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**Technology to support young people 16 to 18 years of
age who are not in employment, education or training
(NEET):**

A Local Authority Landscape Review

Final Report

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1. INTRODUCTION: THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

A key area of concern at national and local government levels is the current number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), and finding ways to provide appropriate support to help them engage positively. There has been a range of national and local government activities and initiatives over at least the past 10 years that have used technologies in different ways to offer support for groups of these young people. Recently, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) has published strategies concerned with reducing numbers of young people who are NEET (DCSF, DWP and BIS, 2009), and with providing supportive information, advice and guidance (IAG) through LAs and Connexions services (DCSF, 2009a).

A study conducted last year for Becta by Lancaster University (Passey, Williams and Rogers, 2008), and a study conducted for the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) by Citizens Online and the National Centre for Social Research (2008), both indicated details about some of the pilots and initiatives in place that currently use technologies, as well as focusing on attitudes and access of young people to those technologies. It is clear that more information is needed about these sorts of practices, in order to encourage sharing and any wider implementation. Following the Lancaster University study, Becta commissioned a NEETs Intervention Study, to put into practice some of the key findings and recommendations from the research, looking at how information and communications technologies (ICT) can be used to re-engage young people who are NEET. The intervention aimed to address some specific key findings from the Lancaster University research, by providing an ICT-based solution to support decision-making processes for young people. Becta commissioned the Intervention Study from a partnership, comprising Changing Media Ltd., TwoFour Knowledge, and the Department of Educational Research at Lancaster University.

The intervention study ran within a single local authority (LA) area (Sunderland). Sunderland LA supported the implementation of the intervention, but a key aspect of the project was the need to design a study that was scalable; the intervention could well be one that is appropriate for other LAs faced with concerns around reducing their number of 'NEETs'. In order for Becta to evaluate to what extents interventions of this and other forms might be scalable, a picture of forms of technology and pilots in place, and possible variability across the ICT infrastructures of LAs is clearly required (particularly focusing on those infrastructures in place for communicating with young people who are NEET). The LA Harnessing Technology survey provides an overview, but a deeper understanding of detail is required. For example, the extent of the use of text messaging services by Connexions services, and the availability of web-based facilities for the young audience who are NEET should be known where possible.

The Becta LA NEETs Landscape Review reported here has gathered evidence to assess if and how findings and recommendations from the original study, and the intervention study currently underway, might be put into any wider practice with respect to different ICT systems that may be in place. This report presents the findings of this wide Landscape Review. Four methods were deployed to gather evidence on as wide a front as possible: a literature review; an online survey proforma, which all LAs were invited to complete and return; attendance by research team members at each of the ten Becta Regional LA Forum Meetings in March 2009 to discuss points that LAs might want to raise, and to gain contact to support possible follow-up with individual LAs; and individual follow-up visits to LAs and key groups. Details of the evidence base are provided in Appendix 1.

It should be noted that this report provides details gathered from the Becta LA NEETs Landscape Review, and that the evidence offered is supplemented by the separate report of the evaluation of the Becta Intervention Study undertaken in Sunderland LA (Passey, Davies and Rogers, 2010).

2. KEY POINTS THAT FRAME THE PICTURE PROVIDED BY THE STUDY FINDINGS

2.1 Overall findings and methods

Evidence from literature reviews, case study visits, and online questionnaire returns indicates that:

- There is no known or recognised overview of this area of knowledge; the Becta LA NEETs Landscape Study will begin to address an important gap in this area. It appears that even basic statistics to support government department and agency needs are not readily accessible or known.
- Although there is hardware and software that can be potentially used to support young people who are NEET, many individuals, groups or services in Connexions have not yet developed a strategic way of using the resources or thinking about their forward and future development. Indeed, there has appeared to be a reliance on short-term pilots and projects that have not been able to be sustained or have not been developed strategically (locally or more widely).

Literature reviews undertaken for the Becta LA NEETs Landscape Review have shown that there is limited knowledge publicly available about the ways that those who support young people who are NEET are currently using technologies (or even what their levels of access to technologies are). To support those who need levels of detail in this area, to inform current and ongoing practice, two forms of data gathering were put in place for this study:

- LAs were invited to complete an online questionnaire where they could record details about the technologies used to support young people who are NEET (for example, access to and uses of mobile telephones, emails, and web sites) and the amount of training and other support that has been given to staff in the use of technologies.
- Although LA responses provided important details that allow the government department and key agencies to consider possible forward strategic developments, the low levels of responses mean that further estimated national figures generated may not be entirely accurate. Further details are required to ensure accuracy at a national level, but these are only likely to be generated if there is an escalation of this requirement at a higher government department and LA level.
- In addition, a number of case study visits to LAs and local Connexions services were undertaken to collect more detailed accounts of how technologies were being used with young people who are NEET, discussing areas of possible development and the factors that might inhibit the use of technologies in this type of work.

The Becta LA NEETs Landscape Review explored the ways that personnel in local authorities (LAs) use technologies to support young people who are not in employment, education and training (NEET). Connexions services (usually the primary contacts in LAs with young people who are NEET) have only recently been integrated into LAs (see Watts and McGowan, 2007). Although technologies are used in Connexions services (sometimes through forms of pilots and projects), ways in which they are used, and the outcomes of these activities are not widely identified and shared with others. The Becta LA NEETs Landscape Review seeks to identify as many forms of uses as possible, and to identify the extents of uses across as many LAs as possible.

2.2 A brief description of the 'NEET Population'

A brief description of the 'NEET' population is offered here, taking into account the findings of the study undertaken by Lancaster University last year (which focused on uses of technologies by young people who are NEET, rather than uses of technologies by those who support young people who are NEET).

- The organisations with prime responsibility for supporting young people who are NEET are local Connexions services, but many have only recently been reintegrated into LAs after a number of years when local Connexions Partnership Boards managed them.
- The percentage of young people in each LA area between the ages of 16 to 18 who are NEET is a key statistic used by the government to monitor and analyse the local youth labour market, levels of guidance and support needs, and the performance of the local Connexions and other agencies.
- Young people who are NEET should not be confused with those who constitute a group of long-term unemployed people. Indeed, young people sometimes elect to be NEET – gap year students, for example, are all included in the numbers of young people who are NEET. Young people who are NEET have expressed concern with the use of the term ‘NEET’, and some have proposed an alternative – SEET (seeking education, employment and training).
- The term ‘NEET’ is often used to describe those young people who are both most disadvantaged and most disengaged and are usually considered the hardest to help. Sometimes the learning and employment opportunities open to them are limited by their low levels of education and skills and personal attributes, which act as a barrier both in terms of looking for jobs and courses and being selected for them. Furthermore, some may be disadvantaged because of a history of offending, living in care or being a young parent.
- There are some strong misperceptions regarding young people who are NEET. These misperceptions can class all young people who are NEET as unwilling or uninterested. An unwillingness and disinterest that can be found in some localities should not be generalised to other localities; it is found that locality and local community pressures can have significant impacts on desires and aspirations of young people. Relationships are often at the heart of both the issues that these young people face and the desires that they have. Many young people who are NEET desire to engage with work or training, but often have difficulties in handling certain forms of social interaction, such as a difficulty in handling reprimand.
- Young people who are NEET commonly exhibit limited capabilities to support decision-making. These limited capabilities vary from individual to individual, and may arise because of a lack of: background experiences; decision making strategies at their disposal; skills in certain areas; abilities to make decisions; abilities to take decisions; or a refraining from decision-taking. In addition to this limited capability (in terms of decision making), other factors such as traumatic backgrounds and poor experiences of learning environments can mean that young people who are NEET often do not sustain employment or educational opportunities when these are offered to them. Young people who are NEET often engage most readily in practical and creative endeavour, and desire involvement in social environments.
- Many of the young people who are NEET may have experienced trauma of some form. It may be that some young people still suffer from trauma within their lives, and that their lives are ‘chaotic’. Sometimes it appears that past trauma has not been handled or supported positively, and some may not handle trauma easily or as quickly as other members of the wider population. It is clearly important that front-line support workers are able to recognise and associate with trauma; reports from some front-line workers indicate that the young people recognise ‘care’ as an important element in committing to relationships and endeavour in education, employment and training (EET).
- The phenomenon of ‘churn’ is sometimes seen and associated with young people who are NEET; some young people regularly move in and out of opportunities, vacancies and experiences. However, rather than being an issue in itself, this sequence of interactions could well be offering valuable opportunities for wider and longer-term skill development. How

Connexions and front-line staff handle this 'churn' is potentially important; if front-line staff are attempting to find the 'ideal' vacancy that will offer long-term involvement, rather than using 'churn' to build skills over time, then young people may not be supported in ways that will fit their longer-term needs.

- It is clear that the NEET group is not homogeneous, with levels of disadvantage and disengagement varying widely. Whilst for some being NEET is the result of a personal and family history of disadvantage, for others being NEET is more of a temporary affair often brought about by a particular set of circumstances such as failure to obtain a long-held job ambition, poorer than expected examination results, or just being in a phase of their life when they do not know what they want or how they fit in.
- Technology access and use by young people who are NEET is generally (and perhaps surprisingly) high. On the whole, information and communication technology (ICT) is used for communication purposes more than for information purposes (mobile telephones, for example, are used usually for talking, texting, playing videos and playing music, rather than for specific learning purposes). While specific technologies tend to be used for specific purposes, some are used more widely for purposes concerned with learning; computers and laptops with internet access tend to be seen as workplace or education tools rather than just as personal tools.

2.3 Key findings and issues

A number of different initial issues, raised during case study discussions with Connexions services and LAs, highlight that:

- Within LAs, Connexions personal advisers have the main responsibility for supporting young people who are NEET, often with involvement from considerable numbers of members of social services, youth services and Youth Offending Teams (YOTs). The lack of readily accessible data about recorded numbers of employees is likely to impede technology developments.
- There may be in the region of 17,775 support workers involved in England in supporting young people who are NEET (although low levels of responses mean that this figure may not be reliable). Due to the high numbers of groups and agencies involved and individuals involved, cross-agency technology application should be a strategic concern, centrally focused through Connexions or related agencies, and with a person in post with such a remit at an LA level.
- Many Connexions and related service workers, youth workers and other workers are provided with both computer and mobile telephone access to support their work needs. To equip all workers with both computer and mobile telephone access in England could require investment in a further 3,000 computer and 4,500 mobile telephone units and services (although these figures may not be accurate). Laptops are not generally provided for support workers, and if this provision were to be nationally supported, it would require a major financial undertaking that would need to be backed by a strong business case.
- All Connexions services use a database to store client records. Different LAs use different database systems. The numbers of different systems in use is not known, and the variation in functionality across systems is not known. However, database functionality enables Connexions managers to monitor changes in the NEET population and identify the key characteristics of this group. Keeping data up-to-date is important, but provision of time and access is required if this requirement is to be maintained. To facilitate the efficiency of this process, electronic transfer of data needs to be developed in many LAs. Although data systems have not been developed that have focused on the needs of support workers specifically, many support workers find that details provided are of value to them.

- Most LAs attempt to initiate and then maintain contact with young people who are NEET through a number of means – letters, home visits, emails, landline telephone numbers and mobile telephone messages. Email and mobile telephone messaging is seen to have a number of advantages in terms of speed and cost effectiveness. However, there are issues to do with large numbers of young people who are NEET not having personal computers (PCs) or internet connection and with mobile numbers changing so often that records of these numbers soon get out of date.
- A considerable amount of careers information and job and course vacancies are now available on websites, and an increasing number of opportunities for young people can now only be accessed through online registration and application. The increase in online registration and application for many good quality opportunities raises the concern that young people who do not have access to technologies may be further disadvantaged. To support online applications, some 75 LAs may need to consider the development of e-portfolio and achievement record systems.
- Public access to education and employment information by young people who do not have personal access appears to be in place through the provision of computer facilities in Connexions sites and kiosks. Public broadcast of information about education and employment approaches appears to be focusing on use of websites and text messaging currently; use of local TV is not being widely used for such needs at this stage.
- The matching of interests of young people with opportunities and vacancies is in place or potentially available. However, keeping data up-to-date requires an investment in manual data entry and checking, and it is not clear that LAs have capacity to do this currently. Each LA may require a post to specifically undertake this task if it is to be effectively undertaken.
- There are debates within Connexions services about how best to support young people who are NEET and the value of using technologies as opposed to personal contact. Support programmes often consist of two elements – communication, and engagement. Communication involves obtaining information about clients and also making them aware of opportunities. Engagement is to do with enabling the client to do something positive with the information and support with which they are provided. Many personal advisers in Connexions services see the potential for using technologies for communication purposes, fewer how it can be used to encourage engagement. An example of the latter is a project where young people who are NEET are developing a series of TV programmes that will be available through a website. Technology is not embedded culturally into the practice of all support workers, but there are examples of its widespread integration that could be exemplified to support wider practice of this type.
- One view shared by some in Connexions services is that the use of technologies does not provide that much in terms of supporting young people who are NEET. They refer to such issues as lack of PCs in their homes and only a limited number of PCs available for young people to use in Connexions offices and other sites. Their experiences have led them to believe that young people who are NEET are not particularly “IT savvy” and have difficulties in using websites, or emails. It is clear that young people who are NEET may use some technologies for some purposes very often, but that the technological capabilities they have does not necessarily enable them to use technologies for learning or search purposes. Indeed, some providers have indicated that they need to ensure that young people are trained in some uses of specific technologies in order for them to progress with these on courses. Often Connexions personal advisers stress the importance of helping young people who are NEET through personal contact, building up trust, and mentoring. Clearly it is important that personal advisers recognise that technologies can support social interactions, rather than replace them.

- On the other hand, a number of personal advisers see technologies as providing a means of providing young people who are NEET with better guidance and advice and engaging them in special projects with long term benefits. For example, encouraging them to use technologies to develop online careers education resources. By doing so, these young people can gain new skills, raise their self-esteem, and have a structure placed in their lives whilst also producing worthwhile and relevant careers information.
- There are costs associated with the hardware, software and support. It is clearly important that the value in investing in high quality services for this group is recognised more widely. There is recognition that training is needed for front-line support staff, both in terms of how to use technologies, but also in terms of how to integrate technologies with other forms of support. There is emerging awareness amongst Connexions staff about the potential for greater use of technology and their need for support in this area. Uncertainty over Connexions budgets is a concern for some Connexions services and LAs.
- Training requirements at an LA level need to be detailed to greater extents, but there could be some 3,250 Connexions and related service workers, 4,350 youth workers, and 1,350 other workers who need training at an operational level and, more importantly at the level of how to integrate and balance technology use with other forms of interaction. The training requirement on operating technology is likely to be much easier to put into practice than training about how to integrate and balance technology uses. Culturally, training and development of uses of technologies for support workers is not embedded within LAs widely. Events concerned with sharing of practices happen at a low level, but there are LA examples that could be showcased to support these practices more widely. From data available, it appears that youth workers are least well prepared in terms of using ICT to support young people. Although e-guidance recommendations and advice have been produced in a higher education context (Offer, 2004), such advice is not known in the sector that supports young people who are NEET. CfBT (2009) commissioning a study to report on online guidance for those supporting in the sector, but there is no indication that this guidance will specifically focus on support for particular groups of young people who are NEET.
- Projects have been undertaken in a number of LAs, focusing often on specific technologies and support needs. These projects have often been time limited; sustainability has not been easy or readily possible. To develop technological support more widely, sustainability has to be built into all projects from the outset, and more long-term initiatives could be developed in LAs (perhaps in 75 LAs if all were to be included in such initiatives across England).
- There are a number of ways that technologies are being used by LAs, and these different uses occur within different LAs to varying extents:
 - Collecting, storage and management of data about young people who are NEET (this is felt by Connexions services in LAs to be well developed).
 - Collecting and reporting of opportunities and vacancies that exist (this is felt to be developed in some places).
 - Matching interests and choices of young people who are NEET with opportunities that arise in terms of jobs, vacancies, apprenticeships and work-based learning (this is felt to be developed to some extents in some places).
 - Creating and maintaining records of achievement, abilities and needs of young people who are NEET (this is felt to be developed to some extents in some places).
 - Communicating with young people who are NEET (this is felt to be reasonably well developed).
 - Engaging young people who are NEET in specific endeavours or activities (this is thought to be under-developed).

- The likely increase in numbers of young people who are NEET brought about by economic recession might mean that those who are already disadvantaged and disengaged may be likely to become even more so.

3. BACKGROUND POLICY REQUIREMENTS OF CONNEXIONS AND RELATED SERVICES

3.1 National challenges and local strategy

Identifying appropriate and positive ways to support young people who are not in employment, education and training (NEET) is a key national government agenda. In the foreword to the DCSF strategy document (2008f) that sets out challenges and actions, the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families stated that:

“Engagement in learning and educational attainment are critical if young people are to make a success of their lives. Too many young people choose not to continue in learning beyond the age of 16, or ‘drop out’ between the ages of 16 and 18, and so do not get the skills they need for successful employment. That is why we are embarking on a series of reforms aimed at raising participation and attainment, tackling disengagement and ensuring that we offer young people a range of learning options that are attractive to them, and that meet their needs. This will put us on the pathway to raising the participation age in 2013 – essential if we are to have the highly skilled workforce needed to compete in the international economy.”

There exist already a range of practices that are being used to support young people who are NEET in a variety of different locations. Some of these forms of practice have been documented and are accessible through government department and agency websites (sourced and detailed throughout this report). It is clear from the form of resources about young people who are NEET that are on the government department website, that the government department wishes to provide a means to share practices with those who can directly and indirectly offer opportunities to those young people who are NEET. Indeed, the government department has provided directly some facilities to support interaction with young people (Connexions Direct, 2008c), but at the same time, it recognises that most support should be developed and implemented at more local levels (see DCSF, 2008a; n.d.a). It is clearly important that local provision and implementation through local authority (LA) children’s services and 14-19 partnerships fit with the range of national facilities and requirements. In developing appropriate practices, and the technologies to drive and enhance them, support for LAs in these areas will at least in part be provided through a number of national agencies, including the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Becta. In the latter case, Becta will be concerned with the provision of technological support that fits within the wider context of the Harnessing Technology Strategy (2006). However, although this strategy and its application to the area of support for young people who are NEET is focused clearly at a national level, as appropriate local provision is a major requirement, it will be fundamentally important for Becta to understand the current situation within LAs, and the forms of technological support and practice that it might be possible to support in appropriate but perhaps different ways in different or various regional or local settings at current and future times.

3.2 National and local provision

Although it is clear that the DCSF has provided a useful set of resources to support LAs in their endeavours with engaging young people who are NEET, it is also clear that these facilities will neither in themselves provide the entirety of support that technologies might offer, nor in themselves address the many issues that individual LAs may face in using existing or acquiring or procuring future technologies to support their needs. This review seeks to identify needs at a local level, the challenges faced, and the issues raised.

3.3 The September Guarantee

A key element of action for LAs is the September Guarantee. As the DCSF website (2008a) states:

“The September Guarantee is the guarantee of the offer of a suitable place in post-16 learning to all young people leaving Year 11. From September 2008, we are extending the September Guarantee to 17-year-olds so that young people who have been on a short course, or have dropped out during Year 12, have a chance to re-engage in learning. The

September Guarantee is a key part of the overall 14-19 strategy and supports the delivery of the NEET target”.

3.4 Connexions services and young people who are NEET

How do LAs and Connexions services in LAs use technology to support ‘The September Guarantee’ and their more specific needs? Although the role and remit of Connexions is described by the DCSF, the ways in which technologies might be integrated into support services are not explicitly stated. For example, as the DCSF (2008a) website says: “The Connexions service was established in 2001 with the aim of providing a comprehensive service to meet young people’s needs for information, advice and support.” It goes further, to indicate that Connexions services have a central role in supporting lifelong learning: “Through multi-agency working, Connexions provides high quality, impartial, information, advice and guidance (including careers advice & guidance), together with access to personal development opportunities to help remove barriers to learning and progression and ensure young people make a smooth transition to adulthood and working life”. Furthermore, it specifies a range of target groups for the focus of the services: “Connexions is designed to help all young people aged 13 to 19 regardless of need, and those aged up to 24 with a learning difficulty or disability. However, there is a particular focus on those at risk of not being in education, employment or training (NEET), or of being socially excluded”. However, it is clear from a statement above, that the Connexions services are not seen to have sole responsibility for these target groups, and that the work of the Connexions services comes within the wider remit of LAs.

Although the use of technologies to access information is made clear, other uses of technologies are not clarified. For the example, the website goes on to state that:

“The Connexions service has recently been through a process of transition. Following the publication of Every Child Matters: Next Steps, children's trusts were set up in each local authority area. From 1 April 2008 the funding that went directly to 47 Connexions Partnerships now goes directly to all 150 local authorities (LAs), via the new Area Based Grant, with LAs now responsible for delivery. ... The Education and Skills Act 2008 transfers to local authorities the statutory responsibility for the delivery of Connexions services. ... These specifications [Connexions Service Specifications for Local Authorities] set out the most important features of the Connexions service which LAs are required to adhere to in the way that they provide for Connexions services. In addition, the letter to lead members set out in wider terms the Department’s expectation of every LA, and acts as a reminder of the Department’s ambitions set out in the Children’s Plan. ... To ensure the requirements are clearly communicated, and that the appropriate support resources are readily available, the following pages have been created to reflect the policy areas and guidance which local authorities are required to have regard to. ... In addition, a range of good practice guidance, case studies and reports are available on the Core information page, with budgetary information detailed on the Funding page”.

The DCSF has provided a range of information resources online that defines challenges for those working with the population of young people who are NEET (as well as offering exemplars of supportive practice). The DCSF website (2008b), provides specific details about the 16 to 18 year old age group of young people. It indicates that:

“Reducing the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) is one of the Department’s key priorities and is particularly important in the context of raising the participation age. ... In November 2007 the Department published its strategy for reducing those NEET. The NEET toolkit was subsequently developed to support delivery of the strategy; offering practical advice, activity ideas and guidance to local authorities and their delivery partners. The toolkit also includes best practice examples of action that has been effective in other areas, and a checklist which authorities can use to develop and evaluate their local plans and challenge delivery partners”.

3.5 The Connexions service specifications for LAs

Although the DCSF specifies particular requirements of LAs that could clearly benefit from the integration of technologies, these are not in themselves specified. The DCSF website defines a range of Connexions service specifications for LAs:

“specified levels of contact with, and support for, particular target groups of young persons and relevant young adults, as detailed here:

“Local authorities must contact promptly all young people and relevant young adults (including those up to 25-years-old with a learning difficulty or disability) who are known to have become Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), and are known to have left learning or who are expected to leave learning shortly.

“Local authorities must maintain regular contact with young people and relevant young adults who are at risk of becoming NEET. This might include, for example, those with particular barriers to engagement, who have had previous spells of inactivity, or who are in temporary employment.

“Local authorities must offer tailored packages of support to all young people and relevant young adults who are NEET or at risk of becoming so, and maintain contact until re-engagement in work or learning is re-established”.

Without specific detail, it is highly likely that LAs will use and produce a variety of technological solutions. This is evidenced already by the DCSF on its website. The website stresses the fact that access to guidance documentation and to case studies are readily accessible through direct links. The website provides access to the DCSF website focusing on 14-19 provision, which offers a range of 29 case studies, including some that integrally use technology (DCSF, n.d.b).

4. HOW INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IS USED BY CONNEXIONS AND RELATED SERVICES IN LOCAL AUTHORITIES

4.1 Connexions Direct (CXD)

The DCSF provides certain specific technological resources that can be deployed by LAs and used by young people. How these will be integrated and used is not yet known, but may well be determined in part by the ways in which other interventions link and facilitate support. The DCSF has set up a national dedicated website to support young people who are NEET, called Connexions Direct (CXD). As the DCSF (2008c) says, it:

“offers advice, support and information for young people aged 13 to 19 on a wide range of issues relevant to their age group. CXD consists of a dedicated website - for online searching on subjects such as careers, learning, health, relationships, finance and leisure activities and a helpline where young people can access information, advice and support via the telephone, text messaging, webchat and email. The helpline operates from 8.00 am until 2.00 am, 365 days a year, offering useful out-of-hours support to complement local provision”.

The website states that a service specification requirement is that:

“Local authorities must maintain an effective working relationship with the national Connexions Direct Service - in particular to ensure that the support provided by Connexions Direct accurately reflects and complements the information, advice and guidance provided in each local authority area. ... Although the additional backdrop of support offered by Connexions Direct (CXD) is provided at no direct cost to the local authority, there is a need for local authorities to ensure continued arrangements are in place to provide updates on local provision. These updates should include: details of major activities, campaigns or initiatives (especially those where Connexions Direct contact details are included) as well as changes in premises, telephone contact numbers and website addresses. ... Regular updating ensures that CXD Advisers can provide added value to the young person by having detailed knowledge and access to information about local provision, and ensures that young people can access useful, up-to-date, local information via the CXD website. In return, CXD can provide management information regarding the number, type and frequency of contacts made to the helpline from specific areas, and the staff employed by the contractors can provide visits, support and information sharing with local providers”.

The website itself (Connexions Direct, n.d.), provides a range of facilities. These include auditory access, and text that can be changed in terms of its size (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Screen shot of the Connexions Direct home page, showing facilities accessible by young people

A clear strength of this website is the range of opportunities provided for young people to engage with communication aspects, as well as information aspects, of technology. By contrast, a range of LA websites (14-19 Prospectuses) focus much more on information aspects, and much less on communication aspects (see Passey, Williams and Rogers, 2008).

4.2 Management information systems

As well as supporting use of technology facilities that can enhance engagement with young people, the importance of information and management systems is also stressed on the DCSF (2008d) website. The website states that:

“Connexions has developed excellent case management systems for effectively tracking young people's progress. These systems formed the basis of the Client Caseload Information System (CCIS) specification which enables support to young people across local authority boundaries, ensures multi-agency working and gives better targeting of services; all of which form the heart of any integrated youth support service. Local authorities will be expected to ensure that the client tracking systems set up by Connexions services are maintained and developed to inform local planning and measurement of the NEET group. ... Local authorities must have in place a robust client management system and client tracking arrangements that meet the Client Caseload Information System (CCIS) specification.”

The website also indicates the need for LAs to record and report data:

“There are no changes to the requirement to supply monthly management information to DCSF. However, there are a few changes to the information to be collected from April 2008 as indicated in the CCIS Specification for 2008-2009 available from the Delivering Services: CCIS page. Where the existing Connexions provider's CCIS system is not being used to submit data from April 2008, the new provider database will need to be registered with the NCCIS helpline for authentication before any data submissions can be accepted”.

The website (DCSF, 2008d), indicates that the DCSF will provide annual reports entitled *Moving On: Pathways Taken by Young People Beyond 16*. The website states that:

“These reports give the results of the Annual Activity Surveys which provide information about the early pathways taken by young people in England beyond their compulsory education. Moving On-2007 was published in July 2008”.

