

# Young people's views on finding out about jobs and careers

## Executive summary

With unprecedented levels of unemployment among young people, and uncertainty about the future of our economy, this report outlines what young people say influences their decisions about jobs and careers and how they perceive the available sources of advice. It is based on the findings of an online survey with over 500 young people aged 12–26 conducted by the British Youth Council, NCB and Young NCB.

Young people say they are most influenced by parents, websites, teachers and friends, and over 80 per cent of respondents who had received formal careers advice found it to be 'a little bit' or 'not at all' helpful. Perceptions about the helpfulness of formal careers advice did not vary significantly according to where it was delivered, suggesting that the setting may be less important than the way in which the advice is formulated and delivered.

In the light of these findings, future approaches to careers advice and guidance should:

- Include measures to broaden the knowledge and understanding of the job market among all those who have real influence on young people's decisions.
- Consider the development of more self-accessed web-based solutions for informing and guiding young people, including tools that can be used by young people and their parents together.
- Avoid proposals on the relocation of any dedicated provision from one setting to another.
- Exploit further the role of private and public sector employers, including the provision of work-based learning.

At a time when there is national concern about unprecedented numbers of unemployed young people, it is important that we understand the factors that influence young people's job and career choices. With this knowledge it should be possible for public investment to support 'what works' rather than assume that any well-trodden path that we have taken to provide job and careers advice in the past is the right route for young people who are making difficult decisions about their futures in difficult times.

The British Youth Council, NCB and Young NCB sent out an online survey to young people aged 12–26 about what influences their career decisions, what advice they have access to and their perceptions of the available advice. Over 500 young people responded to the online survey.

## Background

Before setting out the current views of young people, it is important to set the context. The roots of young people's careers advice and guidance services today can be

traced back to the Youth Employment Service that was established in the late 1940s<sup>1</sup> and the legal duty on local authorities to provide career guidance for young people introduced in the 1970s.<sup>2</sup> The settings delivering job and careers advice have changed from time to time and vary today. Advice is currently available in schools; at universities and colleges, for those that attend; at local authority Connexions services for 13–19-year-olds in the community and via the national Connexions Direct service.

Careers advice is now set within the wider information advice and guidance (IAG) offer, which enables young people to seek advice on matters that affect their well-being and can therefore impact on their readiness and effectiveness for work. This IAG offer was a key element of the programme of reform initiated by Youth Matters<sup>3</sup> in 2005, which devolved responsibility for provision of careers advice to local authorities and made it subject to a set of national quality standards. This survey did not focus on the wider IAG areas of financial management, sexual advice and so forth but specifically targeted job and careers advice.

The final report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions,<sup>4</sup> established in the government's 2009 social mobility White Paper *New Opportunities*,<sup>5</sup> argued that the Connexions service was not succeeding in supporting young people to develop and achieve their aspirations. In fact, it argued that Connexions was too focused on the vulnerable, thus 'distracting it from offering proper careers advice and guidance to the majority of young people'.<sup>6</sup>

However, the 2008 TNS Social Research Connexions Direct User Satisfaction Survey<sup>7</sup> found that on the wider territory of IAG, including personal relationships, issues at school, college or work, bullying, abuse, sexual and mental health, Connexions scored very highly. In fact 92 per cent of young people were fairly or very satisfied with the IAG they received. But what is the picture when considering just job and careers advice?

## The study findings

Regardless of age, the majority of respondents (66.1 per cent) have 'an ideal job in mind for the future'. A third, however, were unsure of what direction to take in their future and, of course, 'ideal' jobs may simply not be available or accessible to all those who want them. So what or who does influence young people's job and career choices?

### The key influences

Young people were asked about the key influence on their careers for the future. Three of the four most powerful influences were parents, mentioned by 65.3 per cent of young people; friends by 59.9 per cent; and classroom teachers by 58.2 per cent. This reflected findings from the 2008 TNS survey which found that parents, friends and teachers were the main sources of advice on careers and education for young people. However, job and careers websites are nudging into second place, with 60.8 per cent of young people saying they use these for information more than they use other family members, adverts, newspapers and magazines or TV. In fact, adverts seem to have a marginal influence, with only 19.9 per cent of young people being influenced by them. Nearly a third (30.2 per cent) of young people were influenced by multiple sources.

