

# Getting them in:

An investigation of factors affecting progression to Higher Education of 16-19 year olds in full-time education



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# Contents



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## **Acknowledgements**

## **Abstract**

### **1: The context**

### **2: Aims and methods**

2.1: Aims

2.2: Methodology

2.2a: Selection of the schools and colleges

2.2b: Recruitment of the practitioner researchers

2.2c: Selection of students

2.2d: Developing the Research Tools

2.2e: Data collection from student respondents

2.2f: Data collection from staff respondents

2.2g: Supporting practitioners

### **3-7: Results**

### **3: Questionnaire 1: Interest in HE and awareness of HEIs**

3.1: Levels of enthusiasm

3.2: Preferences amongst HEIs

### **4: Questionnaire 2: Advice and guidance**

4.1: Possible sources of advice and guidance

4.2: People as influencers

4.3: Comparing influences of parents and institutional advice and guidance services

4.4: Interviews with careers guidance and Connexions staff

### **5: Questionnaire 3: Students' perceptions of financial factors associated with Higher Education**

5.1: What do students think they will have to pay?

5.2: Student expectations of financial support

5.3: Awareness of scale of student debt

5.4: Among those not intending to enter university, are financial issues a factor?

### **6: Diary Study**

### **7: Fallen by the wayside: Why do students able to enrol choose not to do so?**

### **8: The Researchers**

8.1: Logistics

8.2: Group identity, ownership and the design of materials

8.3: Degrees of success of different techniques

8.4: Practitioner experience and expectations

8.5: Practitioner feedback

8.6: Recommendations for conduct of Practitioner Research Projects

### **9: Discussion**

### **10: Implications for Practice arising from this project**

### **11: Bibliography**

Appendix 1: Questionnaire 1

Appendix 2: Questionnaire 2

Appendix 3: Questionnaire 3

Appendix 4: Papers used in Diary Study

Appendix 5: Interview script for use with careers and guidance staff from schools and colleges

Appendix 6: Interview script for use with Connexions staff

Appendix 7: The Practitioners

Appendix 8: Membership of the steering group

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# “Getting them in”

## Key factors influencing progression from college to university



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### Abstract

This project, which was conducted between January and September 2003, investigated factors affecting choices made by 16 - 19 year olds in full-time education at all stages of their approach to higher education - ie from the question of whether they chose to seek a university place or not through to what factors cause some to change their minds and not progress, even though they have obtained results that meet the entry requirements of their chosen university.

Students from whom data was obtained came from four colleges and schools in and around Manchester. Methodology included questionnaires, interviews and diary studies. At the outset, staff from these institutions were invited to join the project as Practitioner Researchers; they were offered the opportunity to be introduced to the principles and practice of research, converting into action existing interest in research that their professional commitments otherwise left them no time to pursue.

As a result, data for this project was collected by fourteen practitioner researchers from approximately three hundred students in their own schools or colleges.

This research shows that very high levels of interest in higher education exist amongst 16 - 19 year olds in full-time education, though many begin serious investigation of HE options late. A high level of parental involvement and support also comes through. Parents exert greater influence than do professional advisers over HEI choice, and a majority of the significant proportion of students who plan to study at a local higher education institution (HEI) intend to live in the parental home as they do so.

Local HEIs in fact head the list of universities of interest to students. At least in part, this is due to financial considerations, but students' knowledge of the financial implications of HE is pitifully inaccurate and confused, revealing an acute need for clear, comprehensive and authoritative information.

In making decisions about HE, most students regard intervention from careers specialists as less significant than that from their personal tutors, who are in fact used by more students and rated more importantly by them than any other professional source. Degrees of access to one to one advice from careers specialists vary widely between the participating institutions.

Friends - ie contemporaries, rather than those who have already gone ahead to HE - are regarded as more important than any other personal source in finding out about HEIs.

In finding out about HEIs and about courses, students rely most heavily of all on published sources of advice (to which they attach greater importance than any personal interventions) in the form of prospectuses and websites, and upon Open Days.

Despite the complexity of the task of investigating HE and the evident seriousness with which the majority of student respondents took it, findings from a Student Diary Study suggested that they found it challenging to expand on their experiences of and reactions to the process; there was a difficulty in thinking critically and fully evaluating episodes on the basis of which significant decisions would be taken, at least as far as was shown by the diaries they completed as part of this project.

That this could also to some degree be a consequence of the use of practitioner researchers, not perhaps uniformly at ease with encouraging feed-back in such a form, introduces the question of the importance of supporting them effectively throughout their research experience. It was essential not only that practitioner researchers found their experience positive, but also that the group should function as a single unit rather than a collection of four sub-groups from different institutions. Both of these conditions were achieved by methods described in this report, and practitioners were fully involved in all stages from design of materials through to collection of data and thence to its processing and interpretation. There is a need to recognise and take into account their commitments and expertise if they are to be enabled to carry out research effectively.

The implications for practice of the findings are summarised at the end of the report.

## 1: The Context:

The Government's aim that, by 2010, 50% of 18-30 year olds should be benefiting from higher education can only be achieved if a significantly greater number of young people than at present see the value of progressing to HE and are able to do so. The target group of this research - 16 to 19 year olds in full time education - will be crucially important in reaching the 50% figure.

How effectively are these students equipped to make the decisions necessary to place them on the right path into HE, if this is indeed the route they should follow? And during the complicated and protracted process between the onset of awareness of HE as an option and eventual enrolment (or not, as the case may be), how are they affected by their experiences of and encounters with HE along the way?

That the process of choice is complex hardly needs stating. Foskett and Hemsley-Brown<sup>1</sup> state that choice points are not discrete experiences, but part of a complex interaction with the decision-making process that spans not just the post-16 period but indeed the whole prior existence of students.

Ball *et al*<sup>2</sup> discuss the impossibility of separating choice from cultural and social background, suggesting strong links between the status of universities chosen and class and ethnicity. They also suggest that choices made on the basis of career plans may be strongly based on advice from family sources. Anderson<sup>3</sup> and Farr<sup>4</sup>, however, point to the rise of location of the higher education institution as a key factor in choice, Farr noting this in itself to be class-dependent (a less strong influence for those from higher-income households), but decreasingly so.

Farr also reports an increasing realism amongst potential students, who make their choices according to their perceptions of the range of their likely examination results. Though this appears to override socio-economic considerations, those from higher-income backgrounds tend to choose on the basis of the more optimistic end of their predicted grade range.

Hodkinson and Sparkes<sup>5</sup> talk of "pragmatically rational decision making" in student choice, based only on such information as students happen to have been able to access by the time they feel the need to make choices, and relying only on those sources of advice with whom they happen to have been able to talk. Foskett and Hemsley-Brown regard potential students as consumers following the decision-making model that this would dictate; Moogan *et al*<sup>6</sup> take the consumer model through from "pre-purchase" research (Open Days, prospectuses, etc) through to post-purchase evaluation, pointing out that choice is indeed "complicated and risky" and highlighting the consequent importance of investigating why some qualified entrants fail to enrol for the courses on which they have gained places.

That purchasers are subject to the influence of their peers is well known. Riggs and Lewis<sup>7</sup> suggested that the influence of friends already in higher education was a stronger factor in applicant choice than the influence of teachers and parents.

Although it seems self-evident that course content would be the overriding factor in choice (Anderson <sup>3</sup>), the above suggests that the reality is more complex. Parental influence appears to be growing, triggered by the replacement of grants with loans and tuition fees in 1997. Pugsley <sup>8</sup> reports in 1998 that parents of the 1995 cohort of university entrants left choice of HEI to their children, but by 2002, for 1998 entrants, cites (Pugsley and Coffey <sup>9</sup>) a parental wish to be much more pro-active in HEI choice. Anderson too cites them as one of the “most important” sources of advice. That they are often not clear on financial implications and may be bewildered by application forms (Pugsley and Coffey <sup>9</sup>) is therefore disturbing.

Financial factors equate to a potato that has indeed been hot for some time. Pugsley and Coffey detect a reluctance to confront financial realities amongst sixth formers. UCAS <sup>10</sup> reported that financial reasons were being cited for the first time as the most important reason for qualified applicants declining to take up a university place in 1998, and Knowles <sup>12</sup> reported the beginnings of a negative impact on choice from the 1997 change to financial support arrangements referred to above.

Tellingly, Rhodes *et al* <sup>13</sup> underline how perceptions of financial reality can be far more important and negative than reality itself.

The role of guidance in addressing such problems is reported by Foskett and Hemsley-Brown <sup>14</sup>. They point out that a significant careers advice load falls on the shoulders of tutors who are not careers specialists, even though their accuracy and reliability in this context can be questionable.

The vital importance of quality careers guidance to choice and progression is however researched by Sadler <sup>15</sup> and McGrath <sup>16</sup>. Sadler shows that weaknesses in pre-entry guidance lead to applicants choosing the wrong courses and sees remedies in centralising the provision of guidance onto appropriately trained staff. McGrath compares differing guidance models of post-16 institutions with their rates of progression to higher education and concludes that some guidance models lead to significantly higher progression levels than do others.

The tools of guidance are not always optimally sharpened and oiled. Pugsley <sup>8</sup> highlights the tension between the sometimes confusing nature of university prospectuses and their prominence as the first point of contact with HEIs for many students. Moogan <sup>6</sup> bemoans the rarity of “user-friendly” prospectuses and notes increasing reliance by students on “electronic searching”.

Faced with such complexity, it is gratifying and to a degree humbling to find that the students themselves approach the challenge with high expectations (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown <sup>14</sup>) and enthusiasm (McGrath <sup>16</sup>).

Does the system do them justice? This project seeks to understand the experiences of and influences on prospective university students in the hope that such understanding will improve both the quality of assistance that can be offered to them and, ultimately, the levels of progression to higher education by students who go on to successfully complete their courses of study.

