



LINCOLNSHIRE & RUTLAND

**EVALUATION OF THE
LINCOLNSHIRE CONNEXIONS PILOT**

FINAL SUMMARY REPORT

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LINCOLNSHIRE CONNEXIONS SERVICE PILOT 2000 - 2001

SUMMARY REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Lincolnshire Connexions pilot provided an exciting opportunity to test out new ways of working throughout the county and to develop closer working partnership with a diverse range of youth support organisations. Lincolnshire was one of 13 areas chosen to trail a variety of initiatives to help inform the development of the new Connexions service both nationally and locally. This report was commissioned by the Lincolnshire Connexions pilot to summarise key lessons learned and discuss issues arising from the pilot activities. These range from operational to strategic, local to county-wide, and from research to action. Central to the approach was the establishment of multi-agency working designed to build on what was perceived to be best practice in Lincolnshire and Rutland and to further extend these activities. From 1st April 2001, Lincolnshire and Rutland has received additional Government funding to deliver the new Connexions Service as part of the national roll-out programme in England.
- 1.2 In July 2000, a Connexions pilot manager was appointed with responsibility for co-ordinating the strategic planning and development of the pilot, linking with other local and national organisations. Multi-agency workshops and consultation activities provided new opportunities to develop a broad range of Connexions initiatives. From this, nine local projects were identified in order to focus on specific topics and to gain improved understanding of key areas. Central to each project and the entire pilot, was the formation of multi-agency teams set up to manage and be part of the Connexions development process. The practice of working together created new opportunities for staff from a wide range of agencies to strengthen working links and to improve their knowledge and understanding of how each service operates.
- 1.3 Within this context, research and evaluation played a crucial role from the start in helping to assess the impact of the Connexions Strategy on the local community, and in supporting policy-makers and practitioners to determine what works and why.

National context

- 1.4 The national development of the Connexions Service in England is a new and challenging initiative involving many agencies and partners. Connexions aims to *'provide a new approach to guiding and supporting young people through their teenage years and in their transition to adulthood and working life'*¹. The new service is still evolving following consultations at national and local levels. Evidence from the experiences of 13 pilot projects is still unfolding and the findings are expected to inform future planning guidance from the Connexions Service National Unit (CSNU).

¹ Connexions Service -Prospectus and Specification 2000.

The Government is currently undertaking a national consultation on the future funding of Connexions Services and the training of Personal Advisers², as well as the Connexions Framework for Assessment, Planning, Implementation and Review³. There is also continuing work being undertaken in developing guidance on involving young people in the design and development of future provision⁴. The latter is a crucial requirement within the Connexions strategy.

Research objectives and methodology

- 1.5 The Centre for Guidance Studies (CeGS), University of Derby worked with the Lincolnshire Pilot to develop a customised local evaluation strategy. This involved a dual approach to evaluation activities whereby each Project Manager undertook training in research and evaluation and applied this to their project work with continuous on-going support and mentoring from experienced CeGS researchers. Pilot project managers have developed skills, knowledge and understanding of evaluation practices. The local evaluators also developed a 'Little Book of Evaluation', which will feature local case studies and the intention is to develop the booklet so that it can be customised by other Connexions Partnerships.
- 1.6 The nine supported projects were:
- Pooling and tracking
 - Involving young people and parents
 - Personal Adviser training and supply
 - Early identification of need
 - Raising aspirations
 - Unification of diagnostic instruments
 - Developing a school-based Connexions Service
 - Revitalising the National Record of Achievement
 - Increasing client access to information.
- 1.7 This report draws primarily on findings from each individual project. It provides a summary of the key issues highlighted throughout the evaluation process. However, it does not offer an in-depth account of the full range of outcomes and issues, given that comprehensive reports for each of the projects are available on the Connexions Lincolnshire & Rutland website:
<http://www.connexions-lincsandrutland.co.uk>. Each project report reflects on practice and identifies what works and what does not work, and provides a set of recommendations to inform future planning and delivery.

Local context

- 1.8 The pilot was formed to strengthen models of multi-agency working, and initially twenty-six organisations were involved across the nine projects with project managers leading on initiatives.

² The Guidance Council Policy Document No 17.