The website (DCSF, 2008e), further indicates that:

“These reports give the results of each Annual Activity Survey undertaken by Connexions services from 2002 through to 2007. They provide information about the early pathways taken by young people in England beyond their compulsory education. Since 1996 the Department has required the reporting of activity data for former Year 11 pupils as part of its contract with the organisations providing careers and connexions services. The data from these Annual Activity Surveys provides valuable information at both national and local level on the early transition of young people from compulsory education. It can inform young people, their teachers, parents and advisers, and the research community of the early post-16 pathways taken by recent cohorts of young people. The occupational distribution of jobs and training chosen by young people at 16 is also a useful source of information about the youth labour market. Gender and ethnic breakdowns are included for the Year 11 data, as is progression information for those with special needs. Many Connexions services publish their own local information and make it available to schools and a range of other local partners”.

Although the need for an information and management system is clearly vital, it is less clear how this system will link into other forms of support and intervention. It is not clear, for example, how the needs of young people will be related through CCIS, or how other parts of systems being used by Connexions, youth workers, health and social services, will be linked to enable a useful flow of data. In this respect the way that the Schools Interoperability Framework (SIF) might work across an LA would be worthy of consideration (the SIF is described in documentation produced by Becta, 2007). The direction of evolution of data flow for schools is now more clearly identified, since Becta (2008) have stated that they: “are clear that [the Schools Interoperability Framework] SIF has proven potential to deliver a wide range of benefits at the front line and at local and national levels, and now recommends SIF as a preferred solution ... the expectation is that the SIF standard will be adopted by local authorities and system suppliers to meet specific local business needs over the next 18 months or so”. How this evolution might work yet further across LA groups, within the context of developing interventions, is potentially an important area for consideration in the shorter term, with intentions and aims for the longer term.

Some integration of data management systems has already been undertaken in some areas. For example, CareerVision (n.d.), have developed a ‘Pan London system’:

“CareerVision have been asked by the Association of London Directors of Children’s Services to help electronically track young people across London boroughs from residence to learning. The Pan London CCIS Index combines agreed data from the 5 London

Connexions Partnerships and creates an overarching pool of data to provide a regional view and analysis of the activities and movement of young people across the region. It provides each sub-region with notifications of changes in young people's learning activity and the consequent changes in responsibilities to help reduce NEET, particularly with targeted vulnerable groups. The data from this Index supports the production of a range of reports, including NEET and EET analysis and the movement of residents to and from learning elsewhere".

4.2.1 The vital role played by the Client Contact Information Service (CCIS) database

Updating information, reporting from and interrogation of the CCIS database is at the core of the management of Connexions services. The CCIS database is used by LAs to report on trends and patterns, to partners on LA 14-19 partnership boards, and to report to the government department every month on an LA's 'NEET figure'. The key aspect to manage is the percentage of young people who are NEET. Each Connexions service has a 'NEET target' they must not go above. This is called the Public Sector Agreement target, made between an LA and the government department, but passported to the Connexions provider within each LA.

While each Connexions service has a CCIS database (or has access to a CCIS database from a wider regional facility), these can vary from LA to LA. Different Connexions services also tend to use their CCIS in different ways.

One LA uses a CCIS database but also uses Crystal Reporting Solutions facilities, that provide "report writing, consulting and training for municipalities, school districts and non-profit making agencies to interrogate data" (CRS, 2009). Using this software the Connexions service in the LA produces reports that go on their intranet. These reports are provided as caseload management data for the PAs and line managers. Managers run the Connexions 'business' on the basis of this data interrogation. As well as giving an overview of the whole LA town area, the Connexions service can also check that every young person is being seen. The database highlights the names of those young people who have missed appointments or need following up. It is hard for any young person who is NEET in the LA to get overlooked. It is recognised that this data management system runs the Connexions service. It is made accessible to staff through Citrix, a piece of software that enables the Connexions service to access the database from any computer where there is a link. As a consequence, in theory, all personnel in the Connexions service could work from home.

In another LA, the importance of the database when interviewing clients is highlighted. Connexions service staff access their database client record before an interview with a young person, to make sure they are familiar with the client's background. The records include information linked to the Common Assessment Framework and a list of all previous interventions. To allow these data to be easily accessed, PAs have PCs on their desks and in interview rooms.

The management information system available in another local Connexions service (called Profile, and provided through a regional Connexions team) provides access to a large amount of data. When a member of the local Connexions service staff opens the system, it provides a series of tabs that open up individual pages. These pages allow data to be both entered and accessed. Access to an individual record works from the entry of a young person's name, or from a postcode, or from a date of birth. There is a tracker facility, which keeps a record of what actions have been undertaken by a PA on any day, so that records can be updated. The appearance of the system looks quite 'DOS-based', and it does not appear to have the flexibility at the moment to allow individual users to create a dashboard facility.

On this system, the current pages available to PAs as tabs, from left to right, are:

- Summary. This shows school attended, interventions (all contacts are recorded), an event history and last event notes (with detailed and dated notes).
- Destination. This shows school name, type (from a drop-down menu), status (whether on work experience, or did not start, for example), main destination (which can be changed), position (for

example, a joiner), notes that can be added (for example, indicating 1 day a week), whether it is full-time, part-time, hours worked, or working for a particular person, previous positions, and a history is given to show what people have done and for how long.

- Events. This shows detailed and dated notes that PAs enter, it shows the types of interaction that occur, whether information has been sent, where individuals were seen, and what actions were suggested, or taken.
- Multimedia. This allows action plans to be saved as MS Word files, or as PDF files.
- Code. This page shows aspirational codes (intended destinations). It can show general levels of qualification or projected levels, Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes, and shows experience of young people in the form of codes.
- Qualifications. This page shows the school year, organisation attended, level, subject, predicted, achieved levels or grades, and date. Although the LA provides these, they are not transferred automatically. So this page is not often used, and is found to be complex to complete.
- General. This page shows the name, national insurance (NI) number, a reference number for the Profile system, address, telephone, fax and mobile contacts, date of birth, ethnicity, gender, and the responsible user, team or centre involved.
- Client. This page shows previous notes, language at home, school leaving date, whether the young person is claiming benefit, previous LA contacts, guarantee status (a returner, or in place, for example), and whether available for employment.
- Additional. This page shows LDD status, special educational needs (SEN), behavioural problems, YOT records, organisations involved, and individual circumstances.
- APIR. This page provides an assessment (giving ideas of the young person's self image), in terms of self-presentation, or home, for example, based on action, performance, implementation, and review (APIR). Some PAs feel that it does not offer a very worthwhile perspective. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is felt by some to be more useful (accessible from the Every Child Matters web site, DCSF, 2009b). Although it is 'full of words', it is felt to give a useful picture.
- Address. This page can indicate addresses and type of home, gives a record of addresses, it indicates whether the home is a parent's home, their own home, or a holiday home, for example. It also shows the LA, and the Connexions Partner (CXP). However, it is not generally used to maintain records for those young people who are passing through the LA; it is only for those permanently living in the LA.
- Accreditation. This page has been added more recently; it is not active, and appears to be focused for use by partner agencies such as Targeted Youth Support, and YOT.

Searches can be made using the Profile system, which produces lists of names according to certain search parameters. The parameters that can be selected to produce reports are:

- Current destination.
- Previous destination.
- Destination duration.
- Current school or college.
- Last school or college.
- Special education provision.
- School attended in Year 11.
- Age.
- School leaving group.
- Gender.
- Ethnicity.
- Residency (Local Management of Care (LMC) area, post town, post code, and ward).
- Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LDD) level.
- Support level.
- Planned routes and intended destination.
- Course level studied.
- Individual circumstances (such as pregnancy, or supervised by YOT).

- Client contact and those where contact has been lost.
- Job and training placing.
- Progression (from one destination to another).
- Contact with parents.
- Desired occupations.
- Occupational areas entered.
- Opportunity analysis (training, location, and wage).
- Cross-border movement (those educated outside the LMC area).
- Section 140 assessments.
- Benefit claims.

The reports generated above list individuals within these selected categories, and categories can be combined so that quite specific questions can be asked of the data. However, it is found that PAs do not tend to use these, as they do not know how to generate them. One person in the local Connexions service office generates these forms of reports for PAs, and another person produces statistics and charts from the lists generated. As a consequence, PAs do not generally access charts or pictures; they access lists of individuals. Pictures and charts are not fore-grounded in the system.

Within this system, qualifications that young people have cannot currently be selected as a search or report criterion, as these data are not imported from school or college sources. However, questions such as the proportion of young people who went into education from an individual school, or the number in the 16 to 19 year age group in a particular post code area who have been unemployed for more than 6 months, or the current destinations of those in an LA who left in a particular year who were educated in a pupil referral unit (PRU) or through alternative education provision, can be requested and selected.

Individual reports can be accessed for entire year groups of leavers in any individual school. These reports then list numbers of young people in a wide variety of categories, and clicking on these numbers gives access to a list of their names and from that point, to their individual details. A school list report gives details about:

- Full-time education courses that lead to GCE A or AS or A2 levels, Vocational A levels, GNVQ levels, NVQ levels, GCSE levels, higher education levels, or gap years.
- Work-based training (without employed status) that lead to Foundation Modern Apprenticeships, or other LSC delivered training (including E2E and Lifeskills).
- Full-time employment that leads to Advanced Modern Apprenticeships, Foundation Modern Apprenticeships, government-supported work-based training, employment with planned off-the-job qualification provision, employment with locally recognised good quality training, and employment without training.
- Voluntary and part-time activities.
- Active in the labour market.
- Not active in the labour market.
- Other categories not covered in terms of the labour market.
- Occupations using SOC minor grouping codes.

A Caseload Management Module (focusing on the young people within a particular PA's caseload) allows reports to be generated (in print copy only). The module also allows these to be sent to other PAs (but they are not personalised, and do not show PA names on the reports). It is reported that this aspect of the system is not used a great deal.

Management information reports can be produced in Profile in a facility called Profile 2000. These reports provide lists of numbers of young people in categories across the whole of the LA or by individual school. Reports of these data in MS Excel, in order to create charts or diagrams, are generated using manual data transfer, and are undertaken by one person in the local Connexions

service office. These forms of visual output are not produced consistently from a report generator within the main system.

There are data and reporting links that have been created between elements of the Profile system and other external systems, however. A key worker in the regional Connexions team has produced a reporting system for PAs that uses MS Access. In this system, it is possible to enter a postcode, to identify young people who are NEET by postcode, and produce a report on this basis. The system can be used to highlight those at risk of dropping out of education, and these details can then be exported to MS Excel. However, it is not possible to currently generate statistics automatically; there is no data flow about interventions of PAs that are collated, for example. Similarly, the system does not work through a dashboard facility, which could be of benefit to PAs.

While the CCIS database is a vital form of technology to those who support young people who are NEET, it is also recognised in some LAs that staff have problems with using the database. Until recently, such systems have been more an electronic record system – a caseload record that was used like previous paper systems. More recently such systems have become a data management system, so they can now be viewed as being quite complicated, and the whole system has to be operated more accurately because data has to be entered in a form that is required by the government department. The procedures for doing this can for some seem drawn out and to take a long time, especially if someone only wants to make minor amendments to a client's record. So it can happen that staff are given many instructions on how to enter data.

4.2.2 Database facilities such as Sharepoint transforming Connexions services to paperless offices

Some Connexions services see the potential of different forms of data access, and while certain information may currently be distributed across different databases, parallel systems are being developed that could be merged ultimately in certain ways. All Connexions services in one region now use MS Sharepoint, so that information is more easily stored and exchanged. One of the functions of MS Sharepoint is to capture all the information a PA needs to do their job, which is normally carried around in their head, and store it on the system in a series of online Wikibase tools. This enables PAs to share information, latest trends, examples of good practice with colleagues and also (to an extent) with clients, as some of this gets onto the website. Therefore, all PAs contribute to the same stored knowledge base, which becomes a knowledge source for others. Others can then update or modify this knowledge base so that it gradually evolves. Another reason for this development is to encourage clients to seek information for themselves, so they do not automatically need to book an appointment to see a PA if all they require is a piece of publicly available information. This takes pressure off PAs who can concentrate on those clients who need most support. MS Sharepoint is also used for other purposes, such as producing an internal 'E-brief', which is a staff newsletter. This is important because being in a large regional area means that it is a challenge to share information across all the offices and keep people in contact and up-to-date. This is all part of a move towards using fewer paper systems. It is quicker and cheaper, and makes 'good business sense'. Furthermore, it is said that staff find it easy to use, it is a simple system to operate and staff are positive towards it. Most staff activity – diaries, holiday dates, and applications for internal jobs - is conducted through MS Sharepoint.

In one local Connexions service, their main database on clients merges elements from the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and the earlier Assessment Planning Implementation and Review (APIR). This merged data structure is known as CAPIR. The Connexions service is discussing shared databases with other parts of the local authority; most of the shared data is fairly basic (names of clients and their key workers, mainly those elements needed to meet the requirements of the CAF). Although it is found difficult to share data between systems, it is felt that this might change when unique identification numbers for young people are used. In parallel, the Connexions service internally uses MS Sharepoint for staff communications. This is a web-based shared portal used to post messages, calendar events, update lists, share documents, and place items of current importance such as new legislation. It is an up-to-date facility and it is recognised that it could be used more. Some staff think the MS Sharepoint facility is 'brilliant', while others have yet to work with it.

4.2.3 *Linking databases to client communication systems*

In one regional Connexions service, a next step for them is to take their text service and to integrate text messaging with the client database. This means that every time a text is sent to a client, or a client responds to a text, this is automatically logged on the database. It is anticipated that this will help the Connexions service managers monitor contact with clients and also provide evidence of the attempts that PAs make to contact and support young people who are NEET.

There are other managers in other Connexions services who feel that this form of integrated or linked approach could provide benefits. One manager said that Connexions services could do far more with their vacancy website, by linking it to text messaging. He felt that while there are a range of developments that could be undertaken, that some key people are reluctant to do so.

4.2.4 *Using data to highlight those young people who might become NEET in the future*

In one LA, a joint Connexions/14-19 Development Team/Schools' Applications Support team have developed a tool to assist secondary schools identify those "students at risk of becoming NEET once they leave compulsory education". The tool uses risk factors to identify the students, and these data can be easily obtained from the schools management information system (SIMS). The factors used are:

- Percentage attendance (less than 85%).
- English as an additional language (EAL).
- Exclusions (permanent or fixed-term of 10 or more sessions).
- Free school meals (FSM).
- Attainment results at Key Stage 1 (below Level 2), Key Stage 2 (below Level 3), and Key Stage 3 (below Level 5) for maths, reading and writing, and a U at Key Stage 4 (across all subjects).
- Looked after children (LAC).
- Special educational needs (SEN).
- Traveller.
- Medical conditions (that affect learning or attendance).

All secondary schools in the LA are able to draw down reports for a whole year group or for an individual tutor group. These reports provide data in the form of a bar chart, so that students that have a high number can be quickly identified. Instructions to schools state that: "It is expected that any students with four or more is particularly vulnerable to becoming NEET".

The indicators were chosen from those most commonly selected by a number of LA inclusion representatives on a paper checklist. Indicators were chosen as those that were 'nationally recognised', and what LAs were identifying as factors likely to indicate young people becoming NEET. The indicators were used with a couple of schools as pilots, and the outcomes seemed to be reasonably accurate. Indicators are set at particular limits, but could be changed. So attendance is set at 85% currently, but it could be changed. The facility can be set up to pick out what is needed in terms of levels of indicators.

The LA produced an electronic form of output, as the data was available in the schools' management information systems (SIMS), and the LA SIMS team were able to produce a specific report for this purpose. It would be possible for the young people that are selected by the program to be colour coded as children likely to be at risk. The Connexions service was keen on this approach; it meant that for vulnerable children it was possible to use a targeted (vulnerable) approach, rather than a wider scattergun approach. Year 6 teachers in the LA are interested in running it to look at early vulnerability, and they and the LA want to identify young people who are vulnerable so that they can offer early intervention.

4.2.5 *Databases matching vacancies to clients*

Some Connexions services report that data entry is a time consuming process, but that when data is entered and is accessible, then some outcomes are possible that would otherwise be much more difficult to find. In one local Connexions service, it is recognised that PAs spend a lot of time entering data into computers. The data entry facility is not found to be easy to use; PAs find they have to click on many buttons to get to the section they need. In this way, it is felt that ‘electronic record keeping is the tail that is wagging the dog’. However, it also recognised that with data in the system, it is possible to match young people to vacancies more efficiently. PAs are able to run vacancy-matching surveys using the system also.

Another local Connexions service runs a client-vacancy match about every 5 days or so. The local Connexions service can look for a match between the job-type the client is looking for and the list of current vacancies. Members in the Connexions employment services team can then contact the young person to discuss the vacancy with them. The vacancy matching process links clients to vacancies according to a number of different criteria, including location, occupational area, and qualifications. The Connexions service can do narrow or wide searches according to how specific the criteria are that are selected. It is possible to do searches by whole cohorts or to narrow it down to individuals. However, to do this, Connexions staff are very reliant on client records being kept up-to-date.

4.2.6 *Matching interests and choices of young people with opportunities that arise in terms of jobs, vacancies, apprenticeships, and work-based learning*

A national system for matching apprenticeship vacancies is being developed and launched by the LSC. Called the National Apprenticeship Vacancy Matching Service (NAVMS), it aims: “to provide a single web based location for high quality and dynamic information on apprenticeships for use by employers, potential apprentices, their parents and guardians, those providing advice; and to provide powerful management information on all aspects of apprenticeship recruitment” (Dunn, 2008).

One regional Connexions service has its own system for matching vacancies, which is not limited to apprenticeships. An LA hosts the vacancy team for the region; other LAs contribute to the maintenance of this service. One reason for maintaining a regional-wide service is a recognition that young people are willing to travel to gain opportunities for work and work-based learning. Public sites across the region provide young people with access to information about online vacancies, and additionally young people can have access at home, and they can keep details that they have submitted when applying for vacancies in order to complete other forms, so they do not need to start from scratch when applying again. This system has been in place for the last 2 years, with matched lists linking recorded interests of young people with vacancies arising, and emails are sent out electronically to advise young people of possible opportunities. The success of this system is due in part to the regional Connexions service having a long historical background of working with employers and providers across its 5 LAs. Some regional Connexions service staff go out and canvas for opportunities, there are recruitment campaigns that are run, links are provided online to these, and staff look at advertisements and announcements in the local press for vacancies. Some 90% of all vacancies identified go onto the electronic system.

The regional Connexions service work with all employers, from individual workers, through small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), to very large employers. Matching (of vacancies to young people’s interests) is itself resource intensive, and the regional Connexions service does not have a team in place to do this. Young people can use the system themselves in order to match their interests through broad categories. Local Connexions teams then discuss options with young people. The regional Connexions service is conscious of the need to use different ways to get information out to young people. Public access sites can be visited by young people, and opportunities are advertised in Connexions centres. Additionally there is a jobs bulletin that is sent out fortnightly, a training update is sent out monthly, and these are distributed to partners.

One of the LA Connexions services within the region is experimenting with use of the matching system currently. Before the Connexions service was established, the careers service in this LA

undertook a lot of matching of vacancies to interests of young people. A dedicated member of staff undertook the work of matching vacancies to interests. Vacancies are now identified through the regional Connexions service, but the local Connexions team are exploring how they can use the system (called Profile), to match at a more local level. Some preliminary work has been done, with what is felt to be limited success.

In order for this system to work, the local Connexions service staff need to record occupational choices of individual young people on the system. These choices need to be updated and checked regularly, and then it is possible to do a search using a particular code (such as hairdressing, for example). From a search, if say 20 records come up, then these are judged in terms of potential suitability, and then the young person is invited into the office to discuss options. A clear difference between the Profile system and the national NAVMS system is that matching is undertaken by Connexions service staff using the Profile system, while young people themselves undertake the matching with the NAVMS system. The Profile system will continue to work only if codes are correct and updated, and it is recognised that much more updating needs to be done currently to ensure accuracy. It is reported that staff need to feel it is more useful than other systems, and its use needs to be encouraged. It is reported that while the system indicates job codes, these are not always obvious. So, some vacancies can be matched more easily (such as hairdressing), while others (such as administration or engineering) are more difficult to match because of the breadth of possibilities within the codes. A previous system used by the local Connexions service staff addressed this issue by working through a series of code levels; there were initially a small number of key codes (using 2 digits), and then it was possible to drill further into a narrower breakdown of sort-codes. This previous system was found by some PAs to be easier to use with these different levels; this type of facility is not available at the moment with the Profile system.

It has been found that the Profile system (a Microdec system) requires intensive effort in terms of staff time for the implementation of matching vacancies to interests. One member of staff who has been using the system for some time still feels he is not conversant with the system. One way forward that has been suggested would be to employ a dedicated member of staff to implement and maintain the system full-time. Although the old system was paper-based, and computers are recognised as being easier to use and they can avoid records going missing, it is nevertheless felt that the current computer-based system is not refined enough or user-friendly enough at this stage (although management information delivered by the system is felt to be good).

4.2.7 Collecting and reporting opportunities of vacancies that exist

Opportunities from all training providers available to young people who are 14 to 19 years of age are detailed in online LA 14-19 area prospectuses. In one LA, a 'courses and providers' section gives access to information through localities on a map. The location of each provider can be selected and can be viewed on the map. A section in a completely different location provides details about the subjects that each provider offers, and details of diplomas that are available. Four documents that were available for download, giving details of these specific opportunities and courses, were at a later time incorporated into specific web pages on the web site: Apprenticeships and entry to employment; Sixth form centres at local schools; the local College; and Special Schools in the LA.

Navigation around the site might well have been difficult for some young people. For example, the web page about apprenticeships indicated the range of providers and the subject apprenticeships that they offered. The web page listed 23 providers (telephone numbers were shown on the web page alongside each provider). Subject apprenticeships were then listed, and links to providers were indicated using numbers that related to the provider list.

From two different locations across the LA 14-19 prospectus web site, there were a total of 41 providers listed. A list was provided in a drop-down box on the 'Courses and Providers' page, and a separate list was provided on the web page giving details about apprenticeships.

A review of the individual providers that had websites, and whether published links to those websites were working, showed the range of provider websites currently available to young people using the LA 14-19 area prospectus. Of the 41 providers named on the LA 14-19 prospectus website:

- Further details of 2 could not be found.
- 38 were course providers.
- 19 were apprenticeship providers.
- 4 did not have a website.
- 35 did have a website, and the web links worked for all of these.

Overall, therefore, many providers did have websites where links worked. However, there were 6 where further details were not provided, or there was no website, or the links did not work. Where website links did work, the web pages were reviewed by asking a number of questions about their content and accessibility. Young people are likely to want to be able to see what a site might offer them fairly quickly. The first question asked was: is it obvious from the front page what the provider offers to young people who are NEET? For many provider websites, the answer was 'yes'. Responses for all provider websites are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Whether providers showed clearly what they offered on their web pages

Is it obvious from the front page what the provider offers to young people who are NEET?	Frequency
Various apprenticeships/apprenticeships and vocational training/training	9
Yes	7
Education/6 th form education	3
Yes - education/training for 16+/school leavers/training	2
Yes, one click brings up apprenticeships/easy to navigate	2
Advice and support, details of/links to apprenticeship providers	1
Apprenticeships and vacancies on the main menu	1
Apprenticeships through an 'Education' tab	1
DJ courses, guitar courses	1
Education - details of courses via links	1
Vocational courses and placement opportunities - 'Courses' on the main menu	1
Vocational training with work placements	1
Yes – via a side menu - training and apprenticeships	1
Yes, tab for apprentices/learners	1
No	1
No - have to click on 'Services', and then on 'Training'	1
Seems to cater for employers not NEETs	1
Total	35

In many cases web pages showed clearly what providers offered, which were apprenticeships, education, training, or work placements. Out of 35 provider websites reviewed, 3 did not clearly show what they were providing or what was being provided appeared not to be relevant to the group of young people who are NEET. Although information was directly accessible on many web pages (in 24 cases), in some cases information was indirectly accessible: through a main menu in 2 cases; through links to other pages in 2 cases; through a tab in 2 cases; by clicking on a relevant word or section in 1 case, or through a side menu in 1 case.

However, when the mode of information was reviewed, it was clear that the vast majority of the web pages used the written form (text alone). In 2 cases video was shown with text, in 1 case some images were shown with text, while in 31 cases text alone was used to provide information. The preponderance of text use alone was likely to limit access and engagement for many young people who are NEET. A review looked at whether it was obvious from the web pages how young people would contact the providers. Forms of contact on provider web pages are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Forms of contact provided on web pages

Is the form of contact obvious?	Frequency
Telephone	13
Through 'Contact' in the main menu list	7
Email/email form for queries	5
Yes	5
Address given	3
Via a specific page	3
Online application for prospectus/vacancy	2
Contact details on most pages	1
Contact tab on the home page	1
Via each area of interest	1
Via 'Learners' in the main menu, then through individual courses	1

This review showed that the most commonly offered form of contact was not likely to be used a great deal by young people who are NEET. Young people who are NEET are not very likely to pick up a telephone to call someone; even creating a query using the medium of email without support from a front-line worker might be quite daunting.

The review looked at the facilities for applications that were provided on the websites. In 9 cases, an application form was found in a specific menu list or on a specific page. In 8 cases, providers enabled young people to apply online. In 6 cases, the web pages provided links to an application form, or it could be clicked on. In 4 cases, a PDF file could be downloaded, completed, and sent by email or post. In 1 case, an online form had to be printed out, scanned, and returned by email. In 12 cases, contact details were used to request further information. So, although a range of providers offered access to online application forms, some needed to be completed using quite complex procedures. Young people who are NEET might well need help in finding and completing application forms.

The forms of course and training opportunities that are available for young people clearly need to match their interests (or potential undeveloped interests), as far as is possible. From a number of previous reports on the types of activities that are sought by young people who are NEET (Passey, Williams and Rogers, 2008; Citizens Online and the National Centre for Social Research, 2008; Hayward, Wilde and Williams, 2008), activities that include practical, creative and social aspects have been highlighted as being particularly important. Taking the apprenticeship subject list from the 14-19 website of an LA, those subject courses with practical, creative or social features were identified and are shown in Table 3 following (a '✓' is used to indicate a highly likely aspect, whereas a '?' indicates a more uncertain aspect being in place).

Table 3: Incidence of practical, creative and social aspects arising in apprenticeship courses in the 14-19 prospectus

Apprenticeship	Practical aspects	Creative aspects	Social aspects
Accounting	✓	?	?
Beauty	✓	✓	✓
Business Administration and Management	✓	?	✓
Call Handling	✓	?	✓
Care	✓	?	✓
Customer Service	✓	?	✓
Catering and Hospitality	✓	✓	✓
Construction	✓	?	✓
Dental Nursing	✓	?	✓
Design and Print	✓	✓	?
Early Years and Education	✓	?	✓
Engineering	✓	?	?
Entry to Employment	✓	?	✓
Fabrication and Welding	✓	?	?
Glass Training	✓	✓	?
Hairdressing	✓	✓	✓
Horticulture	✓	?	?
ICT	✓	?	?
Manufacturing	✓	?	?
Motor Vehicle	✓	?	?
Printing	✓	?	?
Retail	✓	?	✓
Sport and Leisure	✓	?	✓
Warehousing and Distribution	✓	?	✓
Total numbers of highly likely aspects	25	5	14

From this analysis it is clear that practical aspects predominate largely in courses offered. Although social aspects are high, creative aspects are low. Although some courses might highlight the creative and social aspects, this may well vary from course to course. It would appear from this evidence alone that creative opportunities are low in number. It appeared that young people were not being given high levels of opportunities to be involved in creative endeavour, which, if offered in some cases, might provide viable alternatives for job or interest routes.

