Stimulating Demand for Learning among 14-19 year olds Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent

Final Report

*"The supremacy
of the human species
did not occur
by brain alone,
but
by brain AND hand."*

Professor Heinz Wolff

Contents

1 Executive summary

Stimulating demand for 14-19s is complex and involves a wide range of individual teenagers, their families and friends, the school system, colleges, other learning providers, IA providers and employers.

In this summary we pinpoint some of the key issues. The full Stimulating Demand Report explains these in more detail, and an Appendices document provides more background, including verbatim quotes from the extensive research program.

1.1 Key points for learners

1.1.1 Careers advice

- Schools have a key role to play in decision making (options, 16+, careers). Currently seen as too little too late
  → start at primary school or at least in year 7
- Out of context
  → need to start with dream building / next step planning
  → low achievers require embedded careers to see the point of learning eg biology for hairdressing, maths for bricklaying
- Confusing
  → learners would like a clearer sense of the pathways open to them to get where they want to be
  → they need a travel guide to help them on the journey, rather than a travel agent
- Partial
  → need to ensure that all young people hear the full story and have access to all options

1.1.2 Communications

- 80% of current printed communications are not of interest to young people
  → scope to simplify and align communications from all parties to increase clarity, relevance, appeal and usefulness
- *"Talk my language"*
  → using the Language profile (see report) can tune up any communications for maximum effectiveness
  → avoid jargon and excessive word count
- *"Come to my world"*
  → reduce dependence on printed materials
  → more face to face and more websites / online advisors

1.1.3 Barriers

- Demand exceeds supply for some courses (mainly vocational)
  → find ways to increase capacity
- Learners choices also reflect emotional factors (eg college in a nice town or where their friends are going)
  → acknowledge this aspect

1.2 Key points for influencers

1.2.1 Informal influencers

- Informal influencers eg parents, have a major impact and can be valuable multipliers for the IA system.
  → make sure they have the right information and access to advice so they can support their children

1.2.2 Formal influencers

- Most employers are not involved with young people / training / placements
  → make it easier for employers to get involved
  → one stop shop
  → demonstrate relevance of school learning to employers
  → communicate with them on their terms
- Many teachers know the academic system much better than other routes, and may have a bias against vocational options
  → ensure teachers have good awareness and understanding of all routes
  → remove "fear of the unknown" or lack of parity of esteem via short term work placements and secondments
  → make sure they have the tools they need for embedded advice

1.2.3 Equal access

- District Coordinators can act as champions and experts for their local area
  → identify which activities can be carried out more efficiently across districts and where localisation is crucial
- Local offer varies across the county and there may be a tendency to push local courses first, creating the postcode lottery effect
  → agree no wrong door approach where an individual approaching any learning / IA provider is given the advice that is right for them, rather than driven by the institution's needs
  → learners all have equal right of access to all options

2   Action plan

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) workshop held at the Yarnfield Conference Centre on 14/04/05 involved over 100 key influencers and decision makers. They debated the conclusions of this report and developed the action plan below. Those comments in bold achieved a high level of consensus both at this Conference and during the on-line discussion undertaken at Phase Two of the project:

2.1   Learners

Issues	Actions
AWARENESS / UNDERSTANDING • Low awareness of vocational options • Lack of awareness of careers service • Making choices without experiences from year 7 up • Lack of understanding of progression routes and qualifications –made worse by semantics eg "vocational"	• Explain qualifications / vocational routes • Agree a national "vocabulary" for use in IAG and use it. • Info must be accessible to all parents + young people. • Avoid the confusion of the huge range of qualifications by concentrating instead on progression routes. • Timetabled careers advice in bite sized chunks • More taster days / skills fairs / practical demonstrations • Integrated timetables • Older "mentors" coming back into schools • Follow up work to back these up • Better job market information to be distributed
RELEVANCE • Don't see point of some subjects	• At end of KS 2 – emphasise importance of maths for entry to courses and eg for bricklaying • Job related learning • Curriculum emphasis to have "real world" examples.
AVAILABILITY • Need equal access for all pupils in all schools to experience the whole range of opportunities	• Increase range of options available to young people • Taster sessions, twilight courses • Joint teaching • Align the post 16 provider institutions • Use of ex-students/ peer mentors (for 11-16) • Increased opportunities for Work-based Learning
ATTITUDE • Not ready for work • NEETs / switched off and without direction • Low achievers don't think it matters anyway • Young people still believe they will get jobs • Low self esteem • Lack of aspiration	• Better preparation of young people eg communication skills at work, work ethics, how it is to work • Look at reasons behind truancy • Get back on track (involving cash / pay) • Support and reward personal success • Influences from an early age, inherent rather than explicit • Need to fit in with their aspirations - start from where they are

Issues (cont'd)	Actions
TIMING - Can be too late - Young people don't think about the options until it is too late Surprised how early boys turn off - Young people can't see beyond the current situation	- Ensure more students are motivated earlier - Explain options at year 7 - Change the 14-16 curriculum - Make choices vibrant / exciting
QUALITY - Does provision of learning live up to the hype? - The 2 key things that have driven up participation in learning in Stoke are EMA and better GCSE results	- Better use of ICT – eg text messages "Word of mouth" amongst young people - good learning provision sells itself! - Manage expectations.

2.2   Influencers

2.2.1   Parents

Issues	Actions
UNDERSTANDING **Must ensure parents are empowered by information to help their children.** - Confusing qualifications framework - Parents lack up to date information	**Give parents the right information about all the pathways, as they are the strongest influence** **Welcome pack for parents when young people start school** - Literature for parents eg Nextstep newsletter - Want 1-1 contact, extra information (website less useful) - In their language and encourage them to talk about it with young people - Bring young people along too, as they won't come alone - Use of children's extended schools to inform parents - Family learning - Arrange workshops for parents.
PARITY OF ESTEEM? **Stigma of vocational qualifications** Vocational skills associated with lower classes / achievers - May not value qualifications if they have none themselves	**Explain early on the need for qualifications for all routes. Practical routes also need qualifications to get onto courses** - Emphasise comparable status - Meetings for parents to attend "options and advice" events at school. Displays by colleges, Work-based Learning providers, Connexions, potential employers - Use providers including Work-based Learning.

Issues (cont'd)	Actions
PRECONCEPTIONS • Fear of college • Unemployment • Bad experience of learning • **Some see school as the enemy**	• Much better partnership between parents/schools/advisers • Promote whole life aspect and promote "personal success" early in life • Create Parent Guidebook – focusing on support the young person will get at college • Involve parents in the discussion • Hold Consortium year 9 • Invite parents into college during the day to see how it is – taster sessions in year 9 • Options evening in a college environment
MEDIA • Traditional method of talking to parents has got to end	• Use new technology eg text alerts • Trial the SPECS events in other areas of Staffordshire, include parental input • Innovative ways of delivering a consistent message – via their media eg info in sports pages of newspaper, Impact theatre in school, activities in the community • Identify agencies that work with parents • Go to them rather than expecting parents to attend • More opportunities than parents' evenings • School websites to include careers information / links to other sites. Use local media
TIMING • Too little too late • They probably work	• Sure Start to engage parents at early stage • Gradual build up of information • Earlier communications with parents probably through primary school and integrated family learning • More and earlier interventions eg Year 6/7 Parents events explaining relevance of routes and different learning styles – tailoring learning to individual needs • Get the practicalities right – transport, childcare, timing – later times? Engage parents in their free time at different venues eg Sports facilities, leisure organisations, Weightwatchers
ATTITUDE • Low expectations • Low self esteem re parenting • Parents may not like to take risks with children • No qualifications or low qualifications themselves • Basic skills issues language (ESOL) • Parents may not have the right knowledge, information and experience	• Focus on parents before the young people • Empower the parents by growing their understanding of what is available • Make them feel useful in the process • Face-to-face "expert" for parents. • Regular communication with parents re pupil achievement to build belief • Options evenings for parents • Target setting days with timed sessions, not queues • Good parenting for teenagers – support and assistance for their role as parents • Research on parents' needs

2.2.2 Careers advice

Issues	Actions

TIMING
• **Careers information starts too late**
• **Need to plant the seeds earlier – year 7 if not earlier as some arrive at secondary school already "switched off"**
• Students progressing to e2e but don't know what it is
	• **Structured careers education and awareness from year 7 (or primary school)**
	   ○ **programmes of work related learning**
	   ○ Connexions PA during options process at year 9
	• Engage parents at early stages – from start of high school
	• Crucial to present short-term goals and break career planning into manageable chunks
	• All pupils to have an entitlement to specific items of information in a clear chronological order

PARTIALITY • Careers advice seems biased towards high achievers • Inconsistency made worse by conflict between schools and colleges → partial /biased IAG • Geographical and cultural differences	• **Consistent + coherent + comprehensive IAG should be a right for all young people.** • **Problem with who delivers it: must have expertise, not be associated with one provider and be able to communicate.** • More inclusive service • Influencers need to understand cultural and social differences
QUALITY • **Quality of IAG in schools** • Lack of relevant experience of influencers • Too many different people eg college, Connexions • Information and guidance not happening in schools	• **All teachers involved in IAG to have a professional qualification which would lapse unless regularly updated** • Delivery of the entitlement to be compulsory and audited – and graded by Ofsted • If we have IAG it has to be giving the right measures - better training for influencers. • Involve young people in the process • Right training / support / information for influencers.
INFORMATION • Lack of in-depth info • Specialisation issues	• Should be general adviser with access to tailored information when needed • Realistic advice to young people about their options – and how this is related to their potential
REMIT • Careers advice not fit for purpose • Careers is an inappropriate term	• Promote "personal success" rather than "career" or "learning" • Enable more 1-to-1 (labour intensive but it improves end result) • Develop trust and build on success → build confidence and raise aspirations
FORMAT Influencers not in tune with young people – age /attitudes Learners buy into a person, not a programme	• On-line chat room with access to advisers • Use of same language pre/post 16 – check learner understanding • Use the right kind of people (personality + knowledge) who have vocational experience learners can relate to • Use testimonials – living case studies • Use students to talk to students

2.2.3　　　Schools / learning providers / teachers

Issues	Actions
UNDERSTANDING • **Lack of awareness and info** • Lack of confidence in the qualifications framework	• **More awareness of WBL + vocational + WBL opportunities – as part of staff development for teachers** • School – college - employer forums. *"Simply get them to talk to one another!"* • Programmes of development specifically for teachers from more traditional / academic subjects
ATTITUDE • **Fear of the unknown** • Need culture change to tackle their outdated view of vocational option • **Staff perceptions of vocational → mixed messages** • Careers = different dept, lack of personal flexibility, "not my responsibility"	• **Work- study - college – staff connectivity** • **Secondments to industry / real work** • Develop links training days – time – can't be individual treatment now • Involve teachers more in real vocational learning and world of work • Get more employers in to talk about what it is really like • Teacher exchange between pre and post 16 institutions • Provide the right Performance Development to give the right measures
RIGHT STAFF • Apprenticeships	• Vocational subjects have a rational career pathway, but need to be taught by appropriate staff who can encourage appropriate progression routes
ACCESS • Some schools discourage Work-based learning	• All training providers / colleges should have a right to access school pupils
TIME PRESSURE • Only government edicts get done – so much to do, very tight timetable • Priorities differ in different schools • Unfair to expect teachers to be advisers • Lack of time with leavers • Lack of opportunities/time for teachers to gain understanding about progression routes / pathways	• Leverage the Influencer network • **Use Connexions to influence influencers?** • Work more closely with parents to use their influence • Allow influencers more time to engage with young people • Focus on small steps • Integrate info into school and college lives • Training needed for school / college staff • Taster days, face to face: use practical • Changes eg new levels

