

Information, Advice and Guidance Processes (IAG)

Summary

- ***Early identification will not catch all potential NEET emphasizing the need for high quality IAG for all students.***
- ***In some schools, IAG is concentrated in a small and carefully managed core team. This appears to be effective in reducing NEET.***
- ***There are concerns over the effectiveness of form tutors in the IAG process.***
- ***Connexions PAs are strongly supported and seen to be effective.***
- ***Those few concerns over Connexions relate to workload of Connexions PAs and communication with the school.***
- ***In only a very small number of schools is there a process to quality assure applications, especially through matching aspiration to predicted grades. This is reflected in a heavy workload at the College in addressing this issue.***
- ***There is little evidence of a strategy in schools to target potential NEET with activities which will ensure applications meet all deadlines.***

5.1 Several of the schools in West Norfolk are very clear about the need to try to identify young people who are potentially NEET at an early stage and to give enhanced support. However, some colleagues also mentioned that they felt that there was also a group of young people who did not appear to be in need of intensive support but were passively disengaging from education. They did not present issues relating to behaviour or attendance, but were not actively looking ahead. These colleagues raised the need to look at names of those who were NEET so that they could look back at the support they had received in school. One colleague who had seen the names unofficially commented that half the names had been worked with intensively at school but the other half had not. If we accept that there will be a proportion of young people who become NEET but who were not identified as requiring intensive support in school, then the importance of robust IAG processes for all students becomes paramount.

- 5.2 The DCSF Strategy emphasises the need for an excellent universal offer of support for all young people (DCSF, 2008a: 6). This “universal offer” is access to high quality, comprehensive and impartial information, advice and guidance to help young people make informed choices about their future. Tunnard *et al.* (2008: 25) claim that nationally, inadequate knowledge about available options beyond school leaving age is one reason for some young people becoming NEET. Given also the increasing options with the development of Diplomas, the need for the highest quality IAG has never been greater. It is therefore seen as an important strand of this research to look at the nature of the general IAG provision in Norfolk schools and to hear students’ responses to this provision as part of a full strategy to reduce NEET.
- 5.3 There is a wide variation in the organization of IAG in West Norfolk. Schools were asked how students first of all receive information about the possible routes they could follow in Year 12 and which providers were available. Responses included use of assemblies, PSHE teaching, form tutors, lessons taught by a careers teacher, information evenings for students and parents, extracurricular activities, collapsed timetable days, Connexions interviews, careers convention at Lynnsport, IMPACT Theatre, RealGame and the interactive software package KUDOS. These were discussed at length with careers coordinators.
- 5.4 Several coordinators raised concerns about the role of tutors. A common concern raised was that of tutor commitment to involvement in IAG resulting in a highly variable experience for young people related to tutor commitment. One careers coordinator was deeply concerned about a lack of wider knowledge from tutors who had become teachers by following one particular pathway. Most had followed an A level route and had limited knowledge of NVQ/BTEC/Apprenticeships. “They can talk the language of A Level but never talk in terms of Levels 1, 2 and 3”. In some schools, structured guidance was given to tutors, in another packs were prepared for tutors but they were given autonomy to use them as they wished. One coordinator raised concerns about quality assurance in a system of vertical tutoring where Years 10 and 11 would be shared between a far greater number of tutors. Nowhere was there any comment volunteered about how the work of tutors in their delivery of IAG was monitored and evaluated.

