

References

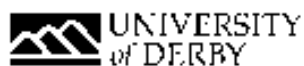
- Bowman, S. & Watson, V. (2000). Peer mentoring. *Newscheck*, 11(1): 14-15.
- Cabinet Office Performance and Innovation Unit (2000). *Winning the Generation Game: Improving Opportunities for People Aged 50-65 in Work and Community Activity*. London: PIU.
- Department for Education and Employment (2000a). *Connexions: the Best Start in Life for Every Young Person*. Sheffield: DfEE.
- Department for Education and Employment (2000b). *Connexions: the Connexions Service: Prospectus and Specification*. Sheffield: DfEE.
- Department for Education and Employment (2000c). *Connexions Service Planning Guidance*. Sheffield: DfEE.
- Ford, G. (1998). *Career Guidance Mentoring for Disengaged Young People*. NICEC Briefing. Cambridge: National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling.
- Ford, G. (2000a). *Stepping Stones Final Evaluation Report*. Stourbridge: Institute of Careers Guidance.
- Ford, G. (2000b). *Career Guidance and Development for Under-Employed Graduates*. Leeds: Leeds Careers Guidance.
- Ford, G. (2000c). *Career Development of Under-Employed Graduates*. NICEC Briefing. Cambridge: National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling.
- Frampton, D. & Hull, L. (2000). *Engaging with the Learning Gateway: a Guide for Colleges*. London: Further Education Development Agency.
- Hooton, J. & Turner, D. (1996). *Transition Teams*. Leeds: CCDU Training and Consultancy.
- Hulbert, S. (2000). *Working with Socially Excluded and 'At Risk' Young People*. Stourbridge: Institute of Careers Guidance.
- Law, S. (2000). Fasten your seatbelts: orienteering the ethical landscape. *Career Guidance Today*, 8 (4): 33-36.
- Offer, M. (1999, revised 2000). *Dotsmarks: World Wide Web Sites for Careers Education and Guidance*. Leeds: published privately.
- Segal Quince Wickstead Ltd (2000). *The Demand for Adult Guidance: Final Report to Scottish Executive*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.
- Stoney, S., Ashby, P., Golden, S. & Lines, A. (1998). *Talking about Careers: Young People's Views of Careers Education and Guidance at School*. Sheffield: Department for Education and Employment.
- Trade Union Congress (2000). *Learning with the Unions*. London: TUC.
- Watts, A.G. (1999). *Home Internationals: Adult Guidance Policy Developments in Britain and Ireland*. NICEC Briefing. Cambridge: National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling.
- Watts, A.G. & Stevens, B. (1999). *The Relationship between Careers Guidance and Financial Guidance*. NICEC Briefing. Cambridge: National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling.
- Wilson, J. & Jackson, H. (1999). *What Are Adults' Expectations and Requirements of Guidance? A Millennium Agenda?* Winchester: The Guidance Council.

The Connexions Strategy and All-Age Guidance

Geoff Ford

National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling

A partnership between



Much concern has been expressed that the focus on 'horizontal' integration of services for young people aged 13-19 within Connexions contains the risk of undermining the 'vertical' integration of all-age guidance. This paper shows that the eight key principles of guidance delivery identified in the Connexions strategy apply to adults as well as young people. This is equally true of a number of additional principles - or 'conditions' - of effective guidance, implicit to Connexions and necessary for the successful implementation of local services. The Connexions Strategy therefore provides a unique opportunity to build guidance provision at local level that meets the expressed requirements of all age groups. Genuine partnership working and deliberate effort by all concerned is essential.

Geoff Ford is a Fellow of the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling (NICEC).

The publication of this paper has been jointly sponsored by East Midlands Development Agency and by NICEC.

The Centre for Guidance Studies was created in 1998 by the University of Derby and five careers service companies (the Careers Consortium (East Midlands) Ltd.). The centre aims to bridge the gap between guidance theory and practice. It supports and connects guidance practitioners, policy-makers and researchers through research activities and learning opportunities; and by providing access to resources related to guidance and lifelong learning.

CeGS aims to:

- conduct and encourage research in to guidance policies and practice;
- develop innovative strategies for guidance in support of lifelong learning;
- provide resources to support guidance practice across all education, community and employment sectors.

Further copies of this paper can be obtained by contacting:

CeGS, University of Derby, Kedleston Road, Derby DE22 1GB
E-mail: dmhughes@derby.ac.uk
Centre Manager: Deirdre Hughes

ISBN 0-901437-46-8

Executive summary

The Connexions Service: Prospectus and Specification states: "it will be critical that effective information, advice and guidance services for adults are provided which are coherent with those for young people" (DfEE, 2000b: 9). This objective is made explicit in the *Connexions Service Planning Guidance* (DfEE, 2000c: 50).

This paper considers the common ground linking the Connexions strategy to adult groups. It compares adult guidance requirements with those of the target groups of 'at risk' and socially-excluded young people, and with 'socially-included' young people in full-time education. The paper makes considerable use of feedback provided by young people and adults about their own expectations and requirements of local guidance provision.

Section 2 considers the eight key principles of Connexions in terms of their relevance to the guidance needs of adults as well as young people. All eight principles can be seen to apply equally to people across all age groups, although contexts and emphases will inevitably vary, depending on age and individual circumstances.

Section 3 identifies seven additional principles – or "conditions" – of effective guidance delivery which, although not included specifically in the eight key principles of Connexions, are implicit to the total strategy. Feedback received from young people and adults shows that these conditions are also of critical importance in terms of meeting people's individual requirements, irrespective of age group. All are concerned with valuing and respecting each individual, and raising personal morale.

Section 4 selects a number of 'services and activities of guidance' in order to compare the feedback on the value set on each service or activity by the two age groups. Most of these services and activities are explicitly set out in the Connexions strategy as necessary for successful locally-delivered guidance provision for young people. In all cases, research and feedback show that these services and activities are also important elements within adult guidance, in terms of meeting individual and group requirements.

Section 5 draws together the comparisons made between the needs of: the targeted groups of young people; students in schools and colleges; and adults. Again, the needs of all three groups can be seen to coalesce.

The paper suggests that the development of local Connexions youth support services and Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) partnerships for adults offer unique opportunities for local areas to co-operate. The paper identifies a range of practical benefits that can result – for young people, for adults, and for the partnerships themselves.

Section 6 considers the possibility of designating all-age 'Guidance Action Zones' at local level to provide a framework for collaborative working between Connexions, IAG and Learning Partnerships. It reviews the potential advantages of extending relevant Guidance Council Quality Standards to members of both the Connexions and IAG partnerships. It also outlines the opportunities presented by the variations in the ways in which youth and adult guidance provision is developing in different parts of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, to compare the advantages and disadvantages of the differing models.

1 Introduction

The term 'guidance' is frequently misunderstood by both policy-makers and the general public. Guidance often tends to be interpreted in terms of a one-off intervention rather than a multifaceted process. Once the distinct but complementary activities that make up the guidance process are distinguished, then guidance can be seen more clearly to be a highly desirable, and increasingly necessary, public provision.

A main feature of the Connexions strategy (DfEE, 2000a; 2000b) is its deconstruction of guidance into constituent elements. The resulting segmentation is necessary because it helps to provide a framework against which to:

- map existing provision;
- develop comprehensive local Connexions services;
- assess the quality of each of the elements of guidance delivered at local level;
- identify those organisations that are fundamental to local Connexions partnerships, and those that – although not necessarily central – can make important specialist contributions;
- identify, and take steps to fill, the gaps that may exist in local youth guidance provision.

The deconstruction of guidance also has the important side benefit of helping to increase overall understanding of the many inter-related processes integral to high-quality guidance.

The analysis of guidance processes within the Connexions strategy was based initially on the guidance requirements of socially-excluded young people. A principal influence has been the views and expressed requirements of the young people themselves. However, Connexions is also a universal service for all young people. In practice, the constituent elements can be seen to apply equally to young people in full-time education and also to adults, although the emphases and approaches used may vary between age and target groups.

The development of local Connexions youth support services and Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) partnerships for adults offers unique opportunities for local areas to compare provision against the main elements of effective guidance through local mapping and analysis, and to build guidance partnerships that can deliver the elements in ways that meet clearly defined local requirements.

This paper proposes that local analyses should also identify:

- (i) those requirements that are common to all local target groups;
- (ii) duplications and overlaps that may exist in the responses, support and approaches required to meet those requirements.

The process of analysis and review is likely to identify areas of common ground shared by the youth and adult guidance services. This may suggest local economies of scale that can help to avoid duplications and improve efficiency. The process may also identify a need for common approaches and activities, and the exchange of information and expertise, which can strengthen guidance provision for all age groups. Preferably, the process should be part of a continuing joint strategy of quality development.

