FULL REPORT: THE IMPACT OF 14-19 POLICY ON CAREER GUIDANCE IN ENGLAND

BACKGROUND
The provision of career guidance (CG) is more central to public policy across the globe than ever before (Watts & Sultana, 2004). In England, its importance is highlighted by recent reforms in 14-19 education, training and youth support. The introduction of new Diplomas and expanded apprenticeships in particular means that young people’s choices are more complex, and posed at an earlier age. Policy is driving forward further articulation of 14-19 education and training with regards to the needs of employers and the labour market (Foster, 2005; Leitch, 2006). At the same time, legislation is being introduced to increase the age of compulsory participation in learning to 18, and a strong, parallel policy focus is on reducing the proportion of 16-19 year olds who are classified as ‘NEET’ (not in education, employment and training).

There is substantial evidence in England that high quality career guidance can support young people to navigate more successfully the shifting landscapes of education and training systems (e.g. Audit Commission, 1993; Morris et al., 2000, 2001; NAO, 2004; DfES, 2005). However, in 2001, the government subsumed it into a new, generic national youth support service, Connexions. All careers advisers (CAs) were designated as ‘personal advisers’ (PAs) and expected to undertake a more generic role. Subsequent evidence shows that Connexions was not adequately resourced to deliver a universal service alongside targeting the ‘NEET’ group (e.g. NAO, 2004; DfES, 2005; Hayward et al., 2005, 2006). A catalogue of concerns has been raised about the weakening of career guidance provision, including in government commissioned research reports (e.g. Foskett et al., 2004; DfES, 2005). Such concerns include a lack of infrastructure (Watts, 2006), a loss of employer liaison work (Fuller et al, 2005a, 2005b), and the inflation of the ‘NEET’ group (Morris, 2003; NAO, 2004). These studies have drawn mainly on the perspectives of external stakeholders, but there has been remarkably little evidence about the state of the career guidance profession itself, or the experiences of CG-trained PAs in Connexions. It is this serious gap in knowledge that the project addresses.

OBJECTIVES
(1) To map the current state of the career guidance profession in England and evaluate the impact upon it of 14-19 reforms
This objective was addressed by the survey (see nominated output). The data did provide some important findings about staffing, qualifications, turnover and training. But the survey also revealed significant obstacles to obtaining reliable and accurate data on these questions. Our findings are therefore qualified.

(2) To enhance understanding of continuity and change in the roles, identities and practices of careers advisers in the social and policy contexts of their lives and work.
This objective has been met through a narrative, interpretive methodology which foregrounds careers advisers voices and experience, including in-depth ‘career history’ interviews and innovative values-related time-use diaries. The data not only highlight continuities and changes in functions, and a reduction in career guidance
capacity; but also elucidate a high degree of contestation and resistance in daily practice, which evoke identity work, emotional labour and ethical labour.

(3) To contribute to the development of theory about the effects of policy change on the dynamics of participation in professional communities of practice. This objective has been met throughout the research, and we will continue to develop it in further publications, through the use of labour process theory and narrative analysis. The research indicates that policy has impacted upon this community of practice by disrupting it substantially, creating widespread alienation. Participation in the community of practice is therefore not a straightforward one of becoming then being, but can entail gradual or total ‘unbecoming’ (i.e. de-skilling or quitting), or for new entrants – ‘not-becoming’ a CG specialist at all.

(4) To inform policy and practice about infrastructural support and professional development needs to maximise the effectiveness of career guidance in the 14-19 sector. The research meets this objective by providing insights that go beyond formal and technical recommendations. Drawing on situated learning theory, the research shows how and why career guidance specialists need regular informal interaction with each other, clinical rather than managerial supervision, and time for guidance-related research, as well as more formal specialist CPD activities, and co-location with other youth support agencies.

METHODS
The mixed-methods research began with a survey (see nominated output) of Connexions service providers to obtain baseline data on professional capacity, focused on staffing, training and qualifications. Qualitative research was mainly based in three local Connexions services in the North of England, where we conducted semi-structured ‘career history’ interviews with up to 6 personal advisers (PAs) initially trained as careers advisers (n = 17). PAs also kept time-use diaries, innovatively linked to professional values through measures of the perceived degree of career guidance and of satisfaction for each activity. We also interviewed 2 senior managers, and 2 local stakeholders (post-16 providers and local authority representatives) for each site. Interviews were also held with 9 CG-trained PAs who had quit Connexions, and with 6 national stakeholders representing policy makers, employers, training providers and key professional bodies. The interviews were transcribed and analysed using a narrative, interpretive methodology (Moustakas, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1995) recommended for the study of continuity and change in professional lives and careers (Collin & Young, 2000). The research findings are further warranted by strong confirmatory feedback from national dissemination to practitioners and managers from a large number of Connexions services.

RESULTS
Within the remit of this report, we focus on the core data generated by the survey and by interviews with Connexions staff and ex-PAs. Data from other stakeholders support this analysis, and will provide opportunities for further analysis and publication.
(i) Surveying a disrupted service.
We conducted a national survey (Feb-April 2008) to establish baseline data about the career guidance profession within Connexions (see nominated output 1 for detail). The post-devolvement status of responding services broadly matched the categories and proportions found nationally by McGowan et al (2009). The response rate (37%, 27 of 72 possible employing services at the time) was much lower than we anticipated, largely due to the extent of disruption caused by Connexions’ devolvement. We conclude that the devolvement of the national Connexions service caused significant disruption and some loss of staff through redundancy or disillusion. Furthermore, there was no national or local collation of information about staff levels and expertise, and therefore no reliable data for policy makers to assess the adequacy of professional capacity for delivering young people’s statutory entitlement to career guidance.

