

# Effective Transitions for Year 8 Students

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This report has been written by the Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby, on the basis of research commissioned by CXL (formerly Connexions Lancashire) on behalf of the Lancashire 14-19 Task Group. The project aimed to establish the extent to which careers education and guidance provision is effectively equipping students in Years 7 and 8 with the skills they need to make realistic choices and transitions, based on fieldwork conducted in Lancashire between May and October 2006.

The research findings reported in this paper are of wide interest in the context of the 14-19 strategy, at the heart of which is the entitlement of all young people to choose personalised pathways which will form the basis for their progression. It has been written by Dr Sandra Morgan, Jo Hutchinson and Nicole Crompton, and edited by Hayley Lamb with editorial support from Deirdre Hughes, of CeGS.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

The *14-19 Education and Skills White Paper*, published by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in 2005, outlined curriculum and qualifications reforms, at the heart of which is the entitlement of all young people to choose personalised pathways which suit them and form the basis for their progression. A new system of 14 Specialised Diplomas will be a national entitlement by 2013, with the first five available from 2008 onwards (DfES, 2005). Given the extent of choice for young people aged 14-19, the White Paper emphasises the need *'to help young people assess themselves and improve their decision-making'* (p.43). It also highlights that *'good quality and impartial information, advice and guidance are crucial'* (p.24). This expectation was reinforced in the *14-19 Implementation Plan* (Office for Standards in Education, 2005), which stated that *'young people will receive better advice and support... so that they are well informed to make choices'* (p.48).

### 1.2 Aims and objectives

In Spring 2006, CXL (formerly Connexions Lancashire) commissioned the Centre for Guidance Studies (CeGS) on behalf of the Lancashire 14-19 Task Group to undertake research to support the effective implementation of the 14-19 strategy in the county. With increased choice and flexibility in the curriculum at Key Stage (KS) 4, Year 9 students will be required to make decisions that could have implications for their future progression and career choices. The provision of good quality information, advice and guidance (IAG) from Year 7 onwards is, therefore, crucial. This project aimed to establish the extent to which current careers education and guidance (CEG) provision in Years 7 and 8 is effectively equipping students with the key skills they need to make realistic choices and successful transitions in Year 9. It is important that early career-related choices

are effectively supported if issues associated with segregation by gender or ethnicity (such as those summarised by Bimrose, in press) are to be addressed. The research had three principal objectives:

- To explore Year 8 students' experiences of CEG activities in order to establish the extent to which current provision supports effective transitions in Year 9.
- To capture the views of parents/carers on current provision for young people.
- To seek perspectives from a cross-section of the community to capture issues associated with equality and diversity.

The research had a particular focus on the needs of young people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups. There are high proportions of young people from ethnic minority groups in Lancashire compared to other authorities, which necessitated an exploration of the extent to which young people from ethnic groups require differentiated career provision that is sensitive to cultural practices.

### 1.3 Methodology

The methodological approach adopted had three main phases:

- *Literature review* – a review of current literature on CEG support for students in Years 7 and 8, including the needs of BME students.
- *Structured interviews and focus groups* – these were undertaken with three groups in 12 educational institutions: senior managers, staff with responsibility for developing and delivering CEG, and young people in Year 8 and the first few weeks of Year 9. The participating institutions were spread across Lancashire: six in Lancashire, three in Blackburn with Darwen and three in Blackpool. A total of 18 staff and 107 young people were consulted as part of this process.

- *Postal questionnaire* – a questionnaire was distributed by 10 of the participating schools to seek the views of parents/carers of Year 8 students. A total of 190 questionnaires were returned; a response rate of 13%.