This paper utilises recent research on the guidance needs of adult groups to identify common guidance requirements and expectations which many adults share wholly or in part with the targeted group of young people who are socially-excluded, and with 'socially-included' young people in mainstream education. Much of the research is based on feedback from adults themselves and from front-line staff including guidance workers, adult tutors, community workers, and trade union officers.

The importance of establishing close relationships between the youth and adult sectors of guidance is implicit within the Connexions strategy. *The Connexions Service: Prospectus and Specification* states: "it will be critical that effective information, advice and guidance services for adults are provided which are coherent with those for young people" (DfEE, 2000b: 9).

This objective is made explicit in the *Connexions Service Planning Guidance* (DfEE, 2000c: 50) where the need for effective co-ordination between Connexions Services and IAG partnerships and with Higher Education Careers Advisory Services (HECASs) is spelt out. Efficient links also need to be established with the Employment Service. Connexions services are expected to be represented as members of IAG Partnerships to identify local priorities and ensure coherence of provision. The plans produced by Connexions services are expected to demonstrate how this is to be achieved by addressing four issues: organisational links; service delivery arrangements; client referral; and staff development.

The separation in responsibility for the two sectors of guidance means that effective liaison depends heavily on genuine partnership working and deliberate effort at local level in order to become a reality.

(Note: The term 'personal adviser' is not normally used in this paper because - in common with the term 'guidance' - there is a risk of differing interpretations. However, the operational content of the role of personal advisers is considered generically and within the context of its distinct - although inter-related - guidance components.)

2 The eight key principles of Connexions

The Connexions strategy is based on eight key principles central to all local Connexions youth support services. These are considered here in terms of their relevance to all age groups.

2.1 Raising aspirations

A fundamental objective of Connexions is to "deliver services in ways which encourage young people to have high expectations of themselves and...to...challenge stereotypical views of their prospects" (DfEE, 2000b: 29).

Many adults also need to develop high expectations of themselves. Currently they may write off their chances. Examples include: many lone parents; returners to the labour market with few qualifications; redundant manual workers; older members of black and minority ethnic groups; and unemployed and early-retired third-age workers who regard themselves as 'too old' and anticipate or have experienced age barriers in seeking employment.

Trade-union learning representatives and tutorial staff involved in the increasingly wide range of TU work-place learning projects, including those organised within the Basic Skills programme and the Bargaining for Skills initiative, frequently find that the initial challenge is to raise employees' expectations of themselves and help them to believe in their own abilities (TUC, 2000). There are many other examples of community and employment-based learning initiatives where the primary task is to raise adults' own levels of aspiration and self-belief.

2.2 Meeting individual need and overcoming barriers to learning

Connexions partnerships will "work with young people and others to identify the needs of young people within the area, analyse... those needs..., carry out a mapping exercise of provision within the area which is appropriate to those needs and discuss with providers and young people how successfully current provision meets young people's requirements" (DfEE, 2000b: 28).

Many IAG partnerships are engaged in similar mapping exercises and needs analyses. There would seem to be professional and cost-benefit advantages in Connexions and IAG partnerships working closely together on the mapping and needs analyses exercises and (as a minimum) exchanging and comparing field data. Connexions and IAG partnerships also need to ensure that the exercises are ongoing so that they remain fully updated on individual needs and barriers to learning.

Fieldwork experience shows that many young people and adults encounter similar barriers to learning. Examples include: poor public transport; inadequate basic skills; negative experiences at school; stereotypical images of learning; low self-esteem; fear of telephoning for information; lack of child-care facilities; and concerns about cost. This suggests that IAG and Connexions partnerships should:

- introduce mechanisms that enable the local partnerships to liaise closely on the issues revealed by individual needs analyses and the identification of commonly shared barriers to learning;
- where necessary, take concerted action in conjunction with local policy makers to help in meeting identified needs and overcoming barriers to learning that are experienced by both age groups.

2.3 Taking account of the individual and collective views of young people

Young people will be involved in the development and management of Connexions on a continuing basis, and their views will be systematically collected (DfEE, 2000b). The *Connexions Service Planning Guidance* (Section F) spells this out in greater detail and shows the extent to which young people are likely to be involved in consultation, and in design, delivery and quality development of local services.

Feedback shows that adults also welcome local consultative initiatives (eg about learning, employment and guidance requirements). These consultations can prove invaluable in helping to shape local policy. Experience shows that young people and adults often share similar concerns (eg about learning needs, low levels of self-confidence, staff attitudes in helping agencies, accessing guidance, and the need for community-based locations).

There is a strong case for close liaison between local Connexions, IAG and Learning Partnerships in order to compare the feedback from local consultations and, where appropriate, to act jointly on issues which are commonly experienced by both age groups. Young people and adults could also be proactively involved in taking the issues forward (eg in making presentations to local policy makers) as well as in the initial consultations.

2.4 Social and educational inclusion

Many young people and adults experience periods of social and educational exclusion for reasons that may include: unemployment; ethnic background; age; health; caring responsibilities; finance; residence (eg rural area, postal address); and poor basic, employability or IT skills. This helps to reinforce the case for jointly sponsored local initiatives and actions to help in overcoming those barriers to inclusion encountered by both younger and older members of local communities.

More apparently privileged groups of adults (eg recent graduates and unwillingly retired professionals) can also experience degrees of social, economic and educational exclusion. For example, research shows that significant numbers of unemployed and under-employed graduates may experience severe financial hardship and social isolation. This includes isolation at work for reasons such as unsympathetic management and work colleagues, and poor or non-existent training arrangements (Ford, 2000b). There is overwhelming evidence (from such sources as the Third Age Employment Network and the Institute of Management) that many older unemployed professionals can experience considerable social isolation and personal disorientation, compounded by cumulative financial difficulties and ageist attitudes when applying for work.

Although these examples may appear specific to particular age and target groups, in practice this may not be the case. For example, graduates' experiences

of poor and non-existent work-based training arrangements, and unemployed professionals' experience of age discrimination, raise issues that are shared by many young people who can also meet barriers to employment because of their age and employer reluctance to train. This may suggest areas of common action (such as jointly organised awareness-raising activities for local employers).

There may also be data here that can be used, for example, to inform the career management and higher-education choice elements of careers education and guidance programmes in local schools and colleges so that pupils and students can take early steps to avoid situations that may lead to future social and educational exclusion.

2.5 Partnership and collaboration

The principle of working in partnership with other local helping agencies is pivotal to the Connexions strategy. Partnership and collaboration "will produce mutual benefit and achieve more for young people than any ... one agency ... could achieve in isolation" (DfEE, 2000b: 28). The development of local IAG provision for adults is also based on the development of collaborative partnerships. This makes it possible, for example, for local expertise to be more fully utilised and standards of delivery raised through: commonly applicable quality standards and quality-assurance procedures; cross-network training arrangements; and the organisation of meetings, lunch clubs, and other events for all network members.

Some local agencies involved in Connexions and IAG partnerships specialise in either youth or adult issues, although numbers of local agencies concerned with youth affairs provide continuity of services after Connexions' upper age limit of 19. However, many potential partnership and collaborative agencies serve both young people and adults. Main examples include: college student service departments; local employers and employers' organisations; trade unions; local community associations; health and family services; drug action teams; housing associations; social services; transport services; the Employment Service; and the Benefits Agency.

As a minimum, this strengthens the importance of ensuring a free exchange of mapping and needs-analysis information between Connexions Services and local IAG partnerships, and joint action on issues common to both age groups. Other areas of collaborative working are likely to be identified as

the local Connexions and IAG partnerships become established.

2.6 Community involvement and neighbourhood renewal

A main objective of Connexions services is to increase the levels of young people's involvement in community and voluntary activity. This objective parallels the aim of government to increase the numbers of older people involved in voluntary work and active citizenship, and its concern that people between 55 and 64 are less likely to volunteer than other age groups (Cabinet Office Performance and Innovation Unit, 2000).

The strategy of the Home Office's Active Community Unit is to: encourage all sections of the community to volunteer; change individual and group perceptions of volunteering; and develop a national database of volunteering opportunities accessible via the internet and local volunteer bureaux (the Do-It database). There is also a recognised need to improve routes into volunteering by: creating and marketing opportunities; increasing training and support; and finding ways of reaching out to non-traditional volunteers including young people and adults who are socially excluded.

There would seem to be a number of ways in which Connexions and IAG partnerships could act together in promoting volunteering and citizenship to local communities, and in improving access, training and support. There is also a direct link with paid employment. Many young people and adults have found that volunteering has provided them with skills and experiences that have enabled them to gain employment and/or assisted career development. Youth and adult employment and guidance agencies have a particular interest in promoting volunteering as a potential bridge leading from social exclusion into inclusion and employment.

2.7 Extending opportunity and equality of opportunity

"The Connexions Service will have at its heart the principle of equality of opportunity" (DfEE, 2000b: 29). Under-represented groups of young people in terms of gender, ethnicity, disability and/or learning difficulty will be supported in identifying and obtaining suitable opportunities, and in making genuine and informed choices. Stereotyping will be challenged, racial issues confronted, and – wherever advisable – the awareness of provider and agency

staff raised to help them increase their sensitivity towards special groups.