³ The Connexions Framework for Assessment, Planning, Implementation and Review - Consultation Draft, February 2001

⁴ National Youth Agency 2001

⁹ Extract taken from section 3 of the Pilot Proposal

This was designed to build on existing links between organisations, to draw on the experience and expertise of professionals within the county, and to foster closer community involvement in the development of a local youth support service able to effectively respond to young peoples' needs.

Although Rutland was not originally a designated area for the pilot wherever possible, representatives from this geographical area were included in the development work. From the beginning of September 2000 to the end of March 2001, a total of:

- 84 organisations, including 26 educational institutions;
- around 200 adults; and
- and 100s of young people

were consulted and involved in helping to shape the Lincolnshire Connexions pilot.

- 1.9 Much has been achieved particularly in relation to establishing highly effective project teams, consulting with local schools, involving partners in the production of delivery plans and setting targets, and in all cases, forming positive working relationships for future development work.

2. FINDINGS FROM THE PROJECT

2.1 Project 1: Pooling and tracking

Aim: To increase understanding of the status and experience of young people by gathering, sharing, and analysing client data in a cost effective way.

Key lessons

- The project highlighted the differences between the cultures of organisations that are required to work together within Connexions partnerships. It became apparent that if practitioners found the process of data sharing too cumbersome they would actually avoid it.
- Generally, there is a lack of specialist knowledge and expertise in relation to the legal structure within which personal information can be used. This includes data protection, human rights and child protection acts that directly impinge on protocols for pooling and tracking information.
- In most cases, young people were willing to allow information about them to be passed between organisations, providing consent was obtained in advance.

Issues

- Alignment of ICT systems is required between organisations in order to achieve maximum benefits for gathering, sharing and analysing client data.
- Clear guidance is required from the CSNU on the legal framework and templates for sharing protocols and use of client consent forms. Given that Connexions partnerships are likely to invest time and effort in developing their own databases to cope with the demands of tracking, there are choices to be made about the extent to which a national database should be created. An early decision is required to ensure ICT compatibility and maximising of resources.

2.2 Project 2: Involving young people and parents

Aim: To develop more responsive and fit for purpose services by exploring an implementing ways of engaging young people and their parents in designing / developing and reviewing services.

Key lessons

- When consulting with young people and parents it is essential to adopt a flexible approach regarding the time, place, delivery and language used. It is crucial to ensure that 'hardest to help' young people are given the option of being met on their own territory.
- The purpose for the consultation needs to be explicit and staff must be fully trained to plan and undertake such activity.
- A multi-agency team approach is desirable in order to ensure a range of knowledge, skills and expertise in the planning, management, delivery, and evaluation stages.

Issues

- Whether or not to have a 'specialist team' to undertake consultation exercises with young people and parents or to develop a more 'generic approach' involving staff within and across agencies.
- How best to involve all parents/carers in consultation exercises to inform them about Connexions and take account of their views.

2.3 Project 3: Personal Adviser training and supply

Aim: To develop approaches to the delivery of Connexions through a network of trained Personal Advisers, Learning Mentors.

Key lessons

- There is a need to widen the representation of Personal Advisers to ensure a diverse range of Connexions staff with appropriate attitudes, skills and experience to meet the needs of all young people.
- Young people should be involved in developing appropriate methodologies for use in the Personal Adviser selection process.
- The Emotional Intelligence Screening Tool⁵ has the potential to be an excellent aid to selection and identifying areas of staff development. Further piloting and statistical analysis is required.
- Reflective practice and professional development should be underpinned by mentoring and supervision arrangements in order to provide continuing support for Personal Advisers and their line-managers.

Issues

- For those without academic qualifications, an access programme designed to offer preparatory training should be made available however, this will require additional DfEE funding. It will be vital to ensure that recruitment and selection policies and practices follow vigorous vetting procedures.

⁵ Lincolnshire Connexions developed this tool as part of the pilot project to specifically measure the attitudes required for Personal Adviser work.

- Close working links need to be developed between Personal Adviser training providers and local Connexions pilot services in order to achieve a well planned, coherent, and 'fit for purpose' training strategy.

2.4 **Project 4: Early identification of need**

Aim: To increase our potential to identify and address the needs of 'at risk' clients at any early stage in the learning process and to increase the potential of their participation and achievements.