The schools participating in this research were purposively selected to ensure diversity in relation to a number of factors. These include:

- *size* – mainstream schools with 2000 to 187 students;
- *location* – both rural and urban;
- *type* – two special schools, four specialist schools, two with sixth forms and four mainstream 11-16 schools;
- *curriculum organisation for vocational subjects* – one school already offers a three-year vocational option starting in Year 9, several are part of mini-hubs with other schools, a further education college and training providers;
- *curriculum organisation for CEG* – varies from a discrete timetabled subject to inclusion in Citizenship or PSHE;
- *delivery of CEG* – through a discrete PSHE team or by form tutors; and
- *pro-activity* – some schools are pro-active and changing to meet the 14-19 challenges for CEG, others are waiting for a clearer picture to emerge before taking action.

Although the findings must, therefore, be regarded as indicative rather than representative, they provide an interesting insight into CEG provision for Year 7 and 8 students in diverse educational institutions in Lancashire.

## 2. Context

### 2.1 The Transition Process

Following the 1997 Employment Act, schools have a statutory obligation to provide a programme of careers education for all young people from age 11. A non-statutory *National Framework for CEG 11-19 in England* (DfES, 2003) was published with learning outcomes for every year group. This emphasises the importance of self-development, career exploration and career management.

However, evidence from the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling (NICEC, 2000) indicates that CEG provision is necessary prior to Year 7 if young people are to be equipped with the necessary skills to make successful transitions. A significant message conveyed in the study is that careers related learning is not the remit solely of the teacher. There is also a role for parents, the Careers/Connexions Service, governors and the wider community. As a result, all could share the rewards of effective careers-related learning including raising standards, tackling under achievement and dealing positively with social exclusion.

Research into the impact of CEG during KS3 and KS4 on young people's transitions indicates that good quality interventions can have an impact. Bowes *et al.* (2005) conclude, on the basis of a systematic review of literature, that there is evidence that CEG contributes towards the success of subsequent transitions. However, the strength of this impact is mediated by a number of factors that include the nature and type of CEG intervention, the timing of interventions, and the extent to which interventions are tailored to meet the needs of the individual.

The evidence suggests that many young people who had clear ideas about what they wanted to do had been influenced by close relatives, friends or neighbours who worked in their chosen field. Wright (2005) supports this, adding that parents appear to exert

influence over some decisions more than others; for example, whether or not students should stay on in education and training at 16 by implicitly or explicitly excluding certain options. However, other decisions were often left to the young person; for instance, over particular qualifications and subjects. It is, therefore, apparent that parents have a significant, and growing, influence over their children's transitions and that some young people without parental support can be severely disadvantaged. This assertion is reinforced by Jones *et al.* (2004) in their study on education beliefs among young people and their parents.

However, recent research by Blenkinsop *et al.* (2006) suggests that the influence of external factors, that can facilitate or inhibit progression, is less when young people feel supported by the school in decision-making. The findings show that where young people felt supported, they were more influenced by school factors, such as individual discussions and CEG provision, and were less reliant on external factors, such as friends and family. Young people valued having sufficient time to make choices, the opportunity to have individual conversations with teachers and detailed, clear and impartial information on courses and pathways so they could make informed choices. Blenkinsop *et al.* (ibid) also found a link between schools which appear to be effective in relation to curriculum management, student support, staff expectations and school leadership and young people who were making the most rational, well thought-through decisions and who remained happy six months later. Evidence showed that teachers in 11-18 schools sometimes lacked impartiality by encouraging students to stay in their sixth form.

Blenkinsop *et al.*'s research (ibid) also found differences in the way that young people make decisions. This appeared to vary according to the context; for example, whether support mechanisms were in place to help with decision-making or the ways in which

information and advice were mediated. Young people brought different mindsets to the decision-making process and this suggests that a single approach will not work and that individuals need varying levels and types of support at different stages in their school careers. Few young people at 14+ made the link between CEG activities and the personal decisions they were making. The findings show that vocational qualifications were not always recognised in the same way as academic qualifications for entry to A' level courses. This led to restricted student choice in some areas (ibid).

