

The ConneXions Service: professional framework for personal advisers

Proposals for consultation

Response from the Further Education Development Agency

- 1 FEDA welcomes the high priority the government is giving to the introduction of this new 'seamless' service for all young people aged 13 to 19 and believes it can contribute to raising attainment and to preventing disengagement. We believe that the personal adviser role
 - Is distinctive to existing roles and has the potential to alleviate the problems of disadvantage and non-participation in learning
 - Represents an emerging profession which will require its own infrastructure, standards, qualifications and training and development framework
 - Will evolve over time and that training needs to commence in advance of standards and accreditation.
- 2 The role described for personal advisers is very challenging in terms of face-to-face work with young people and the skills needed to work with a wide range of other services and professions. It will therefore require significant levels of knowledge and skill. Personal advisers will need to have considerable authority with other services and professions if they are to be effective. These features must be taken into account in determining the training programme, occupational standards and patterns of remuneration.
- 3 It is essential that the emerging role and the professional training and development offered are rigorously reviewed and evaluated. This should then contribute to the development of professional occupational standards which ensure an holistic service for all young people. Such standards can then be used to create appropriate training programmes, continuing professional development schemes and performance review processes.
- 4 We make a number of key points in our response:
 - There needs to be greater clarity about the different professional roles involved in intervention with young people. The key differences must be articulated between the personal adviser role and other professions working with young people (teachers, youth and social workers etc)
 - Personal advisers should not be associated with any single educational institution in order that their independence is not compromised

- Duplication of existing qualifications and training programmes should be avoided by mapping the range of opportunities currently available against the needs of the personal adviser role
- There needs to be an indicative level for both qualifications and experience required for the role, in order to give the profession the standing it deserves
- Progression routes into the profession and out of the profession need to be established.

The Role of the ConneXions Service personal adviser

- 5 The focus on addressing the needs of all young people is welcomed. There is an evident tension to be resolved between the professional skills needed for a universal service and those for dealing with disengaged and disaffected young people.
- 6 Throughout the document, references are made to *‘doing things for’*, *‘ensuring that’* and *‘arranging for’* young people to access services. Without care, this could be interpreted as the creation of a dependency model. The central aim of the service is ensure a “smooth transition to adulthood”. It is therefore essential that the ability to manage and promote the gradual independence of the young person should be reflected in the training framework as a key function of the personal adviser.
- 7 The roles of those who will work at the interface between the personal adviser and other professions need to be recognised. An example might be the college lecturer who also has the role of personal tutor. This could be viewed as a “para- personal adviser” role for which training and development are needed. The training framework should identify appropriate modules or units for these associated professionals.
- 8 We welcome the recognition in paragraph 3.5 that personal advisers need to be representative of the communities they serve and work closely with voluntary and community organisations. We believe this is vital to the success of the role.
- 9 FEDA welcomes the proposal to produce occupational standards. These will need to be flexible to reflect the range of roles needed to work with young people and their changing needs as they develop towards adulthood. FENTO, ENTO and PAOLO could all be involved in this work.

Working with, or as part of, the schools or college or training provider

Learning mentors and personal advisers

- 10 Paragraph 3.8 refers to the need to build on the '*current model of learning mentors being introduced in Excellence in Cities areas*'.
- 11 We understand that the role of the learning mentor is to ensure that the young person's learning is effective, well managed and free from obstacles. The learning mentor needs to be a skilled 'tutor', ensuring that the young person's learning and progress is on target. The personal adviser role is wider and includes brokering access to, and supporting intervention by, a range of agencies. The learning mentor would be likely to contact these agencies through the personal adviser.
- 12 There will need to be liaison between the personal adviser and the learning mentor but in our view, they do not fulfil the same role. The distinctive nature of the roles must be clear.