2.2.4   Joined up thinking

Issues	Actions to Improve Communications
CULTURE • We all moan about our jobs • Low aspirations • Increase level of responsibility amongst young people	• Notice and consider more positive messages • Presentations at school from FE / HE / employers. • Show parents and young people that high school / education are not ends in themselves • More employer engagement
INTEGRATED MESSAGE • Difficult when government policies generate more agencies • Is it all the schools' responsibility? • Key influencers give different messages re. vocational options/ routes	• Need to improve information provided to other agencies (eg children's services) • Use different groups eg Sure Start • Simple, single message for key workers to disseminate • Bring together careers / FE / Connexions partnership → consistent / coherent message from all • Skills station - 0ne stop shop for parents, leaders, employers
COORDINATION • "too many experts" • All involved have too little time to devote to important role	• LSC to take lead in bringing together all the influencers and funding. They get access to VP (2/2) to develop a true partnership • A coordinated approach that includes parents, teachers, college staff, advisers, etc

2.2.5   Employers

Issues	Actions
RAISE INTEREST • Employer is too busy • Need to align to employer goals • Fragmented approach currently	• **Brokerage → coordinated approach** • **Communicate in the way employers want** • Impartial central advice • Employers and parents can be one and the same! • Better use of existing employer networks to disseminate that message • More opportunities for employers to "actively" engage and support young people's learning
INVOLVEMENT • Improve connectivity between schools and workplace	• **Support employers in work experience / training opportunities that work for the business too** • Face to face case studies with employers at schools • Improve opportunities for work experience in certain industries / commerce - the quality of placement. • Greater integration of work experience with the curriculum - requires a District strategy as a focus. Pockets of good practice (eg Burton)
RAISE AWARENESS • Lack of awareness / understanding • Need their commitment	• Sell concept of practical learning integrated with academic • Emphasise relevance of curriculum eg numerical skills • Emphasise key skills and technical certificates to employers (rather than eg NVQs)

Issues (cont'd)	Actions
PRECONCEPTIONS • Employer prejudice	• Need an effective way of giving currency to non-academic learning eg work experience, community activities etc. Has to be highlighted in a straightforward way to employers • Remove barriers eg bureaucracy, particularly for SMEs • Positive incentives for employers eg finance

2.2.6 The System

Issues	Actions
QUALIFICATIONS • Employers particularly SMEs have a lack of understanding about curriculum. Tendency to look for things that are familiar	• **Simplify the options** • **Consistency** over qualifications needed rather than keep changing • Single agreed qualifications, which everyone understands. Eg. HWC/ HND known and understood
TARGETS • League Tables	• Less measures – allow a greater range of qualifications to count towards league tables so less importance is placed on these
CURRICULUM • Competing demands of the National Curriculum • Academic bias	• Make careers and lessons relevant to each other • Adopting Tomlinson recommendations would be a step in the right direction
INCREASE EMPLOYER PARTICIPATION	• Simplify H&S / police check requirements • Make it easier for teachers to take children out

2.3 Communications

Issues	Actions
SIMPLE • KISS (Keep it simple, stupid) Confusing messages • Rebranding. Things change too frequently – confusing	• Stop branding by provider and instead emphasise the different routes • Consistent messages • Same literature where possible • No acronyms
EFFECTIVE • Not being heard • Wrong story, too late?	• Leave time for testing eg run focus groups on individual projects (research the message and test it) • Identify the right age to give information

APPROPRIATE
• One message does not fit all
• Vocational route under valued
	• Clearer next steps
	• Promote vocational as a "real" option
	• Relevant segmentation
	    o by age and for NEETs
	    o relating to their district
	    o by attitude (stop/wait/go)

Issues (cont'd)	Actions
RIGHT LANGUAGE • We don't know the target audience well enough – need to speak their language • Jargon eg vocational, academic	• Get language right • Involve young people more in the development of materials – but no tokenism • "Jargon buster" sessions from year 8 • Removal of distinctions between vocational and academic destinations in marketing
RIGHT MEDIA • Not interested in leaflets • Too much reliance on traditional media	• Use range of communication routes – website etc • Use websites for different messages • Tasters / open days • More use of internet / text messages • On-line chat room with access to advisors / peer mentors
RIGHT STYLE • Materials produced for institutions and not target audience • Too much information dumped on young people	• Look at the documents / materials that did not work • Learn from past mistakes • Right messages

3   Stimulating Demand - The project and our process

3.1   The project

3.1.1   Scope

The purpose of the Stimulating Demand Project is to assist in the development of long term joint and individual marketing and communications plans that serve to stimulate demand for learning and inform our local target audience of opportunities.

> *We need to get the message across that learning increases your chances of moving into rewarding employment that offers opportunity and good pay (13)*
>
> Gill Howland Executive Director of Staffordshire LSC

3.1.2   Objectives

As specified by the Staffordshire Learning and Skills Council, the objectives of the project are as follows:

- To investigate whether the wide choice of local young people learning opportunities is being effectively communicated to target audiences (young people 14 – 19, teachers, careers advisors, PAs and parents/carers in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent).
- To identify the key target audience in terms of lifestyle, culture, socio-demographics and behaviour.
- To identify market segments, marketing messages and activities to engage the target audience.
- To assess the best channels of communication both direct and indirect via influencers i.e. parents/carers, teachers, PAs, youth workers, employers.
- To explore opportunities and make recommendations for innovative collaboration between relevant bodies and intermediaries to ensure that marketing and communications better meet the information needs of young people and employers.

3.2   Our process

We approached the project in phases as detailed below during the first quarter of 2005.

3.2.1   Phase 1: Desk research

- Review of the nine local plans (recognising that they are in different states of readiness with Stoke-on-Trent as the most advanced) including Vocational Skills Academy
- Review of other relevant research data provided by LSC (see Appendix 1 for summaries of the reports and publications we reviewed)
- Review of materials collected from displays at various information points (eg schools, colleges, websites) and information on other communication activities (eg Impact Theatre, Open Days)
- Research on existing Staffordshire organisations working with training for young people (Prince's Trust, Staffordshire Provider Association, Total People, Connexions, etc)

3.2.2 Phase 2: Influencers' Research

- Telephone, face to face interviews and on-line debate with a range of opinion leaders in the 14-19 area of activity including all 14-19 District Coordinators in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent plus staff in colleges, local authorities, Work-based Learning, Connexions etc (see Appendix 2 for full list)
- 2 focus groups with parents – one in Stoke-on-Trent and one in Tamworth and informal discussions with parents in Lichfield, Cannock, Stoke-on-Trent and Stafford.

3.2.3 Phase 3: 14-19 year olds research

Qualitative
9 focus groups, one per district, with low achieving young people to cover the range of:
- Year 9, 10, 11 and NEETS
- Male and female
- Urban and rural

This was supplemented with information on higher achieving groups from other LSC projects we have run.

Discussions covered:
- School experience
- Attitude to learning and the barriers to learning
- Awareness of post 16 options and evaluation of those options
- Who advises / where they go for help
- Language and Behaviour (LaB) profile[1]
- Aspirations / expectations / job inclinations
- Reaction to sample marketing materials
- Media consumption / leisure time (best ways to reach them)

Quantitative
We developed an on-line quiz – 'Don't Look Now', creating Language and Behavioural (LaB) profiles for a statistically significant sample of young people who completed the quiz.

3.2.4 Phase 4: Employer research

We conducted one to one interviews with employers and professional bodies to understand their issues and opinions about young people, training possibilities and apprenticeships.
We used the understanding developed from the first three phases to identify key messages for each target group and identify DOs and DON'T's for communicating with14-19s and their parents.

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[1] This approach has been developed from Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) meta-models and used widely around the world. By identifying the LaB profile of an individual or group of individuals, we can pinpoint the most persuasive language to use in discussions and marketing materials

4   Being 14-19

4.1 Summary

A safe way through the challenges of adolescence is to focus on schoolwork, keep your head down and follow the "no wrong way" option of traditional academic subjects. By the time you get to early 20s and have finished your degree and realised that actually you always wanted to be an accountant, you can still do a one year conversion course and be well on your way.

But as we know from this and numerous other studies, this isn't the right option for many young people. The reasons 75% of the population do not progress to HE include:

People / lifestyle
- Lack of role models
- Distractions of the wrong crowd
- Family breakdown
- Homelessness / no fixed abode
- School environment, bullying
- Wish or need to earn money short term

Health / state of mind
- Illness
- Pregnancy
- Substance abuse
- Lack of self confidence, low self esteem

Aptitude
- Learning difficulties, learning styles
- Special educational needs
- Not knowing what they like / what they want to do / no sense of direction

Attitude / behaviour
- Truancy or school exclusion
- Offending behaviour
- Not knowing about the majority of jobs because they do not get much exposure to them
- Lack of interest in, or belief in the future

Our research observations are reinforced by other studies carried out for Connexions[2] which highlight the issue of young people having complicated backgrounds.

We have concentrated on discovering what DOES work for young people, how best to get their attention and what they need for the best chance of making the right choice for them.

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[2] See Appendix 1 sections 7.1 and 7.2 for more detail

4.2 View of school

All the low achievers we spoke to had a predominantly negative view of school. They had fond memories of primary school but felt lost in the system since then, and that nobody cared about them in secondary school. Some of them had been excluded – in one case from 8 schools – and many had been suspended. None of them expected to do well in their GCSEs.

To stimulate debate we used a "Perfect School" exercise where they were able to imagine a school set up exactly the way they would like. In this exercise they choose to

- Keep timetables, exams, homework and even some teachers.
- Learn in modern, light filled facilities with "soft space" for working alone or in groups and smoking in designated areas.
- Have flexibility and free time – as brain breaks for some, time to catch up for others.
- Use computers and practical activities for the bulk of their learning .
- have a wide range of non-academic subjects that develop practical skills and allow for physical activity.
- Have teachers as guides who treat them with respect and have time to help them understand.

4.2.1 Teachers

Teachers – positive

The teachers they like are younger, prepared to laugh with the students, more physically attractive and more understanding.

Teachers – negative

Teachers are however rarely spoken of in positive terms. The key charge against them is that they don't engage, motivate or support the less able students
> *It's a power thing – they treat us badly just because they can*

The young people resent the fact that they are often labelled as troublemakers very early in their school careers – sometimes before they have done anything if they have an older sibling with a bad reputation. They feel this is beyond their control to change, and instead prove the teachers right by living down to their reputation.

