



Office for Standards  
in Education

# Connexions partnerships: the first year 2001–2002

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## Introduction

1. The Connexions Service was established to provide integrated information, advice and guidance, and access to personal development opportunities for all 13–19 year olds. It aims to help young people engage in learning, achieve their full potential and make a smooth transition to adult life. The Connexions Service National Unit (CSNU) within the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) is responsible for developing the policy for the Connexions Service and, together with its partners in government offices, administers the Service through 47 Connexions partnerships. These partnerships share boundaries with the local Learning and Skills Councils (LSC) and have overall responsibility for the local provision of Connexions services. Local management committees (LMCs) are responsible for bringing together partners in their area and for the day-to-day management of the local delivery of the Connexions Service. Central to the Connexions Service is a network of personal advisers who work with young people to enable them to obtain the information, advice, guidance, development opportunities and other support that they need.

## Background to the monitoring inspections

2. The first 12 Connexions partnerships began their work in April 2001 and a further three became operational in September 2001. The Learning and Skills Act 2000 gave the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) the lead responsibility to inspect the provision made by the Connexions partnerships. During their first year of operation, in agreement with the CSNU, Ofsted conducted a programme of monitoring inspections of these partnerships from July 2001 to March 2002.
3. At the time of their inspection, some partnerships had been in operation for just under three months, although some of these had been Connexions pilots for aspects of the service; others, which were inspected towards the end of the inspection programme, had been in operation for almost a year. During the year when the inspections were taking place, CSNU established the objectives for the Connexions Service. CSNU also provided partnerships with guidance on many aspects of provision on which the inspections focused, for example, the involvement of young people.
4. The purposes of these inspections were to report on the progress being made by the partnerships at the early stage of the development of the Connexions Service and to test the Ofsted draft framework for the inspection of Connexions partnerships. A period of consultation was in progress with the intention of publishing the final version of the framework in April 2002. The monitoring inspections also provided the opportunity to familiarise inspectors with the developing work of the Connexions Service and to train the newly appointed additional inspectors (AIs).
5. It was agreed with CSNU that the monitoring inspections would evaluate and report on four themes of particular interest. The four themes were:
  - partnerships
  - the role of the personal adviser
  - the involvement of young people
  - careers education and guidance.

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In focusing on the four themes, relevant aspects of the draft inspection framework were used as evaluation tools. This report describes the main findings on the four themes from the 15 monitoring inspections.

## Partnerships

6. The list of partnerships visited during the monitoring inspections is given in the annex to this report.
7. The partnerships were structured into one of the three models described in the Connexions Service Business Planning Guidance (CSNU October 2001): direct delivery, subcontracting or lead body arrangement. In the direct delivery model, the partnerships are primarily companies limited by guarantee that have been established from a careers company or a merger of such companies. Subcontracting Connexions partnerships are newly formed companies, limited by guarantee, which deliver through subcontracting services to providers. In most cases, the major front-line services are delivered by ex-careers service companies, which may be either private sector or ex-partnership companies that have retained their former status. In the lead body arrangement, the partnership is not a legal entity and uses a third party to carry out the major functions of its operations, including the legal accountability for the use of the CSNU grant. Eight of the partnerships inspected were organised in the direct delivery model, six were subcontracted models and one partnership was structured with a lead body arrangement.

## Monitoring inspection process

8. The inspections took place in the summer and autumn terms of 2001 and in the spring term of 2002. HMI led the inspection teams that comprised AIs and inspectors from the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI). In addition, observers from the CSNU accompanied inspectors on some aspects of the monitoring process.
9. Following a preliminary visit to the partnership, the inspection took place in two stages. In the first stage of the inspection, a core team of HMI and ALI inspectors conducted a series of meetings and discussions with partnership representatives and staff and examined documents provided by the partnership. The partnership, at the request of Ofsted, completed a self-assessment schedule (SAS). This enabled the partnership to highlight its key strengths and areas for development in relation to the quality statements in the draft inspection framework and to point inspectors towards key evidence to support these judgements. The completed SAS was a valuable source of information on the progress made by each partnership.
10. The second stage of the inspection focused primarily on the observation of practice and making judgements on the impact of such practice on young people's learning and development. A team of AIs joined the HMI and the ALI inspectors. The programme of observations was agreed with the partnership and included visits to meetings of the partnership board and LMCs and discussions with Connexions staff and partners. At the end of the inspection week, the partnership received informal feedback on the progress to date and areas for development in relation to the four themes. This feedback was subsequently confirmed in writing to the partnership.
11. The inspection team took account of the stage of development of each partnership. In addition to implementing the first year of their business plan, the

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partnerships were managing the demands of data collection and reporting and were responding to a significant amount of additional guidance provided by CSNU to support the development of the Connexions Service. Inspectors were sensitive to the embryonic nature of some of the services and structures and the fact that many Connexions staff had only recently taken up their posts or were experiencing significant changes in their working practices. In some areas, the amount of Connexions-related practice available for observation was limited. In many partnership areas, existing practice, such as careers education and guidance (CEG), was only beginning to reflect the Connexions objectives. The findings of this report reflect the evidence available and the judgements made by Ofsted at the time of the monitoring inspections. As such, given that these took place early in the development of the partnership, it is anticipated that some of the issues and concerns raised in this report have been resolved and that further progress has been made.

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## Summary of main findings

- ❑ During the first year of operation, the partnership boards and senior managers devoted a considerable amount of time, energy and resources to establishing the working relationships and structures that would enable them to provide an effective Connexions Service. The process of business planning and of establishing the management structures required by CSNU ensured that a good range of key partners was involved in initial strategic and operational decisions. Leadership at a senior level was proactive and effective in fostering co-operation between key stakeholders. The good level of collaboration that already existed between partners, particularly between statutory agencies and with the careers companies, was a significant factor in the initial development of the partnerships. Statutory agencies through their membership of the partnership are able to establish and maintain links between the major national and local policy initiatives. The voluntary sector is well represented in the partnerships' business plans and, in a few areas, the support of the partnership is encouraging greater cohesion within the sector. Connexions pilots have helped to break down barriers between services and the developing Connexions Service is promoting a positive climate of working collaboratively, as agencies recognise the potential improvements in services and the benefits to young people.
- ❑ The commitment to working in partnership is strong, but there is much to do to ensure that this principle is put into practice. In two thirds of the partnerships, some key partners, such as the youth service, employers and training providers, are not appropriately represented on the boards and at LMC level. At the time of the monitoring inspections, the large majority of partnerships had not made clear the nature of the Connexions Service that they intended to provide and how this related to the roles and responsibilities of partner organisations. Agreements, protocols and procedures for joint working were underdeveloped. As a result, tensions remained in the relationships with partners, such as the youth service, social services, schools and colleges, which inhibited their full participation. The arrangements for performance management and quality assurance were in the early stages of development and, as such, partnerships were unable to judge the impact of the work with their partners and their overall effectiveness.
- ❑ Most partnerships have made good efforts to involve young people in the development and implementation of the service. Young people made a significant contribution to the design of information materials and to the selection and appointment of Connexions staff. As a result they increased their self-confidence and gained new skills and knowledge. These young people were justifiably proud of the important part that they had played in setting up the partnership. Strategies to involve young people are most successful where the partnership draws on the existing practice and expertise of partners. However, the range and number of young people with an understanding of the Connexions Service and of those actively involved in determining the direction of the service were low in a majority of partnerships at the time of the monitoring inspections.
- ❑ Partnerships are very aware of the importance of giving young people a significant voice in the strategic and operational management of the partnership and young people are represented on some LMCs. Some partnerships have used the information gained from young people to determine policies and procedures and to improve services. At the time of the monitoring inspections, partnerships were exploring ways of engaging young people in decision-making at board and LMC levels. However, few partnerships had in place a



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co-ordinated strategy to ensure the systematic involvement of young people throughout the Connexions Service.