Interfacing with other professionals

- 13 Other professions working with young people will need to understand the role of the new service and how they should work alongside. We recommend opportunities for joint professional development to promote shared understanding and collaboration between personal advisers and other professions. We have noted in the consultations, pilots and invitation conferences that participation by professional educationalists appears limited. Substantial involvement of educationalists who will play critical roles at the boundaries of the Service will help ensure that the different roles are understood.
- 14 Dealing with young people can lead to 'burn out' especially where contact is with the 'hard to reach' and the 'hard to help' young people. The opportunity for a professional to move from the personal adviser role and back again, might be an effective means of ensuring that the volume and quality of service are retained.
- 15 The role of 'mentor' as mentioned in 3.21 needs clarification with regard to function and to training. When developing a training framework, if there are to be roles which either support the personal adviser role or substitute it in part, these need to be recognised and provided for in the framework.

An independent service

- 16 The need for personal adviser support and guidance from 13 to 19 is welcomed. The proposals appear to suggest different approaches for young people depending upon whether they remain in school or move outside. For those who remain in school it appears the head teacher of the school will employ the personal adviser.
- 17 We recommend that the personal adviser should be independent of the institutions where young people are studying. This should be a clear operating principle for the

system.

- 18 If the personal adviser is employed by a school, there are a number of disadvantages and dangers. The young person will have to change personal advisers if they move from one institution to another at 16. This can be a difficult transition and continuity of the personal adviser will be an important feature of the system.
- 19 A personal adviser employed by a school will inevitably be faced with conflicting loyalties in giving advice to young people in their care. The following factors need to be taken into account:
 - Young people who are at risk of disengagement should not be expected to relate closely to a person who is a part of the establishment which, in their view, is contributing to their state of disaffection
 - The learning and career choices which the personal adviser is able to present to the learner are likely to be influenced by the school's own provision.
- 20 Greater flexibility within the national curriculum and the need to access a wider range of qualifications and learning opportunities means that the personal adviser must be able to give objective educational guidance. We would therefore strongly recommend that personal advisers be employed by the local Learning Partnership or more appropriately by the ConneXions Partnership. This would enable them to be based in a particular school to facilitate access.
- 21 It is essential to be able to match the needs of the individual with the personal adviser. A system in which personal advisers are employed by individual schools will reduce the likelihood of effective matching.

The personal adviser as team member

- 22 Paragraph 3.9 describes the personal adviser supporting '*teachers and others in developing careers education, personal, social and health education, special educational needs transition processes and the provision of relevant information, including information and communications technology and advice on labour market developments*'. This role is extremely broad. While personal advisers must be seen as a vital part of the team which supports effective learning, there is a danger that their role could be focussed on supporting other professionals at the expense of the direct service to young people.
- 23 It is ambitious to give responsibility to personal advisers to '*support ... institutions in promoting a culture that values diversity and an environment in which young people from all backgrounds can participate and progress.*' Equally, the proposal that they will be involved in '*developing approaches which challenge existing practices that prevent young people from participating fully*' is very challenging. We accept that a

shared vision among professionals is important to create a positive learning experience for all young people. Training for personal advisers must take account of this aspect of their role.

- 24 Personal advisers will develop understandings of effective practice with young people that should be harnessed to influence practice in institutions as described. Mechanisms need to be established to enable them to do this systematically, and training will need to recognise this important role.

One-to-one support and providing information, advice and guidance

- 25 We agree that effective one-to-one relationships and sustained support over a period of time will be crucial in determining future life and educational successes. One of the key features of establishing good and long-lasting relationships is the need to match the skills of the personal adviser with the needs and background of the young person. It is therefore essential that any institution dealing with young people in this age group is able to access a pool of personal advisers in order to facilitate a good match.
- 26 FEDA fully supports the need for personal advisers to be involved in preventative work to avoid disengagement, as well as curative processes of re-engagement for disengaged young people. In a universal service, a focus on prevention should ultimately form the bulk of the work.
- 27 It is essential that personal advisers have an understanding of the education system, including the voluntary and community sectors. This allows them to provide the information, advice and guidance essential to developing an effective learning plan.
- 28 FEDA also welcomes the strong emphasis on equality of access and opportunity and the need for stereotyping to be challenged. This emphasises the fact that all young people are individuals in their own right and present a unique mix of strengths, needs and backgrounds.
- 29 Beyond training, there is a need to identify the organisational and professional values which underpin good practice. These need to be embedded in occupational standards and codes of practice. The DfEE project undertaken by FEDA on '*Effective Working with Young People*' proposes a set of '*core values*'. In our view, these are applicable to a range of professions including that of the personal adviser.