They recognise the importance of maintaining control in the classroom, and complain about teachers who are not able to do that. However, they are not impressed by teachers who attempt to impose that control by shouting and issuing punishments seemingly at random. They know that detention cannot be forced on them, and that being sent to see the head can be ignored. Being sent out of the classroom, or even better, being sent home is welcomed. The disciplinary measures that they dislike (and therefore are more effective) are the isolation room and behaviour cards.

4.2.2   Schoolwork

As the current timetable is dominated by academic and book-based study, lower achievers are against schoolwork on the grounds of it being boring, too hard or pointless[3]. This was reinforced by the CT/TEC Research[4] carried out for Connexions.

Preferred subjects from current timetable
- Practical subjects where they can learn by doing, eg art, drama
- Different subjects that capture their interest eg psychology
- More active subjects eg PE, cookery
- Vocational subjects that they can see the relevance of eg child development, carpentry, IT, running a business
- School trips
- Very occasional mention of more traditional subjects.

Disliked subjects they would like less of
- "Academic subjects" especially RE, Modern languages, English, Maths

Additional subjects they would like to spend time on
- Mechanics – with real cars
- Textiles
- Media studies – with a TV studio
- Free lessons - for revision or homework
- Rock climbing, martial arts and canoeing.
- Beauty and hairdressing
- More trades

4.2.3   Life at school

The environmental factors of being at school matter far more to the girls than the boys – as is clear in the detailed comments in Appendix 3. They mind in particular about the state of the building and the toilets, as well as flexible space for hanging out or eating lunch.

4.3   Plans

In general the future for the young people we spoke to is vague. Even those in Year 11, only months away from finishing school, do not have a clear plan.

4.3.1   Vocational options

A key stumbling block is jargon and we did not find any young people who understood the term vocational. They would use a term like "job-related".

They accept that they may not get what they want and the widespread view is that there are insufficient places on vocational courses. Allocation is variously described as being only for the smart, or the naughty or the lucky.

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[3] See Appendix 1 Section 1.10 for more detail
[4] See Appendix 1 Section 1.2 for more detail

Vocational options are seen to offer:
- More active learning style preferred by this group
- Learning with a purpose that is clear to the young people
- A change of environment
- The opportunity to go to college and be treated differently

Apprenticeships
Apprenticeships are not successfully communicated to all. They are hardly mentioned by the girls though they come up slightly more with boys. If prompted, they know apprenticeships exist (unlike the parents who think they were abolished years ago) but often see them as exploitation rather than opportunity.

College
Overall the view of college is positive among young people for these reasons:
- a manageable step into adulthood
- a way out of the bad reputation / lack of support they see in school
- improved atmosphere eg more flexible eating arrangements, smoking and calling teachers by their first names
- increased range of subjects on offer
- a less traditionally academic approach to learning.

Projects such as Increased Flexibility and School Links in Stoke-on-Trent are generating a positive response as they offer vocational/work-related learning opportunities and examination routes (eg GCSEs in vocational subjects) transferable to post 16 courses. Such initiative has generated positive responses from the students[5]. Data from Connexions shows that both projects have improved staying on rates. Out of 309 Year 11 leavers involved in School Links, 71% continued into FE full time or work based learning

4.3.2   Careers guidance

There are some positive comments about the role of careers guidance, but very little enthusiasm based on their personal experiences of the service. In general, there has either been no engagement with Connexions / careers guidance or a disappointing outcome.

4.3.3   Timing for careers advice

Young people need good information at the right time to make good choices. They may lack role models or well informed support from home – it is up to schools and other services to fill the gaps and provide informal influencers – especially parents – with the tools they need to support good decisions.

All our research concludes that the earlier the better for careers advice. At the very least this needs to start before Options are chosen in Year 9 – and it would be more effective from year 7. This would give less motivated students a reason to learn and help all young people to develop their own direction. It is useful to demonstrate the connection from GCSE options to qualifications to FE/HE options to job/career possibilities.

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[5] See Appendix 1, Section 7.10 for more details

4.3.4   Lifeline chart - girls

On the diagram, the vertical scale shows demand for learning:
- higher up (green area, or GO on the traffic light analogy) = very interested
- middle (yellow area, or WAIT) = undecided, prefer vocational learning, could go either way depending on the opportunities, environment and stimuli
- lower (red, or STOP) = not at all interested

There are windows of opportunity in the life of a young person – and there are moments when it can all go badly wrong. As has been observed in many other studies, once an individual has slipped off track, it can be very difficult to recover - eg for older low-skilled women in other studies, recovery may take decades as they are raising a family first.

The **trigger moments** that require special attention are:
- End of year 9 when they choose their options, especially if they don't get what they want. LEA research has also shown that Years 9 and 10 are when exclusion rates peak[6].
- End of year 11 when they are deciding what to do next.
- Year 12 for higher achievers when they may decide to drop out of learning. Reasons we see for this tendency include:
    - Push towards academic study by school or parents → risk of inappropriate learning route
    - Lack of planning/career discussions → wrong course chosen
    - University grants → staying at home alongside earners
    - Family financial pressures → part time work invades study time
    - Family / personal circumstances eg parents split/move, pregnancy, illness
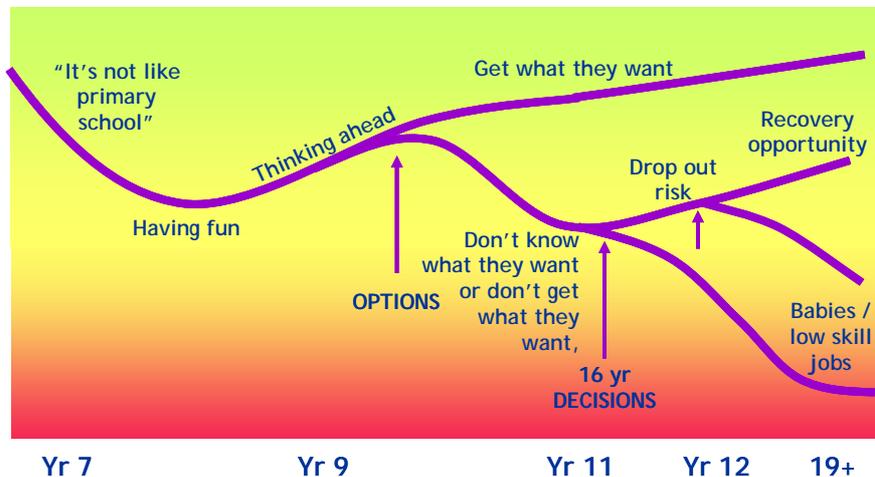
Students and parents tend to consider the familiar rather than assessing a wider range of possibilities to find something suited to the individual. So the most likely option for girls to stay at school after year 11. This is a default option not a choice. They don't like school, but it is familiar and therefore less intimidating. The more confident ones are thinking about college. The availability of vocational options seems to be considerably below demand from both young people and their parents.

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[6] See Appendix 1 Section 1.17 for more details

Limited forums for discussing what to do

This issue has also been brought up in the 14-19 Education and Draft Strategy[7]. Most young people have had limited contact with Connexions or any other organisation offering a careers service. Very few have any real sense of where they are going. They are short of ideas and required stimulus material to identify jobs they liked.

The choices tend to be traditional for girls – childcare, hair and beauty, travel rep. However some were also interested in VSO style work overseas - to escape or to help others.

4.3.5   Lifeline chart – boys

Risks for boys:

- As for girls plus...
- Come from "problem" families and struggle with a bad reputation
- A lifetime of being told they'll come to nothing
- Seem more likely to develop a "why bother?" approach
- Believe they can do poorly at school but still have an ok life *"like my dad"*.

- More likely to plan to *"just get a job"* which may or may not include training[8] The main thing they want income for is going out drinking (they spend about £40 in an evening)
- If they have been in the red zone for a long time then they have stopped trusting anyone except close family and are in a state of very low self esteem. They are therefore tempted by minor transgressions, neighbourhood disturbance and drugs/alcohol
- They resent the fact that they still have to stay at school till they're 16. Their focus is on training and getting skills rather than qualifications
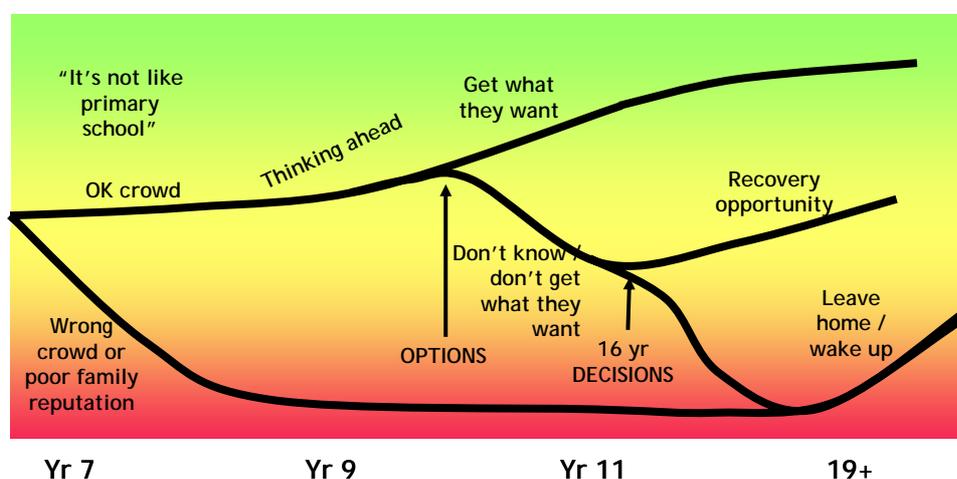
Vitamin R
Professor Heinz Wolff[9] explains his concept of Vitamin R, where "R" stands for "Risk" in this extract from Brunel University's Conference on Catastrophe Management.

> *We have a biological need for risk in our lives, and need for 'Vitamin R', admittedly greater in some than others and **a need especially present in young people**. If not managed well by society by providing enough legal risk - in schools, sports clubs, the arts and social and family environments, this need for risk will become mismanaged and cause risk-seeking behaviour by individuals - antisocial, criminal or simply unhealthy."*

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[7] See Appendix 1 Section 1.4
[8] See Appendix 1, Section 1.3
[9] Of the European Space Agency, the Great Egg Race, Young Scientist of the Year

In our Futures exercise, both boys and girls are drawn to more adventurous pictures showing rock climbing, active sports and travel to very different cultures.

Young males – especially NEETs – face an absence of anything risky or unpredictable in their lives. By hanging out with a small group of similar people and staying at home on the couch watching TV they are avoiding risk – and avoiding life.
→ Successful sports programmes and outward bound style events can tackle this head on and may help regain self esteem and a sense of being in control of their lives.

