
CONNEXIONS STAKEHOLDER SURVEY: HEADLINE FINDINGS OF THE QUANTITATIVE SURVEY OF PHASE TWO AND THREE CONNEXIONS PARTNERSHIPS

Introduction

This study forms part of the DfES's strategy for evaluating the Connexions Service. Its aim is to assess stakeholders' expectations, experiences and views of the Connexions Service. This second phase of the research involved surveying 1691 Connexions Partnerships (CXP) Board and Local Management Committee (LMC) members (referred to here as stakeholders), as well as 469 young people's representatives (referred to as 'young people') in 12 Phase 2 CXPs, which went live between April 2002 and June 2002 and 19 Phase 3 CXPs which went live between September 2002 and April 2003. This brief summarises these stakeholders' assessment of the effectiveness of multi-agency working within Connexions Partnerships at a strategic level; the extent of improvements in services delivered to young people; and barriers to and enablers of joint working. Publication of the full report is planned for summer 2004, after some of the issues raised by the survey have been explored via a programme of case studies.

Summary of Key Findings

- The majority of stakeholders (67 per cent) rated the progress of their CXP since it was set up as good. Eighty-five per cent of young people agreed that their CXP's progress towards meeting its aims and goals was good.
- "*Joint working*" was most commonly cited (by 49 per cent of stakeholders) to be one of the main achievements of the CXP. Almost twice as many stakeholders (83 per cent) regarded current joint working between agencies providing service to young people in their areas as effective, compared to those (46 per cent) who considered joint working to be effective prior to the establishment of CXPs.
- The key objectives for Connexions were considered by stakeholders to be working with disaffected young people, particularly those outside education and training, encouraging young people to stay on in education and training, and providing impartial advice and guidance. Young people cited helping young people prepare for their working life as an adult, helping young people with their personal and social lives and encouraging young people to stay on in education and training.
- Stakeholders were divided over whether Connexions had had an impact on their own organization, with 54 per cent reporting at least a fair amount of impact, but 43 per cent reporting negligible impact. The main reason given for this, particularly in Phase 3 CXPs was the short time since CXP set-up.
- The most common developments which stakeholders identified as resulting from Connexions were the opportunity for young people to influence services provided, and the introduction of, or improvement to various aspects of joint working.
- Gaps in services have been identified and the majority of CXPs are responding to these by putting in place additional/targeted funding and staff, as well as increasing joint working and strategic planning.
- Stakeholders and young people both thought that key benefits for young people were improved information and access to advice and support, and the introduction of Personal Advisers (PAs). Adult stakeholders also emphasized the co-ordination of services, while young people mentioned the ease of finding the right information and support.
- Resourcing issues were recognised as problematic by both stakeholders and young people representatives, while young people were far more likely than adult stakeholders to prioritise raising awareness of the service. The main problems of the Connexions Service for young people which were most frequently cited by stakeholders were a lack of staff and insufficient time spent with individuals, a reduction in service to the majority of young people, low awareness of the service and confusion about what different services do. Young people themselves identified lack of awareness of Connexions, accessibility of Connexions offices, lack of resources and lack of trust in the service, and limited opening hours and insufficient time spent with young people by PAs.

Background

A key characteristic of Connexions is multi-agency working. The Stakeholder Survey was therefore designed to assess the extent to which Connexions has brought together organisations responsible for delivering services to young people and improved their effectiveness. Between September and December 2003, Connexions Board and LMC members and young people's representatives were asked about their perceptions of Connexions Partnerships' structure, ways of working, planning and progress. They were also asked about changes in working arrangements, information-sharing between agencies, their relationship with the CXP and other partners, and the involvement of young people and their impact on the development of the Service. Boards are small strategic bodies, usually comprising chairs of LMCs, the chief executive of the local LSC and representatives of the private and voluntary sectors.

LMCs are responsible to the Board for the implementation of the local Connexions Service. They typically comprise representatives of agencies and organisations such as Local Authorities (various interests, including elected members), Social Services, Youth Service, Probation service, Employment Service (ES), Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs), Local Education Authorities (LEAs), head/teacher representatives, Youth Offending Teams (YOTs), Drug Action Teams (DATs), voluntary bodies and employees of the Connexions Service. Young people's representatives were defined as those who had been involved in the design, delivery or evaluation of Connexions services, as well as those young people who were formal members of Connexions Boards, LMCs or Youth Shadow Boards.