4.2.8 Connexions databases and systems are mostly user friendly

Connexions staff in some LAs find that CCIS databases can be accessed and used readily. In one LA, Connexions and related services PAs access and use the management CCIS database often. While PAs say that on the whole Connexions systems 'are very user friendly', it is also true from evidence that many PAs use only a restricted range of the facilities and functions that are available. User-friendly responses are likely to be indicative of those facilities that they use a lot, or routinely, therefore. The fact that technology training is not always easily accessible does not help this situation. As one PA said: "We get a lot of training around other things, but not IT".

4.2.9 Some staff find using databases tricky and very time consuming

It is recognised in both regional and local Connexions service teams that some staff have problems with using database systems. This is partly due to the fact that the system itself has developed from a previous electronic record system (a caseload record that would be used like previous paper systems), to a data management system. This means that its functionality can be complex, and procedures for doing this can initially take a long time, especially when minor amendments to a client's record need to be made. Data entry can require many instructions, especially as sensitive data clearly needs to be separated from and handled differently from more routine data. In one LA, it is recognised that PAs spend a great deal of time entering data, and the entry systems may require a large number of clicks to get to the section that is needed. This is time consuming and frustrating; it is potentially symptomatic

of the fact that the systems have been developed to fulfil system requirements rather than being developed in consultation with PAs and their needs.

4.2.10 Client databases ‘speaking to one another’

A major challenge found by some LAs and PAs is the tracking of interventions and interactions of young people who are NEET who are involved with a range of agencies. Although in one LA most of the data required is on the CCIS Profile system, the version of CCIS in place does not always pick up information from other services. The LA finds that there are too many databases that do not ‘speak’ to each other. As a consequence, for example, the youth offending team often go back to paper records to update their own database.

However, this challenge is not found to be the case in all LAs, or it does not arise at a high level. In one LA the Connexions team do not share their database details with other agencies on an automatic basis. Reasons for this include the cost, and ‘political reasons’. The Connexions team shares information on specific clients who they are jointly working with, but the databases of the different agencies involved do not ‘speak to one another’. The different agencies share information on clients who are thought to be at risk, through the common assessment framework. The Connexions team normally find that they can share enough information about clients by using the usual email communication system, cutting and pasting email information into clients’ records. The Connexions team are not sure what the situation is with regard to data protection and sharing information with others. They find that young people tend to be very trusting and tell them lots of details. For most young people the Connexions PA and possibly a youth worker are their main contacts, unless they have other issues such as housing needs. So for many young people there is no need to share information, as there are no special circumstances. There is also a degree of informal sharing of information with those professionals PA’s have had experience of working with. As this informal method is found to work well, the team are not sure if there is a need for a shared database.

In one regional Connexions service team, security has been recognised as key issue and development need. It has been recognised that there is a critical need to ensure that data is encrypted properly for security reasons. The aim in doing this is to ensure that if data is exchanged between different agencies or groups of the LA, that it must be done via a strongly protected data transfer system. It has been found in developing systems to address this need that LAs are lagging behind the regional Connexions team in terms of their data handling guidelines. LA guidelines are found not to be as stringent as the regional Connexions team guidelines. The regional Connexions team find they have to tell some groups including schools, that data cannot be sent to them until their handling systems improve. The team find that the security thresholds of data transfer are getting higher and their encryption methods are more rigorous than others in the LA. There have been occasional situations where the regional Connexions team have had to physically deliver some data on memory sticks rather than send it electronically or put it in the post.

The situation with regard to data protection in this area is potentially complex and not widely understood. In one LA, for example, PAs indicated that they were not sure what the situation was with regard to data protection and the sharing of information with others. They find that young people tend to be very trusting and tell them a great deal. It is felt that this raises a crucial issue about what can be shared, and PAs in this LA feel there is a need for the several agencies involved to think about information that should be shared within the context of data protection.

4.2.11 Projects to share database records - MIAPS - Managing Information across Partners

Some LAs are beginning to become involved in projects that are working on the development of shared database records. In one LA, most of the necessary shared data is fairly basic, such as the names of clients and their key workers (mainly data to meet the requirements of the CAF). Currently the Connexions team find it difficult to share data between systems, but it is recognised that this might change when unique identification numbers for young people are used and commonly in place. The Connexions team are involved in a large LA initiative called MIAPS – managing information across partners.

4.3 Communicating with clients

4.3.1 *Connexions use multiple methods of communication with young people who are NEET*

Maintaining contact with young people who are NEET is a key challenge for those who work in Connexions and related services. As a consequence, those involved often use a number of methods of communication. Technology is increasingly opening up new methods. Although Connexions services send letters, use landline numbers and do home visits (as a final step if the client has not been in touch for some time), they also try to get email addresses and use these where possible. Some Connexions teams use text messages to send information about appointments, for example. Some teams find that text and email is effective if the young people are 'motivated'.

Although the same methods are adopted in different Connexions teams, the balance of use can vary from team to team. For example, in one Connexions team, some PAs use company mobile telephones to contact their clients and they also use a website. However, they still mainly use traditional methods of contacting young people, such as landlines and letters. They have done some mass texting, but find that this is too expensive. They undertake some home visits, and for reasons of personal safety PAs who do this (and other outreach workers) use their mobile telephones to ring in when the visit or meeting is over. The Connexions service also has an email system and this is used a lot.

The PA in another Connexions service uses mobile telephones when possible. The reason she prefers using the telephone is that it is an immediate form of contact, and she can pick up a young person's mood. She recognises that mobile telephone numbers change a lot, but she still finds that it is good to have a mobile number. She can check where a client is if they are late for an appointment. She finds that some young people have 'blocked numbers' (they will not accept calls if they do not want to). As well as using the mobile call facility, she sends texts to young people through "Text Anywhere" (a website that allows texts to be sent to mobile telephones). She has been given a work's mobile, which she uses a lot, particularly with some clients. For example, she has been working with a deaf client who responded best to text messages. She might text a client with a vacancy, and if they were interested she would telephone them to check this. By calling them and speaking directly she could tell from the tone of voice whether they were interested in the vacancy. Clearly it is not possible to do this with text or email, so she finds it is necessary to pick and choose when to use technology. She finds that a lot of what is done is about talking to the clients and sensing what concerns them most at that time. She finds it also possible to tell by looking at them if they are really interested in what is being offered. She finds that landlines are better than mobile telephones; they let her speak to the parents so that she can get an impression of how supportive they are. She also does home visits for this reason, but still she finds the best method of keeping in touch is if the young people call in to see her on a regular basis.

The PA tends to use email as a last resort, and then would only use it if it were known that a young person was likely to respond. The PA would rather speak over the telephone. She uses email with perhaps a quarter of her clients, but finds that they do not respond to emails a lot. She also finds that they change their email addresses a lot.

A PA in a third Connexions service finds that young people who are NEET normally prefer a 'personal service'. She finds that although they may make contact by telephone, they prefer to meet up and get to know their PA. She finds that most want to build up a positive relationship with their PA. The PAs in the Connexions service generally use mobile telephones and emails for contact. They give out email addresses to clients, clients can email their PA, and clients often use email in general, but young people who are NEET tend not to use it so much. About 70% of contact with young people who are NEET is by mobile telephone. PAs find often that young people who are NEET tend to mix together in groups, so if they speak to one young person via a mobile they can ask them to pass the telephone around so that they can speak to more of them. They find that this is the best way of contacting young people who are NEET - word of mouth from friends. They find that mobile telephones are far more useful than computers and emails. Often young people who are NEET do not

have computers at home for all sorts of reasons. They may not have a landline and there is a worry that ICT equipment in a house may get stolen. A lot of the young people who are NEET do not have a home email address (as many do not sit at home using the internet). They tend to be mobile – out and about rather than in one place. The PAs find that there are very few occasions when they would try to contact a young person who is NEET using email. The Connexions service has also trialled online chat rooms for clients, but has found that very few use them, so they have been discontinued.

4.3.2 A PA's knowledge of an individual young person who is NEET will determine communication methods

Connexions teams recognise that in order to help their clients, PAs need to do a lot of intensive work. PAs have to know about the routine patterns of the young people, what they tend to do all day, when they are likely to be at home to be contacted, and the best way of contacting individuals. PAs find that they get to know which method of keeping in touch a client likes. Contact with clients is often selected on a case-by-case basis. A PA assesses the client and works out the best way to contact them. In one LA, PAs are finding that one of the problems of using email with the more traditional hard-to-reach young people who are NEET is that it is text based, and that for many of them literacy is a major issue.

4.3.3 PAs have a contact process or hierarchy in place

Connexions teams and PAs tend to have a contact process or a contact hierarchy in place. The methods of communication used in one LA are:

- Letters home (but they find the response rate is minimal, usually under 5%).
- Telephone, both landline and mobile (mainly to invite the young people to have a talk with their PA).
- Text messaging (using a facility to send out a mass text, but it only works if the mobile number records are kept up to date).
- Email (for those who have it and use it, as some have email either on a PC or their telephones, although there are some who have special needs and who cannot use this technology).
- Home visits (as a last resort, as this is very expensive in terms of time).

A PA in another Connexions service echoes the need for a PA to get to know which method of keeping in touch a client likes, and the normal contact process used by this PA is:

- Start off with an appointment for the young person to visit the office.
- If they do not attend, call them.
- Then do evening telephone calls, using whatever number is available.
- If after three attempted contacts it is not possible to contact them, then a home visit is undertaken.

In another LA, however, the hierarchy of home visits is being raised. The LA is moving to home visits as being the most productive form of contact. They find that the good thing about home visits is that it is possible to get some insight into the client's circumstances, and may give the chance to speak to parents. All the LA's operational staff do some home visits from time to time, but they also employ client support staff who are recruited just to do home visits. These staff have been recruited to help with the tracking of young people. In another LA, they are called "Keeping in touch workers".

4.3.4 Texts are used more than email

The experience of some Connexions services and PAs is that texts are more effective and used more with young people than is email. In one Connexions service they find that many young people who are NEET use mobile telephone texts a lot, but are not that good at logging on to the internet and websites. In another Connexions service, they encourage PAs to email their clients, but find that many clients do not have a computer at home, so they use texts more than emails. However, they find that the more text is used, the more it waters down the effect of receiving a text message. They find it is possible to over-text a client and they have had some parents complaining about numbers of texts being sent. In a third Connexions service, a PA would use text to generate an initial response, which would be followed up by telephone call; she might text a client with a vacancy and if they were interested she would telephone them to check this. However, for some clients, text messaging has been found to

work more effectively than other contact methods. The same PA has been working with a deaf client who has responded best to text messages, for example. Experiences from a fourth Connexions service echo this finding; experiences indicate that some PAs and their clients prefer using text.

A regional Connexions service find that one of the features of many young people who are NEET is that they live in homes with no fixed telephone lines. They find that young people change mobile telephones too often for their numbers to be reliable, so they do not record mobile telephone numbers on their database. By contrast, text messaging has been used for a range of purposes by one of the private careers providers, for example, to send details of vacancies. This provider has used a system linked to MS Outlook, through Edutext (a large company providing text services as well as a system for truancy reporting). The careers provider also uses texts for motivational messaging, for example, sending a message the evening before an interview to remind the young person and to say 'hope it goes well'. The provider finds that PAs who do intensive work with young people who are NEET often use text messages. Although they have sent emails too, they find that the young people do not check their emails so frequently.

4.3.5 *Mobile telephone calls are better than text or email*

Although text and email is used by Connexions services and PAs, an issue that has been found when working with young people who are NEET is the difficulty of maintaining an email dialogue. Many young people who are NEET have learning difficulties and find it hard to understand what a text-based email is about. PAs often find it is better to explain things to them by word of mouth than to write about it. Experiences in one Connexions service indicate that young people who are NEET do use mobile telephones, but that the Connexions service may not always have the most up-to-date number, and that while young people might have a mobile, they may not have any credit on it (a financial, rather than a technological access, problem).

4.3.6 *Use of a mass text facility to contact clients*

Some Connexions services have used mass text facilities. One Connexions service has a mass text facility that can send out messages to larger groups of young people, perhaps in batches of 10, but this tends not to be used a great deal as the service has to comply with LA policy and protocols on the use of mobile telephone texts. So, the service cannot send out anything that might be viewed as promotional in nature, for example.

Some Connexions services are looking to develop their text messaging in particular ways. One regional Connexions service uses text messaging to maintain contact with clients, using both individual and mass texts. Mass texting is used with particular cohorts, for example, young people who are NEET, to encourage them to start to communicate with a PA via text. Once contact and communication is achieved, the young people are then encouraged to visit PAs in their offices. So text messaging is used to engage with young people who are NEET and other hard to help clients and to persuade them to come to see PAs directly. The next step envisaged with the text service is to integrate text messaging into the client database, so that every time a text is sent to a client or a client responds to a text this is automatically logged on the database. It is anticipated that this will help Connexions service managers monitor contact with clients and also provide evidence of attempts that PAs make to contact and support young people who are NEET.

Sending text to mobile telephones is something that is regularly reviewed by another Connexions service. The Connexions service recognises that a valid contact number is critically important. The service are thinking about using texting or mobile telephone calls more, because home visits are a very expensive form of intervention. The service has given young people a £5 top up on their mobile if they contact them, which means that the service has a record of their telephone number that they can use. This has been found to be a good way of establishing and maintaining contact with young people who are NEET. The service's records show that they have up to a 75% response rate from texts that are sent out. They have used bulk texts, but they do not use the facility that much. The service prefers to minimise the amount of text in a message and to customise it so that it is relevant to the needs of an individual young person.

A third Connexions service uses texts more than emails, but find that the more text is used, the more it waters down the effect of receiving a text message. They find it is possible to 'over text' a client. The service's Aspire database system can send out mass texts, but some parents say that the service should prevent hassling them. So they have a mixed reaction from clients about the use of text messages. However, their experiences show that young people do respond better to text than to emails because they have a mobile telephone in their pocket and they pick it up straight away. In this case, they do not have to log on as they have to with their emails.

A fourth Connexions service uses a facility called 'Text Anywhere', which can send messages to clients' mobile telephones and can receive replies in forms such as emails. The facility can be used to send individual or batch messages, and the cost of an individual text using this system is cheaper than a text sent from a mobile telephone. The system is mainly used to remind people of forthcoming events. Ideally the service would like to have a free telephone number so that clients could contact them, especially as most young people who are NEET tell them that they may have a mobile, but may not have any credit on it.

4.3.7 *Mixed views about how to contact young people who are NEET*

Many Connexions centres and PAs are concerned with whether it is better to contact young people who are NEET via technology or via more traditional methods such as home visits, or office appointments. A lot of contact with young people who are NEET is done by telephone in one Connexions service; they use letters less and less, as they are not found to be that effective. Although the service has used some text contact, and has used email if the client has an email address, they are now moving to home visits as the most productive form of contact.

Experiences of another Connexions service highlight the importance of personal contact for young people who are NEET. Most of the contact the service has with young people who are NEET is not through technology; most of the time the young people call in to the Connexions Centre or Connexions service staff meet with them in the community. The community-based PA team have mobile telephones and laptops, so that they can work with young people who are NEET and get access to all the online resources they have. Although some work is done in the community, it is recognised that it is still the Connexions Centre that plays the most important role. In this service there are 1,200 callers a week into the Connexion Centre. The service finds that this is the most important way of working with young people who are NEET; face-to-face contact is found to be more important than technology. The young people need a lot of handholding to move forward. The service did a survey of what young people who are NEET wanted, and none of them indicated 'better websites'; although they wanted information, most of all they wanted someone to listen to them.

Experiences of a third Connexions service indicate that young people who are NEET normally prefer a 'personal service'. They may make contact by telephone, but they prefer to meet up and get to know their PA. It is found that most want to build up a positive relationship with their PA.

4.3.8 *Doubts about the value of texting and use of mobile telephones*

Although a number of Connexions services and PAs see the value of texting and the use of mobile telephones, there are also those who have doubts about the value of these forms of facility. In one regional Connexions service, it is found that young people change their mobile telephones so often that their numbers are not reliable, so these are not recorded on their database. In a Connexions service in another region, it is found that young people who are NEET do use mobile telephones, that the service might not always have the most up-to-date number, but that most young people who are NEET say that their main problem is not that they do not have a mobile, but that they do not have any credit on it. In another Connexions service, while some PAs use company mobile telephones to contact their clients and also use a website, they still mainly use the traditional methods of contacting young people such as landlines and letters.

4.4 Systems providing information online

4.4.1 *Virtual Connexions Centres and Virtual PAs*

Although many of the forms of online information provision for young people are generating websites, one LA is supporting the development of a Virtual Connexions Centre. The purpose of the Virtual Connexions Centre is to produce an online Connexions Centre, which is as close as possible to the physical LA Connexions Centre; indeed it is a visual representation of the actual centre. The Virtual Centre will enable clients to log on and ‘walk through’ the door of the centre and go into various ‘interview’ rooms where they will be able to gather various pieces of information and guidance. There are two main reasons for developing a Virtual Connexions Centre:

1. To enable young people to gather careers and other information online.
2. To help those who lack confidence to become comfortable about entering a centre and asking for information. There might be barriers preventing them from entering the physical Connexions Centre and this might help them overcome these. In time they might then feel able to come to the actual centre itself.

The LA was already using a lot of technology with young people. They had developed a website with the youth service to enable young people to have a place where they could express opinions about a range of topics relevant to their lives. Some people in the LA were very interested in using social networks, although Connexions itself was slightly cautious about using social networking for various safety issues.

During the early thinking about the Virtual Connexions Centre it was decided that it needed to be produced in a format that young people were used to – the various ‘virtual world’ computer games they might play with on their home computers. It was thought that this format might attract some of the young people who are NEET or those whose actions the Connexions service did not know about. Some parts of the Virtual Connexions Centre website will be completely open to the public. Other areas and services will only be for clients who can prove their authenticity through the logon process. Some parts will enable a client to have direct and live access to a PA who will be online to receive ‘visits’. However, it is not anticipated that there will be an online ‘live’ guidance service all the time. There will be particular ‘opening hours’, although clients may be able to leave a message that PAs can respond to via email or text. It is hoped that workshops for young people who are NEET will be run in the virtual centre.

The hope is that young people who are reluctant to attend a physical workshop might logon, feel comfortable in the Virtual Centre, get on well with the PA and then decide to come into the physical Connexions Centre. A person might be NEET because they are caring for another person and cannot attend physical events; the Virtual Event might be a good substitute for this. The main purpose will be to engage young people and then make them feel comfortable about actually talking to a PA in the physical Connexions Centre. The key thing is for PAs to introduce the idea of attending the physical Connexions Centre when they think the client might be open to this idea. The concept is based on ideas of people making friends on a social networking site and then deciding to meet in real life. It is planned that there will be a ‘room’ about social issues such as bullying, and a ‘room’ about college. When online, staff will be alerted that there is someone else in a virtual room. When a young person is in the Virtual Centre, by moving the cursor, the young person will be able to walk around. They will have the opportunity to take part in text chat, but only with a PA, not with other people also using the centre.

The Virtual Centre might possibly be run by having a dedicated team, or possibly by all the staff taking turns on it. Connexions centre staff are found to be quite positive about it, but it has been found that there are a few staff who have shown some cynicism about increasing use of ICT within Connexions work. It is also recognised that schools will need to provide support for this initiative, to ensure that school leavers know it is there and that the facilities will be available to them when they leave school.

It is recognised that whichever organisation eventually develops the website, it will need to work very closely with the Connexions service to build up the site piece by piece. It was anticipated that a final version of the website would be ready at the end of 2009. Regular review and evaluation will include feedback from young people. Ideally it is anticipated that a connection between the Virtual Connexion Centre and a reduction in the NEET figure will be shown.

In another LA, a Virtual PA pilot has been set up. In this pilot, PAs are testing out if it is possible to deliver Connexions services virtually through a combination of text messaging, emails, and telephone calls. The facility has the advantage of being accessible to clients who may not be able to (or not want to) access Connexions sites. Benefits of the pilot include:

- PAs may be able to work more flexibly (for example, text, emails and telephone messages can be forwarded to PAs who work from home).
- Services can be provided beyond the normal Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm slot (evenings and weekend guidance will be available).
- It is anticipated that this will provide a more cost effective way of delivering Connexions services (it also fits into the lifestyle of some clients who might be more active in the evenings or at weekends).

Some of the ideas behind this pilot have come from young people who have formed part of the LA Connexions consultative groups. They have provided a great deal of user feedback on services and how these might be developed with young people in mind.

A third Connexions service feels that a Virtual Connexions Centre is a possibility, but that such a centre should not be established at the expense of shutting down a physical Connexions Centre. Although the Connexions service opens the Connexions Centre until 7pm in the evening and on Saturdays, it is found that only a handful of clients visit during this time, so it is felt that it is not really cost effective. It is felt that a Virtual Connexions Centre could be a useful idea for evening and weekend work, and that then it might be possible to close the physical Connexions Centre. However, it is recognised that additional funding would be needed to do this. Although young people might respond positively and like this initiative, it is recognised that a critical need for new initiatives is sustainability. The Connexions service recognise that it has to be shown that they are useful enough to become part of the system.

4.4.2 Importance of good Connexions websites

A number of Connexions services have highlighted the need for websites to be effective. One Connexions service recognises that it has a useful website which is part of the integrated youth support service, updated by staff in the information team. The website has many sections and links, providing a range of information, about finance, and health, but there is also a 'Young People's Zone' and 'RPlace' (an internet-based television station for the West Midlands, which broadcasts programmes about local issues). This means that groups of young people can make programmes for other young people.

This Connexions service finds that a key issue is to make sure that all the websites that young people might visit in their search for information and advice link together. There is currently discussion within the LA on how data might be moved between sites, but there is also a prior need to decide on what data is needed and how to use it. Apart from the technical aspects involved in linking websites, other main issues surround ethical concerns and the establishment of protocols about use.

Some PAs are recommending to clients that they use certain websites available. A PA in another Connexions service finds that about half of her client caseload seems to use them. The main one used is Connexions2Jobs.co.uk; clients can go on it if they want to look for vacancies, and they can make different selections and search different occupational areas. The website gives them basic information about the job. If the client wants more information they enter their details – name, date of birth, telephone number, and what they are doing at the moment. They can write a message such as “I

would like someone to contact me”. The PA then receives an email saying that one of her clients is interested in the vacancy.

A third Connexions service has a Connexions website but finds that it is difficult to find the resources to maintain it. As a consequence, it is felt that the website does not look as professional as it might. It has sections on careers, health, housing, leisure, money, relationships, the law and rights, and links to details of local Connexions Centres in the LA. The Connexions service also uses the regional Connexions website. All the vacancies in the area are accessible on this database so young people in the LA can access them. This regional website has a facility to help the user match their requirements against a list of current vacancies.

Experiences of PAs in a fourth Connexions centre indicate that young people can gain useful information from the Connexions service website and other related websites, but while the provision of general advice is good, it is recognised that what is needed ideally is customised 1:1 advice. PAs recognise that it is of little value just giving out the addresses of useful websites; it is necessary to work with the client and demonstrate how to use the websites.

4.4.3 A one-stop shop website

All LAs are required to provide an online 14-19 prospectus, to show the range of options that are accessible to young people, and that can be accessed by those young people. In one LA, although this development had been undertaken elsewhere within the LA, a member of the local Connexions service team had been helping with the updating of the courses on the 14-19 website. A teacher seconded to the 14-19 Team led for the LA on the Area Prospectus 14-19. A company developed the software and facilities within the prospectus itself. The local Connexions service promoted the use of the website with young people from Year 9 to 11 via group sessions in schools, in one-to-one guidance interviews and discussions, and, where appropriate, to support their written action plans. However, it was not clear how well the 14-19 prospectus website was being used by the local Connexions service advisers with young people who had left school (although the considered view of the person from Connexions who had been updating the information was that level of use was probably not high). It was felt likely that most Connexions staff would use the local college website and the Year 11 Recruitment and Information Directory for training and apprenticeships. This latter item was a paper brochure that was sent out to all Year 11 students and produced by the local Connexions service (although it was felt that it might well be incorporated into the 14-19 website in the future). The website had only been running for a few years, and most local Connexions service advisors used ‘tried and trusted sources’. It was recognised that website details could sometimes be incorrect, or go out-of-date quickly. For example, the local college website was used a lot, but some of the information was found at times to be out-of-date.

Although the 14-19 prospectus was continuously being developed in an ongoing way, the home page at the time of review provided largely textual access, to a range of other listed pages, including pages providing details about diplomas, opportunities at 16, courses and providers, news and events, and a course finder. The site contained imagery (which could be removed if desired), and text size could be altered.

Although there was a useful section that provided details in the forms of profiles of some young people who had been involved in courses, and indicated in their own words what had happened to them, uses of both video and auditory material were not evident. Although some interaction was possible, such as a completion of a survey, there was no attempt to provide social networking interaction of the types provided on the national Connexions Direct website. As the DCSF (2008) says, the Connexions Direct website: “offers advice, support and information for young people aged 13 to 19 on a wide range of issues relevant to their age group. CXD consists of a dedicated website - for online searching on subjects such as careers, learning, health, relationships, finance and leisure activities and a help line where young people can access information, advice and support via the telephone, text messaging, web chat and email. The help line operates from 8.00 am until 2.00 am, 365 days a year, offering useful out-of-hours support to complement local provision”. The website itself

(Connexions Direct, n.d.), provides a range of facilities that include auditory access, and text that can be changed in terms of its size.

The form of access for the LA 14-19 prospectus being reviewed was largely concerned with provision of information. For example, although there was a course finder section, unless a young person had already formulated some ideas of subject interest this section did not provide potential different leads or directions that a young person might take. Having different leads is likely to be particularly important for those young people who seek practical activity, when the levels of job vacancies are limited, and the young people do not know what other possible avenues they might explore. Although sections such as ‘Which subject?’ did provide some opportunities for young people to explore options, these were not clearly linked to examples of what had happened to young people on those courses (particularly those who had chosen options outside their initial range of selected possible jobs).

A key issue with websites that provide details about opportunities is that they rarely provide young people with any insight about what certain jobs or opportunities involve, what they might be doing when they apply for a job or join a course, or what others have felt about their experiences. A new education development from Channel 4 (2008), called ‘The insiders’, offers some examples of insider insights from young people who have been involved in certain jobs or opportunities. This career information project uses short comedy clips developed from real-life work blogs of individuals working in a number of professions (including a policeman, a teacher and a fashion assistant). A screen shot of the doctor’s pod cast being run is shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Screen shot of the web page showing the doctor’s podcast being played (Source: Channel 4, 2009)

An additional issue for young people who might have difficulty with access or navigation of different websites, or who might not want to look beyond a single site, is that created by multiple sites with similar or complementary or contrasting information. In one LA featured in this sub-section, as well as there being an LA 14-19 website, it is also recognised that the local Connexions service has a website that already exists, and is accessed and used by a wide range of young people. This raises the question of whether there is a need for an AP (Area Prospectus) as well. A solution could be to put the AP into the local Connexions service site to link all items to the LA. NAVMS is linked already to the local Connexions service website. So, key concerns are to ensure that any site is not stale, but also that longer-term integration is considered.

