The Integration of Understanding Connexions Training into Mainstream Professional Programmes

Pilot Evaluation Report

G. Turnbull
I. Sinker

St. Martin’s College
School of Applied Social Sciences
and Business Studies

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- YMCA George Williams College,
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1. Executive Summary

1.1 **Background**

1.1.1 ‘Understanding Connexions’ (UCX) is a training programme for those working with and within Connexions services. The course provides training with a focus on the multi-disciplinary nature of the Connexions Service.

The identified learning outcomes of the course are:

- *To define and analyse the young person centred approach that Connexions promotes*

- *To demonstrate understanding of the impact of the Connexions Strategy and Service, on young people, other organisations and society*

- *To define and analyse effective inter-agency working in the Connexions context*

1.1.2 The UCX course has traditionally been delivered within Connexions Partnerships through contracted HEIs and other training providers. The vast majority of participants have therefore been Connexions staff or staff from agencies contributing to Connexions Services.

This pilot was commissioned by the DfES / Connexions Service National Unit with a stated aim to:

“To integrate Understanding Connexions Training into mainstream academic training courses across several professional areas relevant to Connexions, e.g. Diploma in Youth and Community, Qualification in Careers Guidance.”

Selected courses included Youth and Community Work (or Informal and Community Education), Careers Advice and Guidance, Social Work and Post Compulsory Education Training (PCET). The course was also available to a generic, non-qualifying course in applied community studies at one site.

1.1.3 The pilot took place between March 2003 and July 2004 at three main sites (one site involved two HEIs):

- Canterbury Christ Church University College / YMCA George Williams College
- Manchester Metropolitan University
- University of Huddersfield.
Pilot sites ran a minimum of three student cohorts during the pilot period and a wide range of delivery approaches were explored during the course of the programme.

1.2 **The Evaluation**

1.2.1 The evaluation of the pilot was conducted by a team from the Applied Research and Evaluation Unit at St. Martin’s College, Lancaster.

1.2.2 The aims of the evaluation were:

- To evaluate the different models of integrating UCX into mainstream HE programmes at participating HEIs, and
- To identify whether the integrated approach gives people who may work within agencies involved in Connexions partnerships the necessary skills and knowledge they need to work effectively.

1.2.3 The evaluation draws on a range of sources, both qualitative and quantitative, in order to gain an understanding of models of delivery and the context in which they operated. Project reports, other documentary analysis, focus groups and interviews with staff and students have helped to create a detailed picture of the key issues emerging from the pilot.

The report seeks to present these findings, together with conclusions and suggested ways forward, in a way that is of future use to participating sites, other interested HEIs and the commissioning body, the DfES.

1.3 **Findings**

1.3.1 **Methods of Delivery**

The pilot provided the opportunity for exploration of a wide range of models of integration, both within and across sites. Over the course of the pilot programme delivery models included:

- Elective delivery as part of core professional programmes
- A ‘bolt-on’ approach with teaching and assessment taking place in addition to core professional programmes
- An embedded approach, with learning outcomes and relevant teaching content incorporated into one or more modules of core academic programme.
- A part embedded approach with learning outcomes mapped against
existing core programme, with supplementary teaching to top up areas not already covered by students.

1.3.2 All sites adapted their delivery approaches during the pilot. Often these changes were brought about by logistical issues and difficulties, including:

- Timetabling across programmes, levels of study and delivery sites
- Co-ordination with professional placements
- Staff availability and / or support outside conventional timetable
- Avoidance of a build up of workload and assessment for students

The proximity of professional programmes within institutions impacted on the ease with which logistical difficulties were overcome. Although problems were apparent within all sites, they appeared to be compounded when programmes were seeking to work across faculties or indeed across institutions.

Changes were also made to programme delivery as a result of the desire to increase the level of integration of the delivery model (and improve the likelihood of future sustainability). For some sites, these changes were a significant departure from their intended delivery approaches at the start of the pilot, with several sites moving to models where UCX teaching and learning was embedded within single profession student groups.