People's attitudes can differ in important respects between young people and adults, and comparison is not always helpful. For example, young people can encounter prejudice based on stereotypical assumptions about young people's behaviour. Some older members of ethnic communities can face particularly entrenched difficulties, intensified by their age and consequent cultural estrangement from younger family members born in Britain as well as from the wider community itself.

However, many issues relating to gender, ethnicity, age, disability and learning difficulty are common to young people and adults and may therefore lend themselves to unified action. This includes action to help in overcoming those barriers that may result from the public's inadequate understanding of the issues, or from prejudice.

Examples of unified activities might include: joint marketing of local basic skills provision including provision that is specifically targeted at both age groups (eg at families); the promotion of courses and events to help people gain a better appreciation of other cultures; and joint action to help employers understand the economic and social consequences of age demarcations and age stereotyping affecting different age bands (eg young people, mature graduates of 24+, and older adults).

2.8 Evidence-based practice

Improvements in the delivery of Connexions services will be based on evaluation and on "evidence of successful practice wherever it is to be found" (DfEE, 2000b: 29). Although some guidance methods and approaches may be best suited to particular age groups, there are strong indications that a significant number are appreciated by young people and adults alike, although there may be differences in content and delivery methods. For example, research shows that all age groups respond positively to; mentoring; short concentrated CEG and career management courses; and work experience. The establishment of systems to facilitate the exchange of information between Connexions and IAG partnerships on successful guidance practice could help to enhance services for both age groups, and improve quality.

Guidance approaches which can be effective across age groups are considered in more detail in the next section.

3 Conditions of effective guidance delivery

The conditions included here are additional to those itemised specifically in the eight key principles of Connexions, although most are implicit to the whole strategy. Research and feedback show that all the conditions are of fundamental importance to effective guidance work with socially-excluded young people. All are concerned with valuing and respecting the individual, and in raising morale, motivation and personal confidence and self-esteem.

In the final analysis, it is likely that the ability of the Connexions Service to achieve the headline targets set out for young people's participation, achievement levels and progress out of aspects of social exclusion (DfEE, 2000c: Section M) rely heavily on the extent to which staff can gain young people's trust and respect, and increase individual motivation. Motivational issues are also likely to determine the extent to which the government can achieve its targets for adult learning achievement.

3.1 Holistic approaches

Young people welcome guidance approaches in which they are respected and supported as a whole person. This has been clearly demonstrated in youth guidance projects that have included the Government's New Start programme and the Institute of Careers Guidance's ESF-funded Mentoring Action Project and Stepping Stones initiatives.

The Connexions strategy is designed to respond holistically to young people's needs and responsibilities. There is a clear understanding that young people's requirements should not be categorised only in terms of learning and work. Many careers staff have found that sole concentration on learning and work can prove self-defeating because it does not acknowledge or seek to deal with the many personal issues that can influence or impede successful learning and career development. Wider networks are required that provide the expertise to help the whole person.

Many adults also require guidance approaches that enable them to speak freely about themselves, and that take account of the totality of their needs. This requirement is not always sufficiently recognised by helping agencies, where time pressures can also present a constraint. When conditions allow, adults frequently bring a range of issues to interviews

which can have profound effects on their career and learning choice, and on their ability to take up opportunities which may otherwise appear suitable. Examples of issues include: personal relationships; caring responsibilities; place of residence; transport; financial situation; health; and attitude of partner. These and other issues may need to be dealt with before, or alongside, providing help with the immediate career or career-related problem (eg growing awareness of unrealised potential).

Holistic guidance requires the availability of a wide local network of helping agencies, many working with all age groups. Efficient holistic guidance may call for the introduction of procedures that are common to both partnerships. Examples could include: systems to diagnose individual needs at the front-line, for example in community agencies; referral procedures to network organisations; and local databases of helping agencies.

There are also likely to be similarities in the holistic guidance methodology which succeeds with both age groups, suggesting the advisability of providing opportunities for the mutual exchange of expertise and good practice, and for the identification of common areas of staff training.

3.2 Reaching a state of readiness to engage in personal development and change

A recent study of adults' expectations and requirements of guidance states that "the attitude individuals have to personal development and/or change is a critical factor in determining whether they show any interest in presenting themselves for guidance at all, as well as how positive the outcomes from the guidance process are likely to be" (Wilson & Jackson, 1999: 5). The change required by adults is seen as two-fold: change in regard to individual work, learning activities and prospects; and change in regard to how individuals generally view themselves and their potential.

These observations can apply equally to many young people, who often require considerable support before they are ready to engage in a process of personal development and change. Some projects have successfully used a combination of skilled mentoring over a period of time, combined with groupwork carefully phased to meet individual needs and to build up self confidence (eg ICG's Stepping Stones initiative). The impact of this form of approach on young people's motivation and state of readiness for change can be considerable.

Experience shows that similar approaches can prove equally successful with adults. Close liaison between local Connexions and IAG partnerships may suggest additional ways of helping socially-excluded young people and adults to reach a sufficient state of readiness to engage in personal development and change, so that the total guidance process for both age groups can prove effective.

3.3 Raising self-confidence and self-esteem, and improving motivation

Many, and arguably most, socially-excluded young people have low to non-existent levels of self-confidence and self-esteem, although this may be disguised from public view. Youth and guidance workers commonly find that their primary task is to help individual young people to believe in their own self-worth and innate ability to succeed. Often this means supporting and encouraging individuals to develop the motivation to confront and overcome a wide range of negative experiences, situations and feelings. This process can take time, which is frequently broken by the mentor or adviser into small and carefully phased steps that can be assessed only in terms of 'soft' and individually-defined outcomes.

Adult guidance worker experience, supported by research and adult feedback (eg Wilson & Jackson, 1999; Ford, 2000c), shows that many adults are similarly held back by low levels of self-confidence and self-esteem. Reasons can be various and may include:

- Lack of encouragement and opportunity to overcome previous negative experiences, including those in the classroom. The initial task for many basic skills tutors is to help adults to understand and believe that they also can learn to read and write, and to give themselves permission to do so.
- Isolation, sometimes sudden, from previous peer and support groups. For example, this can be a particular problem for: new graduates trying to enter the labour market; lone parents; redundant workers; refugees, asylum seekers and migrants; older members of ethnic communities; and the early retired and those who have reached statutory retirement.
- Personal circumstances, relationships and responsibilities - especially those that constrain self-realisation (eg financial difficulties, discouragement from a partner or other close family member, caring responsibilities at home).

- Life events, eg redundancy from a long-term career or workplace, health difficulties and disablement, bereavement.
- Innate or long-term shyness and lack of self belief.

Levels of adult self-confidence can often be improved or restored by using the same or similar approaches to those used with young people: for example, through the individual interest and encouragement shown by mentors and tutors; holistic guidance; skilled group-work; use of role models; recognition of small and larger-step achievements; and career guidance that helps adults to identify and recognise their strengths. However, these approaches can take time. Further research is required into more concentrated guidance approaches (including those using neuro-linguistic programming and equivalent techniques) that may help adults to improve their levels of self-confidence – and therefore their levels of personal motivation – more quickly. These guidance approaches may also prove of value to young people.

Feedback shows that the inter-personal skills and attitude of the advisers, mentors, tutors and other key figures working most closely with individuals in need is arguably the central factor in enabling people to gain or regain self-esteem. This is true both for young people and adults. It suggests that front-line workers in both partnerships may gain from training and other events designed to increase staff sensitivity and to equip staff with relevant skills (eg in motivational guidance).

The extent to which differences in approach to raise levels of self-confidence and self-esteem may be required between the age groups merits further identification (eg to inform and support work with families).

3.4 Welcoming and supportive staff

A number of successful projects for socially-excluded young people have been organised in careers offices and other 'non-neutral' premises. These might be expected to fail because they are not based in outreach and community premises situated in young people's own territory. However, research shows that the deciding factor in terms of young people's acceptance is whole staff attitude, including the warmth of welcome they receive at reception (Ford, 2000a).

Adult groups show a similar sensitivity to reception and staff attitudes. Research involving unemployed and under-employed graduates showed that a main criterion in their evaluation of guidance and employment agencies (including those employing temporary staff) was the friendliness and efficiency of reception (Ford, 2000b). In particular, graduates were sensitive to staff attitudes that made them feel unwelcome or patronised.

A number of agencies have realised the critical role played by reception and 'first impressions' in making callers feel included. Jobcentres have become concerned about ensuring that their offices and staff are customer-friendly to counteract the debilitating effect of unemployment on individual morale, including the sense of being 'second class' and excluded. An increasing number of colleges and adult education centres have radically improved their telephone reception arrangements because many adults are 'telephone shy', and the first approach can be a major step.