## 2: Aims and methods:

### 2.1: Aims

The proposal for this research arose from the commitment of the Education Liaison Department at Manchester Metropolitan University to the quality of pre-entry guidance offered to potential students. Students are likely to “benefit” from the experience of higher education not merely by gaining a place, but further by being able to continue to the end of their chosen course and gain a qualification - in other words, progression must be sustainable.

The implications for the quality of guidance are clear, and bear as much on the nature of the guidance itself as on those who deliver it. The decision to involve as part of the research team some of those who work in this field therefore followed naturally, giving rise to two distinct aims to the overall project:

**1: To investigate key issues, to include guidance, parental influence and financial factors, affecting progression from school/college to higher education and consider the implications for practice.**

**2: To bring participation in practitioner research within the reach of teaching staff, involving them in the planning and development of research tools as well as the conduct of the research itself.**

### 2.2 Methodology

#### 2.2a: Selection of the schools and colleges

Respondents and researchers for the project were to be obtained from four of the colleges and schools local to Manchester Metropolitan University. The institutions chosen covered a wide range of provision for 16 - 19 year olds in the Manchester area - ie further education colleges, sixth form colleges, and school sixth forms; all four institutions already had close links with Manchester Metropolitan University, which was important for four reasons:

- we had some knowledge of the guidance systems and knew that they varied across the institutions
- we felt that the likelihood of obtaining volunteers to work as practitioner researchers was strong
- we were confident of senior management support for the project should it be needed.
- we already knew staff in each institution with a strong interest in promoting progression to HE amongst their students, with in some cases a concern that existing progression levels were insufficiently high

Of the four participating institutions, two were in Excellence Challenge areas, one in an urban setting with a partly rural catchment area, and one was situated in a comfortable suburban area.

#### 2.2b: Recruitment of practitioner researchers

Initial telephone contact was made with a senior member of staff at each institution to gauge potential interest in the project. This was followed up with written detail and the request that the project be promoted to other staff who might be interested, but whose existing commitments would prevent them being able to enter the research field entirely unassisted. The only criteria were that volunteers should indeed be interested in progression to HE and that they worked in a teaching and/or tutorial capacity with 16-19 year old students.

Researchers were offered a token payment of £500 as acknowledgement of the time and effort that would be involved.

Fourteen volunteers came forward to participate in the project.

## **2.2c: Selection of students**

### **To whom do our findings apply?**

We offer our conclusions on behalf of a large sample of 16 to 19 year old students in full time Level 3 education, without making any deductions specific to ethnic background, to socio-economic status, or to vocational as opposed to non-vocational students, as explained below:

Opportunity sampling (ie the use of whichever students practitioners happened to have access to when data was to be collected) was used to produce respondents for each stage of data collection, the only criteria being that those students should be following a programme of study that would qualify them for HE entry and were willing to participate.

In practice, each sample comprised a teaching or tutorial group known to the researcher.

The opportunity sampling meant that sample compositions by ethnic background generally did not correspond to those of the whole year group or institution, except in some cases by coincidence; discrepancies were generally smaller in the case of gender.

Overall sample sizes were large (216, 155 and 214 for Questionnaires 1, 2 and 3 respectively) and it was indeed found that numbers in "ethnic minority groups" taken as a whole were often considerable. Data from questionnaires showed however that the numbers of student respondents from most individual ethnic groups other than white British were very small. Conclusions about ethnic minority issues could therefore only have been drawn by making the self-evidently valueless assumption that members of all non-white British ethnic groups would share the same perspectives.

After lively and carefully-considered discussion, practitioners decided not to seek conclusions on the basis of social or economic classifications. There was a widespread, very strongly-held feeling that seeking information about social background from students they knew personally would be disagreeable and likely to cause negative reactions. The information would not have been available to the researchers in any other way for reasons of data protection.

No significant number of students in any sample were following purely vocational courses, although the groups of some practitioners contained Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) students and others contained a number of students pursuing vocational alongside non-vocational courses.

## **2.2d: Developing the research tools**

All research tools were compiled using an "Aunt Sally" approach: the project leader or project manager would produce an initial questionnaire / interview script to investigate issues previously discussed and agreed with the practitioners, who would then be invited to criticise or amend it as they saw fit in open discussion.

This was done with enormous enthusiasm and brutality: an almost instant key to complete freedom of discussion across the entire group. Initial and final drafts usually bore very little resemblance to one another, and the sense of ownership of materials was high.

## **2.2e: Data collection from student respondents:**

The **Questionnaire** method was used to obtain all of the quantitative and some of the qualitative data, for the following reasons:

- every member of the group of researchers was able to contribute to the design and analysis of each questionnaire



- it allowed standardisation of data collection - important with fourteen different researchers
- it is a relatively straightforward technique for inexperienced researchers

Each questionnaire was administered in a group setting during normal contact time between the practitioner researcher and students. Questionnaires were distributed with a brief verbal explanation, completed at once by students and handed back to the researcher.

Each questionnaire began with a short explanation of the purpose of the research designed to avoid pre-administration discussion between researcher and students. The alternative of standardised verbal instructions to be delivered verbatim was rejected by the practitioners as likely to seem unnatural given the existing relationship between researcher and students. It had been agreed that practitioners could discuss the questionnaires with students once they had all been handed in, but not before.

The **Diary Study** method was used to obtain qualitative data that was longitudinal in nature to show the development of the decision-making process.

The Diary consisted of a series of loose-leaf templates (one for each week), to be completed by students in their own time after any episode connected with their investigation of HE. Students who volunteered to participate received a letter explaining the purpose of the study and how to complete the Diary. Practitioners were to regularly monitor the progress of Diaries kept by their own students.

## **2.2f: Data collection from staff respondents:**

Interviews were seen as the most effective way to assess detailed comparisons between complex approaches to advice and guidance in the participating institutions.

Face to face interviews were carried out by pairs of practitioners with an interviewee from an institution other than their own. One practitioner concentrated on asking the questions while the other took notes, since it was felt that use of tape recorders might inhibit interviewees. The atmosphere was relaxed and three-way discussion frequently took place, leading to considerable expansion of answers.

## **2.2g: Supporting the practitioners**

Qualified teachers and lecturers are in many ways ideally suited for the roles we asked them to assume. Additionally, by virtue of their being volunteers, one would naturally expect a willingness to take on the associated challenges.

It was however felt that it would be wrong to take it for granted that initial levels of interest could be maintained over an extended period, in face of heavy professional commitments, without some extra element of support. The project manager therefore took on the responsibility of maintaining regular telephone or email contact with practitioners between meetings - for example, to ask how things were going, to maintain awareness of his availability should help or advice be required, or even merely to remind everyone that the next meeting was approaching.

The intention was that the sense of involvement with the project would be continuous rather than spasmodic, which proved very important in terms of the group's sense of cohesion. In addition, as the following chapters show, the sheer volume of information collected was immense, presenting the obvious danger that busy people would leave large scale important tasks connected with the research too late. In practice, this did not happen.

The structuring both of individual meetings and the overall programme to best support practitioners is described in chapter 8.

# Results (sections 3-7)

## 3: Questionnaire 1: Interest in HE and awareness of HEIs

Completed in March 2003 with 109 respondents from Y12, 107 from Y13

### 3.1 Levels of enthusiasm

Respondents were asked to indicate on a scale of 1 (least positive) to 6

- How much they wanted to go on to HE
- How confident they were of their ability to obtain a place
- How much their parents wanted them to go on to HE
- How important they felt an HE qualification would be to their career

Year 12, ie first year level 3 students (Y12) were asked to name up to three HEIs in which they were interested. Year 13, ie second year level 3 students (Y13) were asked which HEIs would be their first, second and third choices and to state any career plan they might have for after higher education.

**Table 1: summary of initial attitudes towards Higher Education**

	Desire to enter HE	Confident of getting a place	Parental support	Importance to career
Y 12	88%	82%	93%	94%
Y 13	92%	95%	94%	94%

*(Data refers to the % of respondents choosing 4,5,or 6 on a six point scale where 1 = lowest level, 6 = highest)*

These figures surely represent a ringing declaration of interest in higher education, with desire to enter HE and confidence of so doing well above levels likely to be achieved in practice.

Parental support - at least as estimated by the respondents - is impressive in face of the financial implications of sending children to university; only 2 of the 216 respondents indicated parental opposition to a wish to enter HE.

The perceived relevance of higher education to career development is high, with 94% of both Y12 and Y13 rating it as important. Despite this, only 52% of Y12 and 47% of Y13 stated what their post-university career might be.

## 3.2 Preferences amongst HEIs

Levels of enthusiasm run ahead of awareness and investigation, particularly in Y12, as Table 2 shows

**Table 2: student respondents not naming any HEIs in which they were interested**

	All respondents		HE seekers only	
	% of males	% of females	% of males	% of females
Y12	38	42	34	38
Y13	15	10	13	4

In all, Y12 named 32 HEIs, Y13 named 55, with Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan universities by far the dominant choices, as shown in Table 3. This is consistent with the work of both Anderson<sup>3</sup> and Farr<sup>4</sup> on the increasing role of institutional location in choice.

**Table 3: Frequency with which HEIs were listed as 1st choice**

Position in overall list	Y12		Y13	
	HEI	% of respondents listing HEI as 1st choice	HEI	% of respondents listing HEI as 1st choice
1	Manchester	32	Manchester Metropolitan	18
2	Manchester Metropolitan	21	Manchester	14
3	Leeds	8	Leeds & Salford	9
4	Salford + others	5		

The tail-off below Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan universities is sharp. Of the four local HEIs, UMIST (standing for University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology) is the least cited - named as first choice by 2% of Y12 (position 10=) and by 3% of Y13 (position 6=). Practitioners suggested that this could be due to the absence of obvious geographical identification in its title.

The switch in position of Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan universities between Y12 and Y13 could support Farr's<sup>4</sup> observation of increasing realism amongst students, who make their choices according to their perceptions of the range of their likely examination results. The entry requirements of Manchester Metropolitan University are generally lower than at Manchester University.