Methodology

This survey was carried out, on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills, by MORI. Fieldwork took place in 32 Phase 2 and 3 CXPs between September and December 2003. All CXP Board and LMC members were approached and asked to take part in a telephone survey. The option of completing a postal questionnaire was also offered to stakeholders who did not want to take part in the telephone survey, or for whom telephone numbers were unavailable. In total, data were collected from 1691 stakeholders, representing a valid response rate of 84 per cent. Data were also collected from 479 young people representatives, representing a valid response rate of 59 per cent.

A second phase of research took place in March 2004. In this phase key themes emerging from the quantitative findings were explored in more depth in case studies of six CXPs.

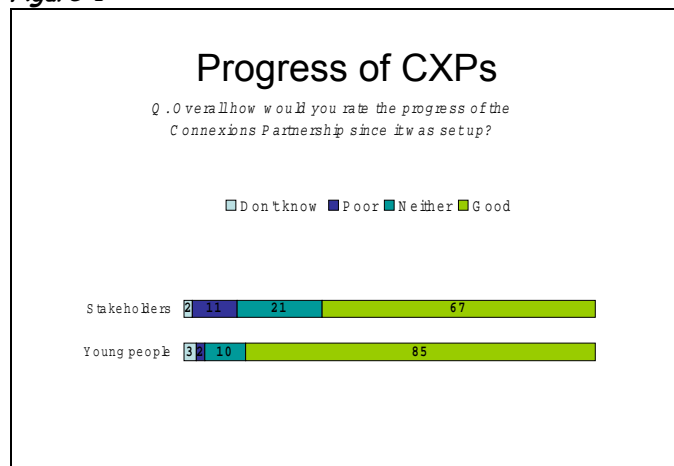
Findings

Perceptions of progress

The majority of stakeholders (67 per cent) rated the progress of their CXP since it was set up as good. Eleven per cent rated it as poor. Eighty-five per cent of young

people agreed that their CXP's progress towards meeting its aims and goals was good, with 2 per cent classing it as poor. (Figure 1).

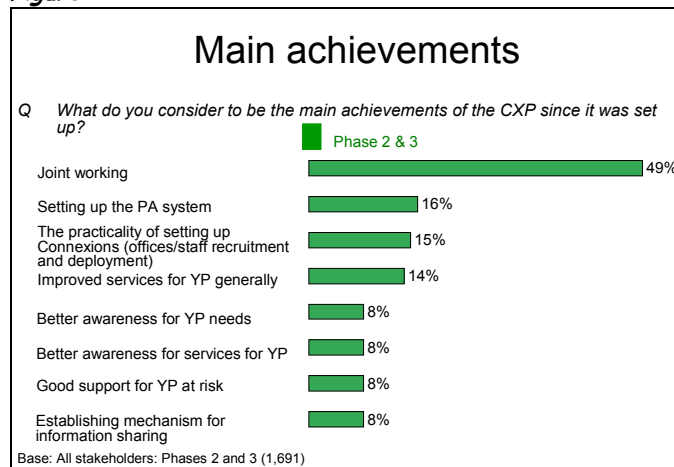
Figure 1



Most stakeholders (89 per cent) believed that the objectives of Connexions fitted with those of their own organisation, with 60 per cent claiming that Connexions was a priority within their organisation. However stakeholders were divided over whether Connexions had had an impact on their own organisation, with 54 per cent reporting at least a fair amount of impact, but 43 per cent reporting negligible impact. The main reason given for this, particularly in Phase 3 CXPs was the short time since CXP set-up.

The main achievement cited by the largest proportion of stakeholders (49 per cent) was joint working. Other reported achievements included the Personal Adviser (PA) system (16 per cent), the practicalities of setting up Connexions (15 per cent), improved awareness of young people's needs (8 per cent) and of services for young people (8 per cent), good support for young people at risk (8 per cent) and the establishment of a mechanism for information-sharing (8 per cent).