- 5.5 Similarly, concerns were raised especially by students about the teaching of elements of careers in PSHE/Citizenship courses. In some schools, coordinators felt comfortable where there was a small core team of committed PSHE teachers. However, there were concerns raised where teachers were asked to teach PSHE in order to complete their teaching load. Implicit in these concerns were questions about commitment. This had been recognized in one school where there was a senior management decision to reduce the PSHE team to a small core. In one school, however, a qualified careers teacher sees all Years 10 and 11 as part of a PSHE programme where staff specialise in key areas. In this school, work experience is seen as an integral part of careers education and is used as a trial run for the real applications in Year 11. All students take part in a two lesson debrief on the lessons from Work Experience. Whilst other schools use work experience in a similar way, this school saw work experience as an integral element of IAG and developed lessons around it.
- 5.6 Some schools recognized the need to begin talking explicitly about the post 16 world in Years 7 to 9. In one school, RealGame was used for a full day in each of the three years. Other schools commented that elements of IAG were now beginning to appear as part of Citizenship programmes in Years 7 to 9.
- 5.7 Schools recognized the importance of developing elements of IAG as part of an extra curricular programme. In some cases, these programmes were targeted at individuals, elsewhere they were more general. All schools would hold an evening in Year 11 for parents and students involving FE, Connexions and employers. In one school, all of Year 10 have an "interview day". On this day, they look at applications, cvs, personal statements, but then all students have an individual interview with one of a group of local employers who have been brought in for the day. In Year 11, the school has also developed series of lunchtime sessions where an employer representing a particular area comes to schools and students attend on a voluntary basis. However, interest was waning by the time of the eighth employer!
- 5.8 An important strand of IAG in West Norfolk is the careers convention held at Lynnsport. All schools send students to the event and student responses

are described later. However, one interviewee did raise the concern that it needed to be broadened out with more representation from companies and organizations which had a national perspective. In one school, there was an unusual teaching link involving the Lynnsport convention. Preparation for the convention and subsequent follow up of activities are integrated into the core ICT lessons.

5.9 Across all schools, there was generally strong support and praise for the work of Connexions. Where there were any negative feelings, they tend to relate to the effectiveness of an individual PA rather than to the service as a whole. The variety of response from schools to how they engage with Connexions is interesting:

- We identify early those who are at risk of being NEET. They are fast tracked to Connexions. We also link referrals to our monitoring processes. If a student is unsure of his/her future route the school refers to Connexions.
- Pupils are told through their tutor about the Connexions service and the tutor asks them if they want an interview. Our pupils are not slow to ask for help if they need it.
- All our pupils get a 1:1 interview with Connexions. If we receive an application that is unrealistic we immediately involve Connexions.
- All students at Action or Action Plus receive an interview. Some students self refer, others are directed. We put together groups with a specific vocational interest for group interviews with Connexions. Connexions interviews are confidential so I have no idea what the outcome of an interview is.
- Some students self refer, some are directed.
- We ask all students to complete the proforma at the beginning of Year 11. The careers coordinator will then look at all forms and identify those who need to be fast tracked. Most of our students will have an interview with Connexions either on a 1:1 basis or as part of a group.
- We work very closely with Connexions. They see all our students in Year 9 in pairs to discuss futures. Connexions also attend all parents evenings and options evenings so they are known to parents.
- Referrals to Connexions can be made by staff students and also by parents. We inform parents at a meeting that they can also refer to

Connexions. We worry that we do not have sufficient capacity to meet the needs of middle ability students.

- We identify those who need with personal needs for Connexions interviews at the end of Year 10. We then use the Year 11 questionnaire to prioritise those whose aspirations are unrealistic, those who are unsure, and those who are on the borderline between Sixth Form and College and will therefore have to submit two applications. We use target grades to match aspiration and potential and we share them between our own IAG adviser and the Connexions PA.

The comments do not necessarily reflect all aspects of the work of Connexions in schools. They were the immediate responses of interviewees so represented those aspects of work with Connexions which featured most strongly in the partnership. Some schools are more proactive than others in seeking the engagement of Connexions at an early stage. Secondly, some schools appear to have very rigorous internal monitoring processes allowing them to prioritise those students with the greatest need of Connexions expertise. The result is that Connexions engagement is seen to be an integral part of a wider partnership incorporating resources provided by the school. Thirdly, the value of Connexions having a higher profile with parents is important to at least two schools. Almost all schools felt their students would benefit if there were more time for Connexions' PAs.