The overall message from Questionnaire 1 can be summed up as follows:

- There is great enthusiasm for higher education amongst potential students and their parents
- A large proportion of students are particularly interested in local HEIs
- The extent of investigation and awareness of HE by midway through Y12 does not appear to be great

## 4: Questionnaire 2: Advice and Guidance

**Completed March/April 2003; 155 respondents,  
all Y13 students who had applied for entry to HE**

**4.1** Practitioners discussed and agreed on a list of possible sources of advice and guidance available to the students being surveyed. Respondents were given this list with space to add others, and invited either to indicate that they didn't use them, or to assign them a rating of 1 to 4 according to how important they found them in:

- Finding out about HEIs
- Finding out about courses
- Filling in the UCAS form

**Table 4: Percentage of student respondents claiming to have used each source of information/advice:**

Source	% of respondents using	Source	% of respondents using
Prospectus	96	HE fairs	60
UCAS Directory	87	Other family	55
UCAS website	87	Interviews	54
University websites	86	UCAS big Guide	48
Open Days	85	Visiting speakers	42
Tutor/form tutor	78	Careers tutor	38
Friends in school/college	69	Degree Course Offers	37
Parents	67	Connexions	35
Careers resource base	63	Head of Sixth	31
Subject teacher	61	Learning Mentor	21

For each source, we investigated how important students regarded it as being, irrespective of how frequently they used it, by calculating what percentage of those citing it rated it 3 or 4. The results are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5: perceived importance of the five most used sources of information**

Used by:	Prospectus 96%	UCAS website 87%	UCAS directory 87%	University websites 86%	Open days 85%
Importance for finding out about HEIs	77%	57%	41%	79%	75%
Importance for finding out about courses	77%	56%	48%	70%	78%
Importance for filling in the application form	30%	45%	48%	30%	14%

*(Data refers to the % of respondents choosing 3 or 4 on four point scale where 1 = not very important and 4 = extremely important)*

The prospectus has traditionally been the most popular and most highly rated source of higher education information (McGrath <sup>16</sup>). Tables 4 and 5 show that university websites now appear to challenge the predominance of the prospectus in finding out about HEIs; however the typical student used only 6 to 10 of each, with very few using more than 15. Given that each student can apply to up to six HEIs, this would suggest that prospectuses and websites are being used to check detailed information once decisions about which institutions to investigate have already been made.

The importance attached to Open Days is striking, especially since other questions revealed that most respondents had only attended 2 or 3.

### Other sources of information:

The term Careers Resource Base was chosen to cover the central provision of careers materials in each institution, whether in a dedicated careers room, part of the library, etc. That 63% make use of it (Table 4) is encouraging. Yet in the light of low levels of take-up of other sources of advice and information, one also feels concern that 37% appear not to access it at all. The relatively high importance ratings attached to it by those who use it (HEIs = 51%, courses = 48%, completing UCAS form = 32%) is ammunition for anyone wishing to argue for greater resources, or for any approach that might increase the proportion of students who are directed through its doors.

The UCAS big Guide and Degree Course Offers were originally listed because practitioners felt that they were likely to be important, but low levels both of usage and importance rating indicate that students do not share the view - as accords with Moogan's observation <sup>6</sup> of increasing reliance by students on electronic searching.

## 4.2 People as influencers:

**Table 6: perceived importance of people as sources of information**

	Form tutor	Friends	Parents	Subject tutor	Careers tutor	Connexions
Used by:	78%	69%	67%	61%	38%	35%
Importance for finding out about HEIs	36%	45%	31%	28%	32%	26%
Importance for finding out about courses	32%	33%	30%	33%	34%	29%
Importance for filling in the application form	54%	28%	28%	16%	29%	23%

*(Data refers to the % of respondents choosing 3 or 4 on four point scale where 1 = not very important and 4 = extremely important)*

Comparison of Tables 5 and 6 shows that people are generally rated as less important than published sources of information.

Within schools and colleges, the main burden of advice falls on the tutor/form tutor (Table 4), who is also (Table 6) the highest rated of the professionals consulted.

By a significant margin, the personal advice most highly regarded in finding out about HEIs is from friends; indeed, even for courses, they are rated as (marginally) second only to careers tutors. Those with well-informed friends are presumably fortunate indeed.

The influence of friends already in HEIs was recognised by Riggs and Lewis <sup>7</sup> in 1980; McGrath <sup>16</sup>, in a survey of Y12 pupils in four schools and colleges in the summer of 1993, found that friends - whether in HE or still in school/college - were used by 22% to 29% of the pupils. Our study specifically asked only about "friends in school/college" and yet revealed a 69% usage. It would appear that reliance on friends is increasing.

Careers tutors and Connexions are used by significantly fewer people than the other four sources shown in Table 6; in fact even other family and visiting speakers were used by more students. This is discussed more fully in 4.4.

The terms Learning Mentor and Head of Sixth Form were included in the list of possible sources of advice and guidance at the request of some of the practitioner researchers in whose institutions the roles existed; since students in other institutions were not familiar with these terms, it is unsurprising that they come so low in the list for overall popularity. The Head of Sixth shared frequency of use and importance rating with the form tutor - ie ahead of all other personal professional sources - in the institution to which the term applied; the term Learning Mentor appeared to be recognised by an insignificant number of respondents.

### 4.3 Comparing influences of parents and institutional advice & guidance services

Students were asked to rate the extent to which their parents and the advice & guidance services (A & G Services) in their school/college had been involved in their decisions on universities and courses, as well as completing the UCAS form, on a 6-point scale:

**Table 7: extent of involvement of parents and institutional guidance services in making decisions on university applications**

Institution		Deciding which HEIs	Deciding which subject(s)	Helping complete UCAS form
1	Parents	30%	13%	13%
	A & G Services	22%	14%	44%
2	Parents	7%	0%	0%
	A & G Services	0%	0%	20%
3	Parents	34%	9%	10%
	A & G Services	8%	9%	48%
4	Parents	27%	18%	15%
	A & G Services	19%	17%	51%

*(Data refers to the % of respondents choosing 5 or 6 on a six point scale where 1 = not involved at all and 6 = very involved)*

Parents clearly play a more influential role in choice of HEI than do guidance systems of the schools and colleges, confirming Pugsley and Coffey's observation<sup>9</sup> that parental influence over choice of HEIs has increased considerably since 1995. Schools/colleges and HEIs might usefully reflect on whether they can help parents exercise that influence more effectively.

The findings of Ball *et al*<sup>2</sup> that career-motivated choice is strongly linked with gaining information from family sources might lead one to expect that parents would be more involved than advice and guidance services in choice of subject. As Table 7 however shows, amongst our respondents the influences of parents and advice and guidance services are closely comparable in choice of subject (and both are weaker than in the context of choice of HEI). Perhaps this is partly explained by a low level of career awareness - only 47% of Y13 responding to Questionnaire 1 were able to indicate a career intention.

Institutional expertise is clearly more relied upon than parental guidance in completing the UCAS form.

## 4.4 Interviews with careers guidance & Connexions staff

Discussion of the findings from Questionnaire 2 amongst the practitioners had produced a number of questions to which it was hoped that these interviews would provide answers, namely:

- why are the percentage use and importance ratings for specialist careers staff so low compared to form tutors?
- Why is the perceived involvement of the schools/colleges' advice and guidance system in students' decision-making often so low (Table 7)?
- Why is Connexions the least used and appreciated agency of all?

**Table 8: Summary of interview data (PiC = person in charge in each case)**

		Institution 1	Institution 2	Institution 3	Institution 4
1	Structure of guidance team	PiC centralises programme structure /materials;delivered by 50 tutors	PiC organises programme;delivered by 5/6 tutors for each of Y12 and Y13	PiC has two deputies and 15 tutors,each having more than one group	PiC and 66 tutors, 6 of whom are senior (oversee 10 groups each)
2	Support for tutors	Weekly news sheet; annual programme provided, with extensive printed materials	Half-termly briefings for tutors from PiC;	Weekly news sheet; annual programme provided, with tutor manual;tutors meet with PiC every 2/3 weeks.	Weekly news sheet; annual programme and materials provided;periodic meetings with PiC
3	How is programme delivered?	HE work starts in term 3;all work done in tutor groups	Weekly programme of HE topics for whole year group;tutors/ subject staff manage applications;students pursue own research via guided targets	All work done within tutor groups except 1 week concentrates on HE in term 3	Fortnightly whole year group sessions in Y12;research and applications covered within tutor groups
4	Arrangements for 1 to 1 tutor contact	4 times pa	Tutors have time every day (between 5 & 20 mins)	monthly	Once per half term
5	PiC involvement in direct delivery to students	None;administers programme via tutors	Sessions in central programme	Presenting HE week	Delivery in year group sessions;some interviewing
6	Arrangements for 1 to 1 contact with careers staff/ Connexions	PiC and Connexions staff confer and select those to be seen; students can self-refer	PiC and Connexions staff confer over questionnaire returns to prioritise	Every student must see institution careers specialist or Connexions PA at least once	PiC and Connexions staff confer;also self-referral
	% students seen	10%	100%	100%	10%
7	Do students know predicted grades?	Yes	Yes	Yes for those who ask	No
8	Do students see their UCAS form References?	If they ask; they rarely do	If they ask; they don't	Most tutors show references to students	No

#### **4.4a Perceived importance of form tutors and specialist careers staff in helping with decisions about HE:**

Table 6 showed the form tutor to be the professional rated most important in choice of HEI and completion of UCAS form. Only in respect of subject choice was a comparable rating given to careers specialists.

Table 8 offers an explanation. It shows that because of the way in which advice and guidance systems are organised, the burden of delivery falls very heavily on the form or personal tutor. In effect, the typical student rarely or (depending on the institution) never goes beyond the form tutor in drawing up his or her HE plans. They have little personal experience of careers specialists on the basis of which they could assess them. The lower importance ascribed by students to careers specialists is therefore no surprise. This would seem to be consistent with the “pragmatically rational decision-making” described by Hodkinson and Sparkes<sup>5</sup>.

