questions from the panel. This counted for 40% of their overall mark. They were also interviewed by a professional panel which gained them 60% of their overall mark.

The young people's panels' comments were perceptive and specific.

Candidate A : *"Not positive, made me feel like a child, no eye contact, didn't answer our questions, needs to learn more about young people."*

Candidate B : *"Treated us as equals, covered quite a lot, involved us in the debate along the way."*

Candidate C : *"A bit wet behind the ears but I think he's got what it takes."*

The young people were particularly good at challenging interviewees who;

- used jargon.
- assumed that they could read.
- did not follow the remit they had been given for the interview. (Facilitator A).

The young people were particularly hot on equal opportunities... They were also not happy with a candidate – a teacher – who didn't turn up without letting anyone know. "If you say you're going to do something, you do it!" (Facilitator B).

The panels initially agreed on 12 of the 14 eventually appointed. In one case (Candidate C above) the professional panel was dubious but was swayed into appointing them by the views of the young person quoted. There was a case where the professionals' 'weighting' caused a candidate to be appointed who was not one of the young people's choices. However, in this case, the views of the young people influenced where that personal adviser would be located and the induction and staff development programme they would receive.

### Pilot B

In Panel B, 10 young people from a young people's organisation undertook the local authority's recruitment and selection training. On the day, three panels – each consisting of 2 professionals and 2 young people – each interviewed 14 candidates. Of the other 4 young people, two were unable to attend and two were concerned about the responsibility and preferred front-of-house roles. On each panel, the young people's scoring counted for the same as that of the professionals. There was very close agreement within the panels on the scoring of each applicant against the predetermined criteria. Where there was debate it was never between the two young people's views and those of the two professionals, but 'one of each' debating with 'one of each'.

## Commentary

### What was in it for the Connexions Service?

- In both Pilots, the young people brought to the activity not only comparable insights but also fresh insights which actually enhanced the decision-making process in the eyes of the professionals.
- The professionals, many of whom were apprehensive before the exercise, were very positive about it: *"We need to accept more easily what young people are saying and not be surprised by the perceptiveness of their comments."*
- The message given to the participating young people and potential service users is that young people's views are taken seriously. If this is carried forward into the culture of the organisation it is likely to; enhance motivation among service users to engage. lead to decisions being taken on fuller and more accurate information.
- The successful candidates in Pilot B were interviewed and commented: *"It took the interview into appropriate areas, not just the standard interview format in which I could reel off buzz words."*  
*"Because half the panel were young people I would be working with, it gave me a great deal of confidence to see that I was communicating well with them. It confirmed my interest in the position."*  
*"Young people are very good at spotting genuineness. If you get the job, that confirms to you that you're worth it."*

### What was in it for the young people ?

- They said they had enjoyed the experience and were given out of pocket expenses.
- They got an insight into the selection process from the other side. One young interviewer went for a job the following week, got it, and reckoned he had learned a lot of helpful tips from the Connexions process.
- They or their peers would be working in the future with PAs whom they had helped select and for whom the selection process had been a symbolic and formative experience.
- Their views carried great weight, they had good preparation and they got swift feedback afterwards on the formal outcomes. They felt respected. In one case, they were picked up from their hostels by the support worker and taken off to breakfast at Macdonalds in order both to ensure they got there on time and had the stamina for the day.



## Case study E7 – Investors in Young People (Example from Oldham Connexions Service)

1. This initiative originated in discussions among young people in Dream, a young people's organisation in Oldham which grew out of a 3-day face-to-face consultation in October 1999 organised by the Youth and Community Service with 350 young people in touch with various services in the borough. Their concerns were based in their knowledge and experience of interacting with a number of different agencies and their belief that some services could be much more responsive to young people's needs:
 

'It is evident that where organisations consult and involve young people in the design and delivery of the service, they are more attractive, relevant and appropriate to their needs and therefore more effective.' (About Dream 2000).
2. The idea was to develop a 'standard' which local services could apply to be assessed against based on the concept of Investors in People.
 

'Dream' believes that IIYP provides the opportunity for young people to define performance and assessment standards. We also believe that if organisations commit themselves to working towards and meeting standards, this will help secure greater accountability to young people.'