The report summarises the four key issues for providers of support to young people facing transitions:

- *Decision-making skill gap* – at a time of choice for young people there is a need to ensure that they not only have information but the skills to make the best use of the information.
- *Quality of CEG* – CEG was deemed to be most effective when it was comprehensive and impartial, delivered by trained staff within the school with the support of external professionals such as Connexions, and was a dedicated part of the curriculum.
- *Mediation of information* – the importance of young people accessing good quality and impartial information is at the forefront of meeting the requirements of the 14-19 Implementation Plan. The training needs of professionals, such as teachers and personal advisers, who help young people to make use of the information should be considered.
- *Personalised support* – as young people make decisions in different ways, varying levels and types of support are needed. Teachers are essential to the decision-making process. However, questions were raised as to whether teachers have the necessary knowledge to provide the

information and guidance that young people need.

## 2.2 The needs of young people from BME groups

Existing research on 14+ transitions does not differentiate gender and race as separate factors. Irving & Barker (2004) concluded that ethnic minority groups have diverse career needs, yet there are relatively few initiatives designed to address them. They state, *‘There is a distinct absence of differentiated career provision that actively engages with, and is sensitive to, diverse cultural practices and/or religious beliefs.’* (p.42)

This is reinforced by Bhavnani (2006), who found that Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean girls believe that their careers advice had not opened their eyes to a full range of possible jobs and careers. They were, therefore, not able to fulfil their potential and consider as wide a range of jobs as other young people. Parker-Jenkins (1999) suggested the then existing careers service’s policies and practices did not formally take into account the unique religious and social cultural characteristics and influences that affect Muslim girls.

After many years of equal opportunities education and training, school leaver destination statistics show that many young people are still following traditional, gender-stereotyped career choices (Woman and Work Commission, 2006). These are rarely based upon a single decision point but on a long series of decisions made throughout their lives. Although young people’s attitudes to traditional gender roles are changing, many jobs are still viewed in a stereotypical way by both girls and boys. All schools have a responsibility to ensure that all young people receive IAG that is free from gender and race stereotyping. In England, the national standards in careers education in schools, to be published in 2007, aims to step up cultural change in order to challenge assumptions

about jobs and ensure all young people are aware of non-traditional career opportunities. The 14-19 curriculum changes have implications for career choices with earlier decision-making in Year 9. The increased emphasis on vocational education could reinforce stereotypical patterns of race and gender and restrict choices at an earlier age than before.

## 3. Key findings from school staff

### 3.1 Current CEG organisation and delivery in Years 7 and 8

Only one school delivers a discrete CEG curriculum from Year 7 onwards, with the majority delivering it as part of the PSHE curriculum. The remaining schools deliver it under Citizenship or Student Support.

Only three out of the twelve schools are meeting the statutory requirements for CEG. They deliver CEG to students in Years 7 and 8 as part of a timetabled programme which is delivered either by form tutors or PSHE staff. In the nine other schools, students in Years 7 and 8 may have no CEG input, a single lesson during the two years or an Industry Day. All staff interviewed agree that this is inadequate, reporting that *‘CEG has got lost’* as *‘the PSHE curriculum now covers too many aspects’*. Several emphasise that CEG has been *‘squeezed out’* over the last few years as other demands on PSHE time are met, such as the introduction of Citizenship. This was confirmed by senior staff, who cite timetable

*‘Everything is fighting for space in PSHE and we don’t have enough time to provide effective CEG. We are losing sight of what is important for young people. KS3 is still too much of a strait-jacket – we need to change.’* (Headteacher)

*‘We need time with children to make them understand what this means to them. Who is having conversations with students about their futures?’* (Careers Coordinator)

pressures in KS3 as the main reason for lack of CEG. The majority of schools begin CEG input in Year 9. However, this is limited and is mainly delivered by form tutors. Three schools deliver through a dedicated PSHE team as they feel this improves consistency and expertise. While several respondents raise the lack of training for form tutors as a concern, only one school provides training for staff and governors in vocational options. The findings, therefore, indicate that CEG in Year 9 is limited and staff currently feel the emphasis should be in Years 10 and 11.

