

# **Young People, Connexions and the Digital Divide**

**Peter Lord**

**Dissertation for the award of  
M.A. in Information Management  
at the University of Sheffield**

**2003**

### Abstract

The purpose of this research project was to investigate the relationship between the 'digital divide' - the gap between those who are and are not able to benefit from Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) - and Connexions, the government's new information, advice and support service for 13 to 19 year olds. Connexions has invested heavily in web technology to meet young people's information needs, while concentrating human support on the most unsettled teenagers, raising the question of whether the digital divide might exclude some young people from web-based resources.

The question was addressed in two ways. Firstly a literature review sought to clarify the role of ICT within the Connexions Service, and to establish the extent, nature and consequences of the digital divide in England, particularly among young people. Secondly a questionnaire was completed by 52 Personal Advisers delivering the Connexions Service in one city, giving information about whether they refer young people to web-based information resources, and what might encourage them to do so.

The literature revealed that while a digital divide persisted among young people, Connexions aimed for an inclusive ICT strategy targeting web resources at all teenagers. The questionnaire, however, revealed that the more settled young people were six times more likely to be referred to websites than those in greatest need. Advisers had little knowledge of relevant websites, particularly outside their previous professional background; consequently nearly all referrals related to careers resources, reflecting the background of the majority of advisers.

The research concludes that advisers are influenced in their use of websites as information sources for their clients by their perception of a digital divide among young people, manifest in terms of motivation and skills as much as physical access. It recommends measures to make websites more attractive and accessible to all young people, as well as an education programme for advisers to increase their knowledge of relevant resources across a wide range of issues.

## CONTENTS

<b>Abstract</b>		<b>p i</b>
<b>Contents</b>		<b>p ii</b>
<b>List of Tables</b>		<b>piii</b>
<b>Chapter One: Introduction</b>		<b>p1</b>
<b>Outline</b>	<b>p1</b>	
<b>The Connexions Service</b>	<b>p2</b>	
<b>Connexions and ICT</b>	<b>p3</b>	
<b>Research questions</b>	<b>p4</b>	
<b>Chapter Two: Literature Review</b>		<b>p7</b>
<b>Introduction: aims, scope, methodology, limitations</b>	<b>p7</b>	
<b>Literature on the Connexions Service</b>	<b>p9</b>	
<b>Literature on the Digital Divide</b>	<b>p17</b>	
<b>Conclusions: themes; direction for original research</b>	<b>p31</b>	
<b>Chapter Three: Methodology</b>		<b>p35</b>
<b>The selection of methodologies</b>	<b>p35</b>	
<b>The methodology for this study</b>	<b>p37</b>	
<b>The questionnaire in detail</b>	<b>p39</b>	
<b>Methodology reconsidered</b>	<b>p43</b>	
<b>Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis</b>		<b>p45</b>
<b>Personal Adviser Questionnaire</b>	<b>p45</b>	
<b>Respondents</b>	<b>p46</b>	
<b>Numbers of website referrals</b>	<b>p49</b>	
<b>Information needs</b>	<b>p54</b>	
<b>Reasons for non-referral</b>	<b>p57</b>	
<b>Factors potentially increasing referrals</b>	<b>p63</b>	
<b>Attitudes to Young People and ICT</b>	<b>p67</b>	
<b>Priorities for a Connexions website</b>	<b>p77</b>	
<b>Additional Comments</b>	<b>p82</b>	
<b>Chapter Five: Conclusions</b>		<b>p87</b>
<b>Conclusions from the literature review</b>	<b>p87</b>	
<b>Conclusions from the original research</b>	<b>p88</b>	
<b>Improvements to research methods</b>	<b>p100</b>	
<b>Areas for further research</b>	<b>p101</b>	
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>p101</b>	
<b>Bibliography</b>		<b>p103</b>
<b>Appendix: Questionnaire</b>		<b>p106</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table 1: Respondents by Client Caseload Type</b>	<b>p46</b>
<b>Table 2: Respondents by professional background</b>	<b>p47</b>
<b>Table 3: Young People seen by Respondents: by Priority Group</b>	<b>p48</b>
<b>Table 3A: Young People seen by respondents:</b>	
<b>by Priority Group and Respondent Category</b>	<b>p49</b>
<b>Table 4: Number of Website Referrals per Respondent</b>	<b>p50</b>
<b>Table 5: Number of Website Referrals</b>	
<b>by Priority Group of Young Person</b>	<b>p51</b>
<b>Table 6: Number of Referrals compared to Total Number of</b>	
<b>Young People seen from each Priority Group</b>	<b>p52</b>
<b>Table 7a: Respondent Subgroups by Professional Background</b>	<b>p52</b>
<b>Table 7b: Respondent Subgroups by main Client Group</b>	<b>p53</b>
<b>Table 7c: Respondent Subgroups by Referral Rate</b>	<b>p53</b>
<b>Table 8: Information Needs for which Respondents made Referrals</b>	<b>p54</b>
<b>Table 9: Information Needs for which Respondents made Referrals,</b>	
<b>by Professional Background</b>	<b>p55</b>
<b>Table 9B: Referral Topics by Respondent's Referral Frequency</b>	<b>p56</b>
<b>Table 9C: Respondents Referring to Connexions Websites</b>	<b>p56</b>
<b>Table 10: Reasons for Non-Referral</b>	<b>p58</b>
<b>Table 10A: Percentages endorsing reasons for not referring:</b>	
<b>by Respondents' Referral Frequency</b>	<b>p59</b>
<b>Table 11: Factors Potentially Increasing Referrals</b>	<b>p64</b>
<b>Table 11A: Factors potentially increasing referrals:</b>	
<b>by Respondents' Referral Frequency</b>	<b>p65</b>
<b>Table 12: Statements about young people and ICT:</b>	
<b>respondents agreeing and disagreeing</b>	<b>p68</b>
<b>Table 12A: Respondents agreeing that most young people they work</b>	
<b>with have Internet access: by Respondents' Referral Frequency</b>	<b>p69</b>
<b>Table 12B: Correlation between Internet access in building</b>	
<b>and making referrals</b>	<b>p71</b>

<b>Table 12C: Correlation between seeing client at a computer and making referrals</b>	<b>p71</b>
<b>Table 12D: Statement (i), by Respondents' Referral Frequency</b>	<b>p73</b>
<b>Table 12E: Statement (j), by Respondents' Referral Frequency</b>	<b>p73</b>
<b>Table 12F: Statement (j), by Adviser Caseload groups</b>	<b>p73</b>
<b>Table 12G: Statement (l), by Respondents' Referral Frequency</b>	<b>p74</b>
<b>Table 12H: Statement (n), by Adviser Caseload groups</b>	<b>p75</b>
<b>Table 13: Respondents Agreeing with Suggested Website Features</b>	<b>p78</b>
<b>Table 13A: Support for various groups of features: by professional background</b>	<b>p80</b>
<b>Table 13B: Support for various groups of features: by Respondents' Referral Frequency</b>	<b>p81</b>

**Chapter One: Introduction****1.1: Outline****1.2 The Connexions Service****1.3 The Connexions Service and ICT****1.4 Research Questions****1.1 Outline**

This research looks at the relationship between two concepts: the Connexions Service, a new support service for 13-19 year olds in England; and the digital divide, a term coined to describe the phenomenon whereby some sections of the population do not share in the benefits from ICT, particularly the Internet. It is concerned with the use of the Internet by young people as an information source. It raises and addresses a number of questions about government policy in respect of support services to young people in the transition between school and adult life, and in respect of access to Information and Communications Technologies (ICT).

These two concepts, the Connexions Service and the digital divide, are explored at length in the literature review in the following chapter. The focus of the original research undertaken for this project is the degree to which Personal Advisers - the key providers of support to young people in the Connexions Service - refer their clients to websites for their information needs. The hypothesis to be explored is that there may be a tendency on the part of Personal Advisers to regard websites as relevant to the needs of the more able young people but not the more disadvantaged, which if true would be both a reflection and a reinforcement of the digital divide.

Finally, inferences are drawn regarding the government's strategy for providing information and other forms of support to young people, relying heavily as it does on the Internet as a means of communication with young people.

First, however, by way of introduction, the Connexions Service is explained in more detail in order to provide a context for the study. The questions which gave rise

to the study are then presented, and the focus of the study narrowed to address a particular subset of the questions raised.

## **1.2 The Connexions Service**

The Connexions Service is a new service providing information, advice, guidance and personal support for young people aged 13-19, introduced in England by the UK government in 2001. It aims to support young people in making decisions regarding their career and educational choices, as well as other 'lifestyle' issues such as health, money, housing, substance abuse, offending, relationships and sex. It offers support through a variety of means depending on the level of individual need (Connexions Service National Unit, 2003a).

The notion of varying levels of need is a key aspect of the delivery of the service. Young people are categorised as Priority 1 - facing multiple, serious barriers to progressing in education, employment or training, and in need of ongoing intensive individual support from a Personal Adviser; Priority 2 - with significant short-term problems, at risk of disengaging from education, employment or training, and needing intensive short-term support; and Priority 3, those who are more settled and focussed, for whom information is required to support decision-making with little personal intervention. For those in greatest need, a personal adviser works with the young person for an extended period. For others with a lower level of need, contact with the Connexions Service may amount to access to information to support choices when they need it.

Connexions is directed by the Connexions Service National Unit, a section of the Department for Education and Skills. It is organised at local level by 47 Connexions Partnerships; these are governed by senior representatives of organisations such as local education authorities, social services departments, police services, health services, probation services, employers, and the voluntary and community sector. There are a number of different models for the actual delivery of the service, the two most common being:

- a sub-contracting model whereby a small Partnership executive contracts with local organisations, typically careers companies, youth services and smaller agencies, to actually deliver the service to young people;
- a direct delivery model whereby the Partnership itself employs the vast majority of the staff who deliver the service.

The main provider of the service is the Personal Adviser, a new profession drawn from the ranks of careers advisers, youth workers, social workers, teachers, learning mentors and others.

### **1.3 Connexions and ICT**

The use of the Internet as an information source for young people is an essential component of the Connexions strategy:

“It will be delivered through a variety of means, including Personal Advisers, professionals in the wider Connexions service, young people themselves and ICT.” (Offer & Watts, 2000: 1).

A key element of the strategy to provide information involves the development of websites. Three national government websites ([www.connexions.gov.uk](http://www.connexions.gov.uk); [www.connexions-card.gov.uk](http://www.connexions-card.gov.uk); [www.connexions-card.gov.uk](http://www.connexions-card.gov.uk)) provide an overview of the issues faced by young people at different stages and general information to help with these issues.

“A Connexions website will act as a portal to information for 13-19-year-olds. It will aim to offer interactive elements such as assessment, e-guidance and career profiling. The website will be an integral part of the Connexions Direct pilot.... The pilot will also include a call centre, able to provide information, advice and guidance to a specified level, and to signpost users to other sources where appropriate. ...

These developments are linked to the Government’s broad agenda for the electronic delivery of Government and other services.” (Offer & Watts, 2000:1).



These national ICT initiatives are complemented by websites developed by individual Connexions Partnerships or Connexions service providers at the local level; these have a greater emphasis on local opportunities in education, employment, training, volunteering and personal development. It is the development of these local sites which this research primarily seeks to inform

#### **1.4. Research Questions**

This approach to service delivery raises a number of public policy questions. Though some of these are left for further research and policy debate in the future, as outlined in the concluding chapter, many of the questions raised are addressed by existing research, summarised in the literature review in the next chapter; while others are the subject of the original research described in later chapters.

The broad concern which provides the impetus for this research is the question of whether an information strategy heavily reliant on websites is appropriate for a service promoting social inclusion. On the one hand it may be argued that web-based information services foster inclusion, since access to information is no longer dependent on time, place, or the intervention of intermediaries. On the other hand the evidence in other contexts of a digital divide shows that certain social groups are excluded from the internet revolution. Thus a key issue is the impact of the digital divide on young people. It might be assumed, for instance, that this age group is less affected than others: there is now almost universal access to the Internet in schools and increasing penetration in the home and the community; young people acquire Internet skills in school, and, it is assumed, are more motivated than older people to use modern technology.

The opposing view would argue that those young people most likely to be affected by the digital divide are the very ones that the Connexions Service prioritises: those from deprived backgrounds who are less likely to have computers at home; who

have not thrived in the education system and so are less likely to have acquired ICT skills; and who are most disaffected from adult society, and might see the Internet as irrelevant to their lives.

The Literature Review (Chapter Two) therefore looks at the concept of the Connexions Service and the role of ICT within it, and at the evidence for the digital divide among young people. It seeks answers to these specific questions:

- how far does the digital divide apply to young people?
- which particular groups are affected?
- what are its causes and effects?
- what responses have been used to address the digital divide?
- how does the Connexions Service attempt to use ICT?

The Original Research has, at the most practical level, the primary aim of informing the development of a strategy for the Connexions Service in Sheffield to meet the information needs of all 13-19 year-olds, particularly through the use of a website. This may assist in the development of similar strategies for the Connexions Service in other localities and at a national level.

A more academic but equally important objective is to explore the hypothesis that in practice, Connexions Personal Advisers use web resources as a means of supporting the more able and motivated (Priority 3) young people, but rely on other means of giving information to the more unsettled (Priority 1 and 2).

The study considers the use made by Connexions Personal Advisers of web resources as an information source for the young people they work with. This addresses the following specific questions:

- to what extent do Personal Advisers refer young people to web resources?
- what factors prevent them from referring more than they do?

- what factors would encourage them to make more such referrals?
- what attitudes do advisers hold about young people's use of the Internet?
- what features would they wish to see in a Connexions website for young people

The **Conclusion** of this section on research questions is that the original research questions, though narrowly focussed, shed light on a broader social concern. As stated earlier, the Connexions Service is both universal - available to all young people - and targeted - concentrating help on those in greatest need. There may be a tendency to equate the universal aspect of the service with information provision, particularly through websites; and to equate the targeted service with direct interventions from a personal adviser. Whether explicit or implicit, planned or unintentional, this approach risks perpetuating the digital divide into a new generation, in a society increasingly dependent on its citizens' ability to access and utilise electronic information sources. The research therefore looks at how the needs of all young people are being addressed. From these findings, recommendations are made for how Personal Advisers can make greater use of websites as an information source for disadvantaged young people, and how Connexions websites can be made more relevant to their needs, in order to inform an information dissemination strategy for Connexions Services.

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review on the Connexions Service and the Digital Divide

#### **2.1 Introduction: aims, scope, methodology, limitations**

#### **2.2 Literature on the Connexions Service**

#### **2.3 Literature on the Digital Divide**

#### **2.4 Conclusions: themes; direction for original research**

### **2.1 Introduction**

As the first part of this study, a literature review was undertaken, seeking to identify and synthesise existing knowledge on two areas: the Connexions Service and the digital divide.

The aim of the review was to establish what research existed on the digital divide, and whether it had been investigated in relation to young people in particular; it also aimed to confirm that no research had considered this in relation to the Connexions Service. It would then be possible to see which of the questions raised in the introduction had been explored, in order to avoid duplication, whilst at the same time providing a context and focus for the original research planned for this study.

It was anticipated at the start that literature on the Connexions Service would be sparse, whereas that on the digital divide would be plentiful. It was also anticipated that the latter would be predominantly centred on the United States, which might provide useful contributions to the broad context, but would have limited relevance to the specific interests of this study. These assumptions all proved correct.

It was therefore decided to limit the scope of the literature search to UK documents, from the last five years, for the following reasons:

- while the digital divide is an international phenomenon, its causes and effects are likely to differ according to the particular social circumstances of an individual country.

- the situation regarding the digital divide and levels of access to ICT in general is rapidly changing, so that older items would have little relevance;
- the Connexions Service is unique to England and is less than three years old.

Literature on the digital divide has appeared in the form of government reports and statistics as well as articles in academic journals. Research specifically in relation to 13-19 year olds (or young people in general) is limited. However, several studies explore the related issue of access to ICT and the Internet, some focussing on young people, and shed light on the extent of the digital divide among this age group and its effects.

Literature on the Connexions Service, as a new initiative, is far scarcer. Several reports were published both before the establishment of the Connexions Service, looking at the social problems among young people which led to its introduction, and since its launch, evaluating projects, disseminating good practice and providing a critical perspective.

There is little research as yet on the information needs of young people in relation to the Connexions Service, or to the use of ICT in meeting these needs. Only two documents on this specific aspect have been found, one published in the very early days of Connexions, looking ahead at how ICT might be used as part of the delivery of the service (Offer & Watts, 2000); the other issued very recently by the Connexions Service National Unit (CSNU, 2003).

## 2.2 Literature on the Connexions Service

2.2.1 Government documents on the Connexions Service

2.2.2 Academic research on the Connexions Service

2.2.3 Literature on ICT and the Connexions Service

### 2.2.1 Government documents on the Connexions Service

The Connexions Service was first mentioned by name in a government report addressing the problem of young people who were not engaged in education, employment or training after reaching the statutory school leaving age of 16 (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). This catalogues the extent and causes of social exclusion amongst young people and recommends the setting up of a new youth support service.

The Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) was remitted to assess how many 16-18 year olds are not in education, work or training, analyse the reasons why, and produce proposals to reduce the numbers significantly. The SEU (1999) reported that at any one time they totalled 9 per cent of the age group, or 161,000 young people, with a further 17% working but undertaking no formal education and training. Those from an unskilled family background were over four times more likely to be out of learning at 16 than those from managerial and professional families (SEU, 1999: 15). Consequences for the individual and for society include lack of qualifications, unemployment, poor health, crime, teenage pregnancy and parenthood, and substance misuse.

A year later, as part of the government's National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, the Policy Action Team 12 reported on *Young People*, with further analysis of social deprivation and proposed solutions. (Policy Action Team 12, 2000). A later publication setting out the vision for Connexions summarises the extent of the problem:

“173,000 young people between 16 and 18 - around 9% of the age group - are neither in learning nor in work, a proportion that has remained virtually unchanged since 1994. Those who are not in education, employment or training

between 16 and 18 are more likely than their peers at age 21 to be unemployed; unqualified; on a low income; a parent and at risk of depression and poor physical health. ... institutional fragmentation, insufficient preparation for post-16 choices and the lack of a comprehensive support service for 16 - 18 year olds outside full-time education were contributing to this problem.”

(CSNU, 2002a: 4)

The DfEE (2000) took government policy further with a report setting out a detailed strategy for the Connexions service. This establishes the principle of a three-tier service for young people according to individual levels of need, comprising: information and advice on career/learning/employment choices with minimum levels of intervention; in-depth guidance for those at risk of disengaging; and intensive support for those with multiple problems; together amounting to a universal and targeted service (DfEE, 2000: 38).

The Connexions Service was piloted in 2001 and expanded in stages to become a nationwide service in England from 2003. By March 2002 over 2000 Personal Advisers were employed by the service nationwide, and over a million “interventions” had been made with young people. (CSNU, 2002c: 5,11). However, an independent inspection of the first year of operation found that many Personal Advisers “do not yet have the breadth of skills and knowledge to perform the wider role needed in an integrated support service”, and that there is “a lack of clarity and understanding about the role and deployment of the personal adviser across many partnership areas” (Ofsted, 2002: 5).

For the future, the vision for Connexions is to become recognised as having transformed and modernised the delivery of support to 13-19 year-olds. Involving young people in shaping the service is a key element in this (CSNU, 2002: 5). The government has set a target for the Connexions Service, and each partnership within it, to reduce by 10% the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training, to be achieved by November 2004 (CSNU, 2002b: 16).

### 2.2.2 Academic research on the Connexions service

Independent academic research and comment on the Connexions Service has questioned this approach to supporting young people.

Colley and Hodgkinson (2001) argue that the Bridging the Gap is fundamentally contradictory in its analysis of solutions for non-participation in learning. Despite its apparent concern for the social dimension, it sees the causes of non-participation primarily as individuals and their personal deficits. At the same time it denies individuality and diversity by representing the socially excluded as stereotyped categories. It not only correlates non-participation with other social problems, but presents it as their cause, ignoring structural inequalities. Thus social exclusion is addressed through a strongly individualistic strategy, while the Connexions Service, a measure to enhance individuality, is set in a prescriptive structural framework. While such approaches doubtless assist some young people, there is a significant risk that they may make things worse for others.

Ainley, Barnes and Momen (2002) see Connexions as symptomatic of the present government's 'experimental' approach to social policy development, encouraging 'social entrepreneurs' to deliver new services and partnerships to meet changing individual and group needs. The fluidity of the new arrangements encourages competition between the various 'partners' involved. The authors report conflicting loyalties between organisational agendas and the priority accorded by individual advisers to the needs of the young people on their caseload. This way of delivering social services creates a highly dynamic but also extremely uncertain social policy environment.

Watts (2001) criticises the government for subordinating careers guidance, which had been a universal entitlement, to the social exclusion agenda, which affects only a minority. Watts sees a fundamental design flaw in the government's attempt to create both a universal and targeted service; the logical way to reconcile these aims would be to design the universal service and then adapt it to address the distinctive needs of the targeted group; instead Connexions had been designed in reverse.



“In other words, universality was a second-order consideration. As a result, efforts were made to extrapolate to all young people measures designed to address the needs of the primary target-group. ... If young people at risk were to have a Personal Adviser, then all young people must have one.”  
(Watts, 2001: 166-167).

This design flaw was exacerbated by the fact that there were not sufficient numbers of Personal Advisers available to the Connexions Service to provide meaningful individual support for all young people; the numbers of young people on caseloads for individual advisers would be too high (Watts refers to unpublished government figures of 800 low priority young people per adviser).

### **2.2.3 Literature on ICT and the Connexions Service**

The role of ICT in the Connexions Service was first mentioned in the government’s original Connexions strategy document, stating that the Service will “make innovative use of technology to encourage access by **all** young people.” (DfEE, 2000: 35). Thus any implication that ICT based information provision should be targeted at those young people least at risk of disaffection, receiving the lowest of the three levels of service, is explicitly rejected. The issue of whether in practice Connexions websites address the needs of all young people constitutes a major consideration of the original research described in later chapters.