- The learner or client is treated as an individual and central to every aspect of the programme or intervention
- Staff have a positive regard for their clients and treat them with respect

- Clients are actively engaged as partners in the project, conveying a sense of 'mutuality' about the work
- Staff have high expectations concerning their clients' achievement, coupled with realism and honesty
- All staff show a continuing commitment to high quality

Assessment planning and review

- 30 FEDA welcomes the proposal to find a rigorous approach to the assessment of needs and planning the way forward for young people. An assessment framework is therefore welcomed, as is the recognition of the need for training so that personal advisers know how to use it effectively.
- 31 We are concerned at the apparent lack of involvement of education specialists in the formulation of this framework. Identification of the right learning activity will be one of the most important needs of young people. We recommend that steps be taken to ensure that educationalists play a full part in developing the assessment framework.
- 32 All young people will need to be assessed in terms of their support and guidance needs – even those requiring only a 'light touch'. Thus personal advisers will need to be trained in assessing all young people to various degrees of depth and the 'trigger points' will need to be inclusive.
- 33 Personal advisers need to support young people with special needs and learning difficulties effectively. We recognise the need for all personal advisers to be aware of special needs in the same way that this is expected of members of the teaching profession, and for them to be trained accordingly.

Working with parents and carers

- 34 We welcome the involvement of parents and carers as active partners in the process. However, this should not be seen exclusively as the responsibility of the personal adviser. It is an aspect which should be common to all the professions who work with young people, and reflected across all related training frameworks.

Community support

- 35 We welcome the proposed local nature of the service and its potential contribution to community capacity building and neighbourhood renewal.

- 36 It will be essential that personal advisers understand the local map of services and provision. The development of the mapping tool already underway will be vital. We see two levels which need to be represented in the training framework:
- The ability to undertake the mapping process is likely to be the responsibility of the ConneXions Manager
 - The ability to work with a young person to plan an appropriate route will be the responsibility of the personal adviser.
37. This distinction should be made clear in the roles, the emerging occupational standards and in the training framework. Both personal advisers and ConneXions Managers will need to understand the concept of the map and its purpose and be able to evaluate its coverage in the light of experience gained.

Working with other agencies

The brokering role

38. Paragraph 3.22 describes the heart of the personal adviser role. This is the ability to work as a broker on behalf of the young person to achieve a supported, co-ordinated and coherent approach to learning. The brokerage role differentiates personal advisers from other professions. This should form a central part of any training framework. We recommend that it appear as a discrete unit.

Working with agencies at different levels

39. There are different levels of activity which are likely to be undertaken by different roles within the ConneXions Service. For instance:
- It should be the Manager's responsibility to ensure that local key agencies – including employers or their representatives, youth, voluntary and community organisations – support the ethos of the Service and demonstrate this through local provision
 - Personal advisers should work with the local map and be able to identify appropriate pathways as well as understand the diverse roles and responsibilities of different agencies.
40. Personal advisers also need to be responsible for identifying situations where support for the Service and its young people appears to be lacking, as well as identifying areas where it is working well and to the young person's advantage. Intelligence gathered and understanding developed by personal advisers must inform practice. As stated earlier, mechanisms need to be in place to enable this.
41. Work with other agencies needs to recognise that many young people will be involved in interventions which are 'outside the mainstream', as it is currently

perceived. Personal advisers will need to work with these agencies, including managing effective transition from one intervention to another.

42. A critical aspect of the personal adviser role is to oversee the effectiveness of a variety of interventions and ensure co-ordination of services. Inspection has an important role here. We propose that the ConneXions Inspection framework is used to evaluate how effectively local services are co-ordinated, to identify gaps or weaknesses and recommend appropriate action.