1.3.3 The Nature of Integration

The pilot successfully secured the commitment of a range of programmes within institutions to UCX and to greater cross-programme co-operation. Programmes that would traditionally have been peripheral to Connexions, for example PCET and Social Work have also become involved in UCX training for the first time.

All institutions used the national UCX delivery materials, though these were adapted in different ways. With the exception of embedded models, teaching approaches tended to differ from the usual modular delivery for many HE students, with full delivery days rather than the more common pattern of weekly taught sessions over terms or semesters.

The level of integration of UCX into academic programmes and systems varied from site to site and from programme to programme depending upon institutional context and the flexibility of the professional programme into which UCX was integrated.

The implications of different models, and the potential risks and benefits within
each\textsuperscript{1}, raise questions about what the UCX course is, and what parts of the course as it was originally designed should be retained in future flexible delivery, whether in HE or partnership settings.

1.3.4 The Student Experience

Students identified two main reasons for undertaking the course, to increase employability and to gain a greater critical understanding of Connexions and the Connexions context.

In relation to employability, participants view the UCX course as a means by which to increase their job prospects in the Connexions field, identifying ‘Understanding Connexions’ as a qualification in the Connexions Service. A number of students raised questions about what UCX actually qualified them to do (if anything).

Some students, did, however, cite the course as a contributory factor in them subsequently gaining employment in local Connexions Partnerships.

Time and workload was of primary importance to students and where there was successful accommodation of the course into their existing teaching programme the experience was usually a positive one. Students identified ‘successful accommodation’ in terms of no timetable clashes, well distributed learning and assessment and a good fit with field-based study / placements to maximise learning.

1.3.5 Learning Outcomes and Assessment

The UCX assessed piece was retained in its original format for the pilot, though at times staff and students interpreted the assessment flexibly in order to enable students to draw on broader experiences.

A number of students chose not to undertake the assessment, mainly due to additional workload demands. Time and workload permitting, many students did, however, see value in gaining accreditation for the course, particularly since they had attended the taught element.

Generally, it was considered that those students submitting assessments (or at least those passing the assessment) met the course’s learning outcomes but in a different way to those undertaking in-service training. Whilst pilot sites have adopted considerably different models of delivery it appears that assessments were being taken and passed by students in all settings.

\textsuperscript{1} A full breakdown of positives and negatives is contained within the full report, as is a more full discussion of implications of integration approaches.
1.3.6 **Multi-Disciplinary Learning and Teaching**

Logistical issues of operating across sites and / or schools meant that in some sites the multi-disciplinary learning environment was abandoned.

Whilst this paved the way for different models of integration through the embedding of learning outcomes into existing programmes, it raises questions about the extent to which multi-disciplinary working and / or teaching is, or should be, an important or valuable part of the UCX delivery.

1.3.7 **Sustainability**

Questions of sustainability inevitably raised questions about broader issues relating to the future role of UCX training and the Diploma for Personal Advisers.

Most sites and programmes within sites are keen to support the continuation of UCX training within HE programmes provided that the course retains a perceived value for students.

In future it is likely that the course delivery and assessment will either be fully integrated into existing programme structures (either through electives or embedded learning) or be provided at additional cost (which is likely to be passed on to the student).

A number of institutions are currently mapping the learning outcomes of both UCX and the Diploma for Personal Advisers to see how far learning is already met on their core professional programmes, what is additionally required and the extent to which prior learning in either the professional course.

Uncertainty about the continued production and updating of centrally produced UCX resources and access to these resources means agreements about standard delivery content may vary in future. In a context where the original training materials are not available or are out of date there is potential for greater variation in delivery.

1.4 **Conclusions**

1.4.1 The pilot achieved significant success in its aim of integrating Understanding Connexions training into HE professional programmes. Participating sites identified and tested a range of different models of delivery and have provided useful learning for those intending to commission or deliver similar training in the future. Whilst the pilot focused on UCX, much of the learning from the pilot is relevant to the consideration of broader issues in relation to the integration of education and training into HE programmes.