Whether the form or personal tutor has the necessary training or time to properly fulfil the obligations that come with their pre-eminence is an important matter. Foskett and Hemsley-Brown<sup>14</sup> indicate that the accuracy and reliability of tutors is not always complete. Sadler<sup>15</sup> underlines the need for high-quality careers guidance and advocates its centralisation onto purpose-trained staff.

#### **4.4b Student perception of involvement of advice & guidance services:**

Two institutions (2 and 3) organise contact with careers specialist(s) for 100% of their students, yet their advice & guidance systems are lowest rated in degree of involvement in making decisions about HEIs and courses (Table 7). Indeed, Institution 2, with its spectacular 0% involvement ratings, has the most interventionist tutor contact programme of all, backed by one of the most regular year group delivery programmes; it is also the one institution to specifically mention encouragement of students towards independent research.

It therefore appears that:

- the more intimately embedded careers guidance is into the programme, the less students see it as having any special significance
- where independent investigation is specifically encouraged, the students see the role of others as less significant than their own - not so much biting the hand that feeds, but rather forgetting its existence.

Should one be pleased or concerned? Accepting advice and guidance as an unremarkable essential has obvious attractions, whereas taking it for granted might be much less beneficial; equally, that students should see decisions as their own is clearly desirable as long as the quality of the guidance means a) that this is true and b) that the decisions are good ones.

It is a tantalising field for further investigation.

#### **4.4c What lies behind the low importance ascribed to Connexions?**

Since September 2002, Connexions personal advisers have had an embedded presence in each participating institution and are therefore potentially a much more familiar feature of school/college life for the students than used to be the case.

*How do Connexions staff see their role?*

Quotes such as “Expand into personal/counselling territory...” and “target the disaffected...” or “...people with pastoral issues...” indicate a broader brief than HE guidance

*How do they liaise with tutors?*

All described liaison practice, but in three of the four institutions arrangements for the transfer of information from tutors to Connexions staff were stronger than those from Connexions staff to tutors.

*What involvement have they in the Careers Programme?*

Connexions staff contribute to the Careers Programme in three of the institutions, but have a significant planning role in only one institution.



*How are contacts initiated with students?*

"...referral from tutors or retention officers in feeder schools..."; "tutors indicate students who arrive with problems... eg statements from Year 11, or learning difficulties"; "we see very few people about HE: a pity, since depending on the sort of institution, it can be difficult for students to find HE advice..."

*Is there the expertise and will to offer HE advice?*

"One has to remain authoritative on the whole HE spectrum while dealing with other, higher priorities..." Particularly (not exclusively) from staff who had advised when Connexions' predecessor (the Careers Service) had concentrated more on HE, there was regret that more could not be done given the competing demands.

*What pressures did Connexions staff mention?*

Increasing difficulty in accessing students in lesson time at one institution was ascribed to pressures of AS exams at the end of Y12; more demands now for work with Years 9 to 11.

*How do school and college staff view the role of Connexions?*

We found that acceptance of the Connexions role was not absolute; in one institution a senior member of staff went out of their way to insist that "Careers Advice is *all* that is required of Connexions" (speaker's emphasis) - a different picture to that painted by the Connexions Personal Adviser of that institution.

One of the practitioners asked "Are Connexions staff rivals or colleagues?"; and subsequent discussion suggested the perception to be something of each ("Our perception of them is mediated by what students say..."). Practitioners who were also tutors saw liaison as much less effective than did Connexions staff.

Practitioners were enthusiastic about developments such as Connexions personal advisers specialising in Mental Health, Community Awareness, and Drugs Awareness. There was ambiguity towards the HE role, with some feeling it was insufficient, and others feeling it duplicated staff expertise.

#### **Overview:**

Not all parties agree precisely what they would like the role of Connexions to be. Its low perceived importance rating amongst students is however clearly explained - Connexions priorities laid down by Government lie with students with problems, not with HE seekers *per se*, except where they go out of their way to request HE guidance: in other words, most HE seekers will have little to do with Connexions in its latest role.

There is potential contradiction within that role: whilst the greater embedding of Connexions into daily school/college life increases its profile within the institution, it could also compromise students' views of its independence: practitioners from one institution pointed to greater student reliance on the services of a bought-in agency, viewed as outsiders, than on Connexions.

There is obvious scope for liaison to be more evenly two-way.

Clearly, Connexions staff simply have other things to do than provide help to all HE seekers, even though they often feel they have the expertise and the will to offer such help. The competing priorities are of undeniable merit. All that being said, Connexions is clearly and through no fault of its own delivering less help to young people investigating higher education than could be the case.

**4.4d** One further point, not anticipated in the preliminary questions, emerged from Table 8: some entries occasioned surprise amongst practitioners working in the institutions from which they came, suggesting a difference of perceptions between managers/specialists on the one hand and deliverers of advice and guidance systems on the other over how those systems actually operate.

# 5: Questionnaire 3: Students' perceptions of financial factors associated with Higher Education

Completed in April/May 2003 by 131 Y12 and 83 Y13 students

## 5.1 What do students think they will have to pay?

Students were asked "Assuming that you go to university in 2003 or 2004, which of the following costs do you think you will have to pay?" and asked to tick the amount per year they thought appropriate for each.

**Table 9: Students' estimates of costs in HE: Y12 (Y13)**

	Won't have to pay	Up to £500	£500-£1K	£1K-£2K	£2K-£3K	Over £3K	Don't know
Tuition fees	4 (18)	2 (2)	12 (20)	27 (27)	5 (4)	9 (0)	41 (29)
Top-up fees	9 (30)	6 (5)	12 (7)	6 (1)	3 (1)	3 (0)	61 (56)
Accommodation costs	17 (38)	4 (3)	12 (9)	15 (13)	10 (19)	6 (1)	35 (19)
Living costs	13 (26)	6 (15)	13 (14)	22 (13)	3 (9)	5 (3)	38 (21)

*(% of all students, intending applicants or not, ticking each box; Y12 figures first, Y13 in brackets)*

Reassuringly, Y13 students are better informed than Y12; nonetheless, the percentage responding "don't know" in each category is alarming. Whilst accommodation and living costs might be genuinely unknown to students not yet knowing where they will study, responses on tuition and top-up fees suggest that they simply do not have the relevant information.

**Tuition fees:** comparison of individual students' responses with estimates of family income sought elsewhere on Questionnaire 3 showed that those expecting to pay no tuition fees were almost always correct. Amongst those expecting to pay fees, however, around 50% made unrealistic estimates, with as many estimating low as high. Everyone estimating £2000 or more is of course entirely wrong. (Maximum tuition fee payable for 2003 - 2004 is £1125.)

**Top-up fees:** only 9% of Y12 and 30% of Y13 knew that they would not have to pay these. With a total of 30% (Y12) and 14% (Y13) expecting to pay, this left the majority responding "don't know". Clearly the message on top-up fees is causing great confusion.

**Cost of accommodation and cost of living:** a realistic estimate of the cost of each of these is £2000 - £3000 pa plus. Table 9 shows that most students either underestimated these sums or didn't know. Amongst the 17% of Y12 and 38% of Y13 who think there will be no cost, however, the overwhelming majority say that they plan to live with their parents. This also applied to the 13% of Y12 and 26% of Y13 who thought there would be no living costs. Zero cost could therefore be a valid answer, though whether parents are aware of their children's expectations seems at least questionable. In default of research on the parents themselves, it seems likely that a proportion of those estimating zero costs will be doing so unrealistically. When responses from those students who do not plan to study near home are separated out, only 26% estimate accommodation costs at £2000 or more and 7% estimate living costs at that level, again showing a lack of realism about the costs of living independently that accords with the findings of Pugsley and Coffey<sup>9</sup>.

## 5.2 Student expectations of financial support

**Table 10: Student expectations of sources of financial support:**

Source	Y12			Y13		
	Yes	No	Don't know	Yes	No	Don't know
Parents	79	12	9	78	12	10
Student loan	78	8	14	87	3	10
Sponsorship	3	62	34	4	78	18
Grant	30	33	37	41	41	18
Personal savings	66	20	14	75	18	7
Wages from a job	76	13	11	88	7	4
Bank overdraft	30	50	20	49	42	8

*(% of all students, applicants or not, expecting to make use of each source of finance. Only 6 out of 111 respondents came up with other sources)*

Awareness of the Student Loan is reassuringly high; however, percentages expecting a Grant of some sort are worryingly high.

High levels of realism over the need to support oneself (via savings or working whilst a student) are offset by unrealistically low percentages expecting to use an overdraft.

## 5.3 Awareness of the scale of student debt

Students were asked to indicate the amount they thought they would owe after a 3 year university course

**Table 11: Student respondents' estimate of 3 yr student debt**

Debt level expected (£)	Y12	Y13	Debt level expected (£)	Y12	Y13
0	2	3	from 15,000 up to £20,000	12	14
Up to £1000	2	0	from £20,000 up to £30,000	2	0
£1000 - £5000	12	19	Over £30,000	1	1
from £5000 up to £10,000	20	24	Don't know	31	18
from £10,000 up to £15,000	17	22			

*(% of all students, applicants or not, ticking each option)*

Taking a realistic estimate for someone making full use of the student loan as £10,000 - £15,000\*, only 17% of Y12 and 22% of Y13 select it. 36% of Y12 and 46% of Y13 expect to borrow considerably less than this. This might be explained by the high number of students planning to study near home (46% of Y12, 65% of Y13), as further suggested by the fact that 58% of this group cited cost as the main reason for their decision to do so. However, it would be wrong to assume that all "local" students expect to cut costs by living with their parents: 17% of those planning to study near home said they intend to live independently.

