Dearne Valley Learning Opportunities Partnership (DeVeLOP)

Transition Advisers Project

Draft Final Report to Steering Group

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Executive Summary

This evaluation focusses on the initiative of appointing Transition Advisers (TA) for a two-year period to contribute to the improvement of the post-16 participation rate in the Dearne Valley. There were three main tasks:

- evaluation of the role and effectiveness of the TAs appointed
- support for small-scale investigations and report on their potential value to the role of the TA and how they contribute to achieving key targets
- consultancy on how schools and colleges are planning for post-16 transition.

This report focuses on the first of these, but should, ideally, be read in conjunction with the other reports. It draws on data from interviews with TAs, TA line managers, other key stakeholders such as heads of careers in schools and managers in training providers and also uses documentary evidence and structured interviews with young people. A support session was held for TAs and individual support given on-line to help in the preparation of their investigation reports.

These are the main conclusions and recommendations:

- pupil selection into the categories of P1 and P2 varied across the schools and there are differences in selection criteria
- some TAs and schools felt that the size of the cohort supported by TAs could be larger
- the start of the project in April was too late to build relationships with pupils who were going to leave school in June
- whereas some TAs fitted in comfortably into the school working within the careers and guidance area, others felt isolated
- the role of a TA in special schools and a college was less distinctive
- it was difficult for TAs to undertake their training, conduct their investigations, give pupil support in 2 schools (or school and college) and provide monitoring information, all at the same time
- it was sometimes difficult for the TAs to reconcile the demands from several different line managers
- it was generally felt that TAs had made an effective contribution to improving positive destinations for young people
- there is additional robust evidence from the young people interviews that the support of TAs was helpful, and provided additional value to the project group compared with the comparator group:
the project group had more contact with Connexions in general and TAs in particular in school, whereas the comparator group had less involvement overall, and generally received support by visiting an office
- those who received support from TAs could point to specific assistance in decision making and in two cases saw the TAs as having made the biggest impact on their decision-making
- the support received by TA contact after leaving school was useful for at least some of the TA group

- although the evidence is difficult to quantify, the TAs have had an impact from the viewpoint of the young people.

**Recommendations**

Should the TA initiative continue:

- careers staff in collaboration with other staff in schools should further consider appropriate criteria for the selection of P1s and P2s and be confident in their application to ensure that selection procedures work effectively
- consideration should be given to increasing the size of the cohort of P2s that the TAs work with
- the contact of TAs with youngsters should ideally commence in the autumn term and not later than January
- further thought should be given to the role of TAs in special schools and colleges
- further consideration should be given to establishing a well matched control group or comparator group to investigate the impact of TAs on progression to positive post-16 outcomes
- there should be clearer lines of responsibility in the line management of TAs
- consideration should be given to alternative sustainable models for the deployment of TAs
1. Introduction

In 2002, the Dearne Valley Learning Opportunities Partnership (DeVeLOP) commissioned research which found that for school leavers in 2002 in the Dearne Valley (totalling over 1400), 11% were unemployed immediately after leaving school, and a further 8% became unemployed after leaving their first destination in the following months, particularly if they undertook work-based learning or employment without training. As a result, DeVeLOP sought to fund a new role - the Transition Adviser (TA) - to try to reduce this level of dropout.

Six Transition Advisers were appointed in April 2004 for a two year period. They were employed and managed by Lifetime Careers, with responsibility also to DeVeLOP, Connexions South Yorkshire and the schools within which they work. Five of the six appointees held or were working towards an NVQ 3 in Advice and Guidance. The funding for these posts came from the LSC and Rotherham, Barnsley and Doncaster LEAs through Area Post-Inspection Action Plans. Two TAs have since resigned for another post.

Each TA works across two institutions:

- Rawmarsh and Swinton Schools
- Milton and Athelstane Schools
- Mexborough and Northcliffe Schools
- Pope Pius and Wath Schools
- Dearne Valley College and Dearne High School
- Wombwell and Foulstone Schools

TAs work with a group of around 10-15 Year 11 students who are either unclear about their post-16 destination or have a plan, but the destination is causing concern. Specifically, the young people are identified as being in Connexions Priority Group 2 (P2)\(^1\) at the beginning of the programme.

The specific remit of the TAs is to increase post-16 participation rates by

- supporting identified Y11 pupils from April onwards to identify and secure their preferred post-16 option, with ongoing support until the following February in order to ensure retention or to help the young person move to an alternative option
- working with a small group of post-16 level 1/2 students to enable effective progression to level 2/3 programmes.

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\(^1\) Young people at risk of facing multiple and profound problems, who require intensive support from Connexions, are identified as being in Priority Group 1, or P1. Young people with fewer or less acute problems, who are nevertheless at risk, are considered as being in Priority Group 2, or P2 (Hogarth and Smith, 2004: 22)
Key targets include:

- reduction in numbers not in education, employment or training (NEET)
- improved retention in post-16 education, employment or training
- improved progression to level 2/3 courses by 17 year olds.

The evaluation had three tasks which were as follows:

**Task 1**

Evaluation of the role of the TA and the effectiveness of TAs in contributing to the achievement of the above targets. Specifically:

- to report on the how TA roles have been developed and established in the first year of the project
- to recommend ways of monitoring and evaluating the impact of TA roles for the second year of the project.

**Task 2**

Support for small scale research exercises given to TAs. The outcomes of this would be:

- support materials for TAs and mentors useful to support action research tasks and also to raise awareness of wider perspectives of transition and support roles with this age range
- a report on the quality of action research reports produced and their potential usefulness to the role of the TA, currently and in the future and how they contribute to the key targets of the DeVeLOP project.