The design of the award and the criteria for assessment were to be developed by young people with the advice of professionals.
3. It was considered very important that Investors in Young People was seen to be an independent organisation. Services such as the Connexions Service and the Youth and Community Service would themselves be able to apply for the standard.
4. In relation to Connexions,
 

'The standards set also support the notion of a radical new service in helping put right and transform current inadequate provision....Oldham's Connexions Pilot Service has embraced the IIYP as a 'core tenet' and as a requirement for inclusion in the Connexions network...IIYP will also help to ensure the involvement of young people in the development, governance, management, delivery, evaluation and inspection of the Connexions Service.'
5. Outside of Connexions, it might be an important lever in assuring quality in the private sector e.g. retail, entertainment and leisure services.
6. As of October 1st in Oldham, the situation is that
  - The standard has been developed. It consists of four key principles:
    1. Services for young people are young person centred.
    2. Services for young people are anti-oppressive in practice.
    3. Services for young people provide appropriate environments.
    4. Services for young people are accessible and transparent.
  - The planned process for becoming an Investor in young people involves five key steps:
    - Step 1 A 'self-audit' and action plan.
    - Step 2 An initial assessment – with representatives of the IIYP assessment team from Dream – to discuss the self-audit and develop a written agreement on how assessment will take place.
    - Step 3 Assessment.
    - Step 4 Achievement and Award – if the organisation does not meet the standards, there will be an agreement made on a time-scale for re-assessment.
    - Step 5 Continuous Improvement : continued checking out by 'mystery shoppers' etc. The award is only valid for a period of 2 years at which time the organisation will need to reapply for IIYP status.

## Case study E8 – One Personal Adviser’s view of his role at service user level

I try to establish a partnership with the young people I'm working with, to make sure it is two people thinking well about the one person, rather than one person 'doing something to' the other – which is how many of them see their treatment at school, with law and welfare agencies, and even in their families. Young people want to be treated as people with thoughts, feelings and aspirations – not as problems or 'cases'.

To make the partnership work we both need information. I've got plenty to give – and I used to be really keen to get this across. But nowadays I'm more concerned with helping young people trust me enough to volunteer information about themselves – this means I can intervene more accurately.

There are three important conditions for making this work well:

1. **Thinking well of the young person** even at times when their behaviour is off the wall. I'm not an easy touch. I don't accept the behaviour but I recognise that the violent, abusive, chronically timid, devious or defeatist behaviours – which some of them display quite often – are just how they've learned to survive. I try to help the young person recognise this too – but encourage them to see that they do have other choices. It very often works – but it is not easy! Some people say that young people behaving like this are just testing out those in authority and that it is important to 'hold the line'. But I think that what they are really testing – consciously or unconsciously – is whether they can trust us, whether deep down we like them – or whether we are going to react as other adults have done before and dismiss them.
2. **Feeling good about myself.** If I am feeling under too much pressure or I haven't been getting much support myself, the young people's behaviour can 'press my buttons'. This can mean that I dump my own negative feelings back on the young person – I'll pull rank or lose my cool. To keep my own emotional shock absorbers in trim I do try to ensure I get listened to on a regular basis and build a mutual support network with my colleagues. I'm lucky, too, that my managers put a lot of store by regular supervision sessions.
3. **Finding the time.** Time to build the relationship as a partnership so that I'm not under pressure to rush the information exchange, push the young people through hoops, and trample on their chances of thinking things through for themselves. I try to make time to meet them informally too – outside the relative intensity of the one-to-one, whether informally in the coffee bar or on residential. I think that time invested well and accurately in the early stages helps young people attain independence more quickly. I'm all for active involvement, but 'deep' involvement starts in the quality of the one-to-one.

## Case Study E9 – Feedback from Young People about Active Involvement

Groups of young people from the UK Youth Parliament were commissioned to provide comments on this Guide, focusing attention on Section B of the Guide. However, to fully appreciate the impact of the Guide, they were briefed on all Sections and generally had a high regard and awareness of the new Connexions Service. Several Members of Youth Parliament (MYPs) are involved in local Connexions Partnership's management committees.

