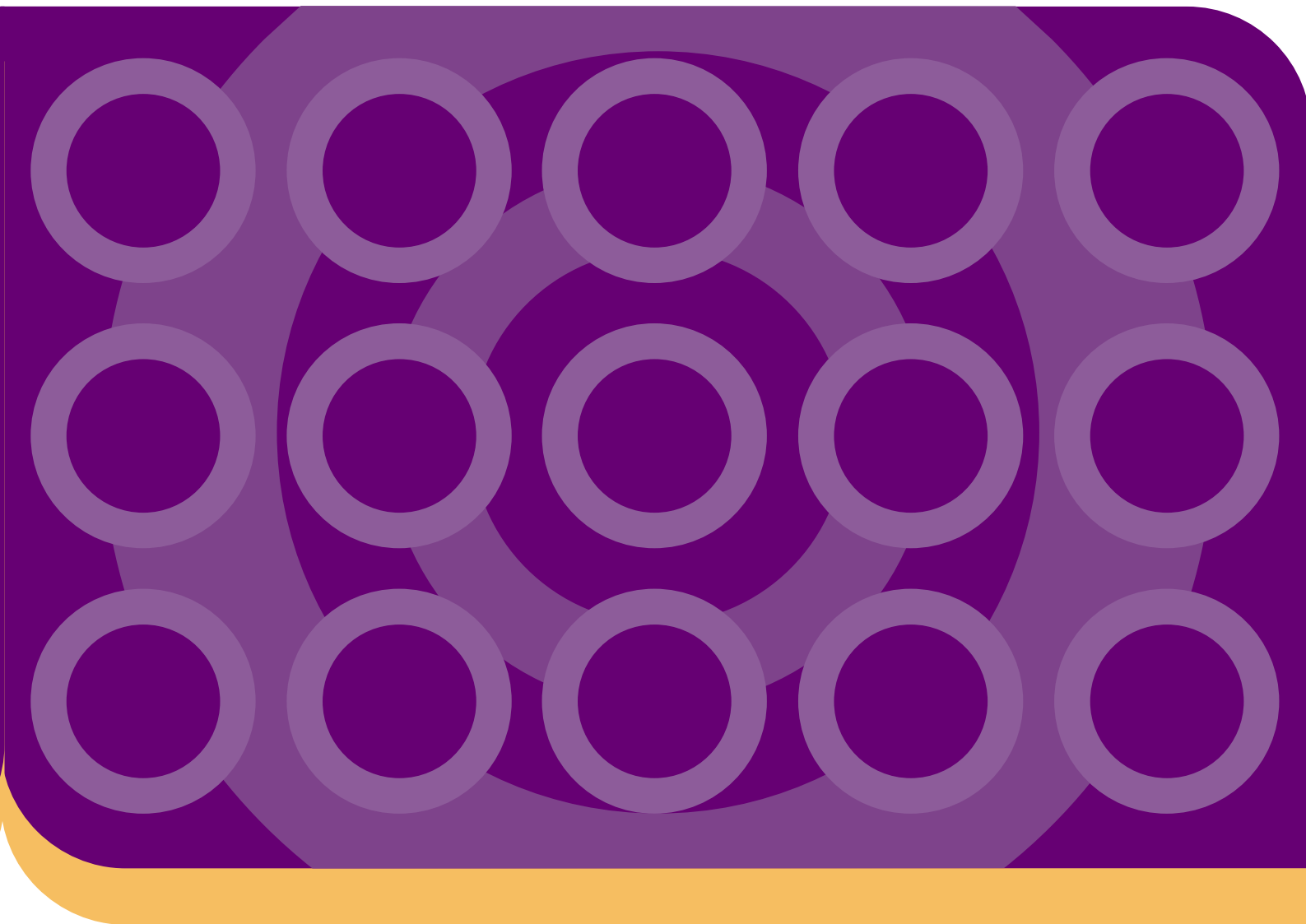


Implementing the Connexions Service in Colleges



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Implementing the Connexions Service in Colleges

Connexions is the new advice and guidance service for young people aged 13-19 in England. In November 2000, Anne Weinstock, Chief Executive Connexions, wrote to all college Principals describing what the new service meant for colleges (letter available at www.connexions.gov.uk). This note informs colleges of latest developments in Connexions and outlines next steps, as well as serving as a reminder of the need for all colleges and their local Connexions provision to work together to implement the service in colleges. **It has been compiled in consultation with the Association of Colleges (AoC), the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA), and the National Association of Managers of Student Services (NAMSS).**

Action required

This document is designed to help senior college managers make effective plans to introduce Connexions into their FE institution.