The government’s original proposal for Connexions promised employment of between 15,000 and 20,000 PAs by 2003 (Holmes, 2004). Extrapolations from our data suggest that overall employee numbers nationally fall somewhere between 5,169 and 12,816: even at best, falling clearly short of the original target. Recruitment in the first three years of Connexions favoured those with non-careers specialisms, given the need to broaden the skills mix within the new provision. However, some services reported difficulties recruiting and retaining practitioners with professional career guidance qualifications (PCGQs). In some cases, services have addressed this by training staff in-house towards National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) (see following section). There did not appear to be a mass exodus of experienced careers advisers when Connexions was launched, as might have been anticipated; but devolvement and lack of ring-fencing of funds for career guidance may lead to a loss of front-line practitioners. Future losses may, however, be difficult to ascertain, since services transferred to a new employer (a local authority or competing Connexions service or careers company) are obliged to hand over only minimal information about their personnel.

The survey data showed that 66% of PAs employed in services delivering the full Connexions remit held PCGQs. We defined PCGQs as: the traditional, university-based Diploma/Qualification in Career Guidance (DipCG/QCG), and the work-based NVQ Level 4 in Advice and Guidance, introduced in the mid-1990s. However, the numbers of PAs with PCGQs may have been over-reported because of different interpretations of what counts as such a qualification. Our qualitative data confirms that this is confused and contested. Changes in the NVQ in Advice and Guidance and the introduction of the NVQ in Learning, Development and Support Services have produced qualifications focused on more generic forms of guidance around a range of young people’s educational and social issues, and may entail little specialist knowledge about career guidance. This indicates a need for greater clarity about this distinction, and recognition that professional capacity to deliver career guidance requires adequately specialised initial training.

(ii) Local contexts: contradictions and tensions
In looking across the qualitative data, the local contexts appeared fraught with contradictions and tensions. These can be thought of in terms of three areas of the service: resource framing, managerial framing, and professional framing. The latter is
considered in depth in later sections of the report, but here we discuss resource and managerial framing.

Resource framing: (see Appendix [1]). First, the understaffing of the service meant individual PAs carried very large caseloads. Education-based PAs (EPAs) were overwhelmed:

In [one school], I have a caseload from Year 9 to Year 11, of over about 3,000 students. In [another school], over 1,000. It just cannot work – those ones who are universal are not having equal opportunity of service. (IY, PA, p16)

Community-based PAs working with the ‘intensive needs’ group had between 60-80 clients (rather than 10-20 as originally envisaged). The promise of holistic long-term relationships with young people was impossible to achieve in these conditions. Indeed, the ‘targeted’ service appeared to be as much under pressure as the ‘universal’ service. Yet despite limited and reduced resources for career guidance within Connexions, there was an increasing demand for it, particularly because new 14-19 Diplomas entail a career guidance process. Whilst services had coped with the introduction of the first few Diploma subjects, it was unclear whether they could resource increasing Diploma lines and applicants in future.

Second, despite problems delivering a universal career guidance service for all young people, Connexions was viewed by other agencies as a ‘universal’ service in the different terms of providing for all the needs of young people in the NEET group, and other services sometimes refused to take referrals from PAs. Yet the resources and tools available to PAs were focused largely on tracking and surveillance of young people rather than on social support. Also, Connexions could offer no direct provision for housing, drug rehabilitation or mental health needs, for example; even facilitating entry to education, training and employment was difficult, given a lack of available places.

Third, there was considerable concern in the two services taken in-house by LAs that their funding, no longer ring-fenced, would be diverted to other competing priorities (this had already happened in one service).

Managerial framing: (see Appendix [2]) First, Connexions services were strongly focused by government policy and funding régimes on reducing NEET figures. However, PAs largely felt these targets were unrealistic. Moreover, many PAs and some senior managers also believed that this approach was counterproductive; and that NEET numbers were being inflated by the lack of adequate career guidance for ‘mainstream’ young people, and inappropriate placement of ‘NEET’ youth to meet targets. Both of these problems were perceived to increase drop-out and related social and educational problems.

Second, there could be confusion either within a service, and/or on the part of external partners, about whether the role of the PA is to deliver or to broker a broad range of services for young people:
Their roles are becoming – boundaries are a bit unclear – so a social worker may expect Connexions to do something, when we would have thought that was a social worker’s role. (SC, PA, p9)

Third, supervision (provided by line managers) was also a contentious issue. Some felt that the frequency of supervision was inadequate. Many also complained that supervision tended to be managerial and disciplinary rather than clinical and supportive – relating to the meeting of targets rather than to concerns for professional practice. As a result, most PAs tended to rely on their peers rather than managers for aspects of supervision relating to clinical support and professional knowledge and practice.

Fourth, managerial framing also included that imposed by schools in which PAs had to work. There were strong perceptions that schools gave young people advice that was not impartial but driven by institutional interests. Careers education programmes had ‘collapsed’ in some schools, and the roles of school careers co-ordinators had been weakened, with some losing motivation and commitment. As a result, PAs felt they had little influence within the school, and that young people were unprepared for in-depth guidance interviews with them.