4.3.6   Work experience

For a lot of young people they know two things about work:
- What their parents think of it (often negative as they are in low skill, low pay jobs themselves, with very limited prospect of change)
- What happens to them personally during their work experience

Work experience is therefore an important opportunity to offer a more inspiring view of work, but suffers from:
- Often organised by the individual
- Low skill / low status parents without good contacts
- They can get discouraged or simply give up due to lack of self confidence.
- There is a view that work experience is a form of cheap labour for businesses and that they just end up making the tea for a fortnight.

Work experience could be more valuable if it took place one day a week for a term, instead of as a two week block.
- Employers would have time to think of things they wanted the young person to do.
- Young people would have time to absorb what they have learnt from the previous week, discuss their experiences with friends and compare notes, and look forward to Work Day

4.3.7   What job?

Spontaneous awareness of a range of jobs is limited, so in the research we ran a Futures exercise using about 80 photos of real people doing real jobs. We then asked the young people to sort through them and pick out the three that most appealed.

The most popular jobs from our research are active "doing" jobs rather than office based or thinking jobs. For boys sports coaching / teaching appealed in particular, and for the girls being a holiday rep in order to travel.

5   Informal influences

Reflecting the low self esteem already mentioned, when it comes to face to face contact the need for both young people and their parents is to talk to somebody who they already trust – better the friendly amateur than the unknown professional, as shown below.

	Trust Personal connection Personality	Knowledge Access Connections	Weighting
Informal	🙂	🙁	58
Formal institutions	🙁	🙂	30
Internet	🙂	🙂	26
Formal individuals	🙂	🙂	10

- Other studies confirm the relationship is with the person not the institution[10]
- The Internet, with its anonymity and accessibility, overcomes the need for a personal connection
- Among family members, parents are key – but not as important as they think[11].
- Girls favour friends, open days and key workers (eg probation officers, youth service)
- Boys prefer Connexions, parents and other family members
- Parents like newspapers, TV and radio

Leveraging informal influencers

The challenge with informal influencers is that knowledge levels are currently low and vested interest in maintaining the status quo can be high. In many cases the young people we spoke to do not know a wide circle of adults, and their view of the working world is based on patchy information eg work experience, their parents' jobs and TV.
→ Critical that parents are aware and informed of options and pathways

Increasing appeal of formal influencers

Many young people do not have the confidence and self esteem to approach officialdom, though they will respond to a structured environment and were always able to discuss their views with us once trust had been established.

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[10] See Appendix 1, Section 1.2
[11] See Appendix 4.

Positive views of formal influencers are based on one of two things:
- Good personal experience – they talk about "the probation woman" rather than the Probation Service. They have a connection with the individual not the institution
- Strong brand – eg Connexions, learndirect, Gremlins

→ Integrated communications around a consistent brand will support the take-up of advice. The Connexions brand is the obvious candidate as they have high awareness and acceptability to the primary target audience (young people) and their informal influencers.

5.1   TV

TV is by far the most popular medium after the internet.
The chart shows their favourite TV shows[12]. They also talk about:
- Reality TV eg Cutting edge, Bricking it, Faking it, Big Brother
- Soaps eg Coronation Street, Eastenders, Emmerdale
- Comedy eg Little Britain, Frank Skinner (boys only), Shameless! (boys only)

→ This material could be used in careers lessons to bring vocational options to life and stimulate discussion.
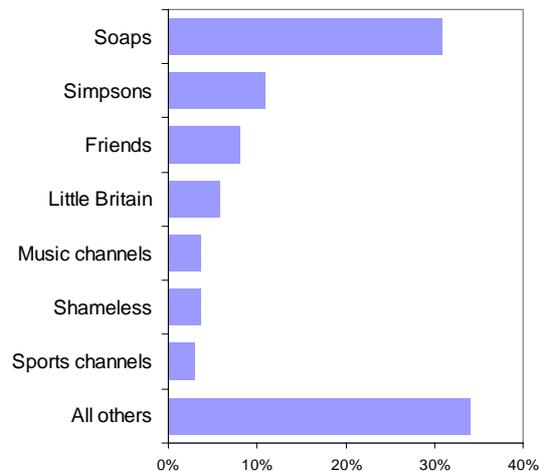
5.2   Internet

Every young person we talked to had access to and used the internet. All of the boys and the majority of the girls are avid users as it provides a safe way of finding out information anonymously and without face to face contact. Even if it takes them a long time to understand something – or they ask a stupid question – there is no loss of face. They are very interested to see a website listed on communications materials – but do not want to see a freephone number.

5.2.1   Careers advice on line

They use the internet to check out specific information rather than to explore options.
There are many tools on the internet to help young people eg Fast Tomato, Apprenticeships, learndirect careers advice. But finding them requires a level of perseverance that rules out many lower achievers.

→ A single entry point, showing the chosen single brand (eg Connexions) and linking in to other marketing communications activity would be more powerful. IA support during first visit would help less competent surfers

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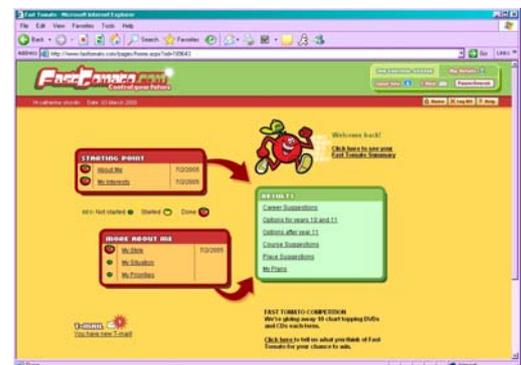
[12] Results from "Don't look now" on line quiz measuring 14-19s' attitude towards learning

5.2.2   Sims-get-skills

The SIMS is the world's best selling computer game, known and liked by all the young people we talked to. They respond well to the idea of a version of the SIMs where part of the objective is to improve the earning capability and satisfaction index of their SIMs characters by investing time and money in training. They also want a way of seeing what is involved with a job, playing with life scenarios, and think that the SIMs-at-work would give them a way to do that.

5.3   Other influencers

5.3.1   Press

Press is of some use for persuading parents but not young people. Young people read magazines but the range is very wide eg Fast Forward and other car magazines (for the boys), Kerrang (boys and girls), Bliss (girls). Their parents read local and national papers.

5.3.2   Friends

They feel very comfortable with their friends and think they can trust them, however they accept that their friends may not know much about career options and that they may prefer to keep the group together, rather than optimise the prospects for any individual in the group. For some of the boys, there is also a need not to step above the rest of the group, and many of the most disillusioned boys (the NEETs) have broken off with their school friends because of the loss of face implicit in their current status.

They do not self-organise with their friends - a combination of lack of self confidence and lack of leadership skills. Eg some of the 14-16s studying at Stoke-on-Trent College are enjoying lunchtime football but the College had to organise it for them. They enjoy learning together, and for males in an all-male work environment, training offers the possibility of meeting girls.

5.3.3   Parents

We observed some key features of parents:
- Lack of experience: for a low skilled parent it is difficult to advise their offspring on something they have not managed to get to grips with themselves. They talk about feeling lost, out of touch and not well placed to communicate with their children.
- Lack of aspiration for themselves and their children.
- Lack of control: they do not feel in control of their children themselves and hope the school can fill the gap. They feel let down when it doesn't and their interaction with the school can be to fight for support rather than collaborate.
- Lack of information: low awareness of increased timetable flexibility, but supportive of this idea. Out of touch with current pathways and job opportunities.

What parents would like
- More career guidance that is tailored to the needs of their child
- Parity of esteem from teachers
- More help with managing their young people
- A learner driven system
    I find school very crushing.
    I think the kids should have more say.

Parents' jobs
When talking to low achieving young people or to the parents, the only profession we came across was one teacher. On the whole, they work in low skills / low pay / low prospect roles.
- Not working: unemployed, at home with kids, caring for elderly relatives
- Working: in retail, service industries, driving, logistics, catering, trades, factory work, school support staff
- Studying: eg computer related course
    I don't know what my parents do. And I don't care.

5.3.4   Other relatives

In some cases, individual young people cited helpful relatives as having an influence on their career prospects and life choices.

- "Staffordshire aunts" are an influence on both boys and girls. It seems that these are often women without children who have done vocational training eg nursing, and encourage their nieces and nephews to do the same. Young people seem to listen to these slightly distanced relatives more readily than to their parents, and they play the part of role models.
- In a small number of cases an elder brother or sister has some influence, though we came across very few that had been successful.
    I don't want to end up like my brother
- Occasionally grandparents play a role, particularly where the relationship with the individual's parents is not working, or is non-existent - they act as surrogate parents.

6   Employers

6.1   Context

The role of employers in Stimulating Demand for 14-19 year olds is influenced by:
- the size of businesses in the area
- the industry type and associated legislation
- their attitudes to learning and young people

Given the low confidence issues and the focus of young males in particular on the earn-and-learn option rather than school or college, employers are a key route to learning and it is important to understand how to communicate with them in order to increase participation.

6.2   Businesses in Staffordshire

Structural issues:
- Traditional big employers have disappeared although companies such as Kerrygold have been committed to raising the essential skills levels of its 400 staff[13].
- Smaller businesses are reluctant to take on the risk of an apprentice or trainee.
- Significantly more jobs are in manufacturing (23% of the total compared to UK 15%) and fewer in finance and business, (12% here, 18% UK)
- Manufacturing jobs are often low skilled and do not offer career progression.
- Increasing trend to use agencies to supply staff in these roles as that increases flexibility. Staff are much less likely to get training and development.
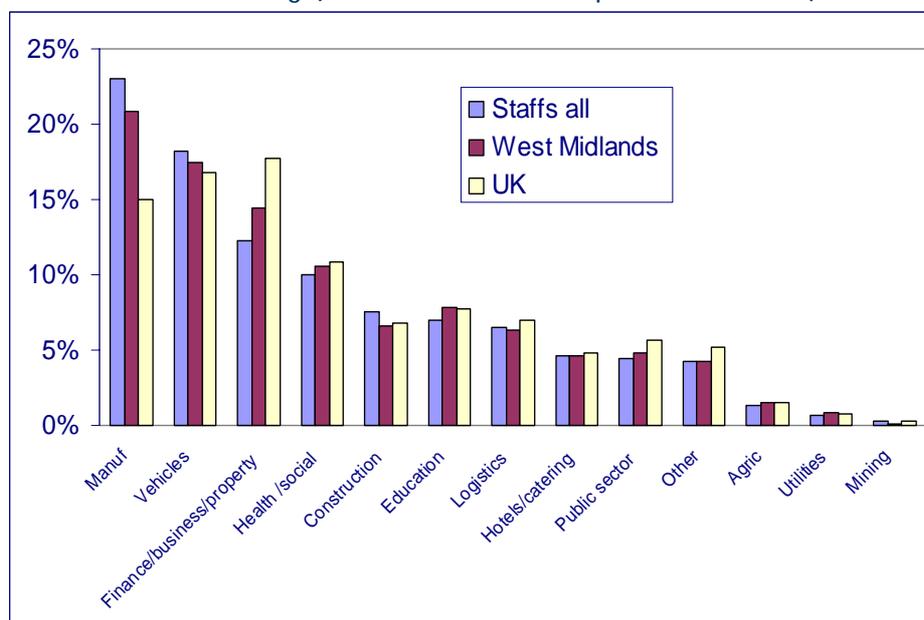
Attitudinal issues:
- Training is low priority for employers
- Processes they use for identifying and meeting training needs are ad hoc and driven by their own personal experiences and preconceptions.
- They are influenced by changes in legislation or insurance practice that require staff training for the business to comply with regulations.