Training framework for personal advisers

43. There needs to be a careful balance between providing a distinct professional structure for the personal adviser and ensuring that it does not become separated from other key professionals.
44. Attention needs to be paid to the description and allocation of level. The term 'entry level' is unhelpful in promoting a profession. We would recommend that level 4 is appropriate. Its standing with other similar and related professions needs to be established, bearing in mind the levels of authority, knowledge and skills required to undertake this multidisciplinary role.
45. To create the framework rapidly, we would recommend an early mapping exercise to bring into the framework existing units or modules from other professions which are related to the role of personal adviser either in the 'Foundation' or 'Extension' programme. This would facilitate the creation of opportunities for accreditation of prior learning and avoid redefinition of appropriate content.

Framework Structure

43. Clarification is needed as to whether the training framework is about qualifications, the process of training or both. They appear to be synonymous in the consultation document and should be distinct. For any profession we would recommend that a robust training framework should:
 - Reflect occupational standards, drawing on the work of FENTO and PAOLO
 - Indicate routes to, and requirements for, initial training
 - Highlight professional development opportunities
 - Indicate appropriate qualifications and levels.
44. We are concerned that there is confusion over the purpose and process in arriving at a suitably constructed training framework. This may be because of the urgent need to ensure that current professionals in other fields will be able to join the personal adviser profession and access the training framework. This should, however, be a secondary consideration.
45. In order to arrive at the most appropriate training framework, a logical approach would be to:
 - Define the key personal adviser skills and knowledge
 - Extend this into other areas of specialisation
 - Map with existing qualifications and training programmes
 - Consider access routes for individuals.

46. FEDA welcomes the desire to produce a framework which is inclusive and can be accessed from different routes and by people with different backgrounds. In order to achieve this aim there needs to be absolute clarity as to what is key and critical for the role. Once this has been done, a range of other skills and knowledge can be developed as options. It should then be possible to identify areas of commonality with other professions and their qualifications and to build up a framework which can be accessed from a range of different routes and sources. This will make the identification of pre-requisites and co-requisites easier to define. This would be more likely to produce the desired inclusive model.
47. The framework needs to recognise a wide range of skills and specialisms. This should comprise a series of units or modules, some of which are core, and a range of electives which provide the opportunity to specialise. It is in these specialist areas where there is likely to be overlap with other professional achievements. The electives also provide appropriate opportunities for professional development and a widening of specialisms.
48. FEDA supports the idea that there should be a Foundation and Extension model of training and qualification. We recommend that these be not seen as hierarchical levels but routes for achieving or recognising particular specialisms.
49. The Foundation element would be essential training for all personal advisers, and those who work in a 'para-personal adviser' capacity. Extension skills would provide the specialisms.

Defining personal adviser core skills

50. FEDA welcomes the need for a universal service to which all young people between the ages of 13 and 19 have a right to access. The service will need to engage personal advisers who have strengths and abilities to work with young people with different needs.
51. Whilst we agree with the intent of the Foundation programme, we feel that to retain this terminology would be confusing and potentially detrimental to the role of the personal adviser. We would suggest that 'Core Programme' might better reflect the requirement for baseline training for the profession.
52. The core aspects of the framework should represent the skills and knowledge which are at the heart of the personal adviser role and which are also required in whole or in part by those working in 'para-personal adviser' capacities.
53. We fully support the need to identify the key skills and knowledge for the personal adviser role. Whilst we broadly support the four themes identified for the proposed Foundation programme we would suggest they be reconstructed to give a clearer focus on the core personal adviser activities.