1.4.2 The pilot suggests that there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to integrating
UCX into programmes and that there are advantages and disadvantages to each approach. These include:

- The danger that mapping / embedding learning outcomes could mean that the original sense of ‘Understanding Connexions’ becomes lost in the overall programme

- That, whilst retaining a clear identity, a ‘bolt-on’ approach is likely to incur extra cost and workload for students

- That an elective approach is not available on all programmes and, whilst a mapped learning outcome approach recognises previous learning and locates UCX as central to the core professional programme, an elective is only an optional component.

1.4.3 The pilot has raised some significant issues about not only models of integration, but also questions regarding what it is that is being integrated.

Because of the integration processes used within the pilot ‘Understanding Connexions’ has primarily become defined by its assessed learning outcomes. In this context the question, therefore, is how significant are the aspects of the programme that are contained within the original programme content but not clearly evident in the learning outcomes themselves?

Other questions raised relate to the very nature of UCX and to the extent to which it has value and status across Connexions Partnerships both now and in the future.

1.4.4 For courses to generate enough future demand to be viable, the UCX course will need to retain its perceived value, both amongst prospective students and with employers.

HE quality assurance systems achieve parity in terms of academic standards. However, for qualificatory equivalence across the country it may be necessary to explore additional systems such as the establishment of an endorsement body or the development of Connexions occupational benchmarks, to provide a tool for quality assurance audit and inspection.

1.4.5 Provided that there is still a perceived benefit to offering UCX, future integration is planned by all pilot sites. It is likely that this will increasingly follow patterns of mapping existing learning outcomes and, if possible, integrating the assessment into existing programmes.

1.5 Recommendations

The evaluation team recommends that consideration be paid to the following areas when considering the future development of Understanding
1.5.1 Consideration should be given to the development of agreed UCX identity (content, process, assessment and award status) that enables flexible adaptation whilst assuring quality, equivalence and fitness for purpose.

1.5.2 Current training models for Understanding Connexions should be reviewed and / or the role of Understanding Connexions, its purpose, qualificatory status and its core content clarified in order to ensure delivery bodies are able to confidently meet UCX expectations and requirements now and in the future.

1.5.3 Consideration should be given to the development of quality assurance systems (in addition to standard academic QA processes) to ensure (if desired) national parity and transferability of qualification (e.g. endorsement body, occupational benchmarks etc.).

1.5.4 Consideration should also be given to the continued provision of up to date UCX teaching, learning and support materials in order to facilitate and encourage consistency of teaching content and shared understanding of the Connexions context. This is likely to be particularly important for new HEIs who have had little or no experience of UCX delivery.

1.5.5 HEIs, when considering UCX integration, should pay due consideration to the logistics of integrating the course across programmes and the implications for validation, timetabling, teaching, assessments, examination boards and quality assurance expectations and requirements.

1.5.6 Opportunities should be explored for skill and experience sharing between HEIs approaching UCX delivery for the first time and those with experience of partnership delivery and / or integrated delivery.

1.5.7 Learning from this pilot should be considered alongside the broader learning generated from delivery of Understanding Connexions and the Diploma for Personal Advisers within Connexions Partnerships.

1.5.8 Learning from the pilot should also be appropriately disseminated for policy and practice application in Higher Education and other settings.
2. Introduction

2.1 This external evaluation report was prepared by members of the Applied Research and Evaluation Unit at St. Martin’s College, Lancaster, who were appointed by the DfES / Connexions Service National Unit to evaluate the pilot project to integrate the Understanding Connexions training programme into specified relevant mainstream professional programmes.

2.2 The pilot, and the subsequent evaluation, sought to test and to understand a range of models designed to integrate the Understanding Connexions (UCX) course into existing professionally endorsed qualificatory programmes. These courses were Youth and Community Work (or Informal and Community Education), Careers Advice and Guidance, Social Work and Post Compulsory Education Training (PCET). The course was also available to a generic, non qualifying course in applied community studies at one pilot site.

2.3 The pilot took place between March 2003 and July 2004 at three main sites (one site involved two HEIs): Canterbury Christ Church University College / YMCA George Williams College, Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Huddersfield.

2.4 Pilot sites ran a minimum of three student cohorts during the pilot period and a wide range of delivery approaches were explored during the course of the programme.