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[13] See Appendix 1, Section 1.14

However, despite assertions to the contrary from the NEET groups we spoke to, there are jobs available in Staffordshire, including some where a qualification is a requirement. A review of local paper job adverts revealed the following requests for qualifications:

- ACOPS - Approved Codes of Practice
- Mechanics class 1
- Drivers L2 / HGV / PSV / fork lift
- Childcare NVQ3, Nursing
- Health and Safety
- C&G - City & Guilds mechanical engineering
- HND – Honours Degree mechanical engineering
- AMSPAR (medical admin)
- LLB – Bachelor of Law, Architect

The Staffordshire Labour Market Trends Bulletin[14] shows Staffordshire with economic activity rates at 64.2%, that is, 1.2% higher than UK average. This, along with normal levels of unemployment, contrasts with the despondent view we heard from NEETs.

6.3 Employer view of young people

6.3.1 Broadly tolerant

Employers in Staffordshire acknowledge that some prospective trainees are lacking in the self discipline required to show up at work on time, appropriately dressed etc. But they also accept that they, as employers, have some responsibility to help them and are supportive.

> *We have to find ways to raise aspiration levels and the self esteem of kids here.*

6.3.2 Need for guidance

The lack of skills among the employers can reduce the value they place on qualifications. They also recognise the same lack of direction as we identified in 14-19s:

> *The trouble is most of the ones that come along asking for an apprenticeship haven't really decided that they want to do it. Their parents push them into it. So they drop out half way through.*
>
> Employer, Construction Sector

> *The problem is most young people don't know what they want. They need more support because they don't go after it, it has to come to them.*
>
> Employer, Professional Services Sector

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[14] Bulletin published in November 2004. See Appendix for more details

6.4   Approach to training

6.4.1   Attitude to training

Overall there is a balance between positive and negative comments about training, although the positive comments tend to be about the bigger, more theoretical issues *"training is a good thing"* while the negatives are about the practicalities and express their fears of wasting money / effort on the wrong course or wrong employee. Most of the negative views support the idea of a broker service that can take some of the fear of failure out of the process for the employer. This need for *"a broker organisation to match employers with the best training provision"* was also identified by previous research[15].

> *Why can't we have a one stop shop?*

→ Important that marketing materials and brokers talk about the positive benefits of training and use the same language as the employers (see below).

Apprenticeships - familiar territory and fear of the unknown

As we have seen in other studies, there is higher awareness of Apprenticeships among companies which have a tradition of that approach to staff training – eg engineering and construction. Employers may have been apprentices themselves and understand how it works. In the same way that teachers understand and support academic routes because they have been through them personally, former apprentices support the Apprenticeship route. This is not the case outside of the traditional Apprenticeship occupations.

> *Our Apprentices are the company's future. By taking the apprentices in at an early stage in their development it allows us to mould them and develop them as people.*
> Employer, Engineering/Logistics[16]

Employers are not looking for innovative new programmes; they are looking for something that works, that they feel safe with.

> *Businesses want good value, low risk, convenient, safe options, that make sure they are not getting left behind.*
> Employer, Consultancy

Some of the employers we spoke to were also realistic about the level of attractiveness of Apprenticeships to young people. This is backed up by 14-19 research where there is a strong sense that apprentices are underpaid.

> *The problem with Apprenticeships is that their friends are making twice as much working for McDonalds.*
> Employer, Professional Services

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[15] See Appendix 1, Section 1.21
[16] Source: Burton College website

6.4.2 Current training

Training is about fixing a specific skill gap and is very focused and based on business needs. Few employers that we have interviewed - in Staffordshire or elsewhere - see training in a broader sense of personal development of the individual.

The LSC Employer's Guide[17] to Training Providers is potentially a useful tool.

Employers are using the following providers:

- FE Colleges: accountancy, driving, food hygiene, foreign languages, hairdressing, NIC electrics, NVQ2 customer service, Sage
- WBL: apprentices – plumbing, care, bricklaying, mechanics
- HE: accountancy and other professional services
- In house training: Building regulations, conservation, induction, manual handling
- Others:
  - Blue Flame – Corgi, ACOPS
  - Fire service – fire awareness
  - NHS – infection control, diabetes, dementia
  - Police – domestic violence
  - SARCA distance learning (Care)
  - Social services – assistive techniques
  - St John's – first aid
  - Suppliers – builders merchants, manufacturers, roofing systems

6.5 Communicating with employers

The technique of LaB[18] (Language and Behaviour) profiling has been used for employers in the development of the national Apprenticeship strategy as well as other Customer Interpreter projects[19]. By understanding the motivation patterns of the target group – in this case employers – we are able to target communications so they are more persuasive.

6.5.1 Their buzzwords (criteria)

It is generally recognised that employers who value training for themselves are more likely to support training for their staff. If, on the other hand, they have built their company from scratch, based on hard work and a lifetime's experience, they may feel that anybody can learn on the job and training courses and qualifications are a waste of time and money.

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[17] See Appendix 1, Section 1.24

[18] Language and Behaviour profiling draws on Metamodels – an NLP (neuro linguistic programming) and has been developed as a way of targeting communications

[19] Action for Business research 2003 and 2004: carried out for SEEDA + LSC South East, Stimulating Demand Adult project in LSC Staffordshire in 2004 and business to business research in the City of London in 2004.

The first issue we assess is their own CRITERIA – what they look for in their job. This is an important source of trigger words that can be usefully included in any communications.

Personal criteria	Business related criteria
• Job satisfaction • To enjoy what I'm doing • Making enough money to enjoy a good standard of living • To do the right thing for the area • An easy life • Staying interested in what I do • Happy customers	• Getting things done, doing the job • Having happy staff • Growing our own staff who know how we do things • Knowing that the staff know how to react to situations

It is often underestimated in business to business marketing that the person making the decision is still a human being. Some studies suggest that up to 80% of the decision is based on emotional factors rather than rational ones:
eg who they trust, who they enjoy meeting with, who they feel understands their position. The price has to be right of course, but the choice of supplier is usually an emotional one – with rational reasons developed to back it up.

For the rest of the LaB profile we place the employers on a continuum where each extreme represents a particular motivation pattern.

In all of the charts, the following key is used:

Most business ⬭

Small and family owned ⬭

Messages ⬭

6.5.2   Away from / towards

Towards | ⬭   ⬭ ⬭ | **Away from**

The fact that employers are **away from** about training means that they think about 14-19 training in terms of solving problems rather than achieving goals. Messages are currently very positive about training – focusing on how they can help employers achieve their goals. This is less likely to be successful than messages that tap into the employers concerns.

Examples of phrases that can work
> *Don't lose out on recruiting the best people*
> *Don't be forced to take on someone else's problem – grow your own staff*
> *Solve your training problems*

6.5.3 Internal / external

Internal [diagram] **External**

Most employers are **external** about organising staff training and keen to see case studies. However they are **internal** about deciding what to do so the broker/marketing materials will be more successful if they use the language of suggestion, not advice.

Examples of phrases that can work
> *You might want to consider…*
> *You know what's best for your business. Here are some ideas that have worked for other companies in the area*
> *Lots of businesses like yours have been finding out how having an apprentice works*
> *Running a business is tough enough without trying to work out what young people are looking for these days*

6.5.4 Procedures / Options

Options [diagram] **Procedures**

Employers tend to be **procedures** about training. They want to know that there is a process that leads to a result. They want to know that staff are going through "the <u>right</u> training" or will get "the right qualification".

Some of the materials we reviewed have a more **options** message. Focusing on **procedures** is likely to make the materials seem more relevant and useful to employers.

Examples of phrases that can work

Procedures
> *The first step is to talk to X who can help you identify how young people could help your business*
> *We have a tried and tested process for introducing work experience candidates into your workplace and ensuring a successful experience for everyone*

6.5.5 Sameness / Difference

Sameness [ ] **Difference**

Staffordshire employers are consistent with those elsewhere in the country in seeking **sameness with difference**. For this group, improvement is important. They do not want their staff to develop completely new and different skills – it is more efficient to build on what they already know.

Current materials tend to focus on newness and offering something different. A more effective approach will be to concentrate on *improvement* of what already exists.

Phrases that can influence this group

> *Build on the skills your staff already have*
> *Refresh your team with a new recruit*
> *Grow your own*

Any phrase incorporating a sense of progression or talking about more or better

6.5.6 Reflective / Proactive

Reflective [ ] **Proactive**

Most employers are **proactive** about getting their training needs sorted out. Their "just do it" approach may mean they don't always identify the best solution, but they will certainly get it sorted quickly. However smaller, traditional, family owned businesses tended to be more cautious in general and therefore **reflective**.

A broker could usefully steer any employer to being **proactive** later in the discussion by making the best plan clear (procedures), showing how it builds on existing skills to improve the business (sameness with exception) and making it easier for them to take action.

Examples of phrases that can work

Moving reflective to proactive
> *You may have been thinking about how to bring some fresh blood into your organisation for some time – now we can help you take the first step*
>
> *We'll get on with looking at the best college for you to work with then you can review the information and decide what to do next*

Proactive
> *We won't waste your time – one of our brokers can come round and get started immediately on identifying easy ways to address your training needs*

6.5.7 General / Specific

Specific [============================] **General**

This dimension is important in business because of the acute time pressure that many employers feel they are under. They are used to processing large amounts of information in the shortest possible timeframe. A lot of the sample communications we showed them had far too much information – their ideal piece of communication would be a single sheet of paper with bullet points of the key points and clearly identified next steps works much better for people with a **general** pattern. Again the exception are the smaller, family owned businesses who do not often network or see information relating to their sector – for them the detail is interesting.

Phrases that can influence this group

> *Here's the overview*
> *Call xxx now to arrange an assessment visit from one of our advisers*
> *It won't take long to find out if having an apprentice is right for your business*

Not too much detail, straight to the point

6.5.8 People / Thing

People [============================] **Thing**

Most businesses are **thing** about training. So they talk about "the staff" rather than "Julie in accounts". Employees are viewed as a resource to be managed and brokers need to be careful not to enthuse about personal development and people benefits if they are to maintain credibility. Small family businesses are more personal in their approach.