**Task 3**

Consultancy about how schools and colleges are planning for the post-16 transition and how induction in colleges is delivered, leading to recommendations about future strategies. The outcomes from task 3 are:

- A report identifying good and less good practice in preparation for transition at post-16 and induction into post-16 training, employment or education.
- Recommendations for improving transition preparation and induction for the target group of students.

Tasks 2 and 3 are reported in separate documents (available from the authors or from DeVeLOP). This report is concerned only with Task 1, but the three reports should, ideally, be read together since they each contribute to the study.
2. Methodology

Three main methods of data gathering were used:

1. Semi-structured face to face interviews with stakeholders

These included interviews with transition advisers themselves, TA line managers and, where possible, careers teachers. In addition there were interviews with key stakeholders (representatives of DeVeLOP, Connexions, the LSC and Lifetime Careers). Over 20 such interviews took place.

2. Documentary evidence

Destinations data for both the young people supported by a TA and a comparator group, consisting of all school leavers in Rotherham, Barnsley and Doncaster in the P2 category in November 2004, were provided by Lifetime Careers. In addition, TA reports and school documentation were gathered.

The qualitative interview data were used primarily to examine the role of the TA and the understanding of it from the perspectives of the key players involved. Ideally, young people would have been interviewed, but project timing (most of the fieldwork took place after young people had left school) meant this was not possible. These data were used primarily to examine the role of the TA presented in the findings section below.

3. Young people interviews

A series of telephone interviews were conducted with TA-supported young people (called, in this section of the report, the project group) and a matched comparator group. The young people left school in summer 2005. The comparator group was matched on gender, school and Connexions categorisation (i.e. they were in the P2 group), and then randomly selected. 20 in each group were selected. This randomness means that our findings are quite robust.

By the beginning of November, SHU CER were in a position to undertake the interviews. They were able to interview 31 young people (17 from the comparator group and 14 from the project group).

Appendix 1 contains a list of data sources consulted for this report, and Appendix 2 contains a copy of the young persons’ interview schedule.
3. Key Findings

In this section, findings are presented thematically, rather than separately for each stakeholder group. But where differences emerge between different groups they are presented separately within each subsection. Key recommendations are given here, linked to each subsection.

Pupil selection

This varied across schools. In the cases where it seems to have worked well (i.e. appropriate pupils were identified from the start), staff involved in selection were aware of and supported the emphasis on P2 students and were clear about how to define 'P2s'. Pupil selection tended to be effective when careers teachers and/or personal advisers were generally involved in the selection process.

In some cases, P1 students were selected, which took up a large part of the TAs' time. These pupils were generally seen to have enough additional support in any case:

"there is no real need to extend it to P1s who get a smoother transition through developing a relationship with a PA" (stakeholder representative)

In some cases a group of key people were involved in selection, in others a single individual with support from others made the selection. Selection could be a problem with the variety of options for support for young people; for example, one school manager said "there are lots of agencies overlapping". Some systems provided clear mechanisms that worked well. One example is the pupil referral group at Wombwell, where a group of managers at the school handled all pupil referrals in the school. This provided an effective mechanism to deal with multiple needs for referral. In several cases, a 'filtering' process proved effective, with a larger group working with the TA to begin with. The group was progressively whittled down by the TA as those in most need were singled out and supported as required, or passed on to the Personal Adviser if appropriate.

By the time the second cohort was in place, all schools were reported to have established procedures to ensure that appropriate pupils were selected.

There was an issue throughout the first year regarding the size of the cohort. In most schools, TAs supported around 12 young people. Some schools and TAs, felt they could have supported more young people, possibly twice as many, particularly if the selection criteria were properly applied (P1s took a lot of time, compared with P2s). TA managers resisted the change in cohort size to ensure a high level of support. However other stakeholder representatives pointed out that the intense level of support was not sustainable in the longer term.

Recommendation: careers staff in collaboration with other staff in schools should further consider appropriate criteria for selection of P1s and P2s and be confident in their application to ensure that selection procedures work effectively.
Recommendation: consideration should be given to increasing the size of the cohort of P2s that the TAs work with.

**Timing**

It was widely agreed that the timing of the beginning of the project, in April, was too late to enable the best start to be made, particularly in terms of building relationships with pupils who were about to leave school. This meant the first few weeks were very difficult. Comments supporting this were made by TAs, teachers and the college manager. An earlier start, perhaps even in Year 10, was put forward by some interviewees. However, this would have implications for how the programme would run and for TA workload, since TAs would need to work with two or three cohorts at the same time.

The end point of the programme, at a mid-point in the support work for the final cohort, was also brought up by some respondents as a problem. However, as noted by one stakeholder representative, the project needs an end point somewhere, and since most TAs had some overlap between cohorts, support would have to be curtailed. It is just finding the best point that is difficult.