Where there is good practice in CEG, the following typically apply:

- there is an emphasis on quality throughout;
- senior staff are involved;
- the policy is reviewed regularly;
- the programme has clear learning outcomes for each year group;
- delivery is by knowledgeable staff;
- students provide feedback;
- clear links are made with the work-related curriculum; and
- the programme is evaluated and changes made.

### *3.2 Implications of the 14-19 curriculum changes*

The findings show that schools are very aware of the changes to the 14-19 curriculum and have begun discussions on the practicalities of broadening their curriculum options. A range of routes and pathways are under discussion, some of which involve students taking some curriculum options at another school or college. One school is pro-active in this regard and already offers a three-year vocational option from Year 9; they realise they should develop their CEG programme in Year 8 before students choose this option.

Three schools are planning changes in Years 7 and 8 as a consequence of the 14-19 agenda. These include:

- a 15-20 minute, one-to-one discussion with a tutor in Year 8 – although this may provide an opportunity to discuss career options, it is not structured specifically for it as the staff involved have no guidance training;
- introducing the Real Game; and
- improving the self-awareness of students.

However, overall discussion on curriculum changes is not mirrored by a similar emphasis on changes needed to PSHE and, in particular, to CEG. With the new 14-19 curriculum, students may be making early decisions, which could affect their future career options. Many schools lack understanding of the impact on student option choice and have not yet fully thought through the implications of early decision-making on the PSHE curriculum in Years 7, 8 and 9. Those that are looking to change have been influenced by area-wide discussions held by various forums. They have proved helpful in promoting the recognition of the need for change.

### *3.3 Current support for students and parents/carers with option choices in Year 9*

All schools offer students information on option choices through booklets. They also offer discussions with teachers and, in some cases, form tutors. All schools offer a parents' event, although attendance at these varies enormously between schools. Parents/carers receive details of the options available and are also sent their child's final option choices by the school.

### *3.4 Connexions delivery*

All 12 schools were very positive about the Connexions Service and the support they and their students receive. However, there is no evidence of Connexions work in Years 7 and 8 in any of the twelve schools visited. This begins in Year 9, although is limited as the emphasis is on Year 10 and 11 students.

Overall, respondents believe that Connexions is most effective with older students. They

feel the service is working to its maximum with Year 10 and 11 students and do not want to dilute its impact with work with younger students. However, they appreciate the potential of earlier work and would welcome this if additional resources were allocated. One Headteacher commented, *‘There is scope for Connexions in Years 7 and 8, but not at the expense of the older years.’*

In light of the curriculum changes, staff realise that more effort will be needed with younger students and expect that Connexions will be closely involved in this. However, this has substantial resource implications.

### 3.5 Major influences on young people with option choices

The findings highlight three main areas of influence on student choice:

#### *School organisation*

- Timetabling pressures influence students’ choices by restricting the options available and requiring students to choose one subject at the expense of another where there is a conflict between subjects. This may be heightened when subjects are offered at different locations.

#### *PSHE/CEG curriculum*

- Lack of expert advice on the longer-term implications of particular choices; for example, future labour market trends and qualifications needed for entry to particular courses.
- Lack of self-awareness leading to unrealistic expectations. Without a planned CEG programme students may not have the opportunity to develop self-awareness of their skills and strengths and weaknesses.
- Lack of motivation and aspiration; this often reflects the support young people receive at home.

#### *Extended network of influence*

- All respondents agree that parents/carers are a major influence on student choices. There is an issue with lack of home support in some schools, with attendance at parents’ options evening in one institution only 45%. One Deputy Headteacher was of the view that parents want children to leave school at 16 to enable them to contribute financially. Parents/carers will be faced with unfamiliar routes and pathways. These will pose a challenge to them, and they will need support to understand the new choices available. Two respondents highlight *“some GCSE snobbery amongst parents”* which could prevent students from opting for a more vocational route.
- Friends are seen as another major influence. A lot of informal information on options and career choice comes from older students. This can be both a positive and negative influence since they may have preconceived ideas but they can give factual information on courses.
- Teachers are thought to be influential and are often the main source of information about option choice subjects.