It is also true that 14-19 Area Prospectuses may not be specifically designed for use by young people who are NEET; the prospectuses intentionally cover the needs of all 14 to 19 year old young people. A key worker in one LA, developing a 14-19 website, felt that it is important that young people who are

NEET are not confused by the presence of two or more sites, and that the prior existence of a local Connexions service website means that it should be considered for primary use (especially when it is much more widely used). It is clear that a 'one-stop shop' needs to be considered strongly, in terms of integrating data flow and information flow. It is also clear that some of the forms of system being created currently (such as the Common Application Profile form for employers to access – the CAP system) is designed to support users who are primarily readers and writers; it is not designed to support those who work through more social forms of interaction – listening and talking, or those who work through imagery.

4.4.4 Online applications

Some Connexions services in case study visit interviews highlighted changing practices with regard to applications for opportunities and vacancies. It is recognised that some companies now insist on online applications, and that this practice requires both access and abilities to work in an online medium. In one Connexions service, it was envisaged that the LA 14-19 online prospectus would enable young people to apply for opportunities online. At the same time, it was anticipated that this practice might allow the service to track various cohorts of clients and be more aware of their progress.

In another Connexions service, it was recognised that to register for vacancies with companies, young people needed to apply for an application online and to supply an email address. It was recognised that an advantage of applying online is that a young person can partly complete the application form, log off, have a rest and then log back on to complete it. This is clearly important if a client finds filling in forms difficult and wants to do it in 'small bits'. However, for some companies a young person cannot apply unless they register online first; so without an email address it is recognised that they might have a 'real problem'. Some PAs allow their clients to use their work email address in order to overcome this problem (although it is felt that this is not fully effective).

4.5 Providing technology and access to technology

4.5.1 The importance of communications using technology in large Connexions Services

Communications across a Connexions service, and to those outside the service, are vitally important functions. It is clear that some Connexions services have invested in technology in order to support vital elements of communications. In one regional Connexions service, an IT manager reported gaining senior management support in part due to the fact that the region is quite a large geographical area and consequently rapid communication systems are needed. In part, this support has been due to the fact that IT is seen as contributing to a more efficient and cost effective service for clients.

4.5.2 Providing Connexions PAs with mobile telephones appears to be commonly standard practice

Mobile telephones are a main technology that has been used to support communications. Uses of mobile telephones are explored within sub-sections above, and from case study visits and from online questionnaire returns it appears that provision of mobile telephone facilities for PAs and other support workers is common. Uses of mobile telephones at the moment tend to be for voice calls, texts, and in some cases, for email access. Use of mobile telephones for internet access has not been raised in interviews at this time.

4.5.3 Provision of laptops varies according to need

The provision of laptops for PAs and other support workers varies, both according to specific needs and tasks that PAs are undertaking or involved in, and according to the Connexions service. One Connexions service does not have many laptops, and these are usually issued if someone is working on a special project and it is funded through this means. Most of the service's PAs work in school, so they have access to a PC rather than a laptop. Those PAs who undertake home visits do have laptops, but these are booked from a central stock. The main reason for limited access to laptops is lack of funds. A few PAs have expressed concern about carrying a laptop with them, especially if it is large and visible, so the service tends to favour smaller 'notebooks'. Given funds for purchase, the service feels that a supply of these would be an ideal situation. Currently the service provides PAs with

memory sticks, which have all the forms that clients need to complete on them and they also include some basic information on policies so that PAs can refer to these if they can get access to a computer, even if there is no internet access. Another Connexions service has a similar policy with regard to laptops. They have some laptops, but not that many, and PAs need to give a specific reason to book out a laptop (such as wanting to show a careers education DVD). Laptops are used on some of their projects also. A third Connexions service has a bank of ‘thin client’ laptops, which PAs book out if needed. These store very little information on them, and they are really just a means to access the database, so if they are lost or stolen there is no loss of any client data. Most PAs do not use laptops, but most have access to a fixed PC either in their centre or in the schools where they work. The issues raised by a fourth Connexions service were similar. Not all their PAs have laptops, since most have a base in a school or some other office where they can access the service’s systems via PCs. It is felt that laptops are of limited use in the community as the Connexions service need to work within the LA protocols and policies, so PAs cannot let clients have access to their laptop to add to their CV, for example (clients have to use their own PC or a public access one). A further issue raised is the cost of the equipment, and whether staff will actually use the laptop.

A regional Connexions service is focusing more on use of laptops, and wants to develop use of them with staff. The service is conducting a number of laptop trials with different types of machine, including one that weighs very little (no more than a few paper files). Although it is recognised that these devices are very portable, they are also at the moment quite expensive. In this region staff do not feel vulnerable working in the community and carrying laptops. The most commonly used type of laptop is a slim client version, which is used by about 15% of the staff, used by PAs whose work takes them away from the office and where they meet clients in community settings. Laptop access means that staff have all the necessary ICT facilities in the field (as they would in the office). School-based PAs do not have laptops, because they can access databases and other systems through the schools’ computers. The only problem that sometimes arises is the quality of the wireless signal; the 3G wireless network access can be patchy, which means that internet access does not always work. Until the wireless signal becomes more consistent (and this may take 4G technology before it can be resolved) there is always going to be limited use of laptops in certain locations. However, the service sees them as ‘the future’ and a good way of working with the most hard to help clients in the community. Staff are very positive towards the use of laptops (and the ones used are relatively cheap and are secure).

In a second regional Connexions service, laptops are not used so much. Where these are used, the laptop has access to the internet through a 3G dongle. It has been noted recently that there have been difficulties reported by PAs when using laptops with clients. Information about a client comes up on the screen, so when using a laptop the client could see this. If that information is particularly sensitive, then it could damage the relationship between the PA and the client. So the IT support staff now set up pages so that the information that is visible on screen is limited, and there are alert box messages that say something like “refer to entry made on record on July 14”. Staff need to look at a client’s record before they meet them, so they are aware of any issues that will not be visible on the screen. Staff are recommended to be very careful using a laptop if the alert box comes up. It is found that they get used to hiding the screen from the client. Most of the staff who work in Connexions centres or schools have access to either a Connexions PC or a school computer, so they do not need laptops. Some of the PAs who work in the community have laptops, and some of those who work on separately funded projects. There have been complaints from some staff that laptops are too big and heavy; it is recognised that smaller laptops are needed in situations where staff are mobile. The next generation of laptops that the service will buy will probably be smaller and have screens no larger than 9 or 10 inches.

4.6 Projects and approaches to engage young people who are NEET

4.6.1 *Projects around filmmaking and the creative arts*

A number of projects around filmmaking and the creative arts have been developed by Connexions services to engage young people who are NEET and to develop their ICT skills. Additionally, it is

recognised that they have a therapeutic value. Some of these projects have been funded by the Arts Council (see the document called *Worklessness and volunteering*, n.d., for example).

One filmmaking development uses a wider internet television channel that was set up in one region. CentralVision (Coventry Solihull and Warwickshire Partnership Ltd., 2009) was set up through European funding as an economic growth project linked to the need to regenerate the local economy in following the decline of manufacturing industry. The aim of CentralVision is to support the development and prosperity of small and medium-sized employers (SMEs) by providing them with broadband opportunities where they can promote and advertise themselves through a local internet TV channel (see Figure 3). CentralVision has a television studio where programmes for a young person's channel are made and then communicated via the web. Broadcasts of some programmes can also be made via Freeview. The channel is used to promote young people and what they are capable of doing. It advertises vacancies and events, and also includes documentary-style programmes on topics such as what it is like to be a teenager. The young people create films themselves. Groups of 10 young people work for perhaps 2 days a week on this. They do the research by interviewing people on the streets. The ICT available appeals to the young people; they like filming and then putting music to the film. By taking part they receive accreditation. As well as using the ICT they develop other skills; they have to research the topic, and plan a production schedule, before they start to make the programme.

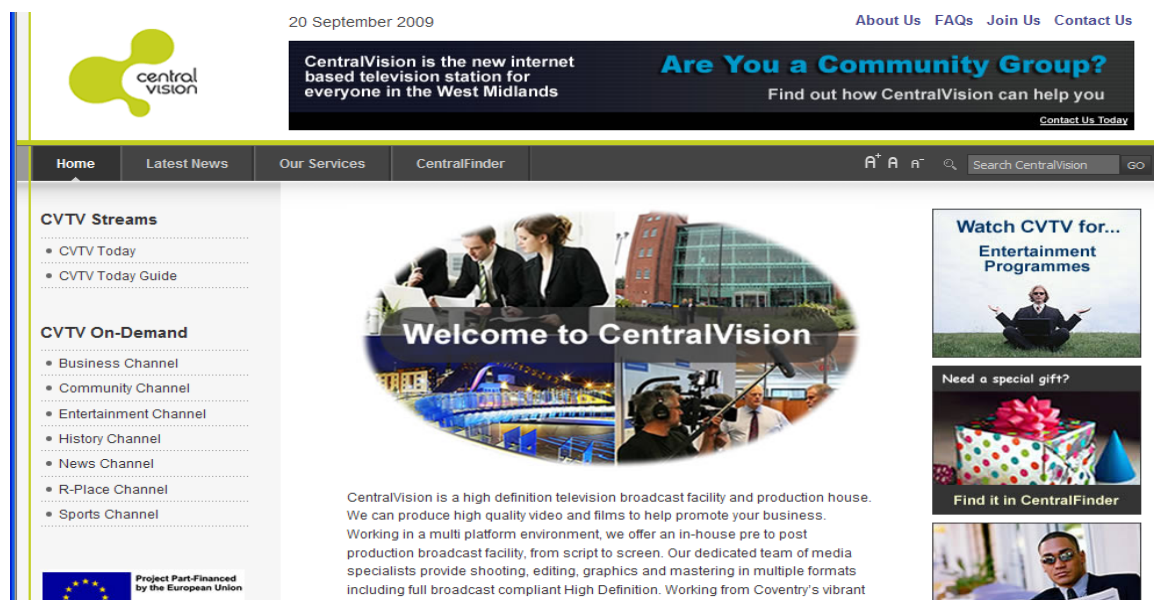


Figure 3: Screen shot of the home page of CentralVision (Source: CentralVision, 2009)

A consultant to the project set up the broadcast side of the facility based on his experience as a community broadcaster. He also had experience of a mix of video and music projects funded by a local council, which were targeted at disadvantaged young people.

There are a number of elements contained within the CentralVision web facility. SMEs can promote themselves through short films, and community groups can also make short films of local interest. The idea is that both will support one another. For example, people who are interested in the performance of a local sports team will logon to see their film and will then become aware of the other aspects to the channel. It is the presence of community programmes that draw the public to the channel so they can see the SME promotions. All the films sent into CentralVision have to be made to and regulated by Ofcom standards.

R-Place is the channel within CentralVision that is run by young people who are NEET and produces films of interest to young people (see Figure 4). The films are important, but the main purpose of R-

Place is to provide young people with learning and development opportunities so they can get off the NEET register.

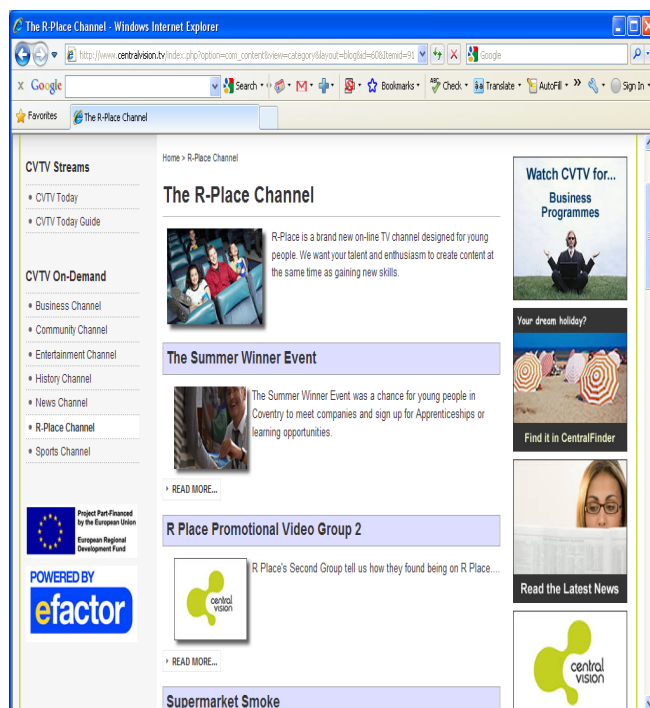


Figure 4: Screen shot of the R-Place Channel page (Source: CentralVision, 2009)

Young people who are NEET can apply to create films to go onto the website. Developing a film consists of a 10-week training programme where young people have to attend for 12 hours, which enables them to claim an Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). They also gain a Young Challenge Award if they successfully complete the course. All the training is done on CentralVision premises, which has excellent production and editing facilities (and is in the same building as the regional Connexions service offices). In addition to studio facilities, CentralVision has portable facilities, which means the young people can do outside broadcasts. The R-Place group (and other community groups) can borrow or rent equipment as the aim is to promote filmmaking in the community.

In order to give the R-Place films a higher profile, CentralVision has a presence on You Tube with a clear link back to the CentralVision site. It is a way of drawing in young people who might not logon directly to CentralVision.

A recent graduate with a degree in communications and society and a City and Guilds in filmmaking works directly with the young people who are NEET. Each cohort of about 10 young people are introduced to camera work, editing and audio skills during their 10 week course. The aim is for each group to produce 2 films, which are at the quality required to broadcast on the CentralVision channel.

The young people who are NEET are recruited through their Connexions personal advisers. If they have some interest in technology and the media then this is regarded as a bonus, but R-Place is mainly looking for those with a general motivation to learn, to get off the NEET register and probably move on to further training at college. Experience of the key support worker indicates that the young people have mixed views about taking part in the course; some are very keen to do it, while others seem more reluctant. However, it seemed to provide a popular opportunity with local young people who are NEET as the first three cohorts filled quickly. The fourth cohort had a slower stream of applicants and the fifth cohort was harder to recruit.

The course starts with an induction day of some 2 to 3 hours. Young people fill out the paper work, there are ice-breaking activities, and they are shown examples of the work of others on previous cohorts. A technical skills phase follows, where they are shown and develop camera skills, they work in tone workshops, and ideas workshops. Following on from basic skills training, the cohort is often split into 2 groups of 5, to make 2 separate films. The filmmaking phase uses ideas that are led by the young people. It is found that if the young people are passionate about what they are doing, they put a lot of effort in.

Films can be about any topic. For example, 'Supermarket Smoke' – a fresh examination of the drugs issue, 'Ghost Story' – a fictional tale of love and betrayal, and 'Bottle Battles' – a spoof sports event. The films are about topics or themes the young people are interested in rather than films about themselves. Some personal profiles have been done on film (see Figure 5), with those young people who are comfortable working with the film team in that way. It is felt that more personal profiles should be done.



Figure 5: Screen shot of the R-Place Channel page giving access to young people's videos (Source: CentralVision, 2009)

Having worked on the programme, the young people get a UK Youth Awards Achievement, which is a modern version of Asdan. They keep a folder and gradually add to it and build it up. They then send them off to be assessed. They can include a DVD with the folder as part of the evidence. There has been a mixed response to the folder system, but most complete it.

As part of the programme the group also has a visit from a personal adviser who helps them draw up an action plan. The main point of the project is to re-engage them rather than to make a film. The aim is also to build up their confidence, although in this respect it is recognised that the 10-week course is probably too short. Sometimes the young people find the planning stage to be the most difficult. Some of them have problems with their literacy and find this hard. Some do not see why a film needs to be planned. Some find the filming itself to be difficult; they need to be guided without having a member of staff take over - more a case of prompting them. Editing does cause some problems but the editing software used, *Final Cut*, is found to be very simple to teach. The young people do most of the editing themselves, with some support. Towards the end of the process, the key support worker does the more advanced things such as getting the film ready to be broadcast. There are now several films being broadcast and many of the young people have been invited to come back to act as peer mentors with subsequent cohorts.

In another Connexions service, it is found that most young people who are NEET can use ICT because it is part of their culture. The service's experience is that typical clients who are NEET like using ICT although a lot depends on the type of ICT they ask the clients who are NEET to use. In particular, this can depend on whether the technology reminds them of school or not. For example, writing a CV would remind them of school. In this Connexions service they are looking at whether it is feasible for these young people to produce a CV and then send it out to employers and colleges in DVD form. It is

felt that this is a lot better than the personal adviser typing out a CV for the client, where there is no real learning taking place and where the client would have difficulty updating it.

Other Connexions services have focused on digital art and media projects, producing and distributing work made by young people. In one local area young people learn a range of technological skills including photography, video and VJing, animation, graphics, web technologies, mobile technologies, music and sound in a project established by the local Connexions service in partnership with a charity and the local authority (with additional funding received from the Arts Council). The project arose from a previous project where young people used GPS technology to record their movements around their home area. The idea of using digital technology in a rural county where traditional transport links are problematic and which has a relatively weak arts infrastructure is part of the appeal of this project. The project has a website where young people can exhibit work. The young people also create blogs as part of the work. Through the project young people learn technical skills and develop social confidence. The project works with existing groups that have been set up by youth workers.

An extension of the project has formed a programme allowing two different geographical areas to share art forms. This programme is concerned with cultures in urban and rural settings. For example, films have been created that explore the rural-urban divide. This is a two-year programme based on digital media. As a part of this programme, young people are being encouraged to create blogs that are placed on a local area website. The website has been set up to enable a wide range of people in the locality to make contributions to the web via blogs. It provides a platform that enables the young people to publish their work. The rural group has been working with a group based in an urban area, and this has led to a range of projects involving media, which are showcased each year. The local rural group mainly consists of targeted young people; some have been excluded from school, while others are school non-attendees. The programme focuses on making good end products and engaging more people, with the longer-term aim to create a community of creative young people. Two of the young people involved with this programme that were interviewed had both been NEET at some stage, but had obtained places at college. While they had mixed experiences of school and few qualifications, they were extremely articulate, positive and motivated. One wished to pursue an interest in digital technology, while the other was more interested in working with children.

In some other Connexions services staff feel that it might be therapeutic to enable young people to express themselves with cameras, to enable them to be 'put on the map', and to provide them with something to talk about. It is recognised that some of these young people have a lot of frustration that needs to find an external channel, and it is felt that they could obtain a sense of achievement if they took part in making a small film. It is recognised that many young people who are NEET are caught up with emotional issues, and that many are very upset about life. On the other hand it is recognised that there are those who say they cannot be bothered with technology and all they want to do is find a job and not learn in any particular way. It is felt to be important for young people to experience technology in a way that is not just typing, as many of them think that ICT is typing, and this is a sedentary activity that may not appeal to them. Often the young people only have a limited attention span and cannot sit down and work at something, so they find it hard to pass a key skills test. In one local area, young people who are NEET used ICT for creative purposes. A number of young people who were NEET on one estate made a video about what it was like living on the estate. It was felt that this sort of endeavour would make a useful Activity Agreement, especially as the young people were very engaged with the activity. Although the film was not broadcast they all received copies of it. Not only did it give them a voice, it was also useful to put on their CVs.

4.6.2 Pilots on social networking sites

Some Connexions services are developing, piloting or are involved in LA provision of social networking sites. In one Connexions service, a social networking site is provided for 13 to 19 year olds using the existing sites *Facebook* and *Bebo* but with safeguarding measures built in to enable frequent moderation of material and restricted access to certain resources or sites. The purpose is to encourage young people to take part in online discussions and forums on topics of interest to them. It will also enable 'decision makers' in the LA to obtain the views of young people and consult with

them through this facility. Young people will be supported in their use of the site through their schools, youth clubs and other organisations. The site was being tested with a pilot group and the plan was to launch it in autumn 2009. Some form of accredited outcomes was anticipated for users. In order for the Connexions service to be happy with the development it must be proven that the site is entirely secure.

Other Connexions services have other pilots, and one Connexions service has 4 or 5 pilots with social web tools. Again the Connexions service has to overcome some barriers that inhibit the use of such tools. There is a fear that young people will misuse it and LA and Connexions staff need to learn how to use these facilities in line with protocols for safeguarding young people. In this private Connexions service a policy for social web use is being put together. It is anticipated that some PAs will set up a site for a particular group of clients, such as pregnant teenagers and young mothers, who can support and guide each other. At the same time, PAs are requesting developments of access to and a social web presence on *Facebook*, *Bebo* and *MySpace*. The prime motivation is to find out what young people are doing. Young people on these sites normally state what job or course they are doing and this knowledge would enable Connexions staff to record their current status. In a pilot in one urban Connexions service a network was accessed without contacting people, to try to find out from the public pages what people were doing.

4.6.3 Using social networking sites

A number of Connexions and related services are considering the uses of social networking sites, but there are clearly concerns about safety and LA protocols. In one Connexions service, for example, they do not use these sites but they are interested in their potential. Protocols and protection are recognised as key issues to consider and address, as the service does not want staff to use their own social networking sites.

A key informant in one Connexions service believes that social networking sites are likely to be used and of value for particular groups who share a common situation, such as “young mums”. Although the Connexions service believes they could establish such practices, they also recognise the need to look into protection and how sites are monitored. Anxiety about cyber bullying, use of inappropriate language and use of racist language would all need to be allayed.

Some Connexions services recognise the cost of establishing and running social networking sites. One Connexions service believes that for them to do this from internal funds they would have to stop doing something else. Therefore, initiatives such as this will have to be either funded by external money or be shown to be more effective than other things so that these could be dropped.

Another Connexions service is looking at the idea of using sites such as *Facebook* and *Bebo* as a way of contacting clients. The idea would be for a young person to choose to have a PA as their *Facebook* friend. In yet another Connexions service they are not sure if clients who are NEET are the ones who are using facilities like *Facebook*. It is felt likely that there is a difference in young people’s use of mobile telephones and their use of computers and the internet (supported by evidence from the Passey, Williams and Rogers report, 2008).

One Connexions service has a young people focus group to help them with ideas about future development. This focal group was asked about how Connexions could make better contact with them. They suggested using social networking sites, so the service is thinking about setting up a ‘student room’ on a site where people could ask questions and other students could give answers. It is felt that a forum like this might work well but that there would be a need for a moderator such as a PA to make sure ‘no nonsense was being exchanged’. In this instance, it is recognised that there would be a need to look into the safety issues. Another Connexions service recognises that it has not made much progress on this form of development because of protocol issues. The service likes the idea of using social networking sites because young people are attracted to them, even those who live in the poorest areas and who do not have computers at home, but can access *Facebook* and *Bebo* from a friend’s house.

There is clearly a need to monitor and evaluate developments and progress in this area. It is clear that a modern service for young people needs to consider how to use social networking sites safely and effectively.

4.6.4 Concerns about using social networking sites

The development of social networking sites raises concerns other than safety and protocols. Some PAs feel that it encourages young people who are NEET to stay at home and not to meet other people. The importance of getting young people who are NEET out of the house so they meet people face to face is recognised, so it is felt that use of these sites might be counter productive. It is felt by some PAs that young people can already use the Connexions Direct Website (see Section 4.1) if they want to send messages or get advice.

One Connexions service has used *Facebook* to track young people over a summer vacation period, but encountered issues with using public social networking sites. This raised the possible need for a dedicated social networking site. In another Connexions service, social networking is low down their list of priorities. As a tool they do not feel that it has that much value. They are aware of the growing interest in this area, but do not know how comfortable the service would be exchanging information on something like *Facebook*, not knowing how secure it would be.

4.6.5 Technology can be used to engage young people who are NEET but it depends on how it is used

A number of key informants indicated the need to think carefully about how ICT was being used, so that it avoided simplistic uses, for just typing up CVs, for example. Some uses of ICT are recognised as being successful, such as getting young people involved in digital arts. But at the same time it is recognised that there is a difficulty in attracting clients who are NEET as many view anything involving ICT to be boring. This is possibly because it has mainly been used in the past to write CVs, so it is felt to be important to have something different to offer them. Certainly typing is regarded as a sedentary activity that may not appeal to them. Often the young people involved only have a limited attention span and cannot sit down and work at something for any length of time.

4.6.6 Using summer school projects linked to sports and technology

Some Connexions services are using summer school projects linked to sports and technology to engage young people. For example, *Playing for Success* is a project undertaken in many areas with local sports organisations, not only with young people who are NEET but also with younger students in after-school clubs. *Playing for Success* is a national scheme initiated by the DCSF, with the aim to drive up attainment levels by mixing learning and sport. Activities involved aim to help students to concentrate on basic skills and ICT. It is felt that this project particularly might be more relevant to school students who may become NEET at a later age.

There are a number of projects in one LA where groups of young people make films or video drama. The Youth Offending Team use these forms of activities a lot in their Summer Arts programme. This is a programme covering a wide range of arts areas, and technology is used in the recording of music, making films, and 'DJ-ing'. The Youth Service also organises a targeted activity programme in the summer that is targeted at young people who are NEET.

4.6.7 Mobile youth buses with computers on board visiting clients in their own neighbourhood

Some LA and Connexions services use buses to take facilities and resources to the young people, rather than them coming to a distant location from their communities. One Connexions service uses youth buses, which go out to youth clubs (a sort of roving mobile library). Youth workers invite the clients in, although there can be a lot of 'no shows'. The bus is also taken to Leisure Centres, in an attempt to cut down the amount of distance young people have to travel. Laptops are used, which are WiFi connected, and youth workers support clients on aspects such as CVs. The youth workers also engage them with other activities such as helping to practice for their driving theory test. It is found that the Leisure Centres are good places to contact clients. This Connexions service has just set up a

Job Shop at a Leisure Centre and they are hoping to see the numbers who call in go up during the summer months. A spin-off is that they also get adults coming up to them and asking about opportunities for them.

In another LA a library service bus with PCs and other technology visits and provides facilities for local communities in the LA. In one project they have provided specific training sessions for young people who are NEET, offering two sessions a week to groups of young people over a period of 2 months. A youth group that supports young people in one local area brought 8 young people to the bus for these sessions, focusing on creative uses of digital technologies.

4.6.8 The role of Connexions in engaging clients and re-introducing them to learning in technology by linking it to work

A point made by a number of key informants in Connexions services indicated that too much use of ICT communication between PAs in Connexions centres and clients who are NEET in their homes might not be useful. It is felt that an important role of text or email communication is to inform clients about appointments and other opportunities, and that it is important to encourage them out of the house and to engage with people and projects (such as a film project). Some Connexions service workers have indicated that longer-term as well as shorter-term engagement through the media of ICT should be considered and developed. Some interest has been shown, for example, in developing an ICT skills programme for young people who are NEET within the context of preparation for job applications and entry into employment.