2.5 This evaluation report draws on a range of sources, both qualitative and quantitative, in order to gain an understanding of models of delivery and the context in which they operated. Project reports, other documentary analysis, focus groups and interviews with staff and students have helped to create a detailed picture of the key issues emerging from the pilot. The report seeks to present these findings, together with conclusions and suggested ways forward, in a way which is of future use to participating sites, other interested HEIs and the commissioning body, the DfES.

2.6 The pilot, and subsequent evaluation, took place during the period when the DfES was formulating and disseminating plans for the future of Connexions training post March 2005, when the current training contract delivered through CfBT terminates.
3. Background

3.1 Understanding Connexions

3.1.1 The UCX training programme was designed for those working with and within (primarily those within) Connexions services. This has tended to be to those with prior experience and a professional qualification. There is also an assumption that participants know and understand a little about Connexions, its context and its operation.

3.1.2 The course provides training with a focus on the multi-disciplinary nature of the Connexions Service. The identified learning outcomes of the course are:

- To define and analyse the young person centred approach that Connexions promotes
- To demonstrate understanding of the impact of the Connexions Strategy and Service, on young people, other organisations and society
- To define and analyse effective inter-agency working in the Connexions context (DfES / CSNU (2003) Understanding Connexions Course Guide)

3.1.3 The UCX course is now a pre-requisite for entry onto the Diploma for Connexions Personal Advisers, the qualificatory route for those personal advisers working with young people with ‘multiple difficulties’\(^2\).

3.1.4 The UCX course has, prior to the pilot, been delivered within Connexions Partnerships through contracted HEIs and other training providers. The vast majority of participants have therefore been Connexions staff or staff from agencies contributing to Connexions Services.

3.1.5 The traditional mode of delivery to partnerships takes places in two parts. The first part, for all participants, takes place over four full days and provides the underpinning knowledge about the Connexions Service, its context and methods of working\(^3\). The second part, only for those wishing to be accredited for the course\(^4\) includes an additional training day and a half day action learning set followed by the completion of a work-based assignment.

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\(^2\) The course was initially a stand-alone course in its own right delivered over ten days. This, the second version of the course, is now 5 ½ days delivery and also replaces module of the new PA Diploma (2002).

\(^3\) This non-assessed route is intended for those working in Connexions but not as Connexions Personal Advisers.

\(^4\) For all Connexions Personal Advisers.
The CfBT preferred model of delivery is for days 1 and 2 to occur consecutively, followed a week later by days 3 and 4, also running consecutively. Day 5 should follow two weeks later followed by the action learning set a further two weeks later. Six weeks is then allowed for the completion and submission of the assessment.\(^5\)

### 3.2 The Integration Pilot

#### 3.2.1 The Pilot Specification Document (DfES, 2002) identifies the DfES’ aim to widen access to UCX beyond its initial role as a conversion course for staff. The pilot sought to explore the integration of the course into relevant initial training programmes, creating for many students what has come to be understood as a ‘dual qualification’ of UCX and their main professional qualification.

#### 3.2.2 Following initial planning in 2002 and early 2003, the pilot programme took place between March 2003 and July 2004.

#### 3.2.3 The stated aim of the pilot was:

“To integrate Understanding Connexions Training into mainstream academic training courses across several professional areas relevant to Connexions, e.g. Diploma in Youth and Community, Qualification in Careers Guidance.”\(^6\)

Requirements of the pilot were:

- To ensure that the necessary validation of Understanding Connexions based on the course materials
- To ensure that the ‘Understanding Connexions’ learning outcomes are met
- To ensure the external moderation of the programme by at least one other HEI
- Quality Assurance of delivery by the approved agent of DfES
- To develop any materials needed to support the implementation across mainstream programmes
- To evaluate the effectiveness of the Understanding Connexions

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programme as a cross module in several mainstream professional programmes including youth work, social work and careers advice and guidance.

3.2.4 Three sites were selected for the pilot primarily on the basis of their potential for cross programme (Youth and Community Work / Careers Advice and Guidance) delivery and their experience of delivering Understanding Connexions training within partnerships.