The government’s detailed requirements for Connexions Partnerships repeatedly emphasise the role of ICT in delivering services for young people:

“access to information and initial advice on all topics covered by Connexions. ICT and self help should be promoted. ... Partnerships should look to maximise the use of ICT within schools to access information, advice and guidance”  
“Each Connexions Partnership must develop and maintain its own website

giving local information about Connexions, and links to relevant other local services for young people.” (CSNU, 2002b: 22-23; 56)

The Chief Executive of the Connexions Service envisaged a major role for ICT in service delivery, offering vast potential for young people to access information and advice independently, conveniently, and enthusiastically. ICT empowers young people and provides access independently of time and place. It would supplement and complement face-to-face services, but not replace the need for individual advice (Weinstock, 2001: 5).

The first of the two items specifically addressing the role of ICT in Connexions was a report on a policy consultation conference sponsored by the (then) Department for Education and Employment. Its aims were to examine current usage of ICT in relation to information, advice and guidance for young people aged 13-19; explore the issues and creative possibilities in developing the role of ICT as a ‘tier’ within the Connexions service; and identify the measures needed to assure the accessibility, impartiality, confidentiality and quality of technically mediated services within Connexions (Offer & Watts, 2000).

The authors recognise that access to ICT is crucial in this context:

“High-quality services delivered by ICT and related media are of little value if the target audience does not have physical access to the necessary hardware or equipment.” (Offer & Watts, 2000: 2).

They observe that people marginalised by society, e.g. the homeless, have little or no access to ICT; for others the cost of access may be prohibitive; therefore free public access points are necessary. They further comment that barriers may be social as well as geographical, due to:

- language (requiring translation into minority languages, language level appropriate to the target groups, with account taken of visual/aural impairment);
- skills (e.g. keyboard skills, Internet awareness), so design must allow for this (e.g. touchscreen);

- gatekeepers, such as parents, who may control access, and whose attitudes towards younger teenagers viewing information on sex or drugs, for example, must be recognised
- perceptual barriers, such as the resource being seen as irrelevant by the target group, or the brand image not appealing to them, resulting in non-use

(Offer & Watts, 2000: 2-3)

They also highlight the importance of involving young people in influencing the way ICT is used in the Connexions service, acknowledging that young people are not a heterogeneous group, and that consultation must be genuine not tokenistic or patronising. They emphasise the potential for ICT to channel feedback on the service, as well as to put young people in touch with each other for social and developmental purposes (Offer & Watts, 2000: 4).

The authors acknowledge the differentiated levels of service inherent in the Connexions Service, and apply this to the ICT context. For some issues, a website may provide sufficient information with no direct human intervention; for other problems, a brief conversation by email or telephone may be required; for some, in-depth, intensive perhaps iterative face-to-face or on-line interaction with a specialist will be necessary. “These levels may also be seen as developmental stages, with support tapered in either direction, from self-help to specialist support, or the reverse as users develop greater autonomy” (Offer & Watts, 2000: 4). In other words young people may move between different levels and not require the same depth of support constantly. The use of ICT may actually increase demand for face-to-face services rather than replace it.

They go on to explore the potential synergy between face to face and ICT-based support. While stand-alone ICT resources are important, a high-quality delivery model depends on their effective integration with direct human interaction. Through the fluidity of communications technologies, the personal adviser can conduct multiple, simultaneous interactions with clients, their parents, and specialist referral agencies, with a spontaneity and speed of response not previously possible. A generic Personal Adviser can also access knowledge and expertise outside their specialism,

enhancing their capacity to respond to a wide range of issues across the board (Offer & Watts, 2000: 5-6).

Thus ICT and human intervention should be seen not as alternatives but as synergistic and complementary:

“Particular care should be taken to avoid the notion that ICT-based services are for ‘mainstream’ young people, while Personal Advisers are for young people with complex or multiple problems. Connexions should provide a continuum of services, in a variety of media and methods, for all young people to access.”  
(Offer & Watts, 2000: 6)

Among their recommendations are:

- using fashionable media such as SMS (short message service) through mobile phones
- developing simulations and games, “not hitherto much in evidence among computer-assisted guidance software or websites”
- ensuring websites are regularly updated
- differentiating the service, recognising that different users use different media differently - anecdotal evidence suggests, for example, that young men prefer email to helplines; young women, the reverse
- ensuring that in the design and marketing of ICT services, equality of opportunity is paramount, with attention to access issues and differentiated services, avoiding ‘one size fits all’ solutions.
- achieving maximum coherence between national/local ICT provision and the role of the Personal Adviser
- actively involving young people in influencing and shaping the role of ICT in Connexions
- identifying and evaluating models of innovative practice – for example, in interacting on-line with young people and actively connecting them to other services

(Offer & Watts, 2000: 3, 6)

The second publication specifically addressing the role of ICT in Connexions comprises guidance from the Connexions Service National Unit (which has steered the development of Connexions from its inception), to local Connexions partnerships on the development of websites (CSNU, 2003). This highlights the need to involve young people in the development of Connexions websites, to ensure that sites are attractive, informative and interesting to them and are based on issues which are important to them. Nevertheless it advocates a balance between what young people want and the views of teachers and parents, cautioning against promoting explicit material on sex, drugs or any other controversial issues, (CSNU, 2003: 5); “what is acceptable for a 16-19 year old user may not be so for a 13 year old” (CSNU, 2003: 9).

Suggestions include using the website to promote the services offered by Connexions, to engage young people in shaping local services, canvassing opinions and asking what would encourage them to get involved. Ideas include quizzes, competitions, games or local and national gossip (CSNU, 2003: 8).

Other advice concerns the information content, with the emphasis on local content covering the full range of issues where Connexions seeks to provide support (CSNU, 2003: 23); the use of graphics and images, which should be used to make the site more attractive but without causing unacceptable download times or accessibility problems, or distracting from the main purpose of delivering information (CSNU, 2003: 20); and interactivity, particularly the use of chatrooms and discussion forums (though with a warning against live postings in an unmoderated situation) (CSNU, 2003: 24).

### 2.3 Literature on the Digital Divide

2.3.1 Government statistics, surveys and policy documents

2.3.2 The digital divide, young people and education

2.3.3 Digital divide solutions

#### 2.3.1 Government statistics, surveys and policy documents

The digital divide has been a major theme of government publications on the issue of social inclusion. UK government statistical services provide the most reliable and up-to-date assessments of the extent of access to ICT, and therefore, conversely, of the size of the digital divide.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) provides regularly updated statistics on this theme. The government is committed to ensuring that all who want it can have internet access by 2005 (Office of the e-Envoy, 2003). Significant progress is reported in terms of physical access: in April 2003, 60% of adults in the UK, or 28 million, had used the internet; 54% reported doing so in the last three months; 47% of households have internet access (over three times the number three years earlier); over 95% of schools and businesses are now online (Office of the e-Envoy, 2003; ONS, 2003).

An ONS survey in autumn 2002 looked at the statistics in greater depth, and found that access depends very strongly on income. In September 2002 levels of household access were lowest in the lowest income group (10%), increasing rapidly with income up to 82% for households within the highest income group. In the preceding year, Internet access increased fairly consistently across all income groups (with some of the lower groups experiencing larger proportional increases), except the lowest income group where access remained the same (ONS, 2002: 4).

Of relevance to the present study was the finding that Internet use was highest among the youngest age group surveyed, 16-24 year-olds (94%). (ONS, 2002: 5)

Reasons for Internet use showed that only 4% of users accessed the Internet exclusively for work purposes - in other words, the vast majority use it for personal reasons. These include email (76%), information about goods and services (71%), and lagging far behind, information about education (36%) (ONS, 2002: 6).

The survey also considered those adults who had never accessed the Internet (38 %). 73 per cent of this group stated that they were very unlikely to access the Internet in the next year. This represents over a quarter (28%) of all adults, again suggesting a persistent core of non-users (ONS, 2002: 7).

Non-users were also asked why they had not used it. 37% of those who had not used the Internet stated that they were not interested in using it (with an additional 12% citing 'no need' or 'no wish'), 25% had no means of access to the Internet and 23% did not feel that they had the confidence or the skills required to use the Internet. (ONS, 2002: 7). In April 2003, 40 per cent of adults had never used the Internet. These people were asked which of four statements best described what they thought about using the Internet. Over half of non-users chose the statement "I have not really considered using the Internet before and I am not likely to in the future". This core group of non-Internet users represents 22 per cent of all adults. (ONS, 2003). The prominence given to lack of interest over lack of access or skills is another finding which will appear again later in this review

The ONS analysed access rates by income group but not by social class. Other government-commissioned research has focussed more specifically on this aspect:

"it appears that penetration of PCs and the Internet among those living or likely to be living in deprived neighbourhoods is lower than for the UK as a whole."  
(Policy Action Team 15, 2000: 25)

Subsequent studies fill in some of the gaps relating to social class; for example a benchmark survey commissioned by the (then) Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) in 2000 (Research Surveys of Great Britain, 2001), updated in

2001 to identify trends (Russell and Stafford, 2002). At the time of the update, in which a nationally representative sample of 4000 adults were interviewed, 55% of the population reported having ever used the Internet; this masked a divergence between classes AB and C1 on the one hand, with figures of 79% and 70% respectively, and classes C2 and DE with 51% and 31%. Increases since the benchmark survey were higher among the AB groups than the DEs, suggesting a growing divide (Russell and Stafford, 2002: 6).

Another survey commissioned by the (now) Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in 2002 reported on PC ownership and Internet access by social class, based on 2000 interviews with parents and children. This study found that Internet access at home showed a huge variation, between 92% for social classes AB and just 48% for classes DE. Comparison with a similar, baseline research project revealed no narrowing of these gaps since 2001 (Hayward et al., 2003: 10-12; DfES, 2001: 1-3).

The hope expressed by the Policy Action Team that relatively high penetration of cable and digital televisions and mobile telephones among the lower social classes would increase Internet access (Policy Action Team 15, 2000: 25) receives some support from this research (Hayward et al., 2003: 2, 10); however, later government statistics referred to above found very little use of these technologies to access the Internet (ONS, 2002: 1, 5; Office of the E-Envoy, 2003).

### **2.3.2 The digital divide, young people and education**

The research by Hayward et al. (2003) focusses on the use of ICT among young people; while age comparisons made by Russell and Stafford (2002) also reveal significant findings relating to young people which are relevant to this research. The two studies find that:

- The most popular reasons for young people using the Internet were: schoolwork; email; study/learning; hobbies/interests; music; games; chat; information for careers/options; young people use computers for learning purposes: not only for



school/college work but for learning independently of school/college/employment, developing computer skills in general, accessing electronic reference material and learning related to job or career

- Most young Internet users visited sites recommended by their teachers (increasing with age from 65% at age 11-14, 70% at 14-16, and 77% among post-16s.)
- Young people are more likely than older people to be daily Internet users, and spend more hours per week using computers.
- Young people who do not own a computer are likely to give cost as the reason, and would welcome free/cheaper machines, software or lessons; small numbers accessed the Internet in other people's homes, libraries or cafes, and young non-users generally want to use the Internet in future (though a not insignificant 15% of 16-24 year-old non-users say that nothing would persuade them to use it).
- There was a lower perceived level of computer skills among those without a computer, and particularly without Internet access; but younger people were more likely than older people to regard computer skills as very important for life in general and for work.

(Hayward et al., 2003: p.2, 8, 26-27; Russell and Stafford, 2002, p 22-23, 30-32, 39-40, 47, 53-54)

The Department for Education and Skills also commissioned research from the British Educational Communications and Technology Association (Becta), looking for an association between levels of ICT usage and pupil performance in national tests and GCSE examinations. Covering about 1200 pupils from a representative sample of 60 schools, this survey found a positive relationship between extensive use of ICT in school and at home, and better performance in exams; or conversely, an educational disadvantage for those without access to ICT (Harrison et al., 2003).

The research found that although home computer ownership and Internet access are increasing, the 'digital divide' between those with and without computers at home remains a serious problem for a minority of pupils, a quarter of whom still lack home access. There are stark differences between the most advantaged and the

least advantaged in terms of socioeconomic status. Access to a home computer is now universal among the former, while a number of pupils in the remaining groups do not have home access, and the difference is even more marked for Internet availability. Nevertheless, even here, only a minority of pupils in the sample were unable to access the Internet (Harrison et al., 2003: 61, 63). The implication is a decreasing number of young people on the wrong side of a widening divide.

The authors caution against placing too much reliance on ownership statistics as a true indicator of usage levels. Even with a computer at home, potential access did not necessarily translate into actual use. In a minority of cases this was due to lack of interest, but more generally resulted from competition from other family members, or occasionally from parental restriction (Harrison et al., 2003: 122).

Those with home access benefit from sustained use of more powerful ICT equipment and resources, supporting a wide variety of school and non-school pursuits. For most secondary school pupils, the vast majority of time spent using ICT and the Internet is at home rather than school. Alternative provision (in public libraries, Internet cafés and on school premises outside lesson time) lacks flexibility and in some cases is expensive; use of school ICT for personal interest was minimal, with school Internet access suffering from technical limitations, inaccessibility and the constraints of school policy (including filtering) (Harrison et al., 2003: 61-66).

The educational and social effects of this are considerable:

“Access to ICT (and particularly the Internet) outside the confines of the classroom is engaging pupils who would not otherwise be motivated to continue working outside school hours. ... As pupils are clearly able to spend far more time at home than at school using ICT for both self-directed and teacher-directed learning activities, the minority who do not have access at home are clearly disadvantaged” (Harrison et al., 2003: 66).

Pupils' use of the Internet is often active and purposeful in contrast to the image of them passively 'surfing the Net' in a relatively aimless fashion. Even leisure-related Internet use included constructive information searches, with pupils considering online information as relevant to everyday life, up to date, and better than libraries; acquiring an extensive range and sophisticated level of ICT skills through extensive and regular home use, and developing social skills through chatrooms and email (Harrison et al., 2003: 68-69).

Of relevance to the Connexions Service is the conclusion that ICT connects with a range of social practices specific to youth culture, allowing young people to engage with a range of social, health, moral, ethical and political issues. This suggests that ICT not only affects academic achievement, but also provides motivating and stimulating material related to a wealth of broader issues (Harrison et al., 2003: 81-2). The socio-cultural context of youth culture and the home as the preferred location for computer use promotes use in a positive light, fitting with young people's interests and reinforcing their sense of self-worth. Positively regarded as part of youth culture, ICT helps bridge the gap between school and home and increases motivation. (Harrison et al., 2003: 99). Again the implications for the personal development of young people on the wrong side of the digital divide are serious.

Teachers often recommended educational web sites for pupils to visit, an option clearly available in a Connexions context to Personal Advisers also; but again the digital divide affects this:

"Teachers tend to encourage, rather than require pupils to use the Internet for homework, largely because not all children will have equal access at home."  
(Harrison et al., 2003: 120)

Young people were shown to be highly motivated by the Internet. While some usage was at the request of teachers, much of it was voluntary, but complemented school work. Parents confirmed this general view of the usefulness of home access for developing confidence and competence in ICT skills and engaging those who would not otherwise have been likely to study outside school. (Harrison et al., 2003: 121)

Harrison et al. suggest that schools should audit home ownership in order to target support on pupils without access to ICT outside school. Other methods being tried include after school and lunchtime access, home computer loans, and public library ICT provision. However, some of these approaches offer limited flexibility and can incur costs. (Harrison et al., 2003: 128)

Longer term recommendations for overcoming the digital divide in learning include:

- “Increasing bandwidth. Bandwidth is becoming increasingly important and broadband will become part of the basic minimum requirements for effective use. Where schools had broadband connections, the advantages of speed and reliability were readily recognised despite the extra costs of installation and running.
- Widespread use of light-weight laptops and wireless networking with the aim of every pupil as well as every teacher having access to ICT throughout the day, both at home and at school.
- Use of email and conferencing to enable pupils to contact others for homework advice and other kinds of support”.

(Harrison et al., 2003: 128)

### 2.3.3 Digital divide solutions

Initiatives to tackle the digital divide have been led by national government. These have concentrated on improving access and skills. This government investment is justified by the cross-departmental team cited earlier (Policy Action Team 15, 2000), describing the benefits of ICT in terms of economic impact, employment, education, health, democracy, entertainment, and creativity:

“Competitiveness depends on the skills and creativity of the whole workforce. The social arguments for an inclusive information society reinforce the economic ones and vice versa.” (Policy Action Team 15, 2000: 1)

“For people living in low-income neighbourhoods, gaining and exploiting ICT skills can lead to opportunities to participate fully in the local and national economy.” (PAT 15, 2000: 15).

ICT can help people in deprived areas in finding jobs, self-development and creativity, community development and networking, and skill development.

“Skill development is not just about developing IT skills. People can use the technology to develop their basic literacy and numeracy skills, for example. The key priority is to get people to a basic level of confidence whereby they can use ICTs for their own purposes.” (PAT 15, 2000: 17)

Government initiatives have included: The People’s Network; the New Opportunities Fund ‘Digitise’ Project; the National Grid for Learning; UK Online and LearnDirect, which both include the establishment of local access centres; and the Wired Up Communities initiative (UK Online 2003: 70-85)

A number of authors have criticised the government’s policy of promoting ICT as a means of reducing inequalities and ensuring all sections of the community benefit from the economic prosperity which ICT will bring.

Firstly, from a sociological perspective, Selwyn (2003) begins by highlighting the lack of understanding of why some people do not use ICT. While almost everyone now has theoretical access, this is meaningless if people feel unable to use it. He raises the idea of degrees of access, so that individuals could be categorised as core users, peripheral users or excluded users; they may also move between use and non-use at different periods or in different contexts. Debate has focussed on users, with non-users consequently pathologised in terms of individual deficits. Developing a systematic and objective understanding of individuals’ non-use is a key challenge for understanding the information age, and yet this remains peripheral to the ‘technology and society’ debate. (Selwyn, 2003: 99-101).

From the literature, Selwyn identifies four main groups of reasons for non use - economic; cognitive - concerning knowledge, skills, attitudes and experiences; ideological refusal; and, based on diffusion theory, the idea that non-users are 'laggards' who have not yet adopted ICT. These explanations all assume a deficiency on the individual's part, implying that non-use is disadvantageous to the individual and must therefore be an abnormality (Selwyn, 2003: 102-105).

Selwyn argues that the individuals' viewpoint is missing from this debate, denying them any degree of agency in their non-use of ICT; this ignores the fact that the relevance and utility of ICT to an individual's own life and situation is of fundamental importance to their decision whether or not to use it. This relevance can be seen in terms of information needs, or just enjoyment; but also in terms of its contribution to the individual's 'social quality' - their socio-economic status, social inclusion and participation. But some are already so comfortable in their social position that ICT cannot offer anything further; while others are lacking in social quality for a great variety of deep rooted social reasons which will remain even if they do use ICT (Selwyn, 2003: 106-109).

Selwyn concludes that non-use of technologies is a "complex, fluid and ambiguous issue" determined by its relevance to everyday life; an individual may have the capacity to change some factors, but remain powerless to affect other underlying social and economic forces. Not using ICT is one way that individuals can assert some control over their lives. It is an idealistic, middle class notion that ICT and the information society empower people to resolve all the problems in their everyday lives: "for some people 'dealing with everyday problems' does not and will not involve personal use of ICT." (Selwyn, 2003: 110-112)

A second criticism of government policy comes from an economic planning perspective. Southern (2002) questions whether ICT can really support regeneration:

"There is doubt about what this type of policy initiative can achieve, particularly to help address complex matters such as social exclusion, persistent structural unemployment and other characteristics of deprivation including crime and health related problems. This is not achieved through rhetorical statements that

suggest, in an inconclusive manner, how ICT skills support better opportunities in the labour market and how access to ICT can enable greater levels of participation in mainstream society.” (Southern, 2002: 701).

Thirdly, in an educational context, Lax (2001) points to uneven distribution of ICT between schools; patchy, often very limited access in schools, and widening educational disadvantages for those without home access; and argues that other priorities should be tackled to reduce gaps in educational provision and attainment between “the educationally-rich and educationally-poor” before worrying about “the information-rich and the information-poor” (Lax, 2001: 113).

Broadening his criticism from educational to social policy, he claims that the idea that increasing public access to ICTs and ICT skills will promote equality of opportunity is deeply flawed:

“Instead there is a greater likelihood that existing inequalities will continue or even be re-inforced, and that the promotion of access to ICT equipment and its use will simply give the illusion of progress while deflecting attention from underlying social divisions” (Lax, 2001: 108).

The focus on ICT reflects a belief in an information society or knowledge economy, with education and ICT as key agents. Information is promoted as an essential component of society, and access to information leads to competitive advantage. For the disadvantaged individual, this means that the issue for government is no longer ‘having a job’ but having access to information about jobs; by providing access, the government creates the impression that equality of opportunity has been delivered; the implication is then that individuals are responsible for their own success and have no-one else to blame for failure. This reflects a pessimistic view that genuine solutions to social problems are unattainable. By promoting the notion that information is paramount, the government creates the illusion that access to information amounts to redistribution of wealth. Lax concludes that “the idea of

everyone being equal in an information society will eventually be seen for the diversion that it is” (Lax, 2001: 122).