4.6.9 CLCs running informal learning projects with young people who are NEET and those in school likely to become NEET

While Connexions services are concerned with projects and pilots to engage young people who are NEET, other groups are looking at ways to support young people who may become NEET in the future. In one LA, the City Learning Centres (CLCs) have a performance agreement setting out how they are to support clients who are NEET within the 14 to 19 agenda across the LA. In particular this is to “Pilot the use of hand-held technologies to support learning with a single NEET cohort (6 to 10 students). Plan, produce and circulate an evaluation of the pilot activities. Implement a programme of accredited curriculum activities aimed at engaging and empowering 25 to 40 NEET students”. The CLC is also preparing a report for Becta on topics such as the Foundation Level of the Creative and Media Diploma and how they contribute to information, advice and guidance within the LA.

In the past the CLC has run a range of taster activities for young people who are NEET and intends to turn some of these activities into accredited learning opportunities. A key aim of the Participation Group within the LA (the LA now uses the phrase ‘not participating’ rather than NEETs) is to develop more innovative programmes that introduce young people who are NEET to technology. The CLC is equipped to either bring young people who are NEET into the centre and give them access to technology, or to take the technology out into the community in cafes or clubs, to run more informal sessions there. Another aspect of this development work is to gain a better understanding of the characteristics of the NEET cohort so that provision can be tailor-made for them. However, it is intended that whatever is developed needs to be in the form of accredited learning. There are currently a lot of non-accredited activities provided for young people who are NEET and this needs to be brought within the Foundation Tier Level learning to meet the needs of the raising of the school leaving age.

The training offered by the CLC is practical in nature. The CLC provides technologies that young people do not get access to in schools. The CLC in one locality offers a specialism in creative media, so it does a lot with video production. Another site is more concerned with design and manufacture.

Another key part of the CLC development work with young people who are NEET is to promote the idea of informal learning where the young people do not attend a college but learn alongside people who are not seen as teachers – such as youth workers and key workers. CLC staff can support key workers in the early phase and then reduce their involvement as the key workers take over. So young

people who are NEET do not have to come to the CLC, which is located on a school site. The CLC can take the learning to where the young people feel at home. The CLC feels it is in a good position to take the lead on providing accredited informal learning. They have good contacts with other sectors of the LA and other agencies through the Participation Group. They are likely to have the capacity to be able to offer programmes for up to 40 young people.

A CLC in another geographical area is based at the centre of a network of 15 secondary schools. These schools have identified a cohort of students who are at risk of becoming NEET. The CLC is running a pre-NEET project based on pro-active ways to engage the students. Rather than excluding the students from school, the CLC rent an office building where about 30 Year 10 and 11 students go to learn key skills including a wide range of ICT skills. Here the students are supported in more of an adult environment and the main aim is to prepare them for employment. The project is currently in a pilot year with a special staff team. The students spend 4 days a week at the centre and every Friday they attend the CLC. This takes the form of a 6-week block of activities and 10 students are included at a time. The aim of the support is to improve students' reading age by about 2 years – a very ambitious target. The students are tested when they first arrive. Each student is loaned an ACER notebook and installed on this is appropriate software. On the notebook are various e-books, chosen to appeal to 15 year olds.

The students write a book as a part of their programme, and this can take a variety of forms and the books are often illustrated. The students work with photo manipulation software to learn ICT skills at the same time as they learn reading skills. The book is produced at the centre and they use this book as a resource for other students. The students are also introduced to Podcasting with video. They are asked to keep a diary when they visit the CLC. They work with digital cameras as well as doing written work and they create and publish posters.

This is a small pilot but has the support of the local head teachers. The CLC is now looking at ways to get the young peoples' work accredited. Part of the success of the project is that the CLC is made as 'un-school' like as possible.

4.6.10 Setting up a mentor contact facility for those likely to become NEET

Regional broadband consortia (RBCs) are also considering support for young people who might become NEET. One RBC has set up a specific project to offer mentor contact facilities for young people, including young people who are in hospital and who are travellers. They have a learning platform up and running (using UniServity) and have 45 registered users, mostly adults at the moment, some tutors, LA advisors or EAL specialists. They intend to roll out training to groups of young people with the intention of gaining feedback and initiating collaborative work between tutors and career advisors and the young people.

There are 17 LAs within the RBC, some of the LAs with specific ICT advisors and some without. All LAs who wanted a project to offer resources and facilities to support children not in school support it. The current project is a pilot, offering a portal, with a single sign-on, using Shibboleth. It is known that there are pockets of 'not-school' activity across the region, but it has been difficult to find detailed information to support the project. Provision of ICT facilities for the children likely to use this portal has been an issue: tutors can sit with children but uses of ICT can be 'buried'; patchy internet access can occur, as 3G cards do not always work; and filtering may be a problem. Consequently, frustration in the system can arise.

The Uniservity platform is designed for use with Key Stage 3 and 4 students predominantly. It has a learning area, a staff room area, and an information area. In the project, students will access the learning area where they can look at subject-based resources. LAs will each have their own area, but will share exemplar resources. There will be an e-portfolio area, with space to put up files, and to create and use wikis. However, this facility tends to be file-based, so there is also a Moodle server acting as a portal. Login will be via this latter platform initially. Video provision and access for users

would probably require an additional video server, and video content would need to be created if resources of this nature were required.

The RBC has provided the infrastructure for the project. However, it is clear that future use will depend upon funding if certain levels of access are to be increased. If video use is to be supported then there will be a need for an additional video server. If tutors are to access the resources at any time and in any location, then tutors may need laptops, and for young people to access the resources they may also need ICT equipment. It is also recognised that the skill set of tutors and young people may need to be developed.

Costs associated with these forms of additional access and resource could be in the region of:

- For filtered internet access, £120 for a BT line connection, line rental costs, and £21 per month for filtered access (this would apply to many young people perhaps, and to some 16 of the 50 tutors registered on the project).
- For a laptop, perhaps £250 with Flash, open source Word, an internet search engine, and broadband access (this would apply to 16 of the 50 tutors registered on the project).
- Training (3 days each for 5 of the 50 tutors, but just-in-time training rather than traditional courses).
- A video server (perhaps costing £3,500).
- Filming and inputting data that will provide perhaps 200 video resources (requiring 1 day per film for filming, 1 day per film for editing, and 1 or 2 days in total to design and embed the film).

4.6.11 Courses, jobs and work-based learning opportunities that involve uses of technology

For young people moving onto courses, jobs or work-based learning opportunities, the involvement of ICT is not always clear to them. Table 4 shows, for each occupational group identified within a database system of a regional Connexions service, the number of training vacancies across the region in 2008, as well as the range of opportunities. 'Opportunity type' indicates the number of different training descriptions or types of training offered within the broader occupational category.

Table 4: Numbers of training vacancies in a Connexions region in 2008 (both youth training and E2E)

Vacancy Type	Opportunity type	Number of Vacancies*
Agricultural Worker	1	10
Banking	1	6
Bar work	1	100
Care/Children	3	297
Clerical/administration	3	101
Electrical Engineering	1	99
Engineering Other	2	123
Fitness Instructor	1	99
Gen Service Unskilled	4	209
General Construction Trades	1	213
Hairdresser	4	195
Health - other	1	355
ICT Technician	2	143
Mechanical Engineering	1	4
Motor Vehicle Trades	2	145
Paint/Decorator	2	103
Plumber	1	99
Preparatory Training	11	1289
Printing/Screen print	1	10
Retail Assistant	2	65
Service Engineering	1	99
Transport - other	1	19
Travel Agency Work	1	14
Grand Total	48	3797

(* Note - some providers offer training for an open-ended number of young people. When this is the case, the number 99 represents this open-ended number for recording purposes. In these instances, this number is included within these figures.)

In 2008, there were 48 different types of vacancies recorded, offering some 3,797 potential vacancies in total (including those where open-ended opportunities were recorded as 99 vacancies). Many of these vacancies fell within the areas of preparatory training, health, care and childcare. Other than ICT technician, it is unclear which other areas of training might involve ICT.

Table 5 shows that in 2008 there were 640 types of employment or apprenticeship vacancies available across the region (for all age groups). Across the region, this amounted to some 1,491 vacancies in total.

Table 5: Numbers of employment vacancies in a Connexions region in 2008 (including Advanced Modern Apprenticeships and Foundation Modern Apprenticeships)

Vacancy Type	Opportunity type	Number of Vacancies
Accountancy Technician	9	10
Agricultural Engineering	1	1
Architectural Technician	1	5
Army	2	4
Bakery Worker	1	2
Bar work	1	2
Beauty Therapist/Beautician	2	2
Business	1	1
Butchery	1	1
Canvasser	3	3
Car Sales	1	1
Care/Children	5	9

Care/Elderly	4	11
Carpenter/joiner	2	7
Chain Person	1	1
Civil Eng. Tech.	2	4
Clerical/admin	260	309
Computer Aided Design	6	7
Computer Operator	1	1
Curtain/blind fitter	1	1
Customer Service Operative	6	6
Dancer	1	1
Dentistry Support work	11	17
Dog Groomer	1	1
Electrical Engineering	7	40
Electrician	3	5
Electronics Technician	2	3
Engineering Other	7	10
Environment/Conservation Work	1	1
Factory Process Worker	10	13
Fire Service	1	1
Food Prep/Service	18	27
Garden/Horticultural worker	6	6
Gas Fitter	1	1
Gen Practical Unskilled	2	4
General Building Operator	1	2
General Construct Trades	14	322
General Engineering	20	139
General Financial Work	1	1
General Skilled Trades	1	1
Hairdresser	44	173
Hotel Receptionist	2	2
ICT Programmer	3	3
ICT Technician	6	7
Insurance Tech	1	1
Laboratory Assistant	4	6
Leisure/Swim Attendant	4	7
Managerial/Professional	2	2
Marine Engineering	1	3
Marketing	1	1
Mechanical Engineering	9	22
Merchant Navy	5	7
Motor Vehicle paint sprayer	1	1
Motor Vehicle Parts	4	4
Motor Vehicle Trades	36	147
Nursing all levels	1	1
Plumber	5	8
Printing/Screen print	1	1
Professional Sport	1	1
Retail Assistant	27	28
Royal Navy	1	5
Scientific Lab Work	1	1
Service Engineering	6	6
Sign writer	2	2
Surveyor Building	1	1
Telesales	8	10
Travel Agency Work	5	11

Warehouse/Stores/Deliver	35	41
Welder/Fabricator	3	5
Window Cleaner	1	1
Grand Total	640	1491

Many of these vacancies fell within the areas of general construction trades, clerical and administration, hairdressing, motor vehicle trades, and general engineering. It is clear that many of these vacancies are of a practical nature, while some are likely to additionally involve quite high levels of social interaction. Hairdressing (and some other occupations) may also involve highly creative aspects. Apart from the jobs within the categories of ICT programmer and ICT technician, however, it is unclear which other jobs might involve aspects of ICT.

Table 6 shows the numbers of employment and apprenticeship positions that were filled by 16 to 19 year old young people in 2008. Figures for the entire region, and for a specific LA, are shown separately.

Table 6: Numbers of 16 to 19 year old residents starting employment, Advanced Modern Apprenticeships or Foundation Modern Apprenticeships in 2008

SOC codes	Region Total	LA Total
Catering Occupations	619	167
Childcare and Related Occupations	250	114
Clerical and Secretarial Occupations	1215	503
Electric/Electronic Trades	184	25
Hairdressing and Related Occupations	462	156
Health Care Occupations	158	53
Labour and Other Unskilled Industrial Work	219	77
Mail Workers and Other Messengers	28	12
Managerial and Professional Occupations	62	13
Metal Forming and Related Trades	107	11
Other Elementary Occupations	546	65
Other Occupations Agriculture/Forestry/Fishing	63	17
Other Personal Service Occupations	154	42
Other Skilled Trades	218	81
Personal/Protective Services	81	2
Plant and Machine Operatives	169	121
Protective Service Occupations	173	88
Sales Occupations	1384	415
Skilled Construction Trades	882	237
Skilled Engineering Trades	459	108
Textile/Garment and Related Trades	4	0
Travel Attendants	19	8
Unskilled Workers Service Sector	74	4
Vehicle Trades	258	95
Grand Total	8703	2997

Table 6 shows that most of the employment or apprenticeship positions filled were in clerical or secretarial occupations, sales occupations, and skilled construction trades. While these work areas are practical in nature, many are also likely to rely upon quite high levels of social interaction (but less so on creative activity). Across the region, 7,573 young people filled the 8,703 employment and apprenticeship positions. Across the LA, 2,623 young people filled the 2,997 employment and apprenticeship positions. There was no indication of ICT-related positions being filled.

Table 7 shows the numbers of training positions that were filled by 16 to 19 year old young people in 2008. Figures for the entire region, and for one LA, are given separately.

Table 7: Numbers of 16 to 19 year old residents starting New Deal (where these were notified by clients), E2E or Work-Based Learning in 2008

SOC codes	Regional Total	LA Total
Catering Occupations	25	10
Childcare and Related Occupations	112	26
Clerical and Secretarial Occupations	88	36
Electric/Electronic Trades	11	1
Hairdressing and Related Occupations	105	20
Health Care Occupations	29	7
Labour and Other Unskilled Industrial Work	12	1
Mail Workers and Other Messengers	1	0
Metal Forming and Related Trades	2	0
Other Elementary Occupations	1363	374
Other Occupations Agriculture/Forestry/Fishing	34	3
Other Personal Service Occupations	36	6
Other Skilled Trades	15	8
Personal/Protective Services	3	0
Plant and Machine Operatives	9	2
Protective Service Occupations	27	6
Sales Occupations	59	27
Skilled Construction Trades	210	99
Skilled Engineering Trades	6	1
Unskilled Workers Service Sector	3	0
Vehicle Trades	97	21
Grand Total	3014	1012

Across the region, 2,667 young people filled the 3,014 training positions. Across the LA, 920 young people filled the 1,012 training positions. In terms of courses, Table 7 shows that most young people aged 16 to 19 years in the LA chose ‘other’ elementary occupations, or skilled construction trades. It appears that these courses may well be practically oriented. Overall, many employment and apprenticeship opportunities that are taken up by young people in the LA involve practical activity and social interaction. There appear to be far fewer opportunities available, and there is a much lower take-up, in areas concerned with more creative endeavour. There is no indication of positions being filled that are ICT-related. As Hughes and Grattion (2009) state: “Essentially, the process of matching talents to opportunities is a ‘hit-and-miss affair’, and there are vast economic, social and human consequences. Also, occupations used to be relatively stable over time; now, old occupations are disappearing, new ones are being invented at a rapid rate, and the work that is done within an occupational title may be considerably different from what it was a few years ago”. There are clearly implications, not only in terms of how young people find out about what is done within any occupation, but also for those who create categories that describe these for young people.

4.6.12 Records of achievements, abilities and needs of young people

Some projects are seeking to use ICT, to develop ICT skills, and to develop other wider longer-term education and employment skills. One reported project (Ellingham Employment Service, 2008) sought to enable a small group of learners, 10 learners in a group of 15, to gain supported employment through a specifically designed programme of training and support. It was recognised that these learners had specific learning needs; most had received additional support while they were in mainstream education. It was important for these young people to appreciate that their learning disability was creating difficulties in terms of learning and attainment. This led to some emotional and behaviour difficulties for some of them, as they became disillusioned with learning. It was clear that unsupported work placements did not work for them. Their concerns about hiding their limitations meant that they did not seek help.

The University of East London had pioneered use of multimedia for people with learning disabilities. The university provided digital media and ICT training, with learners also receiving ‘travel training’,

and peer mentoring. Learners needed to develop a multimedia CV, 'to encourage the increase of self-worth and motivation, starting, as it did, with the creation of a list of the learner's abilities, talents and aspirations. Over a period of 4 sessions over 4 weeks, by using video, photography, interviews, internet, music, graphics and ICT, LLDDs developed a minidisc containing details of education and prior attainment, aspirations and potential'. The concept was to present to an employer an holistic CV of a person who might 'not come across well at interview'. The CVs were also presented to 'a large audience at an award ceremony held at UEL'.

The creation of the multimedia CV was seen to gain 'the learner's attention on developing their own Individual Learning Plan, which formed the basis of their vocational and personal development. This enabled staff to tailor the teaching to the specific needs of the individual learner. Attendance and timekeeping to the programme was excellent, particularly as learners gained confidence and motivation through the attainment of goals in their ILPs and the realisation of ownership of their learning and the achievements made'.

Outcomes were positive. Of the 14 young people recruited to the course, 10 went on to do supported work experience. Support prior to and during work placements was put in place by support staff and by employers. Support staff met weekly to assess learner attainment and to plan further. The report indicates that as a direct result of the project, 6 of the 10 learners entered paid employment, 1 learner was offered full-time employment as a result of a successful work experience placement and now works on an ad hoc basis as a service user tester with UEL under Supported Permitted Work, 1 learner enrolled onto an NVQ1 Motor Body Repair course, 1 learner was amongst the finalists shortlisted as a MENCAP Advocate and is now a volunteer at a community centre, and 1 learner enrolled on the London Underground work experience programme.

The reasons given for the success of the project were the approaches used by staff treating 'each learner as an individual, engaging them in a tailored individual learning plan to progress them from being NEET towards and into employment and/or further training', and staff remained 'in touch with many of the learners, offering support and advice as required'. It was also reported that the 'innovatory and practical elements enabled the learners to develop personally and vocationally within realistic goals and vocational expectations'. Although it was recognised that the project was staff-intensive, it was also recognised that this 'enabled a flexibility of teaching/support in the workplace according to the needs of the learner and of the employer'.

A Becta-supported intervention study has also focused in part on the development of a multimedia CV by young people. This initiative was not so staff-intensive in terms of direct support, and has engaged young people who are not necessarily in the same category as those in the Ellingham Employment Services project. The Becta-supported study is reported separately (Passey, Davies and Rogers, 2010).

4.7 Features of different uses

When considering uses of ICT that support projects within Connexions and related services, a number of features become clear:

- The technologies involved in each project may well be different, as might the technological links between them also. Business processes defining links are not always exploited or clear. If support for this area is needed, then there will need to be an understanding of the different technologies that are used, and how these might vary within an LA and its providers, and indeed across LAs.
- The people involved in each specific technological use are often quite different in terms of their remits and approaches. Understanding these will provide insights at operational and organisational levels, and could help to define business processes required.
- The links between each use of ICT across an LA or Connexions service are potentially important. Technologies in some cases have been deployed for different purposes relatively independently. Yet it is clear that the value for the young person is likely to arise from an integration of value within and across these uses, rather than being provided with value from individual uses alone.

- A focus within an LA on one or more uses can support or bring forward a cultural approach to the arena. If a focus is on recording and reporting, for example, then challenges are likely to be data driven. If a focus is on maintaining contact, then challenges are likely to be engagement driven.
- There will be issues concerned with data protection and safeguarding within this arena. Indeed, some LAs appear to have developed distinctly different applications without having any linking between them, in order to avoid potential risks associated with data protection and safeguarding.

Looking across a range of LAs, a picture emerges of a number of different but distinctive ways in which technologies are being used to support those who work with young people who are NEET. Six distinctly different ways of using technology can be identified (these are explored in more details in Section 4.9). Currently, these different uses are often quite distinct, and are handled by different personnel, or used at different times in specific circumstances. At this stage, the linking (or potential benefits that might arise from linking) between these forms of use has not been developed to any great extent.

4.8 LA perspectives on technology being used to support young people who are NEET

It is clear that technology alone does not drive directions or approaches of support. Although technologies could drive certain features of support, other dimensions have a major role. For this reason, three different perspectives (following the ideas of Corbett and Rossman, 1989) are taken within this review:

- A cultural perspective (concerned with purpose, focus, aims and intentions of an LA and those who work to support young people who are NEET).
- An organisational (called ‘political’ in the Corbett and Rossman study) perspective (concerned with the management, responsibility, and how services are provided with regard to support of young people who are NEET).
- A technological (called ‘technical’ in the Corbett and Rossman study) perspective (concerned with identifying those technologies that are being used, those that could be used, and how readily these could be put into place).

4.9 Uses and technologies themselves

The technologies used by support services are currently often quite distinctly separated from each other. Indeed, the purposes of the technologies are quite distinct in a number of respects. Data collation and reporting about the status of young people who are NEET, for example, is not necessarily seen as having links to opportunities that are available and involve young people. Commonly reported forms of technologies associated with specific uses are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Uses and typical forms of technologies used in practices concerned with young people who are NEET

Uses	Forms and features of technologies
Engaging and maintaining contact with young people	Technologies are often concerned with public presentation, public internet access, or with uses of mobile technologies or email
Courses, jobs and work-based learning opportunities that involve uses of technology	Technologies are often concerned with presentational applications, research through the internet, use of specific online resources, imagery and video creation
Records of achievements, abilities and needs of young people	Technologies are often concerned with writing and CV-creation applications, or with uses of virtual learning environments or e-portfolios
Matching interests and choices of young people with opportunities that arise in terms of jobs, vacancies, apprenticeships, and work-based learning	Technologies are often concerned with data bases where meta-tagging or search features are available
Collecting and reporting opportunities of vacancies that exist	Technologies are often concerned with data bases where search features are available, or where information is provided in online web-based forms that can be navigated
Collecting and reporting data about the status of young people who are NEET within a locality, area or region	Technologies are often concerned with data bases where statistical and presentational forms of reviews can be selected or developed

4.10 Uses and organisation

The technologies used for different purposes are supported by, and often used by, quite different groups and users. Some commonly identified support groups and user groups are shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Uses of technologies and typical groups involved in practices concerned with young people who are NEET

Uses	Supported by	Used by
Engaging and maintaining contact with young people	Supported by LA groups, Connexions, youth workers, or partnership groups	Used by young people directly, and by those who support young people in some cases
Courses, jobs and work-based learning opportunities that involve uses of technology	Supported by providers and employers	Used by young people directly
Records of achievements, abilities and needs of young people	Supported by LA groups and sometimes providers	Used by young people directly
Matching interests and choices of young people with opportunities that arise in terms of jobs, vacancies, apprenticeships, and work-based learning	Supported by LA groups	Used by other LA groups, and with young people
Collecting and reporting opportunities of vacancies that exist	Supported by LA groups	Used by other LA groups, and some by young people directly
Collecting and reporting data about the status of young people who are NEET within a locality, area or region	Supported by LA groups	Used by LA groups

4.11 Uses and culture

A focus on a specific use of a technology could well lead to a focus on certain activities with young people, which are then identifiable in terms of the culture of support or interaction. Ideally, all of the uses that are listed in Section 4.9 (Table 8) are important, and potentially uses should be balanced according to local circumstances and need. This implies that a balance of support cultures may need to be considered across and within an LA. Potential cultures concerned with each technological use are outlined in Table 10.

Table 10: Technological uses and possible cultures related to practices concerned with young people who are NEET

Use	Potential associated cultures
Engaging and maintaining contact with young people	An informal culture is likely to persist, with youth workers taking a lead role in terms of contact with young people
Courses, jobs and work-based learning opportunities that involve uses of technology	A culture of provision is likely to persist, with providers and employers taking a lead role in terms of information and the development of opportunity
Records of achievements, abilities and needs of young people	A culture of support is likely to persist, with advisers and mentors working with young people to consider their strengths, needs and the building of their profiles over time
Matching interests and choices of young people with opportunities that arise in terms of jobs, vacancies, apprenticeships, and work-based learning	A culture of choice matching is likely to persist, where young people's interests are used to link to possible courses, work-based learning or jobs
Collecting and reporting opportunities of vacancies that exist	A culture of job drive is likely to persist, where the need to collate information and consider the wider job needs are a focus
Collecting and reporting data about the status of young people who are NEET within a locality, area or region	A culture of data driven concerns is likely to persist, where data is recorded and reported, and used to determine decision making in different ways

5. AN ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

5.1 Who provides the primary contact with young people who are NEET

The provision of support for young people who are NEET will depend upon particular individual circumstances of each young person. From an organisational perspective, however, the support provision involves a number of agencies and groups, with different and specific remits. In one LA, for example, Connexions workers were the primary contact for young people who are NEET, but primary contact could for some young people be through targeted youth support key workers, the youth offending team, the teenage pregnancy team, LLDD transition mentors, substance misuse teams, or the LAC (care leavers). From a technology perspective, this width of contact groups and agencies offers particular challenges (and opportunities). It is clear, however, that primary contact is usually in the hands of Connexions and related services. This was the case reported in all 6 LAs responding in the online questionnaire, and for all case study visits. It seems important, therefore, that technology-based solutions and technology support provision is centred on Connexions and related services.

5.2 How many, and which, groups, agencies and individuals in LAs are involved in supporting young people who are NEET as well as youth workers and Connexions services

Details from the 6 LAs responding in the online questionnaire indicated that the width of support groups, agencies and individuals is generally high. Two of the LAs indicated that there were many groups, agencies and individuals involved; one indicated 12 are involved, while another indicated 9 being involved. From across the range of responses, the groups, agencies, and individuals involved include: Connexions and related services; youth workers and service; youth offending team; care leaving team; adolescent resource teams; educational welfare service; schools; FE colleges; extended schools; education business partnerships; primary care trusts (CAMS and teenage pregnancy teams); Job Centre Plus (Care to Learn and EMA); Way 2 Work; supporting people teams; adult learning teams; safer and stronger communities teams; third sector housing groups; voluntary sector groups (including the Princes Trust); and advice services.

The ways in which these groups relate will depend upon the specific LA. In one LA, since March 2007 there has been a NEET Strategy Group in place in the LA, which is a sub-group of the 14-19 Strategy Group, working to the 14-19 Learning Partnership. A Learning and Skills Task Group also looks at how to address challenges in this area. The key agencies present at strategic and consultative meetings include the LA, Connexions, the local FE college, schools, the LSC, work-based learning providers, the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and Jobcentre Plus. There is a key worker in the LA who looks at and works with young people who might be potentially NEET. This Youth Engagement person is concerned with the socialisation of young people, and there is an active Youth Development Group in the LA. From a technological perspective, the LA has an ICT Strategic Group, and a head of virtual learning, leading on the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme. It is clear that for support to be effective, certain information should be passed to primary contact support workers. While groups and agencies exist, and technology is developed in certain places, LAs appear to be at early stages in the development of technology systems that will allow this to happen effectively, and to provide the appropriate details to key workers according to their specific needs and support requirements. Developments towards multi-agency access and support are likely to be aided by a key worker being placed in the Connexions service, who has an LA remit to work across the multiple agencies and partners to develop a cross-agency organisational technology. The reason for the need for this position is clear; a description above of organisational links across an LA indicates that while individuals often work within teams, the relationship between teams relies more upon meetings and documentation, rather than on individuals working across teams, building up and drawing together key elements.

5.3 Whether there are specific individuals who are responsible for specific technologies or for technology initiatives

At the moment, not all LAs have individuals within Connexions or related services who have remits or responsibilities for technology. Of 6 LAs responding in the online questionnaire, 4 did have individuals with specific technology responsibilities, while one did not. These responsibilities lay,

however, in areas concerned with the management of the CCIS, the management of text messaging, of e-ILP, the area wide prospectus and the common application process. While these aspects are important, there are other longer-term strategic developments that will allow data to be recorded, transferred and used by different agencies that also need to be accounted for at this time.