It emerged that some of the difficulties faced by CG-trained PAs could be mitigated by good practice in local service management through:

• security of adequate funding
• co-located multi-agency collaboration with other social services
• a clear commitment to the delivery of career guidance as a core aspect of Connexions’ provision
• clarity about the PAs’ role as brokers rather than deliverers of all youth support
• supportive rather than managerialist supervision
• a focus on client-centred mission and values rather than numerical targets
• schools’ commitment to careers education and guidance

Whilst such measures did not appear to prevent the systemic problems encountered, they could enable PAs to cope better with them.

(iii) What do career guidance-trained PAs do? Time use and functions
(See Appendix [3]) In all three services studied the PA role is divided between EPAs (Education PAs) working mainly in schools and colleges, and CPAs (Community PAs) working mainly with young people categorised as NEET. There was little difference between EPAs and CPAs in time-use by activities, with both groups spending around one third of their time in client interviews, one fifth of their time on interview preparation and follow-up, and over 10% of their time on liaison with other agencies and institutions,

All CG-trained PAs reported that a minority of their overall time was strongly or wholly related to career guidance, but here there were stark contrasts: 39% for EPAs, and only 12% for CPAs. EPAs were more likely to be satisfied with the outcomes of activities related to career guidance, especially client interviews and CPD, than other activities, but there was no such correlation for CPAs. This may indicate a difference not only in client groups and practices, but also in professional values between the
two groups of PAs, reflecting a broader set of concerns for CPAs, and a more specialised set for EPAs.

Integrating time-use data with the qualitative data, some strong themes emerged about the PAs’ practices. Interview preparation and follow-up was often perceived as overly bureaucratic, limiting time with clients, and therefore frustrating. In particular, as already noted, PAs (especially CPAs) felt that increasing amounts of their time were spent tracking young people rather than directly supporting them. Most importantly, all PAs felt that there was insufficient time for them to deal with their caseloads (see Appendix [1]).

Liaison activities reported were mainly with key workers from other services, school staff, and Connexions colleagues – contact with employers or other opportunity providers was minimal, and national employer representatives complained about this. School liaison usually entailed ‘triage’ of a cohort rather than development of the careers education programme, and PAs’ careers education and groupwork activities were limited. EPAs also complained that they had very little time for researching the opportunity structure, an essential aspect of being able to deliver high-quality career guidance. Whilst some PAs had caseloads including disabled clients, there was no evidence of any equality initiatives (regarding disability, race, gender or other issues) in the accounts given.

Beyond the more overt functions revealed by PAs’ time-use diaries, we also wished to investigate other aspects of their roles, identities and practices, and the professional framing which constitutes them. Our findings suggest that three areas of work were highly significant: identity work, emotional labour, and ethical labour. All three appear closely linked to professional capacity.

(iv) Identity work
Castells (2004) notes that roles are defined by social norms expressed through institutions, whilst identities produce meaning for persons through processes of individuation. Therefore roles ‘become identities only when and if social actors internalize them, and construct meaning around this internalization’ (pp.6-7).

A prime element of Connexions policy was the formation of a new profession of personal advisers. The PA role was supposed to include an holistic approach and long-term trusting relationships with young people, as well as the brokerage of multiple services through ‘one-stop shops’. However, the lack of clarity in policy documents on this role (Watts, 1999), and the tensions in linking it to targets for employability (Colley, 2001, 2003), made its internalisation difficult.

All CG-trained EPAs and ex-PAs strongly resisted the PA role as ‘jack of all trades and master of none’ (WC, PA, p7):

When I came into the [Connexions] service, careers was more or less a dirty word. […] I can remember managers telling people off for calling themselves careers advisers. (AP, PA, p1)

I think I’ve tried, in that school, to still be seen as being careers, because I think if I’d opened it up to more things, then I wouldn’t be able to do what I
do because […] I wouldn’t be doing any careers at all – because I would spend all my time dealing with other issues. (BK, PA, p9)

They felt that this new role was de-skilling:

I feel my knowledge is just trickling away all the time, that I’m just not on the ball with things. You want to follow things up and update your knowledge, and it’s like we don’t get that anymore. (PJ, PA, p10)

... a great deal of time [in Connexions] was spent updating records. It just took away the focus of your work from helping supporting young people in education and work too – highly bureaucratic and, yes, de-skilled. (LJ, ex-PA, p5)

Many who had worked in careers services explained that they had always sought to explore young people’s wider social needs, and had had well-developed networks for referring them on to other services for support; but they resisted expectations that, as PAs, they would give advice on matters such as sexual health; they felt that the short training courses offered on such issues did not equip them adequately, and their advice would therefore be inexpert. Indeed, understanding the boundaries of one’s own professional competence, and referring clients on when these are reached, is a key element of CG expertise (Repetto, 2008) (See Appendix [4]). At the same time, some raised strong concerns about inexpert career guidance being given by PAs without specialist CG training, and argued that this was damaging young people’s progression and potentially increasing the number entering the ‘NEET’ group. By contrast, CG-trained CPAs were happier to embrace the broader remit of Connexions and the notion of the PA role as wider than that of a careers adviser. There was, however, an overwhelming consensus that others outside Connexions were confused about the PA role, and many PAs felt they had to work continuously to convey their understanding of the role to others.