Others agree with the government that ICT is essential to promote an equal society, but disagree with their approach. Rudd (2002) argues that initiatives focussing solely on access and skills are inadequate, and arise from “insufficient knowledge about the extent, characteristics and dimensions of the ‘digital divide’ and the way it interrelates with other aspects of social and cultural exclusion” (Rudd, 2002: 1). The term is used in a generalised, one-dimensional way, masking its complexity and diversity, and detracting from informed and coherent debate. Until recently, discussions have focussed on access and ownership - admittedly a huge element in the fight to bridge the divide - but have overlooked its complex and multi-dimensional nature, with several divides co-existing with different impacts on different groups and individuals. Citing current American research, the author emphasises the equally important issue of Internet content, which needs to be tailored more specifically to the communities it is intended to serve, rather than imposed in a ‘one size fits all’ approach (Rudd, 2002: 2). Content generally reflects the views and caters for the interests of the already advantaged sections of society. Furthermore the large majority of information on the Internet is written for those with average or advanced literacy skills. An approach based on involving excluded groups in creating content is an effective solution to this “content chasm”. Such an approach has the effect of empowering individuals through involvement and ownership of initiatives, making excluded groups partners and creators rather than passive recipients of content which may not wholly understand or cater for their specific requirements, however well intentioned (Rudd, 2002: 3). There is now an awakening awareness in government of this issue. UK Online’s Citizen Portal, based on ‘life episodes’ within an inclusion agenda, is a positive step, but there remains much to do:

“Only by finding ways of developing content in partnerships with excluded groups will the chances of realising the benefits of ICT in relation to education, employment, economic competitiveness and citizen and community participation be enhanced for the excluded” (Rudd, 2002: 4)



Independent studies of the digital divide make similar points regarding the need to address the digital divide to achieve a more equal society. Many of these are reviewed by the British Educational Technology Association (Becta, 2002) which has undertaken extensive research into the educational implications of the digital divide. Their review identifies three aspects of the digital divide: access to technology; acquisition of the skills to make effective use of the technology; and the availability on the internet of relevant content for the sections of society disadvantaged by the digital divide (Becta, 2002).

Among authors proposing alternative solutions to tackle the digital divide, the most relevant in our context is Hellowell (2001), who studied a number of initiatives at a very local level. In a ground-breaking report on ICT and social inclusion, Hellowell recognises that improving access to ICT on its own will not succeed in bridging the digital divide, and warns that government targets for universal access by 2005 will fail unless more is done to target excluded groups. She asserts that because the Internet is largely market-driven and aimed at affluent consumers, there is little content of relevance or interest to those who are socially excluded. Despite government initiatives to improve access to hardware and increase skill levels, the evidence suggests that excluded groups remain less likely to use ICT, often because they cannot see any benefit in accessing the technology and acquiring the skills (Hellowell, 2001: 1-2).

While applauding government efforts to increase access to technology, she proposes a radical approach to delivering an inclusive information society. She presents case studies of innovative projects showing how excluded people can be enabled to develop web content for themselves, engaging with technology on their own terms. Thus ICT is used as a tool for social inclusion more generally (Hellowell, 2001: 3-4).

She does not underestimate the importance of investment in technology; on the contrary she sees the development of broadband as an essential ingredient of an inclusion strategy, able to support multimedia applications which will bring the

Internet to life for many who are not currently interested; without this, deprived areas will lag further behind (Hellowell, 2001: 3).

Though concerned with all excluded groups, Hellowell includes case studies specifically involving young people - one project preparing them for leaving a young offenders' institution, another a cybermagazine and virtual youth club. She claims that "ICT has the capacity to present disaffected young people with a vision of an alternative future" (Hellowell, 2001: 13); and recommends content being built around life episodes relevant to these groups; with e-mentors providing support; but with professionals giving young people the freedom to develop content relevant to their situation (Hellowell, 2001: 36-38). She sums up: "it is hard not to conclude that there is enormous scope for content creation to benefit the most marginalised young people in society". (Hellowell, 2001: 38). She concludes that for access and content, the views of excluded groups should prevail, and professionals should learn to stand back and let go.

Though the emphasis of government interventions has been on developing accessibility and skills, its own Policy Action Team also saw the need for addressing issues of content and motivation. They call for better promotion of the benefits of ICTs to those who are alienated from them, and development of content relevant to the local community (Policy Action Team 15, 2000: 2). They also see ICT as a gateway to employment, through content which motivates people but also develops their skills in literacy and numeracy, IT literacy, and technical skills (Policy Action Team 15, 2000: 35).

"People who do not feel ICTs are relevant to their lives, or are not aware of the benefits they can offer, are unlikely to try to learn about them. An important part of attracting people to engage with ICTs is the information that ICTs allow them to access or manipulate. ... If they can be interested because it provides them with easy access to information about their health, hobbies, the local community, local events etc., they will learn about the ICTs as a means of accessing that information. How the technology is used, therefore, needs to be

more relevant to peoples' lives. Different audiences will want to access different information. Content, therefore, needs to be relevant to the target audience...

The PAT's visits and research found a number of examples where people had got involved with ICT, not because of an interest in the technology but because it helped them with another interest unrelated to technology."

(Policy Action Team 15, 2000: 34)

## 2.4 Literature Review: Conclusion

### 2.4.1 Major themes

### 2.4.2 Unexplored areas for further research

### 2.4.3 Direction for current research

#### 2.4.1. Major themes

A number of major themes emerge from this literature review. These all provide a background and context for the original research described in the following chapters, while some suggest other avenues for further research.

Regarding the Connexions Service, the work of the Social Exclusion Unit and the Department for Education and Skills (SEU, 1999; DfES, 2000) makes an eloquent case for the establishment of a specialist support service for the most disadvantaged sections in society. However, the critiques by Colley and Hodgkinson (2001), Ainley, Barnes and Momen (2002), and particularly Watts (2001) indicate that a universal service designed around the needs of a targeted few, with insufficient professional staffing resource to allow for a Personal Adviser for all young people, was seriously flawed from the start. Applying this criticism to the role of ICT in Connexions, it is apparent that despite government claims that ICT should be equally available to all young people, there is a strong temptation to see it as a means of providing information services to those young people not prioritised for individual support. In other words it is so indispensable to the universal service that its potential as part of the targeted service may be ignored. There may therefore be a tendency for the more able young people to receive nothing but ICT, and for the more disadvantaged to be excluded from using ICT - in itself a form of digital divide.

Despite this, the government-sponsored conference report written in the early days of Connexions (Offer & Watts, 2000) and the recent guidelines issued by the Connexions Service National Unit (CSNU, 2003), each put a strong case for a more inclusive website strategy. Clearly, however, the role of information, ICT and the Internet as part of the Connexions Service remains largely unexplored.

Turning to the digital divide, government statistics show that despite rapid advances in access to ICT and the Internet, there is still a significant minority without access to technology, and more significantly, without the skills or incentive to use it (Office of the e-Envoy, 2003; ONS, 2002). The digital divide is a real and persistent phenomenon in the UK, mainly affecting the poorest and lowest qualified sections of society.

While most young people now have the skills and the means of access to use the Internet, a significant minority do not (Hayward et al., 2003). Socially, this minority comes predominantly from the same sections of society to which the majority of Connexions priority clients belong.

Access to ICT and the Internet has been shown to have a positive effect on young people's educational attainment. The digital divide can be seen therefore both as a cause and a consequence of disadvantage among young people.

Young people have been found to value the Internet as a trusted information source, and to respond to recommendations made by teachers for good informational websites. Despite this, teachers avoid requiring pupils to use the Internet as a source of information, for fear of placing those without access at a further disadvantage. As Connexions Personal Advisers are in a similar position to influence young people's behaviour, it is of interest for the current research to investigate how much Personal Advisers refer young people to the Internet, for what purposes, and whether any barriers inhibit such referrals.

Rather than a simple issue of access to ICT, which has been the primary focus of many government interventions, the digital divide has been shown to have three dimensions: access to equipment, acquisition of the skills to use the Internet effectively, and the existence of attractive and relevant content to motivate people to use it. With a majority of young people having access and skills, content becomes the

most important issue, particularly the existence of content which has been written by young people with relevant local information in a style which is attractive to them (Hellowell, 2001)

#### **2.4.2 Unexplored areas for further research**

There are many topics still unexplored in the broad area of the digital divide and young people. At one level, statistical research is needed looking specifically at the precise extent of the digital divide among young people, and how this is changing over time. But more importantly, a greater understanding is needed of how young people are affected by being on the wrong side of the divide. For instance, if young people's educational development is hindered by not having access to the Internet, what about their social development, and their acquisition of the skills to find and evaluate information in order to reach informed decisions on issues affecting their lives? What makes a good website for young people, and what can public service providers learn from commercial organisations in this matter? What strategies are successful in engaging young people in the development of website content and style, and particularly those young people who are most disengaged from participation in 'adult' life?

Several other promising avenues for future research centre around the Connexions Service and young people - their attitudes to Connexions websites and specific aspects of website content and design, their information and their information-seeking behaviours needs in the fields covered by the Connexions Service, and differences between different groups of young people in each of these matters.

#### **2.4.3 Direction for current research**

For the purposes of the current research all of these questions must remain unanswered. The research instead focuses on one specific area arising from the original research aim, exploring the extent to which Personal Advisers, as key information gatekeepers, refer young people to web-based resources. Picking up a

theme suggested by the literature on the digital divide, that teachers recommend websites to pupils but are inhibited in this by considerations of access, the study investigates whether Personal Advisers are making similar recommendations and whether they are inhibited by similar considerations. The methodology for this enquiry is described in the next chapter.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### 3.1 The selection of methodologies

### 3.2 The methodology for this study

### 3.3 The questionnaire in detail

### 3.4 Methodology reconsidered

### 3.1 The selection of methodologies

The methodological division between quantitative and qualitative techniques is the most significant distinction found in research practice (Allan, 1991: 177). Nevertheless, some question the validity of the contrast, arguing that the best research contains elements of both; in reality, each methodology has strengths and weaknesses which make each better suited to some research problems than others.

The selection of appropriate methodologies for a particular piece of research is closely linked to the research objectives. If the primary objective is to establish the incidence of a particular phenomenon, then large scale techniques using highly structured questionnaires are likely to be used; if on the other hand the study is concerned with understanding the experience of (and reactions to) that phenomenon, then less structured face to face interviewing techniques are more useful (Clark & Causer, 1991: 171).

The differences between the two approaches are summarised as follows:

<b>Quantitative</b>	<b>Qualitative</b>
Distant relationship between researcher and subject	Close relationship between researcher and subject
Structured research strategy	Unstructured research strategy
Hard, reliable data	Rich, deep data
Research confirms theory	Theory emerges from research

(adapted from: Bouma & Atkinson, 1995: 208).



The historical debate between the two methodological paradigms has focussed on the relative importance of internal validity (emphasising controlled settings, as favoured by the positivist quantitative camp), and external validity (emphasising natural settings, as preferred by the constructivist or naturalistic qualitative camp) (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998: 4). These authors conclude that the differences have been overstated by purists and that in reality most researchers use a pragmatic combination of techniques drawing on both paradigms (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998: 11).

This mixing of methods might for example involve the use of structured questions to obtain 'hard data' capable of quantitative analysis; and open questions allowing respondents to comment more freely according to what they (rather than the researcher) perceive as important. In such cases it is important to decide at the start the relative importance of the different methods employed, according to how much they contribute to the overall research objectives. One advantage of multiple methods is that they allow cross-checking to ensure consistency of results (Clark & Causer, 1991: 172).

Research methods, regardless of which paradigm they are drawn from, need to be capable of matching up to strict criteria of quality and rigorousness. For quantitative techniques, these criteria focus on the notions of validity (does the variable reflect the quality it claims to reflect, or is the variation due to some other cause?) and reliability (is the test capable of being repeated with the same results?) (Bouma & Atkinson, 1995: 60; 104). In the case of naturalistic enquiry, the criteria sought are credibility - whether the description which emerges from the enquiry rings true for the actors in the situation; transferability - whether findings can be applied to other contexts or respondents; dependability - whether changes in findings are traceable to changing reality rather than inconsistent methods; and confirmability - whether conclusions can be tracked back coherently to the findings from which they purportedly derive (Erlandson et al., 1993: 29-35).

The structured questionnaire belongs more with quantitative than qualitative methodology; this is particularly true in the case of self-administered questionnaires

(as opposed to structured interviews), where questions need to be precisely and unambiguously worded to avoid misunderstanding and inconsistency (Fowler, 1995: 129-132).

Nevertheless quantitative research can still be regarded as open-ended or exploratory, undertaken in the expectation that the significant relationships between variables will emerge at the analysis stage (Skinner, 1991: 217). Whichever method is used, surveys designed to elicit the views and attitudes of respondents are inevitably prone to uncertainty and differing interpretations:

“Individuals’ opinions and responses are not necessarily internally consistent. Ambivalence and ambiguity in research findings do not always need to be resolved one way or the other, but may accurately capture the reality of the situation at the time of the research”  
(Clark & Causer, 1991: 173).

### **3.2 The methodology for this study**

Arising from the major themes from the literature review in the previous chapter, the focus for this study was narrowed to concentrate on the three aspects of the digital divide affecting young people, namely access, skills, and motivation. It was decided to approach this from the perspective of Personal Advisers rather than young people (though as suggested in the concluding chapter, there are several promising avenues for future research which would focus on young people). The main area for this research was identified as the extent to which Personal Advisers refer young people to websites.

Returning to the research questions poses at the end of Chapter One, the aim was to gather data on the following:

- to what extent do Personal Advisers refer young people to web resources?
- what reasons prevent them from referring more than they do?

- what factors would encourage them to make more such referrals?
- what attitudes do advisers hold about young people's use of the Internet?
- what features would they wish to see in a Connexions website for young people?

This research sought to discover what use was made by Personal Advisers of websites, including Connexions sites, as a source of information to which they could refer their clients. As the key professionals delivering Connexions services to individual young people, they can be seen to have an essential part to play in ensuring the success of the use of websites as part of the strategy for providing information for young people. It makes sense, therefore to pose a number of questions regarding this 'gatekeeping' role undertaken by Personal Advisers.

These questions relate to the frequency with which advisers refer young people to web resources for information; the context and reasons for these referrals; reasons preventing larger numbers of referrals and factors which would encourage greater numbers; attitudes towards young people's use of ICT; and the features considered most important in a Connexions website. The individual Personal Adviser's professional background and the nature of the client group they work with is also an important consideration to enable any significant differences to be detected in their attitudes towards and use of the Internet.

The specific method chosen for the original research was a written questionnaire sent to every Personal Adviser working for one Connexions service provider, eliciting information on their use of websites as a referral point for young people to meet their information needs.

This method would allow for both formal structured questions and open-ended exploratory questions. The former would produce data capable of quantitative analysis, to establish the incidence of advisers referring young people to websites, and the most common reasons for doing so. The latter would probe for the reasons underlying the patterns of referral and for individual views on the relevance of web-based resources for young people.

The self-administered questionnaire was initially piloted with a group of five advisers, who each completed a draft version of the questionnaire and then provided feedback on the extent to which the questions were clear to understand and respond to. This also gave the opportunity to confirm whether their responses could be meaningfully analysed. Minor amendments were then made, mainly to eliminate ambiguity or to simplify the response task (where more significant changes were made these are outlined below in relation to the specific question). The final version was distributed via internal post to all 105 personal advisers employed by Sheffield Futures, an independent charity which provides Connexions services in Sheffield under contract to the Connexions South Yorkshire partnership.

### **3.3 The Questionnaire in Detail**

The questionnaire used is shown in Appendix 1. The purpose and rationale for each question is explained below.

Question One asked about the Personal Adviser's caseload and background. It was already known (from personal involvement with the employing organisation) that most Personal Advisers either work in schools with a caseload of mainly 13 to 16 year-olds; or in the community with a caseload of 16-19 year olds who have left full-time education, and are in most instances unemployed. Smaller numbers work in schools with young people with special needs; or in sixth forms and colleges with 16-19 year-olds still in full-time education; or have a narrow specialism such as young offenders or care leavers. It was also known already, for the same reason, that most Personal Advisers came from a professional background in either careers guidance or youth work. The purpose of the question was for multivariate analysis against other questions in order to establish whether significant differences emerged in referral patterns between advisers with different types of caseload or different professional backgrounds.

The question also asked about numbers of young people seen in the last two working weeks, both in one to one situations and in group work, and how many of the young people seen individually were categorised in each of the three priority groups (Priority 1 - facing multiple, serious barriers and in need of ongoing intensive individual support; Priority 2 - with significant short-term problems, at risk of disengaging from education, employment or training, and needing intensive short-term support; and Priority 3, those who are more settled and focussed). This was again to cross-refer against subsequent responses, to get an overall picture of whether the number referred to websites were a large or small proportion of the number of young people seen, and whether any differences emerged according to the priority group of the clients being worked with. (The period reviewed was changed to two weeks rather than one month in the pilot to simplify the recall task, at the suggestion of some of the pilot respondents).

Question Two asked Personal Advisers to recall (or estimate if necessary) how many times they had referred a young person to a website in their last two working weeks. The questionnaire defined the phrase “refer a young person to a website” as including either giving a young person a web address or web site name and recommending they use it to find information, or using a website with a young person to find information. This was stipulated because it was known from conversations with Personal Advisers that they differ in working practices, some tending to advise clients where to look for information and then leave them to it, and others preferring to find the information while with the client. For the purposes of the research these were equally valid as they both indicate that the adviser wishes the young person to make use of a web resource.

This question was asked in three parts. The first and third asked the number of referrals in individual and group work respectively. Advisers were given the option of ticking boxes indicating the responses None, One, Two Three or Four, or to enter a number in a box if greater than four, or to tick Not Applicable if they had done that form of work in the specified period. The second part asked the numbers of young people referred from each of the three priority rankings.

The purpose here was threefold: first to discover the overall numbers referred, which could be calculated as a percentage of all clients seen. This would show whether PAs in practice regard the Internet as an important source of help for the young people they work with: if there were very few this would be significant in itself; if very many it would be a positive endorsement of government strategy. Secondly, to show whether referrals occurred more frequently in group work situations (in which case they would probably be fairly general to be applicable to the whole group) or in individual interviews (which would suggest they were more tailored to individual client need). Finally, whether certain priority groups were referred in greater proportions than others, possibly indicating a form of digital divide between the types of client referred: if they are predominantly Priority 3 (disproportionate to the numbers seen by Advisers) then this would suggest that Priority 1 and 2 clients are perceived as less able to benefit from the Internet.

Minor changes were made from the pilot version to simplify the response task and at the same time to gather more precise numbers.

Question Three asked what types of information advisers had referred young people to look up on the Internet in the last two working weeks. This was to establish whether referrals are predominantly for the sort of information careers services would traditionally have dealt with; or whether they include topics relating to the newer, broader, more inclusive Connexions agenda; as well as to gain a general picture of advisers' views of young people's information needs. It also asked whether advisers had ever referred young people to any Connexions website to see whether these were regarded as important information sources.

The remaining questions sought to measure attitudes rather than referral patterns. Questions Four and Five asked advisers to give reasons for not referring to websites more than they do, and to give factors that would make them refer more often. This was asked of all advisers not just those making fewer referrals. It offered a list of possible factors for respondents to tick as many as they considered applicable, with an opportunity to record their own factors in addition. The listed responses were

originally suggested by the literature review and informal conversations with advisers, and subsequently refined after the pilot questionnaire.

For both questions, the suggested responses divided into two principal groups of causes: some due to perceived levels of access, skills or interest among young people; the others relating to issues of access, knowledge and preferred working style on the advisers' part. If the former group of reasons appear more frequently in responses this would indicate that the digital divide is perceived as a problem affecting the young people advisers work with. It would then be instructive to see whether these reasons were cited equally by all types of adviser, or whether those working mainly with the Priority 1 and 2 client groups, or specialist client groups, were more likely to cite this set of factors.

Again the questions were changed from the pilot version to make the response task easier and to include additional response options.

The final two questions sought advisers' views on young people's access to and use of ICT, and on what features should be included in a Connexions website for young people. Again the questions took the form of a list of factors with the opportunity to suggest additional ones. Question Six gave a range of statements asking respondents whether they agree or disagree; these were devised to shed further light on advisers' perceptions of young people's access, skills and interest in web resources.

Question Seven gave a list of possible features for a Connexions website and asked advisers to state which they thought should be included; these features broadly divided into traditional, careers-related information-giving functions, and more innovative, participative features. The range of possible features included in this question was prompted in part by the ideas contained in the Connexions Service National Unit's guidelines on web design (CSNU, 2003), and in part by personal observation of features actually included in the websites of different Connexions Partnerships.

This question was changed significantly from the pilot version, which had presented the suggested features in the form of a pair of statements asking the respondent to tick the one they most agreed with; it was felt that a simple Yes/No response for each feature was less open to misinterpretation.

Question Eight simply gave a final opportunity for respondents to make any other comment they wished.

### **3.4 Methodology reconsidered**

The methodology employed could be criticised inasmuch as it focussed on Personal Advisers when the broad issue for the study was the digital divide among young people. In defence of this method, it can be argued that Personal Advisers are the main point of contact with the Connexions Service for young people, and so their behaviour and attitudes are crucial in this respect. Furthermore the topic was so new that it was felt necessary to use a methodology which combined quantitative techniques, to give an accurate measure of the extent to which these key ‘gatekeepers’ are using the Internet as an information resource for their clients; as well as qualitative open questions to explore possible reasons and influences behind the patterns which emerged. While further research directly involving young people is recommended in the final chapter, it can be claimed with some justification that without this analysis of the Personal Advisers’ perspective, the research issues and questions to be addressed with young people could not have been reliably formulated.

In several respects this choice of methodology appears to be vindicated by the outcome, as the next chapter will show. Firstly the response rate achieved for the questionnaire at nearly fifty per cent was very positive, and allowed statistically significant quantitative analysis to take place. Secondly, most respondents made additional comments, providing qualitative data to give a richer picture of the interaction between the adviser and the young person, and the position in this relationship of the Internet as a means of meeting the young person’s information needs.



Nevertheless it is inevitable that a survey using only one instrument provides only a partial insight into the research problem. Some of the limitations arising from the methodology chosen are discussed in the concluding chapter, along with suggestions for further research which would help to compensate for these limitations.

## Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

### **4.0 Personal Adviser Questionnaire**

#### **4.1 Respondents**

#### **4.2 Numbers of website referrals**

#### **4.3 Information needs**

#### **4.4 Reasons for non-referral**

#### **4.5 Factors potentially increasing referrals**

#### **4.6 Attitudes to Young People and ICT**

#### **4.7 Priorities for a Connexions website**

#### **4.8 Additional Comments**

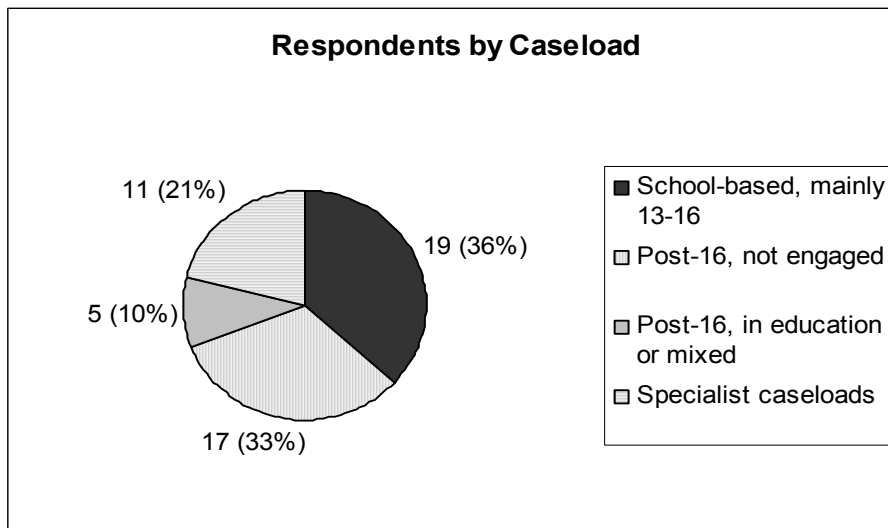
### **4.0 Personal Adviser Questionnaire**

The design and deployment of the questionnaire was discussed in the previous chapter, on methodology. The questionnaire itself is reproduced as Appendix A.

Out of 105 questionnaires issued, a total of 52 were completed, a healthy response rate of 49.5%. Though some respondents had omitted some parts of the questionnaire, all returned questionnaires were suitable for inclusion in the analysis; where less than 52 responses were given this is indicated. The findings are summarised below (percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number, and averages to one decimal place).

4.1 Respondents

Client Caseload:



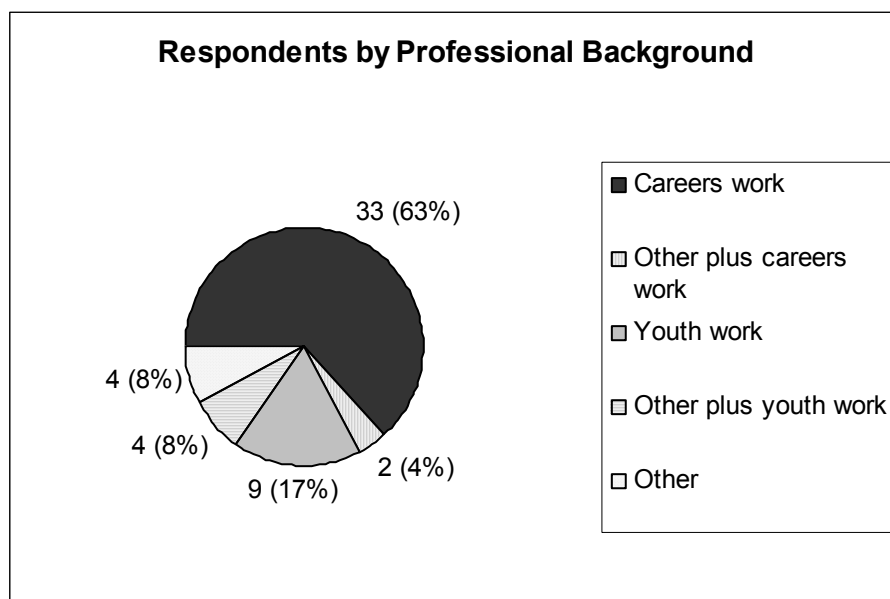
*Table 1: Respondents by Client Caseload Type*

As Table 1 shows, the largest group were school-based advisers with a caseload mainly comprising 13-16 year-olds. These were closely followed by advisers dealing mainly with young people aged 16-19 who were not in employment, education or training, including one with a 14-19 ‘not engaged’ caseload as part of a special project. Three advisers had a caseload of mainly post-16 young people still in full-time education; two more had a mixed caseload of 16-19 year-olds (together making 10%). Eleven had narrower specialist roles, usually involving a smaller caseload of young people in a particular category; these included “looked-after children” (i.e. in local authority care), young people with special needs (three advisers each); two advisers working on a project to promote higher education among young people from disadvantaged backgrounds; one each working with Afro-Caribbean young people, homeless young people; and one on a project to involve young people in shaping the Connexions Service.

Professional Background:

A large majority (33, or 63%) had been careers advisers or careers assistants prior to being re-designated (or retrained) as Personal Advisers with the advent of Connexions. Nine (17%) had been youth workers, and ten (19%) came from other backgrounds; these included three social workers, four teachers/academics, two from other educational roles (a learning mentor and an attendance worker), and one each from the arts and the voluntary sector.

In six cases, respondents answering ‘Other’ were known (from informal conversations) to have retrained as careers advisers or to have also worked as youth workers before becoming Connexions Personal Advisers. This is reflected in Table 2. Adding these to the totals for the two main professional backgrounds gives a total of 35 (67%) from careers backgrounds and thirteen (25%) from youth work.

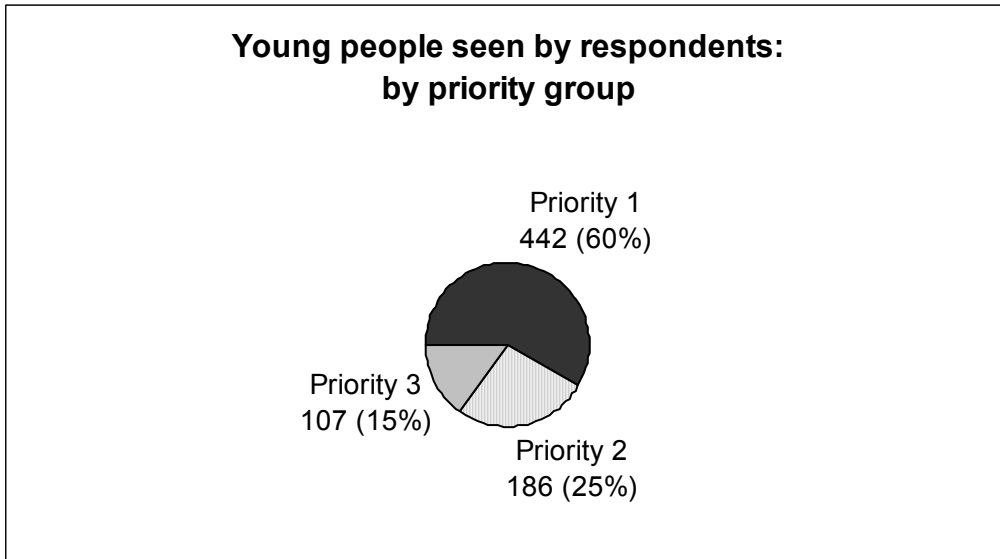


**Table 2: Respondents by professional background**

Work with Young People:

Between them the 52 Personal Advisers reported working with a total of 757 young people in their last two weeks at work, a mean of 14.6. Individual responses ranged from two to fifty, the mode and median each being ten.

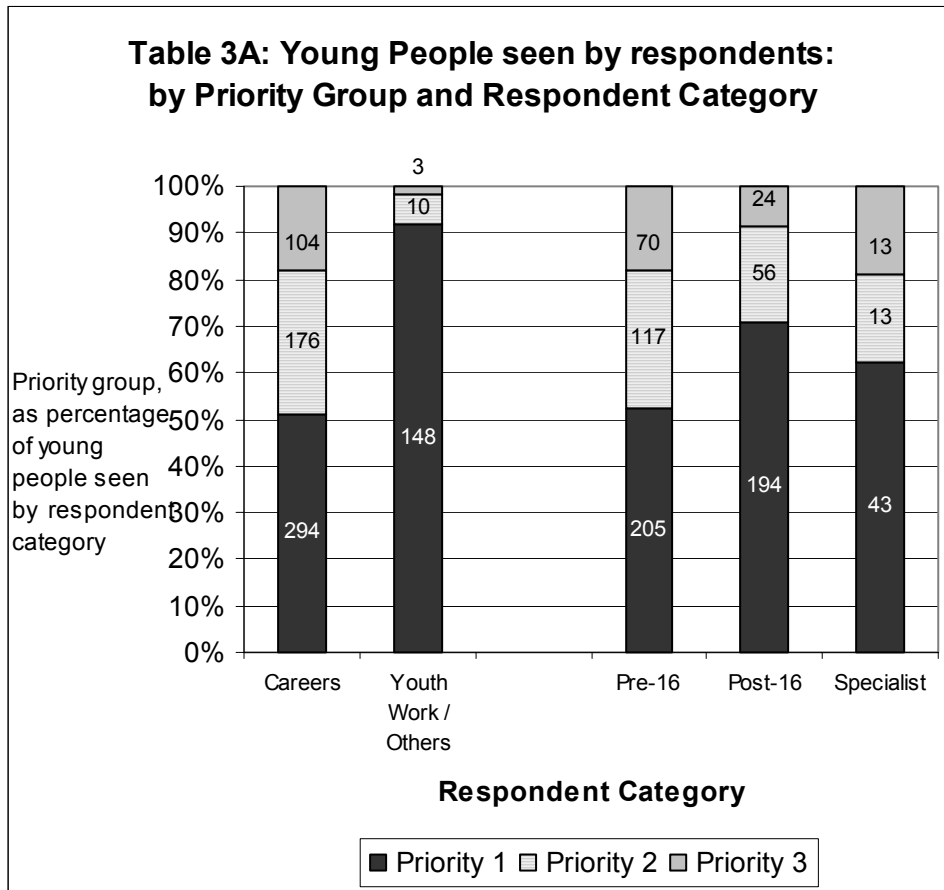
Respondents were also asked how many young people they had seen from each of three priority groups (Priority 1 - those in greatest need; Priority 2 - those at risk; Priority 3 - those with least need). Table 3 shows the total for each group:



**Table 3: Young People seen by Respondents: by Priority Group**

The total for the three groups (735) falls slightly short of the overall reported total of 757 young people worked with; this is due to some advisers giving approximations rather than accurately recalled figures, so that the total they reported did not quite tally with the sum of the figures they gave for the three priority groups. However the difference (3%) is too small to distort findings significantly.

Table 3A shows the numbers of young people in each Priority Group, broken down by the respondents' background and main client group. It was found that 32 advisers (62%) saw no Priority 3 clients in the survey period; whereas six advisers (all from careers backgrounds and working with pre-16 students) saw over eight each, and together accounted for 69 (64%) of all Priority 3 clients reported.

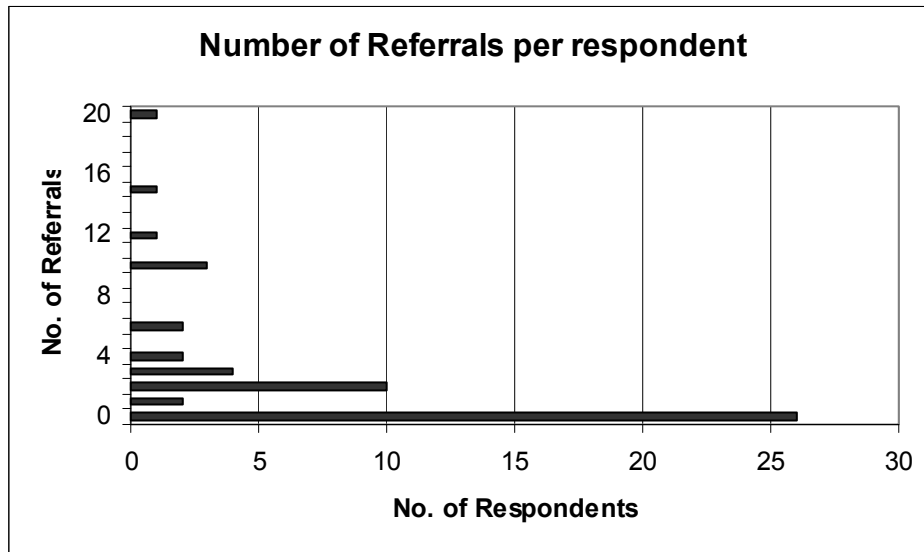


**Table 3A: Young People seen by respondents:  
by Priority Group and Respondent Category**

In addition, a total of 84 group work sessions were reported, averaging 1.6 per adviser. The range here was from zero to eleven, with 24 advisers (46%) reporting no sessions, and nearly two-thirds of the sessions (54) undertaken by just eight advisers. Those from youth work or ‘other’ backgrounds averaged over three group work sessions each, while former careers workers averaged less than one.

#### 4.2 Numbers of website referrals

The total number of reported occasions on which advisers referred young people to websites in one-to-one situations during their last two weeks at work was 131, about once for every six young people seen. Each adviser averaged 2.5 referrals in 14.6 interviews, the most being twenty, with exactly half the respondents (26) reporting no referrals at all (see Table 4).

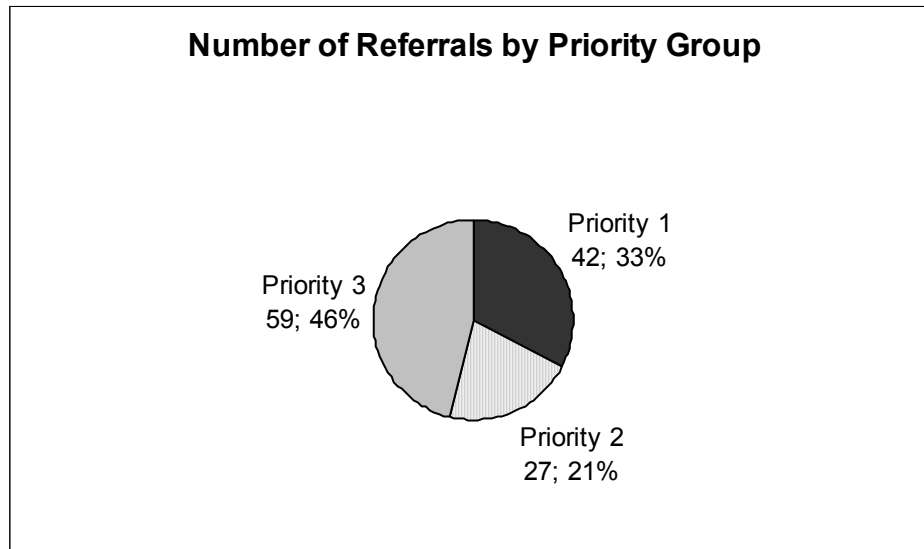


**Table 4: Number of Website Referrals per Respondent**

Referrals in group work sessions totalled 21, about one in four sessions. Here the range went from zero (18 of the 27 who did sessions) to six in six sessions reported by one individual. The purpose of including questions on the numbers of group work sessions and the number of referrals made in this context was to establish whether larger numbers of referrals were made in groups than in one to one work; the former are likely to be referrals of a general nature of relevance to the whole group rather than specific to the needs of an individual. In practice however, group referrals made up only 16% of the total number of referrals; it can therefore be safely concluded that the vast majority of referrals by these advisers were made in one-to-one situations and were therefore tailored to the needs of the individual.

Overall (including group work sessions as well as individual work) 28 respondents (54%) reported making at least one referral, with 24 (46%) reporting none at all.

The priority groups of the young people being referred to websites in one-to-one situations are shown below in Table 5:

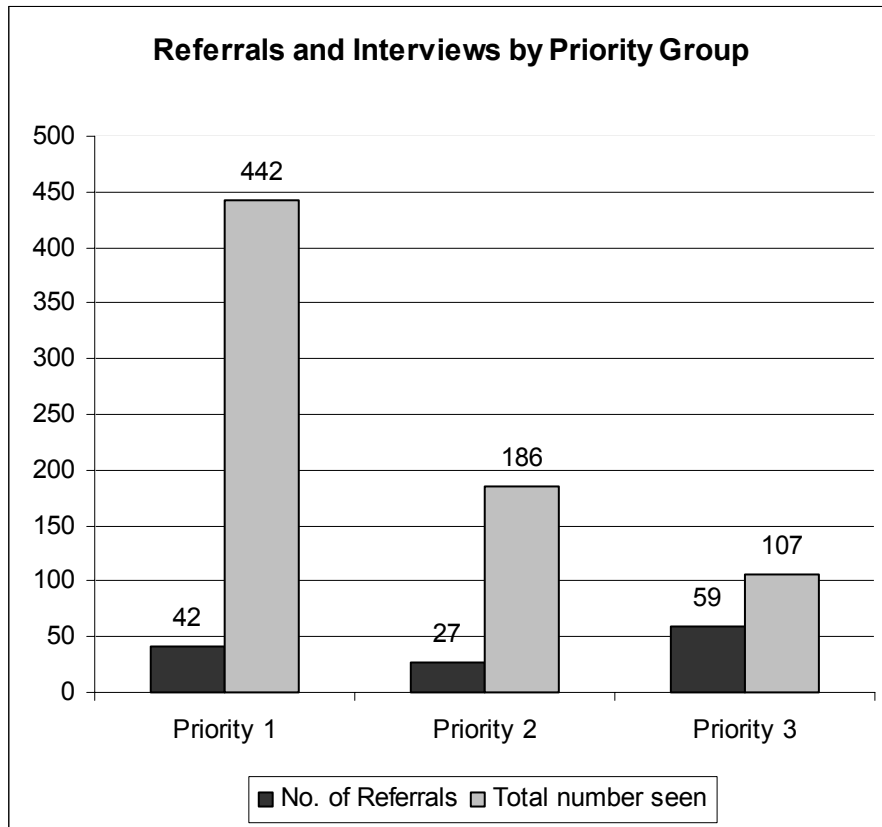


***Table 5: Number of Website Referrals by Priority Group of Young Person***

This total (128 referrals) falls slightly short of the overall number reported, again due to approximations given by some advisers rather than accurately recalled figures; however the difference (2.3%) is again too small to distort findings significantly. The chart shows that nearly half the referrals involve those with the lowest level of need.

This is highlighted more starkly in Table 6, showing the number of referrals for each priority group against the number of young people seen in that group. This shows a marked contrast between the ratio of one referral per ten interviews for Priority 1 clients, and over one referral in two interviews among Priority 3 clients. The significant point is that among the young people seen by the respondents in the two weeks under review, those in the category of lowest need were nearly six times more likely in a one to one interview to be referred to a website for information than those in the highest need group.

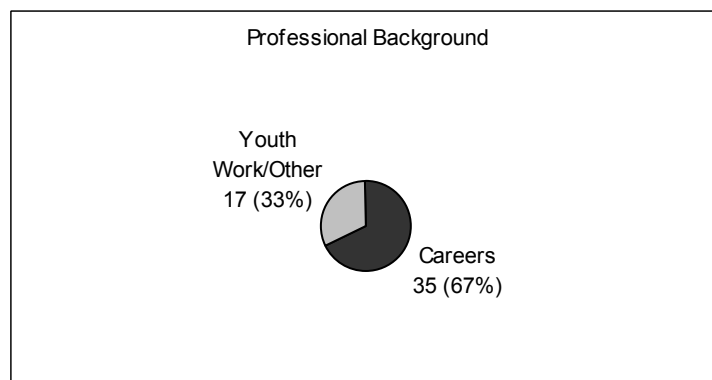




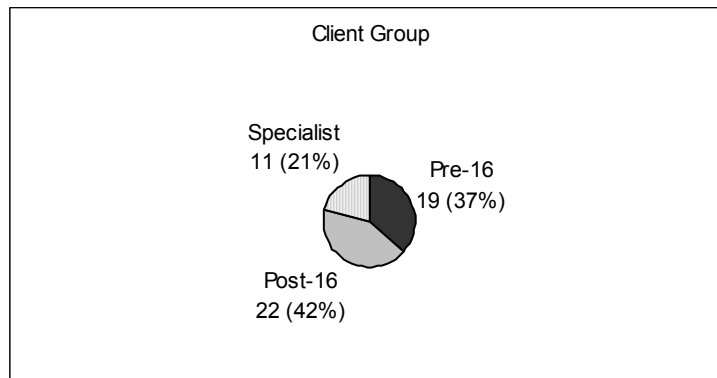
**Table 6: Number of Referrals compared to Total Number of Young People seen from each Priority Group**

Multivariate analysis

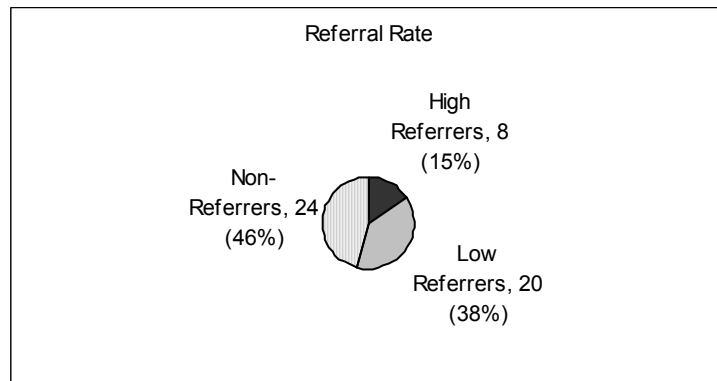
In some parts of the analysis of the questionnaire responses, comparisons are made between different groupings of respondents, based on the information from the first two questions discussed above. These groupings are shown in Table 7(a) to (c):



**Table 7a: Respondent Subgroups by Professional Background**



**Table 7b: Respondent Subgroups by main Client Group**

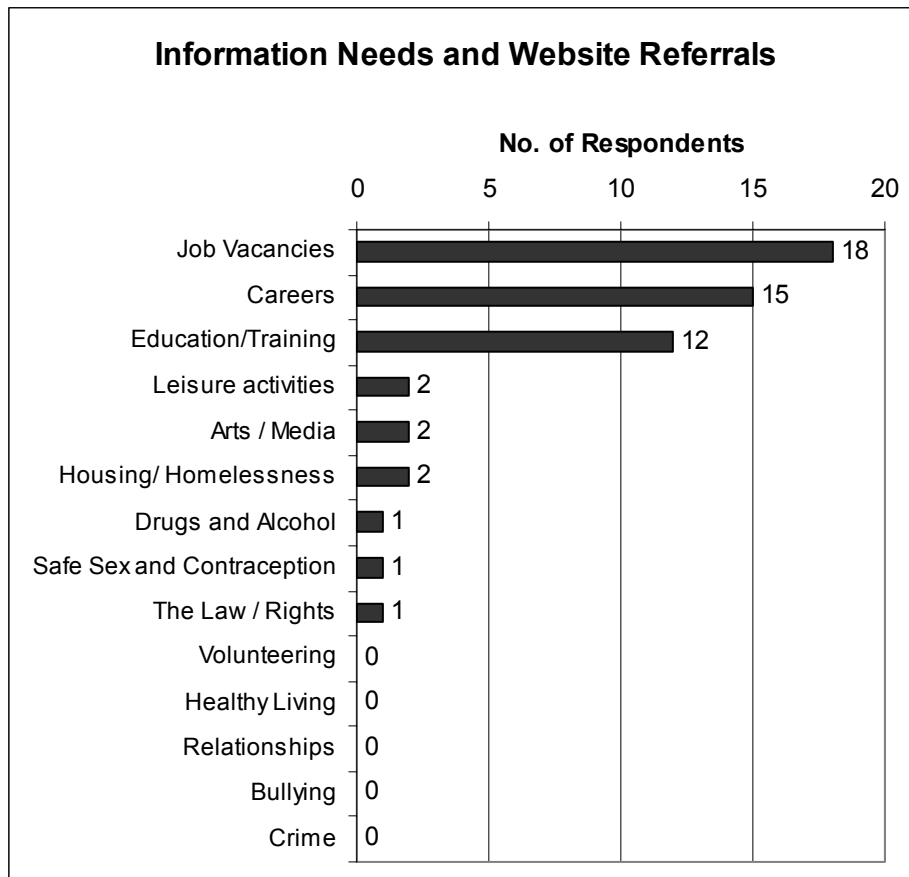


**Table 7c: Respondent Subgroups by Referral Rate**

All ‘high referrers’ were from careers backgrounds; ‘low-referrers’ comprised fifteen from careers backgrounds and five from youth work and other backgrounds; while the 24 ‘non-referrers’ comprised twelve from each background category. In total, those from careers backgrounds averaged 3.5 referrals each, and those from youth work and other backgrounds only 0.4 each. Pre-16 advisers reported the highest numbers of referrals, averaging almost five each.