- ❑ Partnerships have been successful in securing a cohort of personal advisers who are enthusiastic and committed to the aims of the Connexions Service and who bring with them a wide range of expertise. There is good evidence that the role of the personal adviser enhances and extends the support and learning opportunities for young people, particularly for those with complex and multiple needs. Partner agencies value highly the contribution of the personal adviser. Most young people responded positively to the work of the personal adviser. They became more self-confident, overcame barriers to progression, understood the choices that they needed to make and engaged more effectively in learning. In the best practice, personal advisers have clear objectives for their work, plan their sessions well and use personal information sensitively to assist young people in making important transitions in their lives. Where Connexions practice is most effective, the personal adviser provides activities and interventions that challenge young people's attitudes to learning and help them refocus on their academic and personal goals.
- ❑ The role of the personal adviser is developing well, but key aspects of Connexions practice and the management and support arrangements for personal advisers were inconsistent or were not yet established at the time of the monitoring inspections. Personal advisers recruited to the Connexions Service provide contrasting and complementary strengths. However, some do not yet have the breadth of skills and knowledge to perform the wider role needed in an integrated support service. Partnerships have yet to put in place sufficiently robust arrangements and procedures for needs assessment, planning, recording, referral and tracking to ensure that the work of the personal adviser is effective. There is a lack of clarity and understanding about the role and deployment of the personal adviser across many partnership areas and within schools. Policies and procedures that define working relationships with partners and secure the quality of services provided by personal advisers are underdeveloped. In over two thirds of the partnerships, the arrangements for the line management and professional supervision of personal advisers are unsatisfactory and insufficient to support them in developing their role and a coherent approach to the services that they provide.
- ❑ The implementation of the Connexions Service has maintained, restored and, in some instances, improved the provision for CEG in schools and colleges. Where Connexions practice is developing well, the careers professional in the role of the personal adviser provides a holistic approach to the support for young people's learning and development that complements the pastoral and academic goals of the school or college. The quality of practice in guidance sessions is good overall, although, in a small number of sessions, personal advisers fail to provide sufficient challenge to young people's aspirations. The quality of target-setting and action planning varies in quality ranging from some good practice linking action plans to Progress Files to poorly structured reviews. Across the partnerships, the quality of careers guidance for young people on work-based training routes is also variable, with some unsatisfactory practice observed in a small number of guidance sessions.
- ❑ The resources available for CEG are very good and some partnerships have developed additional materials to support the provision for young people with specific needs. However, the quality of information in many schools relating to work-based training opportunities is poor. Some schools and colleges have improved the accommodation used for CEG and many have attractive Connexions Service areas, often designed by young people. In a small number

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of schools, however, guidance sessions take place in inappropriate accommodation. Most partnerships have made good progress in the development of Connexions centres and one-stop information and advice shops that provide attractive and purposeful accommodation for careers guidance.

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## Partnerships

*'partnership – agencies collaborating to achieve more for young people, parents and communities than agencies working in isolation'*

(Objectives for the Connexions Service, CSNU October 2001)

### **Areas where good progress has been made**

- ◇ *The process of business planning and of establishing management structures ensured that a good range of key partners was involved in initial strategic and operational decisions.*
- ◇ *Leadership at a senior level was proactive and effective in fostering co-operation between the main stakeholders.*
- ◇ *In the development of the Connexions Service, partnerships have benefited from the prior experience and success of effective inter-agency collaboration.*
- ◇ *Through their involvement in the development and management of the partnership, statutory agencies are able to establish and maintain links between the major national and local policy initiatives that have an impact on young people.*
- ◇ *The voluntary sector is well represented in business plans and, in a few areas, with the support of the partnership, greater cohesion within the sector is emerging.*
- ◇ *Connexions pilots have helped to break down barriers between services; the developing Connexions Service is promoting a positive climate of working collaboratively as agencies recognise the potential improvements in services and the benefits to young people.*

### **Areas where more progress is needed**

*To improve work in this area, partnerships should:*

- *ensure that key partners, such as the youth service, employers and training providers, are effectively represented at board and LMC levels and are fully involved in the planning and implementation of Connexions practice*
- *clarify the nature and functions of the Connexions Service in relation to the roles, responsibilities and priorities of partner agencies and organisations*
- *find ways of ensuring that the contribution of voluntary sector partners to the Connexions Service is exploited fully*
- *clarify with schools and colleges the joint working arrangements for personal advisers, pastoral staff, learning mentors and others*
- *ensure that collaborative working is underpinned by clearly detailed protocols, agreements, processes and procedures that focus on young people's learning and development*
- *establish effective arrangements for performance management and quality assurance to judge the impact of their work with partners and their overall effectiveness.*

12. The development of partnerships is one of the eight key principles of the Connexions Service. Partnerships need to be effective at a strategic level where the policy and practice of the Connexions Service as a whole are formulated and, equally importantly, at the level of contact with young people. During the

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first year of operation, the partnership boards and senior managers devoted a considerable amount of time, energy and resources to establishing the working relationships and structures that would enable them to provide an effective Connexions Service.

### Strategic partnerships

13. At a strategic level, the partnership boards were set up with representation from most key statutory and voluntary agencies, including the local LSC. The process of business planning and of establishing the management structures required by CSNU ensured that a good range of key partners was involved in initial strategic and operational decisions. The boards provided good strategic leadership in setting up the partnerships and engendering commitment and collaboration from most partners. However, in a very small minority of partnerships, the boards are dominated by one or two lead agencies or fail to provide the strong and coherent leadership needed in the early stages of the development of the Connexions Service.
14. Partners bring significant resources and expertise to the work of the partnership and much benefit was drawn from existing levels of collaboration in the early days of the development of the Connexions Service. Senior Connexions staff were proactive and effective in fostering co-operation between the main stakeholders. Such co-operation was established more quickly where there were already long-standing effective relationships and inter-agency working, for example, within and between local authorities, careers companies, youth services and with the voluntary sector. In some partnership areas, the development of the Connexions Service re-established links and relationships affected by the reorganisation of local government structures.

*The initial strategic development and early work of the partnership have benefited greatly from the strong leadership of and commitment from the LEAs and the careers companies (South London).*

*A multi-agency group brought together several services to analyse the immediate needs of young people, map provision and identify gaps. They saw a need to improve provision for teenage mothers and non-attenders at Key Stage 4 and to set up taster classes for those in employment who were not receiving training (Lincolnshire and Rutland).*

15. The formation and work of the board and the LMCs provide important structured opportunities for statutory agencies to establish and maintain links between the major national and local policy initiatives that have an impact on young people, such as those on teenage pregnancy. Reflecting the growing co-operation and collaboration between agencies, some partners already look to involve the Connexions Service in their strategic planning. The North London partnership, for example, is represented on key planning and strategic groups, such as the local LSC work-based learning strategy group.
16. There were good examples where partnerships brought together a great deal of information for young people by drawing on the services of careers, youth services, social services, health services and other partners. Similarly, effective collaboration is demonstrated through the developing websites of the partnerships.

*The partnership provided copies of The Ultimate Survival Guide for young people. The guide helpfully covers aspects of education, health, finance, housing, employment and training, and other important topics (Lincolnshire and Rutland).*

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17. Although the commitment to engage with a wide range of partners is evident in all the partnerships, there is still much to do to ensure the transition from partnership in principle to partnership in action. In two thirds of the partnerships visited, some partners, such as the youth service, social services, the police, employers and training providers, are not yet fully involved at board and LMC levels and the absence of their expertise inhibits the development of the services. Key partners in the welfare and education of young people such as social services and the youth service are concerned that, although nominally represented on the board by the officer from the local authority, their contribution to strategic debate and decision-making can not be made directly. More commonly, however, in the large majority of partnerships, the significant factor in achieving the full participation of partners is how clearly the partnership itself describes the nature of the Connexions Service and the implications for the work of existing services for young people and the agencies providing these. For some partners, the Connexions Service remains a difficult concept to grasp. The vision and aims of the Service have not been translated into clearly defined objectives and communicated within the partnership well enough to engage more successfully these important stakeholders. While committed to the overall philosophy of the Connexions Service and willing to work in partnership, some partners are unsure about their specific role and contribution. Partnerships need to be sensitive to the impact of such tensions on their working relationships with others and on the development of the provision.
18. A key area of tension for agencies such as the youth service, education welfare services, social services and schools has been the perceived pressure of balancing their statutory responsibilities and priorities with the wish to meet the growing demands of the partnership. Similarly, careers companies have functions that go beyond the remit of the Connexions Service. One large company has four delivery units, the first and largest covering Connexions, while other units provide information and referral services for adults, an opportunity network and work with business communities. In many instances, partners are anxious that, in making their contribution to the partnership, they risk a loss of control, a reduction in their services or conflicting priorities. In a very small number of partnerships, the recruitment or transfer of personal advisers from the youth service has resulted in a decrease in their capacity in the short term.
19. In a few cases, existing organisations carried out major restructuring to serve the interests of young people more effectively and demonstrate collaborative working.

*The Sheffield-based careers service and the youth service have merged to form Sheffield Futures. This initiative seeks to provide a seamless service for the 11–19+ age range and the resulting organisation has a detailed specification of outcomes and standard (South Yorkshire).*

### **Partnership with the voluntary sector**

20. The development of the partnership as an inclusive body ensures that the involvement of the voluntary sector is given due priority in business plans. In some partnership areas, strategies to support the contribution of voluntary agencies are playing an important role in establishing greater cohesion within the sector itself, while at the same time, extending opportunities for young people.