Following Lave and Wenger (1991), these matters of identity can be seen as closely allied to those of professional capacity: since learning entails processes of becoming a member of a community of practice, it is therefore enabled or constrained by the system of social relations within each such community. Colley et al (2007) argued, in relation to committed FE teachers quitting their profession, that this could result in a process of ‘unbecoming’, where individuals’ professional identity could no longer find expression within a regime of working life severely constricted by national and local policies, and they quit the profession. Our data deepens such an analysis, since it offers examples of different degrees of becoming, unbecoming and not-becoming (see Appendix [5]):

- ‘Partial unbecoming’: many EPAs felt their established ‘being’ under erosion, through gradual de-skilling (loss of knowledge about labour markets and HE entry in particular).
- ‘Not-becoming’: two PAs, who had gone straight into CPA roles in Connexions after their initial CG training, felt they had never actually become careers advisers.
- ‘Total unbecoming’: some ex-PAs had quit career guidance altogether.
- ‘(Re)becoming’: most ex-PAs had left Connexions for another CG sector, working as specialist careers advisers.
This suggests that capacity is being lost from the 14-19 CG sector through both turnover and de-skillling. Importantly, many of those interviewed also believed that participation in a community of practice populated and managed by CG specialists was essential to their on-going informal CPD and to the maintenance of high-quality practice. PAs in one area argued that this would be undermined if (as proposed by their local authority) they had to work as individuals in multi-professional teams, with no infrastructural location for them to come together with fellow CG specialists, or managed by people who had little understanding of CG. There is a risk, therefore, that some Connexions services may attract concentrations of CG-specialist staff, whilst others lose CG capacity, potentially creating a ‘postcode lottery’ in terms of CG provision for young people.

(v) Emotional labour

(See Appendix [6]) Hochschild’s (1983) seminal definition of emotional labour is that it ‘requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others’ (p.7). Many such studies address contexts of customer or public service, and the task of producing ‘proper’ feelings in the customer/client, focusing on negative consequences of stress and burn-out. In this project, CPAs in particular gave such accounts of the emotional demands of working with severely disadvantaged young people:

…last week, I had this homeless person. I went away on Thursday, having got to the point where he was going to spend the night on the streets, and [I] felt dreadful, absolutely dreadful, because I don’t work Fridays, and I thought ‘Should I phone Friday night?’, and ‘No, don’t phone Friday, I might hear worse’, so I didn’t. I had a couple of bad nights. (BM, PA, p6)

Far more often, however, PAs gave accounts of coping with continual frustrations and affronts. They had to retain a professional demeanour in the face of ‘micro-aggressions’ (Pierce, 1970) against their professional status, such as not being allocated space at a parents’ evening, or being told by non-CG practitioners to undertake inappropriate careers-related activities with a young person. PAs had to contain frustration about the increase of bureaucratic work within their role, which they perceived as reducing time they could spend helping clients. They also experienced frustration with the size of their caseloads, and disappointment about its effect on the quality of their work with clients. A number of PAs and ex-PAs talked of supervision and other meetings with managers, where these frustrations boiled over into anger and open conflict (often relating to ethical issues, see below). At the same time, some PAs committed to staying in Connexions spoke of their enjoyment of working with young people – in spite of these difficulties – as a key reason for staying.

This suggests that some capacity is being lost because of the intensity of emotional labour demanded. One PA left Connexions during the project because of burn-out; conflicts with management had prompted decisions by others to quit Connexions.
(vi) Ethical labour
(See Appendix [7]) Cribb (2005) has argued that managerialism in public services encourages ‘ethical drift’ – the ritualistic meeting or manipulation of targets – posing ethical dilemmas for practitioners, who “…need to continually make decisions about when to conscientiously object, when to comply and when to adopt a stance of ‘principled infidelity’” (pp.7-8). Such decision-making is a form of work within a division of labour for ethical responsibility, related to role-construction and positioning within the field prior to individual practitioners’ entry into that role.

PAs’ offered many accounts of ethical dilemmas they face on a daily basis because of the way their role is constructed. Some EPAs worried about how to offer CG interviews universally to Year 11 pupils, when caseload size meant they had to resort either to inadequate 10-minute interviews, or group interviews which did not offer confidentiality. CPAs were confronted by dilemmas about which young people they could help, and to what extent. Across the sample, PAs and ex-PAs spoke of being pressured by managers to place young people in unsuitable destinations, not record young people as ‘NEET’, or even forge signatures, in order to meet targets:

You are kind of sidling them into a particular road: ‘You will go to e2e [a vocational preparation programme], because we don’t want you to become NEET!’ You know what I mean? Not quite literally, but they are almost sort of shuffling them along this little-, to say, ‘Look, you’ve not got a college place, you’re not going to work so, ultimately, you need something to do, so how about this?’ They seem to be saying, ‘There you go, and that will tick another box’, so they don’t become NEET. (SB, PA, p.11)

Such dilemmas were a major concern for all those interviewed, producing further emotional stresses, and frequently cited by ex-PAs as a prime reason for leaving Connexions. One PA did not have their short-term contract renewed, and believed this was because of their insistence on client-centred vs. target-centred practice. It is important to recognise that individuals’ responses to these dilemmas could vary at different times between compliance, conscientious objection and principled infidelity – individualised or collective. The more overt, consistent, and individualised the resistance, the more likely leaving Connexions (voluntarily or otherwise) seemed to be. This suggests that professional capacity is being undermined not only by the loss of CG-trained PAs, but also within the service by compromises of ethical behaviour driven by inappropriate targets.