**4.3 Information needs**

Respondents were asked to indicate what type of information they had referred young people to web resources for in their last two working weeks. They were presented with a list of fourteen possible topics to tick as many as applied, and also invited to add other topics. The results are shown in Table 8:

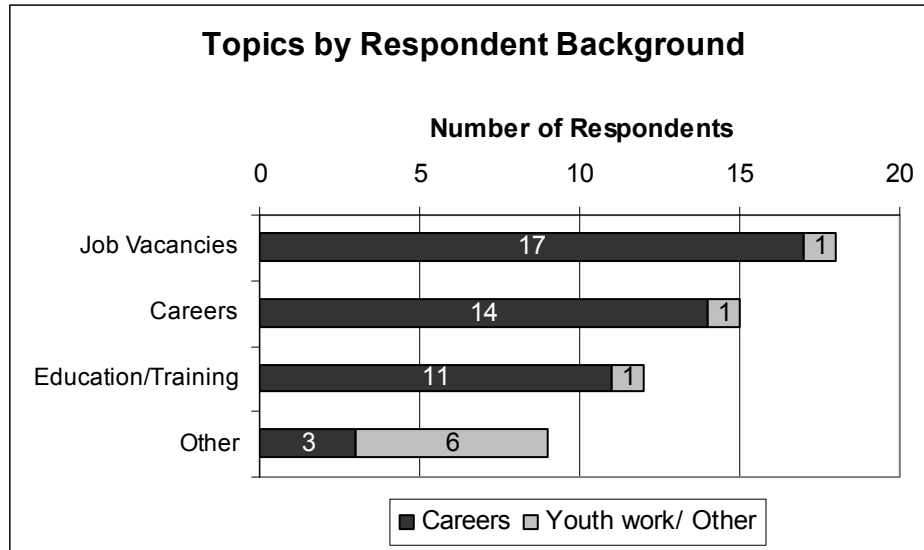


**Table 8: Information Needs for which Respondents made Referrals**

Respondents recorded a total of 57 ticks. By far the most popular topics were information about ‘Job Vacancies’ (18) ‘Careers’ (15), and ‘Education/ Training’ (12), which correspond to the traditional concerns of the careers service. Two advisers each reported referrals for information on ‘Leisure Activities’, ‘Arts/Media’ and ‘Housing/Homelessness’; one each for ‘Drugs and Alcohol’, ‘Safe Sex and Contraception’ and ‘The Law/Rights’. Five topics received no reported referrals at all.

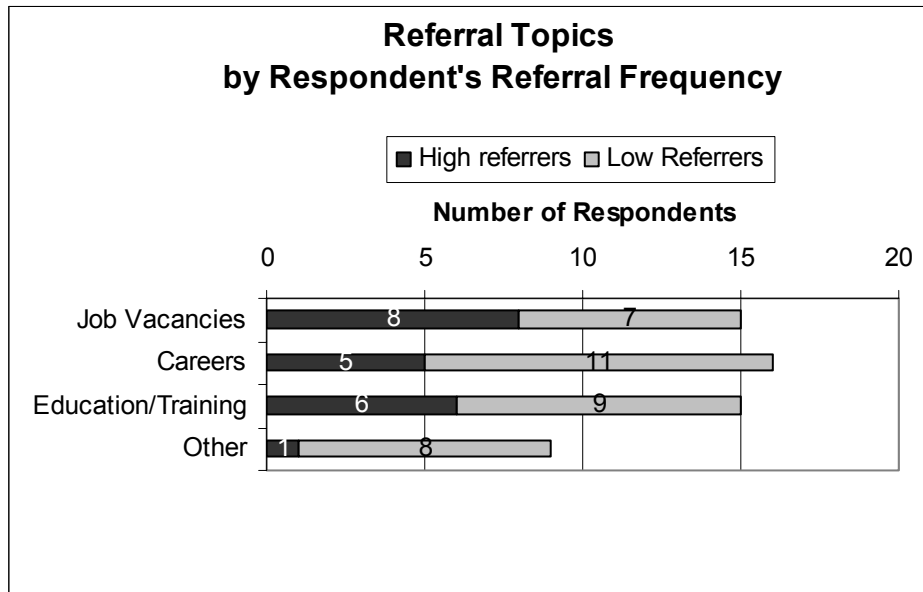
Three ‘other’ reasons were given (GCSE revision; college/university information; and higher education information). These could be all quite reasonably

be classified as Education/Training information. That would mean that the three most popular topics together accounted for 48 of the 57 topics recorded in total, or 84%.



**Table 9: Information Needs for which Respondents made Referrals, by Professional Background**

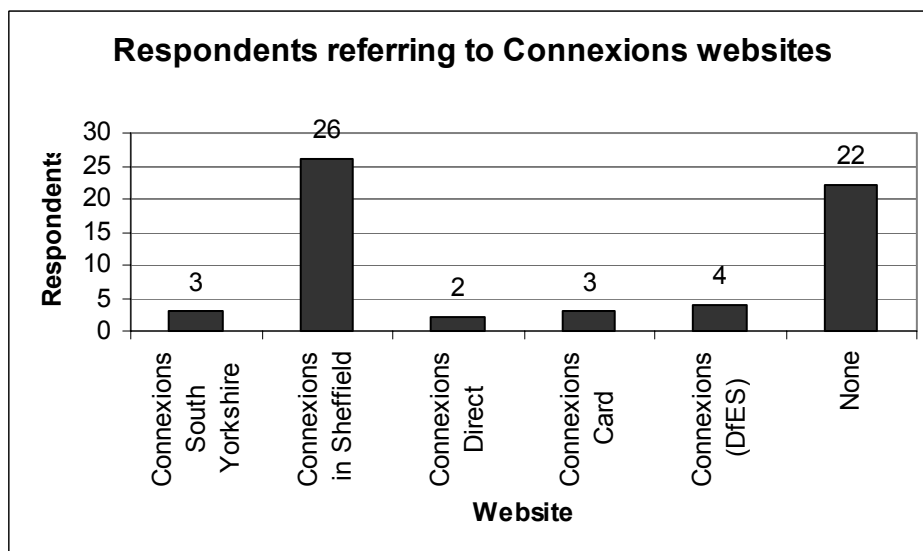
Referrals by those from a careers background were almost exclusively for the three most popular topics, with only three ticks for other topics from a total of 47. Those from youth work and other backgrounds ticked a wider range of topics, with only four out of ten ticks given to the most popular three. Post-16 advisers were more than twice as likely as pre-16 advisers to make referrals for topics outside the traditional careers areas; and the eight high referrers recorded only one tick between them outside the traditional careers areas. By contrast, those recording fewer than six referrals assigned eight to other topics out of 35 in total (Table 9B)



**Table 9B: Referral Topics by Respondent's Referral Frequency**

Therefore those from a careers background, those working at the younger end of the client age range, and those making high numbers of referrals are very likely to refer only for traditional careers-type information.

Respondents were also asked whether they had ever at any time referred a young person to a Connexions website, and if so, which one(s). Five sites were listed as options, with an 'Other, please specify' option as well.



**Table 9C: Respondents Referring to Connexions Websites**

Positive responses were given by thirty advisers (58%), including twelve of the 24 respondents reporting no referrals in the last two working weeks, against 22 negative responses. Of the five sites suggested, the one developed by the advisers' own organisation (Connexions in Sheffield - [www.connexionsinsheffield.org.uk](http://www.connexionsinsheffield.org.uk)) was by far the most commonly selected (26 advisers, 50% of the total and 87% of those who had referred to Connexions sites). The four other suggested sites (the Connexions South Yorkshire Partnership site [www.connexionssy.org.uk](http://www.connexionssy.org.uk); and three national Connexions websites [www.connexions-direct.com](http://www.connexions-direct.com), [www.connexionscard.com](http://www.connexionscard.com), and [www.connexions.gov.uk](http://www.connexions.gov.uk)) were each selected between two and four times; only six respondents (12%) had ever recommended any of the three national sites to a young person (Table 9C).

#### **4.4 Reasons for non-referral**

All advisers, regardless of how many referrals they reported, were asked to give reasons for not referring to websites more than they do. A list of nine possible reasons was provided for respondents to tick as many as they considered applicable, with an opportunity to record their own reasons or make additional comments.

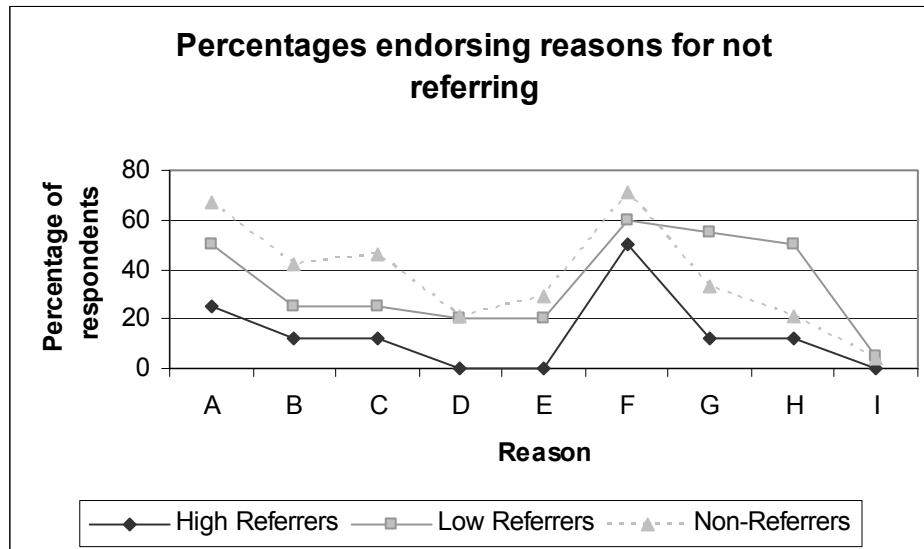
The total number of respondents selecting each reason is given below (Table 10). The reasons labelled A to E (in the left-hand column) concern advisers' perceptions of the young people they work with in relation to Internet access or the skills and motivation to use it. The other four factors (F to I) apply not to the clients but to the adviser (their knowledge and attitude towards web resources, and their preferred method of giving information).

	Reason	Respondents
F	Because I don't yet know of enough sites with the information they need	33 (63%)
A	Because the young people I work with have no access to the Internet	29 (56%)
G	Because I prefer to give young people information verbally	21 (40%)
J	Other reasons	19 (37%)
C	Because the young people I work with do not have the reading skills needed	17 (33%)
H	Because I prefer to give young people information in writing or print	17 (33%)
B	Because the young people I work with do not have Internet skills	16 (31%)
E	Because websites with the relevant information would not appeal to the young people I work with	11 (21%)
D	Because the young people I work with wouldn't want to use the Internet	9 (17%)
I	Because the Internet is not a good source of information	2 ( 4%)

**Table 10: Reasons for Non-Referral**

Most advisers gave a mixture of reasons from each of these two groupings. Only eighteen (35%) gave none of the reasons relating to perceptions of the young people they work with (reasons A to E). This suggests that (consciously or not) most advisers in this sample (34, or 65%) do perceive there to be a digital divide among young people and are influenced by this consideration in their dealings with them. The most commonly selected reason among these five is the simple question of access (A), though 22 (42%) gave a reason concerned with skills (B or C), and fifteen (29%) a reason concerned with motivation (D or E).

Table 10A shows the percentages agreeing with each reason, according to the three categories of 'high referrers' (eight respondents who made six or more referrals in the two week period); 'low referrers' (twenty who made up to five referrals) and 'non-referrers' (24 who made no referrals):



- A Because the young people I work with have no access to the Internet
- B Because the young people I work with do not have Internet skills
- C Because the young people I work with do not have the reading skills needed
- D Because the young people I work with wouldn't want to use the Internet
- E Because websites with the relevant information would not appeal to the young people I work with
- F Because I don't yet know of enough sites with the information they need
- G Because I prefer to give young people information verbally
- H Because I prefer to give young people information in writing or print
- I Because the Internet is not a good source of information

**Table 10A: Percentages endorsing reasons for not referring: by Respondents' Referral Frequency**

'High referrers' endorsed every reason the least, while 'non-referrers' endorsed most reasons. For all three groups, limited knowledge of web resources on the advisers' own part (F) was the single most frequently selected reason (33 respondents, 63%); 22 of these, or two-thirds, also gave reasons relating to young people, while one third did not. Three quarters of the 'non-referrers' group cited this reason. Only two advisers, one 'low referrer' and one 'non-referrer', gave the reason that they did not regard the Internet as a good source of information (I) (also citing lack of access and appeal for young people and their own lack of knowledge); however, both had referred to their local Connexions site in the past.



Half the respondents (26) added other reasons of their own or made additional comments on this section; in all but five cases these were in addition to reasons selected from the list. These additional reasons or comments tended to fall into the same broad categories of lack of access, skills or inclination on the young person's part, or the adviser's own lack of access and knowledge, or their preference for providing information and support face-to-face:

Lack of access was cited as a factor in relation to the location where the adviser met the young person, rather than as a deterrent to young people using the Internet after the interview.

“Because I don't always have access to the internet in my interviews.”  
(Respondent 10)

“The IT system at school is crap. It's often difficult to get them to come to the office and use the computer.” (Respondent 9)

“The vast majority of the one-to-one work I do with young people is in their own homes or in city centre cafes. The only way I would use the internet more was if I did more centre-based work and this is not possible given the nature of the [young people] I work with and the issues they face which makes it difficult for them to do this” (Respondent 44)

Lack of skills on the part of young people was a deterrent for some advisers:

“Referring to a website is unlikely to result in them accessing the site independently (lack of access/skills etc.)” (Respondent 21)

“Although many of the young people I work with know computer games they don't know the first thing about the internet, so even when they say they 'know about using computers' they don't really.” (Respondent 22)

“More IT training should be available to [young people] that are not engaged in school” (Respondent 50)

However one adviser explicitly rejected this as a factor:

“If the computers are available young people will surf even for stuff to find info. Nearly all the young people I work with are very competent in computer skills.” (Respondent 25)

Lack of motivation on the part of young people was implied by a number of comments:

“Most of my caseload wouldn’t use the internet owing to lack of IT skills, lack of access to computers, lack of IT culture in their lives.” (Respondent 39)

“Most of the young people I work with never make any mention of using the internet and/or won’t respond to me mentioning it so assume it’s not effective or helpful me making suggestions regarding it.” (Respondent 40)

“I cannot be sure they will actually access the information” (Respondent 52)

“[young people] have low concentration and finding info on the website takes too long for them they want it right away ...” (Respondent 48)

In some cases it was felt that young people were interested in the Internet but for entirely different reasons:

“[young people] enjoy using internet for surfing etc.; but not so keen to use it to access information re jobs / training as can be deemed to be a bit dull!” (Respondent 7)

“Not all but some young people may easily get drawn off task preferring to download music off the internet rather than access the Connexions site.” (Respondent 8)

Lack of knowledge on the part of advisers is also frequently suggested:

“I don’t have the skills in IT to [do] this.” (Respondent 48)

“I am not particularly familiar with the net and do not have much access myself so this also deters me from sending people to sites.” (Respondent 22)

“Because I am still making a transition from not having had a website to refer them on to.” (Respondent 18)

Training and time to gain greater familiarity and confidence were identified as a need:

“There needs to be training on how we can give P1 clients information on relevant websites.” (Respondent 30)

“My background and age I am sure are a factor in my response. I currently rely on [young people] using it as a result of posters & handouts - rather than direct reference to. I need to change and highlight them more? - time/training etc.” (Respondent 45)

“I don’t feel confident about knowing where to suggest for info on Internet. Need to spend some time on the sites mentioned in this document.” (Respondent 20)

Lack of appropriateness of the Internet to the type of support needed by young people was also frequently commented on. The nature of the interaction between adviser and young person, where immediate information and additional face-to-face support are often necessary, means that ICT is not considered relevant to the situation:

“Have dealt with very specific enquiries that require talking to people not general info.” (Respondent 20)

“My work with young people does not require using much of computers or internet.” (Respondent 19)

“Machines can be frustrating, impersonal. I prefer person contact.” (Respondent 37)

“Some young people who are isolated prefer the individual one-to-one support.” (Respondent 37)

“I have not really thought about looking at websites, my work tends to be of crisis intervention so info finding on websites is not a priority.” (Respondent 28)

“... time (lack of) is a factor why I don't access internet on client's behalf during an interview on many occasions.” (Respondent 21)

“Many of the P1's I see want information there and then. They find it hard to take action on anything you suggest e.g. filling in app. forms.” (Respondent 34)

“If they were using sites to access vacancies they would need support to know if it was worth applying to, how to apply, help with filling in forms etc.” (Respondent 3)

Limitations of the Internet as an information source were also seen as a factor:

“Not that it can't be a good source of info but I worry about accuracy, currency, completeness; it often requires help to read it/interpret it.” (Respondent 6)

“Because websites often don't give specific enough information that you can be sure is up to date. Sometimes its quicker to phone organisation for this.” (Respondent 49)

“Only access under strict supervision.” (Respondent 41)

“Shelterline holds national information which is certainly useful but [young people] needs locally based information e.g. services” (Respondent 28)

#### **4.5 Factors potentially increasing referrals**

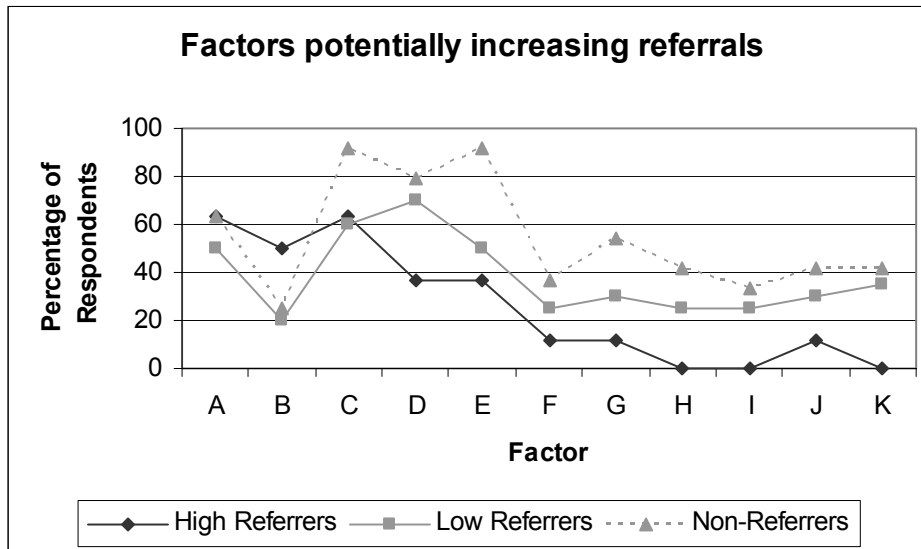
As a corollary to the preceding question, advisers were asked what factors would make them make more referrals to web resources. This time eleven possible factors were provided, as well as the option to add other reasons or comments. There was a further option to tick the statement ‘Nothing would make me more likely to refer young people to websites’, but no respondents selected this.

The total number of respondents selecting each factor is given below.

