

Connexions Youth Charter: Guidance for Practitioners and Young People

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Background

The Connexions Service National Unit (CSNU) commissioned the National Youth Agency (NYA) to produce guidance on the development of a Connexions Youth Charter.

Young people were closely involved in the project through focus groups, a residential weekend and as members of the national Steering Group. The quotations are directly from young people and the illustrations are based on scenarios written and performed by young people.

This document is a 'hands on' guide designed to be used by practitioners (with experience of youth participation) working with young people. Practitioners may wish to adapt the content of this guide into a more young people friendly format. A separate document, called 'Guidance for Partnerships', goes into more detail about the various elements of the Youth Charter. It is aimed at Connexions Service managers and staff who might be less familiar with active involvement work with young people.



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Introduction

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Young people must be actively involved in the creation of any Youth Charter. They should be asked at the start what they want from their local Connexions Service. It is very important to involve a range of young people in developing and designing the Youth Charter and in checking out whether it has worked well. The Connexions Service must make an effort to include young people who are often disadvantaged and excluded from society.

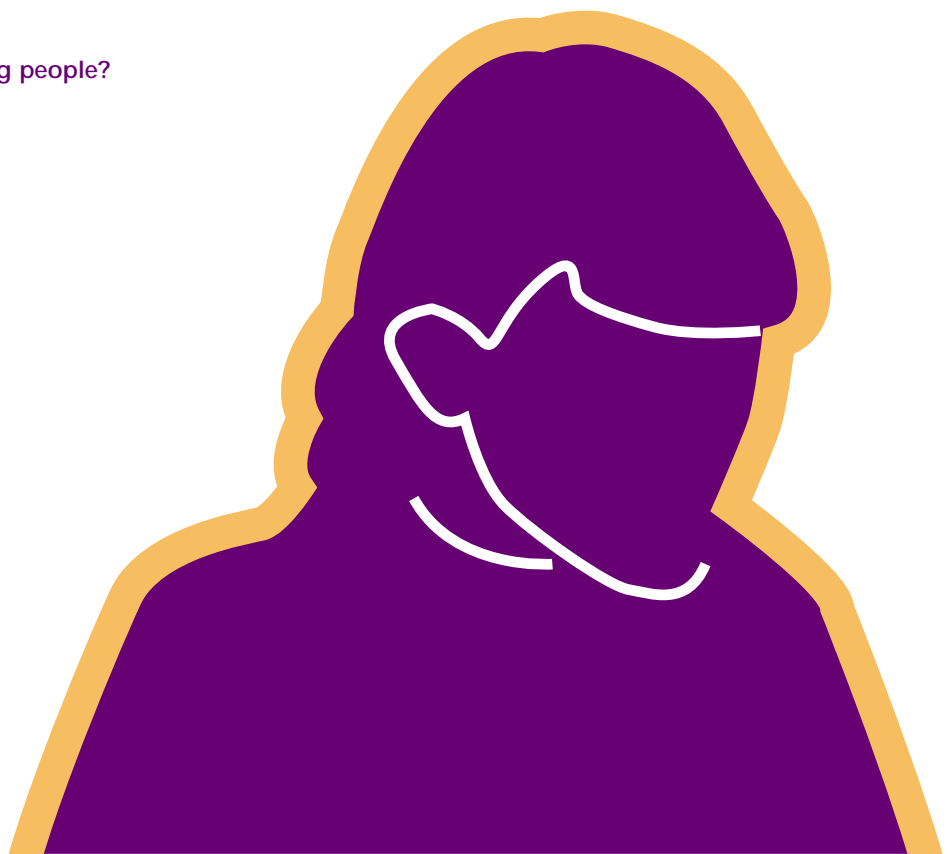


After talking to other young people and Connexions Partnerships, our main conclusion is that there should be at least two versions of the Connexions Youth Charter Guidance.

- the basic Youth Charter. This is the "label on the tin" for Connexions and will help other young people to understand the key points of the Service and what it means for them.
- a more in-depth version of the Youth Charter. This will feature all the same points as the basic Charter, but will contain more detail, as well as additional information aimed at Connexions staff and partners.

The Connexions Partnerships should work with young people to consider the following areas:

- what's a Connexions Youth Charter for?
- how will the Youth Charter help?
- what are the key elements of a Charter?
- what should it look like?
- how will young people know the Charter is working?
- how to promote it to other young people?
- how to keep it alive?
- how to engage other young people?