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*Youth Opportunities Wolverhampton, supported by the Partnership, represents youth, voluntary and social groups on the LMC executive group and the board's shadow body for the voluntary sector (Black Country).*

*The partnership made very effective use of grant aid for special projects to encourage voluntary youth organisations to explore how best they might contribute to the Connexions Service (South London).*

21. However, many voluntary sector partners do not have the infrastructure and capacity to engage fully with the Connexions Service. In the early weeks of one partnership, only 35 of 780 voluntary and community groups responded to a consultation exercise. Many groups find the language and concepts of Connexions difficult to understand and need much more mediation than is available. Furthermore, the funding needs of some agencies mean that, understandably, they focus on what the Connexions Service can do for them rather than what their contribution might be.

### **Partnership with schools and colleges**

22. In the provision of an effective Connexions Service, the partnership with schools and colleges is of the utmost importance. In the main, the relationship between the partnerships and local schools is good and, despite some early frustrations about the initial deployment and allocation of personal advisers, schools are generally willing to explore the opportunities presented by the Connexions Service.

*The partnership provided financial support to schools to fund a Connexions manager who would have responsibility for co-ordinating the Connexions-related work throughout the school. Strong links were being developed between the Connexions managers from the different schools. One school had produced a development plan that had clear, manageable targets for Connexions activities (North London).*

*Two schools ran a 'Connexions on the Ground' project funded through the Single Regeneration Budget to motivate vulnerable young people in Years 10–11 and to re-engage them in learning. In one of the schools, three personal advisers worked with designated teachers as a team and attended pastoral board and year team meetings. The newly appointed personal advisers brought strength and diversity that was much appreciated by the school (Black Country).*

23. Formal partnership agreements have been slow to emerge in some areas, but these provide a good starting-point for schools and colleges to review with providers the service which would best meet the needs of young people. The best examples feature audits of existing provision; clear priorities for working, including the intended outcomes for young people; agreed activities and contributions. Such agreements relate clearly to local and national targets and assume that a team approach is essential. Some agreements, however, lack the criteria and targets for measuring their effectiveness and are not focused sufficiently on the intended outcomes for young people. Of particular concern is the lack of protocols for record-keeping, the sharing of information and approaches to confidentiality, and procedures for the referral of young people to partner agencies. The first experience in many schools of the Connexions Service was the development of the careers adviser role into the Connexions personal adviser. Most schools welcome this, not least because they perceive the additional time involved as going some way to restoring their allocation of careers guidance expertise which had been lost over previous years. Although

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some schools have already seen the benefits of the wider role of the Connexions Service, as the following example illustrates, a large proportion of schools express concern about this wider remit. They are concerned, in particular, about how such a remit relates to the roles and functions of teachers, particularly those with pastoral responsibility and to others engaged in guiding and supporting young people, for example, learning mentors, education welfare officers and social inclusion officers.

*The headteacher described the role of the personal adviser as an important bridge that helped close the divide between school and home and brought together the provision for pastoral support, careers education and academic achievement. He felt that the former careers interview process had a very limited impact with those pupils who experienced attendance and other problems. He welcomed the follow-up that now took place when pupils do not attend for interviews and meetings with the personal adviser (Coventry and Warwickshire).*

### **Partnerships with training and employment agencies**

24. Links with employers and training providers are not well established and few are represented on the boards and LMCs. As a result, the work of many partnerships lacks the contribution of the business and commercial sectors. At a local level, some partnerships have supported the development of networks and relationships between training providers and support agencies. An important area for co-operation is in the provision of the Learning Gateway. The Learning Gateway was introduced in September 1999 to support young people who have drifted away from learning and need additional help to re-engage with education and training. Good relationships with the local LSC in some areas have contributed to the further development of the Learning Gateway Life Skills programmes. However, in many areas, the absence of an inter-agency approach has resulted in inconsistencies in the quality and provision of the Learning Gateway across the partnership area.

*A joint project between the partnership and local LSC examined the issue of early leavers from Life Skills programmes and improvements were made to the provision (Cumbria).*

### **Partnership with young people**

25. The partnership with young people as the key stakeholder is still underdeveloped. As described later in this report, all partnerships successfully engaged young people in consultation and decision-making events and activities during the first year of operation. In some areas, consultation with young people has led to changes in the content of programmes and the ways in which services are provided. Some young people are involved in the LMCs or other structures that contribute to decisions made about the development of the Connexions Service. However, most partnerships identify a need to sustain and develop ways in which young people can be represented in, and contribute to, the structures and processes of Connexions.

### **Partnership in local communities**

26. All the partnerships have one or more LMCs. These play a vital role in the operational management of the Connexions Service. It is at this level that the impact of partnerships on services and young people is felt. At the time of the monitoring inspections, many of the LMCs had only recently been formed and



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did not yet have the capacity to direct the development of the Connexions Service at a local level. Representation of key stakeholders on the LMCs is generally good, although in some partnerships irregular attendance at meetings is of concern. The role and responsibilities of the LMC in relation to those of the board are not always clearly defined or understood by partners. This is of particular concern in the case of the contracting model of operation where the infrastructure of the partnership is insufficient to manage its essential operations.

27. There are good signs that the developing Connexions Service promotes a positive climate of working in partnership as agencies recognise the potential improvements in services and the benefits to young people of such an approach. At a local level, a wide range of organisations is keen to support the development of the partnership and extensive networks have been established or are being built. In over half of the partnerships, the LMCs have been effective in bringing partners together and all are attempting to build the capacity of the partnership locally to respond to the diverse needs of young people and to widen participation in services. Agencies have become more aware of the advantages of co-operation through experiencing it.

*Through its special projects funding, the partnership works with the local councils, the youth service and a specialist multi-agency team to provide mentors for young people. The African-Caribbean Mentoring Project was set up in response to parents' concerns about the underachievement of 11–16 year olds. In addition to supporting young people to participate more effectively in learning, the work of the project was building important links across the community (Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire).*

*An excellent example of collaborative working on the ground was the teenage pregnancy support group at a local youth centre. The personal adviser had identified the need for better support for local young mothers and had linked with the youth service to establish a meeting place. The personal adviser, youth worker and community midwife worked together effectively to provide health support, parenting education (Suffolk).*

In many LMC areas, Connexions pilots have helped to break down barriers between services and provide valuable models of collaborative working. In particular, the development of Connexions centres as one-stop information and advice shops is a good example of collaboration. Such centres provide a useful focus for joint working between personal advisers and agencies that use the premises to introduce young people to the services available. A key feature in several partnerships is an enthusiasm to face the challenge of providing an integrated service for young people and a willingness to seek new solutions to achieve this.

### **Judging the success of working in partnerships**

28. The arrangements for performance management and quality assurance are in the early stages of development in all the partnerships. In some cases, especially where services are subcontracted, the quality assurance systems of existing partners, particularly the careers and youth services, are being relied upon and work on quality assurance policies is incomplete. Data on contacts with and participation by young people required by the CSNU are collected and most partnerships have access to data provided by partners. However, co-ordination of the different information systems across the partnership is underdeveloped. Partnerships face the inevitable difficulty of attempting to judge personal and social development outcomes, such as changes in attitude, behaviour and



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outlook on life, alongside the more measurable achievements of improvements in attendance, decrease in exclusions and examination results. They are not yet able to measure formally the impact of the work of personal advisers on the learning and achievement of young people. Although partnerships are aware of the need to do so and pilot work is being undertaken in some areas, few have the means to track effectively the progress made by young people through education or training and as they move between the different support structures. As a result, partnerships are unable to judge the impact of their work with partners and their overall effectiveness.