	<b>Factor</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
C	If I knew of more sites with relevant information	39 (75%)
D	If I knew of more sites which would appeal to young people	36 (69%)
E	If the young people I work with had better access to the Internet	35 (67%)
A	If I had better access to the Internet when I see young people	30 (58%)
G	If the young people I work with had better reading skills	20 (38%)
J	If websites were easier to use for young people	17 (33%)
K	If websites had all the information young people need in one place	17 (33%)
F	If the young people I work with had better Internet skills	15 (29%)
H	If the young people I work with had more interest in using websites	15 (29%)
B	If I had better Internet skills	14 (27%)
I	If websites were more attractive to young people	13 (25%)
L	Other factors	2 ( 4%)

***Table 11: Factors Potentially Increasing Referrals***

These results are very consistent with the previous section, with respondents' own knowledge of relevant or appealing sites (C and D) scoring highest, especially among the 'non-referrers' group (Table 11A), where it was almost universally endorsed (22/24). The issue of access, for both young people (E) and advisers (A), also ranks highly, again with the highest support from the 'non-referrers'. Factors relating to skills (G, F, B), interest (H) or website design and content (J, K, I) all received much weaker support.



- A If I had better access to the Internet when I see young people
- B If I had better Internet skills
- C If I knew of more sites with relevant information
- D If I knew of more sites which would appeal to young people
- E If the young people I work with had better access to the Internet
- F If the young people I work with had better Internet skills
- G If the young people I work with had better reading skills
- H If the young people I work with had more interest in using websites
- I If websites were more attractive to young people
- J If websites were easier to use for young people
- K If websites had all the information young people need in one place

**Table 11A: Factors potentially increasing referrals:  
by Respondents’ Referral Frequency**

The only two ‘other’ factors put forward related to access (speed), and to preference for giving written materials over referring to web resources:

“If it wasn’t so slow” (Respondent 22)

“I suppose giving written materials you feel you’ve “done your job” rather than recommending websites they may not look at” (Respondent 16)

Additional comments were offered by eight respondents, again elaborating on some recurring themes.

Access:

“If I had a laptop or Core [computer system] at school/college then I would use the internet at the end of guidance interviews etc. if appropriate and necessary.”

(Respondent 4)

“Could look at sites there and then with the young person.” (Respondent 16)

“Internet access is available in the resources library at the Connexions centre.”

(Respondent 27)

“This situation [i.e. access for young people in care] is improving - residential units now (mostly) have internet access, but it needs to be staff supervised and this is not always available.” (Respondent 39)

“I don’t think I have ever done one-to-one with a [young person] who has access to the internet in their own home or who is familiar with using the internet.” (Respondent 44)

Knowledge:

“Need to familiarise myself with sites.” (Respondent 16)

“My use of referrals to the Connexions in Sheffield website will increase because I now have lots of publicity about it (i.e. posters and the credit cards).”

(Respondent 18)

“I think [young people] being able to research their own info needs is great and very empowering but I just need to be more aware of what’s available so I can pass this on to [young people]” (Respondent 20)

Skills:

“Sounds like we need a short course for [young people] on using the internet.”

(Respondent 21)

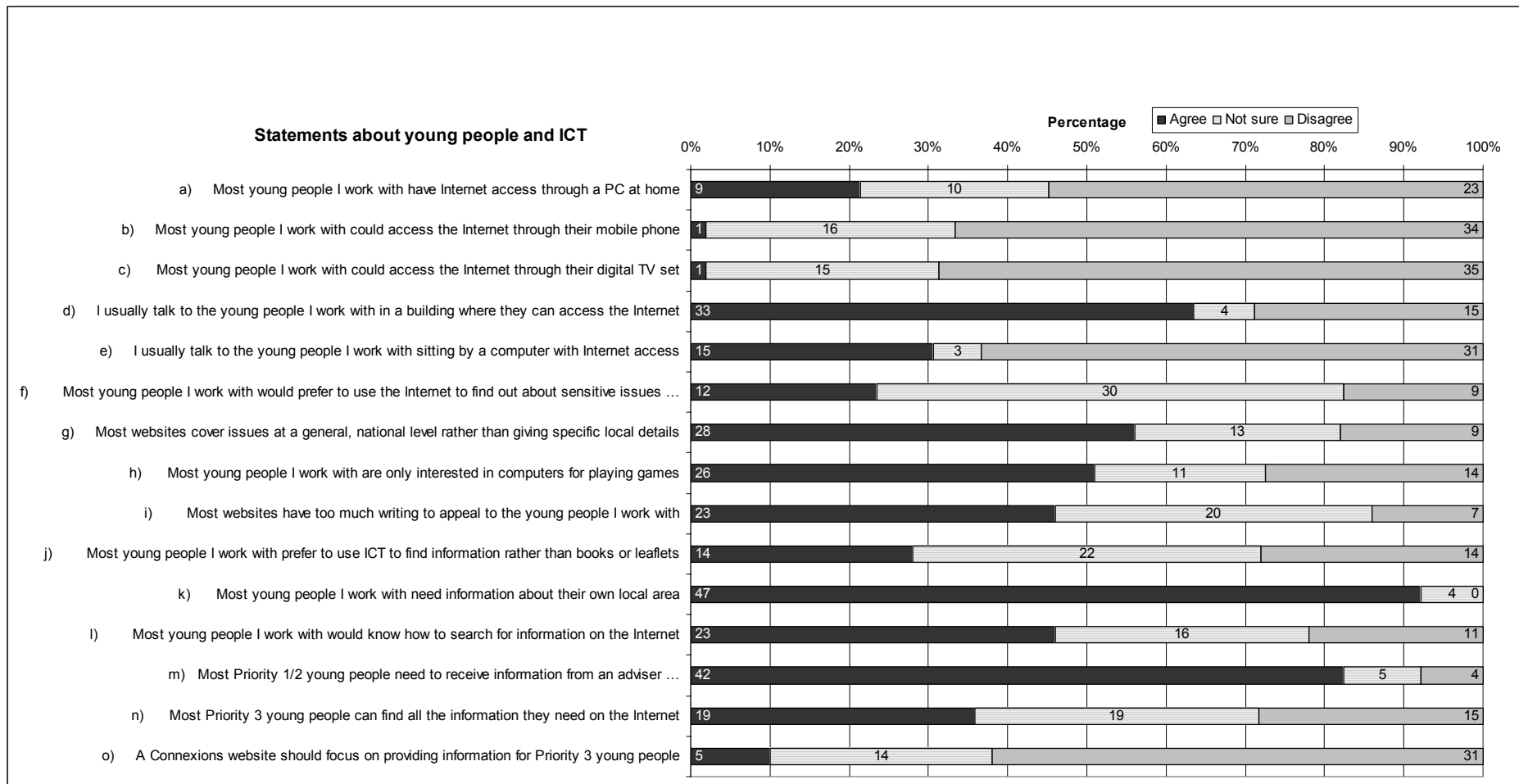
“Young people can use the web effectively but when there is too much reading they tend to not bother reading/it’s not that they can’t read but can’t be bothered” (Respondent 25)

#### **4.6 Attitudes to Young People and ICT**

Respondents were given fifteen statements about young people and ICT, and asked whether or not they agreed, using a five-point scale (Completely Agree, Generally Agree, Not Sure, Generally Disagree, Completely Disagree). For the purpose of presenting the results, the figures for “Completely Agree” and “Generally Agree” have been combined into one total for “Agree”, and those for disagreement likewise; in the event it was found that the different degrees of agreement or disagreement were not particularly significant and a three point scale would have sufficed.

The findings are at best impressions or generalisations but provide a useful insight into the attitudes held by advisers. The results for each statement are shown in Table 12, and then discussed individually or in small groups. The Table shows actual numbers for each statement, with the bar showing responses as a percentage of the total number giving a response against each statement (which did not always equal all 52 respondents).





**Table 12: Statements about young people and ICT: respondents agreeing and disagreeing**

Statements a), b) c)

**a) Most young people I work with have Internet access through a PC at home**

Agree 11 (21%)                      Not Sure 11 (21%)                      Disagree 28 (54%) (n=50)

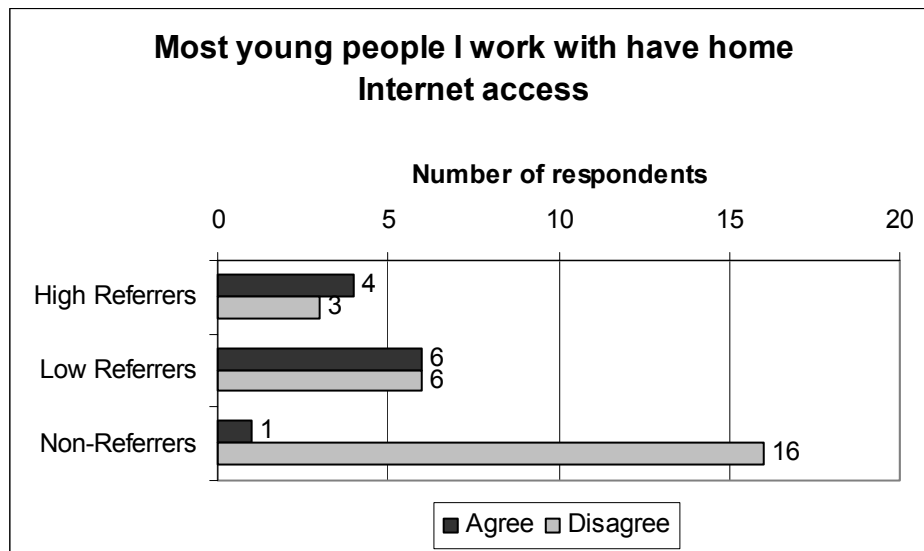
**b) Most young people I work with could access the Internet through their mobile phone**

Agree 1 (2%)                      Not Sure 16 (31%)                      Disagree 34 (65%) (n=51)

**c) Most young people I work with could access the Internet through their digital TV set**

Agree 1 (2%)                      Not Sure 15 (29%)                      Disagree 35 (67%) (n=51)

This set of three questions sought to establish whether advisers thought that the young people they worked with had the benefit of home Internet access. The fact that only just over a fifth of respondents thought that this was the case reinforces the sense that web-based resources are not a major information source for these clients. The newer means of access are not a significant factor, only one respondent agreeing with the second and third statements. The relatively high ‘Not Sure’ response to these two statements suggests that many advisers had not particularly considered this as a means of access for their clients; but two-thirds disagreed, and over half thought that most of their young people had no home access at all.



**Table 12A: Respondents agreeing that most young people they work with have home Internet access: by Respondents’ Referral Frequency**

Table 12A shows a significant contrast between the ‘high referrers’ and ‘non-referrers’ groups, with a majority of the former agreeing that most young people they worked with had home access, but only one of the ‘non-referrers’ believing this.

Statements d), e)

***d) I usually talk to the young people I work with in a building where they can access the Internet***

Agree 33 (64%)                      Not Sure 4 (8%)                      Disagree 15 (29%) (n=52)

***e) I usually talk to the young people I work with sitting by a computer with Internet access***

Agree 15 (29%)                      Not Sure 3 (6%)                      Disagree 31 (60%) (n=49)

This pair of statements looked not so much for opinions but for factual information which would examine the question of access from another angle. Referrals to websites had been defined to include use of web resources by an adviser on behalf of a young person in their presence. Therefore it was relevant to find out whether the locations where advisers talked with young people provided Internet access or not. Locations were known to include purpose-built interview rooms with Internet-enabled PCs in a main Connexions Centre; smaller local Connexions Centres and schools where Internet enabled PCs were known to exist but not necessarily in the same room; and ‘neutral’ locations such as cafés which would in most cases have no access, and certainly not free access.

The findings here are two-edged: about two thirds of respondents do usually talk to young people in a building with Internet access; but only one third actually talk whilst seated at an Internet-enabled PC. In most cases therefore a special effort would have to be made in order for the adviser and the young person to use the Internet together.

Table 12B shows that Advisers who agreed that they usually talk to young people in a building with Internet access (including all eight ‘high-referrers’) accounted for 125 (95%) of all reported referrals; while the remainder made only six. While the number of clients seen by the former group averaged twice as many as the latter, this does not fully explain the difference in referral numbers, so there does

appear to be a correlation between the availability of the Internet and the number of referrals made.

	Number of Respondents	Average Number of Clients seen	Number of Referrals	Average Number of Referrals
Agree	33	17.8	125	3.8
Disagree	19	8.9	6	0.3

**Table 12B: Correlation between Internet access in building and making referrals**

However, no such correlation could be found between an adviser actually interviewing young people at a computer and the number of referrals made:

	Number of Respondents	Average Number of Clients seen	Number of Referrals	Average Number of Referrals
Agree	15	17.2	33	2.1
Disagree	31	14.0	92	3.0

**Table 12C: Correlation between seeing client at a computer and making referrals**

The explanation for this might be that most advisers who interview at a computer are based at the main Connexions Centre, seeing mainly unemployed 16-19 year-olds, where time pressure discourages Internet use during the interview; whereas most referrals are made by advisers seeing under-16 year-olds in schools, where there is access in the institution but not actually in the interview room. There is no evidence to support the idea that advisers who do not refer to the Internet actually avoid interviewing at computers.

Statement f)

***f) Most young people I work with would prefer to use the Internet to find out about sensitive issues (e.g. sex, health) rather than talk to an adult***

Agree 12 (24%)                      Not Sure 30 (58%)                      Disagree 9 (17%) (n= 51)

The high ‘Not sure’ response to this question (the only case where it exceeded 50% of responses) might be due to advisers in most cases not discussing such sensitive topics with young people and therefore not having formed an opinion on the statement. The others were divided fairly evenly between those who agreed and those

who disagreed. Those working with older clients were more likely to agree (8 against 2) than pre-16 advisers (2 against 5).

Statements g) and k)

***g) Most websites cover issues at a general, national level rather than giving specific local details***

Agree 28 (53%)                      Not Sure 13 (25%)                      Disagree 9 (17%) (n=50)

***k) Most young people I work with need information about their own local area***

Agree 47 (91%)                      Not Sure 4 (8%)                      Disagree 0 (0%) (n=51)

In order to avoid suggesting a link, these two statements were intentionally separated. Nevertheless a majority agreed with both statements. Statement (k), the only statement receiving absolutely no disagreement, and only a few 'Not Sure' responses, scored the highest level of agreement of all. Taken together, the two statements highlights the importance of developing websites at the partnership level or below, with an emphasis on local information rather than nationally available information. This corroborates the earlier finding that the vast majority of referrals to Connexions websites were to that of the respondents' own organisation.

Statement h)

***h) Most young people I work with are only interested in computers for playing games***

Agree 26 (50%)                      Not Sure 11 (21%)                      Disagree 14 (27%) (n=51)

The strong level of agreement with this statement suggests that a majority of advisers in this sample would regard lack of motivation as a reason for young people not using the Internet as an information source. However, only two 'high-referrers' (25%) agreed with the statement compared to thirteen 'non-referrers' (54%).

Statement i)

***i) Most websites have too much writing to appeal to the young people I work with***

Agree 23 (44%)                      Not Sure 20 (38%)                      Disagree 7 (13%) (n=50)

A similar level of agreement with this statement again suggests that most respondents have misgivings about the appeal of the Internet to young people, though in this case there may be a number of different underlying problems: either a lack of interest or of reading ability on the part of the young person, or a failure on the part of web designers to provide the right level of written information for at least some of their audience. Again the level of agreement was higher among those making few or no referrals:

	Agree	Disagree
High Referrers	1	2
Low Referrers	11	4
Non Referrers	11	1

**Table 12D: Statement (i), by Respondents' Referral Frequency**

Statement j)

***j) Most young people I work with prefer to use ICT to find information rather than books or leaflets***

Agree 14 (27%)                      Not Sure 22 (42%)                      Disagree 14 (27%) (n=50)

This statement produced an interesting division of opinion. It received the second highest number of 'Not sure' responses, while the numbers agreeing and disagreeing were equal. Closer analysis, however, reveals strong agreement among 'high-referrers' but little among 'non-referrers', with 'low-referrers' divided equally:

	Agree	Disagree
High Referrers	7	0
Low Referrers	7	7
Non Referrers	2	7

**Table 12E: Statement (j), by Respondents' Referral Frequency**

Most pre-16 advisers agreed, while most post-16 and specialist advisers disagreed:

	Agree	Disagree
Pre-16	7	2
Post-16	6	8
Specialist	1	4

**Table 12F: Statement (j), by Adviser Caseload groups**

Statement l)

***l) Most young people I work with would know how to search for information on the Internet***

Agree 23 (44%)                      Not Sure 16 (31%)                      Disagree 11 (21%) (n=50)

The responses to this statement show a majority in agreement, suggesting that most advisers do not regard lack of searching skills as a problem for young people when using the Internet. However, those in the ‘non-referrers’ group were almost equally divided and accounted for most of the disagreement with this statement; high referrers unanimously supported the statement.

	Agree	Disagree
High Referrers	6	0
Low Referrers	8	4
Non Referrers	9	7

***Table 12G: Statement (l), by Respondents’ Referral Frequency***

Statements m), n), o)

***m) Most Priority 1/2 young people need to receive information from an adviser rather than find it for themselves on the Internet***

Agree 42 (81%)                      Not Sure 5 (10%)                      Disagree 4 (8%) (n=51)

***n) Most Priority 3 young people can find all the information they need on the Internet***

Agree 16 (31%)                      Not Sure 19 (37%)                      Disagree 15 (29%) (n=50)

***o) A Connexions website should focus on providing information for Priority 3 young people***

Agree 5 (10%)                      Not Sure 14 (27%)                      Disagree 31 (60%) (n=50)

This final group of questions shifted the focus away from the particular young people that the respondent works with, onto the priority groups into which Connexions categorises young people. This showed very strong agreement with the statement that higher priority young people are better served by an adviser providing information than by being referred to a website; this accords with the finding reported earlier that these groups receive a disproportionately low number of referrals.

The converse statement that the information needs of the lowest priority group are adequately served by web resources did not receive the same measure of support; in fact the profile of responses shows an exact symmetry between those agreeing and those disagreeing. Post-16 advisers were more likely to agree, while pre-16 advisers (who see a higher proportion of this client group) were evenly divided:

	Agree	Disagree
Pre-16	7	7
Post-16	8	3
Specialist	1	5

*Table 12H: Statement (n), by Adviser Caseload groups*

The final statement, which might be regarded as a logical implication of the preceding two, in fact produced one of the highest levels of dissent. Only one in ten agreed that a Connexions website should be targeted at the group receiving the least personal support. This outcome suggests a huge challenge for Connexions services - to produce websites that meet the needs of all young people, including those who, according to some of the other responses, have the least access, skill and motivation to use it.

***p) Other comments***

Several additional comments in this section referred directly to the final statement that Connexions websites should focus on those in least need of direct support (Priority 3). Only one respondent appeared to endorse this suggestion:

“Much of our work now is with P1/2 clients so perhaps concentrating ICT for P3s would be the best idea.” (Respondent 45)

The majority argued against it:

“Connexions website should focus on information for all young people not just P3.” (Respondent 31)



“If the Connexions website decided to go “up market” instead of appealing to a wide range of clients wouldn’t this be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Shouldn’t we be aiming the website at everybody and providing access points to clients without their own PC. Isn’t there an implication here that many clients simply need information without guidance.” (Respondent 3)

“Efforts should be made for inclusion of all young people in IT skills and access. Provision shouldn’t be targeted just on P3.” (Respondent 39)

“I feel that currently websites focus on providing support for P3 [young people] but we should be exploring creative ways of making sites more accessible to all [young people].” (Respondent 44)

“We should be a universal service!! ” (Respondent 49)

One commented on the suggestion that Priority 3 young people find all the information they need on the Internet: “*Info yes guidance no*”, and “*Potentially true if we’re just talking about hard facts*” ; and on the question of too much writing on websites to appeal to young people “*It’s more structure and presentation*” (Respondent 6). Others commented that all young people needed human intervention and guidance as well as access to information:

“All young people could find info with the right support and if it was given at the right level.” (Respondent 48)

“But [Priority 3 young people] would need some guidance as well” (Respondent 51)

“don’t think a [young person] can rely on website solely for help around housing, it needs to be explained and understanding checked.” (Respondent 28)

Finally two comments returned to the question of access:

“Accessing the internet via the mobile can be too expensive.” (Respondent 8)

“You need a good IT system at school as a base with a printer that works.”  
(Respondent 9)

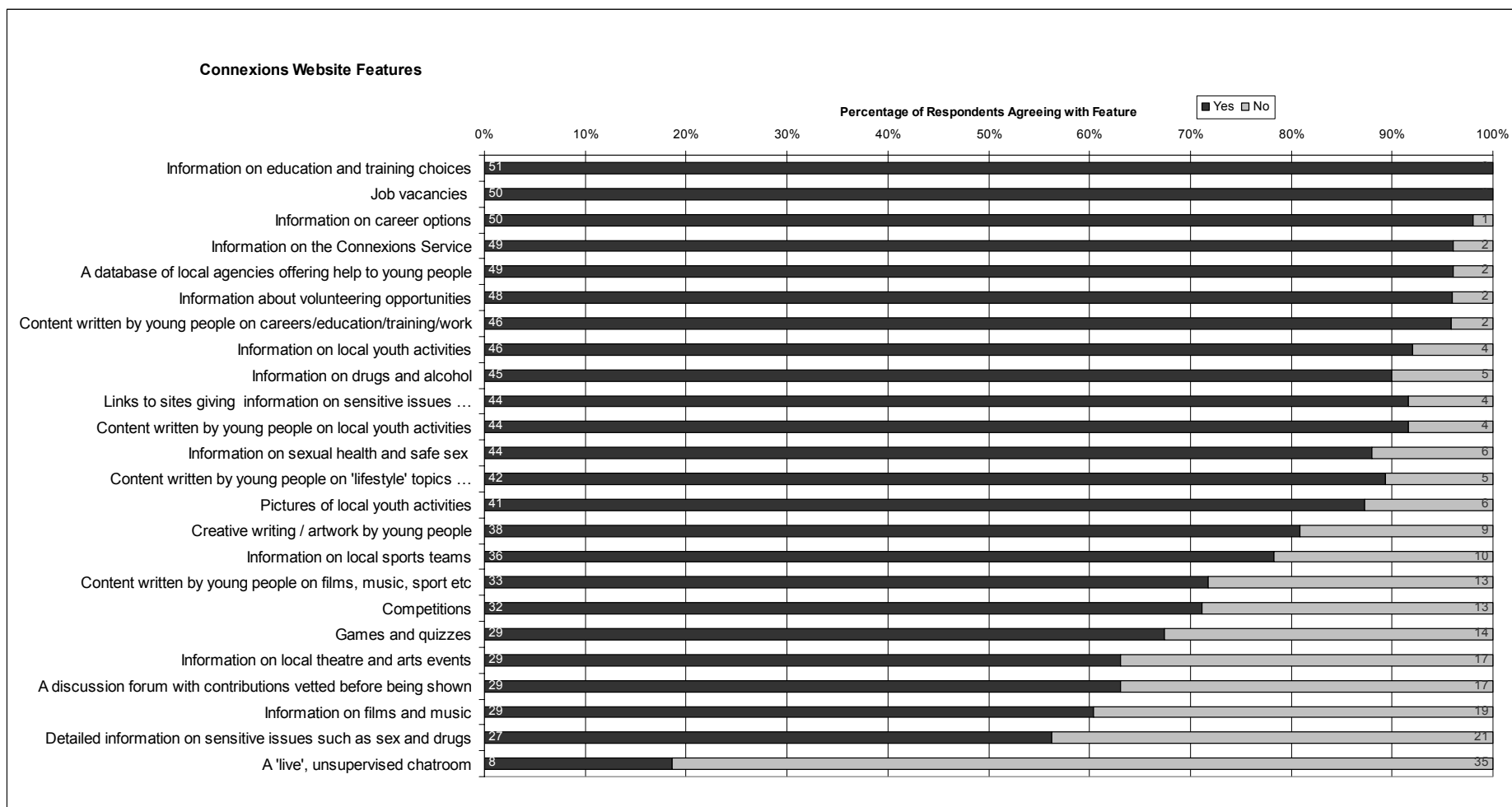
#### 4.7 Features of a Connexions website

Respondents were given a list of 24 possible features of a website and were asked to tick Yes or No against each feature to indicate whether or not a Connexions website should include it. The results are shown in Table 13, listing the suggested features ranked in order of the strength of support received; actual numbers are shown for each feature, with the bar showing responses as a percentage of the total number responding (which varied between features from 43 to 51).

