

0353

The role and attitudes of secondary school staff in the provision of Post 16 Information, Advice and Guidance for Year 11 students

Tony Macfadyen, Carol Fuller, Elizabeth McCrum, Deb Heighes, Andy Kempe
Reading University, Berkshire, United Kingdom

Background

The 14-19 agenda retains a high profile within educational policy in the UK. There is now a myriad of post 16 courses and training available to students including ten Diploma Lines, the International Baccalaureate, apprenticeships, and established courses such as A level and BTECs. This means the choice for students can seem complex and getting on to the appropriate course far from certain.

Papers by McCrum, et al (2009) and Fuller, et al (2009) focussed on Yr 11 pupils to gain insight into their perceptions of the usefulness and quality of the Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) they received. A notable finding to emerge was that pupils considered teachers to be important to them and that they sought them out for IAG. However it appeared that pupils often thought teachers were only able to provide subject specific, traditional, advice so regarded their support as being of limited use. Furthermore, this finding was replicated in a study of Vocational Further Education pupils (Macfadyen and Fuller, 2009).

This research is both relevant and timely given that despite considerable resource provided by Government in the 14-19 arena it is not clear how much teachers know about the changing 14 - 19 landscape, what their attitudes towards the changes are, and, consequently, how well placed they perceive themselves to be as sources of IAG to their students.

Research Questions

In order to build on this existing work, to create a more comprehensive picture of the present position, this paper re-visits the key questions outlined above to investigate teachers' perspectives on the issues previously explored with pupils. In addition, this project utilizes the key, and sometimes unexpected, findings from pupil IAG research (e.g. McCrum, et al, 2009, and Fuller, et al, 2009) to drill further and deeper into the IAG year 11 pupils are given, particularly in the Diplomas and other vocational routes.

The main focus of this research is to better understand what teachers know about the range of 14-19 options and, in particular, explore how familiar teachers are with alternative post-16 routes into Higher Education, for example, via Diplomas. Secondly it aims to gain an understanding as to how confident teachers consider themselves to be in providing post 16 IAG as well exploring their perceptions of the importance of their role and responsibilities in post 16 IAG provision. The research goes onto consider what factors impact on teachers' delivery of IAG, for example length of time in teaching and the type of school.

Methods

The research methods for this study are a large scale, on-line survey of teachers, from four counties in the SE of England, as well as interviews with a sub-sample of these. Secondary school teachers involved, or likely to be involved, in post 16 IAG provision (e.g. Form tutors; Heads of Yr 11) will make up the sample. All data collection is scheduled to be completed by June 2010. A pilot of the on-line survey was completed in early January 2010 and the results of this are used to inform the main survey. Data collected via the main survey investigate teachers' attitudes and experiences of providing post 16 IAG. Additionally, teacher confidence in this area is explored alongside knowledge of post 16 options for year 11 students.

Data from the on-line survey will be analysed using SPSS, allowing us to identify patterns, for example, across teachers' knowledge of different courses. All interviews will be carried out via telephone and, once transcribed, will be analysed using content analysis to permit an exploration of patterns and themes within the data.

Frame

This study is framed in a grounded theoretical approach where, through the process of analytic induction, the key concepts and ideas that help improve our understanding of the experiences of teachers' post 16 IAG will emerge from our data and inform the discussion of our findings. Key findings from previous research in this area on pupils' attitudes to Post 16 IAG are used to support the framework of the investigation.

Research findings

Research on provision of IAG by the Connexions service has come in for criticism (e.g. Sutton Trust, 2007; Fuller et al, 2009) perhaps because the advisors do not know the pupils very well; this suggests that there is a key role for teachers as our previous research suggests. By researching teachers' views on post 16 IAG this will enable us to compare and contrast how staff and students see the current situation and build bridges between the two stakeholders for a better future for young people.

Although not necessarily indicative of what the main study findings might indicate, the initial teacher responses from the pilot study suggest that all teachers know something about the 14-19 agenda but there is quite a lot of variation in knowledge and confidence. For example, whilst most teachers were clear that they had an important role to play in IAG provision, most teachers were only moderately confident about their ability to deliver this well and this tended to be in areas of established, more traditional, routes they were familiar with (e.g. A levels) compared to alternative routes such as apprenticeships. Nearly all teachers felt they would benefit from support and guidance in this area.

It is expected that an improved understanding of staff' attitudes towards their role in post 16 IAG for their pupils will emerge alongside greater recognition of staff needs for CPD. The research should lead to improved quality and relevance of IAG provided to year 11 students so helping them to make better, more informed, choices and an overall improvement in school provision of post 16 IAG, reducing the number of students who opt for the wrong course or who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).