Copies should be circulated across college sites as widely as possible, including amongst:

- college management;
- student services managers and student support workers;
- Personal Tutors;
- other teaching/tutoring staff.

Extra copies are available, free of charge, from the number below. A checklist is included in the document for senior managers to plan implementation. Further guidance will be issued over the next few months to help colleges successfully implement Connexions.

Further Information

Further copies of this document are available from the DfES order line on 0845 60 222 60 by quoting reference DfES CXIMPCOL

More information on Connexions can be obtained by writing to:

Connexions Service National Unit, Moorfoot, Sheffield S1 4PQ

Email: connexions.service@dfes.gsi.gov.uk

The Connexions website can be viewed at www.connexions.gov.uk. Copies of all Connexions publications are available to download from this site.

The Case for successfully implementing the Connexions Service in Colleges

The widening participation agenda, and the need for each learner to have a coherent yet broad learning programme, means there is more need than ever for FE institutions to support young students effectively. Colleges already provide quality support to their students. This is becoming more important as they continue to work with increasing numbers of students who need different types and levels of support, and with the wide range of services who provide this support. Increasingly there is a need for a coherent, holistic approach to supporting and developing young people - the Connexions service will support colleges to provide this through the contribution of personal advisers as part of, or alongside, existing student support teams.

Connexions is an **additional resource** for colleges, which can help meet targets for **widening participation**, and student **retention, achievement and progression**.

Inspection reports tell us the majority of FE Colleges have strong student support arrangements. However inspection evidence also highlights areas where improvement is needed - in particular in college **retention and achievement** of young learners. This view is confirmed in the National Audit Office Report 'Improving Student Performance – How English Further Education Colleges Can Improve Student Retention and Achievement' published in March 2001.

This challenge is brought into sharper focus by the changing environment in which colleges must support learners. Colleges are being asked to modernise and respond to the economy's need for a highly skilled workforce, by developing stronger vocational and technical provision. In July this year, Secretary of State, Estelle Morris announced the first 16 Centres of Vocational Excellence in colleges – more will follow. Other aspects of the modernisation agenda require colleges to:

- forge much stronger links with schools, universities and employers;
- develop dedicated centres for 16-19 year olds;
- make changes to the training and development available to, and required of, college staff;
- enhance the role of the college as part of the local community.

This demands more of colleges – Principals and their executive team, teachers, tutors, student support workers and other non-teaching staff, and provides many opportunities for Connexions, through the **personal adviser**, to work with the college and **enhance** the support offered to young people in FE.

Connexions will be a **universal** service for all young people – because every teenager will have access to it; and crucially it will also be **differentiated** – since it will offer more intensive support for those who need it. To be accessible to all young people, Connexions must be present in settings where we most commonly find young people – and Colleges are a key setting. Those working in a college will often have wide experience of many of the issues that young people face as they move towards adulthood and its responsibilities. Such experience will help inform the workings of the Connexions service, and ensure that all young people receive **the help they need at the time they need it**.

Connexions – the latest position

Connexions has begun in 15 areas. If your college is in one of those areas you should already have been liaising and working with the Connexions Partnership – and you may even have already devised a Partnership Agreement detailing how Connexions will contribute to helping young people and how it will work with college staff and other agencies supporting young people. In September the pilot **Connexions Direct** helpline opened in the North East. It enables young people in the region to contact an adviser by phone, text message, email or web chat, for professional information advice and guidance. And **Connexions should operate across England from 2003**; when local plans are satisfactory there will be a total of 47 areas, corresponding with Learning and Skills Council areas.