Connexions, IAG and Learning Partnerships share the same need to ensure that front-line reception and other staff understand the key role played by their own inter-personal skills and attitudes in helping to overcome social exclusion, and the critical importance of making young people and adults feel valued and included.

3.5 Genuine care and respect

Evaluation of the effectiveness of mentoring in career-guidance contexts shows that young people respond to staff who: demonstrate genuine, client-centred concern and caring; empathise with and understand their needs and difficulties; and value and respect them as individuals. These and other personal qualities are main factors in helping the young people to progress from disaffection and disengagement, and to begin to establish a clearer sense of purpose. Young people are quick to discern the absence of these qualities, or pretence including insincere and patronising attitudes (Ford, 2000a).

Adults also respond positively to client-centred staff and approaches, and to guidance services where there is "a strong emphasis on individual support and a very high standard of personal care. Anything less than this puts off those lacking confidence or making initial tentative enquiries" (Wilson & Jackson, 1999). Some jobcentres have designated staff with highly developed mentoring and inter-personal skills to specialise in advising specific adult target groups, and where necessary to support them

individually over a period of time (eg the long-term unemployed, older people of working age). These initiatives are welcomed by the clients and are proving successful.

Comparison shows that young people and adults respond positively to similar qualities in their helpers, and gain in confidence and motivation where staff demonstrate genuine respect and positive regard. Connexions and IAG partnerships are likely to require broadly similar qualities from their front-line staff, and this suggests the adoption of common policies towards staff selection and training. There are also factors here that could prove critical in guidance work involving whole families.

Numbers of staff involved in local partnerships will be employed by agencies with no age demarcation and will work simultaneously with young people and adults (eg local community centres, Benefits Agencies). It is in the interests of both local partnerships that the staff concerned do not differentiate in their genuineness and in the approaches they adopt towards the different age groups.

3.6 Open and shared agendas

The positive reaction of young people towards holistic and client-centred approaches that they can see as clearly concentrated on meeting their own needs can create difficult ethical issues for guidance staff. Careers staff may experience severe problems in reconciling their objective assessment of young people's individual requirements with the targets and objectives that may be set by their organisation. Guidance workers and young people may share the perception of external challenges to the relationships of trust they have worked hard to establish, where the programmes required to meet young people's needs can be seen to conflict with organisational policy.

Young people may readily exclude themselves from the guidance process if they sense that advisers are working predominantly to their own or to organisational agendas. There are difficult balances here that require open discussion, and skilled and sensitive negotiation. The guidance process is unlikely to succeed unless young people can build and retain relationships with their advisers that are built on mutual trust and respect, and in which the young people can remain confident (Ford, 1998; Law, 2000; Hulbert, 2000).

Similar issues confront guidance and employment

staff working with adults. Adults share with young people a strong preference for genuine client-centred approaches and tend to react against agendas that may be seen as imposed by their advisers. For example, colleges may dissuade some intending students by adopting marketing strategies that focus on their own courses, rather than ensuring that staff listen carefully to students' own learning and personal needs and provide information and advice on a broader range of opportunities (including those offered by other members of local Learning Partnerships) where this is in the individual's interests. ES staff working with New Deal clients have to be able to develop and maintain relationships of trust in situations where clients may feel that the main agenda is the reduction of monthly unemployment statistics and the achievement of jobcentre targets, and not their own personal career development.

The ethical issues that can face staff working in Connexions and IAG partnerships are complex. Their successful resolution may prove critical in determining the extent to which both partnerships can succeed in helping young people and adults to progress from exclusion to inclusion. There are likely to be common issues here that require open acknowledgement and sensitive consideration between youth and adult partnerships. Open sharing of the sometimes difficult ethical issues involved may suggest joint responses (eg in the introduction and implementation of similar staff support systems; shared staff training agendas; joint guidelines for staff; and continuing dialogue and exchange of experience on ways of resolving areas of potential or actual ethical conflict).

3.7 Informality and flexibility

Young people and adults share a preference for approaches and delivery styles that are informal and flexible. Adults respond well to a guidance process in which parts can be taken in 'bite-size chunks' (Wilson & Jackson, 1999). This corresponds with the success of youth guidance projects in which programmes, inputs and objectives are arranged in flexible stages to allow for phased progression (Ford, 2000a).

Adults welcome guidance facilities that are accessible outside normal office hours (Wilson & Jackson, 2000). Guidance work with under-employed graduates and others who may be under-utilising their potential at work, and who require informed assistance on their career development outside the work-place, can normally only take place

at weekends. Some of the most effective initiatives for young people incorporate events and inputs organised in the evening and weekends, and provided in community and youth premises in which the young people feel readily at home.

There would seem to be considerable merit in Connexions and IAG partnerships sharing information and experience on flexible and informal delivery methods and, where advisable, determining common policies and approaches.

4 Services and activities of guidance

A number of 'services and activities of guidance' are selected below in order to compare the value set on each service or activity by the two age groups. Most of these services and activities are explicitly set out in the Connexions strategy as elements which are necessary for the successful delivery of local guidance provision for young people.

4.1 Accessing guidance

The network of agencies working in partnership with local Connexions services increases the points of entry through which young people can become engaged in the guidance process. Personal advisers have an important brokerage role. A main function of personal advisers is to "end the current fragmentation of services...and ensure...all the needs of a young person are met in an integrated and coherent manner" (DfEE, 2000a: 35).

Many adults encounter difficulties in locating individually appropriate sources of information, advice and guidance, although more is being done nationally and locally to direct them to the relevant providers: for example, through the learndirect helpline and through local guidance and lifelong learning websites.

Adults' difficulties may also result from lack of appropriate local guidance provision. Some groups of adults (including recently qualified graduates, working adults who wish to change careers, and older people of working age) may find that there are no guidance agencies with the necessary specialist expertise available locally to help them.

IAG partnerships share with Connexions services the need, not only to map local sources of information, advice and guidance on a range of

issues ultimately related to learning and career progression, but also to make the services offered and main target groups covered by each agency explicitly clear to the public.

Mapping helps to pinpoint gaps in local provision. It also enables local partnerships to identify effective ways of improving accessibility, including the dissemination of information in appropriate modes to the local public which clearly state the points of entry.

There would seem to be scope for joint cross-partnership collaboration here, most immediately to assist whole families and young people who require support after 19. However, the need for easy accessibility to local guidance provision is much wider and applies to many other groups within local community areas.

4.2 Mentoring

A large number of local mentoring initiatives have been organised to support and assist socially-excluded and vulnerable young people. A high proportion of the projects have had to rely on short-term finance, and have often been discontinued when the funding period has ceased because they are highly resource intensive. However, they have frequently proved very successful and have been welcomed by the young target groups.

Mentoring has become increasingly recognised as a valuable and effective means of extending help and support to vulnerable young people, and helping them to progress from exclusion to social exclusion. Young people respond positively to: the client-centred approach adopted by mentors; genuine care combined with reliability and efficiency of action; advocacy, brokerage and skilled referral; modelling of effective attitudes, personal skills and behaviour; informed advice; and the ability of the mentor to provide encouragement and sense of purpose (Ford, 1998).

The value of mentoring is recognised in the Connexions strategy, and the principles of effective mentoring are incorporated into the concept and responsibilities of personal advisers. However, the case-loads of personal advisers may well prove too large to permit the concentration of care necessary to match the results achieved by dedicated mentoring projects. Connexions services are also seeking to attract mentors from local communities, including industry, and to "work with them to develop their expertise with young people" (DfEE, 2000a).

Many of the mentoring schemes available to adults are organised by employers and often represent a key feature of successful work-based staff development programmes. A smaller number of mentoring projects have been organised for specific groups of adults. For example, in Leeds career guidance staff have successfully piloted mentoring provision for under-employed graduates, and have trained recruitment and employment service staff in mentoring skills so that they can support the career development of graduates who 'temp' (Ford, 2000b).

Although there may be differences in the starting points between graduates and vulnerable young people, there are close parallels in those aspects of mentoring which both groups identify as valuable. These include: the personal skills of the mentors; the mentor as a reliable central figure who encourages, motivates and helps to provide a sense of purpose and a framework for action; being valued as a person; growth or restoration of self-confidence; identification and confirmation of individual skills and potential; individually relevant information, advice, guidance and career development activities; informed referral; and direct links with the local labour market.

Similar parallels can be drawn with other projects to help specific groups of adults where mentoring skills and mentoring-related approaches have been employed, although the projects cannot necessarily be classified as specialist mentoring projects. Examples include: the work of trade-union learning representatives in industry; a number of locally-based projects organised to help workers affected by large-scale redundancies in major companies; local community-based initiatives to support older people in maintaining a full working life such as those supported by the Third Age Employment Network and Third Age Challenge; and the Employment Service's designation of specialist staff to work intensively with small case-loads of the long-term unemployed. Some education providers have trained adult tutors in front-line guidance skills so that they can provide skilled guidance support to adult students within the context of the continuing tutorial relationship; an example is the Workers' Educational Association (WEA).