**Recommendation: the contact of TAs with youngsters should ideally commence in the autumn term and not later than January.**

**Role of the Transition Adviser**

The TA role in Year 11 did not differ significantly in terms of tasks undertaken from that of Connexions Personal Advisers, with the key difference being that TAs have much smaller cohorts. However they undertook a wide range of different tasks once young people had left school. It is possible to distinguish the following aspects of the role. The *Task focus* included the following, outlined in Table 1 below:

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...
Table 1: Support undertaken by Transition Advisers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time of support</th>
<th>Type of support</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>During Y11</strong></td>
<td>Supporting careers education</td>
<td>Interview practice, assistance with writing CVs, completing application forms. In some cases, TAs supported work experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Linking with providers</td>
<td>TAs took young people on visits to colleges and training providers, including open days and taster sessions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One to one support</td>
<td>Discussions with young people about their future career plans, personal issues, supporting them in choice making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Home visits</td>
<td>Working with young people and their parents to provide information on options and to discuss these, to provide personal support where necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Post-Year 11</strong></td>
<td>Summer activities</td>
<td>Residential involving working on work-related skills, discussing first day at college fears, career plans, different styles of learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Follow-up contacts</td>
<td>Weekly phone calls, home visits as above where necessary to support young people where necessary (e.g. if young people want to change course or have already dropped out)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ad hoc contacts</td>
<td>TAs gave young people a mobile phone number to make contact if necessary to support them if necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support in post-16 destination</td>
<td>Advocacy (e.g. getting access to Education Maintenance Allowances), information on course switching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support to prevent specific course drop out</td>
<td>Particular to the TA working in college</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These activities tended to be more reactive in Year 11, depending on young people being present in school for initial meetings, at least in the early stages (for obvious reasons: relationships need to be built up before TAs were able to confidently arrange to meet in young people’s homes). In contrast, once relationships had been established, and certainly after the end of Year 11, contacts were generally proactive on the part of TAs, who instigated meetings and conversations. To be able to complete these activities successfully, Transition Advisers needed specific skills and knowledge. The most common attribute necessary, was the ability to build relationships, mentioned by the majority of interviewees. The key relationships were of course with young people, but TAs also had to work with parents and school staff and their other managers (see below). An ability to counsel young people and provide pastoral support was seen.
by interviewees to be important. They also needed knowledge of careers opportunities in the local area. This group of TAs all came from careers-related backgrounds, many of them having worked with young people in a counselling or guidance role. They studied for a Personal Adviser qualification as part of their role.

Despite the varying settings, TAs working in mainstream schools found that their roles did not differ across the schools significantly, although the role did differ in college. In the best cases, TAs were able to fit in with school systems and felt welcomed by informed staff. This often (although not exclusively) meant working within the careers and guidance area, often closely with PAs. But sometimes, TAs felt isolated and did not fit in clearly with school structures, or were in a school where school staff were not clear about who they were and what their role was, particularly at the start of the programme.

Within the Special Schools and the College, the role did not work in the same distinctive way. In the College, there was a very small cohort and the TA role was not as clearly defined as in the secondary schools. This was due, at least in part, to the very different nature of post-16 learning environments. There is also the problem of being in a large institution: the TA role was not advertised widely in college, for fear of the TA being "swamped" with referrals. The College Manager was still grappling with this issue at the time of our interview. Finally, the distinctiveness of the TA role - supporting young people from Year 11 through the transition into post-16 destinations - did not apply in a college context.

"... It is different to other roles because of the college and but also as the school is recognised as being challenging ... the TA working with the special schools was also seen as a different and challenging role." (Transition Adviser)

In the Special Schools, the environment again meant that the role of TA was less distinctive than in the secondary schools as they did not target P2 pupils specifically, and in fact worked with all Y11 pupils, providing more intensive support for some. This did not mean that the work of the TA was unnecessary; there is evidence that guidance work with young people with special educational needs is particularly important (Grove and Giraud-Saunders, 2003). However, the specific support of the TA was not clearly distinct from that of the Personal Advisers working in these schools.

Recommendation: further thought should be given to the role of TAs in special schools and colleges.

**TA management**

TAs felt that having a number of managers - within Lifetime, Connexions, DeVeLOP and the schools - made their roles more difficult to negotiate. In particular, the varying tasks required of them: undertaking a research project, PA diploma training, pupil support in schools, providing detailed monitoring information, meant that their time was squeezed.
"There are conflicting priorities for different managers - transition managers, careers coordinators, school management roles, college management roles". (Transition Adviser)

School managers and careers advisers in almost every case stated that they would like the TAs to have more time in school, and in some cases felt that without this happening the impact of the TA could only be marginal. Schools also felt that they would like more control of the TA's time, and had in some cases discussed how this could be managed in the future, for example by creating a TA-type role in-house or across clusters.

... "TAs should spend more time with youngsters before leaving school - if this is well done they can spend less time with them after leaving school...". (School Careers Coordinator)

...."At present the schools decide what is done and how a TA works ...it would be better if they were line managed by the school."...(Transition Adviser)

However, there was some concern about bringing TAs into the total control of schools due to differing priorities, as explained by one stakeholder representative:

"There could be a simplification of arrangements, for example give it to one organisation to oversee ... the alternative for schools to take the lead is not the best option .... there is a need for impartial advice post-16 and a tension between progression target, school needs and the outcomes for young people" (Stakeholder representative)

This issue was illustrated by some instances of problems related to conflicting requirements of the group managing TAs. For example, some TAs had difficulty getting pupils out of school lessons due to school issues:

"At [school] there is an issue - they had bad GCSE results last year, so it is difficult to get them out [of lessons] to do tasters" (Transition Adviser)

Recommendation: there should be clearer lines of responsibility in the line management of TAs.

Young person interviews

This section contains a thematic analysis of the structured interviews with young people.

Profile of the interviewees and initial destinations

As noted above, there were 17 in the comparator group, and 14 in the project group. The gender distribution was broadly similar, as can be seen in Table 2:
Table 2: Gender distribution of the sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Comparator</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, Table 3 shows that there are more differences according to their destinations profiles. The numbers in unemployment was higher for the comparator group, and the kind of positive destinations differed in one regard as well: the comparator group was much more likely to be doing A Levels compared with the project group. Other than this, the destinations were broadly similar.