Figure 2

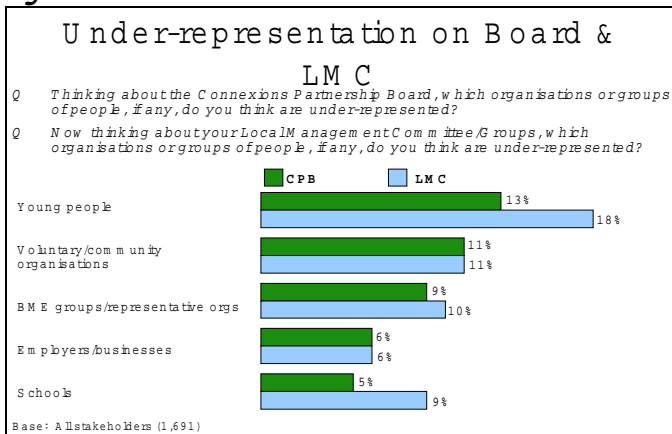


Structure and remit of Boards and LMCs

Of those stakeholders surveyed, 29 per cent were current members of their CXP, and 82 per cent were members of their LMC. Thirteen per cent were members of both. Local authority representatives made up the highest proportion of stakeholders (28 per cent, followed by representatives of voluntary and community organisations (14 per cent), education-related organisations (13 per cent), police, DAT or youth-related organisation (11 per cent), the Connexions Service (8 per cent), Careers companies (7 per cent) and health related organisations (6 per cent).

Stakeholders were asked which groups of people were underrepresented on their Board or LMC. The group most commonly identified was young people, followed by voluntary /community organisations, Black and minority ethnic groups, employers/businesses and schools (Figure 3).

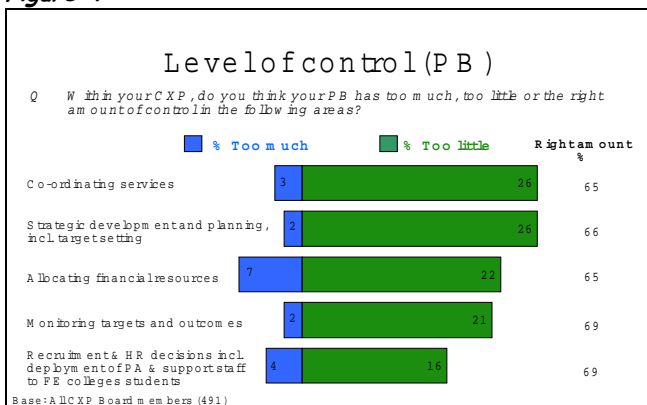
Figure 3



In almost all cases, stakeholders claimed that action was being taken to address the underrepresentation of key groups. For example, 30 per cent of stakeholders said their partnership was talking to young people, 29 per cent that it was developing a young people group or Shadow Board, 24 per cent, that the matter had been raised with the Board, and 5 per cent, that it was working on ways to engage with or involve young people.

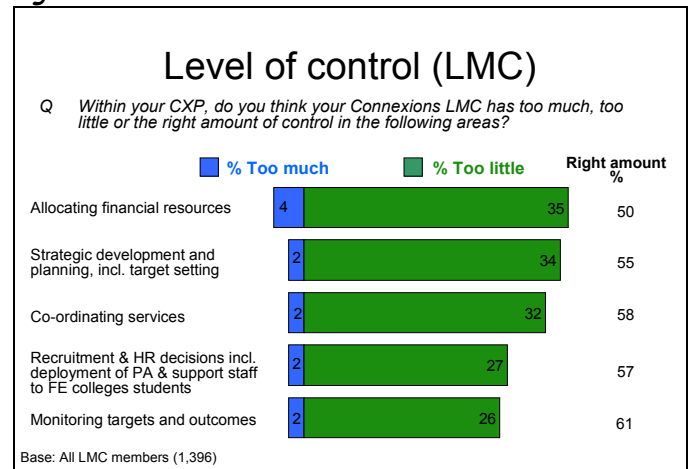
Areas in which Board members were most likely to express a desire for greater Board involvement included co-ordinating services, strategic development and planning, including target setting, allocating financial resources and monitoring targets and outcomes (Figure 4).