(\* for 2003 - 2004, maximum annual loan for a student living away from home is £4,000; for students living at home, it's £3,165 - which means an estimate of £10,000 - £15,000 over 3 years for students starting a course in 2004 and making full use of the loan would be correct)

## Overview:

Student views of all aspects of financial arrangements for Higher Education are clearly sadly encumbered with misunderstandings partial or complete. That student support arrangements have an adverse impact on decision-making amongst potential HE applicants is well-established (UCAS<sup>10,11</sup>, Knowles<sup>12</sup>). It is no comfort that those students whose image of the system is unduly pessimistic may eventually become more enlightened as their research develops, for Rhodes *et al*<sup>13</sup> point out that perceptions of financial reality are more influential than the reality itself; the damage may already have been done.

## 5.4 Amongst those not intending to enter university, are financial issues a factor?

The great majority of students in this study expressed a strong desire to enter HE. The reasons offered by those *not* intending to go on to HE were examined.

Respondents were asked to indicate how much they wanted to go on to higher education (1 = not at all ..... 6 = very much). Those indicating little interest (ie choosing 1, 2 or 3) were invited to rate suggested reasons (or reasons added by themselves).

Table 12 shows the weight given to different reasons for not progressing.

**Table 12: Reasons cited by Y12 respondents for not going on to HE**

Possible reasons	Number of points attributed under important or very important
Rather get a job	44
Financial factors	39
Had enough of studying	37
Family doesn't want me to go	0
Won't like being at university	13
Other	

*(Data refers to those respondents choosing 3 or 4 on a 4-point scale where 1 = not important at all and 4 = very important. Figures quoted are total number of points attributed to 3 and 4.)*

Total number of respondents = 18; only one cited other reasons

No single influence appears to have a monopoly on dissuading students from seeking a university place; there are instead three main factors, one of which is financial. This is quoted as the factor of greatest or equal greatest importance by 8 of the 18. The findings of UCAS<sup>10,11</sup> and Knowles<sup>12</sup> on the influence of financial considerations are supported.

Without exception, the 8 either failed to offer an estimate of the level of debt they would incur, or underestimated it as £5,000 - £10,000.

Amongst the 18, estimates of student debt over three years were as follows:

**too low: 6      too high: 1      don't know: 6      didn't answer: 3      correct: 2**

The 9 students in Y12 who failed to estimate student debt or claimed not to know what it would be are presumably potentially open to changing their view if better informed, but 8 have decided against on the strength of a debt estimate lower than the real thing, so would be unlikely to be influenced positively by having more accurate information.

The much smaller Y13 sample (only six respondents) took a more world weary line, putting "had enough of studying" well out in front in terms of importance. Finance was granted equal importance by three of the six, two of whom were deterred even though their estimate of student debt was low.

## 6: Diary Study

**Carried out between March and September 2003 by 40 volunteer students in year 12.**

Students completed a weekly diary sheet recording any contact with HEIs and how this contributed to their decision making. Key points derived from analysis of the diaries were:

- **Open Days:** The influence of Open Days has been shown elsewhere (4.1) to be remarkably strong. Open Days providing no student contact are however strongly criticised, as is any apparent disorganisation and lack of preparedness in presentations; poor presentation can be enough to put off some respondents who had previously regarded the course concerned with interest. On the other hand, friendliness and explanations in accessible language attract highly favourable comment.
- **Communications:** Slow responses to requests for prospectuses or course details, or responses that don't exactly correspond to whatever was requested are deprecated fiercely. Quick responses are esteemed to a degree that can overcome reservations about their content.
- **Liaison events:** Perceived imperfections in speakers are picked up with sniffy precision, but events seen as "useful" or "relevant" engender a strong positive reaction.

Overall, data collected by the diary method was disappointing. Many respondents showed little capacity for critical reflection on what they encountered or how they were dealt with during the process of researching HE.

It is true that the months covered by the diary represent a relatively quiet time for HE-related episodes. Interviews have not begun, and many students have not even begun acquiring prospectuses. That being said, many of the students experienced conventions, Open Days and liaison visits from HE staff, during the diaries' lifespan, but a disappointingly small proportion of diarists referred to them.

With hindsight, the challenges that conducting a Diary Study would pose to researchers were underestimated (see later, 8.3) and this in itself may have contributed to the disappointing results. Researchers reported a significant degree of reluctance amongst students to volunteer; it was felt that pressure of course work and the approaching AS exams were to some degree responsible.

## 7: Fallen by the wayside: why do students able to enrol choose not to do so?

Why do students drop out of the UCAS system of their own volition rather than as a result of rejection? Moogan *et al* <sup>6</sup> suggest that the sheer complicatedness of the process, perhaps now exacerbated by the arrival on the scene of tuition fees, may play a part; the UCAS Statistical Survey 1999 Report <sup>10</sup> analysed reasons obtained from applicants for 1998 entry who chose not to take up their places and found financial reasons to be the major factor.

In discussion of this issue, practitioners contrasted anecdotal evidence of the problem with what they saw as its apparent absence from their institutions. In the light of the question's relevance to the project, it was therefore decided to investigate those applicants to Manchester Metropolitan University from the four participating institutions who decided not to take up places offered. Practitioners felt that the crucial time for such decisions was between the issue of level 3 examination results and enrolment, so the work necessarily fell outside the timescale over which their own participation had been agreed.

Members of Manchester Metropolitan University's trained Student Adviser Team therefore undertook telephone interviews after training in the use of prepared scripts. Between 21 August and 2 September, applicants who had made Firm Acceptances and met the terms of their offers were telephoned and asked whether they still intended to take up their places; the results are given in Table 13 below:

**Table 13: Number of applicants\* withdrawing from UCAS procedures despite holding offers:**

Stated reason	Holders of offers deciding before results to withdraw	Holders of places deciding after receiving results to withdraw	Total response
financial	5	1	6
Returned to improve grades rather than accept Foundation place	Not applicable	1	1
Had enough of studying	2	1	3
Taking relevant work experience	1	1	2
Course offered at associated college	0	3	2
Decided grades would be insufficient	2	Not applicable	2
Changed HEI**	0	3	3
Personal/family	1	0	1
Total	11	10	21

(\*total sample size = 141; \*\* supposedly impossible if one fails to take up a confirmed Firm Acceptance, but apparently widely practised)

Of the ten applicants pulling out of UCAS arrangements after issue of results, only four have given up plans to progress to university; the other six are continuing towards an HE qualification. Of those choosing to withdraw before results are issued, none is planning to continue into HE; financial factors are the most frequently cited reason for this decision.

Direct comparison with the UCAS statistical survey data is not valid, since UCAS did not restrict its survey to 16 - 19 year olds in full time education.

# 8: The Researchers

What was successful or unsuccessful in approaching the concepts of research as well as research techniques? What was the "researcher experience"? To what extent did we succeed in "getting them in"?

## 8.1: Logistics

The first meeting of the group was used not only to agree the aims and methods of the research but also to discuss the practicalities of carrying it out. It was agreed that the group would meet every three to four weeks, always on the same evening at 4.30pm starting with a buffet, and finishing at 7.00pm.

It was also established what they would be expected to do between seminars to meet the research targets, which gave them a clear view of what their commitments would be over the following six months.

Researchers completed a questionnaire to assess existing experience of research and expectations of participation in the project. Each session took seminar form; new techniques were introduced and discussed, findings obtained since the previous seminar reviewed, and targets set for later seminars.

## 8.2 Group identity, ownership and the design of materials

The project manager's role in maintaining regular contact with researchers has already been described (2.2g). It was also his role to produce the "Aunt Sallies" to fuel the development of all research tools, which in itself made a significant contribution to the establishment of a sense of group identity and ownership of the project as described in 2.2d.

Data resulting from each questionnaire was collated at the next seminar and initial analysis carried out. When this was done for the first time, ie following Questionnaire 1, practitioners were able to see at once which questions students had been able to answer clearly, which not, the difference between responses produced by open and closed questions, and the importance of precise wording of questions.

Group discussion highlighted issues from which later questionnaires benefited; questions were better targeted and worded and data quality consequently improved.

## 8.3 Degrees of success of different techniques

- The **compilation of questionnaires and interview scripts** using the Aunt Sally approach was a resounding success both in its own right and in helping the group to gel.
- **Collation and initial analysis** of all fourteen sets of data using standard response sheets took place in the seminars, successfully giving each practitioner immediate feedback on how their own students had responded and how this compared with the group data.
- By virtue of their professional training and experience, **practitioners felt comfortable about interviews with careers and guidance staff**, and they enjoyed the process. We should however have role-played the interviews first among practitioners to standardise recording conventions and ensure all practitioners were equally informed of issues behind the questions: those with personal tutorial responsibility found it easier to see when to accept a "yes" or "no" answer, and when to probe further.
- **Diary Studies** Difficulties are discussed above (6). This technique needs practitioners to bring diaries in progress to each successive seminar meeting for support in maintaining the sort of scrutiny that will encourage critical as well as sustained records.
- Practitioners proved adept at **analytical discussion of collated data**. Teachers' professional skills led them automatically to a full role in interpreting our observations.

## 8.4 Practitioner experience and expectations

These were assessed by a questionnaire completed by researchers at the first meeting.

Only two of the practitioners had any significant experience of educational research, in neither case recent. Two did have experience of analysing data, but not in a research context. Practitioners differed considerably however in their knowledge of underpinning skills (eg calculation of averages, percentages etc), depending on their subject background.

The main (and almost universal) expectations were that participation in the project would improve practitioners' own understanding of the HE applications process in its broadest sense, and in its turn their confidence in both advising their students and understanding what they were going through; also that the practitioners' institutions would benefit from the improvements this would presumably bring to the quality of progression.

Several practitioners anticipated that sharing of ideas and practice with staff from different institutions would be both interesting and helpful.

Exactly 50% of the respondents mentioned learning (more) about research as one of their main wishes.