Table 3: Broadly categorised destinations of the sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Comparator</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unavailable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment – full time</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment – part-time</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education &amp; Training – Modern apprenticeship</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education &amp; Training – ‘A’ Levels</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education &amp; Training – College (not ‘A’ Levels)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When we examine the destinations in more detail, we see a broad range of choices.

For the **project group**, destinations included:
- 8 on college courses (including Beauty Therapy, Basic Skills, Child Care, Art and Design & Public Services)
- 1 doing ‘A’ Levels
- 2 in full-time employment (a fibre glass laminator and a shop assistant)
- 1 doing a modern apprenticeship (electrician)
- 1 unemployed
- One respondent was unavailable as she had just had a baby.

For the **comparator group** destinations included:
- 6 on college courses (including Motor Vehicle, Beauty Therapy, Joinery & Administration)
- 4 doing ‘A’ Levels
- 2 in full-time employment (shop assistant & railway line trackman) and one part-time shop assistant
- 1 doing a modern apprenticeship (hairdressing)
- 3 unemployed.

For those who were unemployed in the **comparator group**, one had not had any help to find work, another was looking for work with the support of Connexions and the third had just had an interview for a job and was waiting to hear whether or not he had been appointed.
Only one was unemployed in the project group. She wanted to get back into college (she had previously dropped out of a college course) and was being supported by a Personal Assistant at Connexions.

Only two respondents in employment, education or training reported not feeling settled in what they were doing, both of whom were in the comparator group. One was working part-time and was looking for full-time work. She had had interviews for dental nursing, receptionist and other store work but had not been successful. The other was on a Beauty Therapy course, and whilst she said she would finish the course, she said she would rather be working in a salon.

**Influences on choice-making: general**

Regarding influences on their choice of post-16 destination, young people were first asked a series of general questions about whether they had received any particular help and then given prompts regarding whether, for example, teachers, family or friends had helped. Connexions was not mentioned at this point, to enable us to see if young people would bring this up without prompting. We have divided this section into three sub-categories.

**a) How did you decide to do what you are doing now?**

Young people differed in their responses here, as can be seen in Table 4.

**Table 4: Responses to: 'How did you decide to do what you are doing now?'**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Own decision / had an interest in the subject/area</th>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Comparator</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The destination would provide a springboard on to something else</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of friend, family member or school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of Connexions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needed a job</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable (unemployed or unavailable)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Around a third of young people in each group said the decision to do what they were doing now was their own. Most said they chose the destination because they had an interest in the subject. Some had always liked the subject at school; one respondent in the comparator group said she chose Beauty Therapy because she wanted to do something different; in the project group one said he made the decision after reading a college prospectus (although he mentioned the role of Connexions Advisers in response to the next question/probe).

Four respondents in the comparator group and one in the project group chose their destinations because they would provide a springboard to something else. The respondent in the project group wanted to join the police service and chose to do a Public Services diploma as a good way into it. Another respondent chose to do ‘A’ Levels, as the fire service (which he wanted to join), do not recruit people until they are 18.
A total of five respondents said they were influenced in their decision by other people, often a family member. For example, the respondent in the comparator group who was doing a modern apprenticeship (electrician) said his uncle was an electrician and a respondent doing joinery said his granddad had been a joiner. Another respondent studying Basic Skills at college said she had been advised by teachers at school to do this course.

Three respondents in the project group mentioned the importance of Connexions Advisers in supporting them to make their decisions.

b) Who was the biggest influence on your decision?

Table 5: Responses to: 'Who was the biggest influence on your decision?'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Comparator</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No-one – own decision</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family members</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher(s)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connexions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking at Table 5 in more detail, four respondents in each group felt that no-one influenced their decision. In the comparator group, family members (usually parents, but also an uncle, granddad and sister) were more influential. Teachers at school and friends were an influence for a small number of respondents. However, the support offered by Connexions was mentioned by four in the project group (compared to none in the comparator group).

c) Would you be in your current destination without the help you received?

Table 6: Responses to: 'Would you be in your current destination without the help you received'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Comparator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the project group, four respondents said they would not be in their current destinations had it not been for the support they received. For three of the four respondents, the help they received was from Connexions (two of these could be identified as Transition Advisers), and specifically included talking through available options and showing them around colleges. The fourth respondent received support from his uncle who was an electrician.
In the comparator group, five respondents said they would not be in their current destinations had it not been for the support they received. For four of these, family members had been the main influence on their decision and one said a friend of the family had been the main influence. Two of the five also mentioned that Connexions Advisers had been influential.

The specific influence of Connexions on choice-making

After the questions on general issues around support for choice-making, interviewees were then asked if they had any specific help from anyone from Connexions, such as a Personal Adviser. The project group were asked, in addition, whether they had any specific help from a Transition Adviser.

Responses can be categorised in general terms as follows in Table 7:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>project</th>
<th>comparator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not sure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is a marked difference between the two groups here, with the project group much more likely to have has some assistance from Connexions. As noted in Table 8, this assistance was clearly from a TA in four cases, but the term TA was not recognised by two of the four. It was likely, but not clear, that the Connexions involvement was with a TA in five cases, and it was definitely not a TA in two cases (one involved a PA in the Connexions office in Rotherham, the other was a PA based in Dearne Valley College).