(vii) Conclusions: the impact of Connexions on professional capacity in career guidance
These findings suggest that identity work, emotional labour and ethical labour are all related to professional capacity, both quantitatively and qualitatively. On the one hand, as Rikowski (2002) notes, doing any kind of work draws on existing capacity and can serve to enhance it through practice. Here, it is important to recognise that the arguments put forward by respondents cannot easily be dismissed as instances of vested interest or conservatism; but are mostly rooted in theoretical knowledge and practical experience of career guidance and its importance in helping young people make successful transitions; and in an ethical commitment to client-centred practice that underpinned personal commitments to remain in Connexions despite the...
difficulties. Theories of alienation (Brook, 2006, 2009) suggest that such resistance can be productive in ameliorating the effects of workplace conflict. On the other hand, such work can also result in negative effects: the loss of capacity through de-skilling, demoralisation and stress. All three kinds of work – on identity, feelings and ethics – contributed, often in combination, to PAs’ departure from Connexions, and to a weakening of expertise within the service. Our findings suggest therefore that, since career guidance has been delivered through Connexions, there may have been a significant overall reduction in professional capacity to deliver guidance for 14-19 year olds; and that the causes of this reduction need to be addressed to avoid further loss.

(viii) Recommendations
A number of recommendations follow from the projects’ findings:
1. Policy-making should be based on the available evidence about the importance of career guidance for young people’s transitions, and the most appropriate methods for its delivery.
2. There is a need either to increase the resources for Connexions, or to devolve some of its remit to other services. Further cuts in funding for career guidance should be avoided.
3. There should be a clear commitment by funders and managers to the delivery of career guidance as a core aspect of Connexions’ provision.
4. Career guidance should focus on a client-centred mission and values, and any numerical targets should be congruent with such mission and values.
5. The delivery of career guidance should be carefully monitored – in terms both of quantity and quality – in local authorities, and action taken where they are not assuring an adequate service.
6. All providers of 14-19 career guidance should be required to provide data – at least annually – on numbers of staff, and their type and level of qualifications. These data should be publicly available, and monitored by the DCSF.
7. Clarity should be achieved about which qualifications can appropriately underpin the delivery of specialist career guidance, ensuring they are fit for purpose in line with international studies of CG knowledge and skills.
8. PA supervision should be clinical, supportive and regular. Managerial and disciplinary issues should be addressed by other means.
9. Policy levers should be exerted to ensure that all schools are committed to high-quality careers education and guidance.
10. The ethical dimensions of career guidance should be taken seriously by policy-makers, local authority managers, service managers, and professional bodies in this field. There is a need for wide-ranging public debate about the values and ethical standards of career guidance work, and the pressures upon these.
11. Policy-makers – nationally and locally – need to recognise the pre-conditions for on-going learning and professional development in the workplace. There is a need for local infrastructures which support communities of practice in career guidance, by facilitating regular professional contact between CG-specialist PAs, and providing management support from CG specialists.
ACTIVITIES

OUTPUTS


Two working papers were produced, on analyses of the survey and on the time-use diary. A paper proposal has also been accepted for the Canadian Association for Studies in Adult Education (2010) and two paper proposals submitted for the British Educational Research Association Conference 2010, one for an international keynote symposium with Seddon, Niemeyer and Henriksson. Further papers are in preparation for peer-reviewed academic journals and Career Guidance Today, on overall findings, communities of practice and resistance, and policy and ethics.

IMPACTS
The team provided interim findings to inform the DCSF’s new Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) Strategy. We have also been invited to meet with DCSF policy leads in March 2010, and to present findings to the DCSF Task Force on the Careers Profession. We are planning with NICEC a public debate on ethical values in career guidance. The work is also contributing to an international network of scholars, led by Prof. Terri Seddon at Monash, studying changing occupational boundaries in lifelong learning contexts.

FUTURE RESEARCH PRIORITIES
Subsequent anecdotal evidence indicates an urgent need to investigate further changes in 14-19 career guidance following the devolvement of Connexions to local authorities, with an additional focus on what is happening to careers education programmes in schools and colleges. An ESRC proposal will be developed to seek funding for this.

An ESRC proposal is in development to investigate changing professional roles, identities and practices in youth work, which is similarly subject to new policies. It is
envisaged that the current project and this future project will contribute to an international comparative study through collaboration with Seddon’s network.

Since our findings also indicate a lack of equality initiatives in Connexions, Chadderton has submitted an application for a Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship to study the experiences of black and minority ethnic youth during their 16-19 transitions.

(5,294 words)
REFERENCES


APPENDIX: ANNOTATED DATA

Transcription conventions
For interviews, data are identified by anonymised initials, role, and page of transcript. The sensitivity of some material and the potential identifiability of respondents in spite of anonymisation means that we have not included the name of the service for which they work(ed).

Roles:
PA – personal adviser
Ex-PA – personal adviser who has left Connexions
SM – senior manager
LS/P16 – local stakeholder, post-16 provider
LS/LA – local stakeholder, local authority representative

Transcription conventions:
[young person] – editorial insertions to make sense of data extract
[common assessment framework] – editorial insertion to explain e.g. acronym
[…] – lacuna to abbreviate, make sense or protect anonymity

(1) Resource framing
Tools available to PA’s tend to be for recording situations rather than solving issues:

I talked to my manager about [a situation with a young man who was homeless] – he said, ‘Oh you must do a CAF [Common Assessment Framework record]. They need a CAF,’ so I did a CAF and nothing came of that, and you just think, ‘OK, what am I doing with this?’ As far as I can see, that went nowhere. (BM, PA, p7)

There were also tensions in tracking young people when the support on offer was inadequate:

A lot of time and resources were devoted to what we called ‘following up’ which one of my colleagues referred to as ‘social surveillance.’ (WT, ex-PA, p8)