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## Involvement of young people

*'taking account of the views of young people – individually and collectively, as the new service is developed and as it is operated locally*

*put in place effective arrangements to ensure the ongoing involvement of young people in the design and delivery and evaluation of the service'*

(Objectives for the Connexions Service, CSNU October 2001)

### **Areas where good progress has been made**

- ◇ *Most partnerships have made good efforts to involve young people in the development and implementation of the Connexions Service.*
- ◇ *In the majority of partnerships, young people were significantly involved in the selection and appointment of Connexions staff and, as a result, increased their self-confidence and gained new skills and knowledge.*
- ◇ *Young people made a substantial contribution to the design of Connexions publicity and information materials.*
- ◇ *Some partnerships have used the information gained from consultation with young people to determine policies and procedures and to improve services.*
- ◇ *Young people, who were involved in the development of materials and services, felt that they had played an important part in setting up the partnership.*
- ◇ *Strategies to involve young people are most successful where the partnership draws on the existing practice and expertise of partners, such as the youth service.*

### **Areas where more progress is needed**

*To improve work in this area, partnerships should:*

- *establish a co-ordinated strategy for the systematic involvement of young people in all aspects of their work*
- *give greater priority to explaining and promoting the role and work of the partnership so that young people understand the Connexions Service and how this can make a difference to them*
- *ensure that a wider range of young people is involved in the development, implementation and evaluation of the Connexions Service*
- *work with partners, particularly schools, colleges and training providers, to offer young people increased opportunities to participate in decision-making and to represent their peers*
- *continue to explore and provide ways to attract and enable young people to contribute effectively to governance and other strategic decision-making.*

29. The involvement of young people in the development and delivery of the Connexions Service is a fundamental expectation of the partnerships. This is reflected in the Connexions principles and in the key tasks for the Service. Partnerships have made a strong commitment to involving young people in the development and implementation of the Connexions Service and most have made good efforts to do so. Business plans and publicity material produced by the partnerships contain clear messages conveying this commitment and, in many cases, these outline the ways in which young people might contribute to

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the development of the service. Some partnerships have established a strategy group or appointed staff with responsibility for promoting greater involvement of young people, such as the Engaging Young People workers in Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. Such approaches provide a focus for activity and raise the profile of young people's participation.

30. From the outset, there was much enthusiasm about involving young people in the launch and in the early stages of the development of the Connexions Service. Partnerships have used a range of strategies to engage and consult with young people. Such strategies necessarily have two purposes: to promote the Connexions Service as widely, and to as many young people, as possible, while, at the same time, ensuring that young people have the opportunity to contribute their views as services were being developed.
31. Young people became aware of the Connexions Service through launch events in the partnership area and information sessions in schools and colleges. In some areas, the work of the personal advisers in local communities has widened the contact with young people, particularly those outside or beyond formal education. Some partnerships have made specific efforts to inform young people from their priority groups. In all the partnership areas, however, in the first year of operation, only a relatively small number and limited range of young people have a good grasp of the role and function of the Connexions Service, of the benefits that it can offer and how they might become involved. This low level of awareness is linked to the lack of clarity within some partnerships about the role and purpose of the Connexions Service. Insufficient emphasis has been given to explaining and promoting the work of the partnership more widely to young people as something that could make a difference to them and that they should have a stake in. Furthermore, some partnerships have been slow to take advantage of the strong links and relationships that other partners have with young people, particularly within the voluntary sector and local communities.
32. Partnerships made contact with young people very early in their first year with the clear expectation that they would contribute to strategic and operational decisions. All the partnerships have involved small groups of young people in the design, development and delivery of the Connexions Service. In some areas, Connexions staff have specifically brought together groups of young people to seek their views, such as the Reference Group in Cheshire and Warrington, the Young Persons' Advisory Group in South Yorkshire, and young people's panels in Cumbria. Where this is particularly successful, partnerships have drawn on the existing good practice and expertise of partners, such as the youth service. In other areas, partnerships involve in consultation and development activities young people from established groups such as youth forums, school councils and Millennium Volunteers.
33. Across all the partnerships, these groups of young people contribute significantly to two main areas of activity. The first of these is in the design and, sometimes, presentation of information material for young people about the Connexions Service. Such work includes the development of the Youth Charter that sets out the partnership's commitment to young people.

*Connexions personal advisers met with a group of students from three schools to discuss and plan school-based activities designed to raise awareness of Connexions across the partnership area. The young people gave their views on Connexions publicity material and provided some useful examples about possible scenarios where Connexions staff might provide support (West of England).*

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In some partnerships, young people have designed a web site and contributed to the design and relaunch of Connexions centres. In participating in these activities, young people gained new knowledge and understanding about the Connexions Service itself and also enhanced their personal and social skills.

*A group of around 10 young people organised a presentation introducing Connexions and delivered it very successfully to a much larger group of around 90 of their peers from a number of schools. This process had helped the group to broaden their views about future options and develop teamwork and dramatic presentational skills (Greater Merseyside).*

34. The second most significant area of involvement of young people is in the selection and appointment of Connexions staff. In the large majority of partnerships, young people participated in the recruitment of personal advisers. Where this occurred, great care was taken to ensure that the young people received training and support that enabled them to play a full part in the selection process. Again, as in the consultation processes, this was most successful where the partnership benefited from the established mechanisms and experience of partners in facilitating young people's contribution. In two partnership areas, young people interviewed candidates for the post of chief executive and their views were given substantial weight in the final appointment process. Young people involved in these activities commented on how much they had learned about recruitment and selection procedures.

*Young people from the youth service's Youth Forum were trained to contribute to the development of Connexions as well as to recruit and train personal advisers. Young people involved in personal adviser recruitment were convinced that they had influenced the process (Cornwall and Devon).*

*Young people were very actively involved in the selection and appointment of personal advisers and the chief executive. They devised selection methods and these were built into the two-day selection process (North London).*

35. To a lesser degree, but nevertheless very effectively, some young people are involved in determining the content and style of Connexions programmes. As the work of the partnership grows, young people also assist in the planning and delivery of Connexions projects. In many of the projects, this includes peer education and support.

*There were good examples of young people involved in planning Connexions provision: pupils formed an anger management group in a school; young people helped shape a project in the voluntary sector for African-Caribbean young people; other young people were consulted on the refurbishment of the Connexions centres (South Yorkshire).*

*Teenage parents produced a 'young-mums-to-be' information pack and were involved in a buddying scheme with pregnant teenagers. In the Isles of Scilly, where there are problems for 16 year olds moving to residential education on the mainland, young people contributed to the development of in-school strategies, including peer education, to cope better with transition (Cornwall and Devon).*

Some partnerships have used the information gained from consultation with young people to determine policies and procedures and to improve services. In North London, young people's evaluation of training programmes led to changes to the content and methodology. However, in the most partnerships, young people's involvement in the implementation and evaluation of Connexions programmes and activities is underdeveloped.

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*To research the effectiveness of the Connexions provision, a survey was conducted of pupils in Years 10 and 11. The survey investigated the impact of personal, social and health education (PSHE), careers guidance and the range of specific help available to pupils. It provided valuable information about young people's attitudes to self-awareness, how they coped with pressure, lifestyle and career choices, and the nature of help required (Lincolnshire & Rutland).*

*Each borough recruited four students to carry out 'mystery shopper' visits to each Connexions centre. Their recommendations are resulting in a wide range of improvements with regard to signage, speed of contact, access for those with physical disabilities, briefings on vacancies and access to the information libraries (Black Country).*

36. Partnerships have also promoted training programmes to increase the opportunities for young people to make a direct contribution to the delivery of the Connexions Service. Young people have been recruited to the modern apprenticeship scheme for personal advisers established in Cornwall and Devon, and the personal adviser training programme in Greater Merseyside recruited 11 young people.
37. Partnerships are very aware of the importance of identifying appropriate ways of giving young people a significant voice in strategic and operational management. During the development of the partnership, young people contributed to the identification and assessment of needs and to business planning. Engaging young people in the processes of decision-making at board and LMC levels is more problematic and was still very underdeveloped at the time of the monitoring inspections. Partnerships state clearly their intention to ensure that young people contribute to decision-making at all levels of its work and efforts have been made to involve young people in the decision-making bodies. Young people are members of some LMCs and work hard to represent the views of their peers. However, the nature of the committee meetings is not always conducive to ensuring that young people are able to contribute fully. Furthermore, not all partners are convinced of the rationale and benefits of involving young people in decision-making and in some respects are unwilling to facilitate their contribution. For this aspect of young people's participation to be effective, partnerships need to ensure that schools, colleges, training providers and other agencies working with young people, provide more opportunities for them to feed back to their peers and to be involved in decision-making.
38. Understandably, at the time of the monitoring inspections, partnerships were experimenting with different approaches to involving young people. Many of the young people felt that they had exerted a real influence on the development of materials and services and were justifiably proud of the important part that they had played in setting up the partnership. However, although of significant benefit, the efforts to involve young people in the development and delivery of the Connexions Service tended to be one-off events with small groups of young people. These activities were rarely co-ordinated effectively across the partnership or the local area and were often the outcome of the work of enthusiastic and committed individuals. Partnerships lack a strategy for the long-term involvement of young people that clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of staff and partners to promote young people's participation.

