

1. the young learners

'We've got to start paying real attention to these young men and women; and we've got to start doing it while they're still at school. Age 13-19 is too late!'

Things are changing. We're now finding a lot more people with bad experience of being at school: they may have been excluded, they're in families with lots of difficulties, they have low self esteem. And some headteachers are saying "it'll get worse!".'

'When people talk about changing courses it is not always that they are on the wrong course - it can be that there are just too many things getting in the way of their doing well.'

'Realising that young learners are at risk means noticing things: like when they don't show up, or are not adapting to the course, or starting to drop out, or chopping and changing their programme, or that their concentration is going, or starting to be a nuisance, or just not coping, or that there is no sign of achievement - no progress is being made. It means keeping our eyes and ears open.'

'When any of this happens we must be prepared to look around for the causes. They could be in physical health or in psychological well-being. But they often have to do with social circumstances.'

'You can often tell this as "a tale of two cities": the city may be thriving, but there will still be neighbourhoods where absolutely nobody at all goes into HE - or even knows someone who has ever done so.'

'We, in guidance, need new ways of talking about our work. We need a whole new way of understanding what's going on in people's lives. And, as we understand that things are getting more complicated, we need more specialised helpers.'

'For a lot of people it just doesn't feel as though they are making any kind of career choice. It feels more like they are just struggling to find out what they are going to do. But we can work with that starting point. And there is a lot we can do with it.'

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*Young Learners at Risk***

2. new ways of helping

‘Do we really believe that a dose of old-fashioned careers education and guidance is going to wake these students up? Sometimes, it’s not only the students who are bored stiff - it is also their poor tutors.’

‘We will find useful helpers among youth workers, social workers, nurses and voluntary workers - as well as among teachers and careers advisers.’

‘We aim for a programme which helps tutors to think about what their own students need. It is a programme from which they can select the elements that respond to those particular needs.’

‘We go for as many opportunities for informality as possible.’

‘One of the best things about putting youth workers in charge of the programme is that there need be none of the stifling bureaucracy of accountability. You can do a lot without “targets” and “verifiers”, but there’s not much you can do without “fun”!’

‘Please! Let’s not go down the accreditation route!’

‘In this work now, offering what we call “support” has got to mean a whole range of things.’

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3. facing the challenge

‘There are some things that we must face up to in Connexions. Like: the overall distribution of resources is decided at regional level. Ratios for resource allocation - for pre-16, post-16, and so on - are set at the regional office’

‘And we also have to face this: Connexions has become very target-driven. And every regional office needs to know what local provision can do to help it meets its targets.’

‘So, there are all kinds of potential for duplication and overlap - “what-you-are-already-doing” and “what-we-want-to-do” can compete. We need a better basis than this for deciding what to do.’

‘And there are boundary disputes: some people feel threatened while others feel thwarted.’

‘And, sadly, some people seem to have forgotten what was being said at the beginning - about the real need for Connexions. It would be a shame if we now find that all we are doing is somehow trying to “blunderbuss” our way through.’

‘Connexions must enhance existing provision, it must not seek to replace or duplicate it.’

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4. managing networks

‘But we are moving towards a new organisational and cultural ethos.’

‘Every locality needs somebody who knows how to appreciate what is going on in the neighbourhood; and, then, how to coordinate a team response.’

‘All of this means that regional management must learn how to be flexible - in linking what local people know, and what they can do, to the overall framework.’

‘Successful local managing of this work is, as much as anything about finding the right helpers: we need non-defensive and non-competitive people in our local teams.’

‘The whole process needs a lot of maturity - so that people can be openly reflective about what is happening “out there”, and self aware about what they can - and cannot - do to help.’

‘Managing networks of help means respecting professional values, organisational drives and personal priorities. This is the basis for coming together to help.’

‘There is no single blue-print for this.’

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5. learning about each other

'I tried to look up "guidance" on the net. I found a professional site; but you can't get in unless you're a member of the association.'

'Some IAG people are doubtful about us social workers, and others who seek to help young men and women in this way. They fear that we are not qualified.'

'Some people learned what they do now from training they received twenty years ago . They need up-dating: and they need to be able to learn from what is happening now.'

'We don't all need to know how to do "guidance". What we all need is to know who is in the network-of-help, and how to work with each other. That means both feeding information in and getting help out.'

'But how would (say) a college lecturer know whether to refer a student to somebody else, and who to refer them to?'

'Not everybody can do everything, but we all need to know there are people who can help. We each need a complete map of the help available.'

'And IAG people mellow after a while. When they find out that we social workers and youth workers have something to offer - after all!'

I've heard people say that Connexions is doomed. Not true! If we believe in it for what it can do, it will work!'

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