Some of these initiatives may employ or use the services of dedicated mentors, but in most cases the staff have wider responsibilities. However, the more successful of these initiatives are likely to incorporate elements of best practice in mentoring including genuine and disinterested care, and a concentration on identifying and responding to the

needs of each individual adult. Some of the initiatives have also designated personal advisers or equivalent to work intensively with specific groups of adults.

The available evidence, mainly drawn from evaluations, indicates that well-organised mentoring projects can prove effective with all age groups. Techniques and approaches drawn from high-quality mentoring can also be incorporated into guidance and related work with young people and adults, with beneficial results.

This suggests that there should be opportunities available locally to compare experiences and exchange good practice between Connexions and local IAG partnerships, and to organise joint programmes of training in mentoring techniques. There may be scope for joint projects, possibly targeted at families or specific communities and estates. Combined partnership approaches may also strengthen collective bids for external funding to finance local mentoring initiatives.

4.3 Career and related information

Connexions services are responsible for ensuring that career and career-related information "is provided in a readily accessible, well organised, accurate and unbiased way" (DfEE, 2000b: 8). The Connexions specification makes clear that the range of information available for young people should include: education and training opportunities; comprehensive information on career options; informal and community-based education and development opportunities; issues related to young people (eg drug misuse, youth offending); housing and health issues; financial support; and leisure, cultural and volunteering activities. Help should also be available in interpreting the information.

The experience of adult guidance advisers, supported by field research (Wilson & Jackson, 1999), shows that adults want and require a similar range of information. Analysis of the main findings of a recent government report on improving opportunities for people aged 50-65 in work and community activity (Cabinet Office Performance and Innovation Unit, 2000) indicates that similar categories of information are also needed by older adult groups.

The main differences between the age groups relate to:

- Issues: information on issues self-evidently needs to be relevant to the principal target groups,

although there are likely to be areas of considerable overlap (eg on drug misuse, child care facilities, employment legislation).

- Job entry, especially relating to mature applicants: although in terms of longer-term career planning and career management, this information may also be relevant to young people.

However, cumulative career guidance experience shows that the similarities prevail over the differences. Research indicates that most young people and adults of working age share an overriding concern about their own employment and career development (Ford, 1998; Ford, 2000a). Wilson & Jackson's work on adults' expectations of guidance shows that adults want "specific information about local labour markets, areas of growth and development, what skills may be required, levels of pay etc. People's overwhelming interest...is...in getting a job, or a better job" (Wilson & Jackson, 1999: 13)

Adults and young people both want information on learning opportunities to be clearly work-related. "There was an overwhelming desire for learning information that was not only free-standing but linked to local labour markets, therefore helping individuals understand what specific jobs – or better jobs – could be applied for as a result of the learning programmes being considered" (Wilson & Jackson, 1999: 13). Learning information for all age groups should include hard information on the career implications of individual courses, including: the relationship between courses and local and national labour market; employment opportunities; student destinations; and any subsequent need for further study before one is fully qualified (ie to work in specific occupations). Information is also required on any age demarcations in recruitment policy that may affect specific groups (eg minimum age of entry for young people, any maximum age limits that may affect older age groups – including age limits on graduate entry that may affect mature students).

The similarities in the information requirements of young people and adults suggest that Connexions and IAG partnerships should identify ways of avoiding duplication. Most local career resource and information centres operated by careers companies already provide information for all age groups, and would seem to offer common bases from which to develop information dissemination strategies – including the identification of main community resource points – appropriate to age and target

groups. A strong working relationship between career resource and information centres, and school and college careers libraries, public libraries (favoured by many adults) and some outreach community centres, is already firmly established in many areas. In the interests of effective guidance practice and cost efficiency, Connexions and IAG partnerships may be best advised to collaborate in maintaining and building on the existing systems.

4.4 Information and communications technology

Some areas have created internet sites which contain local learning, guidance and employment information relevant to all age groups.

Most national guidance-related sites are targeted at particular age or interest groups (eg graduates, older age groups). A number of the sites for older people are holistic in their design, and in the range and depth of the information they provide on issues related to ageing; examples include those managed by Age Concern, Help the Aged, and the Association of Retired and Persons over 50. The learndirect site contains information relevant to all age groups although it is targeted principally at adults. The Connexions Direct telephone and on-line information and advice service is being designed specifically for young people, although it will inevitably contain information relevant to whole families and to Connexions service and other adult staff working with young people.

Website differentiation between target and age groups is likely to rest principally on style of presentation and selection of information. In practice, some – if not all – the information on targeted sites is likely to have relevance to target and age groups other than those for whom the site has been designed.

At local level this would seem to call for:

- A common core of learning, employment and guidance information from which it is possible to draw information that can be appropriately targeted.
- Site design that points users to other relevant sites and includes hotline access. At local level this would almost certainly include sites operated by: individual learning and guidance providers; public and voluntary agencies; and other members of local Connexions, IAG and Learning Partnerships. National sites would include sites such as Connexions Direct, learndirect, learndirect Futures, graduate sites operated by

organisations such as the Higher Education Careers Service Unit (CSU), the Active Community Do-It site on opportunities to volunteer, and ‘holistic guidance’ sites for people over 45 or 50.

The development, co-ordination and management of inter-linking local and relevant national sites would necessitate close collaboration between Connexions, IAG and local Learning Partnerships.

A main local and national issue is the extent to which websites are accessible to, and useable by: socially-excluded and disadvantaged groups; those with basic skills difficulties; and more isolated groups including people with disabilities and the frail elderly. Many people may be dependent on intermediaries in youth centres, community agencies, public libraries and other organisations to help them appreciate the range of information available, its personal relevance, and how to access it. In some instances intermediaries may identify the need for learning provision to help people with their basic skills needs and/or how to use ICT (a number of public libraries have introduced on-site and flexible learning support in ICT skills for exactly this reason). There are issues here which again are likely to apply across age groups.

4.5 Advice and guidance

The Connexions specification makes clear that advice and guidance should be available at key episodes in a young person’s life "to enable young people to make informed decisions about opportunities" (DfEE, 2000b: 9). Advice and guidance should aim to raise aspirations and help all young people to attain their potential. Wherever necessary, bias and stereotypical attitudes should be challenged.

A main objective is to "help young people overcome a wide spectrum of barriers to their participation in learning including those associated with their academic under-achievement, health, ethnicity, social, cultural or home life" (DfEE, 2000b: 9). This objective can also be interpreted as applying to preferred vocational area as well, because of the interweaving relationship between learning, employment and career development.

Many adults of working age want guidance, including guidance on learning opportunities, which is specifically employment-related. Wilson & Jackson (1999: 13) found that the adults interviewed during the Guidance Council research project wanted "specialist vocational advice from...experts

who can offer practical advice about work in particular sectors, preferably linked to local labour market opportunities". Feedback from young people shows that they share the same requirement.

Many adults also want help in overcoming barriers which are impeding their access to learning, preferred employment and career development opportunities, and ultimate self-realisation and fulfilment. The barriers confronting adults are often identical to those itemised within the Connexions specification as facing young people. Other common barriers which can affect both age groups include: finance; the costs of learning; child care; and transport. Many adults as well as young people also require help and support in: raising their aspirations; overcoming low levels of self-confidence; and learning how best to challenge bias and stereotypical attitudes.

The close relationship between the advice and guidance needs of young people and those of adults has important implications for both age groups. For example:

- There is a strong case for ensuring that employment and labour market information compiled by adult advice and guidance services is automatically fed back to local Connexions services. This is important for a number of reasons, including alleviation of the risk that services for young people may focus on learning opportunities without giving sufficient attention to the consequences for future employment. For most young people the final employment decisions will be taken after age 19, but are likely to be heavily influenced by learning decisions taken before 19. Decisions taken before 19 can (often unwittingly) close down, as well as open up, areas of vocational opportunity. It is critical that learning decisions taken before the 19-year-old watershed are always informed by the potential vocational and labour market implications.
- Conversely, significant numbers of adults require access to similar forms of holistic advice and guidance as Connexions is making available to young people. Unless equivalent assistance is available, many adults could continue to have difficulty in overcoming individual barriers to progression and self-realisation, many of which are shared with young people.

There are some pressing issues here that require joint exploration between the youth and adult advice and guidance partnerships.

4.6 In-depth, integrated and specialist guidance and support

The Connexions strategy highlights the requirement of young people at risk for in-depth support "to help them to address barriers to learning and enable them to fulfil their potential" (DfEE, 2000a: 37).

The strategy also identifies the need that young people facing substantial multiple problems may have for integrated and specialist support. These groups of young people are likely to include: those with disabilities; young people leaving care; young mothers; and the short- and longer-term homeless. The Connexions strategy also recognises the support that may be required by the especially gifted.