Table 8: Involvement with Transition Advisers: project group only

| Help from a TA, known to be a TA | 2 |
| Help from a TA, term TA not known | 2 |
| Connexions, help unclear if TA | 5 |
| Connexions not TA | 2 |

If we look at the range of support received we see the following:

For the project group, the range of support was wide, as can be seen in Table 9 (numbers add up to more than 11, since some young people received support in more than one category).
Table 9: Support provided by Connexions to project group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>literature/leaflets</th>
<th>helped get a job/on a course</th>
<th>form filling</th>
<th>general careers advice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In college</td>
<td>general careers advice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over the summer</td>
<td>general careers advice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In careers office</td>
<td>general careers advice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In one case, support was from a combination of a TA and PA in school - both were consulted and seen to be helpful. Three of the project group young people said that the advice they had received had actually changed their career or had a major impact. Two of these mentioned TA involvement - one said "I would have gone straight into work but she [TA] got me on to the college course". Another said that the TA had helped him out when he dropped out of a college bricklaying course - "She helped me fill in forms and send them in, and in the next few days I got an interview" - the TA was credited as the biggest influence on this young person. The third person had had support from a PA in college, after being referred by a teacher at school.

For the comparator group, five of the six who mentioned Connexions as an influence discussed help in the local Connexions office or involvement since leaving school, including just generally "going into the office", going to get "help on a course" or "filling in forms". One young person in this group was particularly positive about her experience, noting that when she went to the Connexions office they "gave her ideas what to do and where to go and how to apply". This helped her to get a place at college. Only one member of the comparator group remembered getting any useful support from Connexions at school - "at the end of school they were helpful for a while".

Nine of the comparator group had had some contact from Connexions (mainly phone calls, 2 by letter, 1 by email), compared with seven of the project group. However, the contact for the comparator group was mainly purely informative, whereas at least two of the project group could discuss deeper, supportive contact: "I still keep in touch with [TA], to see if I have any family troubles. She talks to me about my problems", "[TA] stayed in touch for a few months. She looked at my assignments to check that I was doing all right. then she sent me a text message to say she wouldn't see me any more because I was doing OK".

Discussion

These interviews indicate that the project group young people received a wider range of positive support, from TAs in and out of school, PAs in school, PAs at college and at the careers office and, in some cases, combinations of Connexions workers. There is some evidence of appropriate referrals, specifically one young person who was referred by the police to a PA who then received appropriate support, and another referred by a teacher to a college PA. There was some involvement of both TA and PA with one young person, and this may have been the case for others.
In many cases young people could not distinguish PAs from TAs, and sometimes did not realise careers advice was provided by Connexions. This may not matter, particularly in the case of TAs, if they can distinguish at least that this help was useful.

We do have some evidence that the support of TAs was helpful, and provided additional value to the project group compared with the comparator group. First, the project group overall had more contact with Connexions in general and TAs in particular in school, whereas the comparator group had less involvement overall, and generally received support by visiting an office. Those who received support from TAs could point to specific assistance in decision-making and in two cases saw the TAs as having made the biggest impact on their decision-making. The support received by TA contact after leaving school was useful for at least some of the TA group.

Therefore, we conclude, that although the evidence is difficult to quantify, the TAs have had an impact from the viewpoint of the young people.

Quantitative measures of Impact

The distinctiveness of the role described in the preceding sections - being able to provide broad support for a small group, working across the transition, supporting P2s, providing a careers focus, rather than a wider mentoring role - was widely supported by staff in schools, and the chief complaint was not having enough time in school, which can be seen as a compliment to the work of the TAs. Managers and Careers Advisers were supportive of the individual contributions of TAs, who were felt to work hard and effectively, and had made a clear contribution to improving positive destinations for young people.

"The TA was seen to have a specialised role within the school....the personal contact with the young people led to positive extended relationships which were crucial for the students ....they put their trust in her...." (School deputy head)

"the children at our school have lots of problems - parental support, peer group relationships - the TAs have been very effective as they have a flexible approach .. it is without doubt value for money." (School deputy head)

The qualitative data, then, shows us that the TAs felt valued and were in fact valued by the schools and other partners involved in the project, and it was reported that young people felt the same.

Quantitative analysis of available data was undertaken, and this enabled us to see if this view could be borne out from the actual destinations achieved. Two methods of quantitative analysis were used.

First, the destinations of the group of young people supported by the TAs were compared with the wider group of all young people in Rotherham, Barnsley and Doncaster in the P2 category as of November 2004 who left school in summer 2004. There were 129 young people in the TA group, 73 (57%) males and 56
(43%) females. The wider P2 group consisted of 564 young people, excluding the TA group, of whom 281 were males and 283 females (50% in each group). The difference in gender balance between the TA group and the wider P2 group, although quite large, was not statistically significant\(^2\). The TA group and this wider P2 group were tracked in two further time periods, February 2005 and September 2005. The destinations data were analysed\(^3\) at each time period.

However, as the analysis was undertaken problems with the comparison became clear. In November 2004, at the first point of data collection, there was a statistically significant\(^4\) difference between the TA group and the wider P2 group for females only. The differences are represented graphically in Chart 1\(^5\).

![Chart 1: Differences in destinations at November 2004 (percentages - females only)](chart1.png)

Females in the TA group are more likely than other P2 young females in the area to be in employment or training, or be unemployed, whereas the wider P2 group is more likely to remain at school or be in FE. It should be noted, however, that although there were more unemployed females in the wider P2 group, overall they were no less likely to be in a positive destination overall; it is just that overall destination profiles differed. In contrast, the differences between the male groups at this point were not statistically significant, although the profiles looked different again. The males for the project group were more likely than the wider P2 group to be in FE or training, whereas the wider P2 group were more likely than the project group to have remained at school, be in employment or be unemployed (Chart 2).