I found it a little paradoxical that we had to go and do home visits and sort of play a heavy-handed role and yet, if the [young person] came into the office, we had nothing, nothing more to offer, really. That was a difficult situation to be in because it was like a policing, authoritarian thing to do to them, visit someone in their home, you know, and yet have nothing to offer them when they actually came into the office. So that home visit thing that was very stressful. (LJ, ex-PA, p8)

The confusion around whether Connexions is a universal or targeted service has led to other services, organisations and clients also sometimes being unclear as to their role as delivering career and other guidance, and brokering other services:
[Another service] has come into the building, so we have a much more close connection with them, when they’re able to help, but most of the time they say, ‘They’re nothing to do with us’. This child’s desperate! If somebody has got a label, you’re OK - ‘in need’, ‘vulnerable’, some official—.. No, even ‘in-need’ isn’t good enough, because the person I’m working with, at the moment, has got this label ‘in-need’ but, because [the other service] have decided he doesn’t engage, he’s under 18, he’s homeless, he doesn’t fit into their little box. I know social services are extremely pushed and don’t really want extra people at all, unless you can jump through all the right hoops and do these CAFs and do all this other stuff and prove that they are desperate. (BM, PA, p8).

Sometimes I think people probably worry that we’re a bit misunderstood, for what we actually do. Is it careers or is it issues? I think it’s been a bit vague, rather than the careers service, and I think there have been times, probably, when some people have thought even people in school don’t know what it is. Send them to Connexions if there is a problem. […] I think there is still a lot of misunderstanding and feeling that people are giving you more work to do that’s not your responsibility. (MA, PA, p13)

Local authority representatives seemed not to have been made aware of statutory and non-statutory requirements with regard to career guidance provision:

I’ve not come from a Connexions background, and you can probably tell from the way I approach this that my main focus is around the NEET cohort and so on, and not around [career guidance], and I don’t pick [career guidance] up in anything that comes through to me. The messages I pick up are about NEET reduction. As someone coming into this service, with not a lot of background in it, those are where it feels to me that the emphasis is, and not as much on the strong career guidance. (TJ, LS/LA, p.8)

(2) Managerial framing
The targets for reducing NEET are viewed as unrealistic:

These are the kind of things that you can’t quantify. We could only ever record it as one intervention, but it literally could be hours and hours spent at the benefit office, sorting money out, sorting accommodation out, went down to the housing, went to a housing panel, an appeals panel (PJ, PA, p3)

The project I was working on, they had a target of 200, you know. You’ve got no chance of reaching those targets, because you’re targeting hardcore NEETs. If you engage one, it’s a bonus. (BT, ex-PA, p11)

The focus on ‘NEET’ means that young people without ‘medium’ or ‘intensive’ needs are missing out on careers guidance:

Just because they’re clever, or just because it looks like they know what they’re doing, they don’t know, necessarily. (WC, PA, p17)
Some of those young people, they may be the first person in their family who has ever looked at going to university but, on the grid, they’re ‘minimum support’ – but nobody can help them look at university (BK, PA, p8)

This in turn is viewed by some as counterproductively inflating the numbers of NEET:

Our NEET has just gone up again – and we were saying that it’s not just a post-16 issue. It’s a pre-16 issue because they are not coming out, often, with the right level of information about careers, that they should have, and part of that is because PAs are saying we’ve not got time to sit down on an individual basis with those young people to do that. (ME, SM, p4)

PA supervision is regarded as inadequate in a number of ways. Its frequency was inadequate:

Supervision has been mentioned, has been discussed, I think, at every meeting we’ve been to since whenever Connexions came in. But it’s never existed, really. (DA, PA, p5)

It was often viewed as managerial and disciplinary rather than clinical and supportive:

A crucial part of Connexions [is supervision,] because it’s along the lines of social work, where, rather than taking on board all these issues and concerns, you’re given the opportunity, with somebody else, to unpack things and go through things. But it’s whether it’s more supervision than support, I’m not sure, because it’s the way things change, you know, targets, this, that and the next thing. (BH, SM, p8)

Schools do not tend to give impartial advice, and teachers do not have sufficient careers knowledge to be able to advise young people suitably:

The alternative pathways in the past have been offered to young people in the past who are often seen to be naughty, or ones who don’t want to be in school full time, and parents have that view of it as well. (WC, PA, pp27-8)

One of the biggest problems, I feel, having been a teacher for 32 years, [is that] the vast majority of teachers in schools have only experience of the route they took, which is, essentially, A Level. They have absolutely no idea of other routes to professions, via a professional vocational route. They don’t know how to become an accountant by taking the [accountancy technician] route. They don’t know how to become a draftsman by doing a vocational construction course. So they only know the A Level route. (GJ, LS/P16, p1)

A lack of careers education has knock-on effects on the potential for undertaking in-depth career guidance with young people:

So what we’re finding, as practitioners, we’re needing to see young people more frequently because there is no careers education. Guidance assumes
prior knowledge. Young people used to have prior knowledge, but there is now a reduction in that prior knowledge. ... (DS, SM, p12)

(3) Time-use diaries
PAs completed time-use diaries during two separate weeks (31 weeks data were collected) and recorded factual information about each activity undertaken. In addition, for each activity they were asked to indicate the degree to which it was perceived to relate to careers guidance (from wholly to not at all) and how satisfied the PA was with the outcome of the activity (from very satisfied to very dissatisfied).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity group</th>
<th>EPAs (n=12)</th>
<th>CPAs (n=3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>% of Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sum</td>
<td>Sum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client interview</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
<td>35.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client interview preparation and follow-up</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groupwork, preparation and follow-up</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liaison</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin/email</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPD</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other careers guidance</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Time spent on each activity group for EPAs and CPAs