5.4 How data that a contact person collects on a young person gets logged and recorded within the management system

Data is at the heart of the main management systems that support and record actions and outcomes for Connexions and related services. That data may come from systems that already hold details of certain types (such as previous qualifications, or contact details), but much of the detail of value to those who have primary contact with young people who are NEET needs to provide up-to-date information about the circumstances, challenges, attitudes and interests of the specific individuals. This means that those who have contact with young people need to be in the position of entering and providing those details, not only for their own records, but also for access by others. However, it is clear that individual support workers in LAs are in different positions in this respect. Of the 6 LAs that responded to the online questionnaires: data about a young person is not logged and recorded in one case; data is put in manually in 4 cases; and data is transferred electronically when there are discussions in one case. There are clearly implications; important data needs to be entered, but there is a requirement on individuals both in time terms and in terms of technological access, and the greatest efficiency will only be gained if electronic transfer is developed further in many LAs.

5.5 Multi-agency involvement

Cultural perspectives are likely to be closely linked to organisational perspectives; organisational perspectives are concerned with relationships, management and provision of services. Organisational issues are particularly pertinent at this point in time, since Connexions services have only recently been integrated into wider LA services. The Citizens Online and National Centre for Social Research report (2008) indicated that although public, private and third sector agencies are involved in providing services for young people who are NEET, that Connexions has had a central role (albeit more closely concerned with those deemed to be 'at risk' from age 14 years). The creation of Children's Trusts is bringing together those agencies concerned with child safety and personal development, and those agencies concerned with educational achievement. Targeted Youth Support (TYS) includes a range of agencies that may be brought together: youth services, schools, health services, voluntary and community sector agencies, Connexions, education welfare, behaviour support, drugs and alcohol services, sexual health services, teenage parent support workers, special educational needs coordinators, child and adolescent mental health services, counselling services, information, advice and guidance providers, housing and housing support, youth offending and the police. Related programmes that could also be involved are: extended services in and around schools, positive activities for young people, the young peoples' development programme, positive futures, youth inclusion programmes, neighbouring policing, and LA or PCT teenage pregnancy strategies. Clearly it is highly likely that different LAs will organise approaches to multi-agency involvement and integration in different ways, and that these alternatives could well have impacts upon selected forms of technology and how they can be used.

Looking at the different uses that can be made of technologies, (according to purpose), currently, looking across a number of LAs, different groups involved in the multi-agency sector tend to be more concerned with uses in certain areas. These are shown in Table 11.

Table 11: Involvement of multi-agency groups with different technological uses and functions supporting young people

Uses	Those involved
Engaging and maintaining contact with young people	Youth services Schools Health services Voluntary and community sector agencies Connexions Education welfare Behaviour support Teenage parent support workers Special educational needs coordinators Child and adolescent mental health services Counselling services Information, advice and guidance providers Housing and housing support Youth offending and the police
Courses, jobs and work-based learning opportunities that involve uses of technology	Schools Voluntary and community sector agencies Special educational needs coordinators Information, advice and guidance providers
Records of achievements, abilities and needs of young people	Youth services Schools Voluntary and community sector agencies Behaviour support Drugs and alcohol services Sexual health services Special educational needs coordinators Child and adolescent mental health services Counselling services Youth offending and the police
Matching interests and choices of young people with opportunities that arise in terms of jobs, vacancies, apprenticeships, and work-based learning	Connexions Special educational needs coordinators Counselling services
Collecting and reporting opportunities of vacancies that exist	Connexions
Collecting and reporting data about the status of young people who are NEET within a locality, area or region	Schools Health services Connexions Education welfare Behaviour support Teenage parent support workers Child and adolescent mental health services Counselling services Youth offending and the police

5.6 LA sites and centres

Table 11 suggests that from an organisational viewpoint, a technological overview is likely to be complex. However, from the perspective of the young people, although there are potentially many agencies involved with their support, it is notable that the Citizens Online and National Centre for Social Research report (2008) indicates that young people who are NEET tend to use certain particular contact points:

- Physical venues (Connexions, JobCentre Plus, youth organisations such as Apex, Youth Offending Team, housing associations or hostels, public transport such as buses, and clubbing venues).
- Online sites (MSN and other web messenger services, YouTube, Facebook, Bebo, My Space, High Five, JobCentre Plus website, Google, and online learning sites such as ASDAN and BBC Bitesize).

In the report by Davies (2008), the internet and computers based in Connexions centres were identified as an incentive for young people who were NEET to visit Connexions and other offices. Sometimes they found it easier to say: 'Can I use the internet', rather than: 'Can I have some help from you'. Connexions staff would leave them for a few minutes and then initiate a conversation. Because many young people who are NEET need information about a range of other services apart from training and employment information, the internet in Connexions offices was for them a very valuable tool. A technological overview from an organisational perspective, therefore, is likely to be quite different from a technological overview from a young person's perspective. Having data to inform overviews of both perspectives is likely to be important from a strategic viewpoint.

5.7 Sites that young people visit

Although multi-agency approaches are intended to provide a more supportive environment, how this matches up to contact points that young people know and use will be a key issue. Who provides an initial point of contact for young people who are NEET, who provides support for them, and how these individuals or groups are organised within the overall LA framework, are clearly important aspects to understand. It is also clear that the range of support organisations within LAs tends to be varied, and that contacts created and maintained by LAs and by young people are likely to be quite specific. The Citizens Online and National Centre for Social Research report (2008), for example, goes on to indicate that the key organisations providing support are:

- Statutory organisations (DCSF, Connexions and Connexions Direct).
- Third sector organisations (YouthNet, Rathbone, Barnardo's, Fairbridge, The Inclusion Trust, Princes Trust, YMCA, Tomorrow's People, and the Foyer Federation).
- Private sector companies (Clearaims Ltd.).

In this respect, differences across different sub-groups within the overall group of young people who are NEET may well be important. The Citizens Online and National Centre for Social Research report (2008), for example, pointed to evidence that indicated different uses of technologies by different groups: girls, boys, young people from ethnic minority backgrounds, and young people with disabilities. How LAs are addressing this issue of different uses of technologies by different groups, and the issue concerned with the desire for some young people to maintain face-to-face contact, and to gain training about use of ICT that goes beyond their immediate experience, is clearly an issue, and likely to be quite different in different localities (and the case studies in the report, and on the DCSF website, bear this out).

5.8 Numbers of front-line support workers

Currently, there is very limited data that will provide forms of overview perspectives. Data that indicate even numbers of front-line workers involved in supporting young people who are NEET is not readily accessible. The National Youth Agency (NYA) has produced a useful table (2008), which shows the numbers of full-time equivalent youth worker staff in many individual LAs. The table indicates numbers of all staff (which includes administrative and management staff), those who are professionally qualified workers, other qualified youth workers (those with professional qualifications in fields other than a professional youth work qualification), youth support workers, delivery staff (which includes all the three previous groups), and amounts spent on continuing professional development (on-site training courses, youth-work specific and multi-agency training, premises costs, and spending from central sources). The total figures for each category for 2007-2008 were (although it should be noted that not all LAs responded to the audit survey):

- 8,273 all staff.
- 2,873 professionally qualified workers.
- 974 other qualified youth workers.
- 2,359 youth support workers.
- 6,206 delivery staff.
- £6,112,297 spent on continuing professional development.

Although it is recognised that there is a large amount of up-to-date data about Connexions, this is not centrally stored because of the reforms to the structure of Connexions services. There are two reported ongoing studies trying to pull together much of this data. A consultant based in Cambridge is undertaking one study, while a team at Manchester Metropolitan University (Lewin and Colley, 2008) is undertaking the other one. However, while neither of these studies is focusing on technology issues, comments from the Lewin and Colley report identify the difficulties faced by anyone involved in data gathering in this area:

“Originally, we planned to conduct a telephone survey to maximise responses from what we understood to be a finite population of 47 Connexions services although we were aware that one or two services had already disaggregated. However, it soon became apparent that more services than we anticipated had disaggregated and that provision across different Local Authorities was incredibly complex and in many cases not at all clear, being a period of transition and disruption. Therefore we decided that a telephone survey was no longer practical and instead developed a questionnaire that would be distributed by post.”

“There were 27 responses out of a possible 72, a response rate of 37.5% which was lower than anticipated but with hindsight unsurprising. Many of the services at this time were in a state of turmoil; staff we spoke to were unsure of future changes. Services which were disaggregating were consumed by the need to TUPE staff and initiate redundancy procedures. This was a distressing time for many and some respondents indicated that had it been any other time they would have been happy to participate.”

5.9 Support staff and uses of technology

From an organisational point of view, technology can be deployed and used in a variety of ways. Whether LAs support the deployment and uses of technology by PAs (mobiles to maintain contact with young people, to support those in more remote areas or to provide information that is timely, or laptops to help test or assess skills or capabilities, to help with creating CVs and application letters, or to track life skills, to maintain portfolios of work, or to show examples of what others have done), in centres, or in public areas, could make a fundamental difference to access and use. Similarly, the ways that technology is used to make job vacancies accessible, or courses and apprenticeships accessible, or to indicate the relative numbers of jobs and courses needed to match numbers of young people who are NEET, could make significant differences to availability.

A finding from the Oldham study (Davies, 2008) identified another important potential use of technology in terms of communication, and how technologies might support disparate teams. It was clear from the evidence in that study that there was a feeling of isolation and vulnerability sensed by some of the Connexions staff, especially those doing outreach work or seconded to other agencies. They lacked the professional communities and general office banter that allowed them to offload the problems associated with that specific type of work. Ways in which they could keep in touch with colleagues was very important, both for accessing specialised information and for the general sense of ‘being in touch’. Using technologies to support those who work with young people who are NEET is clearly an important aspect to explore.

6. A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

6.1 Whether those who make contact with young people use technology to engage with them or make contact with them at all

Evidence from case study visits indicate that uses of technology to engage with or make contact with young people who are NEET is not yet culturally embedded in practice. The case study visits indicate that there are individuals who use technology to good effect, while others are reluctant to use it, and yet others feel that technology hinders interactions at a social level. From the 6 LAs responding in the online questionnaire, three LAs indicated that many front-line workers use technology, one indicated that almost all do, while two indicated that all do. This evidence indicates that technology is not culturally embedded in practice, but that there are likely to be instances where effective integration could be identified and exemplified further.

6.2 Whether course and opportunity providers use technology as a part of their provision

Developing practice for young people in using technology to support activities that will engage and help them in learning and employment terms will often arise from the interactions that these young people have with course and opportunity providers. It is clear that course and opportunity providers do not all use technology; from the 6 LAs responding in the online questionnaire, two indicated that many do, while two indicated that almost all do, and none that all do. Two LAs did not respond to this question, and this may well be due to lack of knowledge about this area; this has certainly been the case shown from case study visits and from previous study evidence (Passey, Williams and Rogers, 2008).

6.3 Whether management systems provide outputs that are felt to allow useful categories of young people to be identified by those who support them

Evidence from some case study visits has indicated that front-line workers sometimes do not find that the details provided from management systems are of use to them in their support capacities. However, the reports from the 6 LAs responding to the online questionnaire indicated that in all cases support workers do find that details provided to them do provide useful categories of young people. It is clear that additional data about categories of young people could be provided and developed, and that systems to offer data that is specifically targeted at support workers (categorising data according to support needs) have not been developed in the past.

6.4 Whether key contact workers are trained in uses of technology

A key area that is required to support the cultural dimension and integration of technology positively into support worker practice is appropriate training. The case study visits have highlighted the need for training in a range of areas, and have highlighted in one LA the need to consider specific and different training for different groups and agencies involved. Of the 6 LAs responding in the online questionnaires, all key contact workers are trained in uses of technology in five cases, while it is some in one case.

6.5 Whether there are ways that contact workers can pass on their experiences with technology

Successful integration of technology at a cultural level is often related to opportunities for those involved to share their experiences, and to be able to ask questions of others when in need or doubt. These forms of practices are not evidenced a great deal across LAs involved in either case study visits or those responding in the online questionnaire. In only one case out of 6 LAs responding in the online questionnaires did the LA indicate that opportunities were set up to provide sharing experiences through good practice events. In the other five cases, sharing only happens in ad hoc ways. Although instances of sharing development appear to be low, there is likely to be opportunity to detail this to greater extents to offer others ideas about these practices.

6.6 Contact workers' levels of competence or confidence in uses of technology

Across the evidence gathered, both from case study visits and from responses in online questionnaires, there is no indication that an LA is at the stage of having all its contact workers with both high levels of competence and high levels of confidence in using technologies to support young people. Of the 6

LAs responding in the online questionnaires, all six LAs indicated that levels were about average or about a half for both factors. Developing competence and confidence is clearly a requirement that LAs have; this will demand some time and opportunity, and is likely to provide challenges due to the forms of practice that exist (and this is due to the need to retain the necessary social dimension, and the development of balance of technology uses with other forms of interaction, rather than being a simple provision of ‘this is how the technology works’).

6.7 Cultures and approaches

In this study, cultures are explored through the dimension of approaches taken, by LAs, and by groups within LAs. Culture is concerned in part with the balance of tracking, with personalised guidance and support, and with the rights and responsibilities of young people to engage in work or learning; it is in part concerned with the identification of young people’s interests and aspirations and how these are matched with opportunities, and is in part concerned with how support is conceived and approached in the context of wider social needs.

6.8 LA front-line contact with young people who are NEET

Connexions PAs in a number of LAs studied are at the heart of contact with young people who are NEET - and as a part of their focal but wider remit, they work with colleagues in educational welfare, drug and alcohol support teams, youth offending teams, colleges of further education, and other agencies such as the Prince’s Trust. Although LAs have a lead agency that provides contact for young people who are NEET, LAs have established, or are in the process of establishing, different multi-agency teams to bring together expertise and support to address areas of identified need. For example, in Oldham LA (Davies, 2008), the LA has formed a ‘Healthy Lifestyles Team’, to bring together community nurses, family planning people, local sports centres, and dieticians.

6.9 Perceptions of young people who are NEET

Cultural perspectives are concerned often with purpose. The ways that young people who are NEET are perceived, by those who support them, is likely to have potential impacts on approaches to support, and uses of technologies to enhance that support. For example, the Becta report (Passey, Williams and Rogers, 2008) indicated the importance of supporting decision-making processes for young people who are NEET (yet this clearly requires a specific form of approach that is not associated with seeking to find an individual job or vacancy):

“Young people who are NEET commonly exhibit limited capabilities to support decision making. In addition to this limited capability in terms of decision making, other factors such as traumatic backgrounds and poor experiences of learning environments can mean that young people who are NEET often do not sustain employment or educational opportunities when they are offered to them. Young people who are NEET often engage most readily in practical and creative endeavour, and desire involvement in social environments. Many young people who are NEET have previously experienced limited education and training choices. Many tend to move in and out of a range of training and employment opportunities (which can mean that they pick up a number of successive and specific skills as a consequence). The amount of this form of ‘churn’ is an important characteristic of this population”.

6.10 Different approaches taken that are based on different cultural concerns

In terms of culture, there can be different approaches taken by those who support young people who are NEET; there may be those who feel that young people who are NEET are better off doing anything other than being unemployed, and those who feel that sending young people who are NEET to an inappropriate opportunity would only set them back. This difference in terms of approach is recognised as leading to a potentially major cultural division within Connexions teams. Another cultural division is concerned with those who feel that little can be done post-16 and that resources should be directed into schools to prevent people becoming NEET, and those who feel that the best work is done after school (because being in school is a major source of the problem).

6.11 Is there an overall cultural approach taken by an LA?

A key question is how the culture of an LA accommodates the, or a, 'NEET perspective'. If the culture is concerned with providing employment or training opportunities, then the information technology (IT) facilities required are likely to be focused on information provision. If the culture is concerned with supporting the individual through periods of difficulty, and providing advice and guidance at times that are relevant, then the IT facilities required are likely to be focused on communication provision. Clearly, ideally, both of these need to be accommodated, as both are important requirements.

6.12 Factors affecting cultural approach

Cultural approach is also likely to be framed by the way that factors and circumstances impinging on the lives of the young people are considered and handled by those who support them. The report for the DCLG by Citizens Online and the National Centre for Social Research (2008), which considered aspects of e-inclusion for young people who are NEET, identified a range of key issues facing young people who are NEET:

- Housing circumstances (living with family or foster carers, in care homes, with no permanent home, or in need of social housing).
- Education and skills (having a sense of failure and previous negative educational experiences, difficulties linked to special educational needs, dyslexia or behavioural problems, a need for basic or social skills, or a need for vocational skills, certificates or qualifications).
- Key life issues (cultural disaffection arising from generational unemployment, boredom, desires to do something, restrictions on freedom, youth offending, lack of money, teenage pregnancy or motherhood).

These issues are all clearly significant, and potentially important in terms of appropriateness with regard to choices of support approaches. This being the case, an important question is concerned with how these data are held, and made accessible to those in LAs who support young people who are NEET. This is particularly relevant since the DCSF NEET Statistics Quarterly Brief (n.d.a) requires data to be reported from LAs through the Client Caseload Information System (CCIS) in 4 categories:

- Group 1 – those who are doing an activity not counted as EET, such as a gap year or undertaking voluntary work, or in custody.
- Group 2 – those with an identifiable barrier to participation, having a child, a serious illness or disability, or requiring some specific help.
- Group 3 – those whose activity is known but not in a specific group.
- Group 4 – unknowns.

It is clear that these four categories do not match readily the categories of concern identified in the DCLG report. How LAs accommodate these different requirements, and handle and manage the data in order to provide for the needs of different stakeholders and users, through appropriate uses of technological systems, is a potentially important question to address.

6.13 What features of support need to be considered?

The identification of appropriate support, and the uses of technological systems to aid that identification, needs to take a very wide range of factors into account. For example, the Citizens Online and National Centre for Social Research report (2008) indicated that female young people who were NEET had been supported more effectively in 2006 to 2007 than had male young people; it may be that this type of support issue is identified and made accessible to those who support the young people directly. This raises questions about certain cultural perspectives of support are recognised and identified, and how technology might be used to do this. More specific technology requirements that might be focused on the potential barriers within that report, and that in turn might enhance the life opportunities of young people, were identified as:

- Limited attention span.
- Poor literacy skills.
- Poor telephone skills.

- Unsafe or ‘alienating’ environments.
- Lack of home access to computers and the internet.
- Costs of services.
- Previous negative experiences with education.

How technology is being deployed within LAs to address these needs is a key question, but so too is how technology is being used to support aspects that the report identified as facilitators:

- Technology at home with connectivity and help.
- Signposting and holistic services.
- Personal support.
- Easily accessible information.
- Free access to services.
- Financial support.
- 24-hour access to support and guidance.
- Confidence building.
- Hooks to engage interest.
- Facilities for fun, leisure and socialising.
- Less formal provision.
- Local access.
- Positive engagement of the family.
- Referrals to services from trusted helpers.

6.14 What categories of support need to be considered?

The NEETs Strategy, published by the DCSF (2008f), indicates that the culture of support and involvement should perhaps be concerned and focused around four separate aspects:

- Careful tracking.
- Personalised guidance and support.
- Provision of a full range of courses to meet demand.
- Rights and responsibilities of young people to engage in work or learning.

Tracking is a main way in which technology is being used across a number of LAs, reported in specific evaluation studies such as that undertaken in Oldham LA (Davies, 2008) as well as in LAs reported through other studies (Passey, Williams and Rogers, 2008; Citizens Online and National Centre for Social Research, 2008). Connexions services are generally regarded as having one of the best databases on young people. The tracking systems are used both to target individuals so that they remain NEET for periods of time that are as short as possible, and to identify patterns in the overall NEET population, looking within groups specified by gender, ethnicity, post code, and former schools, for example (exemplified in the work of one LA studied). The status and focus of technologies in supporting the other three aspects is far less well known and recognised, however.

Associated with the aspects listed in the NEETs Strategy, suggestions for service provision within the Citizens Online and National Centre for Social Research report (2008), indicated a need to focus on:

- Provision of holistic services.
- Creative use of digital technologies.
- Opportunities for peer support and mentoring or role models.
- Use of social networking opportunities.
- Provision of good support to engage young people with learning via ICT.
- Free access to ICT in places where young people go already.

How far technology is used to identify and track these aspects is not at this stage known. However, if these are key suggestions being made, then it may well be appropriate that forms of tracking are applied to these areas.

6.15 Cultures concerned with multi-agency and multi-disciplinarity

The culture of support and intervention that is described by the DCSF in its guidance to LAs is concerned with sharing, multidisciplinary approaches, focusing on the individual through personalised learning, linked to creative and practical possibilities that exploit opportunities offered through 'churn'. "Beat the NEET" (an Oldham initiative, reported by Davies, 2008) focused very much on 'empowerment' and 'multi-agency' perspectives. The idea within that initiative was for various people in the LA and other agencies to work in neighbourhood teams, to be located in 'one stop shops'. This had much to do with providing immediate offers to young people who were NEET, rather than them having to wait to see others, or to travel to appointments (which were seen as barriers to them taking up opportunities). There is clearly a potentially valuable set of opportunities provided by technology in supporting these forms of approach. This study seeks to identify how far technologies have been, or might be used, in these forms of endeavour.

6.16 Cultures concerned with effective differentiation as well as public messaging

There is for an LA a potential tension offered by technologies. On the one hand, technologies allow individual situations to be enhanced to greater extents, and for the differentiation of need to be identified to greater extents. On the other hand, technologies allow a wide-scale and broadcast spread of messages in ways that are non-selective.

A key question is whether the technologies set up within LAs are able to support both of these forms of cultural perspective, and whether, for example, technology is used to help to support those who have serious problems or poor relationships. In this respect, a key question is whether an LA is using technology to usefully differentiate potential support approaches for distinctly different groups of young people - for example, using the categories within the Passey, Williams and Rogers study report (2008), for EERs, NEERs, ALTs and MULPs. In parallel, it is important to know whether technology is being used to offer public messages that give information about aspects such as health, or approaches to employment issues concerned with long-term generational unemployment. Similarly, whether technology is accessible and can be used to support approaches by young people that give them alternatives and ways to engage in forms of decision-making is also important.

7. A TECHNOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

7.1 How many people are employed in each group that support young people who are NEET

Technological involvement and use requires access to technologies, at an individual level. If support workers are to develop technological abilities and processes, then they will need access that meets the needs and the operation of their working practices. Numbers of people employed in groups that support young people who are NEET are not published, but are high. Of 6 LAs responding in the online questionnaire, the number of Connexions workers in an LA ranged from 14 to 60 (with an average of 43.2), the number of youth workers ranged from 6 to 110 in 4 LAs (with an average of 57.8), and the number of others were 15 or 20 in two LAs (an average of 17.5). On this basis (and the averages here may not be highly reliable, so these figures should be viewed with caution), with 150 county, London borough, metropolitan and unitary LAs in England, it would mean that there are some 6,480 Connexions workers employed, 8,670 youth workers employed, and 2,625 others employed, totalling some 17,775 workers who support young people who are NEET. This gives some indication of the scale of access that is involved when technology is being considered. It should also be noted that the numbers of Connexions workers employed in LAs may be recorded, but that numbers of youth workers and other workers is not always recorded. This is likely to hinder ranges of technological and training development.

7.2 How many support workers are provided with a computer for their work

Overall, responses from LAs in online questionnaires indicated that computers are provided for almost all support workers (only 10 Connexions workers out of 259, and 75 youth workers out of 231 were not provided with a computer). Based on these figures (and estimated averages may not be reliable and representative), full computer access for all workers will require an investment of some 250 machines with all related support and services for Connexions workers across England, and of some 2,815 machines with related support and services for youth workers across England (some 3,065 machines, associated support and services in total).

7.3 How many support workers are provided additionally with a laptop for their work

The numbers of support workers who are provided with additional laptops for their work are small in number. From 4 LA responses in online questionnaire where levels of data were provided, it appears that about 17 out of 164 Connexions workers (about 10%) are provided with a laptop, no youth workers are provided with laptops, and about 10 out of 35 other workers (about 30%) are provided with laptops. These data suggest that laptop facilities are either beyond the financial scope of LAs providing technologies, or are not seen as being of particular value. The fact that youth workers are not provided with laptops means that concepts of roving access, offering opportunities for young people to engage with them when they meet them, are not developed and are not likely to be culturally integrated in their working practices. In the case of other workers, it is sometimes reported that these workers do not see the value of laptops in terms of supporting their working practices. If this is the case, however, then data entry for these key workers may well not happen at the time and place when there are meetings and interactions with the young people, meaning that certain details might well be lost or not recorded in any way. However, it is clear that supporting this community with laptop provision will be a major financial undertaking, and the need for this undertaking will need to be argued and a case made for it. The need for laptop provision rather than mobile technology provision will also need to be clear and argued if this area of provision is to be taken forward positively.

7.4 How many support workers are provided with a mobile telephone for their work

Mobile telephone provision for support workers is far more common than laptop provision. From the 6 LAs responding in the online questionnaire, 203 out of 259 Connexions workers, 151 out of 231 youth workers, and all other workers had mobile telephones provided for their working practices. To provide all Connexions and youth workers with these levels of provision across England, using estimated figures generated by low responses (which may not be reliable), it appears that some 1,400 Connexions workers and some 3,000 youth workers would require mobile telephone access and provision (some 4,400 units in total).

However, using evidence about levels of competence and confidence with technologies, it appears likely that levels of training required across LAs will be substantial. Using estimated figures from those provided (which may not be reliable), it would appear likely that some 3,250 Connexions workers, 4,350 youth workers, and 1,350 other workers will require training not just on how to use the technologies provided, but also how to use these to engage and support young people in activities that are of value in communication and longer-term education and employment involvement terms.

7.5 Whether there are public computer facilities for young people to access across the LA, perhaps in Connexions centres or in kiosks

Evidence from the 6 LAs responding in the online questionnaires indicated that public computer facilities for young people, through kiosks or in Connexions centres, are provided in all cases. The development issue here is not concerned, therefore, with provision of access, but more with levels of access, accessibility, and perceived value by those who provide the facilities and those who use them.

7.6 Whether there is a technology system to retain records of achievement or to maintain e-portfolios of work of young people

It is clear from the case study evidence that a number of LAs are concerned with and are developing e-portfolio systems and systems to record achievements of young people. From the 6 LAs responding in the online questionnaire, four of the LAs indicated that they had a technology system in place (in three cases, using different systems, CCIS, Fast Tomato, and a web-based e-portfolio). Based on this low response level, it appears likely, however, that perhaps at least 50 LAs have not developed such a system at this time.

7.7 Whether there is a technology system to match the interests of young people with job or work-based learning opportunities

Evidence from 6 LAs responding in the online questionnaire indicated that in all cases there was a technology system to match the interests of young people with job or work-based learning opportunities. However, it was clear from the case studies that this system requires time input, perhaps from a specific individual within an LA to maintain it. At the moment, it is not clear that all LAs have the capacity to undertake this area of need. It may well be the case that a dedicated person is required within in each LA to do so, and that this post will require funding if it is to be undertaken with the efficiency that will be required to lead to success for providers and users.

7.8 Whether there is a technology system to collect and report opportunities of vacancies that exist

Evidence from 6 LAs responding to the online questionnaires indicated that there is a technology system to collect and report opportunities of vacancies that arise in all cases. However, case study visits indicated that the collection and reporting was not always electronically set up, and that dedicated time was required in many cases to ensure the efficiency of this system.