Key lessons

- Primary and secondary schools involved in the project reported that they highly valued the '11-Up' approach to supporting transition for 'at risk' students.
- A joint schools/Connexions approach towards sharing information between Key Stages 2&3 has led to a more focused use of time and resources for supporting 'at risk' students in their transition to the secondary phase.
- Consultation with pupils at an early stage has enabled their voices to be heard and their views taken into account so that improvements can be made to the transition process.

Issues

- For this process to work effectively, work in the primary phase must start in year 6 or earlier. This has implications for the Connexions 13-19 year old strategy which currently precludes work in primary schools.
- Joint staff involvement in both phases is essential and should be underpinned by relevant staff training.

2.5 **Project 5: Raising aspirations**

Aim: To increase the aspirations of young people by extending and expanding activities, including leisure activities, which focus on increasing motivation/aspiration, particularly with under-performing and/or disadvantaged pupils.

Key lessons

- Practice varies considerably between organisations in terms of the approaches used to measure young people's aspiration and motivation levels.
- Validation of instruments and methods used is crucial in order to fully assess 'what works', what does not work', and the lessons learned.
- There is much scope for sharing of good and interesting practice across youth support services in Lincolnshire. This provides an opportunity for closer joint working and could potentially lead to cost efficiency savings.

Issues

- A variety of educational and personal development products are available for practitioner to use with under-performing and/or disadvantaged young people. However, in many cases these are expensive and/or time consuming, therefore organisations need to be highly selective in their chosen approach(es).
- Accreditation for young people, particularly those 'hardest-to-help' needs to be addressed in order to ensure that their progress is recognised and duly rewarded.

2.6 **Project 6: Unification of diagnostic instruments**

Aim: To increase our ability to diagnose client needs and share this knowledge across a range of organisations using information, communication technology (ICT) in order that professionals are better informed and have a range of appropriate methods that can be used with clients.

Key lessons

- Multi-agency meetings and consultation events involving both senior managers and practitioners from a wide variety of local and national organisations has led to an improved understanding of approaches used by agencies to help diagnose and assess young people's needs.
- At national and local levels, there is a significant need for closer inter-departmental co-ordination and communication in relation to the development of assessment frameworks and definitions. Any new arrangements need to take account of the legal implications of sharing personal data between agencies.
- Development work needs to be undertaken to provide valid and approved initial or front-end cross-dimensional screening questionnaires/checklists to help identify potential and actual client needs.

Issues

- A nationally approved list of validated assessment/diagnostic instruments is required to link with specific framework dimensions and required levels of Personal Adviser competence.
- In Lincolnshire and Rutland, further research is needed to obtain and evaluate studies of available instruments being used elsewhere in the UK, with a view to adopting best practice.

2.7 Project 7: Developing a school-based Connexions Service

Aim: To increase our understanding of the ways in which Connexions services can be delivered in schools/PRUs to appropriate quality standards, paying particular attention to the role of PSHE/Citizenship/Careers Education and pastoral systems, and taking into account the principle of universality.

Key lessons

- All school staff and agency representatives should be fully and formally introduced to the philosophy, rationale and purpose for the Connexions service and how it functions in their area.
- The effective delivery of a school-based Connexions service for all young people is highly dependent on strong communications links and shared agendas between the senior management team within a school and the Personal Adviser.
- The pilot demonstrated the need for group-work activities that focused on increasing the self-esteem and confidence of those young people felt to be 'at risk'.
- Continuity and reliability of personal adviser work in schools is essential in order to establish and maintain effective working relationships with young people, parents and school staff. The Personal Adviser can act effectively as a co-ordinator of multi-agency work within school.

Issues

- Personal advisers require supervision and mentoring in order to enable them to fully reflect on their practice and to analyse effective ways of dealing with complex and demanding issues.
- Management models for personal advisers require further development so that a customised approach can be used to meet the needs of local schools, young people and the Connexions service. The issue of whether or not PAs should be integral or separate from school management systems requires further piloting.

2.8 **Project 8: Revitalising the National Record of Achievement**

Aim: To increase the NRA/PROFILE as a useful tool for young people to record and share their personal progress and to maximise the use of ICT within the process.