\(^2\) Using the chi-squared test for independence, the difference was not significant at the 5% level ($\chi^2=1.92$, $p=0.165$).
\(^3\) The Mann-Whitney test for comparison of non-parametric independent samples was used. A significance level of 5% is used, and where significance is at or below 10% it is reported as worthy of further investigation. In each case, the value of the test statistic ($U$) and the $p$-value ($p$) are reported in a footnote.
\(^4\) $U=6037$, $p=0.003$
\(^5\) RAS stands for 'remaining at school' in Charts 1 and 2
These differences in profiles indicate a possible mismatch between the two groups, which might be expected since, as was noted earlier, the TA group included some young people in the P1 category who are more likely to be in employment, training or be unemployed. In social research, using a matched wider P2 group has possible internal validity problems, specifically group threats (Field and Hole, 2003: 58) since there could be reasons other than the involvement of the TA that explain any difference in outcome. In this case, the match may not have been close enough to allow useful comparisons to be made. In addition, the group size for the TA cohort was relatively small. For these reasons, this particular analysis of impact must be treated with extreme care and should be seen as an investigatory enquiry that would need further exploration. Further results for the next two time periods showed similar differences in destinations profile. The full results are available in an annex to this report, available from DeVeLOP if required.

These analyses, then, do not provide evidence for the impact of the TA work on destinations. This may be partly related, as noted earlier, to the fact that P1 young people were included in the TA group, which could have skewed the data, accounting for the differences in destinations at the first time point. It also points to the need for further comparison, if possible, using Year 2 data, when the make-up of the groups did not include P1 young people.

Another analysis was conducted to compare outcomes for the TA groups with the schools they were in as a whole. One might expect that the TA group without intervention would have poorer destinations than the school group as a whole, since they were chosen because they were at risk of dropping out of education or training.

For most schools, the TA group had positive destinations at a similar or higher level when compared with the school data overall (the exception being Mexborough, where there was a large amount of missing data). We found that the average percentages of students in positive destinations for the school and the TA groups were virtually identical. The average percentage of TA students in positive destinations was 89.9%, compared with 89.5% of the wider student population in these schools. If we leave out Mexborough, because of missing data, we find that
the TA group average moves up to 91.5% and the overall student percentage moves down slightly to 89.1%. This analysis indicates that the TA group had at least as high a proportion of its members in positive destinations as the schools as a whole, but the difference is slight.

This analysis, then, does not provide robust evidence that the TA group had significantly better destinations than the school group as a whole. However, it does give some credence to the view that the TA group had better destinations than might be expected.

We stated earlier that the overall view of the TA project is that it has been worthwhile for young people, and is valued. However, for some individual young people, the programme was more successful. By analysing the qualitative data, we were able to establish factors that were linked to this success, which are worthy of further investigation:

1. **Appropriate selection.** As described above, if schools were unsure about how to distinguish P1 from P2 youngsters then the young people in most need were sometimes selected. They took up a large part of the TAs' time.

2. **Attendance.** Young people with attendance problems were less likely to benefit. When TAs were asked to identify failures, several pointed to young people who were simply not around at school. Of course, this raises the issue of what support is provided for these young people.

3. **Quality of relationships.** TAs found that in the short timescale they had to build relationships in the first year: they were employed in April in 2004, giving them in some cases just a few weeks to form relationships. Sometimes these relationships were not strong enough to make a lasting impression.

4. **Integration of TAs into school systems.** Where TAs were given adequate induction into schools, where other school staff were well-briefed about their role and where they were located clearly within school structures (e.g. in the careers department) TAs were able to settle more quickly into their roles and provide support more quickly and effectively. By the end of the first year, all TAs had been integrated in this way in schools, but this process took much longer in some settings than in others.

**Recommendation:** further consideration should be given to establishing a well matched control group or comparator group to investigate the impact of TAs on progression to positive post-16 outcomes

### 4. Planning for the Future: Models for consideration

Based on the findings presented in the sections above, the evaluation team present 5 models for consideration for the future of the project, and for further development within the boroughs in the Dearne Valley and beyond. These models are presented separately for convenience and to aid debate within the Steering Group; it is not necessarily the case that they are mutually exclusive.
Recommendation: consideration should be given to alternative sustainable models for the deployment of TAs.

Model 1a: Continuation of the current model

The TA role is continued within the Dearne Valley schools as at present.

Advantages

- The positive features of the model are continued
- Since teething problems have mainly been overcome, the role is now better understood
- Current structures are in place, so there is no need for changes in organisation; continuity is assured

Disadvantages

- The limitations of the current model are not dealt with
- Funding needs to be sought and found; this is a risky strategy, and reduces the security of the TA role, with implications for retention of TAs
- This model assumes the continued commitment of current partners, which may not be forthcoming
- The current model is costly, and therefore extension at some future point remains unlikely.

Model 1b: Continuation of a modified version of the current model

The TA role continues after consideration of changes to make the role more sustainable. This might include: working less intensively with a wider group of P2s; sharing the cost with schools (with the necessary requirement that schools have more control of the work of TAs); developing the role of TA in secondary schools specifically and rethinking the involvement of special schools and the college. This last point might involve, for example, providing less intensive TA support in the special schools or supporting the special schools in developing other support staff already in place to help P2 youngsters, and for the college developing the role of TAs in supporting young people in the college but not having a specifically assigned TA.