Figure 4



LMC members cited as areas where the LMC should have more control: allocating financial resources, strategic development and planning, including target setting, recruitment and human resources decisions, and monitoring targets and outcomes (Figure 5).

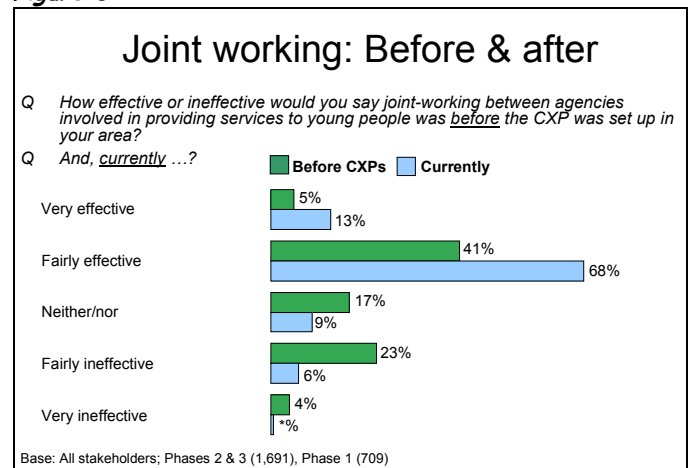
Figure 5



Joint working

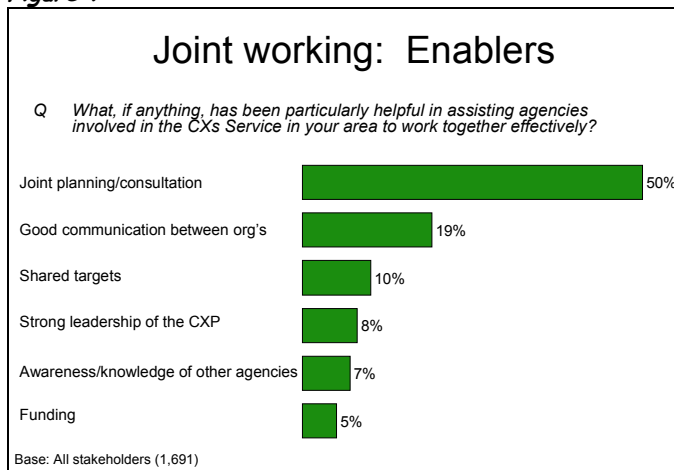
Eighty-two per cent of stakeholders regarded current joint working between agencies providing service to young people in their areas as effective, compared with 46 per cent prior to the establishment of CXPs (Figure 6).

Figure 6



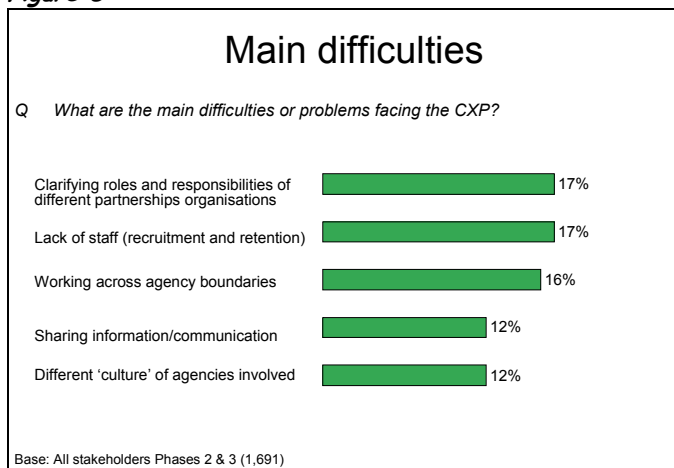
Strategies and practices seen as being particularly helpful in assisting agencies to work together included joint planning and consultation (cited by 50 per cent of stakeholders), good communication between organisations (19 per cent), shared targets (10 per cent), strong leadership of the CXP (8 per cent), awareness and knowledge of other agencies (7 per cent), and funding (5 per cent) (Figure 7).