7.9 Whether there is a management system to collect and report data about the status of young people who are NEET within a locality or area or region

All LAs require a management system to collect and report data about the status of young people who are NEET (the CCIS system). The provider of this system can vary; in one LA stated it was provided by a system called Profile 2000, while in another LA stated it was provided by a system called Insight. Variations across these systems in terms of functionality and output are not known at this stage. It is not possible, therefore, to recognise exactly how a seamless facility might be set up to allow wider data access (for agencies within an LA, or for agencies across LAs).

7.10 Whether contact workers use specific software to support young people who are NEET

From 6 LAs responding to the online questionnaire, in only one case did support workers not use specific software to support young people who are NEET. Apart from the CCIS system itself, other software stated was Kudos, and Adult Directions. From responses, it appears that the software packages used by support workers with young people are not readily known. This has implications for training and support.

7.11 Whether there are facilities to broadcast forms of public messages about approaches to education, employment or training

In five cases out of the 6 LAs responding to the online questionnaire, facilities to broadcast forms of public messages about approaches to education, employment and training were stated to be available. In two cases websites were indicated as the facilities used, in two cases intranets relating to the Connexions and related services were available, and in one case a community TV text messaging facility was available. From these responses it is clear that different forms of facility are being used, but how effective these are is not known, and forms of community TV broadcast through publicly accessible screens and monitors appears to have been considered only in a small number of cases.

7.12 Whether there are specific projects using technology within the LA aimed at supporting young people who are NEET

Evidence from case study visits indicates that specific projects using technology to support young people who are NEET have arisen in some LAs and have been developed in certain groups and agencies of LAs, according to interests, endeavours and funding available. From the 6 LAs responding to the online questionnaire, three LAs indicated that they had no specific projects running, while three had projects running (with two of these involving text messaging). There appear to be two needs arising: a review of the effectiveness of specific projects so that they might be considered from a much longer sustainable perspective and across other LAs; and the creation of other projects that have long term sustainability in other LAs (up to 75 across England, if all LAs were to be involved in this form of endeavour).

7.13 Reasons for using and deploying technologies in LAs

LAs, and all agencies within LAs that are concerned with support for young people who are NEET, can select and apply a very wide range of technologies to a variety of roles. Technological perspectives are concerned in part with what is being used, how these integrate together, and what other technologies might be used, but, overall, reports on uses of technology in LAs to support young people who are NEET indicate that technologies are used in certain fundamental ways. Technologies are used for:

- Tracking and monitoring purposes.
- Information provision purposes.
- Communication purposes.

In terms of tracking and monitoring purposes, there is a need for LAs to maintain records that are consistent with the needs of government department returns. Beyond this, however, LAs vary in terms of what data they have accessible to their staff; these data depend on perceptions and knowledge of details that might provide some useful insights about young people who are NEET. There are variations seen also in terms of how presentations of data are selected to show trends or shifts over time.

In terms of information provision purposes, it is clear that differences exist in terms of the forms in which information is provided. Some LAs provide information for access by young people in largely textual form, while others provide information in more visual or auditory forms, or use video more. Whether information provided is offered in ways that enable young people to consider an extension of their opportunities is clearly important for some young people, and particularly for those who are NEET. How technology is being used to match creative, practical or social opportunities to individual interests is also clearly potentially important.

In terms of communication purposes, it is clear that some LAs use technology to support social interactions in different ways. For example, the use of video conferencing is being considered and developed in some LAs, particularly where there are support needs in remote locations. Another important issue being considered is the maintaining of contact with young people who are NEET, to follow up how they have got on with job or training interviews, or visits to housing departments, for example. Partly this continued contact is used to show that people are interested in

them and that they are not alone, and partly to let them know that they will be followed up and will have to account for aspects such as non-attendance. Connexions PAs sometimes feel they have to be very proactive in their support. This is based to an extent on the notion that regular follow-up is important because it is best to set young people simple individual targets rather than provide them with a longer list of things to do. It is clear that effective communication technology can assist this approach.

The Citizens Online and National Centre for Social Research report (2008) listed ways in which service providers (such as Connexions staff) in LAs were using ICT:

- For communication with clients (mobile telephones for texting or phoning).
- To maintain contact with colleagues (email, mobile telephones or blackberries).
- Accessing information via internet (on PCs in the office, or laptops with wireless connectivity).
- Software for data analysis and monitoring (spreadsheets and databases to track client progress, and information from databases to provide evidence for funders).

A list of examples of ICT used to deliver particular services to young people who are NEET was also provided in the report:

- Touchscreens (installed in care homes, for example).
- Notschool.net.
- One bell-ing (the client rings the provider and hangs up after one ring, and the service provider uses 1471 to identify the caller and ring back).

Examples provided by young people who are NEET were:

- JobCentre Plus access to a Personal Advisor.
- MSN messaging service.
- BBC Bitesize online learning.

7.14 Linking to technologies used by the young people themselves

It is important that LAs are aware of the technologies that young people use, if they are considering some form of direct technological communication. The Citizens Online and National Centre for Social Research report (2008) listed the ways that young people who are NEET use technologies:

- Mobile telephones (for telephone calls, texting, cameras, music, games, internet access).
- Computers (for internet, MSN texting, social networking sites, music and video downloads, online learning such as ASDAN and BBC Bitesize, research on jobs and benefits, bidding for social housing, games, shopping, and word processing).
- Games consoles (for chilling, and relieving boredom).
- Digital TV (for watching recorded shows and information).
- iPod and MP3 players (for music).

The Becta report (Passey, Williams and Rogers, 2008) provided similar findings. A summary of the responses from a questionnaire survey undertaken as part of that study is shown in Table 12. This table indicates that the young people had access to a wide range of technologies, but that they were using them in different ways.

Table 12: Uses of technologies reported by young people who are NEET (n=305) (Source: Passey, Williams and Rogers, 2008)

Technology	Have one	What it is used for							Where it is used			Who with	
		Music	Video	Texts	Talk	Email	Learning	Finding things	School, college, work	Home	Out	On my own	With friends, family
Mobile telephone	279	213	153	256	262	22	19	59	99	227	247	211	207
Computer with internet	204	185	127	77	137	181	156	190	124	180	26	147	129
Laptop or palmtop	84	67	52	29	52	59	50	64	40	67	17	51	54
Games machine	201	74	60	6	15	4	25	14	7	140	20	123	125
Television	278	181	188	2	5	2	109	60	32	217	28	186	192
Radio	202	170	6	1	4	1	30	20	15	113	29	105	86
MP3 or iPod	196	187	67	5	3	3	15	7	58	115	135	135	86
Totals	1444	1077	653	376	478	272	404	414	375	1059	502	958	879

The Becta report indicated that:

“Those items where there were about two-thirds or more responses are shaded. It is clear from these responses that technologies are popular with these young people, and that many young people own or have access to more than one form of technology. In order of decreasing popularity, the technologies owned or accessed by young people were:

- *“Mobile telephones (mainly used for texting, talking, and music, both outside and at home, on their own and with friends).*
- *“Television (mainly used for music, video, and for learning, at home, on their own or with friends).*
- *“Computers with internet (mainly used for music, finding things, email and learning, at home, school, college or home, on their own or with friends).*
- *“Games machines (used for music, at home, on their own and with friends).*
- *“Radio (used for music, at home, on their own and with friends).*
- *“MP3 or iPods (used for music, at home and out, on their own and with friends).*
- *“Laptops or palmtops (used for music, finding things, video, email, talking and learning, at home, with friends and on their own)”.*

The report went on to say that:

“Overall, concerning attitudes of young people who are NEET towards technology, from the samples where evidence was gathered:

- *“Most have access to a very wide range of technology.*
- *“The core technologies used are mobile telephones, the internet, and MP3 or iPods.*
- *“The internet with a computer is used for learning, information access and research by many young people, but the television is also reported to be used for learning.*
- *“The internet with a computer is more popular and commonly used by boys who are NEET than by girls who are NEET”.*

If LAs are considering direct communication with the young people, then some form of survey may well be needed in order to establish what levels of technologies are accessible. Some LAs have provided forms of information and communication through technologies owned by young people, while others have used technologies that are in public places, or in Connexions or community areas.

7.15 Uses of technologies by course providers and voluntary organisations

Within LAs, direct support for young people who are NEET is often provided by a range of course providers or voluntary organisations. The uses of technology by these providers varies considerably both within and across LAs:

- In some LAs, technology is used to help to indicate the forms of life skills that young people need to develop, using a life skill framework (a newly developed example is Personal Skills Tracker, n.d.).
- In some LAs, technology is used to support basic skills development in literacy and numeracy.
- In some LAs, technology is used within creative multimedia workshops or within practical multi-practice workshops in skills centres or mobile units.
- Some course providers use certain software to offer ideas for jobs (Adult Directions, or Job Explorer Database, for example).
- Some course providers use certain software to indicate the status of basic skills (Basic and Key Skills Builder, for example).
- Some course providers use certain software to support aspects of life skills (Lifebites, or Animods 2, for example).

The Becta report (Passey, Williams and Rogers, 2008) identified some specific ways in which course providers and voluntary organisations were using ICT (although variability was evident). The report indicated that:

“Existing uses of technologies suggest that ICT can support engagement and practice for young people in:

- *“Music and creative arts.*
- *“Reflection on practice through the use of digital cameras and video.*
- *“On-line testing.*
- *“Presentations.*
- *“Portfolio work.*
- *“Research work.*
- *“Awareness of access to and successes in courses and activities.*
- *“Social interactions (but only in limited cases observed)”.*

Across a range of provider courses in one region, tutors indicated their uses of ICT (see Table 13).

Table 13: How ICT is used in a range of provider courses (Source: Passey, Williams and Rogers, 2008)

Course topic	Uses of ICT in the courses
Animal care	Only a minimal amount. ICT is used for research. Portfolio work can be completed using a computer (but work can be hand-written)
Apprenticeship in animal care	Used for on-line testing (assessment), in key skills (young people need to produce one presentation), for research, to produce work in MS Word, and young people also use cameras and videos
Bridging the Gap, and E2E	A mixture of paper-based and computer-based learning is used to offer variety and keep students interested
Certificate in Health and Social Care, and BTEch First Diploma In Health and Social Care	Used for creating MS PowerPoint presentations, for research, and number application with MS Excel. Young people word process assignments
Childcare	Used for research for the technical certificate, and some learners complete work using the laptop
Construction	Very rarely. The tutor would like to have more ICT available in the classroom but there is a funding issue. Currently there is only one laptop in the classroom. Work-based learners use ICT for preparing portfolios, and for research. Those on ICA and ACA courses take photographs with mobile telephones (as evidence) then bring them to the tutor who uses blue tooth technology to download onto the laptop
E2E	Used to support job seeking skills, the writing of CVs, application letters, as well as to support basic skills, in literacy and numeracy sessions
E2E	ICT is used, and the needs of individual students are met by looking at the needs of the employment areas that they want to move into
E2E	Some take ICT as a specific unit as part of the course. There are Smartboards in the teaching rooms for use with interactive games. ICT is used in job-seeking skills, and videos are used for teaching. Word processors are used for creating CVs and letters. Digital cameras are used for recording evidence from day trips and also on the 'Working with others' module (one of the key skills)
E2E	There are dedicated ICT classes as well as using ICT being used for other work, research for projects, key skills ICT, production of posters, reports, presentation of work, and videos of residential and fund-raising events. These are all burned onto CD-ROMs for the young people
E2E in horse care, and an apprenticeship in horse care	Only for the advanced apprenticeship for ICT key skills. It is reported that young people attend this course because there is no ICT involved
E2E, and Work-based Learning Group	Very widely, for research, MS Word to create CVs and applications, MS PowerPoint for presentations
Furniture trades cabinet making and wood machining	The provider has just bought SmartBoards, and the young people like them. They use ICT as part of their key skills, and it is incorporated in the work that they do (some of machines will be using computerised controls). The learning in key skills is embedded into the NVQ, and these skills are incorporated within their work practices, such as use of spread sheets for cutting lists
IT engineering	Used for word processing, for research and MS Excel for data recording
Key Skills	Young people have to do ICT as part of the key skills course. Videos are used, and computers for researching and producing work. Assessments are all paper-based
Land-based operations	Use of video cameras and digital cameras for evidence gathering
Learn Direct	Learning is delivered on-line, and learning resources include video clips, images, sound, and on-line assessment. Young people login to web-sites that cover areas such as skills for life
Understanding retailing	Project work uses ICT to incorporate graphs, images, and for research. No assessments are on-line at the moment. Some modules use ICT more than others. Digital cameras are used to gather evidence from role play, and video is used

It is not clear how far LAs are aware of the extents of uses of ICT by course providers and voluntary organisations. For some young people these uses are likely to be important, so some form of survey could provide useful indicators.

7.16 Pilot and exemplar uses of technologies

Some LAs have developed specific pilot uses of technologies, or have taken forward certain initiatives in terms of leading edge technologies that address specific or general needs. The Citizens Online and National Centre for Social Research report (2008) identified a number of key exemplars of technology use in this respect:

- YorOK Database (information sharing in multi-agency working).
- Mobile learning MoleNet projects.
- FreqOUT! arts programme.
- Lyrical Magazine, a voice for Sheffield care leavers.
- Notschool.net.
- Virtual Ruksak.

The DCSF (n.d.b) website also provides a range of case studies, again where technology is involved. However, it should be noted that these all focus on aspects concerned with management information systems:

- Pan London CCIS.
- YorOK, York.
- NEET Statistics Report – Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole.

It is clear that having a wider understanding of these specific examples is likely to be of value. It may be that some of these could be more widely used across LAs, or that there are certain conditions necessary to implement these forms of initiatives.

Overall, certain characteristics of technologies need to be met if young people are to be able to use them. It was concluded in the Citizens Online and National Centre for Social Research report (2008) that technologies need to be:

- Simple.
- In a safe and comfortable environment.
- Easy to use and widely accessible.
- Free to the user.

When LAs introduce initiatives and pilots, it is important that some form of evaluation is undertaken in order to identify whether and under what circumstances the technologies are usable. How these are undertaken, and when, may also have impacts on evidence gathered, however.

8. ENABLERS AND BARRIERS

8.1 ICT confidence and competence

8.1.1 Having the ICT skills to work in a modern office environment is an essential requirement for a PA

In the vast majority of cases it is reported that staff in Connexions Services recognise that an appropriate level of ICT skills is required for them to fulfil their duties. They are mostly positive about operating and using the CCIS client database and value the fact that email and text systems enable them to communicate with each other and with clients in a more immediate and efficient manner. Using websites and advising on online application procedures have become an important part of their day-to-day work. Job descriptions for Connexions posts as personal advisers normally now require applicants to be competent in basic ICT procedures, as well as being familiar with the standard software packages used in offices. These levels of ICT practice are regarded by staff as a reasonable condition placed on a job description.

8.1.2 Both specialist trainers and enthusiastic ICT ‘champions’ provide ICT training

Staff in Connexions centres generally report that they are provided with sufficient training to use the ICT systems in their offices. In addition to this, Connexions management teams are generally responsive to requests for more specialist training in certain circumstances and build such training into their staff development programmes. A variety of techniques are used to provide staff with the opportunity to shape the way ICT is used. For example, one ICT team in a Connexions service has a ‘suggestion section’ on the internal electronic newsletter, whilst another Connexions service has a group of ICT ‘champions’ who promote the use of ICT, listen to staff concerns and provide solutions.

8.1.3 There is little staff resistance to the increased need for ICT skills and there are growing levels of confidence

Reports indicate that staff accept they will need to gradually improve their ICT skills to keep pace with the development of modern office procedures and new ways of communicating with young people, other agencies and employers. Most staff are confident they will be able to cope with further developments in ICT which are usually thought to be reasonably user friendly. There is also a widespread belief that managers listen to staff views about the use of ICT and take these into consideration. For example, some Connexions services are piloting more portable, lightweight laptops. However, some have concerns about losing the personal touch with respect to client guidance, which is a point developed further in a sub-section below.

8.1.4 There are different levels of staff comfort with ICT

Although the general picture from reports is of Connexions staff accepting the need for ICT systems and largely being positive about this, there are examples of situations where this general picture does not apply at a wide level. For example, one Connexions service introduced an ICT amnesty because they sensed that staff had different degrees of comfort with ICT. Training was offered to those requiring it. It was not just the older members of staff who had concerns about their ICT skills; some younger members had these concerns too. In this Connexions service, there was a huge difference between how much and how frequently staff used ICT. In recognising the need to address staff ICT training, the Connexions service is working with outside trainers and consultants. Almost all the ideas for staff ICT training come from the staff themselves, and this included the ICT amnesty when all staff took some ‘back to basics training in IT’. For this training there was no distinction made between seniority or existing ICT experience and skills; it was assumed that everybody was starting from the same point. Now the IT champions are running a series of more advanced courses.

8.1.5 The range of views amongst staff about use of ICT

Despite the general picture regarding staff views of ICT as described in the sub-sections immediately above, there are some staff in Connexions who hold different opinions and who do not feel totally comfortable even with standard ICT office procedures. However, this situation is not considered to be a major issue since training is offered and those colleagues who are more confident provide day-to-day

support. There is also some variation in the extent to which staff look to technology to provide solutions to problems. Some staff have more of a technological perspective and look automatically to new software or a new piece of kit to provide a way forward; for example, the possibility of using social networking sites as a means of gathering the views of young people who would not join a consultative forum. Some staff are less enthusiastic about technology and would prefer, for example, to follow up clients who are NEET through home visits rather than text messages.

8.1.6 Younger staff will drive ICT developments

Many Connexions managers interviewed believe that potential opportunities to use ICT will be identified by those younger members of staff for whom ICT is a normal rather than an innovative way of supporting clients. Text messaging is one obvious example of this, which has, through the influence of use by younger members of staff, now become standard procedure in most Connexions services. It is felt that using social networking sites is likely to be the next major development initiated by younger Connexions and LA staff who use such sites themselves.

8.1.7 Staff need more confidence in using ICT

It is clear that ICT training is more of an issue in some Connexions services than it is in others. In one Connexions service, the training needs of staff in uses of technology is recognised as an issue. This covers both competence and confidence in using it. Sometimes staff are given expensive equipment, but they are reluctant to use it in case something goes wrong. Managers and trainers recognise the need to break down certain barriers and to provide staff with support. In some circumstances, it is recognised that staff need to know both where to get equipment and how to use it.

8.1.8 Training is needed in data handling and protection procedures

Whereas reports indicate that staff feel they have the skills to store and transfer data internally, there appears to be more confusion and alternative views about how data should be transferred to other agencies and what the most secure transfer methods are. For example, different levels of encryption are used in different services, and different levels of discussion arise about this issue. There are some concerns about what data should be shared with other agencies from a legal perspective. This is an area where further guidance and training is clearly required. Furthermore, although staff are aware of potential developments where agencies share databases or integrate systems that allow different databases to 'talk' to one another, most staff appear to be generally satisfied with the set of informal arrangements they have for sharing data. This level of satisfaction is often based on having good personal relationships with professionals working in other agencies.

8.1.9 Staff are positive about new developments such as a Virtual Connexions Centre

Two Connexions services providing evidence for this report are in the process of using technology to develop a virtual Connexions centre and virtual PAs, so that clients can receive guidance from home using PCs and mobile telephones. These are new departures for the world of careers guidance; they are mostly seen as positive steps, which could have benefits for particular clients. It is also felt that they would enable Connexions services to make efficiency savings by not having to open Connexions centres outside usual office hours for the minority of clients who use them on these occasions. Staff in other Connexions services, when told about these innovations, had mixed views. The advantages could be seen in terms of providing more flexible services, but many staff thought it was important for clients who are NEET to visit Connexions centres and actually meet people who can help them. This is an area of development that is worthy of more detailed study as developments are implemented into practice.

8.2 Cost

8.2.1 Financial pressure limits the number of PCs available in Connexions Offices

A commonly expressed view is that the main barrier limiting the use of ICT by support workers who work with young people who are NEET (and with other clients) is the cost of the hardware. Additional laptops, which would enable PAs to work away from the office, and fixed PCs, which would improve client access to websites and online application systems in Connexions centres, would

be welcomed. However, most reports from Connexions services believe the money to purchase these is likely to be in short supply given the existing climate of potential public sector financial cutbacks and the economies that are anticipated by the reintegration of many Connexions services into local authorities.

8.2.2 The cost of technology limits access by young people who are NEET

Although there is some variation amongst PAs as to whether NEET young people are confident users of ICT, there is more agreement around the view that the cost of ICT equipment is a prohibitive factor for those clients who are NEET who live in the most disadvantaged communities. Both the cost of buying equipment and the cost of using it (internet connection, mobile telephone credit) are thought to be significant limiting factors. Not being able to afford such technology is believed to cause two main problems for the most economically disadvantaged clients. First, the lack of equipment means they are unable to take advantage of an important communication channel. Second, they are also less likely to develop ICT skills because they are unable to benefit from repeated use of personal PCs at home.

8.2.3 Special project work undertaken to engage clients is usually funded from external sources

Most of the very innovative work using technologies to engage clients who are NEET, such as film making and developing social network sites, is being funded by time limited external funds rather than core budgets. Such initiatives, therefore, are vulnerable to being cut when these funds run out irrespective of the success they may have had. Embedding such special projects within core budgets is felt to be unlikely to happen in the near future because of financial constraints. Staff who acquire specific expertise and experience through working on these innovative projects are often employed on a fixed short-term basis and will probably have to move on to other jobs at the end of their contracts, taking their expertise and experience with them.

8.2.4 A business case can be made for investment in technology but future developments are likely to be limited because of cost

A member of one Connexions service thought a business case could be made for investing in technology because it will speed up communication, reduce travelling time and costs, and produce a number of other efficiencies, especially for those Connexions services that cover large geographical areas and where communications such as road transport are an issue. However, in the current financial climate, it is becoming harder to argue such a business case since the savings that arise from not spending money on technology are more readily apparent than the efficiencies brought about by investing in it. For example, although the purchase of laptops can produce medium-term travel savings by enabling PAs to work from a number of locations and not having to return to the Connexions centre when they need to access databases, the up-front costs of these laptops is a prohibiting short-term factor.

8.2.5 Lack of funds rather than interest is the main brake on development of technology

The difficulty of making a business case on an efficiency basis, difficulties of upgrading equipment, and the view that the most hard to reach require face-to-face contact, all fuel a view that several managers in Connexions services hold that the increased use of technology in their work is likely to plateau during coming years. This is primarily because of lack of funds rather than interest in exploring the new ways in which technologies might support clients. Considerable interest still exists amongst groups of staff who feel they have not yet fully exploited the potential of the opportunities that technology provides to engage clients who are NEET in programmes which help them express themselves and gain skills (including ideas about filmmaking, broadcasting on community channels, and producing visual CVs). Some City Learning Centres are also interested in accrediting this form of work as a type of informal learning.

8.2.6 Technology has been taken as far as we can within current budgets and patterns of working

A view held by an ICT specialist working for a large Connexions service is that technology has been taken as far it can be currently, given the constraints of funding and work practices. This view is based partly on the premise that within existing budgets there is little possibility for Connexions services and local authorities to upgrade their existing ICT resources to more advanced versions. In addition to

this, there are two other issues that contain the growth of ICT developments. The first is a lack of clarity and confidence in the procedures regarding sharing personal client data with other agencies by electronic means. The second is a strong professional and cultural belief that the most difficult to help clients need to be supported through face-to-face meetings with advisers who they trust and with whom they have developed a personal rapport. In this latter respect, technological interventions are viewed as lacking the necessary ‘human touch’. This is an important issue developed in the sub-sections following.

8.3 Patterns of working: technology versus intensive personal support

The vast majority of those consulted through case study interviews welcomed the introduction of ICT into their work with clients who are NEET and were able to see positive benefits arising from it. However, an analysis of their responses indicated that whilst they valued the ‘back office’ role of technology in terms of data management and communication, they were far less sure of its place in the guidance they provide to young people. A debate over the relative value of technology versus intensive personal support, or indeed the most appropriate mix of these two methods of working, was apparent in all of the case study discussions. Points in the sub-sections following illustrate this debate and provide examples of a number of possible enabling factors and barriers.

8.3.1 *Young people who are NEET are not a homogeneous group*

An overwhelming view was that there is no right way of working with clients who are NEET and that this needs to be left to the professional judgements of PAs. It was emphasised that the term NEET covers a wide range of young people who have as many differences as they do similarities. In essence, it is regarded that part of the professional skill of a personal adviser is to form an opinion about the best method of providing support. For example, who is most likely to respond to a text message and who might best be contacted through a home visit. There is some evidence that standardised, large-scale technological interventions such as mass text messaging might not only have limited impact but might even be counter-productive by being interpreted as a form of harassment. On the other hand some PAs think contacting clients who are NEET by text or email might form an important first step along a pathway of guidance interventions.

8.3.2 *Young people who are NEET are not IT ‘savvy’*

That young people who are NEET are not ‘IT savvy’ is a view expressed strongly by a minority of those consulted, but this perception was challenged by others who think that clients who are NEET are capable of using technology. A careful analysis of the data suggests that most people agree that young people who are NEET are quite capable of using mobile telephone texts and are, in this respect, reasonably IT ‘savvy’. There is far less agreement over whether those clients who are NEET with literacy difficulties are comfortable using emails or searching the internet for information. Another dimension to the debate surrounds lifestyle. Whereas some ‘types’ of young people who are NEET do spend evenings at home surfing the internet or ‘chatting’ to friends through social networking sites, another ‘type’ tends to spend more time outside their home with groups of friends and away from technology (apart possibly from use of mobile telephones).

8.3.3 *Face-to-face contact is more important than technology*

Those personal advisers who stress the counselling aspects of guidance, and who feel they have to support a client’s overall welfare and not just their career prospects, generally think there is no technological substitute for face-to-face guidance. In this case, the adviser can create a rapport with a client and can use such visual forms of communication as ‘reading’ body language to assist them in providing support. Knowing when to sit down with a client and talk through options is thought by many to be at the heart of the work they do with clients who are NEET. An extension to this is the importance of the home visit, which was mentioned by several of those who specialise in working with young people who are NEET. They explain that meeting parents and forming a view of the home environment is hugely advantageous when supplying young people who are NEET with advice.

8.3.4 *Interest in technology will not replace sitting down with a client*

There is evidence from some interviews that the update of technology will require cultural change shifts. In one interview, it was reported that there are many reports produced by Connexions companies around the country that say that an increase in the use of technology is what young people want, but the view held by managers and PAs can still be that technology should not replace sitting down with a young person and supporting them through direct contact.

8.3.5 *Technology provides a channel for young people who are NEET who do not feel comfortable in face-to-face meetings*

A view put forward by some Connexions staff was that within the total cohort of young people who are NEET there is a minority who have great difficulty in expressing themselves in direct meetings with personal advisers or indeed with other young people. In these cases it has been recognised that technology in the form of creative media projects, online discussions or advice received through a virtual Connexions centre provides an alternative communication channel. For example, a digital arts project is enabling some young people to explain what it is like growing up in a large rural county. A personal adviser in another Connexions service is interested in establishing an online forum where a group of young people who are NEET who are caring for sick relatives have a chance to share experiences and support each other. It is clear that Connexions service staff can see advantages and disadvantages, that they recognise that certain young people can benefit more than others, but that their thoughts about the ways that technology is applied to the support of particular individuals has not been formulated directly (although there are exceptions, such as the one described in Sub-section 8.3.9).