Young people at risk and/or with multiple problems may require a continuation of the same in-depth and specialist support after they have reached 19 and entered adulthood. Similarly, there are groups of adults who may require equivalent in-depth and specialist support for reasons shared with young people or unique to adulthood. Examples include: graduates who cannot find ways of utilising their skills and abilities in the labour market; carers whose abilities and potential are confined by their domestic situation; and older people of working age who, for a variety of personal and external reasons, are unable to find ways of re-entering employment.

In all these cases, feedback from field-workers and from the adults themselves suggests that barriers preventing adults from utilising their abilities and developing their potential can contribute to subsequent mental and physical health difficulties. There is a need for more extensive research on the relationship linking unemployment, under-employment and individual health. Ultimately the findings resulting from this research affect young people too as they develop into adulthood.

Many of the support services to which young people are referred also work with adults, and the forms of in-depth guidance provided to both age groups are likely to be similar or identical. This suggests the desirability of staff training policies that are generic to both age groups. Where staff involved in Connexions and IAG partnerships are working solely with either young people or adults, the staff concerned are still likely to have training needs that are common to both age groups: for example, for training which equips front-line staff in the diagnostic skills necessary to identify those young people and adults who require referral for in-depth and/or specialist support, and in the signposting and

referral skills necessary to take appropriate action.

When designing local guidance partnerships it is also essential to remember that many young people and adults require in-depth and specialist guidance and support in determining their future careers and in planning the next step. Research indicates that the needs that young people may have for in-depth career guidance may not always be properly identified by staff working in initiatives where the emphasis and commitment of field-workers is on meeting young people's holistic requirements (Ford, 1998; Ford, 2000a). There are important training and awareness-raising issues here that can apply to staff working with both age groups, and that require attention if local partnerships are to be genuinely holistic.

4.7 Assessment, planning and review

Holistic assessment of young people's needs, and implementation of planning and review systems able to respond efficiently to individual assessments, are central elements of the Connexions strategy (DfEE, 2000b). Assessment within a more narrowly defined career-guidance context constitutes part of a wider whole. A main aim of Connexions is to implement assessment systems that support young people in overcoming the full range of youth issues that can block successful progression.

Wilson & Jackson's (1999) research on adults' expectations and requirements of guidance indicates that adults also see access to high-quality assessment facilities as a key element of effective guidance provision (the research objectives meant that the adults participating considered assessment predominantly within a career guidance and not holistic context). Field experience shows that adults are more likely to reveal their holistic guidance requirements at the stage when the initial career-related enquiry is explored in more detail with their adviser. As with young people, adults seeking guidance often need skilled help in assessing their broad span of needs and then in constructing action plans that help them to deal with these, so that they are better positioned to achieve their vocational and/or learning objectives.

Progression for both age groups frequently depends on the successful resolution of issues not necessarily apparent at the presenting stage, but which may constitute the main barriers inhibiting self-realisation. Youth and adult guidance workers therefore share the same need for sensitive assessment and analytical skills, and for informed

access to the wider partnerships necessary for accurate signposting and referral.

For many young people and adults, effective career-guidance assessment – including opportunities for self-assessment – are essential elements of the guidance process. Wilson & Jackson (1999: 13) found that adults want "the provision of a range of vocational assessment opportunities, including a range of appropriate free-standing and support computer-aided guidance (CAG) packages, specific skills testing, and aptitude testing".

When they are provided with the opportunity, socially-excluded young people also tend to welcome the chance to use CAG resources which enable them to:

- analyse their own skills, expectations and values;
- relate these to possible vocational and learning opportunities that they may previously have perceived as closed to them.

Careers advisers who have used psychometric tests with disadvantaged groups have found that the young people often react positively to the experience of test completion and feedback (Ford, 2000a). Although considerable care is needed at the interpretation and feedback stage, a key message that young people can receive from the use of interactive assessment instruments is "I can do that". Skilfully used, assessment tools can represent a powerful motivating force.

Many young people and adults need considerable help in identifying their own skills and potential, and working out how best to utilise these in a working environment. Ready access to a carefully-selected range of assessment packages and instruments that facilitate self assessment, with skilled support available to aid interpretation, can help both age groups to establish a clearer sense of personal direction, and to construct and begin to implement personal action plans. In the interests of cost effectiveness, it would normally seem sensible that the facilities should be made available to both age groups simultaneously. Preferably they should be integral to careers resource centres or community-based satellite sites so that relevant sources of careers and learning information are readily at hand to assist action planning.

The pilots that are currently taking place to assess DfEE's series of Progress Files may suggest further avenues for collaboration across age groups. The Progress Files enable users to map and assess their

own progression, and record their achievements. Some of the Files are designed specifically for particular age groups; others can be used generically. The emerging evidence from the pilots is that the Progress Files as a series can prove invaluable in helping both age groups to identify and develop their strengths, and learn how to manage their own careers.

4.8 Creating gateways: learning, employability and career management

Learning Gateway courses that provide opportunities for entry into mainstream provision are integral to the Connexions strategy. Research shows that those courses which are most successful in helping young people to progress:

- Ensure that programmes meet the assessed needs of individual students.
- Integrate basic and key skills, and social and life skills, with vocational training and ‘hands on’ vocational experience so that students understand the inter-connections in terms of future employability.
- Ensure that students with particular needs are provided with appropriate support, eg in raising their levels of literacy and numeracy to employable standards.
- Include careers education and guidance (CEG) approaches that enable students: to identify their strengths; record their own progress and achievements; determine how best to develop and use their strengths in learning and in work; and draw up realistic plans of action that provide direction in working towards their career objectives.
- Organise group activities and provide individual support that are designed to improve students’ levels of self-confidence and motivation.
- Provide ongoing opportunities for active and ‘hands-on’ student involvement including reviewing, influencing and organising aspects of the programme.
- Celebrate student success, including ‘small step’ success, and have accreditation systems that enable small and ‘larger step’ achievements to be accredited against nationally recognised awards.
- Provide ongoing individual support, including mentoring support, which can help students overcome barriers to progression including progress into mainstream learning.

(Ford, 2000a; Frampton & Hull, 2000).

Some Learning Gateway courses, and preliminary ‘stepping stones’ courses designed to lead into the Learning Gateway, are based – or partly based – in outreach community centres. Some colleges have taken advantage of outreach provision for young people to create community-based learning which involves adults and whole families in the process of learning. Close collaboration between Connexions, IAG and Learning Partnerships may help to identify more opportunities for the Learning Gateway to reach out to adults as well as young people.

All the success criteria identified above for Learning Gateway courses apply equally to access and gateway-type courses for adults that combine preparation for mainstream learning with preparation for future employability and/or employment.

Wilson & Jackson (1999) show that many adults want the guidance process arranged in ‘bite-size chunks’ and welcome the opportunity to attend courses and group events that are essentially concentrated careers education and guidance and career management programmes appropriately packaged for adults. Analysis of adult requirements shows that the programmes should include: job-related learning and labour market information; assessment opportunities; specialist vocational advice; links with employers and work experience; CV and job-search; opportunities to test out learning opportunities; help in identifying transferable skills; and financial advice. Delivery should be friendly, informal, flexible and responsive to individual needs.

‘Wider opportunities’, ‘new horizons’, access and equivalent courses of this type are available in a number of areas, often targeted at specific groups of adults (eg returners, older redundant workers, graduates, adults living in specific communities). Some of the most successful of ES’s work-based learning programmes for adults are tailored to meet these requirements. Courses organised within the TUC learning strategy also include some or all of these elements (eg the UNISON Return to Learn courses delivered by the WEA).

However, the availability of access, gateway and equivalent courses for adults is patchy, whether these are community, college or work-based. Close teamwork between local agencies involved in Connexions, IAG and Learning Partnerships could help considerably in identifying the need for such courses within local communities, and in extending the scale of adult learning and associated career

guidance provision including that which is targeted at families.

4.9 Work experience

The majority of socially-excluded young people want to work. The offer of a job is a mark of personal acceptability and the achievement of adult status as well as an opportunity to gain financial independence. Although work-experience and recruitment policies are not necessarily directly related, guidance workers often find that socially-excluded young people are genuinely excited and gain considerably in self-esteem when they are offered work-experience places during special projects or gateways courses. However, considerable individual support may still be needed to enable young people to cope with the actuality of work experience.

Evidence shows that many adults want more opportunities for work experience. Wilson & Jackson (1999) found that adults wanted "the opportunity to test out jobs with employers, to have the opportunity for work experience and/or work trials, as well as better links generally with local industries. Links with employers generally came up again and again".

ES experience shows that the Work Trial programme can be highly valued by adults and employers, because it provides employers and prospective employees with the opportunity to evaluate each other without obligation before making a final decision. ES Work-Based Training projects can offer similar advantages to adults, as did the previous TEC-administered Adult Training schemes. For most adults the main value of these projects is the opportunity for 'hands-on' work experience and for direct access into the local labour market.