Figure 7



However the main problems which stakeholders said were facing their CXP seemed to stem from problems in joint working. These difficulties included failure to set out clearly the relative roles and responsibilities of various organisations (17 per cent), lack of staff (17 per cent), difficulties working across agency boundaries (16 per cent), sharing information / communication (12 per cent), and 'different organisational cultures' (12 per cent) (Figure 8).

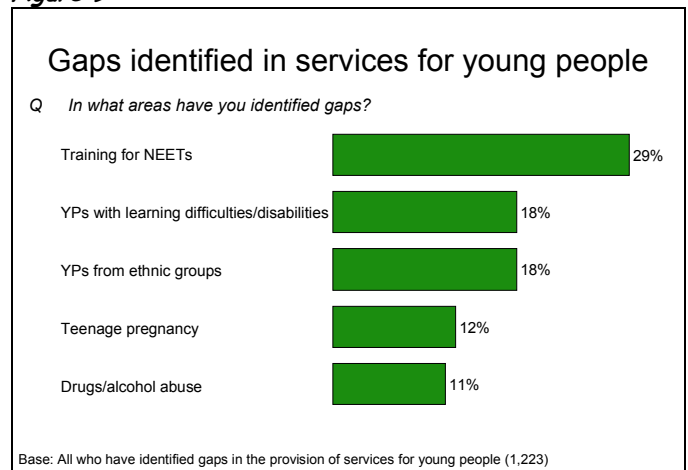
Figure 8



Improvements in services to young people

The Connexions Service was specifically designed to address weaknesses in existing mechanisms for supporting young people. Seventy-two per cent said that their CXP had identified gaps in services for young people. The areas where gaps were most commonly identified were in training for young people not in education, employment and training (NEETs) (29 per cent), services for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities (18 per cent), for young people from minority ethnic groups (18 per cent) (Figure 9).

Figure 9

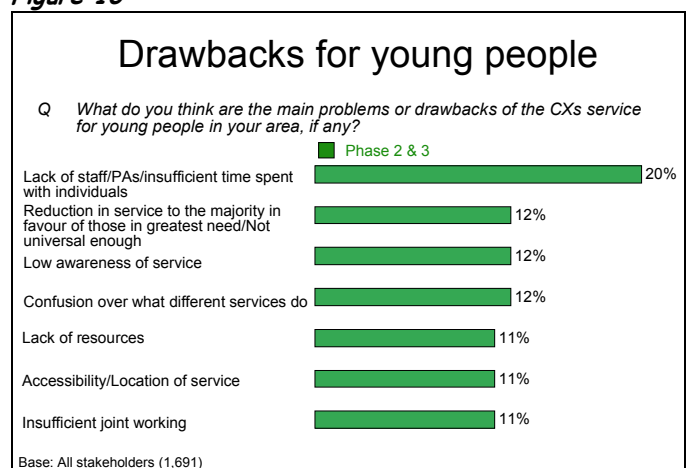


These were being addressed by putting in place services to address the gap (cited by 34 per cent of stakeholders), working with other agencies (31 per cent), seeking additional funding (22 per cent), using information for strategic / business planning (16 per cent), fully investigating the gaps (15 per cent) and increasing staffing levels (15 per cent).

Most young people (73 per cent) did not identify any gaps in the service their CXP was providing. Of the 19 per cent (rising to 27 per cent among Black and minority ethnic groups) who did report gaps, the additional services identified included Careers guidance service (22 per cent), training for NEETs (20 per cent), services to young people with learning difficulties and disabilities (19 per cent), sexual health information and advice (17 per cent), advice and support around sexual abuse (17 per cent), and advice and support for young offenders (17 per cent).