Connexions – the service it will provide

In partnership with each college, Connexions aims to:

- **provide all young people with the help and support they need to** succeed in their current learning programme and make a successful transition to further stages in education, work and adult life;
- **offer advice and guidance** on learning and career options, as well as access to broader personal development opportunities;
- **raise aspirations and motivation** to greater achievement;
- **identify and address potential problems** before they become major barriers to learning;
- help young people **overcome existing barriers** to participation and learning.

To establish a strong base in a college, Connexions **must build on existing successful pastoral systems and curriculum provision, including careers education and guidance**. For instance, colleges will still be encouraged to develop their careers libraries and increase awareness of the advice for students available through ICT. **Connexions will not duplicate or take over where colleges already provide effective support, but enhance such support.**

In providing such a service within a college setting, Connexions will:

- help to build a more **coherent, comprehensive service**, assisting those involved in student support (both within and outside of the college) to work to their strengths in support of young people's needs;
- **liaise with agencies external to the college** (eg, employers, community and voluntary services, agencies typically involved in support for young people), and work with the college to improve links to schools and universities;
- provide **impartial guidance on learning and career options**. This continues, and in many cases will improve upon, what has been provided by careers services in co-operation with colleges. Careers information will be provided to full and part- time students. Details will be determined by individual Connexions Partnerships and their Local Management Committees (which include a college representative);
- support the broader work of a college to **improve attendance and motivation** by working with personal tutors, student counsellors and individual learners, helping to resolve personal issues for students. This brings greater potential for raising retention and achievement, and also for developing the personal skills which can **equip young people to make a success of life**.

The overall structure of Connexions

Connexions managers at LEA or other local level have a responsibility to ensure that in every college:

- guidance on learning options is **impartial**;
- there is sufficient time for **any student to refer themselves** to an adviser;
- Connexions staff can **support the transition planning for students with special educational needs**, especially when they consider post-19 provision;
- **PAs help Connexions keep track of students joining and leaving college**, and provide other information necessary for Connexions.

The Local Management Committee (LMC) oversees delivery by co-ordinating the different services needed by young people. It advises the Partnership on the resources which should be allocated to colleges. It is responsible for deploying personal adviser coverage across its area, for securing Partnership Agreements with colleges, and for improving the co-ordination of agency support to colleges. To give local colleges a voice, College Principals should be represented on every LMC – and some may also be represented on Partnership Boards.

The Connexions Partnership is the strategic body, composed of statutory and voluntary services, such as **local authorities, health authorities, the police, the probation service, employers, the voluntary sector and young people**. It plans and directs the work of Connexions across the whole area, overseeing the provision of vocational routes to learning in conjunction with the local LSC. Partnerships are involved in planning how the service might operate in schools and colleges as part of a well co-ordinated strategy of support for young people.

College Principals will negotiate an agreement with their Connexions Partnership on:

- what **adviser skills and roles** are needed in the college;
- the **mix of the personal adviser team**, if more than one personal adviser is involved (full- or part-time);
- **other support for the college** to be provided by Connexions;
- **management and reporting arrangements**.

Connexions is an integrated service – the local Partnership will bring together all the organisations that support young people and provide coherence in a way that has not happened before. It can **support progress and achievement in the broadest sense** – not just formal learning leading to qualifications, but the personal development gained through access to sporting, artistic or leisure opportunities and involvement in community activities.

Personal advisers

The personal adviser will be at the heart of the service in colleges. Principals will negotiate with Connexions the role and deployment of the personal advisers working in their own college and have a role in agreeing the selection of personal advisers offered by Connexions for work in their institutions. Personal advisers will come from a wide range of backgrounds, with additional training to prepare them for this unique role. Although many will be based in schools and colleges, others will work on outreach activity in the area, or at one-stop shops and drop-in centres.

Through the personal adviser, Connexions will provide the following:

- help for students to access learning opportunities introducing the world of work;
- access (including via ICT) to information, advice and guidance on a wide range of issues, including impartial careers advice;
- referral to, and arrangements with, specialist and voluntary support services in and out of college;
- access to group or peer support and personal development activities (e.g. volunteering).