54. We suggest that the core modules should comprise those which are essential to the role plus those that are different from any other professional undertaking:

- The ConneXions service, its value system and codes of practice
- Effective working with young people –
 - Developing interpersonal relationships and skills
 - Motivational therapy techniques
 - Understanding equal opportunity and access issues
 - Developing self-advocacy skills
- Understanding engagement and disengagement –
 - Causes and symptoms, ripple and multi-causal effects
 - Assessing strengths and needs
- Preparing and Monitoring Individual Development Plans –
 - Interpreting and negotiating identified strengths, needs and wants;
 - Providing ongoing support using effective techniques to monitor, encourage and develop progress towards achievement and independence in adulthood
 - Co-ordination of multi-agency activity
- Brokerage and liaison skills –
 - Understanding different roles, responsibilities and resources of other relevant agencies and services;
 - Brokering and negotiating techniques;
 - Maintaining an effective network of contacts;
 - Helping young people build effective relations with, and attitudes towards, agencies with whom they have to deal;
 - Acting as an advocate for young people who are difficult to place, by encouraging positive attitudes on the part of receiving organisations;
 - Helping agencies to work together in the interests of young people
- Evaluation and Quality Improvement Techniques –
 - Self-reflection
 - Maximising supervision
 - Analytical and synthetic skills.

55. These core skills reflect the key focus of the role – to manage the transition to adulthood for young people – and would ensure that the skills are embedded through training.

Defining extension as specialisation

56. We welcome the proposal to allow greater specialisation. The settings described broadly identify the areas where specialisation will be essential but clearly is not intended to be definitive at this stage. A detailed study will have to be undertaken as part of establishing the framework:

- Defining needs in terms of specialisms within the personal adviser role
- Detailing training content
- Devising or recognising existing qualifications
- Helping inform the boundaries to the personal adviser role
- Mapping with qualifications in other professions for accreditation of prior learning purposes

57. We see several uses to which this opportunity to specialise can be put:

- The choice of specialisation will complete initial training and provide fully qualified status (assuming that this is accompanied by proof of success rather than undergoing the training programme)
- It will allow specialists in other fields to enter the personal adviser profession by accrediting their prior specialism either as APL or APE
- It will provide a framework for continuing professional development, enabling practising personal advisers to enhance their profile
- It will support the development of senior or team-leader roles.

58. We therefore support the need to bring the Foundation and Extension proposals together into one framework. It is essential that they are not seen as different levels or stages.

59. The Extension Programme should be accessible by a wide variety of means to ensure that it is inclusive. There appears to be an assumption that training can only be expressed as a specific programme. We would advocate flexibility of delivery and a variety of assessment routes using different modes including portfolio accumulation, ILT and competence-based assessment, as well as more traditional methods.

Management programme

60. This response has already highlighted aspects of the work which would differentiate this management role from the personal adviser role and from other managerial roles. These include the ability to:

- Map local provision
- Work effectively with other agencies at strategic level both locally and at a regional and national level

- Influence and support the development of good practice
- Gain the support of local agencies and other organisations regarding the ConneXions Service and their involvement in it.

61. We have already endorsed the need for personal advisers to operate to a set of core values. It will be essential that the organisational culture does not run counter to these values. Managers should be trained to manage in a culture of mutual respect, reflection and negotiation.
62. Supervision is a further key aspect of the manager's role. Support mechanisms for the personal advisers will be essential. It will be the responsibility of the manager to provide them or ensure that they are provided. It would be apposite to consider, as part of their training, approaches to self-analysis, self-reflection and self-realisation such as those used in coaching.
63. We suggest that managers should retain a caseload of clients to remain close to practice. This implies that all ConneXions managers should have the core skills to deal with this caseload effectively. However, we do not believe that the sole route to acquiring a ConneXions Manager post should be through the personal adviser fully qualified status route.
64. We support the need for the training framework to include specific management modules which provide the opportunity for aspiring and practising managers to undertake development activities. It will be necessary to map other management training frameworks to identify generic management skills which are also relevant to an effective ConneXions Service manager. There are already established programmes in leadership and strategic management which would undoubtedly be appropriate for this role. The FENTO standards for managers in FE could be drawn on to inform the content of such modules.

Final comments

65. The development of the profession needs to be an organic process which builds on knowledge and experiences gained over a period, through pilots and research and development exercises. A training framework cannot stand apart from the development of occupational standards.

QUESTIONNAIRE CONNEXIONS SERVICE: TRAINING FRAMEWORK FOR PERSONAL ADVISERS

1 In the longer term, how should the profession develop to include qualifications and accreditation?

It is essential that the role is clearly defined and occupational standards and codes of practice created. The PAOLO NTO should be involved in this working in collaboration with FENTO. These can then inform the creation of a framework which is modular, accessible, progressive, flexible and accreditable.