These were:

- Canterbury Christ Church University College / YMCA George Williams College,
- Manchester Metropolitan University,
- University of Huddersfield.

All those involved, had a UCX course already validated and an infrastructure for assessment, moderation, administration and examination boards in place prior to commencement of the pilot through their involvement with Partnership delivery (via central CfBT contract).

3.2.5 In order to meet the needs of the Connexions training framework, teaching content across all programmes included delivery of the Connexions assessment framework, APIR. This is different to field delivery, where APIR is now a compulsory pre-requisite for UCX and therefore the Diploma for Connexions Personal Advisers7.

3.2.6 Sites received funding from the DfES to deliver training to three cohorts of students drawn from mixed groups of at least two professional courses. These included Youth and Community work, Careers Guidance, Social Work, Post-Compulsory Education and Training and generic Applied Social Studies courses.

3.2.7 A representative from Manchester Metropolitan University coordinated the pilot project, also collating data and submitting regular update reports to the DfES.

7 There is also an expectation on in-service courses that participants have demonstrated the pre-requisite knowledge of ‘Introducing Connexions’ prior to commencing UCX.
4. Evaluation Approach / Methodology

4.1 Overview

4.1.1 A team from the Applied Research and Evaluation Unit at St. Martin’s College, Lancaster was awarded the contract to evaluate the pilot project in September 2003 following a competitive tendering process.

4.1.2 The aims of the evaluation were to evaluate the different models of integrating UCX into mainstream HE programmes at participating HEIs and to identify whether the integrated approach gives people who may intend working within agencies involved in Connexions delivery the necessary skills and knowledge they need to work effectively.

The commissioning body, the DfES, wanted to understand the models adopted by each HEI and the relative positives and negatives of each approach. It was also the intention to disseminate findings widely in order to enable other HEIs with an interest in developing similar approaches to make informed decisions about programme development.

It was agreed that the evaluation should concentrate on understanding different approaches to delivery and the context in which such approaches were situated. The evaluation was not to make explicit comparisons about whether one site was ‘better’ than another (an unhelpful and problematic task given the different contexts and circumstances of delivery sites).

4.2 Evaluation Approach

4.2.1 The Applied Research and Evaluation Unit is committed wherever possible, to delivering a collaborative approach to research and evaluation practice. Whilst the timescale, scope and distance between sites on this pilot has made this difficult at times, the evaluation team have been keen to ensure that the way the evaluation is delivered and in which findings or themes are generated remain as cooperative as possible.

This process involved preliminary meetings with project sites prior to commencement in order to discuss both the evaluation content and methods, with evaluation approaches being adapted in order to meet local needs (design flexibility was important). Interim feedback through individual and collective discussions also helped to create an environment where knowledge was brought forth in a reciprocal manner, although it is perhaps regrettable that there were not more opportunities for sites to share experiences in this area (problematic due to time, resources and distance).

4.2.2 The evaluation itself has focussed on the development of a detailed understanding of the phenomena in question (different models of integrating UCX) and therefore lends itself to a predominantly qualitative evaluation
(Patton, 2002), where the experiences and perspectives of participants (staff and students) are prominent. Such an approach is also consistent with the evaluation team’s commitment to participatory research, the importance of participants’ views and the utilisation of qualitative inquiry to gain an adequate depth of understanding.

Quantitative data, drawn particularly from project reports and other evaluation documents has, however, helped to contextualise qualitative data and assist in the posing of critical questions throughout.

4.2.3 Data collection methods included:

- **Preliminary meetings** with staff were conducted in order to assist in the development of interview frameworks and the identification of research questions;

- **Documentary analysis** of project reports, UCX programmes guides and delivery materials, student evaluations and other relevant documentation;

- **Staff interviews / focus groups** with those involved in the planning, management and delivery of the UCX programme across pilot sites. Key issues were identified by staff and then explored in more depth at follow-up interviews;

- **Student focus groups** were used in order to gain different perspectives on the learning process and ascertain key issues for students;

- **Student interviews** were also conducted with several students who were able to offer specific experiences to the evaluation.