In all cases, young people must be given the chance to make local choices about the Connexions Youth Charter in their area - and to illustrate it with real examples and definitions.

The CSNU believes that the following values are important for young people in Connexions:

We are passionate

We have as our focus supporting the needs of young people. We actively encourage and welcome their participation, perspectives and views into the development of the services and products we deliver.

We are fair

We believe every young person deserves the best possible chance to realise their potential, irrespective of who they are, or their circumstances.

We are accessible

We are committed to being available to young people when, where and how they need us. We are open and clear in all our dealings and receptive to new ideas and differing views.

We value partnership

We are active in developing relationships, creating the right links and working together with others to ensure we deliver the best possible outcome for each young person.

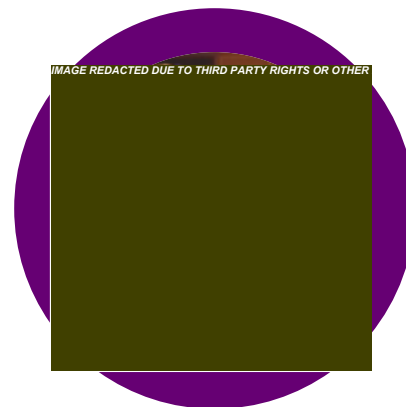
We live high standards

We are committed to high levels of efficiency, reliability and continuous improvement in all we do.

We make things happen

We are active and dynamic, a positive agent for change, confronting barriers that constrain and limit with a 'can do, will do' attitude to get results.

A CD Rom version of this guidance is provided so additional copies can be printed and distributed by Partnerships. The CD Rom also provides graphics, pictures and the process of involving young people in developing this guidance as well as case studies and examples of how Partnerships involve young people in developing Youth Charters.



What's a Connexions Youth Charter for?

The basic Connexions Youth Charter is the "label on the tin" for the Connexions Service. So it does three things:

- 1 It tells young people what the Connexions Service is and what it can do for them.
- 2 It shows a list of the main "ingredients" of the Connexions Service. For example: how to get help, how young people should be treated and how they can have their say.
- 3 It says what young people can do if they aren't happy with the Service.

The Youth Charter will often be a young person's first contact with Connexions. The basic Youth Charter should be something they will want to pick up and keep. It should help them to find out about Connexions and remind them of what they can expect from the Service.

It's always good to KISS – Keep It Short and Simple.

Ask other young people what they think their Connexions Youth Charter is for. How can it work to tell them and their friends about Connexions?



A set of guidelines to help us – to enable us to know if we're being mistreated by the system – and to make sure our needs are being met.

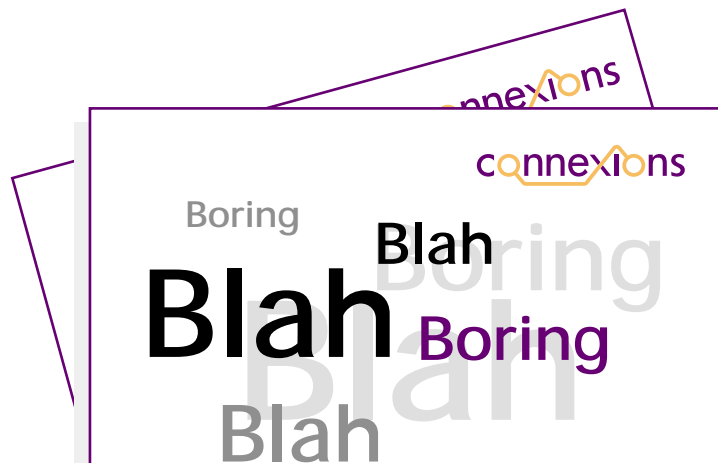


Know our rights and what we're entitled to.