Personal advisers may take on a range of roles, subject to the needs and existing provision in an individual college. Some may offer a broad remit, offering advice and guidance and referring onto other agencies; others may work more intensively with a small caseload. Personal advisers could be involved in challenging able students to maximise their potential, or working with those facing complex problems and who are at risk of dropping out of learning, including making early interventions to stop problems escalating. Personal advisers must complement the work of student services teams and Personal Tutors, to help raise the aspirations and motivation of students by, for example, enhancing the range of business and community mentors a college may already use. Personal advisers can also ensure that the students themselves influence the design and delivery of Connexions in their college, and will be able to learn from the experience and expertise of college staff and their work in involving young people.

The specific roles and activities the personal adviser may undertake with students and college staff will be negotiated through the Partnership Agreement, and could include:

- a referral point for college staff who have identified students at risk and in need of particular kinds of support;
- a self referral-point for the student through a drop in advice service;
- a single point of contact for the young person, especially during **transition**, such as from school to college, when a student moves into a new area and needs to attend another college, from FE to HE, employment, or training, and when a student reaches 20 years old, to support services for adults;
- mediation and links between staff and students;
- helping to accurately identify strengths and needs, often using the Connexions Framework for Assessment, Planning, Implementation and Review (*Issued June 2001. Available from Prolog, tel:0845 60 222 60, ref APIR/01*);
- brokering access to specialist support and making quick links with external agencies;
- case conferencing;
- development of the Personal Tutor's skills and knowledge in guidance techniques.

Personal advisers in action – experience from pilot studies

There is no single blueprint. Every college is different and thus will have different needs. Connexions will, through negotiation, operate in many ways in colleges, to reflect how young people can best benefit and how individual colleges are organised and resourced.

A personal adviser arranged with a local college to offer students from across a range of courses the opportunity to develop their communication and social skills. An event was organised where the personal adviser took a group of students to undertake outdoor activities that promoted teamworking and problem solving skills. All of the young people that took part said it was a positive, fun learning experience, and were keen to work together on similar projects in the future.

In one college young people have been grouped into four curriculum areas, each of which works with a named personal adviser. This allows every young person to access the personal adviser through dedicated drop-in sessions, but also allows the personal advisers to work with a particular group of tutors and to receive referrals of students who are giving cause for concern and are seen as at risk of dropping-out. The personal advisers will also work with groups who need support around issues such as punctuality, personal development or employability skills. All will ensure that their cohorts get the most out of enrichment activities, including specialist events such as College Drugs Awareness and Health weeks.

On a wide range of indicators, personal adviser work is rated a real success. The vast majority of young people in pilot areas are positive about the service, and professionals are equally as enthusiastic.

‘Connexions has really helped to keep students in learning by bringing together the whole range of support functions, as well as connecting institutions.’

Paul Taylor, Principal, Tile Hill College, Coventry

‘The key challenge for Connexions, working shoulder to shoulder with further education, is how we actually increase retention’

Steve Stewart, Chief Executive, Coventry and Warwickshire Connexions Partnership

There is a **bigger vision** of Connexions in colleges. Students can be helped to **link up the different guidance processes and activities** they experience – target-setting, tutoring, careers guidance and mentoring. They can also **make links between their personal development and their learning**, wherever that learning occurs. Such an approach requires the personal adviser to work with college staff in a coherent and integrated manner.

Preparing for Connexions in your college

To be fully effective, personal advisers need to work closely with:

- student counsellors;
- student guidance;
- Personal Tutors;
- welfare officers;
- careers co-ordinators/advisers;
- other teaching staff;
- College Senior Managers;
- other professionals involved in student support/advocacy.

Connexions is designed to slot easily into existing approaches, building on what already happens in the college, and can also be a catalyst for better integration. Personal Tutors and personal advisers should work together as part of an overall co-ordinated approach to providing student support. Connexions will also offer colleges help to integrate guidance and support. This can include **training for staff** on career-related issues and in assessment of need; and support on broad curriculum issues, such as careers and related areas, drugs, health, mentoring or education-business link issues.