A number of work-experience and work-based training initiatives have been organised for graduates (eg by higher education institutions, TECs, or as a DfEE Higher Education Development Project). Most of these projects have involved small and medium-sized employers. Evaluation shows that the initiatives are popular both with graduates and employers. One evaluation of a graduate guidance and career development project which did not include local opportunities for work experience showed that:

- large numbers of local employers want graduate work-experience schemes to be introduced as avenues through which to assess and recruit graduates;
- many of the graduates want work experience to

form an integral element of future projects (Ford, 2000c).

The general popularity of work experience with both age groups suggests that there could be merit in Connexions, IAG and Learning Partnerships initiating joint reviews of local policies to provide work experience opportunities for both age groups, in partnership with local employers and other interested agencies including ES and Education Business Links. Issues that require local review may include some or all of the following:

- Working out how to ensure a sufficient supply of work experience for both young people and adults.
- Reviewing specific local issues. For example, guidance workers in some areas report that the New Deal appears to have eroded the supply of work-experience vacancies for some groups of young people (Ford, 2000a).
- Introducing methods to ensure that employers are not overwhelmed with similar requests from different educational institutions and public and private agencies (methods might include the introduction of joint appeals, marketing policies, and pooling systems).
- Considering the comparative advantages and disadvantages of encouraging more local alternatives to work experience (eg work observation; work sampling; and 'Transition Team' projects that enable young people to select, organise and undertake their own research on career opportunities in the local labour market including visiting and interviewing young people at work (Hooton & Turner, 1996) – the 'Transition Team' concept can also be adapted for adult usage).
- Helping employers to distinguish between different types of work experience (eg initiatives that are related directly to recruitment and those that may have more broadly-based educational objectives), learn about good practice and keep up-to-date on current developments (this might include the introduction of jointly produced newsletters for employers on work experience and associated initiatives).
- Introducing avenues through which to compare experience and exchange good practice between the youth and adult partnerships.

New Education Business Link organisations are being established in each Learning and Skills Council area to aid the co-ordination of work

experience, work shadowing, and other forms of education-business activity. The involvement of the EBL organisations in joint partnership reviews of work-experience and related initiatives could help to stimulate inter-generational 'spin-off' benefits (eg an expansion of local business mentoring projects for 'at risk' young people). Employers are expected "to play an important role in the Connexions Service and to become increasingly involved in education locally, through the further development of Education and Business Partnerships. Local Learning and Skills Councils will be working closely with the Connexions Service and local employers to ensure coherence" (DfEE, 2000a: 44).

Closer employer involvement in Connexions, and also in Learning Partnerships and IAG networks, could be used to benefit all age groups in local areas.

4.10 Learning tasters

Some colleges are organising Learning Gateways projects that start in years 10 or 11 and enable pupils to gain first-hand experience of college courses, including mainstream courses, well in advance of the statutory leaving date. These arrangements may include short learning tasters. Post-16 Learning Gateway and related initiatives for socially-excluded young people also often incorporate the chance to sample and test out learning opportunities. These taster arrangements are generally welcomed by young people.

Adults also often want "the opportunity to try out learning opportunities – either through special access arrangements to existing provision or through the development of 'tasters' that will enable individuals to try out particular provision before making a commitment to it" (Wilson & Jackson, 1999: 13).

There are opportunities here for Connexions and IAG partnerships to work together with local Learning Partnerships in encouraging the expansion of learning tasters offered by both the statutory and voluntary sectors for all age groups.

4.11 Peer support

Peer mentoring is seen as an important element in the Connexions strategy. "The Services will...recruit peer mentors, particularly young people who have themselves experienced difficulties, to act as role models to help young people deal with similar challenges" (DfEE, 2000a: 44).

A number of highly successful locally-based peer mentoring projects have proved the value of training young people who have first-hand experience themselves of having to confront and overcome issues such as bullying, homelessness, drug misuse and unemployment, in the skills necessary to assist and support socially-excluded and 'at risk' young people facing similar problems. Specialist peer mentoring schemes include work with: young ex-offenders; young mothers; and care leavers who have successfully coped with the transition from care to living independently. The Tyneside Peer Mentoring Project (which is generic in its coverage of issues) has shown the extent to which peer-mentoring projects can improve the self-confidence and motivation of the young mentors, and enable them to work towards recognised qualifications (Bowman & Watson, 2000).

Adult guidance workers have also noted the value of peer mentoring in supporting adults in transition. A number of organisations (eg individual trade unions, the Women's Institute) have successfully trained adults as learning mentors. A particularly valuable feature of adult group work (eg with returners, graduates and redundant older workers) is the frequency with which adults help and support each other and create their own informal peer support groups. These informal groups often exchange local information so that individuals are helped to extend their own local support networks and to obtain employment. Some funded projects to assist older people of working age have started in this way.

Staff involved in the New Deal have found that some clients who have successfully completed New Deal programmes, and have entered individually fulfilling employment and/or learning opportunities as a direct consequence, are prepared to act as role models for new clients (either through printed examples or in person).

The proven effectiveness of informal and more formally organised peer-mentoring initiatives in helping all age groups reinforces the importance of local partnerships devising methods to exchange information on effective guidance practice, including peer mentoring approaches, and in identifying common areas of training – such as training in peer-mentoring skills. Many peer mentors working with other young people are likely to be 19 or approaching 19, and may therefore themselves need support through the transitional period in order to gain appropriate qualifications and to use their mentoring skills and experience in helping to develop their own careers. Numbers of socially-

excluded mentees (for example, lone parents) may require continuity of peer support after age 19. Close collaboration between the youth and adult guidance partnerships is necessary in order to ensure continuity, as well as quality, of service.

4.12 Financial guidance

Poverty can be a main cause of youth, as well as adult, social exclusion (Ford, 1998). Personal economic factors that may prolong youth social exclusion can include difficulties in meeting the costs of: affordable accommodation; transport; healthy diet; preparing oneself for interview (clothes, hairdressing); and child care. Future progression opportunities can be constrained by immediate survival requirements, and by the costs involved in studying at college including the forgoing of income. Guidance workers commonly find that a priority requirement is to assist individual young people with their financial crises and difficulties, and to help them with more carefully planned and longer-term budgeting.

Adult career decisions may be constrained by similar financial considerations to those experienced by young people, but with the costs of housing and care for dependants often assuming a higher priority. Young people and adults frequently share the same need to assess the financial implications of entering further and higher education, and (in terms of student loans) to evaluate the longer-term pay-off which may be anticipated from following specific courses.

The case for bringing career guidance and financial guidance closer together has been explored by Watts & Stevens (1999). A policy consultation on the relationship between career guidance and financial guidance, organised jointly by NICEC and Financial and Educational Services Ltd, recommended that local IAG partnerships should consider the provision of financial guidance within their network structures. The economic difficulties experienced by many socially-excluded young people and their families suggest that identification of accessible avenues for financial guidance should also be a main concern of local Connexions partnerships.

5 Careers education and guidance: young people in mainstream education

This paper has concentrated so far on comparing the guidance requirements of young people who are socially excluded or 'at risk' with those of adult target groups. However, Connexions is a comprehensive service which is responsible for meeting the guidance needs of all young people in mainstream education, including those who are not at risk and are likely to progress into further or higher education with their parents' full support.

A number of studies have been carried out of students' expectations of careers education and guidance programmes at school and college. The findings are consistent with those identified in work with socially-excluded young people and with adult groups. For example Stoney *et al.* (1998), in their study of young people's views of careers education and guidance at school, found that young people at school want careers education and guidance that:

- Provides them with information, advice and experience which is individual and specific.
- Enables them to gain relevant, first-hand experience (eg of work and learning opportunities).
- Gives them access to a wide range of well-ordered information on opportunities "but not so much as would lead to confusion" (p.25).
- Provides the opportunity for one-to-one discussions with knowledgeable, sympathetic and non-judgmental adults who listen to them and with whom they are able to discuss their own ideas about future plans.
- Offers facilities for individual reviews, follow-up interviews and more informal contact opportunities with 'careers professionals'.
- Concentrates on their own individual needs. Pupils can be wary of adults who they suspect of having their own agenda, including wanting them to continue their learning in the same institution, or completing action plans or meeting targets that meet the objectives of the organisation rather than the young person.
- Offers opportunities for pupils to find out for themselves about courses and careers by talking directly to employers, college tutors and others in the outside world or through visits to their school.
- Provides "a judicious and well-coordinated mix

of differentiated group activities, supported self-study and research, a range of out-of-school experiences and regular opportunities for individual review and advice" (p.43).