## 4. Key findings from young people

### 4.1 Awareness and understanding of CEG

Young people’s understanding of CEG was tested by asking questions on what they did in PSHE lessons, what elements of CEG were covered in this time, what they liked or disliked about these lessons, and what they

*‘We have learnt about our strengths and weaknesses in school, and we have targets within school and learning objectives in PSHE.’ (Year 8 student)*

*‘You learn about what you can do when you get older; you do a test which gives you a list of five jobs which closely match you and five that would be OK.’ (Year 9 student)*

thought the purpose of these lessons to be. In a few schools, the examples given by students showed evidence of good levels of awareness and understanding. This contributed to their knowledge of careers and an appreciation of the world outside school.

Understanding was highest in schools that had a dedicated careers module in Years 7 and 8, which was differentiated from the rest of the PSHE module by name and content. The students were also clear about the relationship this career element had to the other PSHE modules. However, the majority of schools gave no or very little careers input prior to Year 9. Many of the responses from young people in these schools reveal a low level of awareness around CEG. Responses indicate a tension within the PSHE curriculum as careers-related work fought for prioritisation with a host of other elements which were either totally unrelated to CEG or had a tenuous link.

In the absence of a structured school-based source of CEG, there was evidence of the impact of unmediated information. Students were free to use their imaginations and hearsay to supplement their knowledge and understanding. They also relied heavily on information supplied by friends and family. This is reflected in the pen portrait opposite.

#### 4.2 Barriers to effective option choices

There are several potential barriers to students making informed and effective option choices:

- Lack of CEG in Years 7 and 8, although there is some difference of opinion amongst students as to the value of increased CEG. Some ask for this strongly in Years 7 and 8 whilst others feel it is too early and there will be plenty of time in Year 9 to think about option choice. Overall, girls appear to feel the need for more CEG and there is no appreciable difference between BME students and others. However, it is impossible to generalise from these findings.

#### Pen Portrait – Abby

Abby is in the top sets at school and particularly enjoys PE. Abby had always wanted to join the police but, after watching *The Bill* on the television, she was left with the impression that there were very few women police officers and perhaps it was not something that she could do. During a long car trip with a female friend of her mum's, who had recently joined the police, she discovered that lots of women join the police force and it is not only a job for men. This and subsequent encounters with her mum's friend have led Abby to believe that a job in the police force would particularly suit her, and that it would be *'exciting as you would not know what to expect because it would be different every day'*.

Abby recognises there is some danger in a job as a police woman but she thinks that this is part of the attraction and more of a worry for her mum than for her. Other than this concern, Abby's mum is happy for her to be a police woman as she can see how much her friend enjoys it.

Abby wants to take PE in her options because she knows you have to pass a fitness test to become a police officer. She will also take biology so that she knows how the human body works, as she thinks this will be useful for the job. She is very happy that these two subjects complement her chosen career as she likes them both and is good at them.

Abby feels that if she did not know what job she wanted, she would not go to her teachers as she does not think they know her well enough to fully understand what she is good at.

- Lack of differentiation of CEG within the PSHE curriculum. One Year 8 group highlighted the topics they had covered and the reasons for their inclusion:
  - *Relationships* – to build confidence and help you socialise and to recognise each other’s feelings.
  - *Bullying* – to help the victim and the bully.
  - *Citizenship* – looking after the environment and to learn about the world around them.
  - *Drugs* – to stop us taking them.
  - *People’s rights* – know what you can and cannot do.
  - *No careers-related aspects as such* – played the Real Game last year and learned about buying houses and cars and learned about taxes. It gave us experience about life.
- Variation in delivery of CEG, with students reporting differences in experiences. The majority of students received PSHE from their form teachers or tutors and this led to different experiences and reactions.
- Students’ unrealistic expectations of their own abilities due to low self-confidence or ambitions which exceed what might be realistic due to factors such as their own abilities, or the availability of employment locally.