Advantages

- The positive features of the model are continued
- The role could be re-designed - in some or all of the ways outlined above, or in other ways - to overcome some of the limitations noted in the findings section
- As with Model 1a, current structures are in place, so there is no need for changes in organisation; continuity is assured
Disadvantages

The model shares these disadvantages with Model 1a:

- Funding needs to be sought and found; this is a risky strategy, and reduces the security of the TA role, with implications for retention of TAs
- This model assumes the continued commitment of current partners, which may not be forthcoming
- The current model is costly, and therefore extension at some future point remains unlikely.

Model 2: School-based Transition Advisers

In this model, schools - or clusters of schools - directly employ Transition Advisers. Transition Advisers are therefore accountable to schools, and their commitments are entirely within the schools they work for.

Advantages:

- Schools are able to fit TAs into their systems more effectively, and therefore the likelihood of being isolated within the school is reduced
- TAs have managers only within the schools and so have fewer issues of conflicting claims on their time
- Funding is from schools, so the TA role is not dependent on gaining external funding for continuation
- Flexibility for schools if TAs are employed within clusters - they can decide how much resource, if any, they wish to put in to the TA role
- Employment of TAs fits into the Workforce Reform agenda of schools

Disadvantages:

- TAs lose the benefit of working as part of a team of TAs, and lose the support of Lifetime Careers and Connexions PAs
- The strategic role of TAs as a resource to improve destinations across the Dearne Valley is lost, under the management of Lifetime/Connexions
- There is a risk of TAs becoming study support workers, and lose their distinctiveness from Learning Mentors and Teaching Assistants
- Dependent on schools wishing to continue with this model, so may mean the role is discontinued

Model 3: Develop Provider-based Transition Advisers

This involves colleges and training providers being the base for Advisers, who are allocated part of their time to work in schools to assist with transition into these colleges. The TAs would be employed directly by the children’s service.
Advantages

- Some strategic role is possible, as TAs are not accountable to schools directly
- TAs have strong relationships with the key post-16 providers in the area, with the potential to remove some of the key problems relating to smoothing the transition (providing a link between providers and school, but with an independent focus).

Disadvantages

- There is cross over with the role of college link tutors, and these roles would need to be carefully demarcated
- TAs could be seen in schools as college or provider staff, and would need to work hard to prove their independence
- There is still a gap for young people who want to move to either a school with a sixth form or a training provider. TAs could work with some providers, but is it feasible for them to work with all providers?
- Young people who are not training or education - arguably the most vulnerable - young people would also not be easily fitted into this model

Model 4: Develop the role of PAs to incorporate the most positive elements of the current TA model.

This would involve piloting a change in the role of PAs to follow young people from school destinations into post-16. To examine the impact of such a role, it is recommended that some form of comparator group is used.

Advantages

- The evidence base for the positive effects of the TA role is improved
- The TA role is much more sustainable and can be rolled out further after piloting within existing and evolving structures - it becomes a new type of PA
- The PA role is extended: the current pre-16/post-16 split is overcome and the effectiveness of PAs is likely to be enhanced (this can be tested by piloting with a comparator group).

Disadvantages

- The impact of the TA/PA on individuals is likely to be lessened, since the intensive support for individuals is not sustainable for PAs
- Partners need to commit to piloting the role: it involves major changes in management structure for Lifetime, schools and Connexions
- The PA role will lose continuity in schools; PAs will necessarily need to move in and out of schools as they support young people, not schools. Schools may not be willing to lose this continuity of support.
A preferred model?

The view of the evaluation team is that whilst all of the models above have their merits, Model 4 is most likely to prove sustainable in the longer term, and is also most suitable for an extension of the TA initiative. This model may well incorporate some aspects of others, such as some of the suggested changes noted in Model 1b.

Clearly, however, it is the remit of the Steering Group to decide which, if any, of the models proposed above they favour, or whether a hybrid approach is preferred.

5. Concluding Discussion

Transition Advisers were put in place to try to meet some of the shortcomings inherent in the current system. In fact, the actual role of the TA, particularly their work in school, has proved to be somewhat similar to that of the Connexions Personal Adviser, particularly in the pilot programme (Dickinson, 2001), in that they had a relatively small caseload and were able to make an impact on the destinations of young people over a sustained period following the end of Year 11. In this sense, this research tells us what we knew already from the literature (Foskett et al 2004; Morris et al, 1999; Morris et al, 2001; Morris, 2004): intensive support for young people in their decision-making helps them make appropriate decisions more quickly. However, we also know that a significant minority of young people switch courses and destinations in the months subsequent to leaving compulsory education (Morris, 2004), and here the role of a trusted adult in supporting these changes is perhaps important: TAs can make a difference compared with other forms of support.

In many ways, the TAs are part of the new influx of non-teaching staff in schools, including learning mentors, youth workers and teaching assistants. These staff can develop personal relationships to support young people's decision-making. Integrating these new roles into existing school structures, however, often requires intense preparatory work on the part of schools. This preparation has to be practical, for example, developing induction programmes to inform staff who these new people are. There is also a fundamental need to embed these new roles within the wider educational work of the school. TAs, as we note above, were usually located in the careers areas and rooms of schools, and thus worked alongside careers teachers and Personal Advisers who, arguably, have been able to find a position for themselves over time within the school.

Yet Careers departments can sometimes themselves be outside of the main work, without a place in the core of the National Curriculum, and with little to contribute directly to GCSE results. For Transition Advisers and Personal Advisers, this marginalised position can sometimes create problems, such as unwillingness on the part of some class teachers to allow young people to leave core GCSE lessons for meetings with TAs and PAs. This issue can be more acute in schools with poor league table positions where time out of such lessons can be perceived as a luxury that cannot be afforded.
The recent government consultation document *Youth Matters* (DfES, 2005) may provide an opportunity for new roles such as the TA to become more central to the work of schools, as careers and guidance provision is reformed, and many local authorities look to innovative methods of delivery. However there are some notes of caution to be sounded, on the evidence of this study.