What Colleges should do now

To gain the most from Connexions, college managers should start to develop ideas about the position they would like reflected in their Partnership Agreement with Connexions, and give thought to the following issues:

- How can Connexions **best add value** to the work of the college?
- What type of personal adviser can most benefit your young students and which of the **mix of personal adviser functions** defined by Connexions is appropriate for your college?
- How can the personal adviser be **inducted into and integrated with** your institution's existing student support system?
- What **development activities** will be needed to increase understanding and awareness of Connexions amongst your staff?
- What channels can personal advisers use to **share routine information with college staff**?
- In what ways can Connexions be used in a **multi-disciplinary team** of teaching and support staff within your college? How can that team be **best co-ordinated, monitored and directed**?
- How can your existing relationships between personal tutors and subject teachers be developed to **enable effective referral** of those students in need of a personal adviser?
- How can Connexions enhance students' existing **review and action planning** cycles?
- In what ways can your college **help students to express their views** about Connexions?
- How can the college ensure **parents/carers** are made aware of Connexions?
- How can your college assess and report on the **delivery and effectiveness** of Connexions in its work with students, and show that **impartial guidance** on learning and careers options is available to all?
- How can Connexions be a **natural extension of the college's strategic or development planning**?
- How can Connexions make a positive contribution to the **nature of education provision**?
- How can Connexions ensure a **smooth transition** (e.g. from school to college, between colleges, from FE to HE, employment, or training, and when a student reaches 20 years old, to support services for adults)?
- How can Connexions help the college **reach out to and engage young people not in learning**, and **retain** those young people at risk of dropping out of learning?

Annex 1

Contacting Connexions

To obtain contact details for your local Partnership please contact your Government Office:

<p>North East Eric Bannister Government Office Wellbar House Gallowgate NEWCASTLE NE1 4TD 0191 201 3300 ebannister.gone@go-regions.gsi.gov.uk</p>	<p>London Brenda Pearson Government Office FL4, Riverwalk House 157-161 Millbank LONDON SW1P 4RR 0207 217 3306 bpearson.gol@go-regions.gsi.gov.uk</p>
<p>East Midlands Peter Ward Government Office Belgrave Centre Talbot Street NOTTINGHAM NG1 5GG 0115 971 2631 pward.goem@go-regions.gsi.gov.uk</p>	<p>South East Hilary Omissi Deputy Director, Education & Skills Government Office for the South East Bridge House, 1 Walnut Tree Close GUILDFORD GU1 4GA 01483 882520 homissi.gose@go-regions.gsi.gov.uk</p>
<p>West Midlands Bob Smith Government Office FL3, Chamberlain House Queensway BIRMINGHAM B1 2DT 0121 212 5000 bsmith.gowm@go-regions.gsi.gov.uk</p>	<p>East of England Roger Allen Block 1, Westbrook Centre, Milton Road, CAMBRIDGE CB4 1YG 01223 354 982 rallen.go-east@go-regions.gsi.gov.uk</p>
<p>South West Peter Cloke Government Office Mast House, 24 Sutton Road PLYMOUTH PL4 0HJ 01752 635000 pcloke.gosw@go-regions.gsi.gov.uk</p>	<p>North West Brian Holmes Sunley Tower Piccadilly Plaza MANCHESTER M1 4BE 0161 952 4463 bholmes.gonw@go-regions.gsi.gov.uk</p>
<p>Yorkshire and the Humber Derek Ireland Government Office 516, City House New Station Street LEEDS LS1 4JD 0113 280 0600 direland.goyh@go-regions.gsi.gov.uk</p>	

Annex 2

Connexions Card


The Connexions Card is a further tool to help you to **encourage young people to stay on in learning** by:

- **reducing** some of the **financial barriers to learning** by giving young people access to a range of discounts (for example on public transport, books and equipment);
- encouraging more young people to remain in learning by **rewarding** their **participation and achievements** through the provision of further discounts in leisure facilities and on the high street, and the provision of free offers and services;
- helping young people to improve the choices they make by **providing** them with **information about careers and course options** through the connexions card website (www.connexionscard.com).