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## Role of the personal adviser

*'develop the capacity of the partnership to deliver the objectives of the Connexions Service  
recruit, train and deploy a sufficient workforce of personal advisers and other staff to  
ensure that all young people can access their personal adviser and other services'*

(Objectives for the Connexions Service, CSNU October 2001)

### **Areas where good progress has been made**

- ◇ *Partnerships have been successful in securing a cadre of personal advisers who are enthusiastic, committed to the aims of the Connexions Service and who bring with them a wide range of expertise.*
- ◇ *Most young people responded very positively to the work of the personal advisers, becoming more self-confident, overcoming barriers to progression, understanding the choices they need to make and engaging more effectively in learning.*
- ◇ *Young people welcome the independence and impartiality of most personal advisers.*
- ◇ *In the best practice, personal advisers have clear objectives for their work, plan their sessions well and use personal information sensitively to assist young people in making important transitions in their lives.*
- ◇ *Where Connexions practice is most effective, the personal adviser provides activities and interventions that challenge young people's attitudes to learning and help them refocus on their academic and personal goals.*
- ◇ *The role of the personal adviser enhances and extends the services and opportunities for young people, particularly those with multiple or complex needs; partner agencies value highly the contribution of the personal adviser.*
- ◇ *Many personal advisers are beginning to contribute to strategies in schools and colleges to promote educational inclusion and the reintegration of young people into learning.*

### **Areas where more progress is needed**

*To improve work in this area, partnerships should:*

- *ensure that personal advisers with a specific professional background acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to perform the wider role needed in an integrated support service*
- *promote the use of suitable assessment systems and the sharing of important information about young people*
- *improve the quality and use of learning and support plans*
- *ensure that personal advisers employ suitable procedures for recording young people's progress and passing them on to the next stage of support*
- *help institutions and organisations to understand the role of a personal adviser and the range of tasks they perform*
- *provide a clear rationale for the deployment of personal advisers that all parties understand and act on*
- *ensure greater coherence in the management of the personal adviser function and improve the quality of line management and professional support for personal advisers.*

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## Context

39. At the time of the monitoring inspections, the role of the personal adviser was in the early stage of development and was perceived to have two main functions, described by some partnerships, for planning and deployment purposes, as the universal personal adviser and the targeted or intensive personal adviser. Other nomenclatures are also used, including PA1 and PA2. In all the partnerships, the universal personal adviser works in schools and colleges. As a minimum, these partnerships also provide careers guidance services at careers or Connexions centres. This group of personal advisers generally comprises careers advisers who have transferred formally to the Connexions partnership or who work as personal advisers in the Connexions Service through the contracting arrangements with the careers company. In some cases, but not all, the personal adviser continued to work in the school or college where they had previously been the careers adviser. The nature of careers guidance, the other responsibilities of personal advisers and the time allocated for personal advisers to the school or college vary across the partnerships. Universal personal advisers also support young people in the front end of the Learning Gateway.
40. At the time of the monitoring inspections, most partnerships were in the process of recruiting the targeted or intensive personal advisers to provide Connexions services for young people with specific or multiple needs and who were identified as requiring additional, more focused support. These personal advisers work with individuals and groups of young people in a range of settings, including schools, pupil referral units and colleges, youth centres, clubs and other community-based projects, and in detached and outreach projects with Youth Offending Teams (YOTs). The young people are identified or referred by the school, college, youth service, YOT or other agency to the Connexions Service. The groups include young people from asylum-seeker or refugee families, travellers' families, homeless young people and young people from minority ethnic communities. In schools and colleges, this personal adviser works with young people at risk of social and educational exclusion, for example, those whose behaviour or attitude to learning are giving cause for concern. These personal advisers also work with the YOTs, health professionals, care leaving teams, voluntary youth services and other specialist agencies. In addition, through detached and outreach projects, the personal adviser makes contact with those young people whom agencies have previously found difficult to reach. These personal advisers are recruited from a range of professional backgrounds, which includes youth work and social care.
41. Inspectors observed the work of the personal advisers in a range of settings. In some instances, the personal adviser was following up earlier work with the young person; for other young people it was the beginning of the intervention and support, for example, through outreach work in the community or a groupwork session in a school. In the majority of the sessions observed, personal advisers were engaged in one-to-one work with young people. A high proportion of these sessions reflected the work of established careers advisers now in their role as personal advisers.

## Knowledge, skills and understanding of the personal adviser

42. The wide range of professional backgrounds and expertise of the personal advisers is a strength in the large majority of partnerships. Partnership boards are aware of the importance of establishing a cadre of personal advisers that is able to respond effectively to the diverse needs of young people in local communities. Through careful management of the transfer or contracting of



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careers advisers as personal advisers and the recruitment of personal advisers to work with young people with multiple or complex needs, partnerships are successfully building the professional capacity of the Connexions Service.

43. The large majority of the universal personal advisers have a good level of experience of CEG. They understand local employment and training issues and opportunities well, and most have strongly established links with training providers. Some partnerships have experienced difficulties in recruiting targeted personal advisers and, at the time of the monitoring inspections, were working below their intended capacity. However, overall, recruitment has been effective in appointing personal advisers of suitable calibre from a wide variety of professional backgrounds and disciplines. A significant number of these have a background in youth or community work. Where these personal advisers are drawn from within the partnership area, their knowledge of local issues and of existing networks of contacts is quickly put to good use in helping young people overcome the barriers to learning. In many areas, youth work skills in detached and outreach approaches enhance the capacity of the partnership to make contact with young people.
44. Much of the observed good practice is a result of the high standards of professionalism of individual personal advisers and their initiative in developing work with schools, colleges and other partners. When working within their area of specialism, personal advisers are confident and skilled. In all partnerships, they are well motivated, committed to young people and responsive to their views and aspirations. All the personal advisers are enthusiastic about the concept of the Connexions Service and their contribution to its development.
45. The personal advisers provide the Connexions Service with contrasting and complementary strengths. However, in most settings, the two personal adviser functions remain specialist and separate. Partnerships have not yet clearly determined to what extent and how best these professional roles should be brought together to make the most of their expertise while presenting young people with an appropriately integrated support service. At the time of the monitoring inspections, some personal advisers with a careers adviser background were unable to perform successfully the wider role envisaged for a Connexions personal adviser. They provided good careers guidance, but failed to identify and follow up issues inhibiting the young person's progress. Some felt that this wider role was more the responsibility of the personal adviser providing the more intensive support for young people. Others lacked the knowledge of specialist referral agencies to assist young people with multiple needs. Similarly, personal advisers with a youth or social work background were not always mindful of vocational and training needs. They did not have sufficient basic knowledge about employment and training opportunities, such as the Learning Gateway, to support or refer young people appropriately. The most effective personal advisers were able to draw on a wide repertoire of skills and knowledge to meet the changing and often complex needs of young people, including group work, one-to-one interviewing, advocacy, engaging young people and aspects of counselling.

### **Young people's response and progress**

46. In their conversations with inspectors, young people spoke positively of the work of the personal adviser. In the sessions observed relationships between the personal advisers and the young people were consistently good. Young people felt supported and were able to trust the personal advisers with personal and sometimes sensitive information. Many commented favourably on



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the time that the personal adviser gave them and welcomed the impartiality and independence of their role. Some young people viewed the advice that they had received as being of a higher quality than that which they would have obtained formerly.

*Young people experiencing personal difficulties in continuing with their college courses praised the speedy and continuing support provided to assist them in finding accommodation. Some young people cited the independence of the personal adviser as being of particular value to them (Coventry and Warwickshire).*

47. Some young people attributed the progress that they made in their personal development to the regular contact with the personal adviser. Young people recalled how, in sessions with universal and targeted personal advisers, they developed an understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. They spoke particularly of how their self-awareness and self-confidence had increased and how this had helped them continue in learning.

*In their work with targeted personal advisers, young people at Key Stage 4 increased their self-awareness and became better able to tackle their poor school attendance; a young man successfully overcame his previously negative attitude to learning and was participating in Connexions Service events (Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire).*

*Through the intervention of the personal adviser, a young man had acknowledged the need to recognise the feelings of others and felt more able to control his anger. A young woman with a history of school phobia greatly appreciated how the personal adviser had refused to give up on her and negotiated support from the school to enable her to do exams (Cumbria).*

*A universal personal adviser established an effective anger management group in school. In one successful session, he quickly established ground rules, led a self-awareness exercise, encouraged young people to explore their feelings and sensitively focused on the causes and effects of anger. The personal adviser was non-judgemental and skilfully used a series of open questions to involve the young people. As a result of these sessions, the young people were beginning to cope more easily in their lessons (South Yorkshire).*

48. Young people valued highly the personal adviser's role in helping them overcome a range of difficulties that presented barriers to their progress to education, training or employment.