## 8.5 Practitioner feedback

This was again obtained by questionnaire, issued in May - ie approximately one month before the scheduled end of practitioner participation. The questionnaire (returned by 10 practitioners) revealed the following (*quotes from returns given in italics*):

- 9 felt the aim of expanding knowledge and experience of research was being met: *"I've gained a better idea of how to set questions and to interpret data, and follow up initial research..."*
- most useful &/or enjoyable aspects of participating: interaction with staff from other institutions (7); design of questionnaires (3); seeing conclusions emerge from data (5); increased appreciation of students' position (2); increased interest by students (2): *"It has given me a focal point (apart from my subject) for discussions and advice/guidance..."* *"I have learnt more about students' perceptions than I might have discovered in a typical classroom setting..."*; *"It has encouraged me to be more proactive in form (tutor) time..."*; *"I'm probably more sensitised to HE prep generally this year and as a result the students are giving it a higher priority..."* *"They (ie the students) are also interested in feedback from the questionnaires..."*
- least useful or enjoyable: nothing in the former category; in the latter, 3 mentions of collecting data, and 1 of the time commitment
- effects on practitioners' work with students: positive effects specified by 8, including: improved understanding of student needs (3); improved quality of relationships with students (1); increased tutor skills (3); prompting of student discussions which wouldn't otherwise have occurred (2); students' interest increasing as a result of practitioners' own new angles on HE (2)
- things practitioners would have liked project to have delivered that hadn't been: more information, more quickly (1); more extensive statistical manipulation of data (2); none (7)
- suggested improvements: longer timescale (2); more institutions involved (7)
- practitioners were asked whether participating in this project made them more or less likely to seek further involvement in research in future: yes (9); no (0); not sure (1): *"...it is making me more likely to get involved in research in the future and already I am thinking of subject material."*



Discussion in September, ie after the close of the practitioner participation phase:

- enthusiastic appreciation was expressed of the opportunity to discover the skills involved in research: *"It's been enormously refreshing to encounter the new skills involved in research that aren't necessarily encountered in a busy teaching career."*
- practitioners had a strong wish to follow those Y12 students they had worked with into and through Y13
- did the £500 payment matter. . . ? The unanimous response was that with hindsight, it would not have mattered - the experience of participation had been so positive; however, at the time at which the chance to take part *was* offered, it was important - the factor that made the difference to wondering whether or not to light the blue touch paper
- . . . and the buffet before every seminar. . . ? This was held to have been immensely beneficial. It promoted interaction between practitioners from different institutions; it also presented an opportunity to disengage from the residue of the day's work and the harassing journey through rush-hour Manchester, enabling practitioners to refocus ready for the research.

The practitioners had attended nine seminar meetings in total during the course of the project, representing an aggregate commitment of more than 290 hours (at no meeting did attendance fall below 11) entirely apart from the time they put into working with their students in the collection of data and collating it when required.

The group functioned smoothly as a single unit rather than as four sub-groups. As explained before, this was the case from a very early stage, helped by our old friend Aunt Sally, but by the evening on which the group as a whole acted as hosts for the careers and guidance staff they were to interview, the process was complete.

As the quotes above make clear, there was - in addition to the greater awareness of the process of research - a sense of a broader benefit derived by the practitioners, best summed up by one who said: *"Taking part in this project has enhanced my professional experience."*

Did we therefore succeed in *"getting them in"*? Nine out of ten respondents feel more likely than before to pursue research in future as a result of participation in this project. Thirteen of the fourteen practitioners stayed with the project from the start right through to the finish.

We feel that we did.

## 8.6 Recommendations for conduct of Practitioner Research Projects

- a:** Work demands must be recognised in recruiting practitioners. Attention to civilised comforts (buffet preceding each seminar) promotes group identity and retention.
- b:** Provision of documents as stimuli for group adaptation (*aka* the Aunt Sally Approach) enables the whole range of practitioner expertise to be harnessed and promotes both group cohesion and sense of ownership of the project.
- c:** Regular contact with researchers by telephone and email between seminars is necessary to maintain engagement and provide support when required.
- d:** Techniques which provide immediate results (questionnaires, interviews) are easier for inexperienced researchers than those which require development over considerable periods of time (diary studies).
- e:** For more extended activities such as the keeping of diaries, it could be worth offering students some sort of reward (eg vouchers) to recognise and encourage the commitment.
- f:** Teaching/lecturing staff have ample *wit* to understand any of the issues surrounding research, but may not ordinarily have *time* to come to do so; full explanation is therefore helpful rather than demeaning.

## 9 Discussion

Probably the single most important finding reported in this work is the huge level of interest in and enthusiasm for higher education found amongst the students surveyed. Many of them begin a serious approach to HE late in their Y12 and there is clearly scope for - as well as a probably receptive attitude towards - bringing consideration of HE earlier into that year.

This would give a more positive impact to the influence of friends still at school/college (identified earlier in 4.2): if students' general level of knowledge about HE is higher, the risk that some will suffer from the well-intentioned but ill-informed influence of others is reduced.

As practitioners however pointed out, the strong influence of friends on choices need not necessarily be a cause of apprehension. It may be that students who choose their HEI in order to be with friends, thus benefiting from a social support network, will be better able to sustain their progression to university than will those who start HE more socially isolated.

Guidance systems in each of the participating institutions are clearly well established. One feature that they conspicuously share is the leading role played by the form or personal tutor in the provision of advice and guidance. They are consulted by more students than any other personal source of advice - even more than friends, although the importance of friends as sources of information about HEIs is rated more highly - and the importance assigned to form or personal tutors is greater than for any other professional agent.

They are of course the easiest to contact of the professional sources of advice. Even in those participating institutions that insist on each student having 1 to 1 contact with a specialist careers adviser (be they from Connexions or the institution's own staff), the contact is necessarily far less intimate than can be achieved with the personal tutor.

To judge by the comments of those practitioners who are themselves tutors, there is a wide range of views about whether or not tutors receive sufficient support, training and time to discharge their advisory responsibilities. The most effective way to use careers specialists would therefore seem to merit close attention in order to assess the degree to which their activities should be split between themselves providing guidance to students, or instead increasing whatever support they are able to give direct to the tutors. Especially with the latter option, there would be major resource implications in terms of tutor time in some institutions, to be weighed up against the benefits of maximising the potential effectiveness of these key deliverers of advice.

A theme running through all the findings about people from whom advice, guidance, or simply information is taken, is that the more accessible the source, the greater its perceived importance - thus the more specialised the adviser, the less important their effect is perceived to be. To some of those who recall the effectiveness with which Connexions' predecessor, the Careers Service, was able to advise comprehensively on HE when it had the brief to do so, it is a matter of regret that such a powerful resource cannot be so deployed any more. That the benefits due to its divergence across other priorities have to be weighed against this is obvious. Nonetheless, purely within the context of this report it is clear that the specialist knowledge and skills of Connexions personal advisers could play a more beneficial role. Increased Connexions input to students considering progression to HE could counter the misinformation in some areas (particularly financial) in which potential university students seem so confused or ill-informed.

It needs to be said that the right advice is available in all four of the participating institutions, but significant numbers of students don't seem to be accessing it.

Our work has also revealed that people in different parts of the guidance system have different perceptions of the roles of Connexions staff, pointing up the desirability of the greatest possible liaison and familiarity with roles between school/college and Connexions staff.

The strength of parental influence is explicable partly in terms of the argument above - they are easily accessible to most students. We also however see an extra dimension of reliance on them by those students planning to study from home. The introduction of tuition fees has cemented expectations that parents will play a financial role and they may want some degree of influence in return for their commitment.

It can surely never have been more important that parents be well aware not only of the financial parameters involved in their children studying at university, but also of all the wider issues (eg choice of institution and course) that need to be correctly handled if young people are to achieve sustainable progression into higher education, leading to a successful outcome/qualification.

We have uncovered a parallel need amongst students for more and better information about student financial support and its consequences. Our findings showed that financial considerations were a major factor in the thinking of those who choose not to seek a university place, as well as the main reason cited by those few who withdraw from UCAS altogether after having received offers. In the former category, although there are some for whom one might hope that greater knowledge might change intention, nearly half had decided that student debt was too high even though their own estimate of it was low.

In the context of the methodology used (Diary Study) we have found little evidence that students are critically evaluating their experiences as they encounter HE. That is not to say they are unable to be critical, as some of their observations concerning inadequacies in Open Day provision and perceived unpreparedness in speakers make clear. Evaluative ability is however important to encourage, for we have cited previous research making clear

- a) that young people are prepared to make (pragmatic) decisions on the basis of information they know to be incomplete and
- b) that perceptions matter more than reality.

Self-evidently, the better formed the perception, the less potentially worrying this might be.

There is much to be noted here by HEIs, whose performance in terms of Open Days, liaison activities, and quality/accessibility of information in both prospectuses and websites is subject to stringent if not always considered judgment by potential students.

This all points to the potential value of making HE guidance something that permeates as much as possible of the Y12 as well as the Y13 curriculum in order to provide enough time for the evaluative skills to be encouraged - not easy when the existing demands of that curriculum are already so high.

To sum up: schools and colleges are striving hard to provide advice and guidance on progression into higher education, into which they are expected to encourage more of their students to progress. These students can however only "benefit" from higher education as policy requires if they continue beyond simple progression to a successful conclusion.

If our society identifies the production of graduates as an investment for its own future, then it is clearly vital that the process helping young people make the choices starting them on the road to graduation is as effective as possible.

The implications for practice arising from our research are given overleaf.