Key lessons

- Developing an appreciation of the value of the recording achievement process at student and staff level is essential to ensure its success. This involves instilling a feeling of 'ownership' and utility so that it can be used effectively, in both its formative and summative states, at any given period of transition.
- The development of a NRA floppy disk and CD-Rom that can be used as part of the school curriculum which now has the potential to be rolled-out further into schools and colleges across Lincolnshire and Rutland.
- NRA materials can now be accessed by using the internet and future ICT developments such as SMART MEDIA offer greater flexibility for students to record and present their work.

Issues

- There is a need for 'joined-up' policies in relation to national records of achievement aimed at supporting young people's learning and progress. This research has highlighted duplication and overlap in the lifelong learning log (UFI), the careers action plan (careers service) and the personal education plan (social services).
- ICT offers increasing opportunities for young people to record their achievements; however, access to computers and software packages varies throughout the county.

2.9 **Project 9: Increasing clients access to information**

Aim: To increase the range, relevance, accessibility, and availability of information which can help support young people to make successful transitions and, wherever possible, consolidate information between organisations.

Key lessons

- Over 100 different organisations in Lincolnshire currently produce information for young people. The evidence shows that there are significant amounts of duplication in information materials, therefore multi-agency work is vital to help co-ordinate the production of relevant, user-friendly and accessible materials.
- There are gaps in information relating to finance or housing for young people in Lincolnshire and this should be addressed by the new Connexions service.
- Generally, young people have limited knowledge about who can offer quality, impartial and confidential information, advice and guidance.

Issues

- Evidence from focus group activities with young people shows that their information needs can at times be 'at odds' with mainstream expectations. For example: some young people reported that they wanted to know how they could take drugs safely rather than having to avoid taking drugs.
- The extent to which young people's voices are listened to and used to inform future plans for the presentation and dissemination of information requires careful consideration and co-ordination.

3. OVER-ARCHING THEMES

Partnership & multi-agency working

- 3.1 The Connexions pilot has demonstrated that effective partnership working links have formed building on new and existing relationships and involving a wide range of youth support services in Lincolnshire and Rutland. The process of working in multi-agency teams has enabled staff at all levels to share and develop their expertise, skills, knowledge and experience which in turn, has helped to overcome some of the cultural differences that exist between agencies. Staff reported that working together has not only enhanced their understanding of other organisations but has increased their understanding of how partnership working can lead to a better quality service for young people. This is a key strength of the Connexions pilot.
- 3.2 Evidence from all of the pilot projects has shown that, where there are differences in perceptions and operating styles of partners these must be recognised and communicated effectively so that mutual trust, respect and closer working links can be achieved at all levels. The following extract taken from a project manager's reflective diary clearly illustrates that the Connexions pilot has helped to break down some of the barriers between organisations:

' I have really enjoyed working with xxx. S/he has made things very easy for me..... You are right when you say Youth Service and LC&GS can work together. It has been a good partnership and I hope I get other opportunities to work with xxx in the future. ...When I read the finished version of the evaluation report I thought 'hey – this can actually work'. I have also come away with a totally different view of LC&GS staff (they do a hell of a lot more than give kids crap jobs and laugh)'. (project manager)

It is clear that the range of variation between agencies means that generalisations which each group makes in relation to the other cannot always be substantiated.

- 3.3 The findings from the Connexions pilot has shown that clarity and the expectations of partner organisations need to be addressed regularly as part of an on-going review

process. This is necessary in order to retain the level of interest and motivation required to work within a multi-agency framework. It was noted that the Drugs Prevention Advisory Service has recently produced a 'DAT Guide to Connexions'⁶ which clearly outlines potential involvement in Connexions. This was identified as good practice and should be further developed with other youth support agencies.

- 3.4 Throughout the pilot, strategic developments have concentrated on the planning and implementation of the projects as well as focusing on the preparation and business planning for the next roll-out phase of Connexions in Lincolnshire and Rutland in April 2001. This was led by Lincolnshire Careers & Guidance Services, and as a result, they have had greater responsibility and involvement in setting up Connexions compared to other agencies. A tremendous amount of time, energy and commitment has been dedicated to ensure that the Lincolnshire and Rutland Connexions partnership approach is not wholly dominated by any one organisation.