Table 1 illustrates how EPAs and CPAs reported their time use overall. Whilst it seems from Table 1 that EPAs and CPAs spent similar proportions of their time on interviewing, a further analysis of the time spent on different types of interviewing (face-to-face, telephone, multiagency review) reveals different patterns (Table 2). EPAs, when interviewing, are mostly doing so in face-to-face situations. Whereas, CPAs whilst spending 63% of their time interviewing in face-to-face settings also spend nearly 20% of their time in multiagency reviews and nearly 20% of their time on telephone interviewing.
Table 2: Time spent on types of interviewing for EPAs and CPAs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity group</th>
<th>EPAs (n = 12)</th>
<th>CPAs (n = 3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of Total Sum</td>
<td>% of Total Sum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client interview: face-to-face</td>
<td>85.6%</td>
<td>63.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client interview: telephone</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client interview: multiagency review</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We analysed PAs perceptions of the degrees of career guidance and of satisfaction they associated with each activity. Ratings for both careers guidance and outcome satisfaction were provided for 1099 of the activities recorded by the EPAs and 236 of the activities recorded by the CPAs. Non-work related time is not included. Accounting for the elapsed time taken for each activity (i.e. the total time spent rather than the number of events), the association can be considered to be medium strength (rho = 0.472; p < 0.01) for EPAs (see Figure 1) and to be weak strength (rho = 0.160; p < 0.01) for CPAs. We cannot consider generalising from the CPA data as there were only 3 CPAs in the sample and they had three very different roles in their respective services (so aggregating the data does not reveal any common patterns).

Figure 1: Self-ratings of degree of careers guidance by EPAs by satisfaction with the outcome of the activity (total time)
Presenting the data graphically illustrates the degree of association for EPAs (Figure 1). It shows the relative amounts of time spent on all activities, categorised by the perceived degree of careers guidance intervention. Each bar is further subdivided to illustrate the degree of satisfaction with the outcome (1 = very satisfied, 5 = very dissatisfied) for each of the five categories of degree of careers guidance intervention (1 = wholly, 5 = not at all). It is clear that EPAs are most satisfied with the outcome of the activity when it is perceived to be wholly related to career guidance.

(4) Identity work
Some CG-trained PAs are worried about having to work beyond the bounds of their competence:

We are supposed to be an advocate for the young person, but sometimes social workers say, go and see your PA, for things we’re not qualified to do…. Everything is referred to us. … I trained as a careers adviser. I haven’t acquired any specific other qualification, other than careers qualifications, although I have done little bit all over the place and, with experience, I can do some things, but I’m not qualified to do all those things (IY, PA p5).

CG-trained PAs are also concerned that non-specialists are giving inexpert career guidance to young people:

I do know that some of the young people that are seen [by other PAs] in the centre, who are NEET, are being sent for things that are not suitable, because they’ve not had a proper assessment… and the employers are saying these young people are just not work-ready … I think that is a guidance issue, myself. (WC, PA, pp16-7)

There are careers guidance professionals out there who, in my view, haven’t done a rigorous enough training to be doing advice and guidance. They are alright in giving them advice, giving them a leaflet, that’s fine, but in terms of the guidance and actually digging into motivations and really getting to the source of why they want to do that and yes, that young people, maybe, have suffered a little bit from not having that. (AP, PA, p8)

Many PAs felt that their role was not clearly understood by external agencies:

With other agencies, I still feel that, a lot of the time, they don’t actually know what we do. I think there is this confusion about what a careers adviser does and what a Connexions adviser does and the two are not, necessarily, linked together. Because, to me, we’ve got people who are in the service, who are from different backgrounds and different training, and they come at things from completely different ways. So a social worker might see an adviser that is mainly based in the community, a community adviser, but they might see me as an adviser in school, attending a Year 9 or Year 10 review, so they’re seeing different aspects of the role there. So I think they could be quite confused about what we do and what we’re supposed to do. (WC, PA p12)
(5) Identity and capacity
In exploring this aspect of the data, we undertook narrative analysis, using techniques of emplotment (Polkinghorne, 1995), of the interview data from PAs and ex-PAs who typified different trajectories shared by others. The pen-pictures below summarise the dynamics of their participation in the CG community of practice.

Partial unbecoming: Yvette, EPA, Parkside
Yvette has been a careers adviser (CA) for 15 years. Although she sees herself as a CA rather than a PA, her role is wider than just career guidance: even in services such as Parkside, which retains a ‘careers service’ ethos, several aspects of the more traditional role of CA have been marginalized, as NEET targets still have to be fulfilled. At times PAs have to deliver services they are not qualified to deliver. Yvette tries to address this lack of clarity by making sure that she is known at school as the careers person, but she still feels deskilled. In particular she feels that her local occupational knowledge has become very limited since work with employers has completely disappeared from the remit of a PA. Although up to now, Parkside has supported its Education PAs in retaining their identities and practices as CA’s, this support and protection of a clear community of practice of CG may be lost when the service moves multi-professional teams.

Not becoming: Beth, CPA, Hillview
Beth trained as in career guidance via the traditional university-based route (QCG), and then got a job as a community-based PA, but feels she never really became a careers adviser. Career guidance only constitutes one small aspect of her job. Instead, she describes her job as being more along the social work line. Beth mostly enjoys her job, and feels it suits her better than doing lots of careers guidance. However, it is equally the case that she may be attempting to fulfil a role she is not qualified to do (social work is a registered occupation with vocational degree training), which may have the potential to put young people at risk.