*Young people with complex personal problems judged that their work on the Learning Gateway with the personal adviser had had a significant impact on their lives; they had been helped to recognise the barriers facing them and had been encouraged to take positive action to overcome these. They had moved from the Life Skills provision to courses at the local college and had been involved in a programme of peer mentoring in support of others (Shropshire, Telford and the Wrekin).*

## **Support and guidance, teaching and learning**

49. Inspectors mainly observed one-to-one sessions with young people. In these sessions personal advisers prepared young people for the activities, decisions and processes which would help them make important transitions in their lives. In the best practice, personal advisers have clear objectives for their work with young people, plan their sessions well and use personal information sensitively.

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For some young people, this requires practical help such as in making arrangements for a work placement and going to an interview; for others the guidance and support are more intensive and personal, such as learning how to make their own decisions or manage their behaviour.

50. Personal advisers work with young people in a range of settings – in schools and colleges, youth centres, on home visits, at young offenders' institutions and in Connexions centres. There were some very good examples of how personal advisers provided much-needed practical and personal support for young people with a fractured education history or who were at risk of leaving education because of the significant problems that they faced.

*Young offenders commented on how the personal adviser had been in contact with them before sentencing; during their time in prison, the personal adviser had helped in resolving housing, drugs, and employment issues and in supporting them in their plans on completion of their sentence (Cheshire and Warrington).*

51. For some young people facing more complex problems, mentoring and clear target-setting over a period of time encourage them to re-engage with learning.

*The personal adviser made weekly visits to the home of a young man referred to the Connexions Service by social services. He was keen to return to school but understood the personal and organisational barriers to this. The personal adviser was sensitive to his concerns, but also challenged him to take responsibility and achieve the targets agreed. The young man had been encouraged to join the Youth Council and was positive about representing other young people (South London).*

*The personal adviser provided stability and support through a series of meetings with a student who had suffered family disruptions and had moved schools following bullying. The session was well planned and the personal adviser made excellent use of background information to enable the student to explore the issues he faced and to resolve to complete his general certificate in secondary education courses (Cumbria).*

*A good rapport had been built between the personal adviser and a 15-year-old student, who had left home as a result of domestic violence. This allowed the personal adviser to discuss practical but sensitive issues related to the student's current living situation, such as money and food, while at the same time, ensuring that the student would attend a planned careers interview. The session ended with a plan of action to guide the student's next steps (Humber).*

*Excellent interpersonal skills and commitment over several months enabled the personal adviser to gain and hold the trust of a young person with a history of self-harm. With careful recording and target-setting, the young person had successfully identified a preferred vocational route (Greater Merseyside).*

52. Where Connexions practice is particularly effective, the personal adviser provides activities that challenge young people's attitudes to learning and help them to refocus on their academic and personal goals.

*A Learning Gateway personal adviser with a support assistant provided the right balance of challenge and support to a group of young women with multiple and complex problems. Their ability to identify how their actions affected their choices had increased and slowly they were beginning to take positive action towards the next stage of gaining employment or a place in college (Shropshire, Telford and the Wrekin).*

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53. Through the personal adviser's intervention and work with other agencies, some young people are able to take up opportunities for learning that initially appeared daunting or out of their reach.

*Sensitive to the implications of substantial childcare responsibilities, the personal adviser made appropriately flexible arrangements for a young woman to attend a work placement and a Life Skills programme (Greater Merseyside).*

*A student with learning difficulties was nervous about attending an interview at a training provider. A trainee personal adviser offered to accompany him and made excellent use of the travel time to develop his self-confidence and understanding about national vocational qualifications. Good preparation between the personal adviser with the provider meant that the student left the interview with a clear sense of what he needed to do and a high level of confidence and enthusiasm (Shropshire, Telford and the Wrekin).*

54. The role of the personal adviser is developing well. Much of the good practice observed during the monitoring visits was as a result of the personal skills, enthusiasm and prior experience of the individual personal advisers in interpreting their role. Partnerships have yet to put in place sufficiently robust arrangements and procedures for needs assessment, planning, recording, referral and tracking to ensure that the work of the personal adviser is effective and so provide young people with an integrated support service appropriate to their needs.

### **Needs assessment**

55. Procedures for the assessment of young people's learning and personal needs are generally inconsistently applied or are not in place. In many settings, personal advisers do not establish the baseline needs of young people. Many personal advisers do not use or, indeed understand, the assessment, planning, implementation and review (APIR) framework as they have yet to receive training. Within some partnership areas, different assessment systems are in use, some of which are insufficiently systematic and objective. Personal advisers and agencies previously in contact with the young person fail to share important information on their level of skills and knowledge. This is of particular concern where young people move on to Life Skills programmes on the Learning Gateway. Young people are asked to repeat initial assessments and, in some programmes, the lack of systematic assessment of learning needs results in the use of inappropriate teaching materials. The failure to identify young people's starting-points for their learning and development means that the personal advisers are unable to measure formally the progress made. Judging the specific contribution of the personal adviser and, therefore, the effectiveness of the Connexions partnership separately from that of other professional staff working with or supporting the young person is not always possible.

### **Learning and support plans**

56. The quality and use of learning and support plans are very variable. There were some good examples of written action planning in careers guidance and mentoring sessions. In these, the personal advisers review the targets well to help the young person to acknowledge the progress made. Many personal advisers talk through with young people what their next steps should be, but these conversations are rarely shaped into formal learning and support plans. Where plans are developed, these often lack sufficiently challenging targets for the young person and do not promote high aspirations. In some areas, plans are

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not in place. Very few young people are actively involved in the development of their learning and support plans.

### Recording, referral and tracking

57. The good work of individual personal advisers is often hampered by the lack of consistent, well-defined procedures for recording young people's progress and referring them to the next stage of support. Partnerships have not yet established a clear approach to supporting young people in the transition between providers and agencies and, hence, the key objective of the Connexions Service to provide continuity of support for young people is not being met. Personal advisers are sometimes unaware of the nature of other Connexions projects that might be of benefit to young people. In some areas, young people who completed the front end of the Learning Gateway lost the intensive support of their personal adviser when they moved on to the Life Skills programme. Both within a single setting or partnership area, the links between the universal and targeted personal adviser services are often weak. With the exception of two areas where a tracking system was being piloted, the absence of integrated recording systems meant that many partnerships were unable to track young people's progress as they moved through the provision available.

### Contribution to the work of partners

58. Personal advisers are deployed to work alongside professional staff from a wide range of institutions and agencies, such as schools, colleges, YOTs and educational inclusion services. Partner agencies value highly the contribution of the personal advisers. Their involvement enhances and extends the services and opportunities available for young people, particularly those with multiple and more complex needs.
59. In some partnership areas, personal advisers play an important part in liaising with agencies and building multi-agency approaches to meeting the needs of young people.

*To tackle the problems of poor transport, limited work opportunities and affordable accommodation, personal advisers confidently established practical links with voluntary and statutory agencies, including the housing sector. This co-operation, together with outreach work and links with social inclusion co-ordinators in some schools, were leading to effective work with to re-engage disaffected young people (Shropshire, Telford and the Wrekin).*

*Through subcontracting arrangements, additional personal advisers were deployed to work in partner agencies to meet the needs of young homeless and young offenders (West of England).*

*In a 'drop-in' information service a targeted personal adviser worked effectively with a youth worker to put young people at ease and enable a wide range of issues to be dealt with (South London).*

60. In joining with other partners, the personal adviser sometimes brings specific additional expertise and enhances the approach to working with young people.

*A multi-agency service that refers excluded pupils or those at risk of exclusion to alternative provision has been enhanced by the allocation of a personal adviser with a youth work background. The personal adviser was also working with families (Black Country).*

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*The personal adviser working in a youth offending institution brought a holistic approach that was backed up with multi-agency support. The additional staffing and external networks provided through the role of the personal adviser enabled the institution to improve the support given to young people before, during and after sentencing. The dedicated, enthusiastic service was much appreciated by young people who saw the personal adviser as highly accessible and as a valuable advocate within and outside the institution (Cheshire and Warrington).*

In some services, the influence of the personal adviser role is clearly seen.

*All 18 members of the team responsible for young people leaving public care took on the personal adviser function. A Connexions personal adviser was placed within the team to provide specialist advice and guidance (Greater Merseyside).*

Where inter-agency working is most successful, links between professional staff ensure that contact is maintained with the young person.