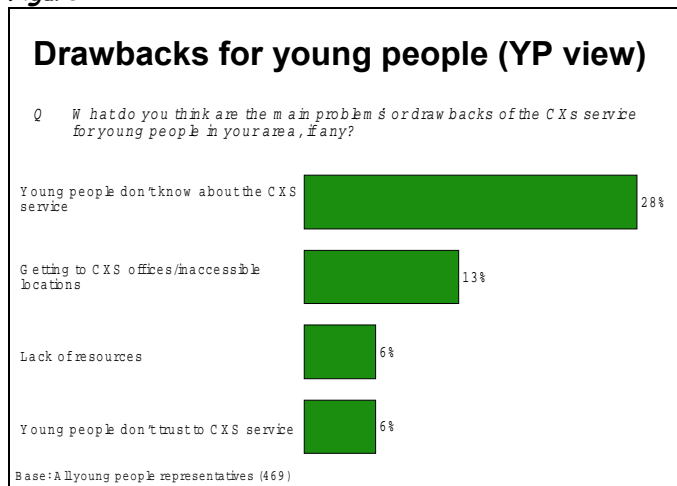
The drawbacks or problems of Connexions for young people, according to stakeholders, were lack of staff/PAs/insufficient time with individuals (20 per cent), a reduction in service to the majority in favour of those most in need (12 per cent), low awareness of the service (12 per cent), confusion over what different services do (12 per cent), lack of resources (11 per cent), accessibility / location of the service (11 per cent), and insufficient joint working (11 per cent) (Figure 10).

Figure 10



Young people representatives ordered these drawbacks somewhat differently, citing lack of awareness of the service (28 per cent) first, followed by getting to / accessibility of Connexions offices (13 per cent), lack of resources (6 per cent) and young people not trusting the Connexions Service (6 per cent) (Figure 11).

Figure 11

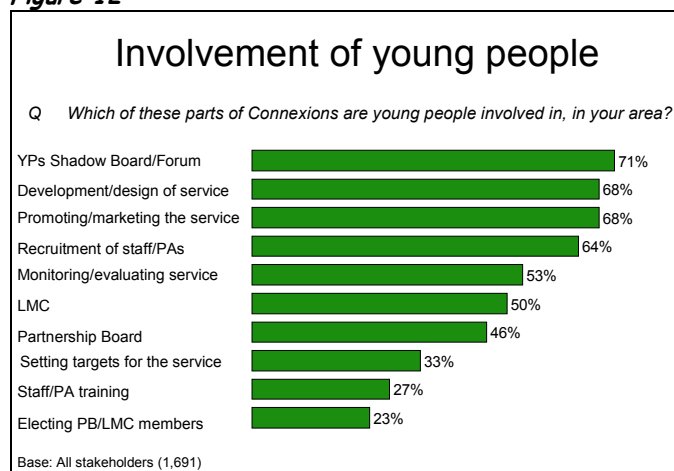


Fifty-six per cent of stakeholders agreed that services for young people with multiple barriers had got better, 30 per cent that they had stayed the same. Only one per cent said they had got worse. As for services for young people in learning or on track, 40 per cent of stakeholders said that these had got better, 35 per cent that they had stayed the same and 5 per cent that they had got worse. Young people were positive about services for both groups. Seventy-seven per cent said that services for young people with serious difficulties were very or fairly effective, with 9 per cent saying they were very or fairly ineffective, and 6 per cent saying neither effective nor ineffective. Eighty-two per cent said that services for young people in learning of 'on track' were very or fairly effective, with 10 per cent saying they were very or fairly ineffective, and 4 per cent saying neither effective nor ineffective.

Young People's Involvement in the Service

Stakeholders cited a wide range of areas in which young people are involved in their CXP. Seventy-one per cent mentioned young people's Shadow Boards/Forums/Parliaments or equivalent; 68 per cent said the development and design of the service; 68 per cent the promotion and marketing of the service; 64 per cent the recruitment of staff; 53 per cent the monitoring and evaluation of the service; and 50 per cent the LMC. Other areas mentioned by stakeholders included the CXP Board (46 per cent); setting targets for the Service (33 per cent); staff/PA training (27 per cent); and electing Board/LMC members (23 per cent). Only one per cent said young people were not involved in any part of Connexions in their Partnership (Figure 12).