The three most heavily supported features were: information on career options, information on education and training choices, and job vacancies; these correspond with the three reasons most frequently selected by advisers for referring young people to a website in their last two weeks at work, and again with the traditional focus of the careers service.

A second group of features received near-universal support:

- Information on the Connexions Service
- A database of local agencies offering help to young people
- Information about volunteering opportunities
- Content written by young people on careers/education/training/work
- Information on local youth activities
- Information on drugs and alcohol
- Links to other sites giving detailed information on sensitive issues such as sex and drugs
- Content written by young people on local youth activities
- Information on sexual health and safe sex
- Content written by young people on ‘lifestyle’ topics (drugs/alcohol/safe sex/relationships etc.)
- Pictures of local youth activities



**Table 13: Respondents Agreeing with Suggested Website Features**

Majority support, though with higher levels of disagreement or abstention, was also given for:

- Creative writing / artwork by young people
- Information on local sports teams
- Competitions
- Games and quizzes
- Information on local theatre and arts events
- Content written by young people on films, music, sport etc.
- A discussion forum with contributions vetted before being shown
- Information on films and music
- Detailed information on sensitive issues such as sex and drugs

The only feature opposed by a majority of respondents was a 'live', unsupervised chatroom.

With nearly all features favourably regarded, and several respondents ticking Yes for almost every option, the interesting point here is the varying level of support given to different groups of suggested features. The strongest support goes to the most traditional, information-giving, 'careers service' features, and the level of disagreement rises as the features move further away from this. Thus the second group of features, with a small degree of disagreement, includes information-giving on other topics relevant to the Connexions Service (the Service itself, local agencies, volunteering, local youth activities, drugs, alcohol, sex); it also includes content written by young people on these topics.

Features giving information on more general topics of interest to young people, such as sports, films, and writing by young people on these topics, received a higher level of opposition. The more interactive features (quizzes, competitions, discussion forum) and pictures also fell within this range.

In two instances, a pair of features listed consecutively on the questionnaire form could be regarded as alternatives. In one case, the choice was between detailed information on sensitive issues, and links to other sites with such detail. The links option received near-unanimous support (though one adviser commented: *“Yes, if they are professional and responsible orgs. Parents and other adults may have a problem with this”* (Respondent 6)); while the detailed information option received the second highest level of dissent (higher than all the general interest and interactive features).

In the second instance, the alternatives were a ‘vetted’ discussion forum and a live unsupervised chatroom; the former received the third highest level of opposition while the latter was the only feature to be opposed by a majority of respondents. One adviser commented: *“Lots of issues here I like the principle though”* (Respondent 6).

Table 13A shows that respondents from youth work and other backgrounds were stronger in their support for content written by young people, coverage of ‘non-careers’ topics, and interactive features, than were those from careers backgrounds, whose support decreased sharply as suggested features moved further away from traditional careers information:

Professional background	Careers		Youth work/other	
	Y	N	Y	N
Percentage of votes				
Traditional careers topics (3 features)	99%	1%	100%	0%
Young people’s content (5 topics)	80%	20%	99%	1%
Non-careers topics (11 features)	76%	24%	94%	6%
Interactive features (3 topics)	59%	41%	83%	17%

**Table 13A: Support for various groups of features: by professional background**

Table 13B shows support decreasing in the same way particularly among ‘high-referrers’, where a majority actually rejected a number of individual

features: games and quizzes; competitions; information on films, music, local theatre and arts; content written by young people on films, music, sport etc; and detailed information on sensitive issues. Non-referrers maintained greater levels of support for all groups, with low referrers usually close behind.

‘Frequency of Referral’ group	high		low		none	
	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N
Traditional careers topics (3 features)	100%	0%	98%	2%	100%	0%
Young people’s content (5 topics)	75%	25%	85%	15%	89%	11%
Non-careers topics (11 features)	74%	26%	83%	17%	84%	16%
Interactive features (3 topics)	50%	50%	63%	37%	76%	24%

**Table13B: Support for various groups of features:  
by Respondents’ Referral Frequency**

Suggestions for additional features included:

“free music downloads” (Respondent 3);

“message board, e-cards, links to sites like housing services. Music and good visual graphics. Easy navigation. Free Nokia tune composer. Cartoons explaining where, what and why see a PA. Photogallery of activities that young people can relate to i.e. schools/trips and youth clubs” (Respondent 19)

“Stuff on race issues things that black young people experience but don’t know how to deal with it (maybe other people’s experience or agencies or individuals they can talk to.” (Respondent 25)

“I thought it might be useful for [young people] to talk about their experiences of living in hostels (positives) so as to give [young people] an idea of what to expect” (Respondent 28)

“Message board; translation options e.g. Somali, Punjabi etc; information for parents / carers; case studies by [young people].” (Respondent 33)

“Information about other support agencies e.g. social services and how to make contact with them directly. Parents might use this too.” (Respondent 35)

”Information on support around sexuality” (Respondent 48)

“A section on money matters i.e. EMA, income support, housing benefit etc. Young people living independently need to know if they are better off in full-time FE or traing etc. Also child benefit etc. Employment trends in Sheffield. Wages survey for Sheffield.” (Respondent 49)

“Links to HE sites e.g. UCAS” (Respondent 51)

“Possibly travel/transport info - how? when? costs etc.” (Respondent 52)

Two brief comments highlight the contrast between the traditional “careers service” perspective and a more inclusive view:

“I think it should be a careers site” (Respondent 45)

“I would say yes to everything in this list.” (Respondent 9)

#### **4.8 Additional Comments**

The questionnaire included a final invitation to make any other comments. Sixteen advisers did so; also in the discussion which follows a few comments have been included which were made in response to earlier questions but are of a more general nature.

Again the issue of young people needing individual support as well as access to information was a recurrent theme:

Peter Lord – dissertation for MA in IT Management, University of Sheffield, 2003

“A website is no replacement for a guidance worker.” (Respondent 3)

“Use internet with [young people] on one-to-one basis for housing info/ Yell.com for speculative letters to local employers. Do not think that my clients use internet for jobsearch info - expect to get that from their PA’s and Connexions!” (Respondent 7)

“Obviously the internet and ICT generally is very handy. However, if [young people] made choices about options etc. via some information on the Connexions website they could be making the complete wrong choice. The website should in principle encourage [young people] to use Connexions bases and how to get in touch with a PA.” (Respondent 17)

“I find that there is rarely the time to use internet sites in actual one-to-one interviews in the Connexions centre, and in my school interviews it has been impossible anyway. I do acknowledge that I’m much more likely to use or refer to internet sites with more able/settled clients, so largely P3. I would check whether they were OK with the web and that this could be of practical use to them. I do regularly remind clients that they can use Star House [Connexions Centre] computers to access the web for careers related stuff. Finally, I admit I am still quite ignorant about the range and content of useful sites. I would benefit from doing some purposeful browsing!” (Respondent 32)

“[young people] if they are P3 clients still require guidance and advice - we cannot assume they understand what they read.” (Respondent 33)

In two cases these comments reflected broader concerns about the relationship between the Connexions Service and young people:

“The nature of my work is very informal, and I find that some [young people] even find paper based information threatening. I generally provide information to young people verbally as I find that it is the relationship I



have with the [young person] which is the key to them wanting to move forward.” (Respondent 44)

“Targeted and specific info in respect of benefits and other funding entitlements is good but when you get something vague like ‘Connexions can help you with money’ more vulnerable clients can have unrealistic expectations about how we can help. [Young people] see lots of Connexions money being spent on corporate stuff and then wonder why we can’t help them with a bit of lunch money” (Respondent 6).

A second group of comments related to issues of website design and the usefulness of the Internet in general:

“Websites with up to date job information are very useful.” (Respondent 34)

“Young people prefer to use the internet and computers as a source of information rather than paper information. However it is important that info is accessible by all students - particularly those with language support / additional support needs.” (Respondent 33)

“I think one of the areas that needs looking at is language on the Connexions website. is it clear? Does it use vocab that young people understand rather than organisational culture?” (Respondent 8)

“Sites have to have fast download speed for young people. Very visual and interactive.” (Respondent 19)

“The website needs to be updated all of the time” (Respondent 22)

“My comments on race issues highlight that all kinds of issues concern young people are taken in account. Sometimes pointing to other websites that may answer their question or concern. ” (Respondent 25)

“All the suggestions for a website seem a good idea, the key however will be in the design that engages [young people] and making it easy to use - interactive” (Respondent 42)

“websites should consider a broader picture / help [young people] contextualise snippets of info - some do some don't.” (Respondent 6)

“I have recently advised students starting to research university courses and websites are very good e.g. open day information, course information & entry requirements.” (Respondent 51)

Two of these comments echoed the message found in the literature review of the importance of users being involved in developing content:

“I think we have to be careful not to patronise [young people] with content and design of websites - and be clear what the purpose of the site is. Really [young people] should be driving the shaping of the site.” (Respondent 44)

“Young people's designs incorporated in pages. Music mixed by young people. Young people involved in whole design.” (Respondent 19)

A third recurring theme was young people's use of the Internet, including access, skills and motivation:

“Never questioned Internet skills as not a priority” (Respondent 28)

“It is frustrating that most of my clients do not have easy access or necessary skills to access internet for careers related issues. If they do have access, it is mainly used for games. This is improving though, but it is still too early for many to cope with IT info. However I do think every effort should be made to include disadvantaged young people to access information via IT.” (Respondent 39)

“Think there is a lot of potential for more internet use with young people but think the interest level is often low - lack of incentive, slow and a lot of effort for little reward e.g. for me I used to have to borrow a friend’s computer or queue up for one, spend an hour maybe searching for work but find nothing = un motivating.” (Respondent 40)

“The young people I work with see the internet as a leisure activity rather than a source of information. Their access to it varies - many have no access at home and access in the Connexions centre I work in is in the staff office, with no privacy. Information is often difficult to access the standard of websites varies enormously. For the post 16 NEET group [i.e. not in employment, education or training] internet services have no relevance if they do not have access at home.” (Respondent 43)

**Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations**

- 5.1 Conclusions from the literature review**
  
- 5.2 Conclusions from the original research:**
  - 5.2.1 Level of referrals to websites**
  - 5.2.2 Reasons for current levels of referrals**
  - 5.2.3 The need for an inclusive approach**
  - 5.2.4 Web design and content**
- 5.3.5 Implications for the Connexions ICT strategy**
  
- 5.3 Improvements to research methods**
- 5.4 Areas for further research**
  
- 5.5 Recommendations:**
  - 5.5.1 Connexions Partnerships and Service Providers**
  - 5.5.2 Connexions web designers**
  - 5.5.3 Connexions Service National Unit**

**5.1 Conclusions from the literature review**

Before drawing conclusions from the findings of the original search, a brief recap of the conclusions from the literature review is presented.

Literature on the Connexions Service revealed high levels of social need for a targeted support service for disadvantaged young people, and a continuing requirement for a universal service, providing information, advice and guidance for all young people at key decision and transition stages. It revealed concerns from some commentators over tensions between the differing requirements of a universal and a targeted service, with criticism that government policy was flawed in this respect.

With regard to the role of ICT and the Internet, it found a similar tension between the claim for an inclusive strategy aimed at engaging all young people in using and developing web resources, and the tendency to see ICT as the means of supporting the more able, while focussing human support on the more disadvantaged.

Literature on the digital divide showed that this remains a serious, multi-faceted issue affecting young people, with consequent disadvantages for some groups in terms of educational attainment and social development. As well as the questions of physical access and skills, the availability of locally relevant content, some of it developed by young people themselves, was found to be crucial, and recommendations by significant adults to use web resources were seen to be an important influence.

## **5.2 Conclusions from the original research**

It must be acknowledged from the outset that the Personal Advisers responding to the questionnaire all work for one Connexions service provider. This makes it impossible to derive generalisations from the survey findings which could reliably be applied to Connexions Services as a whole. Any particular outcome may be due to aspects of local organisational culture and operational practice, which may differ greatly (and in ways not possible to know) from other Connexions Partnerships and service providers. Instead the value of surveying a large number of staff from one company lies partly in the fact that variables such as different organisational cultures and operational practices are not relevant and their effect is thus eliminated. Such variations as are found to exist between respondents are therefore more likely to be due to differences in Personal Advisers' attitudes towards ICT and the young people they work with; which in turn may be influenced by differences in the advisers' professional backgrounds, caseloads, specialisms, and their own knowledge and

experience of the Internet as an information source. These variables are known from the responses and are therefore capable of analysis.

The other value of surveying a large number of respondents from one organisation is in the scope this gives for qualitative analysis. The emphasis in the questionnaire on reasons, influences and attitudes, together with additional information provided from the researcher's own first-hand knowledge and experience of the organisational context, allows a richer picture to be developed. This in turn gives a depth of understanding which, while not directly applicable to other organisations, allows insights to be made.

### **5.2.1 Level of referrals to websites**

Half the advisers reported making no referrals to websites in one-to-one work with young people in the last two working weeks. Overall there was only one recommendation to use information from web resources for approximately every six one-to-one interactions.

While it is not possible to say what number of referrals would be regarded as normal or healthy (in the absence of any comparable research elsewhere), nor to know how typical that particular two weeks were, the very fact that some advisers reported up to twenty referrals in the same period suggests that the referring to the Internet for information is a valuable part of the support an adviser is able to provide. The finding that so large a proportion made no referrals indicates that the potential of websites to help young people is not being exploited.

The number of referrals to web resources reported by advisers from youth work or other backgrounds was particularly low, averaging only 0.4 per respondent, and with over two-thirds reporting no referrals at all. Those from careers backgrounds, particularly those working with under-16 young people in schools, reported higher numbers of referrals, though still over one third reported none. Even among this group, there were very few referrals concerning subjects

Peter Lord – dissertation for MA in IT Management, University of Sheffield, 2003

outside the traditional careers domain, particularly from those working mainly with pre-16 young people.

This low level of referrals among youth workers may suggest a lack of training and experience of using ICT in their profession; or it may be a more local phenomenon; or it may suggest that the web resources are not considered relevant to their working methods and their clients. Nevertheless the literature review revealed examples of innovative work with young people using web resources; so again there is a suggestion of wasted potential.

Of equal significance is the finding that 22 respondents (42%) had never at any time referred a young person to a Connexions website, and only six had referred to a national Connexions site. Given the high level of investment in websites by the Connexions Service at national level as well as by local Partnerships and service providers, this represents a serious under-utilisation of what should be a very valuable information resource.

It has also been shown that Priority 3 young people - those with the lowest level of need - were over five times more likely in a one-to-one interview with a Personal Adviser to be referred to web resources, than were Priority 1 young people. This is evidence of a form of digital divide relating to the types of young people who receive referrals to web resources.

This in part reflects a disparity between different advisers in the balance of their caseloads between the different priority groups. Most advisers (62%) saw no Priority 3 clients in the survey period; whereas six advisers (all from careers backgrounds and working with pre-16 students) saw over eight each, together accounting for 69 (64%) of all Priority 3 clients reported. So Priority 3 clients tend to be seen by pre-16 advisers from careers backgrounds.

This appears to reinforce an emerging picture of two 'typical' advisers: one from a careers background, seeing younger and more able young people in school settings, making significant use of the Internet, for a relatively narrow

range of careers-related information needs; and another, working with post-16 young people in higher priority groups facing a wider range of issues, making little use of the Internet. The former would tend to believe that young people had home access, could locate information on the Internet, and preferred to use ICT than printed information. The latter would be more likely to think that young people do not have home access, are only interested in computers for games, and are put off the Internet by large amounts of text. These two descriptions are highly generalised and most advisers would share some characteristics of each.

This dichotomy suggests a number of questions: is it simply a developmental phase of Connexions, or is it something more fundamental? Could it be that the more able young people, if they only require careers information, are well served by websites; whereas young people with greater needs have issues where websites are of little use? Or again, does the very perception that these young people will not use them mean that they are not referred to websites, which in turn do not cover their specific needs, making the young people still less likely to use them?

### **5.2.2 Reasons for current levels of referrals**

Looking at reasons why advisers do not make more referrals to web resources than is currently the case, it has clearly emerged that young people's lack of access to Internet resources, or lack of skills and motivation to use them, are factors which deter advisers from recommending these information sources. Two thirds of advisers endorsed one or more of these reasons for not making more referrals. In similar vein, when asked what factors might encourage them to make more referrals, better access and skills and greater interest on the part of young people all scored highly. In other words, advisers perceive there to be a digital divide among the young people they work with, and the low number of referrals is a symptom of this. The newer access technologies (mobile phones and digital television) were not perceived to be having any impact.



This interpretation is supported by many of the additional comments proffered by advisers. The divide manifests itself in all the three forms discussed in the literature review, namely access, skills and in particular, motivation, as the following three sets of quotations illustrate:

“internet services have no relevance if they do not have access at home.”

“I don’t think I have ever done one-to-one with a [young person] who has access to the internet in their own home or who is familiar with using the internet.”

“most of my clients do not have ... necessary skills to access internet”

“still too early for many to cope with IT info”

“Although many of the young people I work with know computer games they don’t know the first thing about the internet

“young people I work with see the internet as a leisure activity”

“the interest level is often low - lack of incentive, slow and a lot of effort for little reward”

“If they do have access, it is mainly used for games”

“Young people can use the web effectively but when there is too much reading they tend to not bother

“[young people] enjoy using internet for surfing etc.; but not so keen to use it to access information”

“some young people may easily get drawn off task preferring to download music off the internet rather than access the Connexions site.”

“[young people] have low concentration and finding info on the website takes too long for them

Though access is the most frequently cited reason, this factor might actually mask the extent of the other two, so that if the access issue were resolved the other factors might restrict the growth of Internet usage.

The other major reasons for low numbers of referrals were lack of knowledge on the advisers' part about suitable sites, and a preference for giving information verbally or in print. This preference may itself possibly be due to limited knowledge of web resources. Better knowledge of relevant and appealing sites were the two factors selected as most likely to increase the number of referrals. This highlights a need for an extensive programme of education about web resources for personal advisers, together with printed guides and/or web portals to relevant resources on the Internet. This need is acknowledged in a number of the additional comments made by advisers which were recorded in the previous chapter:

“There needs to be training on how we can give P1 clients information on relevant websites.”

“I just need to be more aware of what's available so I can pass this on”

“I am still quite ignorant about the range and content of useful sites”.

Implicit in these comments is a confidence that the Internet could be of greater use to young people if the advisers were more knowledgeable. A further inhibiting factor here is the simple lack of access for advisers at the time they see young people; only one third agreed that they were usually seated at an Internet enabled computer when talking to young people, and 58% claimed that better access for themselves would increase their number of referrals. This is likely to improve over time, as schools and local Connexions centres acquire better Internet connectivity; it is also likely to vary in its extent between different sites within the locality covered by the survey, and also between different parts of the country; so it may turn out to be a short-term, local problem.

Perhaps some encouragement can be drawn from the fact that only two advisers agreed that lack of trust in the Internet as an information source was a deterrent from referring young people to web resources, and none said that there was nothing which would persuade them to make greater numbers of referrals in the future. Nevertheless, as reported in the last chapter in some of the additional comments put forward, a large number of advisers showed degrees of scepticism

towards the Internet as a suitable information source for the young people they work with. In some cases this reflected a general mistrust of web-based information resources:

“I worry about accuracy, currency, completeness; it often requires help to read it/interpret it.”

“Because websites often don’t give specific enough information that you can be sure is up to date”

“Information is often difficult to access”

“the standard of websites varies enormously”

More often it stemmed from doubts as to its relevance for the type of client they dealt with, to its appropriateness to their relationship with their clients, or to the strongly held view that young people from all priority groups need human support as well as information. The following three groups of quotations illustrate these views:

“Some young people who are isolated prefer the individual one-to-one support.”

“Most of my caseload wouldn’t use the internet owing to lack of IT skills, lack of access to computers, lack of IT culture in their lives.”