# 10 Implications for Practice arising from this Project

No.	Applicable to:		See Report Sections:
1	Schools/colleges	In order to harness the very high levels of interest in HE, consideration of it could start earlier within, and spread throughout Y12.  Frequency and scale of HE advice need however to be balanced: extremes of either intensive or constantly drip-fed advice can reduce recognition of their importance	3.1  4.4b
2	Schools/colleges	Form / personal tutors carry the main burden of careers advice/guidance. Maximising training, support and proper time for them in this role has clear benefits	4.4a
3	Schools/colleges	Careers specialist staff are a valuable resource for provision of training and support for 2 above	4.4a
4	Schools/colleges	Reviewing advice/guidance programmes to increase students' capacities to critically evaluate episodes in their exploration of higher education may increase the chance of sustainable progression	6
5	Schools/colleges	Periodic review of operation of institutional guidance system by managers and tutors jointly could be useful to eliminate discrepant perceptions	4.4d
6	Schools/colleges	The Careers Resource Base is rated highly by those who use it; building its use into every student's preparation for HE is likely to be beneficial	4.1
7	Schools/colleges	Provision of HE advice to parents could be reviewed so as to a) maximise quality of their influence over HEI choice; b) reduce possible misapprehensions about financial issues	4.3 5.1
8	Schools/colleges	An increase in guidance to students on all aspects of student financial support would improve accuracy of current perceptions	5.1 to 5.4
9	Schools/colleges	Reviewing liaison between tutors and Connexions personal advisers (especially in terms of feedback to tutors), and involvement of Connexions where possible in compiling careers programme could enable Connexions to offer a service better integrated with the school/college approach	4.4c
10	Connexions & government	A clearer and more comprehensive role for Connexions in advising about higher education is likely to benefit progression but would require review of its current responsibilities at governmental level	4.4c
11	HEIs	Universities need to recognise increasing importance of university websites to prospective students, giving due attention to quality and user-friendliness	4.1
12	HEIs	HEIs should also be aware of significance attached to Open Days by prospective students, their high expectations of quality of delivery at these events and others, and the store set upon student contact	4.1 6

No.	Applicable to:		See Report Sections:
13	HEIs	The role of parents in HEI choice highlights the potential of the Open Day as a vehicle to offer them appropriate information and guidance	4.3
14	HEIs	Investment in properly targeted , quality liaison with local schools/colleges would improve access to the substantial proportion of students seeking higher education locally	3.2, 5.1 and 6
15	HEIs	Accommodation policy could usefully recognise that a significant minority of students who are not moving away from their area will nonetheless want university accommodation	5.3
16	HEIs	Prompt and correctly targeted responses to student enquiries are disproportionately influential, thus very well worth fostering	6
17	Government	Guidance on all aspects of student financial support, in forms accessible to schools and colleges, need to be clarified and radically increased in order to eliminate misperceptions that adversely affect progression	5.1 to 5.3

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# Appendix 1: Questionnaire 1

## Questionnaire 1

Thank you for being willing to complete this questionnaire. The research that this is part of is aimed at helping to improve the whole process of moving from school or college into Higher Education. Higher Education takes place both in universities and some colleges: in this Questionnaire, the term "Higher Education Institution" covers each of them.

It would be very helpful if you could supply the following information:

Are you male (M) or Female (F)?

Age (years): //

Post Code:

How would you describe your ethnic background?

### Asian

- of Indian origin
- of Pakistani origin
- of Bangladeshi origin
- of East African origin
- of Chinese origin
- of other Asian origin

### Black

- of Caribbean origin
- of African origin
- of other Black origin

### Other ethnic group

- other - please specify below

.....

### White

- of British origin
- of Irish origin
- of other European origin

- mixed race

The first four questions use a 6 point scale. Please circle the number which applies to you.

**Q1** How much do you want to continue your studies after school/college by going on to some form of Higher Education?

**Not at all**    1    2    3    4    5    6    **Very much**

**Q2** How confident do you feel about your ability to obtain a place in Higher Education?

**Not confident**    1    2    3    4    5    6    **Very confident**

**Q3** Do your parents/guardians want you to go on to Higher Education?

**Not at all**    1    2    3    4    5    6    **Very much**

**Q4** How important do you think a Higher Education qualification will be in developing your career?

**Not important**    1    2    3    4    5    6    **Very important**

## Questionnaire 1: page 2

**Q5** If you're in Year 12, please use Table 1 to list up to three Higher Education Institutions that you're interested in, together with the subject(s) you might want to study. **Ignore table 2.**

*(If you don't know any places yet, please just write "none known" in the first line.)*

**Table 1**

Name of Higher Education Institution	Subject

**If you're in Year 13, please use Table 2 only,** and list the details of what would be your personal 1st, 2nd and 3rd choices in Higher Education, regardless of whether or not they have made you offers at the current time. A sample line has been completed to help you.

**Table 2**

Choice	Name of Higher Education Institution	Type of course (subject, level)	Month in which you applied	Outcome (eg Tariff Points or grades of any offer, or Rejection)	Visits made or planned
	Nottingham Trent University	BA Business Studies	November 2002	240 points	Open Day, 19 March
1st					
2nd					
3rd					

**Q6** Have you decided on your career after Higher Education?  Yes  No  
(please tick as appropriate)

If Yes, please say here what you hope to do.

.....  
 .....

**Thank you very much for your help**



# Appendix 2: Questionnaire 2

## Questionnaire 2

This questionnaire is concerned with how students in schools and colleges make decisions about moving on to a university or college of higher education. If you have applied to higher education this year, please complete this form on the basis of your experience so far, regardless of how far through the application and decision making process you have got.

The data you give us will help us to see how the applications process can be made more straightforward for future applicants - and in giving you the chance to think more about your own application, it may be of some help to you too.

It would be very helpful if you could supply the following information:

Are you male (M) or Female (F)?

Age (years): //

Post Code:

How would you describe your ethnic background?

### Asian

- of Indian origin
- of Pakistani origin
- of Bangladeshi origin
- of East African origin
- of Chinese origin
- of other Asian origin

### Black

- of Caribbean origin
- of African origin
- of other Black origin

### Other ethnic group

other - please specify below

.....

### White

- of British origin
- of Irish origin
- of other European origin

mixed race

**Q1:** When making your decisions about which universities to apply to, you probably used a number of different sources of information. **In the grid on page 2**, please say how much use each of the listed items was as a source of information, by inserting the number 1, 2, 3, or 4 as shown on the scale below (the first line has been completed as an example of what you have to do). If the item is something that you did not use at all, please tick the "did not use" box. If there are any sources of information you used that we haven't listed, please add them using the spare lines at the bottom of the grid.

**1 = not very important; 2 = important; 3 = very important; 4 = extremely important**

*please turn to page 2 for the grid...*

## Questionnaire 2: page 2

**reminder: 1 = not very important; 2 = important; 3 = very important; 4 = extremely important**

	Finding out about universities/ colleges	Finding out about courses	Filling in the application form	Did not use
Newspapers	2	3	1	
UCAS Directory				
Prospectuses				
UCAS big Guide				
Degree Course Offers (Heap)				
UCAS website				
University websites				
Tutor/form teacher				
Subject teacher				
Head of sixth form				
Learning mentor				
Careers tutor/teacher				
Connexions staff (Careers Advisers)				
Friends in school/college				
Parents				
Other family members				
Open days				
School/college careers room/library				
Interviews				
HE fairs/conventions				
Visiting speakers				

**Q2:** Now that you have made your applications, do you feel you had enough information about:

- a) Universities and colleges YES  NO  (tick one)  
 b) Courses YES  NO  (tick one)  
 c) The application process YES  NO  (tick one)

**Q3:** When you were gathering information about universities and colleges, how many different prospectuses and websites do you think you looked at in total? (please tick one in each case)

Prospectuses: less than 5  6-10  11-15  16-20  21-25  more than 25

Websites: less than 5  6-10  11-15  16-20  21-25  more than 25

**Q4:** Are you happy with the way UCAS has handled your application? YES  NO

If you've answered NO, please describe briefly what you are unhappy about

.....

## Questionnaire 2: page 3

**Q5:** Are you happy with how the universities/colleges are handling your application?

YES.  NO.

If you've answered NO, please describe briefly what you're unhappy about:

.....  
.....

**Q6:** How many university or college Open Days have you attended? .....  
(please write total number)

**Q7:** The following questions concern the extent to which your parents have been involved in your university applications. For each question, *please circle the number that best describes your parents' involvement* on a scale of 1 to 6, where 1 = not involved at all and 6 = very involved

a) helping you to decide which universities/colleges you should apply for

**Not involved at all**    1    2    3    4    5    6    **very involved**

b) helping you to decide which subject(s) to apply for

**Not involved at all**    1    2    3    4    5    6    **very involved**

c) helping you to complete your application form

**Not involved at all**    1    2    3    4    5    6    **very involved**

**Q8:** The following questions concern the extent to which you have used the advice and guidance services available in your college. *Again, please circle the number that best describes the extent to which you have used the guidance staff* on a scale of 1 to 6, where 1 = not at all and 6 = a great deal

a) helping you to decide which universities/colleges you should apply for

**Not at all**    1    2    3    4    5    6    **a great deal**

b) helping you to decide which subject(s) to apply for

**Not at all**    1    2    3    4    5    6    **a great deal**

c) helping you to complete your application form

**Not at all**    1    2    3    4    5    6    **a great deal**

**Q9:** Are you able to identify one single source of information or influence that has been more important than anything else when making your decisions about higher education? If so, please write brief details here

.....  
.....

**Thank you very much for your help.**

# Appendix 3: Questionnaire 3

## Questionnaire 3

This questionnaire is concerned with how students in schools and colleges make decisions about moving on to university or college of higher education. The overall aim is to improve the help and support that can be provided to school and college students as they come to grips with the process of applying for a place in Higher Education.

It would be very helpful if you could supply the following information:

Are you male (M) or Female (F)?

Age (years): //

Post Code:

How would you describe your ethnic background?

### Asian

of Indian origin

of Pakistani origin

of Bangladeshi origin

of East African origin

of Chinese origin

of other Asian origin

### Black

of Caribbean origin

of African origin

of other Black origin

### Other ethnic group

other - please specify below

.....

### White

of British origin

of Irish origin

of other European origin

mixed race

**Q1:** How many people, including yourself, live in your household? .....

How many of these people are a) full time wage earners .....

b) part time wage earners .....