Figure 12



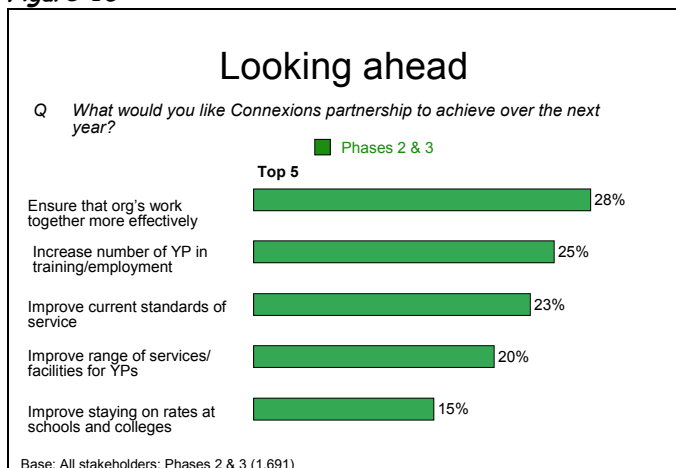
Amongst those stakeholders who said young people were involved in their CXP Board, 87 per cent felt their involvement was useful, with only 7 per cent saying it was not useful. Where young people were involved in the LMC, 89 per cent of stakeholders said it was useful and 6 per cent that it was not. However, only 50 per cent of stakeholders claimed that young people had a great deal or a fair amount of influence on their CXP, while 42 per cent said they had a little influence and 4 per cent said they had none at all. Young people were rather more positive about the impact of their involvement, with 86 per cent saying that their views were taken into account a great deal or a fair amount, any only 12 per cent saying they were taken into account a little or not at all.

Looking to the future

Stakeholders were asked what they hoped would be the main achievements of their CXP over the coming year. The answer most frequently given was to ensure organisations work together more effectively (28 per cent), followed by increase the number of young people in training and employment (25 per cent), improve current standards of service (23 per cent), improve the range of services / facilities for young people (20 per cent) and improve staying on rates at schools and colleges (13 per cent) (Figure 13).

The top five answers given by young people to this question were for the CXP to raise the profile of its services (28 per cent), to provide more services / facilities for young people (22 per cent), to get more input from young people into the design and delivery of the service (16 per cent), to help increase the number of young people in training and employment, and to keep doing what it is doing now (Figure 14).

Figure 13



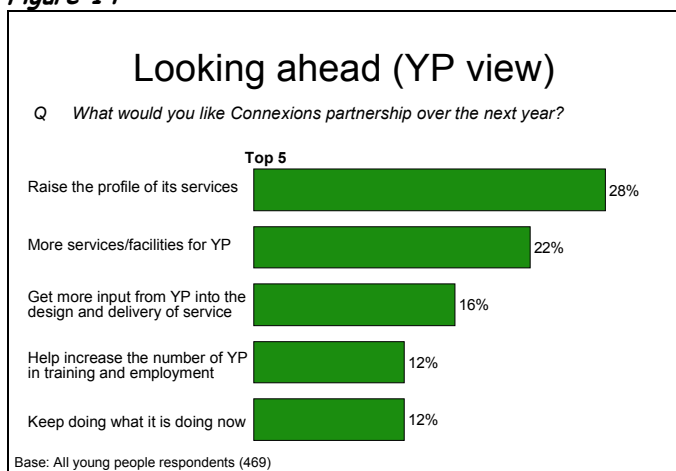
(tel: 0845 60 222 60). Research Briefs and Research Reports can also be accessed at www.dfes.gov.uk/research/

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The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education and Skills

Figure 14



Forthcoming work

The next stage of the research will consist of six case studies of CXPs to explore in more detail some of the issues raised in the survey. Areas for further investigation include: how to achieve good practice in joint-working; issues of recruitment and retention of staff; tension between the Board and LMC; how and to what extent young people's involvement has impacted upon decision-making; resource implications of increased demand for services, following increased awareness of CXS; and how gaps in services are identified and addressed.

Publication Plans

The full report of the survey and case studies is planned for publication in the summer of 2004.

Where the sum of percentages in charts and tables does not equal 100%, this is because of computer rounding or the exclusion of 'don't know' answers.

Additional Information

Copies of this Research Brief (RBX05-04) are available free of charge from DfES Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham, NG15 0DJ