- 5.10 The negative comments involving Connexions were few and related to communications between the school and Connexions. In one case, the school felt that the Connexions PA was suggesting courses which required a Level 1 entry qualification where the school was working closely with the students, to ensure he achieved a Level 2 at the end of Year 11. In another school, the school was willing to consider a student for the Sixth Form as the predicted grades represented the impact of personal circumstances. At a subsequent Connexions interview, the student was told his grades were too low for the Sixth Form and he needed to consider an alternative route. These instances of communication breakdown were rare but do highlight the need for good communications between Connexions and school. There is, however, the wider issue of how Connexions can communicate with the school over the outcomes of a

confidential interview. In one other instance a head of sixth form felt strongly that Connexions should identify those not brave enough to consider elsewhere. This is an interesting comment, in the light of information presented later, that very few students interviewed who had progressed to sixth form had in fact had a Connexions interview. This contrasts with another school where, if there was a concern that a student was "borderline" for that sixth form, they were actively encouraged by the school to have a reserve application for a second course.

- 5.11 Schools were also asked about the way in which they managed student applications for their post 16 pathway. Whilst the careers coordinator "has an oversight" in all the schools, this process of overseeing varied. It was not possible to interview the careers coordinator in all schools so the detail of the process obtained by research did vary from school to school. In one school, the management of applications was a very rigorous process. It began with preparation in lessons taught by a specialist careers teacher. Support was given to groups and individuals on the completion of the application form, with targeting of individuals who were most likely to struggle on the completion of the form, or likely to miss the December/January deadline for completion. All students then produced a draft application which was discussed with the students and a best application completed. The careers coordinator quality controlled the applications, not only for presentation but also to ensure the application was appropriate for the ability and target grades for the student. The school kept a copy of all applications as a means of ensuring all students had applied, and for tracking post application action. A similar process was outlined in one other school. In another school, the preparation of a curriculum vitae and personal statement was part of the English scheme of work. In two other schools collapsed timetable days were used to focus on the application process. However, the process of the management of applications does not appear as rigorous across all schools in terms of a reading of the applications for quality assurance, rigorous follow up with students on the progress of their application once submitted, and retention of a copy of the application. This was confirmed by students who were also asked about the application process. Colleagues in COWA have to get back to a very large number of applicants to clarify and complete sections on the form. The College also has to contact a large number of students over unrealistic applications where course's thresholds exceed the target grades

of the student. This inevitably leads to disappointment and disillusion and will impact most on those whose commitment to post 16 learning is most fragile.

5.12 The application process in the area involves separate applications to different providers. Whilst some schools were encouraging use of the on-line process, it was seen as flawed and the system was clearly not robust with comment made about it crashing. The involvement of COWA staff working with students at Key Stage 4 in preparation of applications was certainly helpful and appreciated by students. Whilst the number of on line applications to the College has increased this year, students frequently gave as their reason for not applying on line that they wanted to make sure that the application was sent "properly", hence the preference for hard copy! With the move to increasing applications electronically (staff at COWA have to upload 4000 plus applications a year from hard copy), there is a danger of losing the ability for a school to quality control an application before it is sent. Potential NEET are the most likely to produce weak or unrealistic applications. It is essential that on line applications can be accessed by schools and reviewed for quality and appropriateness.

5.13 A further aspect of the application process which has an impact on NEET is meeting deadlines. Potential NEET are usually slow to start an application and often miss deadlines. At COWA, some courses such as plumbing and motor vehicle maintenance are oversubscribed. The earlier applicants are more likely to obtain the places. Whilst it is natural to give credit to those students who do apply by deadline and make it on to a course of limited availability, such an approach is not likely to help the reduction of NEET. Schools do work hard to encourage students to meet deadlines. However, if an approach, such as that used on the PLO course for Year 11 in COWA where on a particular day all students on this course complete an application, were adopted more widely then those who are not good at completing forms will not be as disadvantaged.