6.5.9 Look and feel

Employers feel that the complex range of options is confusing to young people as well as to them, and would like clearer communications for all – in an appropriate format.
> *I like this one. It looks like it means business*

They are a bit surprised by the range and diversity of materials, and express concerns about the efficiency of that approach. A wide range of choice can be unsettling for someone in **procedures** mode and is therefore counterproductive. They are also suspicious of material that has been photocopied as they are looking for production values that make them feel that they are in safe hands.
> *Vocational options must be communicated to kids in real terms, in their language; otherwise it just goes over their heads*

> Employer, Professional Services Sector

6.5.10 Media

Step 1: Mail shot
They receive a short, sharp, business-like leaflet mailed with a personalised covering letter.
> *I would read it if it was short*

As they are **procedures** about learning, they need a clear message on the front explaining what the leaflet is for, then bullet points inside summarising the benefits for the business and benefits for the employee. At the bottom they want to see what to do next.
> *I want to see the key information on the front*
> *I like this because it's bullet points*

Any reference to government support is useful if it explains why a service is free to employers, but we have seen in Staffordshire and elsewhere that materials for employers should look like they come from the business world, not government.
> *I don't like that one, it looks too public sector.*

Step 2: Follow up
After the leaflet and personalised letter they get a follow up phone call. They admit that even if they intend to go ahead with training, there are many other pressures on their time and it may drift to the bottom of the pile.

The phone call should be brisk and clear; referring to the mailshot, explaining what is on offer and arranging a visit from a broker.

Step 3 -Broker visit
A training professional with a business background then visits the business and identifies training needs.

Step 4 - Follow up
The broker organisation researches the options and sends a recommendation including where the course is held, times of classes, length of course, resulting qualification, cost and any available funding.

Ongoing support

Alongside this process, employers want:
- a one stop shop that can answer queries and source training for them via a single phone number.
- the option to send queries by email and get advice back in the same way.

6.5.11 Clear communications

Simplifying the qualifications structure is clearly beyond the remit of this project. However, it will help if employers have an overview of current pathways without an overwhelming level of detail. They are used to buying goods and services they do not personally understand eg insurance, healthcare, waste disposal, website design and do not need to understand the qualifications structure if they are supported by a reliable representative / broker.

Training motivations for employers are a good basis for communication:
- to solve a problem
- to fix skills gaps in their organisation
- to get a name as a good employer
- to impress their peers.
  I just need to know that I am sending my people on the right course

  Employer, Retail and Logistics

6.6   Networking

Among the professionals (learning or IAG providers) we spoke to, employers are mentioned far less often than educational institutions. The opposite is also true – there is a mutual lack of understanding which can lead to fear.

It is human nature to stay within a comfort zone, and many employees in the public sector may have made an active choice to avoid the commercial world. Cross-postings between schools and the college in Tamworth have been successful in developing a common understanding, integrating approaches and cross fertilising ideas. Young people say they would like to hear from "real people in real jobs".
→ There appears to be an opportunity here to increase the interfaces between the education and the commercial worlds – to everybody's benefit.

We need stronger partnerships between colleges and businesses.

Employer, Professional Services Sector

7   Formal influences

As well as informal influencers, there are those for whom influencing young people is part of their job.

This group includes:
- Those in strategy / leadership roles
  eg LSC, LEA, 14-19 Forum, Connexions management
- Those managing services and implementing change
  eg 14-19 district coordinators, heads of year, careers services
- Learning providers
  eg schools, colleges, work based learning
- Those in direct contact with 14-19 year olds
  eg Connexions PAs, staff in voluntary and community based organisations, careers staff, social services officers, other Information and Advice providers

We have spoken to many individuals and run an on-line discussion group to form the views in this report.

The need for guidance on decisions about the next stage is clear. In the absence of structured career guidance, as young people see it, they are opting for the uninformed views of their friends and parents rather than to take the personal risk of asking an expert.

The Connexions brand is widely recognised by both parents and young people and ranked highly in our review of trusted sources (see Diagram 3.1). They are recognised for taking the right approach with young people – helping not telling – and do well on building trust. We heard very few negative comments about Connexions.

However, the limited resources of Connexions are apparent. Many young people we spoke to had not had any direct contact – despite their need for guidance from someone on how to organise the next phase of their life.

7.1 Teachers

Low achieving young people talk a lot about teachers – mostly negatively. This is in part a reflection of the culture of schools and the sense of powerlessness of students.

They would still have teachers in their "perfect school", but their role would change to that of supporting IT-delivered and experiential learning. They would like this guidance to include:
- Support when "stuck"
- Careers / life planning guidance
- Behaviour modelling

The following characteristics of successful teachers have been identified[20]:

- know all pupils by name and address them by name
- strong eye contact with individual students
- direct most praise to individual students, rather than to the class as a whole
- demonstrate a high level of acceptance of the students' own ideas and suggestions;
- prepare and structure lessons carefully
- make the purpose of the lesson clear and continually reinforce its learning objectives – pupils are clear why they are doing the tasks they have been set
- start and end the lesson with minimal fuss and pay little attention to minor distractions within the lesson

7.2   *14-19 District Coordinators*

Within the research with formal influencers, we interviewed all the district coordinators. Their views are covered in this section, though in many cases they were also expressed by other Formal Influencers in discussions that took place during research.

7.2.1   LaB profile

The role of the 14-19 District Coordinators is pivotal in leading the move towards a broader access to vocational options for 14-19s in Staffordshire.
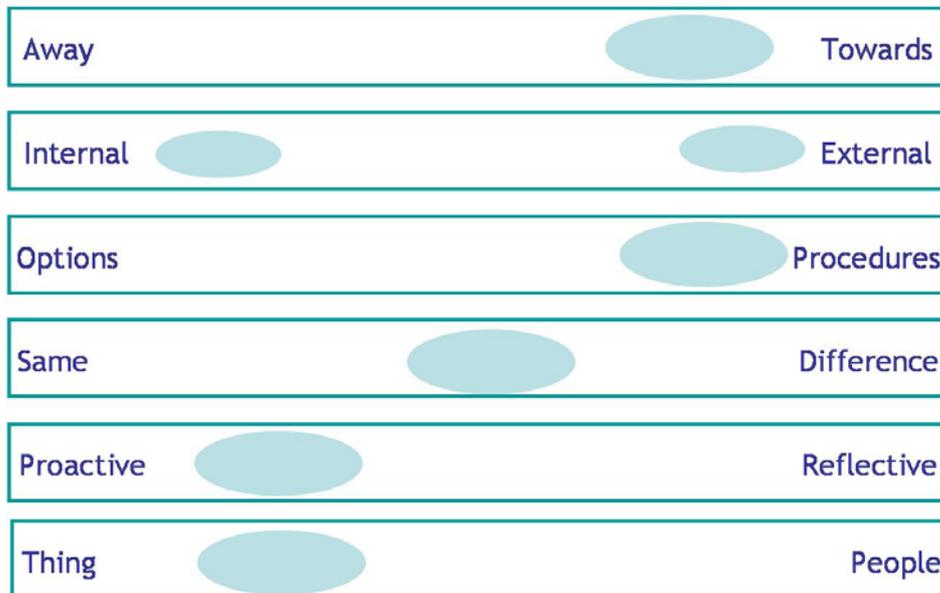
Criteria

The key criteria for district coordinators being interested in the job is a heartfelt commitment to parity of esteem and providing young people with **a full range of options** – vocational as well as academic. They tolerate the frustrations and demands of the job because it is so close to their personal beliefs about how education should work.

The second most cited reason is **the chance to make a difference**. Despite setbacks they all feel that theirs is a vital role and that they are involved at a turning point in history for 14-19 options in Staffordshire.

LaB profile

The diagram shows the LaB (Language and Behaviour) profile of the district coordinators with respect to their work - it is in line with research of similar professionals in other studies – and often rather different to the profile of the young people, parents and employers they work with.

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[20] Based on a case study from the General Teaching Council website
http://www.gtce.org.uk/research/behaviourcases.asp

Away		Towards
Internal		External
Options		Procedures
Same		Difference
Proactive		Reflective
Thing		People

Their direction of motivation shows a **towards** pattern – these people are positive about their role, and about the impact learning can have on the lives of the young people they work with. This belief in one's work is an important motivator, especially when faced with a challenge like cultivating change in a large complex organisation as is the case here. It is necessary to temper this when speaking to lower achieving 14-19s, their parents or employers, all of whom are **away from** about learning.

The second dimension – was split between **internal** and **external**. In general the split was that former head teachers are **internal** and others are **external**. Being externally focussed makes for good consultation, but can be counterproductive in situations where there is a lot of resistance to change. It can make it hard to take a leadership role or make unpopular decisions. A balance of **internal** and **external** in each individual would be good for the combination of customer awareness and clear leadership that is required.

Most of the people we spoke to have a **procedures** pattern around their work, which means they prefer to have steps or processes to follow. This could explain the large amount of time which is spent in interviews explaining internal structures and how many processes have to be followed to change anything. When asked what the job entails, most people speak first about the reports that have to be filed and meetings that are attended. In the public sector, with its increasing emphasis on recording information, the ones who survive the system are more likely to be **procedures**.

An individual who is **options** is more than ready to look at new and innovative ways of solving problems – this plus an **away from** profile can make for a very successful change manager, so long as there are other **procedures** people following along to tidy up.

Sameness with difference is an appropriate profile as people with this pattern tend to look for continuous improvement. They won't throw the baby out with the bathwater but they will be keen to see progress. This combined with a proactive approach means they are more likely to get things done rather than be caught in endless analysis. It also helps that they are mostly not **people** driven – they want to do the right thing for the people they are working for, but they are much less likely to get caught up in the personal circumstances of all the individuals affected by their decisions.

7.2.2   District Coordinators view of the situation

Signs of progress
- There is a strong feeling that things are moving in the right direction, and we heard lots of good examples of projects that are working.
    I've seen a lot of innovative thinking on curriculum issues, especially in the performing arts and business enterprise
- Some work has already taken place with employers, though there is scope for more to take advantage of some of the opportunities that exist.
- They are glad that vocational options are beginning to move beyond the sense of being a last resort for non academic students.
    We are now attracting brighter students too. For example they do mechanics as an entry to engineering

Barriers to progress
- Their focus is strongly oriented towards the schools and teaching staff. They all cite positive examples, but there is a general sense of resistance to change:
    Schools are relatively successful and traditional - staff are reluctant to do new things. I put it down to fear of the unknown
- They feel schools do not understand the full implications of wider choice
    They say "We don't need economics, we've got geography already". Or they try to teach vocational subjects in an academic way – it's about learning styles as well as subject matter
- Families and general attitude to life lower aspirations and reduce the range of options that are considered:
    They don't start up their own businesses round here because they are risk averse

What they would like more of
- Integrated school and college options
- Raising aspirations
    Many of our parents have never been to a university so it's hard for them to imagine their child going there. We are taking them on university visits
- Good communications
    It's ridiculous for each district to be producing its own materials. It would be better to pool resources and have some excellent materials with local adaptation.
- Capital investment
    We need to increase capacity in construction/trades and spice up the building
- Funding flexibility
    If the nearest and most appropriate college is out of the county, we need more flexible ways of making that work for everybody

View of leadership and management
- LSC / LEA: we heard concern from several quarters regarding a reluctance to take the difficult choices and force the pace of change
  They seem to be scared of their role. I feel let down by the slow, gentle approach they are taking

7.3 Joined up thinking

Conflicts of interest

In many aspects of this discussion, the divisions between organisations, and even departments within organisations, are much more apparent than the collaboration between them. It is appreciated when this is overcome

It's been lovely to see people from different organisations starting to cooperate – and see them realising that it works better that way

There seems to be a mismatch between the targets and aims of different organisations, generating too many externalities that compromise progress. For example, the diagram on the right shows the view from the District Coordinators perspective. Parties above the District Coordinators bubble got more positive comments than negative (the higher they are, the more positive). Parties below got more negative references – the lower they are the more negative.