*The training provider alerted the personal adviser to the fact that the trainee had not turned up at the training centre. The personal adviser discussed the situation with the provider and then visited the young person at home who welcomed the opportunity to talk through the events leading up to his absence. The personal adviser encouraged him to identify a solution that would get him back on track and supported him in the steps that he chose to take (Shropshire, Telford and the Wrekin).*

61. In some schools and colleges, personal advisers are beginning to make an important contribution to strategies to promote educational inclusion and the reintegration of young people into learning. Schools value the additional time, expertise and the wider dimension that the personal adviser brings to provision for guidance and support.

*A multi-agency team of six personal advisers with a range of specialisms had been established. The team was deployed into schools and colleges and provided excellent programmes of support and challenge for young people at risk of social and educational exclusion (Humber).*

In the best practice, the personal advisers establish effective and meaningful links with staff with pastoral responsibilities and other agencies working with school or college. The contribution of the personal adviser to the support and guidance for young people with learning difficulties is very strong in many partnerships. Schools and colleges value the networks provided by the personal advisers and the individual support for young people.

*The personal adviser worked effectively in a school's support team, collaborating with learning mentors, the social inclusion officer, the behaviour management teacher, the EWO, the school nurse and heads of year. The school had ensured that the necessary protocols and procedures existed. The personal adviser met pastoral teams regularly and staff had lists of pupils currently being helped by the personal adviser and learning mentors (South Yorkshire).*

*The personal adviser role was used well to complement and so extend existing support for young people with moderate learning difficulties in making the transition from school to college (Coventry and Warwickshire).*

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62. The role of the personal adviser in a school or college setting is clearly in its early stages of development. Although some good practice is developing, concerns and tensions among school and college staff remain and, in some partnerships, these inhibit the effectiveness of the personal adviser. In the main, the tensions centre on the different interpretations of the personal adviser role and how these should be managed. Too few teachers in colleges and schools understood the role of the personal adviser and the relationship with other teaching staff, particularly pastoral staff. There is often a lack of discussion about what is to be achieved through the collaboration between the partnership and the school. The assumption that the priorities of the Connexions partnership and those of the school are the same is often a barrier to the development of the provision. This in turn leads to confusion and conflicting views about priority groups. Where there is clarity in the understanding of the aim of the Connexions Service and the contributions of the different professional staff are established, the personal adviser is able to perform the role well. Success depends very much on careful preparation by the school and the systematic induction of the personal adviser.

*In this school, the personal adviser began to carry out her new responsibilities by reading and discussing key policy documents, observing a range of lessons, meeting other support and pastoral staff and viewing a selection of pupils' files (South Yorkshire).*

## Leadership and management

63. Partnerships have been successful in securing early a cadre of personal advisers who are enthusiastic, committed to the aims of the Connexions Service and who bring with them a wide range of expertise. The initial work of the personal advisers is promising. However, partnerships felt the pressure to offer direct services to young people to demonstrate progress against their business plan objectives and raise awareness of the developing Connexions Service. This has meant that some of the essential management and operational procedures required to direct and support the role of the personal adviser were not in place at the time of the monitoring inspections.

## Clarity of the role

64. Most partnerships have established the two main functions of the personal adviser role. These are reflected by the nomenclature intended to make the distinction for planning and deployment purposes between the personal adviser providing the universal service and the personal adviser working with young people with more complex needs. Across the partnerships and sometimes within the same partnership, different job titles for similar roles are confusing for partners. Such confusion is further exacerbated where partnerships do not provide clear direction for the development of the personal adviser role. In some settings, the universal personal advisers still see themselves only as careers advisers and talk of the targeted personal advisers as the Connexions personal advisers. In the early stages of many partnerships, too many teachers saw personal advisers simply as re-badged careers advisers and viewed the personal advisers providing more intensive support solely as an extra resource for dealing with difficult or 'at risk' young people. While recognising the importance of ensuring that specialist skills are used appropriately, partnerships need to guard against an unhelpful divide between the two roles. The development of an integrated service requires greater coherence in the management of the personal adviser functions.



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## Policies and procedures

65. Partnerships have been slow to establish coherent systems and procedures to support the work of the personal adviser. At the time of the inspection, fundamental policies and practices to protect individuals and secure the quality of services, such as needs assessment, the use and storage of records, the sharing of information, personal safety on home visits and confidentiality, were not in place or were not sufficiently well defined.

## Deployment of personal advisers and caseloads

66. In seeking to develop services quickly, partnerships deployed personal advisers as and when they were appointed or were transferred. A basic allocation model related to the number of young people was used in most cases. However, in many areas, the caseloads of the personal advisers are uneven and there is uncertainty about how needs are to be prioritised and met in the future. Some community-based personal advisers, who are working with young people with multiple difficulties, have a caseload of 30 such young people. The substantial time implications of work with these young people are not fully recognised or balanced with the demands of the universal service. The process for allocating the personal advisers to provide more intensive support is not always understood by schools. Some headteachers expected a higher allocation and are unsure of the rationale for the deployment of personal advisers. Some young people on the Learning Gateway have not been allocated a personal adviser; others were disappointed to find that the careers adviser with whom they had a long-standing relationship had not been allocated to them.

## Line management and supervision

67. In over two thirds of the partnerships, the arrangements for the line management and professional supervision of personal advisers are unsatisfactory. In some partnership areas, team leaders have responsibility for too many personal advisers to be able to provide an appropriate level of supervision. Arrangements for induction and professional supervision are insufficient to support personal advisers in developing their role. The line management of some is too remote and lacks the necessary knowledge and understanding about the Connexions Service. Personal advisers discuss their work with their line manager, but these sessions often fail to provide them with a clear understanding of their role and their contribution to operational objectives.
68. In some settings, such as in a school or college, the partnership has not resolved the tension between the day-to-day management of the personal adviser's work and the line management function within the partnership. Often, headteachers want more direct control and complain of unhelpful working hours and of the objectives for the personal advisers that appear to differ from those of the school. In some contrast, young people themselves usually value the impartiality and independence of the personal advisers. Good training and induction help all parties to reconcile apparent differences between the client-centred personal advisers and a school's need for rapid responses to problems and improved achievement. In a very small number of partnerships, the need for close case supervision, in particular for personal advisers working with young people with complex needs, has been recognised and peer mentoring within the partnership area is available. However, some personal advisers feel isolated and have few opportunities to share practice with colleagues.

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## Careers education and guidance

*'raise the aspirations, participation and achievement levels of young people by providing impartial information, advice, guidance, opportunities for personal development and other support according to their needs*

*provide advice to each young person on planning to achieve their educational and life goals, including impartial career information, advice and guidance'*

(Objectives for the Connexions Service, CSNU October 2001)

### **Areas where good progress has been made**

- ◇ *The implementation of the Connexions Service has maintained, restored and, in some instances, enhanced the provision for CEG in schools and colleges.*
- ◇ *The overall quality of practice observed in CEG sessions is good.*
- ◇ *Where Connexions practice is developing well, the careers professional in the role of the personal adviser provides a holistic approach to the support for young people's learning and development that complemented the school's pastoral and academic goals.*
- ◇ *The resources available for CEG are very good and some partnerships have developed additional materials to support the provision for young people with specific needs.*
- ◇ *Some schools and colleges have improved the accommodation used for CEG and many have attractive Connexions Service areas, often designed by young people.*
- ◇ *Most partnerships have made good progress in the development of Connexions centres and one-stop information and advice shops that provide attractive and purposeful accommodation for careers guidance.*

### **Areas where more progress is needed**

*To improve work in this area, partnerships should:*

- *improve the provision of impartial careers information, advice and guidance for young people who are in work-based training*
- *ensure that careers guidance provides sufficient challenge to young people's aspirations and is always informed by needs assessment and other information from partners*
- *improve the quality of careers action planning and target-setting*
- *work with schools to improve the quality of information available to pupils on work-based training opportunities*
- *ensure that careers information, advice and guidance work with young people always takes place in suitable accommodation.*

## Provision for CEG

69. In the large majority of the partnerships inspected, the implementation of the Connexions Service has had a positive impact on the provision for CEG in schools and colleges. For many schools, this has meant a welcome return to the amount of specialist time and expertise allocated by the careers services prior



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to reductions when work was focused on those young people most in need. Other schools and colleges are pleased to receive the continued support enjoyed pre-Connexions. Where the work of the personal adviser is well developed and targeted towards those young people at risk of educational and social exclusion, the enhanced role of the former careers adviser brings added benefits to the wider support and guidance available to pupils and students. In colleges where the provision for CEG was underdeveloped, the implementation of the Connexions Service has stimulated a review and revision of services. However, there is little formal evaluation of the impact of CEG on young people's learning and development.