The following comments were provided by the MYPs:

- Although the MYPs felt it is important to involve young people who are able to draw on their peer groups and communities' views, it is also important not just to pick the 'usual suspects' – i.e. the 'professional' young people representatives.
- The MYPs were very positive about the use of alternative 'creative consultation,' drama, video, art, music, etc. They felt that this was important for young people who lacked the self-confidence or skills to speak cogently in public. They were concerned that adults might view these approaches as 'second best' and be patronising with the 'real business' still going on at conventional meetings. The choice of facilitator was considered very important.
- A constant comment from the MYPs was the importance and need to continually feedback to young people on the impact and result of their views.
- On the involvement of young people as mentors, group leader, in consultation exercises, it is important that the involvement is not too time intensive, especially at exam or revision time.
- The MYPs commented on the direct input of young people on decision-making bodies that they were all too easy for an adult led agenda and the language too obscure and 'dull' for young people. One MYP for example, has to sit on a group with a senior police officer, college principal, local authority members and YOT representatives and says "all the talk goes straight over my head".
- There is an issue with young people 'representing' the views of other young people as some meetings can be confidential. They find it difficult to discuss even the most relevant points with their constituents/peer groups who then react in a negative way, bringing distance between the young person and her/his peers.
- Regarding peer mentoring with 'hard to reach' groups, there were several comments on the need for adult workers to give sufficient support and protection to young people.
- On the issue of incentives, the MYPs commented that incentives needed to be varied and tailored to individual needs to make them worthwhile to particular young people.

The UKYP is one of several national groups of young people, representing the views of young people. The CSNU recognises other groups\*, and is working with them in other policy areas and establishing contact for potential future work

Comment supplied by UK Youth Parliament May 2001.

\*(Such as British Youth Council, National Black Youth Forum, Article 12, National Childrens Bureau, Coalition 4 Youth etc).

## A guide to further reading

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## Acknowledgments

The Department for Education & Skills (DfES), Connexions Service National Unit (CSNU) contracted the National Youth Agency (NYA) to develop and produce this Guidance.

NYA aims to advance youth work to promote young people's personal and social development, and their voice, influence and place in society. Funded primarily by the Local Government Association and government departments it works to: improve and extend youth services and youth work; enhance and demonstrate youth participation in society; and to promote effective youth policy and provision. NYA can be contacted at 17 – 23 Albion Street, Leicester, LE1 6GD; Tel: 0116 285 3700; Fax: 0116 285 3777; E-mail: [nya@nya.org.uk](mailto:nya@nya.org.uk); [www.nya.org.uk](http://www.nya.org.uk).

Bronwen Hunter and Rob Hunter (NYA) were responsible for researching and writing the bulk of the guidance with management and support from Steering Group members which comprised of NYA (Pete Loewenstein, Richard Parsons and Anthony Lawton), DfES, CSNU (Anthony Evans, Joy Danby, Lester Parker and John Harradence), Careers Service National Association (Linda Mottram, Cheshire & Warrington Connexions Partnership) and the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (Esta Orchard).

Further contributions on the Guide have been sought from young people from the UK Youth Parliament, National Black Youth Forum. The CSNU Equal Opportunities Steering Group were also asked consulted, including Careers Bradford Ltd, Racial Equality Unit, National Bureau for Students with Disabilities, Special Education Needs Division (DfES), Social Exclusion Unit, Equal Opportunities Commission, Black Training Enterprise Group, Women's Unit, Society of Education Officers, Youth Justice Board, Department of Health, Government Office West Midlands, Government Office North East and Government Office Yorkshire & Humber.

Listening to and taking account of the views of young people in the design and delivery of Connexions is a key principle. Anthony Evans and Joy Danby are responsible for the policy lead in this area as well as gathering evidence of involving young people and disseminating this good practice. If you would like to contribute and share your experiences, please contact the Active Engagement Policy Team on 0114 259 3756 or E.mail: [anthony.evans@dfes.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:anthony.evans@dfes.gsi.gov.uk).