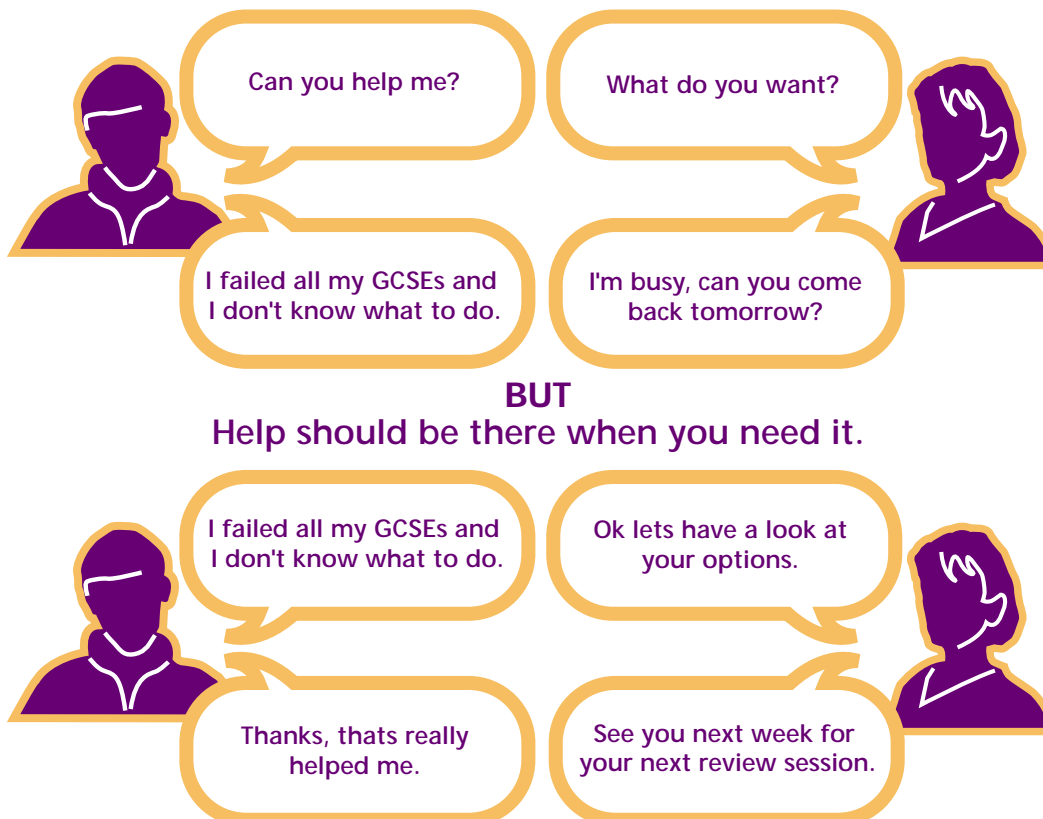


How will the Youth Charter help?

Young people thought a "bad" Youth Charter would look like this:



If the Youth Charter is clear and easy to understand, it will be easier to relate to and use. When young people write their own Charter it's a good idea to use real life examples from their Connexions Partnership area.



What are the key elements of a Charter?

The key elements of a Connexions Youth Charter will be:

- respect (also Equal Opportunities & not being judged)
- having a voice and being listened to
- having a choice – encouragement but no pressure
- confidentiality – what will or won't be passed on?
- good advice, information and support
- getting help in convenient places at convenient times
- a personal adviser who is friendly, honest, well-trained and can be trusted
- a Connexions centre that's friendly and attractive with interesting things to do
- easy for young people to get involved in the Service if they want to
- easy for young people to make complaints or pay compliments about anything.

Action

Ask other young people what they want their Connexions Youth Charter to say. What do they think is essential about how the Connexions Service is delivered to them?

There's more detail about these key elements in the document: [Guidance for Connexions Partnerships](#).

What should it look like?

It's up to young people to decide what their Connexions Youth Charter will look like. Here are some points to think about:

- what's it for?
- is it an advert or for information?
- is it about rights and responsibilities Etc?

Is it trying to help other young people to:

- know about the Connexions Service? or
- like the idea of the Connexions Service? or
- use the Connexions Service?

Is there a case for several versions:

- for different ages?
- for different abilities?
- for different groups?



What should it look like.



The smaller the better!



Is it important for it to be convenient size/ shape?

- we like the credit card size that folds out
- you can list the important points and the helpline
- number on a key ring, so it's always in your pocket



Some Connexions Partnerships felt that they needed to put young people's "responsibilities" on the Youth Charter. But it's probably better to keep the basic Youth Charter as a short list of what young people can expect to get from Connexions – ie what the "label on the tin" says.

There can then be directions to further information on the website or to a more detailed Youth Charter.



How will young people know the Charter is working?

The first job of the Connexions Youth Charter is to tell young people about the Connexions Service. They should be involved in evaluating:

- whether other young people are aware of the Connexions Youth Charter
- their knowledge of the Connexions Service as a whole.

Action

For example, young people could be involved in:

- devising questionnaires
- introducing a survey in schools/clubs
- putting surveys on a web page
- monitoring feedback from other young people.