8.3.6 *Technology is used in order to arrange face-to-face meetings with clients*

A personal adviser who works intensively with a small group of clients who are NEET has formed her own conclusion about the relative advantages of technological support and face-to-face meetings. She has found that the young people who are NEET with whom she works respond well to mobile telephone texts or messages left on their voicemail. The purpose of these is to arrange face-to-face meetings with her clients where she can discuss topics in more depth and gauge their reactions to her suggestions from their body language and general demeanour. This is a useful example of how technology support is combined with face-to-face support.

8.3.7 *Using technology – is the process being given more attention than the outcome?*

Most of those Connexions and related services staff interviewed felt comfortable with the role that technology is playing in supporting work with young people in general and with clients who are NEET in particular. Whilst there were a few who felt that uploading information on the CCIS database was time consuming, most in Connexions services believed such a database was a very useful data management tool. In this respect technology faced no competition from previous manual systems.

Text messaging, email and websites provide personal advisers with additional means of contacting clients and passing information onto them. Most PAs liked having a range of communication methods at their disposal and selected those that they thought were most appropriate for individual clients. They felt they could do their work more speedily and more efficiently as a result of technology.

Guidance, however, was a more contested area and various Connexions managers interviewed reported debates amongst staff as to the role technology might play in this aspect of their work. Whilst staff are prepared to look seriously at initiatives such as virtual guidance provision and social networking sites to determine the value they have, there is a concern expressed by some that in an attempt to appear innovative, too much attention is being given to the technological process and not enough to the outcomes it produces. Consequently, there are many in Connexions services who are yet to be convinced that, whatever benefits technology might offer in terms of data management and communication, it cannot provide a similar level of benefit for guidance and lead to a replacement of the more traditional ‘sitting down with a client’ and talking through the issues about which they are concerned.

Debates in Connexions and related services can revolve around issues concerned with the distancing that results when technology is involved compared to direct guidance opportunities of face-to-face meetings. However, it is clear that young people do come into Connexions centres in order to use the technology facilities that exist there, and related to levels of access and use, it is unclear from evidence either what the attendance figures in centres are (related to the entire population for whom support is offered), and the comparative levels of effectiveness of different approaches.

A manager in one Connexions service expressed some caution about how technology might be used with young people and what effect it has. He felt that it might be that technology might not actually achieve as much as its more enthusiastic advocates claim it can offer, but on the other hand it might do so if it is used in a way that has been proven to be effective. Evidence about effectiveness and comparative effectiveness does not appear to be available to managers or PAs in Connexions and related services. So, for example, the view that working with clients through social networking sites does not offer as much as attractive and interactive websites appears to be a view that is based on personal and local comparisons by interested individuals.

It is clear that some people think technology is the way to deliver more services, while many people are against it if they see careers guidance as 'one-to-one across a table'. The people in this latter group appear to see technology as culturally inappropriate, they say the young people who are NEET have no contact with technology, but in spite of this view, young people who are NEET come into centres to use internet access.

8.3.8 *The importance of home visits and meeting parents*

In one Connexions service, contact with clients is done on a case-by-case basis. The PA assesses the client and works out the best way to contact them. Part of this assessment considers the problems of using email with the more 'traditional hardcore' young people who are NEET, since it is text based and for many of them literacy is a major issue.

A lot of contact with clients who are NEET is by telephone. The service uses letters less and less, as it is found that they are not that effective. They use email if the client has an email address. However, the service is now moving to home visits as the most productive form of contact. The great benefit about home visits is the potential insight into the client's circumstances and a chance to speak to parents. All the service's operational staff do some home visits from time to time, but the service also employs client support staff recruited just to do home visits. These staff have been recruited to help with the tracking of young people in another Connexions service called "Keeping in touch workers".

The service uses some text contact but they feel not as much as they could. Records from the Connexions service show that they have up to 75% response rate from the texts sent out. They have used bulk texts, but do not use it that much. They prefer to minimise the amount of text in a message and this means customising it so that it is relevant to the needs of an individual young person. The service is thinking about using more texting or mobile telephone calls because home visits are a very expensive form of intervention. To maintain effective contact details, the service has given young people a £5 top-up on their mobile if they contact the service. This means that the service has a record of their mobile telephone number that can be used. This has been found to be a good way of establishing and maintaining contact with clients who are NEET.

9. CONCLUSIONS

9.1 The current position

Considering the evidence available so far, it appears that, with respect to how technologies are being used by support workers in LAs with young people who are NEET, a picture at an individual LA level is known much more exactly than a picture across LAs in terms of a landscape. Examples of exemplary practice within LAs are being identified, by LAs themselves and through other reviews, and although these are potentially valuable, they do not necessarily indicate either the strengths or weaknesses of those practices in terms of wider technological, organisational or cultural contexts. They also do not necessarily indicate how LAs can move towards a more holistic system and provision, or the technological considerations that need to be taken into account in order to do so. Issues and challenges that LAs and their agencies face are neither identified clearly by published evidence, nor are the ways that service course providers or voluntary organisations integrate and use ICT made clear.

There is no known existing overview of this area of knowledge. This report provides an initial overview, but it is clear that the width of this review is not as great as it could be, and that this position supports the need for a continued focus in this area. It appears likely that LAs may benefit from reviews that allow useful comparisons of this arena, identification of their own strengths and weaknesses, and a sharing of practices that allow more holistic patterns of implementation to be considered.

9.2 Strategic approaches require a greater focus

From the review across LAs involved, few strategic approaches to the deployment and developments of technologies to support those who support young people who are NEET have been identified. In part this is due to the stage of reintegration of Connexions and related services to the LA, in part to reorganisation that is concerned with the development of wider multi-agency approaches, and in part to lack of funding to support this form of strategic implementation. In moving forward with this form of implementation, however, major initial thrust needs to be succeeded by later continued integration at an increasingly individual level (with regard to agencies, and individual support workers). If strong initial thrusts are not taken at this time, then implementation of uses of technologies will be likely to be patchy at best.

Integration of technologies within and across services will require appropriate levels of strategic, cultural, organisational and technological expertise and effort. Strategic approaches to technological integration will require an integration of multiple expertise, and forms of team grouping and team working will need to be adopted if such implementation is to be fully successful.

9.3 Quantitative evidence is needed nationally and at LA levels

Currently, qualitative data and evidence about the position of uses of technologies by support workers with young people who are NEET is much more accessible than is quantitative data and evidence. However, for any national or local initiative to be implemented, at a hardware, software, resource, support, or initiative level, quantitative evidence will be required. There is a potential national need to drive forward the gathering of this form of data.

9.4 Provision of technologies

Even at a hardware provision level, basic technology equipment (a computer with internet access) is not currently provided for all support staff. The levels of provision vary across LAs, and these levels need to be known more accurately if basic provision is to be adequately addressed.

Database systems that are used by LAs currently will need to be enhanced in the future. It is clear that multi-agency working, and the provision of online support for young people, will be best supported through systems that take a more integrated approach than those currently in use.

Other forms of data presentation could assist those who support young people who are NEET. Data that are collected and reported currently are not handled through categories concerned with support needs and support actions. Those who provide support are likely to benefit from alternative forms of data categorisation and handling.

9.5 Application of technologies will require detailed understanding of support needs

Many groups of supporters are involved with young people who are NEET. Different groups support young people in different ways, and for different reasons. It is clear that training and exemplars of practice with technologies for support workers need to take these differences and specific needs into account.

Those supporting young people who are NEET recognise that they are not a homogeneous group. At the same time, ways that technologies might be deployed to support and engage different sub-groups have not been refined or defined at this time. Much greater detail is needed, to understand how specific support workers might use technologies to benefit specific sub-groups of young people.

9.6 Communication and information

Technologies currently in place are being used most commonly to offer two forms of support: communication between support workers and young people; and the provision of information to young people. Some LAs have put a great deal of effort into looking at which methods of contact are most effective. It is clear that there is a need to consider this aspect to a greater extent; effectiveness of contact mechanisms related to individual characteristics of young people should be considered, identified and recognised more.

Implications of the increasingly wide ranges of information and applications going online need to be considered carefully. A divergence of information may be useful, but a divergence of channels through which to access that information may be confusing (for support workers, as well as for young people).

Public access to information through technologies, and young people's access to information, is not spread within and across LAs in the same ways. This may relate to local differences and preferences, but it is also in some cases leading to gaps in provision for young people.

The relationship of communication and culturally held views about practice need to be explored and recognised more. Some young people do not readily move away from their localities, for instance; in terms of communication channels, this needs to be considered carefully, if technologies are to be of maximum benefit in supporting the needs of those young people.

Ways of engaging young people through forms of technology are diversifying. Using single channels may not be the most useful approach to gaining maximum benefit. Some young people may choose uses of certain technologies more, and the further developments of engagement mechanisms need to match the implementation of new devices that are familiar to young people, rather than trailing them.

The roles of different IAG websites are not always clear for those who use them. This might mean that their uses are most disillusioning for those young people who are the hardest to reach (those who have low attention spans, low literacy levels, and low levels of patience when their immediate needs are not responded to).

One-stop shops need to be developed where possible. The types of communication and information that are accessible to young people should diverge and develop from those available at present, but access routes need to be easy to find and to use.

9.7 Taking some specific forms of support further with technologies

The collecting together and reporting of vacancies that exist in an area or region are still not fully handled through technological systems. This means that dissemination and handling of this

information is not as efficient or effective as it could be. Further action to improve collection and reporting needs to be undertaken within a technological medium.

The separate requirements of support workers who need to make contact with young people, to discuss and check on agreed actions should be considered separately from a technological viewpoint. Technologies that allow interactions of a more personal nature, or where personal details are involved, need to be considered adequately from a safeguarding perspective. A provision that requires safeguarding measures to be implemented should not, however, halt developments of a provision where such measures are not required, or not required to the same extents.

The development of virtual Connexions centres and virtual PAs, as well as an exploration of their wider potential, should be monitored and evaluated. Some of these developments are being implemented at this point in time, and should be evaluated in order to allow wider potential (or not) to be explored.

How young people can access and be involved in filmmaking and the creative arts needs to be recognised more widely. To date, there appears to have been a much wider focus on practical and social skills and initiatives; the width and applications of filmmaking and creative arts needs to be considered in many geographical areas to greater extents. The value of outcomes of these practices with young people needs to be recognised and endorsed more, and the forms of these skills needed for different jobs and vacancies need to be detailed and described more for young people.

The development and role of social networking sites needs to be monitored and evaluated. The creation of specific social networking sites for specific groups, such as support workers, are being suggested in some countries; there is clearly a need to consider this within the contexts of specific support worker groups and across multi-agency working practices.

9.8 Major areas of LA need

Cultural development is likely to be fundamentally important. The culture of using technologies to engage and develop interests and skills of young people is not widespread; the culture of developing uses of emerging technologies is not widespread; the culture of integrating new experiences into practice is not widespread; the culture of using social and creative aspects of technologies is not widespread. However, evidence suggests that many support workers, given financial and training opportunities, would move forward positively in terms of cultural climate.

Training for support workers will be vital. It is clear that there is a need for training in a range of areas, specified for different groups of support workers. How support workers can use technologies to engage and support young people is an area that requires more exploration, if technological provision and training is to be of full value to all concerned.

Technology across an LA needs to be built into longer-term engagement and employment patterns with support workers. Currently the uses of technologies are not integrated into employment needs and practices widely, yet it is clear that benefits are arising that could be deployed more widely. Mechanisms to most effectively put these into place need to be considered and adopted.

Projects and pilots have been a way that Connexions and other support groups have developed uses of technology to support young people. The concepts of projects and pilots need to be reinforced in terms of sustainability and integration. Currently, too many projects and pilots are not sustained because they are not integrated into practice and longer-term planning from the outset, and funding patterns do not allow this to happen.

Using technology to engage and support those young people identified at school age who may become NEET is likely to become increasingly important. However, there is a clear need to understand how to identify young people who are at risk of moving into this category, and what measures of action are most likely to be of benefit to them in the longer as well as in the shorter-term.

LAs and Connexions services should consider how they are addressing the six uses of ICT and what needs they have in each of these respects. LAs should undertake an audit of their ICT and ICT uses regularly, and in a form that will enable them to plan and act strategically with development of all six uses of ICT (see Sub-section 4.9, Table 8).

9.9 National needs

A national website to allow LAs and Connexions services to access resources, case studies and exemplars of practice concerned with ICT developments should be supported. In this context, the role of existing websites, such as the National Guidance Research Forum (NGRF) website, should be considered.

ICT confidence and competence needs to be developed further across groups of and numbers of support workers. Although this should be supported locally at LA or district levels, there is need to consider this at a national level, since the levels of uses of appropriate forms of ICT are not currently widespread.

Costs for different actions need to be recognised. There are likely to be needs for significant funding in certain areas, but there are also likely to be economies of scale that could be involved, in providing for appropriate levels of hardware, software, or training, for example.

Technologies involved in supporting enhanced patterns of working need to be more widely recognised. If uptake of technologies is to occur across support groups, then their enhancements to practice need to be well recognised and made accessible to those who provide support for support workers.

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APPENDIX 1:

Evidence base

Table 14: Forms and levels of evidence gathered for this report

Form of evidence	Level of evidence gathered
Attendance at Becta Regional LA meetings	10 meetings attended, and discussions undertaken with various LA representatives in each location
Interviews with Connexions service representatives	17
Interviews with CLC representatives	2
Interviews with LA representatives	3
Interviews with RBC representatives	1
Online questionnaire returns from LAs	6

APPENDIX 2:

Two case studies

Case study 1

Most of the contact in the LA with young people who are NEET is through personal contact. The young people meet with their personal advisers (PAs) and a record of a meeting is made on a computer. Therefore PAs want to talk to young people in a room with a PC. But there are not enough computers available for PAs and young people to use in the Connexions centres. It is felt that this situation is unlikely to improve because the financial position is getting worse. Many young people who are NEET do not want to wait until a computer becomes free. Therefore, they will not stay at the Connexions centre to get the information they want. The LA needs more computers so that the PAs can do their interviews. Some 500 young people a week go into the 'one stop centre', so there is pressure on PAs to gain access to a computer. There are 4 computers available in the 'one stop centre' and another 4 that the young people can use. So the number of computers does not match the footfall. There are now complaints about the amount of IT facilities the centre has.

Contact with young people who are NEET is maintained through a number of routes:

- i) Letters home – but the response rate is minimal.
- ii) Telephone (landline and mobile) – mainly to invite them in to have a talk with their PA.
- iii) Text messaging – the centre has the facility to do a mass text to young people. But this only works if the mobile number records are updated. Although the problem of changing numbers is recognised, the centre still persists with the use of mobile telephone numbers.
- iv) Email – to those who have it and use it. The centre finds that young people who are NEET have emails either on the PC or on their telephones. The centre realise that there are those young people who are NEET who have special needs and who cannot use this technology.
- v) As a last resort the centre does home visits, but this is very expensive in terms of time.

In order to help their young people who are NEET, it is recognised that PAs need to do a lot of intensive work. They have to know the young people, what they tend to do all day and when they are likely to be at home, so they can be contacted. Also they need to know the best way of contacting individual young people who are NEET.

At the centre, they are trying to use more information technology (IT) and use less paper. For example, every client meeting with a member of staff is recorded on a computer database. More and more applications are now done online as well. There is now a national apprenticeship online registration and application process. The LA 14-19 online prospectus now has a built-in common application process. So an increasing amount of work needs ICT and one of the main problems is lack of resources.

The PAs who work in schools have access to a computer in their offices there. The centre has also supplied 2 computers per school so that students can do their own research. Because of the shortage of computers, the centre is trialling use of digital pens. There is a special pad to write on and what has been written on to a computer can then be uploaded. This is likely to save a lot of time. It means a PA can write an action plan for a young person, and this can then be stored on the computer. The centre is trialling the pen with action plans because the aim is to eventually have all action plans online along with the basic client record – the CCIS. It is felt that the pen will suit those PAs who are not quick enough to type on a PC when they are talking to a client.

Many advisers have laptops. People with laptops usually get one if they are working on a special project and it is funded through this route. Most PAs work in school, so they have access to a PC. The other group who use laptops are those who do home visits. They do not have their own laptop – they have to book one from a central stock. The main reason for this is lack of money. There are a few PAs who have expressed concern about carrying a laptop around with them, especially one that is

large and visible. The centre likes the idea of smaller ‘notebooks’. If the centre had the money, a supply of these would be an ideal situation.

The centre now provides PAs with memory sticks, which have on them all the forms that young people may need to complete. The centre also includes some basic information about LA policies on them, so that PAs can always refer to these if they can get access to a computer (even if there is no internet access).

The centre has a television studio where programmes for a young person’s channel are created, and these are communicated via the web. The centre may possibly broadcast it via Freeview. The channel is being used to promote young people and what they are capable of doing. It will advertise vacancies and events. It will also include documentary-style programmes on topics such as ‘what it is like to be a teenager’. The young people are doing this themselves. They do the research for it by interviewing people on the streets. The young people who are NEET are running it. Groups of 10 young people work for 2 days a week on this. The IT that is available for use appeals to the young people who are NEET; it’s a strong incentive. They like filming and then putting music to the film. By taking part in this, they receive accreditation. As well as using the IT they develop other skills too. For example, they have to research the topic, and plan a production schedule, before they start to make the programme. The TV studio is funded from a number of sources and uses money from the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The aim is to make it self-sustaining through a combination of adverts and funding from other agencies.

It is found that most young people who are NEET can use IT because it is part of their culture. The experience is that typical young people who are NEET like using IT (although a lot depends on the type of IT they are asked to use). In particular, whether it reminds them of school or not. For example, writing a CV would remind them of school. The centre is looking at whether it is feasible for these young people to produce a CV and then send it out to employers and colleges in DVD form. This may be a lot easier than the PA typing out a CV for the young person. If the PA types the CV, there is no real learning and it would mean the young person would have difficulty updating it.

One requirement of obtaining a job in a Connexions Service is having enough IT skills to do the job. This includes knowledge of MS Word, internet use, sending emails and some data base skills. When a PA joins, they are provided with training in use of the data base (CCIS Aspire) so they have enough knowledge to perform necessary functions. The centre has Aspire champions based in each of the offices and it is these champions who offer training to colleagues within their teams. The centre also does some basic assessment to see what level they are at in terms of basic IT skills. If they score under 60, they get specific training on such fundamentals as MS Excel and emails. Most of this training is through the form of e-learning.

Case study 2

The primary contact with young people who are NEET is almost entirely done through Connexions staff. In the LA there is a formula used, indicating that a PA should work with about 40 young people who are NEET. Every intervention with a young person is logged on the data base in a format specified by the government to assist with the collection of performance management and client information data. Interrogating this data, and looking for patterns, is a major part of an LA NEET strategy manager’s job.

Youth workers do not work that much with young people who are NEET. Youth workers mainly work with young people who are engaged with an activity; usually young people who are NEET are not. For various reasons Connexions and youth workers do not work well together. The other group that works with young people who are NEET to some extent is the Youth Offending Team.

The Connexions service is a paperless service. All staff have access to computers at school, in centres and the other sites where they are based. The service does not supply laptops for their staff, just fixed PCs. Staff can have access to a mobile if they want one.

All Connexions Centres have internet cafes. Callers to these centres have access to the internet. PCs have been put into various public spaces in the form of kiosks and other facilities. So it is easy for young people to access the vacancy database from home, centres or other spaces such as libraries.

Connexions PAs use mobile telephones and emails. Email addresses are given out to the young people. The young people can email their PA and this is well used by young people in general. However, in the service's experience young people who are NEET tend not to do so; they are not that 'IT savvy'. About 70% of contact with young people who are NEET is by mobile telephone. Often young people who are NEET mix together in groups, so if a PA speaks to one via a mobile then the PA can ask them to pass the telephone around so the PA can speak to more of them. This is the best way of contacting young people who are NEET - word of mouth from friends. If you can get in touch with one, it is possible to get a message out to a wider group.

Mobile telephones are found to be far more useful than computers and emails. Often young people who are NEET do not have computers at home for all sorts of reasons. They may not have a landline and there is a worry that IT equipment in a house may get stolen. A lot of the young people who are NEET do not have a home email address. It is also a 'lifestyle thing'; many young people who are NEET do not sit at home on the internet. They are not 'IT savvy' and also tend to be more mobile – out and about rather than in one place. In the service's experience there are very few occasions when they would try to contact a young person who is NEET using email. The service has trialled online chat rooms for young people who are NEET but very few use them so they have been discontinued.

Young people who are NEET normally prefer a personal service. They may make contact by telephone but they prefer to meet up and get to know their PA. Most want to build up a positive relationship with their PA. Young people who are NEET do not see themselves as having IT needs.

The LA has got a 14-19 online prospectus, and this works well for getting information about opportunities out to the public. In terms of records, the service only retains a brief record of qualifications, what young people who are NEET are interested in and details of their PA.

CCIS can be used to match young people who are NEET to vacancies and there are programs such as KUDOS that help with the formation of career matches. However, it is not clear if this is the approach that is most useful for young people who are NEET. Many of them find it hard to list what they are good at or their interests. They do not look at opportunities like this; many are not 'work ready' in this sense. They need more support, building up their confidence and self-esteem, and then trying out ideas in supported environments. The big thing that is coming for young people who are NEET is NLP (neuro-linguistic programming). There is likely to be some software linked to this in the future.

CCIS is used to report on trends and patterns, to partners on the 14-19 Partnership Board. The service also has to report to the government every month giving NEET figures. All Connexions Services collect this information – "but just because they collect it does not mean they use it effectively".

The nominated NEETs strategy manager for the LA manages the percentage of young people who are NEET. Each Connexions company has a NEET target they must not go above (it is called the Public Sector Agreement target made between the LA and government, but is passported to the Connexions provider within each LA).

The LA does not have specific individuals responsible for IT functions within the Connexions service – this is mainly due to the fact that the LA is small. The service has people who have an interest in this area, but it is not written into job specifications.

Introduction to the IT systems and the paperless service in the LA forms part of an overall package of training. The service does not have specific training in uses of technology. However, the service has a number of younger PAs who are 'into technology' and it is felt that they will be likely to drive this

dimension in the future. Experiences of using technology are passed on to others mainly through informal support. But it is likely there will be some training in this area in the future. Overall, levels of competence and confidence in use of technology by PAs are felt to be variable.

Contact workers do not use specific software to support young people who are NEET. But the service deals with this group in a different way. For example, with non-NEET young people, if a PA leaves three messages on their mobile telephones with no response, then their number is archived. With young people who are NEET, it is different – the PAs are much more ‘hands-on’ – they are more persistent. They try to make contact by any and all means at least once every two weeks.

The service has access to Council Public Screens in public buildings. The service uses it to advertise vacancies and promote events. There are no specific technology-based projects to support young people who are NEET in the LA.

Things are changing with Connexions services, and it is likely that differences will be seen to emerge in the future. For example in one region, four Connexions services have all become LA services. The other six in the region are commissioned services, and it is likely that differences will start to emerge between the LA and commissioned services. It is felt that the latter may have more scope and flexibility to use IT - and possibly also the funding to do so. It is recognised that there is technology there, but that it is not cheap. A lot will depend on whether a Connexions provider has the money to buy it and then employ the staff to run it. At the moment such specialist non-delivery posts are being removed.

APPENDIX 3:

Survey questionnaire: Essential information gathering

Becta has commissioned Lancaster University to undertake a Landscape Review of technologies that LAs use to support young people who are NEET. Initial research shows that, due to recent organisational changes, there is only limited accurate information accessible. Becta wishes to consider how to support LAs positively, but initially needs to identify an accurate state of play, so that future endeavour might be appropriately focused. Lancaster University want to gather evidence that will provide a fundamental understanding about this area, and want to do so in the first instance by gathering a range of important details through this survey. Completion of the questionnaire is entirely voluntary; any evidence provided will be used to support positive endeavours, and will not be reported in connection with any named LA without agreement.

Please note that this questionnaire will be accessible online (the URL will be provided separately), or it can be completed electronically and returned by email to d.passey@lancaster.ac.uk, or by hand and returned to Don Passey, D72 County South, Department of Educational Research, Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4YL. If possible, please return by Monday 16th March 2009.

To respond to questions, please highlight in colour, tick, or complete boxes as appropriate.

1. Who provides the primary contact with young people who are NEET?	Connexions workers	Youth workers	Others, and these are
2. How many, and which, groups, agencies and individuals in LAs are involved in supporting young people who are NEET as well as youth workers and Connexions services?	Number of groups:	Youth offending team	Care leaving team Others are
3. How many people are employed in each of these groups?	Number in Connexions :	Number of youth workers:	Number of others:
4. How many are provided with a computer for their work?	In Connexions :	Youth workers:	Others:
5. How many are provided additionally with a laptop for their work?	In Connexions :	Youth workers:	Others:
6. How many are provided with a mobile telephone for their work?	In Connexions :	Youth workers:	Others:
7. Are there public computer facilities for young people to access across the LA, perhaps in	Yes	No	

Connexions centres or in kiosks?					
8. Do those who make contact with young people use technology to engage with them or make contact with them at all?	None do	A few do	Many do	Almost all do	All do
9. Do course and opportunity providers use technology as a part of their provision?	None do	A few do	Many do	Almost all do	All do

10	Do you have a technology system to retain records of achievement or to maintain e-portfolios of work of young people?	Yes, it's called:	No			
11	Do you have a technology system to match the interests of young people with job or work-based learning opportunities?	Yes	No			
12	Do you have a technology system to collect and report opportunities of vacancies that exist?	Yes	No			
13	Do you have a management system to collect and report data about the status of young people who are NEET within a locality or area or region?	Yes, it's called:	No			
14	Do management systems provide outputs that are felt to allow useful categories of young people to be identified by those who support them?	Yes	No			
15	How does data that a contact person collects on a young person get logged and recorded within the management system?	It isn't logged and recorded	It's put in manually	It's transferred electronically when there are discussions		
16	Do you have specific individuals who are responsible for specific technologies or for technology initiatives?	Yes, for:	No			
17	Are key contact workers trained in uses of technology?	All of them are	Some are	Only a few are	None are	
18	Are there ways that contact workers can pass on their experiences with technology?	Yes, through:	Only in an ad hoc way	Not generally		
19	What levels of competence or confidence in uses of technology do contact workers have?	High competence and confidence	High competence, but lower confidence	About average for both, or about half	Low competence, but higher confidence	Low competence and confidence
20	Do contact workers use specific software to support young people who are NEET?	Yes, they use:	No			
21	Do you have facilities to broadcast forms of public messages about approaches to education, employment or	Yes, it's called:	No			

training?

22 Are there specific projects using
technology within the LA aimed
at supporting young people who
are NEET?

23 Are you happy for this evidence
to be provided to Becta with the
LA named?

Yes, it's called:	No
Yes	No

24. Are you happy for us to contact you if we wish to follow up with other queries?

Yes, and please contact:	No
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Thank you for your time in completing this questionnaire!

To follow up, Don Passey or a colleague (Paul Davies) will attend the next Becta LA regional meeting, and they will be happy to discuss points with you.