*The Connexions Service helped the college design the CEG programme for foundation, intermediate and Year 11 students (Coventry and Warwickshire).*

*The Life Skills provider, the college and the Youth Offending Team all have good links with the partnership and the arrangements for the provision of careers guidance on site are effective (Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire).*

70. Where Connexions practice is developing well, the personal adviser provides a holistic approach to the support for young people's learning and development that complements the pastoral and academic goals of the school or college.

*An awareness of the complex issues confronting young people who faced difficult transitions due to housing, family and travel problems helped Connexions personal advisers deploy a range of skills to engage young people and help them achieve their potential (Cornwall and Devon).*

*A student at the local college expressed appreciation for the rapid response and rigorous follow up from the personal adviser in helping him cope with his accommodation problems. He welcomed the holistic approach to his needs and aspirations (Coventry and Warwickshire).*

71. Across the partnerships, the quality of careers guidance for young people on work-based training routes is variable with some unsatisfactory practice observed in a small number of guidance sessions. For a few young people in the Learning Gateway, the relocation of Connexions staff has meant a change or loss of their personal adviser. Providers and young people are rightly concerned about the resulting lack of continuity and support.

## **Guidance and learning**

72. The large majority of the CEG sessions observed during the monitoring inspections were one-to-one careers guidance interviews, provided in the main by established careers advisers working in their new role as a personal adviser. A small number of sessions were with small groups of young people. Across the partnerships the overall quality of the practice in these CEG sessions was good. In the main, the personal advisers providing CEG in schools and colleges are well qualified. Many have long experience in the locality and often in the same school or college. They are knowledgeable about local learning provision and the breadth of options available for young people and have good links with training providers. The main characteristics of observed good practice are as follows:

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## **Achievement**

Young people:

- *understood the range of courses and other options*
- *gained useful knowledge about specific jobs*
- *recognised when a change of direction/course was appropriate*
- *identified and communicated their strengths and weaknesses well*
- *could produce good CVs and understood the relevance of the information they contained*
- *acquired useful information by using the internet and other resources well.*

## **Learning**

Young people:

- *participated effectively in guidance sessions*
- *could make appropriate links between guidance activities and their personal development*
- *were usually willing to take advice*
- *identified the connection between their interests, aptitude and ability and their career choice.*

## **Practice**

Personal advisers:

- *established good working relationships and engaged the interest of young people*
- *succeeded in being non-judgemental and responsive to individual needs*
- *were well informed about options*
- *checked young people's understanding, summarised options and the next steps to be taken*
- *were suitably challenging*
- *followed necessary protocols*
- *handled sensitive issues well*
- *picked up 'cues' well and acted upon them*
- *frequently found themselves in an advocacy role and fulfilled this well.*

*In an interview with a young person accompanied by his parent, the personal adviser's approach was relaxed but purposeful. Excellent questioning encouraged the young person to talk about areas of real interest. The personal adviser acknowledged the contribution from the parent but maintained the focus on the young person. The interview progressed at a good pace and a great deal of information gained. The personal adviser drew effectively on this and his recent work experience and part-time employment to inform the action plan (West of England).*

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*In the local college the personal adviser met with a student who was unsure about whether to take up a place in higher education or get a job. The student acknowledged at the start of the interview that she frequently changed her mind. The very experienced personal adviser explored her interests, skills and motivation with good use of checking, clarifying, reflection and summarising techniques and provided good strategies in response to her anxieties about the way forward. By the end of the interview, the young woman understood clearly what she needed to do and had a good sense of the steps that she needed to take (Suffolk).*

73. Where the quality of practice was more variable and, in a small number of sessions, less than satisfactory, the personal advisers lacked the skills to move beyond the basic career guidance needs of the young person. As a result, they failed to respond effectively to the signals provided by young people that indicated significant barriers to a successful transition to education, training or employment. Opportunities were therefore missed for providing or referring to additional or more specialist support.

74. Achieving the right level of challenge in the discussion with young people about aspirations is also a common weakness. Information from the school and other agencies about the young person's academic and personal background is not always readily available. Some schools do not provide young people with sufficient notice of the interview or assist them in their preparation. This, together with inconsistencies in the needs assessment processes in some partnership areas, means that the personal adviser is unable to judge what would be the appropriate level of challenge and ensure that young people's aspirations are realistic and achievable.

*The personal adviser used a challenging exercise to help a student of above-average ability, who lacked confidence and was concerned about peer pressure, to reflect on her strengths and what she had achieved; as a result the student returned to her earlier career goals (Cumbria).*

75. The quality of careers action-planning and target-setting is variable across the partnerships. Action plans lack the involvement of the wide range of partners available to meet young people's learning and development needs. Some poorly structured reviews make little reference to previous targets and the setting of new goals. Where practice is good, action plans are linked to Progress Files.

### **Programmes and activities**

76. In the majority of partnerships, the enhanced role of the careers professional is beginning to have a positive impact on the school and college curricula, although there remains much work to do to ensure that these embrace fully the Connexions agenda.

*In the school young people had clear and realistic aspirations and appreciated the good range of services provided by Connexions: talks, careers fairs, interviews, questionnaires, magazines, work experience placements. Relationships with personal advisers were very positive (Greater Merseyside).*

77. Some personal advisers are involved in teaching sessions, particularly on the PSHE programmes, where young people learn more about themselves, their career aspirations and the Connexions Service. In a small number of

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partnerships, the personal advisers contribute to the development of programmes for citizenship education.

*A well-planned PSHE lesson on stress with very able students was used very effectively by the personal adviser and a teacher to build relationships and introduce the Connexions Service (Cumbria).*

*In a session that was part of a five-week programme, a group of eight Year 11 students explored their behaviour and how this affected others. The personal advisers prepared well and provided good links between the students' current behaviour and their career aspirations and choices (Humber).*

*In a lesson taught by the personal adviser and the teacher, young people from asylum-seeking families learned about the Connexions Service and reflected on future career choices (Coventry and Warwickshire).*

78. Partnerships continue to provide CEG in other settings and support work-related learning opportunities for young people and specific events, such as parents' evenings, careers fairs and conferences.

*In a Young Offenders Institution the personal adviser provided a good range of practical activities linked to securing employment. As a result of careful planning, the group of young men aged 16–17 years developed, through role-play, their interview skills and understanding of the impact of first impressions (West of England).*

In the South London partnership area, the World of Work accommodation provides an excellent venue for CEG work with groups of young people during the day and evening.

*A parents' evening on post-16 options was very well attended. A theatre group gave a performance on learning styles, option choices and the role of Connexions and the personal adviser. A wide range of static presentations on post-16 options was available. Personal advisers talked informally to parents and Year 11 pupils and responded to questions and concerns. There was a high level of animated debate all about post-16 options (North London).*

## Resources and accommodation

79. The resources available for CEG are generally very good, although the quality of information in many schools relating to work-based training opportunities is poor. Some partnerships have produced good additional materials to support the wider role of the Connexions Service and to encourage a more differentiated approach to CEG. The Shropshire, Telford and the Wrekin partnership provided packs to support work with potentially disaffected pupils in Years 7 and 8 and a resource pack to promote career-related learning in primary schools. The use of ICT, particularly web site development and online links such as to cyber cafes, enhances young people's access to careers information.
80. The quality of accommodation for CEG is variable. In some schools and colleges, the advent of the Connexions Service provides a good opportunity to develop new accommodation or refurbish existing careers rooms and interview space. Many schools have attractive Connexions Service areas, often designed by young people. In a small number of schools, interviews take place in inappropriate accommodation. Most partnerships have made good progress in

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the development of Connexions centres and one-stop information and advice shops that provide attractive and purposeful accommodation for careers guidance.

*The school has an excellent careers suite situated next to the sixth form area. It has a large teaching area equipped with computers, higher education area and offices for both the school's careers co-ordinator and the personal adviser with their own telephone lines. Computers provide access to Kudos, Careerscope, Occupations and Key Clips (South Yorkshire).*

81. Where schools have achieved a CEG quality award, such as Investor in Careers, the provision is very good. Such awards provide schools and other institutions with minimum standards by which to measure and develop their provision. Some partnerships are encouraging institutions to achieve these awards, and in some areas there is a growing demand for this.

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## Annex

The Connexions Partnerships visited in the period from the summer term 2001 to spring term 2002 were:

Connexions Cheshire and Warrington

Connexions Coventry and Warwickshire

Connexions Cumbria

Connexions Cornwall and Devon Ltd

Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership Ltd

Connexions Humber

Connexions Lincolnshire and Rutland

North London Connexions

Connexions Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Ltd

The Shropshire, Telford and the Wrekin Connexions Partnership

South London Connexions

Connexions South Yorkshire Ltd

Suffolk Connexions

Black Country Connexions

Connexions for the West of England