- Reliance on unmediated information from family and friends when no other support was available.
- Lack of self-awareness amongst the majority of students, although students who had experience of CEG described how this had helped their own self-awareness and linked this to potential future careers.

### 4.3 Year 9 Option Choices

#### *Year 8 students*

None of the Year 8 students had done any preparation for Year 9 option choice as this often starts late in the Autumn term or early in the Spring term of Year 9. In the absence of structured preparation, there was significant variation in awareness of the option choices. Many students only had the vaguest awareness that they were allowed to choose ‘*what classes to do*’, whilst others had a more in-depth knowledge often provided by a family member or friend who had recently chosen their options. However, where there was increased awareness, knowledge was minimal or often incorrect and lacking details of the process and timing of choosing options. Few students related their option choices to their own strengths and self-awareness. Rarely, were any of the Year 8 students able to contextualise their option choices to career choices or make links into the PSHE curriculum.

#### *Year 9 students*

Year 9 students had a similar range of responses to those in Year 8. Although a few students had already chosen their own options and, with the help of a parent, put significant thought into their motivation for choosing, this was not the case for the majority. More widespread was lack of information to help them, which was a source of great anxiety for some students.

*‘I am conscious about my GCSEs as I think I might not be clever enough to pass the exams I need to do law. I am in the top set but I do not think I am at the standard I should be. I do not know what options I need to take to get a job as a lawyer. I asked a teacher what I would need to do and he said I should call a law school closer to the time of choosing my options.’ (Year 9 student)*

*‘I want to be a guitarist in a rock band. I don’t play the guitar yet though.’ (Year 8 student)*

#### 4.4 Connexions Lancashire

In response to national policy and guidance, the Connexions brand and services in Lancashire have been focussed on Year 10 and older young people; consequently, awareness of Connexions services among those in Year 8 and 9 is low. Where there was a dedicated Connexions office in school, some students knew that this office existed but had no awareness of the function of Connexions or of the role of the Personal Advisor (PA). Exceptions tended to be where the young person had experienced Connexions through an older sibling, relation or friend, or where special circumstances had provided the opportunity for the young person to encounter Connexions and its staff.

#### 4.5 Support for students

In making decisions young people report they would seek help from a variety of sources. Many mentioned teachers, parents, siblings and friends, whilst others looked further a field including librarians and learning mentors. Parental influences have a strong impact on choice of career and post-16 destinations, as demonstrated with the pen portrait from Ben opposite.

During the focus groups the young people were given the opportunity to tell the researchers what other types of help they would like either in choosing their options or with guidance on a future career. Many wanted more CEG-related work and thought this should begin in Years 7 and 8. Other responses include greater understanding of qualities and skills, more information about jobs and careers, and increased opportunity for work-related experiences.

#### Pen Portrait – Ben

Ben had always wanted to be a professional footballer, and he knew what he had to do. *‘The key to being successful is to get into an academy’*. He also thought he had a good idea about what life would be like as a professional footballer and this formed a significant part of his motivation to want to do this as a career. *‘I want to do it because it is an easy job, if you are talented. You train hard to get fit but then you play once a week and train three days, go in the gym one day and have two days off.’* Ben had the support of his dad to pursue this; however, he was realistic and had set himself a deadline. If he was not in an academy by the time he left school then he would still play on a Sunday but pursue another career.

He had two back-up careers in mind: a surgeon because he liked to cut things up and was not put off by blood, or an electrician, which he would do in partnership with his friend, who would be a plumber. This idea was suggested by one of their parents/carers. Ben’s dad said he would like him to go straight from school into an apprenticeship to become an electrician. Ben did not think he would stop him if he wanted to go to college as his sister had done so. His mum was not bothered what he chose as a career as long as he enjoyed it. He thought he would enjoy either of these options.