When asked which was the single most influential source of information, the pattern of the top four remains the same: parents (26.9 per cent), followed by websites (22.6 per cent), teachers (20 per cent) and friends (10.8 per cent). The value of using adverts as a source of information about jobs and careers drops to being the least influential, with only 1.9 per cent of respondents finding them the most useful, followed by other relatives (2.8 per cent), siblings (3.4 per cent) and TV (4.7 per cent).

Boys and girls did not differ significantly in their perceptions of key influences, with the exception of the roles of television and websites. Girls were significantly more likely than boys to view the web as a key influence (63.4 per cent vs. 48.4 per cent, respectively), while

boys were more likely than girls to view TV as a key influence (48.4 per cent vs. 29.8 per cent). Both boys and girls were more likely to report the web as a key influence over TV, but this was particularly true for girls.

The use of websites appears to increase with age, perhaps because teachers are no longer available, and any authority parents had in this area has been 'used up'. So while 54.5 per cent of 14–21-year-olds get their information from the web, this rises to almost 70 per cent of 22–26-year-olds. Web-based information is now a key route for young people and more should perhaps be being made of it, taking into account the fact that access may typically be unsupervised.

It is important to reflect on the significance of teachers' influence. It is not formally part of the work of teachers to provide job and careers advice and guidance, although teachers can go out of their way to ensure that they stay informed about progression routes and career paths. Teachers are aware of their power to influence and take it very seriously. The suggestions that teachers make may be based on their own research and/or be informed by their own career path, preferred subject, their own familial and social networks and what they have seen happen to other pupils. Teachers, like parents, need to be able to 'look up' job requirements quickly and easily. Keeping on top of a changing job and careers market is a challenge.

### Views on formal careers advice

The survey then went on to ask young people's views about formal job and careers advice as provided at school, college, university and through Connexions. Overall, 27 per cent of respondents skipped this question because they did not use, or had not yet used, the formal services. Taking into account the responses of the 73 per cent that replied to this question, the table below shows where young people obtained their formal careers advice.

Table 1. Location of formal careers advice.

Location/service used	Percentage used
School/careers advice service	57.9%
Community/Connexions service	54%
University/careers guidance	23.1%
College/careers guidance	14.9%
Other	5.8%

Young people were then asked how helpful they found these formal services: 80.2 per cent found them to be 'a little bit' or 'not at all' helpful. Below we present some of the participants' comments:

The advisor was clueless about ideas for me beyond teaching and planning.

There was no real matching of ability and the job market; I had to draw my own conclusions.

The whole system was overly simplified, unrealistic and to be honest a little patronising.

I felt as though I were a bottle in a factory on a manufacturing line, through the careers guidance machine and subsequently given the ill fitting job label of 'news reporter'.

The careers tests are hugely outdated and came up with suggestions I would hate, there was no sort of ambition, they were just run of the mill.

Absolutely useless, very little knowledge of what is out there and even less about practical steps needed to get there.

Schools careers guidance only really help with the everyday jobs like hairdressing, plumber, not jobs like professor of metabolic bone disease, no ambition.

Advisors were good at directing me towards the right resources, but didn't give me any particular ideas of careers based on my interests or aptitudes which is what I was hoping for.

Only helpful if you know EXACTLY what you want to do.

Although they are trying to guide me I prefer to talk to my parents and act from there.

Bordering on deliberately unhelpful, I have a leaflet about administration to show for it.

It provided mild insight but nothing I would not be able to find from other sources.

We were all asked to choose a career from a list, being fairly uninterested in any of them and wanting to be more specific about details for my plans I found it all pointless.

Comments from participants who found formal careers advice 'very helpful', included:

It was quite useful, a lady told me about the careers quiz and a Jobs4U website.

I am quite young and have lots of types of careers in mind, they cut it down to 10 in one genre which was helpful.

My advisor was friendly and extremely helpful, listening to my hopes and career aspirations while advising me on ways to get there.

The key message is that the vast majority of respondents do not find that the formal services offer them what they are looking for. Job and careers opportunities are changing. There are many jobs available in the marketplace that parents and relatives may never have heard of, such as the fast growing area of green technologies. They cannot therefore be expected to understand the knowledge and skills base required to undertake them. So while parents and teachers are the preferred sources of advice for young people, to keep on top of the information about a changing jobs market, they may need help themselves.