**Q2:** How much do you want to continue your studies after school/college by going on to some form of Higher Education? Please circle the number which applies to you.

**Not at all    1    2    3    4    5    6    Very much**

## Questionnaire 3: page 2

**Q3:** If you answered 4, 5, or 6 to Q2, please ignore this question and go on to Q4. If however your answer to Q2 was 1, 2, or 3, please attach a score to the reasons in the table below to show why you may not go on to Higher Education

**1 = not an important at all; 2 = only slightly important; 3 = important; 4 = very important;**

Possible reasons for not going to Higher Education	Score
I'd rather get a job	
Cost of fees or charges	
I've had enough of studying	
I don't want to be in debt	
My family doesn't want me to go	
I don't think I'll like being at university	
Other (please specify)	

**Q4:** Assuming that you go to university in 2003 or 2004, which of the following costs do you think you will have to pay? Please use a tick to show what annual sum (if any) you think it will be:

	won't have to pay	up to £500	£500-£1000	£1000-£2000	£2000-£3000	over £3000	don't know
Tuition fees	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Top-up fees	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cost of accommodation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Living costs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Q5:** Please tick below to show from what sources you would expect to obtain the money you'd need if you went on to university:

	Yes	No	Don't know		Yes	No	Don't know
Parents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Personal Savings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student Loan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Wages from a job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sponsorship	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bank Overdraft	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Grant	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please specify)			

If you answered Yes to "Sponsorship," have you yet found a Sponsor? YES.  NO.

If you answered YES, which organisation is sponsoring you?

.....

### Questionnaire 3: page 3

**Q6:** How much money would you expect to owe at the end of a 3 year degree course?

(Please tick once)

nothing <input type="checkbox"/>	up to £1000 <input type="checkbox"/>	£1,000 - £5,000 <input type="checkbox"/>
£5,000 - £10,000 <input type="checkbox"/>	£10,000 - £15,000 <input type="checkbox"/>	£15,000 - £20,000 <input type="checkbox"/>
£20,000 - £30,000 <input type="checkbox"/>	more than £30,000 <input type="checkbox"/>	don't know <input type="checkbox"/>

**Q7:** If you go on to Higher Education, is it your intention to study at a university near home, or at one which is further away? (Please tick as appropriate):

a) near home     b) further away     c) not important

If your answer above is a), what is the main reason?

.....

**Q8:** If your answer to Q7 was a), would you plan to live

a) with your parents/guardian     b) in university accommodation

c) in privately rented accommodation     d) other .....

**Q9:** List three things in order of importance (putting the most important first) that have influenced or will influence your first choice of university

.....

.....

**Q10:** Please estimate the total annual income of your household by ticking the appropriate box

Less than £10,000     £10,000-£20,000     £20,000-£30,000

£30,000-£40,000     £40,000-£50,000     over £50,000     don't know

**Thank you for completing the questionnaire**

# Appendix 4: papers used in Diary Study

Name .....

Please list here the examination subjects you have already taken and the grades obtained

Subject	Level	Grade	Subject	Level	Grade

Please list here all of the examination subjects you will be taking this year

Subject	Level	Grade	Subject	Level	Grade

Please list here the universities and courses you have applied to (or intend to apply to if you have not sent off your UCAS form yet). At this stage you may already have definite ideas about the course and university you wish to attend, or you may still be considering your options. Please use the final column to rank your institutions in order of importance for you at the present time (i.e. number them from 1 to 6, with 1 being your first choice).

University	Course	Rank

If you have already received offers of places for some of these courses, please list them here

University/Course	Offer (i.e. grades, points, etc)





### Diary Study: page 3

Name..... Diary for week ending //

Name of university	Type of contact	Your comments (eg how do you feel about the contact, does it change your impression of the university, are you more or less interested in going there as a result, etc)

# Appendix 5: Interview script for use with careers and guidance staff from schools/colleges

## Interview Script for school/college Guidance staff

**Note for Interviewers:** *if interviewees can't remember all details when answering a question, please assure them that it's not important - we're after the general "feel" of their answers, rather than complete or clinical accuracy; also, do encourage them to expand on any answers where more details would be helpful.*

**Name of interviewee:**

**Organisation:**

**Name of Interviewer:**

Thank you for coming and agreeing to talk about your work to us.

Can we start with details of your precise title or position?

What part do you play in the delivery of Careers advice & guidance to students?

Do you have any teaching responsibilities? (Which subject?)

How is your personal timetable split between your Careers & Guidance work, any subject teaching, other responsibilities, and "free" time?

Have you had any help or training to prepare you for your Careers Guidance work?  
*(for example, In-Service Training, attendance at courses &/or conferences, visits to universities/colleges, etc.)*

Who is involved in the overall delivery of Careers Education & Guidance in your Institution?

Is it yourself?... ..with any deputies?

Are personal tutors or form tutors involved?

If so, how many... ..and what training &/or support is there for them?

If delivered via any other model, please give details.

Are you able to gather entire Year Groups together for Careers Education sessions on a regular or occasional basis?

If so, how frequently... ..and what topics are covered in such sessions

Is there any separation between careers advice & guidance systems for those interested in Higher Education and those not? (Please outline)

Are there any differences between the processes of advising students following vocational as opposed to non-vocational courses at Level 3? Please outline them if so.

How does **Connexions** operate within (.....)?

What proportion of the students do they see in Y12.....

and Y13.....

How is it decided which students to refer to them?

What is *expected* of Connexions in (.....)?

In what ways and to what extent does Institution policy determine how Careers Guidance is delivered?

**Contacts with students:**

What proportion of each year group receives 1 to 1 careers guidance?

How are contacts with students organised? (Do they have to make an appointment? With whom? Is it timetabled for them? Some other way.....?)

How many times, and at what stages of their courses, do students receive their 1 to 1 Advice and Guidance?

**Careers Guidance Programme:**

Is there a Careers programme as part of the timetable?

Please describe the model of participation -

eg for every student, every week?

or opt-in basis only?

other.....?

Which Higher Education topics are dealt with in which term (1, 2, or 3)

in Y 12

and in Y 13

Do you use visiting speakers from Higher Education? On which topics and from which HEIs?

Are there any meetings for parents concerning Higher Education? Please give details

What is school/college policy on Open Days?

eg are there any to which the school/college takes students\*.....?

or to which it encourages them to go\*?

(\*Please say which HEIs)

Does the school/college advise any limit on the number of Open Days attended?

**Careers facilities**

Can you please describe the careers facilities in .....

What are the arrangements for the students to gain access to them?

What computer access if any is available to students in the Careers Resource base?

What other computer provision is there? (Rough estimate of number of terminals / number of students, and times at which they have access to them)

In your view, is there sufficient computer access in relation to the number of students who require it?

And lastly.....

.....if you could develop Careers provision in your institution in any way, what would it be?

**Thank you very much for the help you've given us.**

# Appendix 6: Interview script for use with Connexions staff

## Interview Script for Connexions staff working in schools or colleges

Note for interviewers: if interviewees can't remember all details when answering a question, please assure them that it's not important - we're after the general "feel" of their answers, rather than complete or clinical accuracy; also, do encourage them to expand on any answers where more details would be helpful.

**Name of interviewee:**                      **Name of Interviewer:**  
**Working in which School or College :**

Thank you for coming and agreeing to talk to us about your work in advising students on Higher Education. Can we start with details of your precise title and role?

What training and support does Connexions provide to help you advise students on Higher Education?

What is expected of you in ...      a) by the school/college      b) by Connexions itself?

What part do you play in the delivery of Careers advice & guidance to students within the school/college?

What position is held by the school/college member of staff who is your main contact?

Is there any system for liaising with the tutors/personal advisers of the students whom you see? Could you please describe it?

How much time per week / term do you work in the school/college? from your perspective, is this enough time?

What proportion of the students do you see in Y12... and Y13...  
How is it decided which students are referred to you?  
How many times on average would you expect to see a typical Student, and at what stages?

Do you do any work with groups of students? If so, of what size and on what topics?

Are there any differences between the processes of advising students following vocational as opposed to non-vocational courses at Level 3?

Does the process of advising students *not* interested in HE differ in any way from the process of advising those who *are*?

Are you involved in any way in *planning* Advice and Guidance provision in the school/college, or *advising* on it? If so, how?

If not, would you like to be, and how?

Thank you very much for the help you've given us.

### **Careers Guidance Programme:**

Is there a Careers Education programme as part of the timetable?  
Are you able to contribute to it, and if so in what way(s)?

### **Careers facilities**

Please outline the facilities available to you; would you like them to be developed in any way?  
And lastly... ..if you could develop Connexions' role in your institution in any way, what would it be?

## Appendix 7:

### **The Practitioners:**

**Anne Brown**

**Jakki Capron**

**Shagufta Farhat**

**Anthony Lyons**

**John Reynolds**

**Maeve Sweeney**

**Ian Wilkinson**

**Malcolm Bull**

**Caroline Davies**

**Vicky Furniss**

**Sue Massey**

**John Spiller**

**David Sweet**

**Glyn Williams**

## Appendix 8: Membership of the steering group

Lynne Duckworth	Director of Advancement, University of Central Lancashire
Judith Edwards	Regional Director for North West LSDA
Margaret Kingsford	Vice Principal, Hopwood Hall College
Ian Lever	Director of Strategy and Learning, Greater Manchester Learning & Skills Council
Alberica MacBride	Cumbria Learning & Skills Council
Susan McGrath	Head of Education Liaison, Manchester Metropolitan University
Peter Millen	Educational Consultant and Project Manager
Leni Oglesby	Dean of the Faculty of Community Studies, Law and Education, Manchester Metropolitan University
Fiona Powley	Head of School of Cultural and Performing Arts, Cumbria Institute of the Arts
Michael Spayne	Research Manager, Cumbria Learning & Skills Council
Cath Walsh	Director of Partnerships and Widening Participation, Liverpool John Moores University