

Face-to-face

What young people think about information, advice and guidance

Young people's report





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Getting it right for young people

The National Youth Agency was asked to find out what young people think about the information, advice and guidance (IAG) they receive on careers, educational choices and other life issues

To find out, we held a series of focus groups with 79 young people between the ages of 13 and 21 in London and the South West of England; in schools, alternative education settings and youth groups.

In all our focus groups, young people said that they value good advice. They know that information, advice and guidance that is timely, relevant and accurate is essential in helping them overcome a range of problems; from those facing them now, such as education choices, and money worries, to concerns about the future, such as careers and health.

“You can’t go through life alone and sometimes you need help to see things objectively”



Young people say they would rather speak to someone they trust than an expert

Most young people say they would prefer to turn to parents and family members first for advice on a difficult problem.

"I would ask my mum because she is always looking out for the next best health tip"

But some young people don't have the support of their families and some feel that times have changed so much that the older generation simply cannot understand the pressures that they face today.

Whilst young people value talking to their friends, many young people also say that they can't rely on friends to support them through the trickiest problems.

Many young people feel let down by the formal sources of advice set up to support them. Some report that advice from Connexions isn't tailored enough to their circumstances, and that *"They will tell you what you want to hear"*

Connexions Services can be difficult to access. Young people also felt that the service was targeted more at young people facing the bigger challenges and that *"if you are doing okay then you're just left to get on with it"* and receive little by way of advice.

Whilst many of the younger students we spoke to (13 to 16 years) could think of someone at school they could approach with their worries, many older teenagers have concerns about how confidential schools keep information about them. The young people that we spoke to that had not had good experiences in school felt that there was no-one in the school system they would feel comfortable to talk to about their problems.

Whilst most young people are comfortable using the internet to search for advice on a problem, the majority don't have a clear idea of websites they can trust, and many simply use search engines to look for advice.

The majority of young people say that they want someone to talk to about their problems and concerns who will keep their circumstances confidential and whom they can trust. Many young people say they would rather speak to an adult with whom they have a good relationship – whatever their role – rather than an expert in a particular area.

Key findings

- **Parents and carers**

Young people's first choice of someone to talk to about a problem is their parents or carer. But they recognise that parents and carers may not necessarily know more about a preferred educational choice or career option than they do themselves.

- **Trust**

After parents, young people want to be able to ask advice from a trusted adult with whom they have a good relationship. This may not be from traditional sources of advice such as a Connexions adviser or tutor – it could be a youth worker or a non-teaching member of staff at school. There should be sources of support for these professionals so that they can give up-to-date advice. Young people want assurances that information about them is kept confidential by teachers and school staff.

- **Peer support**

Young people are positive about peer mentoring schemes where support and training is offered to the peer mentors and where it is seen as independent from teachers' control.

- **Careers advice**

Young people want careers advice from someone who has taken the time to get to know them and who has asked them about their preferences.

Young people welcome the involvement of people already in jobs supporting them in making their career choices.

- **Educational choices**

Young people want an integrated approach to options, higher education and careers advice, preferably available at the time they are choosing their options in Year 9.

- **Health**

Young people want measures taken to reduce potential stigma from visiting school-based health clinics.

- **Websites**

There should be more promotion of young people's advice websites, including Connexions Direct. NHS Direct could consider promoting their services more directly to young people.

- **Referrals**

If young people are referred to other services for help, the referring professional should check they are receiving the help they need.

- **Preparation for life**

Young people want practical lessons on preparation for life delivered through the Personal Development/Personal Social Health Education lesson slot. These lessons should be meaningful and could be delivered by a range of professionals or other young people.

Case Study:

Someone I Can Trust

Megan is 19 and in her first year of university, studying Product Design. For her, getting to university wasn't a straightforward path and she feels that more consistent information, advice and guidance could have saved her a lot of hassle.

Megan went to a girls' secondary school in London. She enjoyed school and did well in most of her subjects – except English. "I had a difficult relationship with my teacher," she explained, "and didn't get on with her style. There didn't seem to be anyone else I could ask for help. My form tutor just wasn't able to give all of us enough individual time or attention. When I did try to speak to her, she immediately backed up her colleague. Going to a teacher I didn't know just wasn't an option."

Megan feels that whilst A* students at the top of the class, and the real trouble makers at the bottom, get a lot of attention, middle grade students get ignored. "In large classes, it is easier for teachers to deal with smaller groups who need individual attention. The middle of the road students don't get a look in."

As a result Megan didn't do as well in her GCSEs as she thinks she could have done. When it came to A levels she made her choices based on the recommendations given to her by her teachers based on her past performance, but looking back, she regrets some of her choices. "I dropped two of my A-levels because I just wasn't managing the workload," she says. "If I'd known what was really involved I never would have taken them."

Megan was steered towards a university course in Product Design based on the A-levels she was predicted to achieve. However, she says that this is not a career she plans to follow in the future. "I am interested in the practical aspects of design, and this course is very academic."

Megan feels that the guidance she received at school was based on the experience and educational background of her own teachers. As they came from academic backgrounds, they steered her in this direction without offering some of the vocational options.

"The advice I got was not joined up – from options, to A-level choices to careers", she adds. "Each step was considered separately. This made it hard for me to maintain a clear direction."

Megan went to see a Connexions adviser in Year 11, but found the experience no more helpful. "It was someone I didn't know, who didn't take the time to find out any more about me," she explains. "She read out from a piece of paper information that I already knew."

So how does Megan feel IAG should be offered to young people in future? "It's the relationship that's important," she says. "If I feel comfortable with someone I can open up and talk about what I am interested in and really enjoy. I would like someone to take time to get to know me and find out what I am good at. Then make some suggestions about future options. Someone I can trust."



About the National Youth Agency

The National Youth Agency works in partnership with a wide range of public, private and voluntary sector organisations to support and improve services for young people. Our particular focus is on youth work and we believe strongly that by investing in young people's personal and social development, young people are better able to live more active and fulfilling lives.

Working with young people, we advocate for more youth-friendly services and policies. We have four themes:

- Developing quality standards in work with young people
- Supporting services for young people
- Developing the youth workforce
- Promoting positive public perceptions of young people.

We deliver our work through training and consultancy, campaigning, publishing and online communications. Through our activities we want to ensure that young people have a strong voice and positive influence in our society.

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