*Youth Matters* suggests that schools are allowed to opt out of local authority provision if it is perceived to be poor. This needs to be carefully monitored, since schools with priorities in terms of examination results (typically, those in more deprived areas) may be tempted to sacrifice independent advice for new mixed roles providing support for exams as well as careers input. TAs could well develop into this kind of hybrid role, but whether this turns out to be in the best interests of the young person remains to be seen, particularly if the new TA role is to be developed from the current PA role. Our TAs valued their independence from schools, and it is essential that whatever comes after Connexions does the same. In this case, local authorities, through Children's Trusts, would be the most appropriate employer.

Yet there are still two structural problems that militate against the development of TAs at present. First, in areas like the Dearne Valley (which, as we noted earlier, has 3 local authorities) the likely re-organisation of advice and guidance from sub-regional to local level may well make strategic provision across a wider area more difficult. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly across England as a whole, our system continues to end compulsory education at 16 whilst policy direction moves toward a 13 or 14-19 framework, with particularly innovative work in this area being undertaken in South Yorkshire through such vehicles as the Pathways to Success programme (Coldwell et al, 2004a; Coldwell et al 2004b). Until and unless this changes, Transition Adviser and other roles that aim to 'bridge the gap' will always face a structural barrier, no matter how talented or diligent the individuals are who fulfil these roles.
References


Coldwell, M, Holland, M, Rybinski, D and Trickey, S (2004b) *Walk-in Jobs-Creating Pathways to Success* *Curriculum Briefing*, 2, 3, 14-18


APPENDIX 1: Data collection

Task 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School/College</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Interviewer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wombwell</td>
<td>Manager, Head of Careers, TA</td>
<td>MC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foulstone</td>
<td>Manager, TA [careers department in transition]</td>
<td>MC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Swinton</td>
<td>Manager/Head of Careers [same person] and TA</td>
<td>MC</td>
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<td>Manager, Head of Careers, TA</td>
<td>MC</td>
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<td>Mexborough</td>
<td>Manager/Head of Careers [same person] and TA</td>
<td>MH</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northcliffe</td>
<td>Manager/Head of Careers [same person] and TA</td>
<td>MH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dearne Valley College</td>
<td>Manager, TA</td>
<td>PS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pope Pius</td>
<td>Manager/Head of Careers [same person] and TA</td>
<td>PS</td>
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<td>Manager/Head of Careers [same person] and TA</td>
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<td>Athelstane</td>
<td>Manager/Head of Careers [same person] and TA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wath</td>
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<td>PS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dearne High</td>
<td>TA only</td>
<td>PS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other interviews

Fiona Featherstone - Lifetime
Mike Garnock Jones - DeVeLOP
Collette Bailey and Simon Shaw - Connexions SY
Bev Moxon - LSC
Barnsley College - 2 focus groups of students
Morthyng Training - one focus group of students
Protocol - interview with manager

Telephone Interviews
14 young people in the TA group
17 young people in the comparator group
APPENDIX 2: Young people interview schedule

Transition Advisers Project - questions for young people

Start off - check they understand the research, ask them if they have any questions. Emphasise anonymity, and that we won’t contact them again. Ask if they want a copy of the report, if so we can send it to them if they let us know their address/email address.

1. What are you currently doing in terms of training/education/employment?
   Probe for clarification if necessary to check if it matches current information
   - If answer currently unemployed, go to question 2
   - If answer is in training/education/employment, go to question 3

2. Do you have anything organised for the near future?
   - If yes, probe to see what it is, then go to questions 4 and 5, but ask them about their future destination
   - If no, go to question 7 and ask about most recent destination
   - Note: will need to determine if it’s a firm proposal as often they say they ‘are going in army’ or ‘working in a mates garage’

3. Are you settled in what you are doing?
   3a. If in training or education clarify by adding - do you think you will finish the course?
   3b. If employed clarify by adding - do you think you will stay with this job for the next 6 months?
      - If no, probe for reasons

4. [Key question - needs to be probed carefully] How did you decide to do what you are doing now?
   Probe: what was the biggest influence on your decision? [examples - parents, teachers, friends, careers staff]
   Probe: Do you think you would be doing this without the help and advice you received? If no: what specific help did they give you?

5. Did you have any specific useful help in making this decision?
   Probe: did you have any specific help from people in school? If so, what?
   Probe: did you have any specific help from people since leaving school? If so, what?
   Probe: did you have any specific help from anyone from Connexions, like a Personal Adviser? If so, what?
   Probe: [for TA group only] did you have any specific help from a Transition Adviser? If so, what?

6. Are you doing the same thing now as when you left school?
   - If no, go to questions 7-8
   - If yes, go to question 9

7. What did you do before you started what you are doing now?
   Probe: Why did you stop doing that?
   - If currently unemployed, go to question 9
   - Otherwise, go on to question 8

8. Did anyone help you make the decision to leave?
   Probe: did anyone from Connexions help you make this decision? If so, how?
   Probe: [for TA group only] did you have any help from a Transition Adviser? If so, how?

Thank you for answering our questions.

9.a Has anyone helped you keep on track in your current destination?
   b. has anyone been in touch with you since leaving school regarding your job or training?
   Probe: anyone from Connexions?
   Probe: [for TA group only] a Transition Adviser?

Thank you for answering our questions.