Facilities and activities that pupils particularly welcome include:

- College visits, open days and careers conventions that provide "focused opportunities for gaining information and advice" (p.32) from people with first-hand knowledge and experience.
- Work experience. Pupils see work experience as "an important way of firming up or screening out initial job and career choices, as well as finding out what the world of work...is... really like" (p.32). Pupils also want better preparation and debriefing to enable them to make best use of work experience.
- Business and peer mentors.
- Open days and open weeks at higher education institutions.

Pupils also like the opportunity to use computer guidance packages and the internet for research on personally relevant information, and for interactive self-assessment and assistance in making choices. However, pupils do not always have ready access to computers, or the knowledge and skills to use them properly in a career-guidance context. Recent field experience shows that a main requirement in terms of internet usage is for detailed information and advice on career and learning-related websites, so that young people can readily identify those sites that are individually relevant. Programmes such as Dotsmarks (Offer, 1999; revised 2000) can provide invaluable assistance to young people and to adults in helping them to identify and choose between guidance-related sites, and also in comparing the quality of the various sites.

Activities that actively involved young people and provided them with relevant 'hands-on' experience are generally welcomed. This include Transition Teams and similar approaches that enable young people to select, organise and undertake group research on career opportunities in the local labour market, including visiting and interviewing people at work and preparing presentations on their findings afterwards (Hooton & Turner, 1996). However, some young people are concerned that they might not have the inter-personal skills to undertake this form of groupwork successfully or to take part in the final presentations, and need help and support in developing the key 'employability' skills required.

The parallels between the requirements of the main body of pupils at school, young people who are 'at risk' or socially-excluded, and the adult target groups identified in this paper, are evident. In order to meet these requirements, feedback shows that guidance provision for all age groups should be sufficiently flexible to respond to a variety of personal requirements and should incorporate a range of activities. Guidance should be individually relevant; this necessitates sound arrangements for assessment, including self-assessment. Information should be accessible, accurate and clearly presented. All groups want opportunities to meet people with specialist expertise in specific occupational and learning areas, and for one-to-one discussions with informed and sympathetic guidance practitioners who can help individuals to "make sense of it all", overcome barriers and establish personal direction. 'Hands-on' experience, proactive involvement and "seeing for oneself" are seen as critical.

Stoney *et al.* (1998) found that well-organised work experience is one of the most popular elements of careers education and guidance at school. Students especially welcome the reality of the experience and its individual relevance. This corresponds with the positive reaction of many adults to work experience and equivalent opportunities which help them to learn about occupations and particular work environments at first-hand. This includes Transition Teams and similar initiatives that have also proved effective with adults, for example as part of some access and similar courses.

Wherever possible, young people and adults involved in guidance also require access to informal learning provision or coaching which assists them with the guidance process itself. Main examples identified by Stoney *et al.* during their interviews with pupils at school include: interpersonal, presentational and lifeskills; IT skills; and knowledge of how to use the internet. These skills are required across age groups.

Schools and colleges can profit considerably from strong working links between them and the adult guidance sector. For example, information on common barriers experienced by older age groups such as low-skill manual workers, lone parents and under-employed graduates can be used to inform CEG programmes and equivalent at school, college, and in community settings. Young people can then utilise the information: when making career decisions; in learning how to anticipate the possible consequences of their own choices and where necessary in taking avoidance action; and in gaining

the career management skills needed to cope with similar barriers if and as they arise in their own futures.

Similarly, older age groups can benefit from methodology and approaches developed within school and college-based CEG, where necessary adapted to meet the foreshortened time-scales necessitated by adult responsibilities and the need to work.

Although responsibility for school and college-based guidance and for adult guidance are separately administered, CEG programmes should provide young people with a foundation of skills, information and experience which can enable them to plan and manage their careers successfully throughout life. This calls for seamless approaches to guidance, including the formulation of systems that enable young people's decisions to be informed directly by adults' experiences of learning and work.

6 Implications

6.1 Guidance Action Zones

The Connexions strategy states that "when planning services, arrangements should be put in place which will ensure a seamless service from one service to another" (DfEE, 2000a: 42). The present paper has tried to build on this objective by showing how it may also be possible for the youth and adult guidance partnerships to enrich the guidance process for all age and target groups by working collaboratively on a range of issues. Collaboration could include jointly delivered and shared provision where this strengthens the overall quality of provision for both age groups, and where it is cost-effective to do so.

One approach might be to designate 'Guidance Action Zones' in which Connexions, IAG and Learning Partnerships are required to identify areas of common interest, and to establish mechanisms and procedures which facilitate partnership working across the age groups. Initially Guidance Action Zones might be introduced on a pilot basis in a small number of areas in order to explore the merits and demerits of extending the concept nationally.

All-age Guidance Action Zones assume a commonality of need and a complementariness of experience across age and target groups. If the concept proves to work well in practice, the Zones could help to ensure that a seamless continuity of

guidance is available:

- during the transitional stage from youth to adulthood;
- throughout the increasingly complex and difficult career transitional periods which increasing numbers of adults confront, and which are consequent on escalating economic and social change.

Similarly, if Guidance Action Zones operate efficiently, the subsequent improvements in continuity of provision could: facilitate the feedback between youth and adult guidance partnerships of the key elements of experience shared by many individuals during each of the main periods of transition; reinforce the inter-dependence of the decisions made at each stage; and, as an immediate consequence, improve the ability of individuals to make well-informed decisions that genuinely meet their individual needs.

6.2 Quality standards

Connexions, as well as IAG, partnerships may well be strengthened by the extension of the Guidance Council Quality Standards to apply to guidance for young people as well as adults. Currently the requirement to meet relevant Quality Standards applies only to adult guidance networks. However, the *Connexions Service Planning Guidance* (DfEE, 2000c) emphasises the importance of national quality standards being developed for all organisations involved in the planning and delivery of the new Service, and seems to open the door for the Guidance Council standards to play a significant role. The harmonisation of standards across both partnerships – and within Guidance Action Zones should these be designated – could help to promote the formulation of joint partnership strategies in such areas as: staff development; quality improvement; assessment and evaluation; and the award of quality marks for excellence in guidance practice.

There may also be advantage in terms of cost benefits as well as potential improvements in coherence and quality of delivery. The advantages may include:

- The cost benefits to be gained from shared provision.
- Improvements in quality of delivery.
- Improved coherence of services: eg in terms of transition between services at age 19; signposting and referral procedures; and consistency of quality within the local guidance partnerships for all age groups.

- Improved cohesion, eg in terms of the exchange of information and experience; staff liaison; teamworking; common staff development events; and the continuity and compatibility of guidance delivery to the whole local public.

6.3 Home internationals: comparing models of guidance delivery

Although this paper has confined itself so far to guidance developments in England, it is important to note the variations in the ways in which youth and adult guidance provision is developing in different parts of the United Kingdom and Ireland. In principle, if not necessarily in practice, Northern Ireland operates an all-age guidance service. Wales is also moving towards an all-age approach. In Scotland the position is still being considered. In the Republic of Ireland there remains a division between guidance for employment and guidance for learning, with possible developments in both areas that may lead to greater all-age provision.

The issues raised by the varying guidance developments were explored at a recent policy consultation attended by representatives of government departments, relevant national bodies and guidance professional organisations from the United Kingdom and Ireland (Watts, 1999). The consultation noted the common nature of many of the issues and the potential for sharing experience between the five countries.

Much of this paper concentrates on the potential added-value for local guidance provision to be gained by creating mechanisms and procedures that facilitate the exchange of information and experience on a local basis between the Connexions and IAG partnerships. The exchange process might be further enhanced and enriched if it could also form part of a wider framework in which issues and experiences could be shared on a 'home international' basis, possibly via the proposed Council of the Isles or an equivalent body. For example, a recent report to the Scottish Executive which used a series of focus groups to consult a wide cross-section of adults about their guidance requirements (Segal Quince Wicksteed Ltd, 2000) corresponds closely with the findings from Wilson & Jackson's (1999) research conducted in England for the Guidance Council.

The guidance requirements of adults have much in common with those of young people, as the issues considered below help to demonstrate. The extent to which these requirements are best met by providing

two separate services for young people and adults, or by creating a unified all-age guidance service, or alternatively by offering two services but ensuring that local mechanisms are introduced that enable them to function in a close operational partnership, remains an open question. The economic and social importance of guidance for young people and adults alike, and for the well-being of whole communities, means that the question should remain under continuous and transparent review.

7 Conclusion

In economic and social terms, effective systems to ensure continuity of guidance throughout working life can contribute significantly to: the success of the government's policies on lifelong learning; the operation of flexible labour markets; the establishment of national skills agenda; and the promotion of active citizenship. For young people and adults, the efficient operation of local guidance provision in all its aspects, including its continuity and accessibility, can have a profound influence on the extent to which individuals either under-perform or fulfil their potential. This is why it is so important that local Connexions services, IAG partnerships and other interested bodies should identify ways of offering coherent local guidance provision which, as far as possible, is seamless to the public. The concept of designating local Guidance Action Zones may offer one way forward.