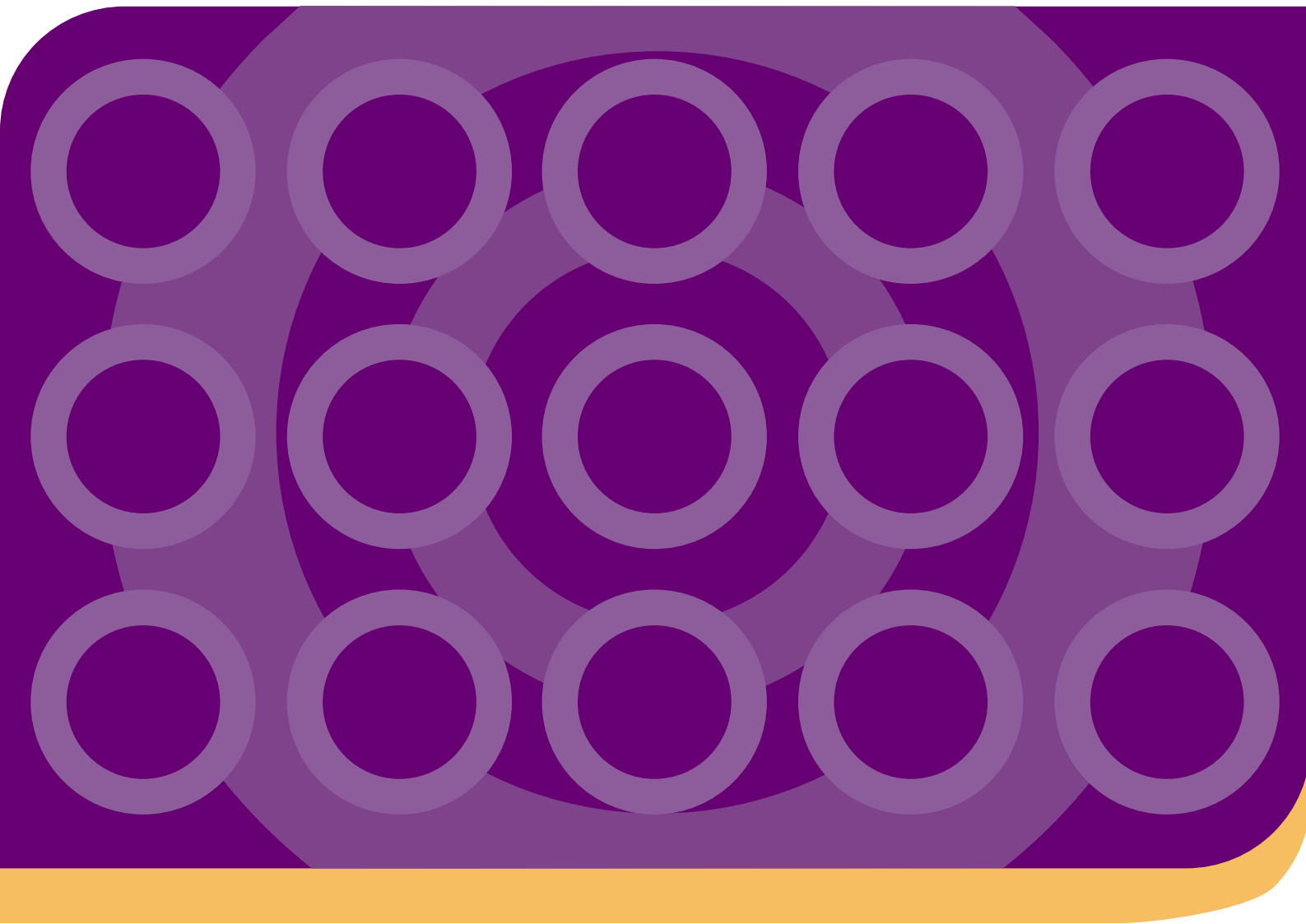
The Card will be available to all young people between 16 and 19 – many of whom will have the Card when they enrol with you. You will be provided with spare application forms for those that miss the regular distribution. Elements of the Card's reward and loyalty function require a robust method of attendance monitoring in the College and an IT based system will be made available to the College to enable this to happen. This attendance system will also reduce the administrative burden of the Educational Maintenance Allowance. Cardholders accrue points for attendance, voluntary activity and achieving other specific goals that encourage learning.

The Card is being introduced region by region throughout the academic year 2001/2.

For further information please contact the help line on: 08081 724444.



Connexions – the best start in life
for every young person



A copy of this document can be ordered from:

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