We should avoid reinventing the wheel by seeking existing qualifications which reflect knowledge and skills required by the personal adviser role. However, this should not be sought to the detriment of creating personal adviser qualifications in their own right.

2 Do you agree with the structure of the personal adviser Training Framework shown in Annex A?

We fully agree that there is a need for a training framework but our concept is different to that described. The model presented is not really a framework but rather a hierarchical progression route. There is no doubt that training will be essential as we are dealing with a highly complex role. Much more work and attention is needed to create a structure which answers these needs. With regard to Skills and Themes, our response develops these ideas.

3 a) Do you agree with the required skills and suggested “themes” identified in the Foundation Programme? b) What skills and themes would you add to, or remove from, the list shown?

Whilst we broadly agree with the skills and themes, our response seeks to articulate more clearly those skills and themes which distinguish the personal adviser role and form essential core skills and values

4 Should we introduce a bridging route for learning mentors to become personal advisers and if so how?

Our response identifies the need for there to be flexible access to the personal adviser role. The identification of bridging programmes for specific professions is premature at this stage until

- *The core skills and values are agreed and specified*
- *A mapping exercise has taken place to recognise prior skills and achievements in other roles and professions.*

5 A) Should the Management Programme be post qualification, i.e. follow completion of the Extension Programme?

No, we do not believe that the Extension Programme should be used hierarchically in this way. Our response has highlighted key aspects of the manager role which need to be reflected in the training framework. It has also identified the need for ConneXions managers to carry a caseload which means that they would need to have the core skills and knowledge.

b) What further accredited training will be needed?

It is too early to answer this question. The training framework needs to be established and refined, informed by the emerging occupational standards in FE and adult and informal education. We do however recommend that there should be aspects of the framework which represent generic modules or units currently available elsewhere.

c) How should we ensure continuous professional development?

The need for continuous professional development needs to be:

- *Embedded in the personal adviser contract – a commitment to ongoing participation in training and development events plus evidence of having undertaken and benefited from them*
- *A requirement for membership of the professional association*
- *Available through a framework for professional development which links to occupational standards and forms part of the overall training framework.*

d) What are the supervision needs of personal advisers?

The commitment required by the personal adviser in supporting the needs of young people, the knowledge and skills required and the multidisciplinary nature of the role all confirm the need for supervision for personal advisers. This needs to be expressed as an entitlement within the personal adviser role.

e) How can the supervision needs of personal advisers be addressed?

Our response identifies the need for the manager to ensure that supervision is provided for all personal advisers. Different methodologies may be used and these need further investigation.

f) What is the appropriate supervisory/support model for personal advisers?

It is too early to recommend any one particular model. The development of supervisory models needs to be part of the evolutionary process of the service. Account needs to be taken of other successful models in existence. These need to be evaluated along with the experience of personal advisers in order to arrive at acceptable model(s).

6 Should team leaders and managers within the ConneXions Service have a caseload of young people, and if so, what are the training implications?

We have indicated in our response that the Managers should have a caseload, as this would enrich the role and potentially make their management skills more effective through deeper understanding of the issues and needs. There are clear training implications where the skills are not already present or where a manager wishes to develop a particular specialism.

The role of team leaders is not fully explored or developed in the consultation document. There are assumptions being made about hierarchy and therefore training and qualification needs which need to be tested before specifying requirements. However, it would seem sensible to retain a caseload involvement with young people for any emerging role which manages a team or group of personal advisers.

7 What existing training programmes should we take account of in developing the Training Framework?

It is essential that the generic and specialist skills be identified first. The framework then needs to be constructed, followed by a mapping exercise to match with existing qualifications and training programmes. The purpose of this should be two-fold:

- *Aid the creation of modules which are specific to the training framework*
- *Identify qualifications and experiences which can “count” as prior achievement for people wishing to enter or specialise in the personal adviser role.*