“I generally provide information to young people verbally as I find that it is the relationship I have with the [young person] which is the key to them wanting to move forward.”

“Have dealt with very specific enquiries that require talking to people not general info.”

“my work tends to be of crisis intervention so info finding on websites is not a priority.”

“P3 clients still require guidance and advice - we cannot assume they understand what they read.”

“A website is no replacement for a guidance worker.”

Peter Lord – dissertation for MA in IT Management, University of Sheffield, 2003

“it needs to be explained and understanding checked”

“need some guidance as well”

“All young people could find info with the right support and if it was given at the right level.”

### **5.2.3 The need for an inclusive approach**

Despite the low level of referrals reported, and the misgivings contained in some of these comments, most advisers did not question the value of the Internet as a source of information for young people. Several comments expressed positive attitudes towards it:

“Young people prefer to use the internet and computers as a source of information rather than paper information”

“Websites with up to date job information are very useful.”

“the internet and ICT generally is very handy”

[young people] “being able to research their own info needs is great and very empowering”

Referrals involving young people in greatest need were particularly low, and many of the negative comments carried an implicit doubt about its suitability for those young people; this might lead to an expectation that respondents would be happy to target Connexions websites at young people in least need of intensive support, leaving advisers free to concentrate their individual attention on the highest priority group. This is not borne out by the findings; from the range of statements exploring advisers’ feelings towards young people and ICT, almost the highest level of disagreement was directed towards the suggestion that a Connexions website should focus on providing information for Priority 3 young people.

This was corroborated by a number of comments explicitly advocating an inclusive approach towards developing a website strategy:

“every effort should be made to include disadvantaged young people to access information via IT”

“it is important that info is accessible by all students - particularly those with language support / additional support needs.”

“We should be a universal service!!”

“Efforts should be made for inclusion of all young people in IT skills and access.”

“Shouldn’t we be aiming the website at everybody and providing access points to clients without their own PC”

“Connexions website should focus on information for all young people”

The conclusion to be drawn here is that the Personal Advisers participating in this survey are strongly in favour of an information strategy where web based resources are targeted equally at all clients irrespective of priority group.

#### **5.2.4 Web design and content**

The section of the questionnaire dealing with adviser’s requirements for elements to include in a Connexions website showed strong levels of support for most of the suggested features. (The only feature opposed by a majority was an unsupervised chatroom which is likely to have been opposed for reasons concerned with child protection).

As shown in the analysis in the preceding chapter, however, the levels of support were strongest for topics most closely associated with the traditional careers service, and gradually became weaker for features further removed from this, including those which were interactive, graphical, or included content written by young people. Furthermore, it was among the advisers from a careers background that opposition to these features was most strongly expressed.

Nevertheless this should not be overstated, as there was majority support for all but one feature. Additional comments from advisers regarding web

content and design argue for a site with a wide variety of features including many forms of content created by young people.

“Stuff on race issues things that black young people experience but don’t know how to deal with it (maybe other people’s experience or agencies or individuals they can talk to”

“it might be useful for [young people] to talk about their experiences of living in hostels (positives) so as to give [young people] an idea of what to expect”

“case studies by [young people]”

“Photogallery of activities that young people can relate to ... schools/trips and youth clubs”

“the key however will be in the design that engages [young people] and making it easy to use - interactive”

“Young people involved in whole design”

“Sites have to have fast download speed for young people. Very visual and interactive”

“Does it use vocab that young people understand rather than organisational culture?”

Finally there is more general advice for the designers of Connexions websites:

“be clear what the purpose of the site is”

“websites should consider a broader picture / help [young people] contextualise snippets of info”

“we have to be careful not to patronise [young people] with content and design of websites”

Clearly the advisers in this group take a positive interest in the development of websites that will be attractive, relevant and helpful for the young people they work with.

### 5.2.5 Implications for the Connexions ICT strategy

In statistical terms it is impossible to say how far these findings reflect the situation in other areas, or the country as a whole. It is also impossible to know from this 'snapshot' how much the situation might be improving over time. It may be a short-term issue as advisers adjust to their new, wider remit and develop a wider knowledge of web resources; it may reflect the current state of technological development in one specific geographical area, or may reflect the immature stage of development of websites in this field.

Whatever the causes, these findings should still be a matter of concern for the Connexions Service. With a strategy based on the use of web resources as a major feature of the delivery of the universal service, and a heavy financial investment in creating such resources, the Service clearly needs its advisers to be knowledgeable about the Internet, confident in making referrals; it also requires young people to have access and skills to use the Internet and the motivation to do so.

If advisers regard the web as only suitable for the more able (although wanting it to be accessible and attractive to all young people), and also consider that all young people require face to face guidance, then the possibility arises that the strategy may be flawed, in implementation if not in intention. On the one hand it excludes some young people from the information sources needed to make informed decisions, and on the other it excludes other young people from the individual support needed to reach a decision and to put it into practice.

In fact young people may move between different levels of need, or have different needs at different levels at the same time; for one type of need web-based information may suffice, while another need requires in-depth human support. It was stated at the outset of the Connexions Service that IT and human support are not alternatives but complement and enhance one another (Offer & Watts, 2000, p6).

### 5.3 Improvements to research methods

There are a number of areas where with hindsight the research could have been more effective. It has not been possible within the time to gather information from a number of important stakeholders: the designers of websites for Connexions services around the country; the policy-makers and strategic planners in Connexions Service National Unit; Personal Advisers in other Connexions partnerships; and most importantly from young people themselves.

It would have been particularly illuminating to find out from young people whether they followed up and acted on the referrals; how they used the Internet, and their attitudes towards it as an information source.

It would also have been helpful to undertake face to face follow up interviews with some of the advisers responding to the questionnaire to gain further insights into their use of websites as information sources to which to refer young people; and to repeat parts of the survey over periods of time to establish whether numbers of referrals had increased

Face to face interviews would have also encouraged a greater level of individual comment, and provided an opportunity to follow up certain comments to obtain further insight and amplification. One limitation found from the use of a written, self-administered questionnaire format was that some respondents made few or no additional comments, while others made comments that were somewhat brief or unclear due to constraints of space and time. In a new field such as this where little research has taken place the value of the qualitative information contained in individual comment is paramount; in practice although every question gave an opportunity for individual comment it did not produce as rich an insight as an interview-based survey would have done.



## 5.4 Areas for further research

This suggests a number of other areas which would be suitable for further research.

Several of these areas would involve undertaking research directly with young people. These include investigations into such areas as:

- how do young people approach the task of finding resources on the Internet for information on careers and lifestyle choices? do they use search engines effectively? do they start from familiar sites and follow links until they find relevant information? how readily do they give up or become sidetracked? how does this vary between different groups of young people? is there a digital divide evident in these information seeking behaviours, between those with greater experience through home access, and those without home access who lack experience and skills?
- what do young people regard as a good informational websites? what features attract them to stay with a site and return to it? again is there a digital divide in terms of motivation to use sites?
- what do they think of Connexions sites in particular? how helpful do they find them? have they used them in the past and would they use them in the future to find information about career and lifestyle choices?

Other possible areas for future research were listed at the end of the literature review.

## 5.5 Recommendations:

### 5.5.1 For Connexions Partnerships and Service Providers

- (1) Instigate an ongoing programme of education for Personal Advisers to increase their Internet knowledge. This should include basic Internet skills for those with least experience; formal training in the use of the sites most relevant to young people; development of resources providing addresses and
- Peter Lord – dissertation for MA in IT Management, University of Sheffield, 2003

search tips for the most relevant sites (including an extensive range of links from the Partnerships' own site); and regular updates with information (e.g. via emails and in internal staff newsletters) about new or additional sites

- (2) Ensure that all premises where advisers talk with young people have fast, reliable Internet connectivity
- (3) Provide access to the Internet for young people at all Connexions Centres, with only the minimum necessary restrictions on the type of materials searched for (because any exposure to the Internet will help some of those currently disadvantaged by the digital divide).

#### **5.5.2 For Connexions web designers and content writers**

- (1) Maximise the amount of website content written by young people, content covering "lifestyle" issues, content on issues of general interest to young people, and interactive features which encourage repeat usage.
- (2) Ensure the traditional 'careers' topics are fully covered since this will be the main source of support for many young people
- (3) Ensure that content is always up to date and regularly changing, with innovative interactive features, to maintain young people's interest and involvement

#### **5.5.3 For the Connexions Service National Unit**

- (1) Recognising the greater likelihood of referrals to local rather than national Connexions sites, and the unanimous agreement on the need for local information, the national website strategy should include a strong degree of support for sites at the partnership and provide level.

- (2) Encourage local partnerships to involve young people closely in developing and contributing to sites, and target sites specifically at young people (sites addressing a corporate audience should be kept completely separate)
- (3) Ensure that national sites address the needs of all young people and not just the lowest priority clients; this applies to questions of site design and language level as well as the range of topics covered by the site.
- (4) Take a lead in developing innovative and inclusive features such as SMS based services, minority language information, and touch screen interfaces
- (5) Recognising continuing access barriers, CSNU should require all partnerships to provide and promote free access
- (6) Reconsider the balance between universal and targeted services, and between face to face support and web-based information, so that lower priority young people can get face to face help when they need it, and are not left with information alone. There is a strong case for regarding careers guidance as an entitlement for all young people, while still targeting intensive support at those in greatest need or at risk; web designers would then more realistically be able to address the needs of all young people, and not just the more able.

### Bibliography

Ainley, P., Barnes, T., Momen, A (2002). Making connexions: a case study in contemporary social policy. *Critical Social Policy*, May 2002, Vol.22, No.2(71), pp.376-387

Allan, G. (1991). Qualitative research. *In* Allan, G., Skinner, C. (eds.) *Handbook for research students in the social sciences*. London: Falmer (pp177-189).

Attewell, P. (2001). The first and second digital divides. *Sociology of Education* 74 (3) July 2001 p252-259

Bouma, G.D., Atkinson, G.B.J. (1995). *A handbook of social science research*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

British Educational Technology and Communications Agency (Becta) (2001). *The digital divide: a discussion paper*. Coventry: Becta.

Clark, J., Causer, G. (1991). Research strategies and decisions. *In*: Allan, G., Skinner, C. (eds.) *Handbook for research students in the social sciences*. London: Falmer (pp163-176)

Colley, H., Hodkinson, P. (2001). Problems with bridging the gap: the reversal of structure and agency in addressing social exclusion. *Critical Social Policy*, Aug 2001, Vol.21, No.3(68), pp.335-359

Connexions Service National Unit (2002a). *Youth Support Services for 13-19 year olds: a vision for 2006: how Connexions will deliver this*. Nottingham: DfES Publications

Connexions Service National Unit (2002b). *Business Planning Guidance 2003-04*. Sheffield: DfES/CSNU.

Connexions Service National Unit, (2002c). *Connexions Annual Report 2001-02*. [Sheffield], [DfES/CSNU].

Connexions Service National Unit (CSNU) (2003a). <http://www.connexions.gov.uk>

Connexions Service National Unit (CSNU) (2003b). *Guidance on website design for Connexions partnerships*. Sheffield: DfES/CSNU.

Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) (2000). *Connexions: the best start in life for every young person*. Nottingham: DfEE Publications.

Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2002). *Young people and ICT*. London: DfES.

- Fowler, F.J. (1995). *Improving survey questions: design and evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Harrison, C. et al. (2003). *ImpaCT2: the impact of information and communication technologies on pupil learning and attainment; full report*. London: Becta for the Department of Education and Skills
- Hayward, B. *et al.* (2003). *Young people and ICT 2002*. London: DfES.
- Hellawell, S. (2001). *Beyond access: ICT and social inclusion*. London: Fabian Society.
- Lax, S. (2001). *Information, education and inequality: is new technology the solution?* *In*: Lax, S. (ed.) (2001). *Access denied in the information age*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Offer, M., Watts, T. (2000). *The use of information and communication technologies in the Connexions Service*. Cambridge: National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling (NICEC).
- Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2003). Internet access. London: ONS. (available online at: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=8>; accessed 17 August 2003)
- Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2002). Internet access: households and individuals. London: ONS (available online at: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/inta1202.pdf>; accessed 17 August 2003)
- Office of the e-Envoy (2003). Internet access. (available on-line at: [http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk/briefings/briefingsarticle/fs/en?CONTENT\\_id=4000086&chk=xF3aeF](http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk/briefings/briefingsarticle/fs/en?CONTENT_id=4000086&chk=xF3aeF); accessed 17 August 2003)
- Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) (2002). *Connexions Partnerships: the first year 2001-2002*. London, Ofsted.
- Policy Action Team 12 (2000). *Young people*. London: Stationery Office
- Policy Action Team 15 (2000). *Closing the Digital Divide: Information and Communication Technologies in Deprived Areas*. London: Department for Trade and Industry.
- Research Surveys of Great Britain (2001). *ICT access and use: report on the benchmark survey*. London: Department for Education and Employment
- Rudd, T. (2002). *Looking into the digital divide(s) and seeing a content chasm*. Coventry: Becta

- Russell, N. and Stafford, N. (2002). Trends in ICT access and use. London: Department for Education and Skills.
- Selwyn (2003). Apart from technology: understanding people's non-use of information and communication technologies in everyday life. *Technology in Society* 25 99–116
- Skinner, C. (1991). Quantitative research. *In: Allan, G., Skinner, C. (eds.) Handbook for research students in the social sciences.* London: Falmer (p215 - 224).
- Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) (1999). Bridging the gap: new opportunities for 16-18 year olds not in education, employment or training. London: Stationery Office
- Southern, A. (2002). Can information and communication technologies support regeneration? *Regional studies*, Aug 2002, Vol.36, No.6, pp.697-702
- Tashakkori, A., Teddlie, C. (1998). *Mixed methodology: combining qualitative and quantitative approaches.* Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- UK Online (2003). Annual Report 2002. London: UK Online.
- Watts, A.G. (2001). Career guidance and social exclusion: a cautionary tale. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 29 (2), 2001 pp 157 - 176
- Weinstock, A. (2001). *Connexions and Youth Policy: a brighter future?.* Derby: Centre for Guidance Studies.

Appendix: Questionnaire

**Please help with my research by answering the following questions. Most questions can be answered by ticking boxes; the whole questionnaire should not take more than 10 minutes.**

**Please be assured that all responses will be treated in the strictest confidence and that nothing in the questionnaire identifies you as an individual.**

Question 1 (please estimate as accurately as possible)

<p>1 a) <b>Approximately how many young people have you worked with on a 1:1 basis in your most recent two weeks at work?</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>1 b) <b>Approximately how many group work sessions have you been involved with in your most recent two weeks at work?</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><input type="checkbox"/></p>

<p>1 c) <b>How many of the young people you worked with 1:1 were:</b></p> <p>Priority 1; <input type="checkbox"/>      Priority 2; <input type="checkbox"/>      Priority 3 <input type="checkbox"/></p>
--

<p>1 d) <b>Is your caseload:</b> (please tick the <u>one</u> that best applies)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mainly or entirely made up of young people still of school age? <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>• mainly or entirely made up of young people aged 16-19 still in full-time education <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>• mainly or entirely made up of young people aged 16-19 who are not in education, employment or training? <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>• mainly or entirely related to specialist role you perform please state specialism _____ <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>• other (please specify) _____ <input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>
--

<p>1 e) <b>Is your previous professional background:</b> (please tick the <u>one</u> that best applies)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• careers adviser or careers assistant <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>• youth worker <input type="checkbox"/></li> <li>• other (please specify) _____ <input type="checkbox"/></li> </ul>
---

Appendix: Questionnaire

***NB in all the questions which follow, the phrase “refer a young person to a website” should be taken to include any of the following:***

- *giving a young person a web address or web site name and recommending they use it to find information*
- *using a website with a young person to find information*

Question 2

*(please estimate if necessary)*

**2a) In your most recent two weeks at work, during 1:1 contacts: how many times have you referred a young person to a website?**

None     One     Two     Three     Four

More than four - please enter number of times

Not applicable - have not done 1:1 work in the last 2 weeks

**2b) How many of the young people you referred to websites in 1:1 contacts were**

**Priority 1?**     **Priority 2?**     **Priority 3?**

(Please leave blank if you answered None or Not Applicable to Q2a)

**2 c) In your most recent two weeks at work, in group work sessions: how many times have you referred young people to a website?**

None     One     Two     Three     Four

More than four - please enter number of times

Not applicable - have not done group work in the last 2 weeks



Appendix: Questionnaire

Question 3

3a) **If you have referred young people to websites in the last two weeks, what kind of information you have referred them to look for?** *(Please tick as many boxes as apply.)*

Careers	<input type="checkbox"/>	Drugs and Alcohol	<input type="checkbox"/>
Job Vacancies	<input type="checkbox"/>	Safe Sex and Contraception	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education/Training	<input type="checkbox"/>	Relationships	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leisure activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bullying	<input type="checkbox"/>
Arts / Media	<input type="checkbox"/>	The Law / Rights	<input type="checkbox"/>
Volunteering	<input type="checkbox"/>	Crime	<input type="checkbox"/>
Healthy Living	<input type="checkbox"/>	Housing/ Homelessness	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify) _____			
Not applicable - have not referred any young person to a website			<input type="checkbox"/>

3b) **Have you ever referred a young person to a Connexions website?** *(not just in the last 2 weeks but at any time; but don't include your own browsing of these sites)*

please tick:                      YES                       NO

If yes, which one(s):

Connexions South Yorkshire <a href="http://www.connexionssy.org.uk">www.connexionssy.org.uk</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Connexions in Sheffield <a href="http://www.connexionsinsheffield.org.uk">www.connexionsinsheffield.org.uk</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Connexions Direct <a href="http://www.connexions-direct.com">www.connexions-direct.com</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Connexions Card <a href="http://www.connexionscard.com">www.connexionscard.com</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Connexions (DfES official site) <a href="http://www.connexions.gov.uk">www.connexions.gov.uk</a>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other, please specify: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix: Questionnaire

Question 4

**Which of the following reasons explain why you don't refer young people to websites more frequently than you do?**

*Please tick as many boxes as you agree with.*

Because the young people I work with have no access to the Internet

Because the young people I work with do not have Internet skills

Because the young people I work with do not have the reading skills needed

Because the young people I work with wouldn't want to use the Internet

Because websites with the relevant information would not appeal to the young people I work with

Because I don't yet know of enough sites with the information they need

Because I prefer to give young people information verbally

Because I prefer to give young people information in writing or print

Because the Internet is not a good source of information

Other reasons (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please add any other comments you feel are relevant:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Appendix: Questionnaire

Question 5

**What would make you more likely to refer young people you work with to websites for information?**

*Please tick as many boxes as you agree with.*

If I had better access to the Internet when I see young people

If I had better Internet skills

If I knew of more sites with relevant information

If I knew of more sites which would appeal to young people

If the young people I work with had better access to the Internet

If the young people I work with had better Internet skills

If the young people I work with had better reading skills

If the young people I work with had more interest in using websites

If websites were more attractive to young people

If websites were easier to use for young people

If websites had all the information young people need in one place

Other reasons (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Nothing would make me more likely to refer young people to websites

Please add any other comments you feel are relevant:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Appendix: Questionnaire

Question 6

For each of these statements, please indicate whether or not you agree

A - Completely agree; B - Generally agree; C - Not sure;  
 D - Generally disagree; E - Completely disagree

<i>Please tick one box for each statement</i>	A	B	C	D	E
a) Most young people I work with have Internet access through a PC at home					
b) Most young people I work with could access the Internet through their mobile phone					
c) Most young people I work with could access the Internet through their digital TV set					
d) I usually talk to the young people I work with in a building where they can access the Internet					
e) I usually talk to the young people I work with sitting by a computer with Internet access					
f) Most young people I work with would prefer to use the Internet to find out about sensitive issues (e.g. sex, health) rather than talk to an adult					
g) Most websites cover issues at a general, national level rather than giving specific local details					
h) Most young people I work with are only interested in computers for playing games					
i) Most websites have too much writing to appeal to the young people I work with					
j) Most young people I work with prefer to use ICT to find information rather than books or leaflets					
k) Most young people I work with need information about their own local area					
l) Most young people I work with would know how to search for information on the Internet					
m) Most Priority 1/2 young people need to receive information from an adviser rather than find it for themselves on the Internet					
n) Most Priority 3 young people can find all the information they need on the Internet					
o) A Connexions website should focus on providing information for Priority 3 young people					

Please add any other comments you feel are relevant:

---



---



---

Appendix: Questionnaire

Question 7

**What do you think should be included in a Connexions website?  
Against each item, please tick either Yes or No**

<b>A Connexions website should include:</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>a) Information on career options</b>		
<b>b) Information on local youth activities</b>		
<b>c) Information on education and training choices</b>		
<b>d) Games and quizzes</b>		
<b>e) Information on local sports teams</b>		
<b>f) Job vacancies</b>		
<b>g) Content written by young people on careers/education/training/work</b>		
<b>h) Information on the Connexions Service</b>		
<b>i) Information on films and music</b>		
<b>j) Information on local theatre and arts events</b>		
<b>k) Information on drugs and alcohol</b>		
<b>l) Information on sexual health and safe sex</b>		
<b>m) Competitions</b>		
<b>n) Content written by young people on 'lifestyle' topics (drugs/alcohol/safe sex/relationships etc.)</b>		
<b>o) A 'live', unsupervised chatroom</b>		
<b>p) A discussion forum with contributions vetted before being shown</b>		
<b>q) Content written by young people on local youth activities</b>		
<b>r) Content written by young people on films, music, sport etc</b>		
<b>s) A database of local agencies offering help to young people</b>		
<b>t) Information about volunteering opportunities</b>		
<b>u) Pictures of local youth activities</b>		
<b>v) Creative writing / artwork by young people</b>		
<b>w) <u>Detailed information</u> on sensitive issues such as sex and drugs</b>		
<b>x) Links to <u>other sites</u> giving detailed information on sensitive issues such as sex and drugs</b>		
<b>y) Other: please enter your own ideas</b>  _____		
_____		