Ben could not remember doing very much about careers in PSHE lessons and questioned whether what he learned in these lessons would be useful for him in the future. *‘I do not think PSHE will help me with my choices as they do not have the time in the lessons to cover every career choice.’*

## 5. Key findings from parents and carers

### 5.1 Parent/carer involvement with child's decision-making

Three-quarters of parents (77.7%) are aware of their child's current career ambitions; the majority believe these are appropriate, in that, they reflect their child's skills and aptitudes, and realistic, based on an assessment of possible opportunities and barriers. However, most parents (53.5%) do not believe or know if their child's career aspirations are informed or based on information.

The majority of respondents (94.0%) are aware that their child would be making decisions in Year 9 that could influence their future choice of career. When asked 'Do you have serious conversations with your child/children about their option choices?', 78.7% report that they do, however, several parents/carers indicate by answers such as 'not yet' that they will be in the future. Three-quarters of parents/carers (75.4%) state that they are 'very involved' in their child's decisions regarding option choices.

### 5.2 Parent/carer knowledge of career exploration and management issues

The majority of parents/carers are confident about their knowledge of the current curriculum choices available from Year 9 (52.7%) and the qualifications that their child could take (54.4%). Parents/carers are most confident in their knowledge of the combination of subjects available (46.1%), although this is not particularly high with a further 38.3% stating they have little confidence. Half of the respondents (50.0%) were confident in their knowledge of the implications of their choices for their child's future learning and job opportunities.

Both children and their parents/carers are more likely to rely on informal sources of information and advice, with more parents/carers having spoken to family

(67.4%) and friends (58.9%) about their child's options than teachers (30.8%), a Connexions PA (2.3%) or careers staff from their child's school (2.9%).

When asked about who their child had spoken to regarding their options, the majority believe family (78.0%) and friends (66.7%). Over half think their child had spoken to their teachers (51.7%). School career staff and Connexions PAs were in the minority, with only 2.3% and 11.0% respectively.

Parents/carers use a variety of methods to learn about their child's option choices; the most frequently used sources are information provided by the child's school (56.9%) and the internet (43.0%). A further one in five use libraries.

The majority of parents/carers are satisfied with CEG provision offered to their child through school. Over half the respondents (50.8%) reply that they are fairly (39.6%) or very (11.2%) satisfied. However, there is some dissatisfaction amongst parents/carers, with 25.8% stating that they are fairly dissatisfied and 8.1% very dissatisfied with the CEG information provided to support their child.

## 6. Conclusions

### 6.1 For schools

Although the findings from this research must be regarded as indicative rather than representative due to the small-scale nature of the project, it highlights a number of important issues to do with the way students in Years 7 and 8 are being supported to make decisions that may have implications for their future career choices. With increased choice and complexity in the 14-19 landscape, young people need good quality IAG to ensure they are effectively equipped with the skills they need to make decisions. While schools are building some careers education and transition support into the curriculum for Year 8

students, there remains gaps in provision for this group. In the absence of a clear strategy and curriculum for CEG, young people supplement their knowledge and understanding from unmediated sources, including family and friends, which may be out of date, incorrect or based on hearsay.

The majority of schools are not yet operating to the standards set out in the *National Framework for CEG 11-19 in England* (DfES, 2003) for delivery to Years 7 and 8, with nine out of the twelve participating schools commencing substantive careers education in Year 9. This is directly impacting on students' abilities to make well-informed, realistic decisions about their future; this also has implications in light of the 14-19 agenda which will see young people making decisions about specialisms that could have consequences for their future career choices. While schools are engaged in discussions about changes to the 14-19 curriculum and the provision of a range of routes and pathways, only three schools have planned to increase their CEG provision to commence in Year 8. Whilst school staff support the work of Connexions and would value further input in Years 7 and 8, they are keen to ensure it does not detract from their input at Year 10 and 11. Few recognised that this was not a direct trade-off; more work with younger pupils could result in the need for less intensive work with older students.

There are a range of issues associated with the organisation of an individual school and its delivery of the PSHE curriculum that compromise the delivery of CEG and effective decision-making by young people. These include timetabling pressures; the importance of CEG relative to other subjects, such as drugs and health, sex education, and citizenship, which all require space in the PSHE curriculum; the influence of peers and parents/carers; the local environment and local work opportunities; and the level of home support.