#### Significance of location

The minimal difference in levels of perceived helpfulness across settings suggests that the setting in which careers guidance takes place may have very little impact on how it is rated by young people. So shifting the location of services would not be money well spent. However, this small survey at least indicates that more investigation is required about how, when and from whom young people obtain advice, as well as into the implications for public investment and the design of careers advice and guidance.

#### What young people want to do

We asked young people to identify the jobs and careers they want advice about and have aspirations towards achieving success in. Unlike the common stereotypes that young people all want to be celebrities or work in politics or the media, the list overleaf, created from the answers given by the first 200 young people who responded to this survey, provides clear evidence that the aspirations that young people have for their future jobs and careers have depth and range. This means that careers advice and guidance provision needs to be equally broad ranging. The task is challenging.

Table 2. Breakdown of the 19.8% of young people who found formal careers advice 'very helpful' by location.

Location/service used	Full sample (12–26)
School/careers advice service	17.8%
Community/Connexions service	20.6%
University/careers guidance	21.4%
College/careers guidance	24.5%

## Implications for the future

The views of young people may suggest that we should:

- broaden knowledge and understanding of the jobs market among those who influence young people to ensure that they have a thorough and nuanced understanding of the range of opportunities that could fulfil young people's ambitions
- build more self-accessed web-based solutions for informing and guiding young people through the maze of job and career opportunities, including
  - providing resources for young people and their parents to use and explore together
  - avoid spending time and money on relocating any dedicated provision from one setting to another
  - exploit further the role of work-based learning alongside other ways in which private and public sector employers can apply their resources to improve the job and careers landscape, such as making the entries into career paths as transparent and accessible to young people, parents and teachers as possible.

## Jobs/careers suggested by the first 200 young people who answered the survey

The brackets indicate the number who used this specific phrase or word, e.g. 15 young people referred to 'law' alone, and all those titles that follow under the heading of law are the choices of additional young people who specified the part of law they are interested in. Where there are no bracketed numbers, only one person suggested this job or career. Some respondents mentioned several careers, e.g. there was commonly a strong association between doing law and then moving to politics, hence the totals exceed 200.

### Media (2) and performing arts

Music artist promoter; media work; fashion photographer; author (3); journalist (5); foreign affairs journalist; communications; fashion designer; film production; film director; theatre technician (2); camera person; music (2); musician; actor; music with young people; arts administration; TV/film producer; presenter.

### Charity sector (9)

Campaigner (4); working with children (2); sanitation in a developing country.

### Public sector

Community development worker; youth worker (10); librarian; youth offender officer; trade unionist; outreach in museums; curator; HM Forces; interpreter; social work; meteorologist.

### Health sector

Midwifery consultant; hospital worker; psychologist; pathologist; professor of bone disease; doctor (2); medicine (7); child psychiatrist; nurse (3); paramedic (4); clinical psychologist (2); criminal psychologist; paediatrics; trauma surgeon; nursery nurse; neurophysiologist.

### Law (15)

Barrister (8), rights lawyer; corporate lawyer; police force (4); forensic scientist (2); solicitor (3).

### Politics and policy

MP (3); civil servant (6); working for the UN/ international policy (3); community affairs; politician (4); in politics (10); lobbyist; policy officer in think tank; political advisor; policy analyst; diplomat/ambassador (3).

### Commercial sector

Animal care; management consultant; project management; vet (2); engineer; catering; graphic designer (2); body piercer; gym instructor; entrepreneur; advertising; international business; manager in a global company; astrophysicist; architect; environmental science; accountant (3); environmental consultant; plumber; IT and business; business (2); property management; aeronautical engineer; investment banker.

### Technology sector

Computing (2); web designer.

### Teaching sector

Languages teacher; university lecturer; primary teacher (3); teacher (9); English teacher (3); researcher (2); historian/history teacher (2); physicist; teacher of disabled children; art teacher; drama teacher.

### Faith sector

Ordained minister (2).

### Other

Archaeologist.

#### References

- 1 Established by the Employment and Training Act 1948.
- 2 Established by the Employment and Training Act 1973.
- 3 HM Government (2005) *Youth Matters Green Paper*. London: TSO.
- 4 Panel on Fair Access to the Professions (2009) *Unleashing Aspiration: The Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions*. London: Cabinet Office.
- 5 HM Government (2009) *New Opportunities: Fair chances for the future*. London: TSO.
- 6 Panel on Fair Access to the Professions, op. cit. 75.
- 7 Hall L and others (2008) *Connexions Direct User Satisfaction Survey 2008*. London: DCSF.