Other surveys can cover:

Number of young people involved in Connexions who:

- know about the Youth Charter

Number of young people involved in:

- developing the Youth Charter
- developing Connexions

Number of young people who think they have benefited from the Service and that the Service is good.

“ How will you know the Charter is working? ”

“ Through feedback off the young people-like surveys ”

Compliments and Complaints



The other main purpose of the Youth Charter is to explain how to make a complaint about the Service – and how to pay a compliment too!

Young People can help to assess whether the system is working by finding out about the:

- number of young people making complaints or paying compliments
- number of responses from Connexions to young people's issues
- speed of response to suggestions and complaints
- satisfaction levels of those that have made suggestions or complaints.

Feedback forms should be quick and easy to fill in – go for short answer questions and devices like different numbers of smiley faces to grade satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Where possible, young people should be allowed to design their own form.



How to promote it to young people

The best way to promote the Charter (and the Service) is to make sure young people are fully involved in its promotion. Activities can include:

- delivery/peer group that goes around touring schools, colleges, youth centres/projects, outreach/detached work and training providers, telling other young people about the Youth Charter and how they can get involved
- organise a session on what a Youth Charter is – a good way of giving young people a say and making sure they are heard loud and clear
- let young people come up with a draft Youth Charter, using language they understand
- let young people come up with their own ideas about what they want to see included in the Charter
- give young people incentives to do design/art work
- let young people come up with ways of getting involved in revising the Charter
- recruit young people as development workers
- hold open day fetes/stalls.

Other favourite ideas for promoting the Youth Charter include:

- television flash ads – keep people guessing about what the ads mean
- Connexions residentials – then keep young people informed via text messages
- school – talks given by a task force of young people
- paid peer educators – young people telling other young people
- drama role plays
- advertisements in job centres
- post cards, magic eye dots, Connexions logos and ‘shocking’ posters to grab attention.

How to keep it alive?

The Youth Charter must be kept up-to-date if it’s going to continue to be an attractive first message about Connexions.

Young people must be involved in this process too - both as current/former users to review how well it has worked and as new users to say what they want to see from the Youth Charter and the Connexions Service in the future.

Overall the young people were clear of the need to update the Youth Charter and the information featured on it.

Here are some ways of making sure young people have a voice in this process:

- hold frequent one-to-one reviews with young people
- hold group reviews
- hold regular meetings with young people to see what’s going on
- provide written agendas for meetings so young people can choose whether or not to come
- telephone conversations
- surveys
- text messaging.

There should be a ‘thank you’ list of people who contributed to the process of developing the original Youth Charter. This would be a permanent reminder that young people can change things and would help them to feel that it really is their Connexions Service.

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How do you get young people involved in the Connexions Service?



By updating the Charter, letting young people have a say on what’s happening





How to get young people involved – and keep it that way

Action

The best way of engaging young people in Connexions and introducing the Youth Charter is by peer education – which means young people talking to friends, family, colleagues, fellow students etc. There is a strong case to be made for paying or rewarding young people in peer educator and consultant roles.



Young people should be paid as consultants training young people to help other young people understand what Connexions is



Getting people to work in teams to learn what Connexions is all about



The young people consulted about Youth Charters wanted:

- more conferences for young people to get together and share ideas
- fun activities to get them motivated - icebreakers and discussion activities to get conversation going
- a guideline session plan so they know what they're going to do
- brainstorming – ideas, views, opinions
- creative work using a range of resources, designing posters, leaflets etc. get ideas flowing, discussion going - and to produce an end product
- help and support in activities in the Youth Worker model. Young people said: "They're on our level and join in helping us work. Better than having a bloke from the council with you. Facilitators help with communication, team building, group work, bringing ideas together, working together."
- an opportunity for young people to say what they feel about the whole Connexions thing
- feedback on how the session went – recommendations for future events

How young people are making a difference in Connexions

It is a fundamental principle of Connexions that young people are involved in the design, delivery, provision and evaluation of the Service.

Connexions has young people at its heart, which means that decision making really is being put in their hands. Specific examples of how they are already involved in Connexions include:

In governance:

- young people are making a valuable contribution to the decisions of Partnerships and local management committees. They're involved in helping to define the measures against which the organisation will be judged, in making decisions about strategic direction and in helping to develop plans. Young people are even taking part in assessing the bids of potential contractors and in selecting key personnel (including chief executives and personal advisers).