Total unbecoming: Barry, ex-PA
Barry’s move to Connexions was a positive one, as he was attracted by the ethos of holistic support and the focus on the disadvantaged. He fully identified with identity of PA as a combination between CA, mentor and counsellor. However, he came to feel that his job was pointless, and that he was unable to help young people: firstly because of rigid NEET targets which PAs had to fulfil, which were tied to funding, and very tightly monitored by management; and secondly, because of over-large caseloads, which meant he had time only to provide information to young people, rather than in-depth careers guidance. Barry became ill with stress, and eventually left Connexions and career guidance to work in a different type of job.

Becoming: Helen, ex-PA
Helen started working at the Careers Service in 1994, and really enjoyed her job, especially working in schools and with employers. However, with the introduction of Connexions, her role changed. she found her knowledge of the labour market and Higher Education slipping away, and her professional status...
diminished. She left Connexions and now works as a senior careers adviser at a Higher Education Institution, where she is doing ‘the job [she] trained for’.

(6) Emotional labour
Some PAs feel undervalued by schools:

I’ve been in that school for ten years (…) and they used to have a format, whereby parents would arrive in the main entrance and they would be allocated a table in the hall, so all the parents were sitting at tables with a number on and they were signed up on a list when they arrived and if they wanted to speak to the careers people, a tick was put by the side of their name, so I could just look on the list and say, right, tables this, this, this and this want to see me and then I would go and locate those parents and sit down and give them chapter and verse on Connexions and careers, and what happens, and you were there for like three hours non-stop working and then the school decided to change the format altogether and they would have the staff sitting around at tables and the parents would arrive and make appointments. Well, we weren’t on the appointments list. We weren’t on the letter that went out to parents to say we would be there and there wasn’t a table for us when we arrived with all our gear to set up our stall and I was not happy, at all but, eventually, they managed to get me a table because I’d got the stand and I’d got the cloth and I’d got all my handouts and nobody very much came near

(PJ, PA, p7)

One ex-PA mentioned a key incident where she was left feeling redundant and undervalued, her professional status undermined. This proved a ‘last straw’ in deciding to leave Connexions:

There was a Higher Education conference organised and representatives from lots of universities were present. There was a big exhibition area and we were asked to go along and do a stint so I turned up at this Higher Education conference fully expecting that I would be, perhaps, giving advice to students who would be interested in applying for Higher Education and I went to the organisers and I asked: What would you like me to do? How can I help? And they asked me to stand at an entrance and stop people coming in because they wanted them to go round a one-way system and I thought: ‘That’s it! This is the point where I’ve had enough.’ I wasn’t asked to give advice. I was just asked to be a door-keeper and I thought, well, you know, it kind of put the nail in the coffin. That was the straw that broke the camel’s back. (LJ, ex-PA, p11)

(7) Ethical labour
It was difficult for PAs to have to make judgements about which young people they could help:

Well, it’s too much really. You can’t really do a proper job with all young people and you have to start prioritising and this is not something that I’m terribly happy with. […] Depending on the school, and who the Connexions
advisor in the school is, and what their priority is, and how many there are, and how many hours they’ve got. (DA, PA, p3)

The same PA could vacillate in their stance, depending on how they responded to this tension at any particular time:

I spent most of last week with one client who is homeless and has got lots of issues and no one seems to want to help him because they’ve tried before and they say he doesn’t engage and goes round and round in circles. That was most of my week. (BM, PA, p2)

If you can help the majority a bit, it’s better than helping one person a lot when they might not even move into something positive. (BM, PA, p4)

PAs and ex-PAs often spoke about pressure to meet targets that conflicted with their professional ethical principles. An extended quote here reveals the ethical ‘tussle’ in one PA’s conscience, leading to resistance that might be termed ‘conscientious objection’:

I’m on the Learning Agreement team and there is a big drive for sign ups, to sign on the agreement and it sort of seems to be this continuous pressure, […] it’s pressure all the time to get people signed up, and I’ve got one now and I can tell he doesn’t really want to do it, and before I came here [today], I was supposed to take him to his training provider for his first induction, and he’s 18 next week and I said, ‘You need to go’. He said, ‘I can’t. I’ve got to stay at home and look after my sister’, or something. So I came away agitated because I couldn’t get the sign on. But it shouldn’t be like that at all. The young person has got a situation at home. He can’t deal with it. All right, he turns 18 in a week – does that make him change much? Well, the Learning Agreement says, no, we can’t go beyond 18, that is somebody else’s remit. All right, he turns 18, he still wants to do training, but he’s just not right at the moment. He’s got things going on at home. He wants to do his driving lessons. He’s got to look after his older sister who apparently is disabled, which I didn’t know about. So this is the second time he missed his appointment, and I said, ‘You’ve got a week to go before you sign up’. So I’m putting pressure on that young person to sign up, and it almost reminds me of back years ago when a double glazing salesman rang, saying: ‘Come on! Sign here, sign here!’ I’m thinking, this isn’t right, this. I had to back right off and say, ‘Fine, if you’ve got things on the go. If you want to sign up before next Saturday, fine. If you’re not ready for it, that’s cool’, and yet I’ll get a bit of background grief about me not achieving a sign-up. I don’t think it should be like that, myself. It shouldn’t be like that at all. It should be person-centred. (SB, PA, p.15)