Who values whom
Many of the coordinators, and Formal Influencers in other roles,

Our mission - a comprehensive range of options widely available to 14-19 year olds

Colleges
Students

IAG

District coordinators

Schools
Parents
LEA   LSC

Employers

Teachers

Our challenge – overcoming ignorance / fear / inertia among school staff, IAG and parents

come from a school background (rather than for instance the LEA, FE or business). A lot of their work is with schools and they seem to feel that they are primarily answerable to the schools.
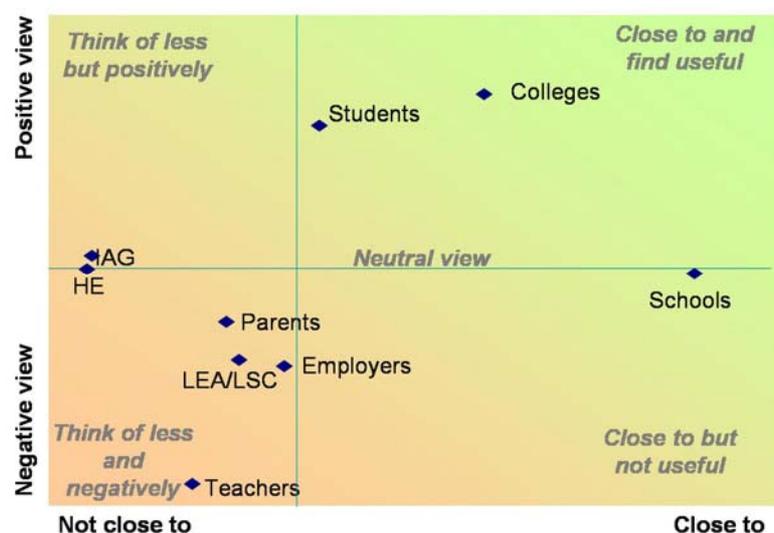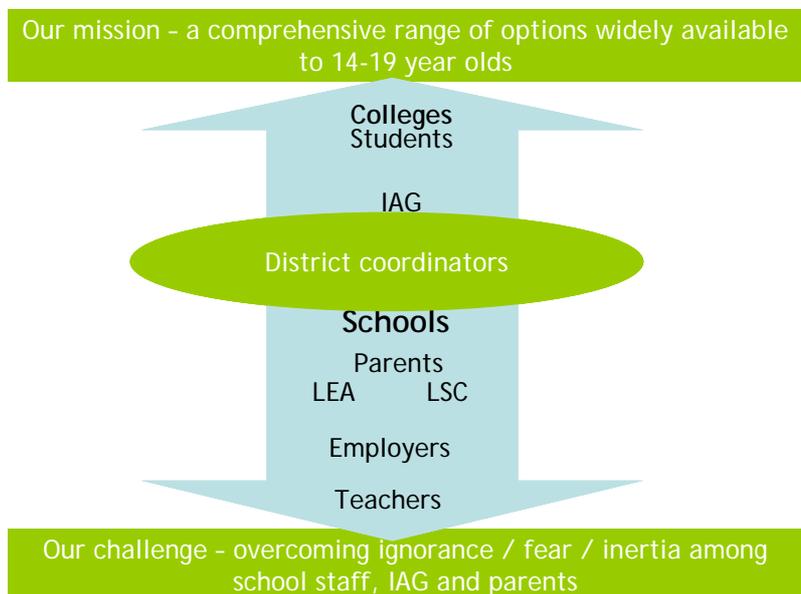
The chart shows the overall view of different parts of the system based on the professionals we spoke to. It also reflects the views expressed by young people and their parents.

- Colleges and the young people themselves are generally well thought of and fairly top of mind.
- Schools are the most referenced organisations – but there are as many negative comments as positive ones, bringing them to a neutral position on the vertical axis.
- Teachers get the most negative feedback.
- Employers are cited as being partly to blame for the lack of interest in vocational options / Apprenticeships by not offering opportunities to young people.
- Many of the people we spoke to on a one-to-one basis had negative or resentful comments to make about other parts of the system.

7.4 Formal Influencers on-line discussion

Despite all the reservations expressed on a one to one basis, when we held a group discussion, we found a very high level of consensus – almost 50% when a typical level is 10-20%. The discussion was active with almost 3 messages /participant/10 minutes. This is 40% above average.

Poll 1:
Teachers do not understand vocational options and are therefore less willing and able to promote them
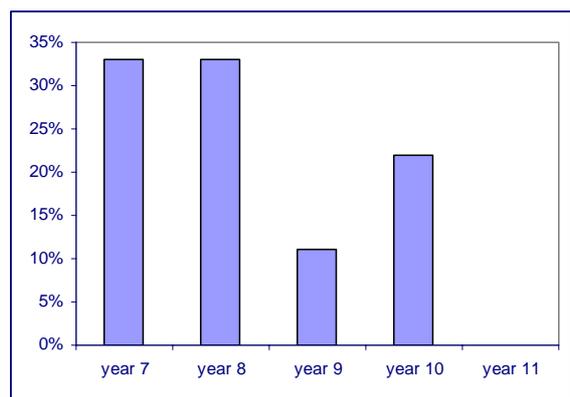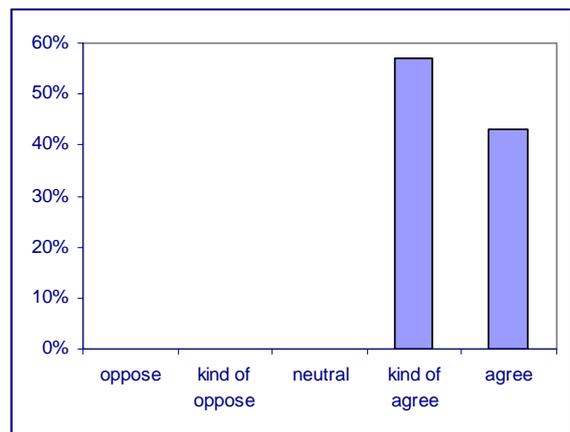
Poll 2:
At what school age should careers advice start?

All the comments during the discussion were evaluated by all members of the discussion to identify levels of agreement.

For each issue we discussed key reasons why it happens, and possible solutions.

All of those comments are included in the tables in section 2.

8 Communicating with 14-19s

8.1 Overview

Communicating with teenagers is notoriously difficult. Even when they want help they may find it hard to ask for or accept. However, they do have a very real need for communications in the area of what to do next in their lives, school options, post 16 options and an understanding of the wide range of ways of learning that are open to them.

> *We work closely with 16-19 year-olds and have heard them time and time again say that no one bothered to explain their options. All they need is someone to sit them down and tell them what's out there in a language they will understand.*
>
> Director, MORE Training

Their understanding of the possible pathways is patchy, their parents are often unable or unwilling to help and teachers have other demands on their time. Inspiring local role models are not highly visible and mentors with the knowledge, attitude and time to help few.

8.1.1 Timing

Currently Year 10 is when careers advice is most likely to be received, although awareness is low.

Based on the work we have done, embedded careers advice should run throughout their school career, starting from year 7, showing young people some purpose to what they are learning – that it can be a stepping stone to a job, as well as an academic process.

> *Today we are looking at cell structure. You might think this has nothing to do with you, but if you have ever considered working as a hairdresser, a PE teacher, an aerobics instructor, a massage therapist – or of course a nurse or vet or doctor or dentist – then this is something that you are probably curious to know more about.*

The next critical trigger point is Year 9 when young people need help making the choices that are right for them. Given the attitudes of many lower achievers, it may be more effective to describe their Options in terms of what doors are closed if they drop a subject.
> *By dropping science you are making it difficult to have a career in x, y, z*

8.1.2 Consistency

The academic progression route is well understood, even by those with no intention of following it. The vocational route however is more complex and diverse, challenging young people trying to make choices, and their parents and advisers to give the best support.

We came across about 200 leaflets and brochures targeted at this age group. When we tested these materials with young people and parents, **80% of them were never selected by anybody.** Not only is this wasteful of time, paper and money, but also it is adding to the confusion and reducing the possibilities of good choices being made.

8.2   DOs and DON'Ts

In the focus groups, we talked to 14-19s about the marketing activities that they have experienced. Very few of them spontaneously remembered any event or any materials.

They are a visual generation used to a high level of interactivity in their leisure pursuits. They mostly have mobile phones, they all play computer games and they enjoy reality TV and soap operas that they can relate to. Their "convincer channels"[21] are seeing and doing, especially if they are lower achievers. They are very resistant to reading information (unless it is on a computer screen, and even then they do not want a lot of words).

Workshops such as the Impact Theatre are a good match for these preferences. For example, "Meet Jo Stephenson", carried out for the Staffordshire Youth Offending Service, got a 94% positive response regarding learners' perception of their own ability to communicate with others and would like to participate in more events like that. Also, 76% said that it helped their confidence levels[22].

8.2.1   Recommended approach to communications[23]

ASPECT	DOESN'T WORK	WORKS
Type of communication	Wordy brochures / leaflets Most events (not noticed)	Open days Structured conversations Tasters Discussion groups On-line adviser Embedded in TV programmes Theatre presentations Leaflets (to the point)
Visual / design	Black and white Clever headlines Subtle / tricky Photos of smiley people Booklets Sober	Bright colours Clear headlines Straightforward / honest Cartoons Fold outs Dynamic (vitamin R)
Content / copy	Confusing layouts Jargon Suggestions Freephone numbers Dull Confusing / complex story Left up to you Career, future	Step by step Everyday language Orders Website Humour Clear story Next step Life, job

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[21] In NLP, the convincer channel is the way an individual is most likely to take new information on board. It can be seeing (visual), hearing (audio), reading or doing (kinaesthetic).
[22] See Appendix 1, Section 1.11 for further details
[23] See Appendix 7 for further details

8.3   14-19 Lab profile

We use Language and Behaviour profiling to identify how best to communicate with young people. We also profile communications, and they are shown as two groups – those that work and those that don't.