Infrastructure & communication

- 3.5 High-quality services delivered by dedicated multi-agency teams have proven effective in the Lincolnshire and Rutland areas. However, it is important to reflect on the lessons learned from this pilot in terms of ensuring that 'back filling' arrangements are in place so that project managers and Connexions staff can achieve the set delivery plans and targets.
- 3.6 The pilot has linked into existing communication systems within and across agencies and in many cases, has acted as the main conduit for bringing together staff to explore areas of mutual interest and to jointly address the issue of improving services for all young people. This approach has worked well.
- 3.7 The national Connexions dissemination strategy has yet to be fully implemented and there is a need for a clear and consistent approach to be communicated effectively to all young people, parents / guardians / carers, schools/colleges, employers and youth support service staff. There is much scope for further work to ensure that Connexions is fully promoted and understood by the Lincolnshire and Rutland community.
- 3.8 The gathering of personal data on young people raises questions of confidentiality and technical security. Should Personal Advisers and other youth support staff have access to such information? There are difficulties about sharing information between agencies with different ethical codes and client policies. It is apparent that, in some cases, there are real misconceptions about how legislation can support or restrict the sharing of client data. A continuous dialogue is required between agencies to help establish agreed protocols and procedures for sharing information.

⁶ DAT Guide to Connexions available from <http://www.dpas.gov.uk>

Work of Personal Advisers

- 3.9 The issue of a universal and targeted Connexions service has yet to be fully tested throughout England. The Lincolnshire Connexions pilot has shown that the active involvement of senior managers within educational institutions is crucial to the success of Personal Adviser work. In addition, new and flexible approaches to curriculum and group-work activities are required in order to support all young people, regardless of their academic ability. A multi-agency team approach within schools based on formal and informal partnership agreements clearly provides a more co-ordinated and coherent youth support service. Joint meetings, common activities and joint training within a multi-agency framework should support the development of a whole-school approach to working with young people.
- 3.10 Recruitment, selection and training of Personal Advisers from a broad range of experiences and backgrounds is essential. However, further work is needed to ensure that the recruitment and selection process is rigorous, yet accessible and flexible enough to attract individuals from a wide range of different backgrounds.
- 3.11 There is growing demand for resource toolkits and measurement devices to support Personal Adviser work with young people, especially those with complex or multiple problems.
- 3.12 Particular care should be taken to ensure that the management and organisation of Personal Advisers working in schools/colleges and community settings is negotiated and customised to suit the individual needs of institutions and young people. This is likely to result in varied partnership agreement policies and practices and will need to be monitored and reviewed in order to assess the sustainability and added-value of this approach.
- 3.13 Mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the quality of provision are vital. A key component of quality is the training of staff, and indeed the active involvement of users.

Involvement of young people

- 3.14 One of the eight key principles of Connexions is to take account of the views of young people as the service is developed. This aspect was identified as high priority throughout the pilot and there are many examples of good and interesting practice that have emerged and are highlighted in projects 2,3,8&9. The findings show that youth consultations must not appear patronising and outcomes from the process need to be attended to, or trust may disappear. Specialist training and/or dedicated delivery teams are required to facilitate the planning and delivery of consultation activities. The fundamental question remains in terms of what are the best methods for getting across the Connexions message and obtaining the views of, young people and their parents/carers?
- 3.15 The pilot has identified the need for 'informed' involvement of young people to be linked to validation and accreditation programmes, where appropriate.

Evidence-based practice

- 3.16 A strong feature of the pilot has been the use of reflective diaries and cameras for project managers to record successes and challenges. This has worked well.
- 3.17 A dual approach to evaluation with researchers working closely with project managers has led to an increased understanding of the importance of research and evaluation within Connexions. Project managers have:
- gained new skills working alongside experienced researchers;
 - tested out a wide range of methods designed to measure the progress and development of their work;
 - critically analysed their findings;
 - developed report writing skills.

The researchers have also learned from this experience particularly in relation to identifying the causes and effects of successful partnership working.

4. OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

- The Lincolnshire Connexions pilot succeeded in achieving its original milestones and in most cases, it actually exceeded expectations and goals, particularly in relation to multi-agency participation in the pilot.
- The findings demonstrate that this was a well managed and co-ordinated approach to multi-agency work involving a significant range of partners.
- Connexions in Lincolnshire was fully operational within a short-timescale. To some extent, the business planning process for April 2001 delayed progress; however this was the case in all of the Connexions pilot projects.
- Although Lincolnshire Careers & Guidance Services has co-ordinated the pilot; this was not problematic because of strong multi-agency links and sound efforts to ensure that a balanced approach was adopted.
- The Connexions pilot has provided increased staff development opportunities for all staff at both a professional and personal level.
- The Lincolnshire Connexions website has averaged 2,500 'hits' per month with international, national, regional and local enquiries received from a diverse range of individuals and organisations.
- Reflective practice has been emphasised and nurtured throughout the pilot. Evidence shows that significant learning has occurred.
- The majority of institutions and agencies that have participated in the pilot have cited clear benefits of being involved in Connexions.
- The question still remains as to how the new Connexions service will reconcile the provision of a universal service for all young people alongside a targeted service aimed at those requiring intensive help.
- Time and resource availability has been an issue, but due to the dedication and personal commitment of all those involved in the pilot, this has been duly overcome.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Lincolnshire and Rutland Connexions

1. Showcase examples of good and interesting practice to help win the hearts and minds of others within the two counties who have not been directly involved in the Connexions pilot.
2. Develop an evidence-based research culture within Connexions whereby policy-makers, practitioners, young people and researchers work together to learn from one another.
3. Have a clear structure of management and organisational plans that are communicated clearly to key partners and designed to inform and involve front-line staff as well as senior managers.
4. Monitor and record the balance of activities planned and delivered in relation to universal and targeted services.
5. Extend and develop customised approaches to work with schools and colleges and closely monitored these in order to assess added-value and sustainability.
6. Personal advisers will require supervision and mentoring in order to enable them to fully reflect on their practice and to analyse effective ways of dealing with complex and demanding issues. Further development work is required to pilot supervision models in order to help determine what works best.
7. Accreditation for young people particularly those 'hardest-to-help' needs to be addressed in order to ensure that their progress is recognised and duly rewarded.
8. The NRA floppy disk and CD-Rom should be further tested and used as part of the school curriculum in the roll-out of Connexions in schools and colleges across Lincolnshire and Rutland.
9. The extent to which young people's voices are listened to and used to inform future plans for the preparation, presentation and dissemination of information designed to support them, requires careful planning and co-ordination.

Connexions Service National Unit

1. Clear guidance is required from the CSNU on the legal framework and templates for sharing protocols and use of client consent forms. Connexions partnerships are likely to invest in developing their own databases to cope with the demands of tracking and there are choices to be made about the extent to which a national database should be created. An early decision is required to ensure ICT compatibility and streamlining of resources.
2. Close working links need to be developed between Personal Adviser training providers and local Connexions services in order to achieve a well planned, coherent, and 'fit for purpose' national / local training strategy.
3. Work with young people, particularly those most vulnerable, needs to begin during the primary education phase. This has significant implications for the Connexions 13-19 year old strategy.

4. A nationally approved list of validated assessment/diagnostic instruments is required to link with specific framework dimensions and required levels of Personal Adviser competence.
5. There is a need for joined-up policies in relation to national records of achievement aimed at supporting young people's learning and progress. This research has highlighted duplication and overlap in the lifelong learning log (UFI), the careers action plan (careers service) and the personal education plan (social services).
6. The Drugs Prevention Advisory Service has recently produced a 'DAT Guide to Connexions' which clearly outlines potential involvement in Connexions. This was identified as good practice and should be further developed with other youth support agencies.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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As a result of their efforts and determination to make Connexions work in Lincolnshire and Rutland much has been achieved in a very short timescale. Throughout the pilot, invaluable information was received from a wide range of individuals, organisations and young people. It is not possible to name everyone who contributed to the pilot; however, the research team and project managers are grateful for all the help and support offered during meetings, visits and consultations events. We trust that this summary paper accurately reflects the key findings from the Lincolnshire Connexions pilot. Finally, we wish to express our sincere appreciation to Jacqui Leggett and Rachel Satchwell for providing administration and general support throughout the project.

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