

Connexions Monthly Article

Connexions Norfolk will produce a monthly article which you may wish to include in your school newsletters to parents or maybe post on the parents section of your school website.

Below is the first article which outlines the options and issues surrounding Post 16 choice.

Year 11 – it's all choices and decisions!

Year 11 is when students make one of the more important choices in their life. To leave school, to stay on? A Levels or something different? David Poulter from Connexions Norfolk looks at the choices and the things to think about.

An American writer called Barry Schwartz has a theory called the paradox of choice. He says the more choice we have the more anxious and confused we get and we end up making poor decisions – the more choice we have the more likely we are to make a mistake. This isn't meant to frighten Year 11s, but the choices open to them are far greater than they would have been twenty or even ten years ago and, for some, that does lead to confusion.

The temptation is to stick with what you know: 'I'm good at GCSE therefore I'll go straight to A Level'. Nothing wrong with that but there are other options. For those with an interest in a particular career area there are BTEC Nationals and the new Advanced Diploma courses, both of which are equivalent to A Level. For those looking for a broader curriculum there are now some schools offering the International Baccalaureate.

What if your son or daughter wants to go straight to work? The government is aiming to increase the number and range of apprenticeships on offer. But what if the economy doesn't pick up as fast as we hope or if someone doesn't want to commit to an apprenticeship? Whether as a first choice or a back-up to applications for an apprenticeship, there are loads of occupational training courses in colleges and sixth forms that are worth thinking about.

Early in Year 11 every student gets a copy of a booklet called Choices which explains their options. And then there's www.helpyouchoose.org, Norfolk's online prospectus of all courses and training in the county – an early visit is advised.

When your son or daughter knows what they want to do then the next step is to visit the sixth forms or colleges offering the courses. Every sixth form and college has an open day or evening to show what they can offer. These are usually held in October or November and dates are published on www.helpyouchoose.org. Many colleges and sixth forms like applications before, or shortly after, Christmas.

Applications for apprenticeships tend to happen a bit later, usually into the New Year. Many colleges are involved in apprenticeships so a visit to their Open Days will be useful: which means someone thinking of an apprenticeship can't sit with their feet up until 2010. The more popular the apprenticeship the more research students need to do before applying and the more contacts they need to make. Look at www.helpyouchoose.org and www.apprenticeships.org.uk for more information on apprenticeships.

Tutors, teachers, mentors and Connexions Personal Advisers are all available to help students make the right choices. If you or your son or daughter gets that confused feeling, don't hesitate to ask for help.