LEARNERS

8.3.1   Direction of motivation: Towards / Away from

The most strongly marked difference in profile between advisers and young people is mirrored in the difference between those communications that work and those that do not.
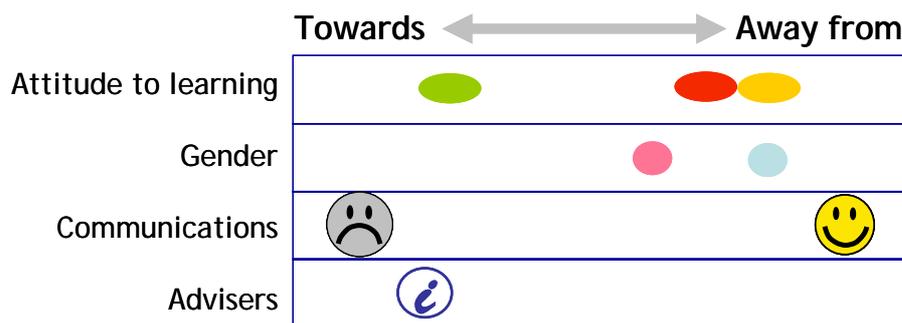
As we have seen earlier, a **towards** person is motivated by goals and objectives. They think ahead, they want to achieve. Many young people, especially the less academic ones, are more motivated by fear of what can go wrong – an **away from** way of seeing the world.

They identify with communications that use phrases like
> *Don't let life pass you by*
> *Don't get left behind while your friends get on*
> *Don't let your lack of confidence stop you from getting what you want*

That is one of the reasons why they respond well to the gremlins, even if they were not designed specifically for this target audience.

8.3.2 Attitude to Change: Sameness / Difference

Many of the young people we spoke to live with limited horizons. Their families live close by, their friends are at the same school. They have not travelled and do not have unusual or adventurous hobbies. They watch a very consistent range of TV programmes. The lack of Vitamin R in their lives has made them nervous of change.

Imagine how they feel then when presented with a message about exciting, new, different ways to study. Small wonder that even the less academic ones we spoke to, and who completed the on-line quiz, were defaulting to stay on at the school they did not enjoy. A clear case of "better the devil you know".
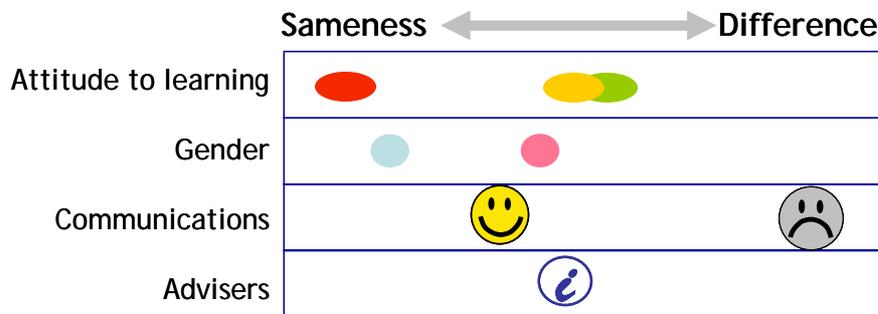
Those least interested in any kind of learning are also the most **sameness**. They are working for family members, or in the same job as a parent and living in the same house. This is more likely for males than females.

To appeal to this group, communications need to emphasise what is the same about all the options, to help the young person choose what is right for them without feeling threatened by what may seem like a drastic change.

> *College is like school in many ways*
> *Stick with what you already know you like. Become an apprentice and do what's right for you*

Those towards the middle of the chart are displaying a **sameness with difference** pattern. As we saw earlier for advisers and employers, this pattern is interested in a sense of progress.

> *It's like school but you get treated as an adult*
> *Learn more of the skills you need in your job*
> *Don't get by, get on*

8.3.3 Decision making timeframe: Reflective / Proactive

For 14-19 year olds in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, **reflective** is the predominant style of decision making. Interestingly, the more **proactive** ones are less likely to complete the on-site questionnaire – their shorter attention span and impatience takes them away.
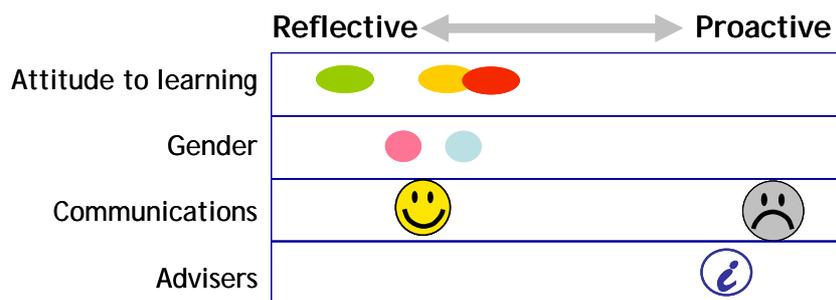
When talking to this audience, they are more likely to respond to phrases that acknowledge their **reflective** state – and then take them into a more **proactive** state so they can make a decision and move on.

You have probably been thinking about how to decide what options to take for some time now. In this booklet we'll show you how you can choose so you get what you want out of life.

8.3.4 Decision making process – Options / Procedures

It is tempting in all kinds of marketing communications to emphasise the amount of choice available.

Hundreds of courses for you to choose from

But given the lack of self esteem among teenagers, this **options** approach implies risk

I'm not sure if that's the right leaflet for me. So I wouldn't pick it up

Successful communications to this group recognise that they need to feel safe with these huge decisions. A clear procedure offers a sense of safety and may help the individual to get to a successful outcome.

I like the way it's step by step. It's still difficult but it takes you through the steps.
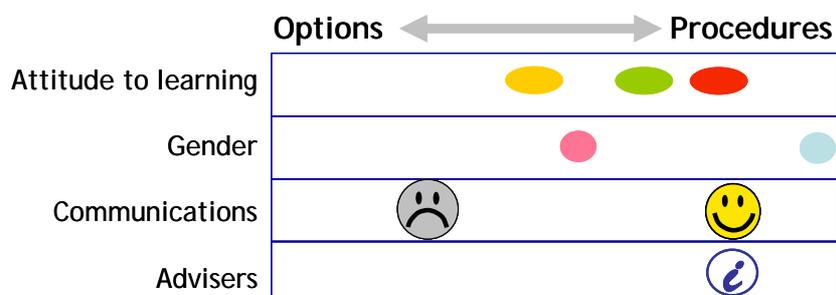
Young people do want to have **options**, but only the options that are right for them. This requires good guidance from somewhere to help them through the process, the way a good sales assistant might suggest two or three ideas to the customer rather than show them the whole range.

Any tools designed for this audience would be better structured in a linear way as branching options could well lose the individual from the process. The way Ikea structure their furniture stores is an interesting example. Even though they are targeting more **options** people, they still set out rooms to help them "pick a look" and the walkway through the departments helps orientate the customer and keep them moving through the process.

8.3.5 Influences – Internal / External

There are two aspects to this dimension. Most teenagers are **external** to each other, to their peers and the people they would like to hang out with, and **internal** to authority (parents, teachers etc).
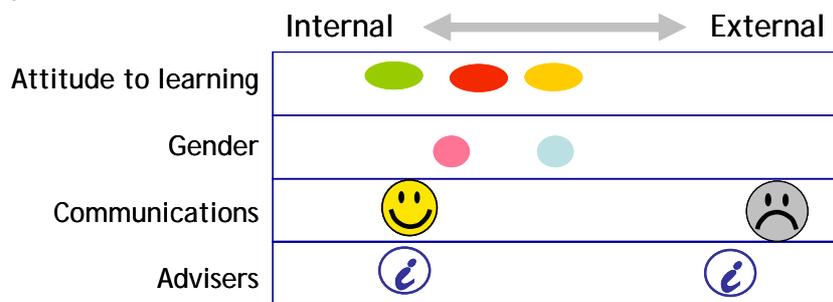
A lot of communications use commands which raise the hackles of many individuals - especially teenagers anxious to prove that they don't have to do what they are told.
> *It's time you decided what to do about your future*

The language of suggestion is more likely to work with this group, pull rather than push, drawing them in.
> *You may be curious to find out how the options you choose this year change what jobs you can do later*

8.4 Don't look now

8.4.1 Attitude to learning

We used the on-line questionnaire to assess attitudes to learning and classified the respondents in three groups:

- STOP (red): those NOT interested in any kind of learning
- WAIT (amber): interested in skills / vocational / job related learning
- GO (green): those with an interest in studying / academic subjects

We then looked at their LaB profiles and attitudes by age group, gender and attitude to learning. The last is the strongest differentiator on their LaB profile as shown in the previous section.

8.4.2   Who do you respect?

The main figures that draw the respect of the young people who completed our survey are parents and family.

Teachers are also mentioned, and friends to a lesser extent. "Other" includes social workers, careers advisors, Connexions, probation officers etc

The diagram shows that respect for parents peaks at college, while teachers are more successful with the older group.
This is mainly driven by lower sixth form students, which could in part be a reaction to having chosen to stay in a school environment.
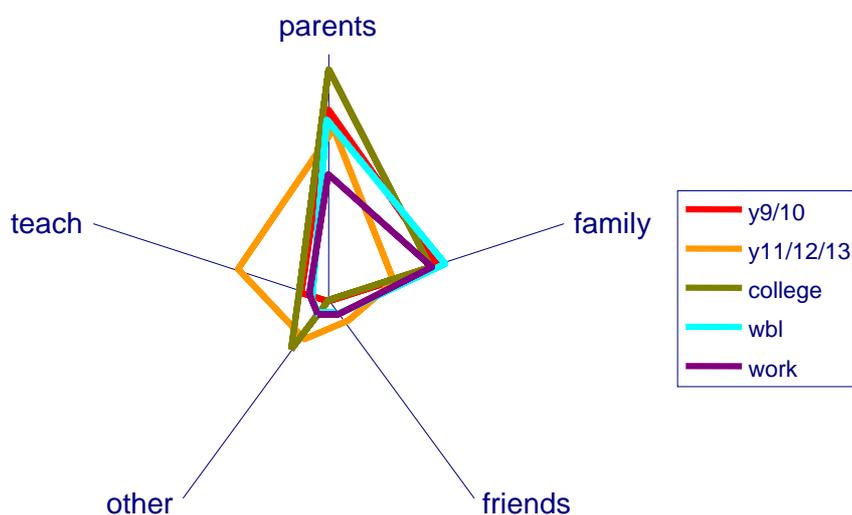
Attitude is important and they look for respect, caring and trust.
> *I respect people who respect me*
> *I respect people who are prepared to listen to me and treat me as an individual*
> *I respect people taking time to help you with something you are finding difficult.*
> *I respect anyone who has done well in life and worked hard to reach their goals.*

8.4.3   View of current careers advice

A high proportion of those completing the Don't Look Now online quiz had something to say[24] about the current careers advice service. Some of them made positive comments about how useful the service had been to them. The majority of comments however were suggestions for improvement

Teachers' attitudes:
> *Unless you're highly academic, then they don't pay attention to you*

Incentives to learn:
> *Students should be paid in any situation for their learning because then no one will quit*

More advice:
> *Give more information on the choices in life to Primary school students. It's a bit late when you are 16!*
> *Give me easy and clear advice because I wouldn't know where to go*

Work related:
> *Give more information on the jobs around in my area*
> *We need more chance to experience work and to see what it's like*

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[24] A full list is given in Appendix 7, Section 13.2