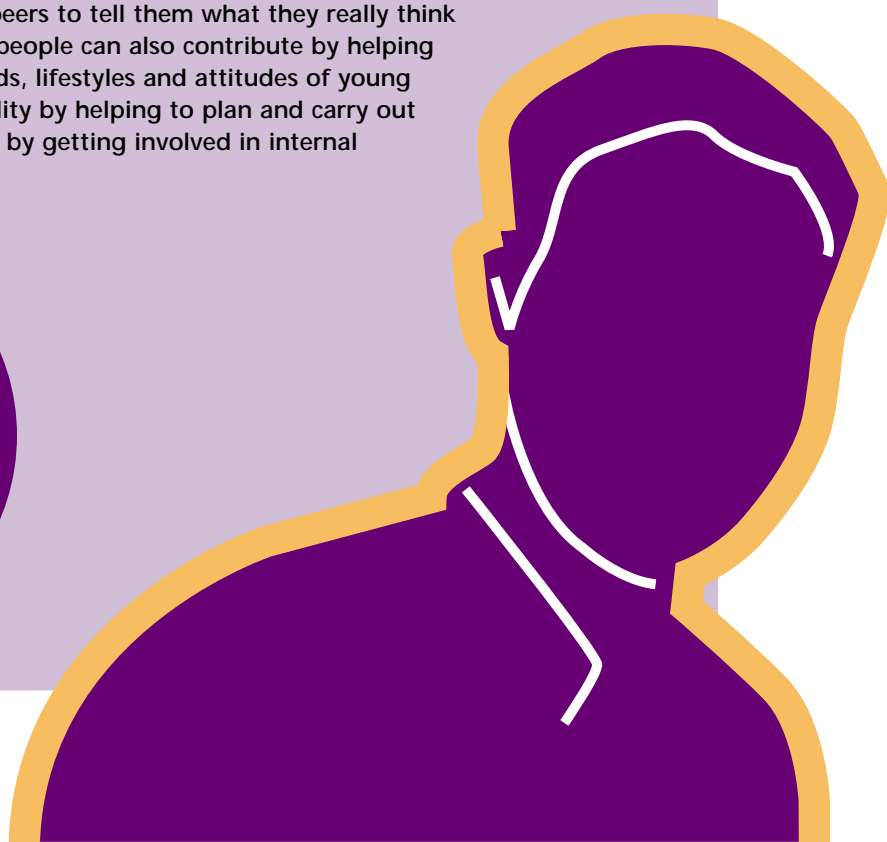
In the planning and design of services:

- young people are putting forward ideas for new approaches and are involved in piloting them. They have made an important contribution to the delivery of the Service to other young people as volunteers or paid staff. Young people participated as peer supporters and educators, as links with other organisations and as advocates (individually and collectively). And they have contributed to promotional activities.

In improving quality:

- young people are also participating as monitors, inspectors and evaluators. This is because it's often easier for their peers to tell them what they really think than for them to talk to an adult. Young people can also contribute by helping with 'reality checks' on the changing needs, lifestyles and attitudes of young people. And they are contributing to quality by helping to plan and carry out evaluations, by reviewing complaints and by getting involved in internal quality monitoring.

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Conclusion

The Youth Charter is all about making sure the Connexions Service really is by, for and about young people. It's about making sure the Service is what they want it to be from the start – and that it stays that way in the future.

The Youth Charter provides a great opportunity for young people to get involved in Connexions and really make a difference. It provides them with a tool to ensure that the Connexions Service is providing what's stated "on the label".

To find out more about how young people can get involved, go to the website at:

www.connexions.gov.uk.

Other publications in this series

This guide is one of a series of publications from the Connexions Service National Unit on how to involve young people in the Connexions Service. Publications currently available are:

An extended CD Rom Version of this guide and "Connexions Youth Charter Guidance for Partnerships" (June 2002)

"Connexions Youth Charter Guidance for Partnerships" (June 2002)

"The Active Involvement of Young People in the Connexions Service – Managers' Guide and Practitioners' Guide" (July 2001)

"Involving young people as decision-makers in the Governance of Connexions" (June 2002)

Forthcoming Publications in this series

"Guidance on Rewards and Incentives for Involving Young People in Connexions" (Expected Autumn 2002)

"Guidance on Involving Young People in Recruitment" (Expected Winter 2002)

"Guidance on Engaging 'Hard-to-Reach' Young People" (Expected Spring 2003)





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DfES Publications PO Box 5050 Sherwood Park
Annesley Nottingham NG15 ODJ

Tel: 0845 60 222 60 Fax: 0845 60 333 60
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