This research identified no discernable

differences in the CEG needs of young people from BME groups. However, it is important to note that the findings from this study are indicative rather than representative and, consequently, a larger, more in-depth study is required to explore this issue more fully.

This research highlights the urgent need to improve the delivery of CEG to Years 7, 8 and 9 students, as evidenced by the finding that young people attending schools with a dedicated careers module in Years 7 and 8, with a clear understanding about the purpose and learning outcomes of each activity, are more likely to have a better awareness of careers and an understanding of the world outside school. In order to prepare young people for an effective transition, CEG in the future must ensure the following:

- increase the decision-making readiness of students;
- emphasise the personal development of students;
- raise the self-awareness of students to make informed choices which could influence their future career options;
- raise aspirations and motivation; and
- challenge gender and race stereotyping in relation to option and career choices.

## 6.2 For students

While there was some difference of opinion among young people regarding the value of having more CEG in Years 7 and 8 (with a minority view being that it was too early), the students that participated in this project were much more animated when it came to the issue of Year 9 options and subject choice. This indicates that students at Year 8 have not made the link between CEG and option choices and, consequently, that demand for quality CEG from young people might be expected to rise if that link were made more explicit.

There is a need for better CEG among young people as the majority of students only had the vaguest awareness that in the future they were allowed to choose ‘*what classes to do*’. Even where there was increased awareness, knowledge was minimal or often incorrect, lacking details of the process and timing of choosing options. In addition, students struggled to relate personal qualities to work. They expressed unrealistic ambitions due to low self-confidence or ambitions which exceed what might be realistic.

Those interviewed were not, however, insensitive to some of these shortcomings and expressed anxiety and feelings of isolation when faced with such important decisions. The majority of young people had not at Year 8 or 9 heard of Connexions; where they had, they were not aware of what the Connexions Service is and what it does.

### 6.3 For parents/carers

There was evidence of the impact of unmediated information on young people’s decision-making. Students were free to use their imaginations and hearsay to supplement their knowledge and understanding. They also relied heavily on information supplied by their family, which has implications as the majority of parents/carers are receiving their knowledge primarily from other family members and friends as opposed to their child’s school or Careers/Connexions Service. This indicates that they may be reliant on information which may be out of date, incorrect or based on hearsay. This leaves them potentially unable to provide effective support to their child despite their strong desire to do so and to be involved in their choices. They may be at risk of misinformation and reliant on knowledge gathered from other children’s previous experience of option choices; over half of respondents had a child over the age of 12.

However, the introduction of new routes and pathways leaves parents/carers at a

disadvantage as they have no previous experience to rely upon. In a period of qualification changes, they might, therefore, prefer well-trusted routes and qualifications, such as GCSEs, rather than newer ones, such as vocational diplomas. For them to support their child, they need access to a range of up-to-date, impartial information on courses, routes and pathways. This includes vocational options, combinations of subjects and longer-term careers information showing where the new qualifications can lead.

For parents/carers to become more involved in their child’s decision-making, it is important that more support be offered in Years 8 and 9 to enable parents/carers to develop their understanding of the choices available. This might be done through newly designed materials targeted at parents/carers, supplemented by talks at parents’ evenings or briefings from further education colleges and training providers (see Hiebert & Hughes, 2007). Additionally, if curriculum options are about to be provided at other locations, parents/carers will need reassurance about the quality of provision available as well as day-to-day concerns such as travel arrangements.

Despite the majority of parents/carers having spoken to their children about career options, some parents/carers question the necessity of careers advice for their children in Year 8 with several commenting that this is too early for their child to be thinking about careers. However, given the new 14-19 agenda, students will in reality be making decisions about routes early in Year 9 which may have consequences for future career options.

The role and involvement of parents/carers in the CEG and transition process is currently under-developed. Young people’s involvement in the design and delivery of new programmes of learning should be actively encouraged and monitored to help assess the extent to which innovative approaches can and do make a difference.

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