Participants were selected through a process of purposive sampling, with interviewees selected on the basis of their potential contribution to the inquiry. Most staff involved in the pilot were however, interviewed at some point during the duration of the evaluation exercise. All students interviewed had chosen to participate in the UCX course (those who declined were not interviewed). Some of these had completed the course others were part way through their study.

Other data collection methods were initially considered at proposal stages but were either rejected at this point or following discussion with pilot sites. For example, non-participant observation of training delivery was not used due to uncertainty about its value in relation to the evaluation questions and concerns about its potentially invasive nature and potential for creating an

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8 For breakdown of data collection at project sites see Appendix One.
unrepresentative training environment (the Hawthorn effect).

A longitudinal study, exploring students' trajectories after the course, was ruled out due to the scope and timescale of the evaluation. The evaluation team did, however, manage to capture the views and experiences of some students who had completed the course and subsequently applied to and / or worked within the Connexions context.

4.2.4 The nature of the pilot and evaluation was shared with all those involved and fully informed verbal consent was obtained prior to commencing. Student participants were provided with information sheets about the evaluation and their right to withdraw or withhold consent at any point during the research process. Participating staff were also given this opportunity. The evaluation team’s contact information was also provided to participants to enable them to add, clarify or retract statements, to ask any questions or to make complaints about the evaluation process.

Most interviews and focus groups were recorded using tape recorders or solid-state digital recorders. Consent was obtained from participants prior to recording. Where interviews were not voice recorded substantial notes were taken.

Interview, focus group and other data was anonymised and stored internally in a confidential, password-protected environment. Other personal or confidential data (e.g. contact information) was kept in a secure manner in accordance with Data Protection requirements.

4.2.5 Data collection and analysis was undertaken according to a framework analysis type approach (Ritchie et al, 2003), using a thematic framework constructed from key identified evaluation questions and generated by preliminary meetings with pilot sites and subsequent data collection activity. The evaluation also brought together elements of programme / impact theory evaluation (Rossi et al, 2004) and realistic evaluation (Pawson and Tilley, 1997), particularly in the exploration of delivery mechanisms, operational context and the relationship to outcomes.

Analysis took place through a process of data familiarisation and analysis around the identified themes. Voice recordings were analysed directly without transcription.

4.2.6 The pilot, and subsequent evaluation, generated considerable breadth and depth of data, particularly due to the diversity of models adopted and the commitment of pilot sites. Findings should, however, be set in the context of the scope of the pilot and the evaluation, noting the following points:

- The pilot was delivered by sites who have already been involved in delivering UCX and no exploration of the implications for HEIs who
were new to UCX delivery was possible

- The evaluation did not seek to make explicit comparisons with traditional in-service training (no control group was used), though many staff were involved in both modes of delivery and their views about this were sought.

4.3 Evaluating a Pilot

4.3.1 The very nature of pilots is to test new policy and or practice and to explore learning about a particular area of practice in order to inform future delivery.

In this context, success of a pilot should in many ways be measured in relation to the quantity and quality of understanding and learning. The underlying questions are about how and why some things worked and others didn’t.

The important aspect of delivering and evaluating a pilot is therefore to seek to create a context of (where possible) risk free, open, honest reflection and learning. Questioning within the evaluation therefore seeks to explore and understand how and why aspects of the project worked (or didn’t), how sites adapted delivery and what key learning might inform future policy and practice.

All pilot sites were open and honest about their delivery and committed to drawing out learning in order to inform future practice in this area.

4.4 Reflexivity Statement – The Evaluation Team

4.4.1 The Applied Research and Evaluation Unit recognises the importance of reflexivity in the evaluation process and the need for the researcher to be explicit about and to reflect upon their own role in research (and evaluation). This assists in increasing the transparency of the relationship between the researcher / evaluator and the study and improves the accountability (and arguably validity) of evaluation findings.

The Applied Research and Evaluation Unit is part of the Community and Youth Studies Section at St. Martin’s College, Lancaster. The Section is active in field and academic research, professional training for JNC Youth and Community Work and post-qualification / post-graduate education. It is also involved in the delivery of in-service UCX training and the Diploma for Personal Advisers.

The Applied Research and Evaluation Unit itself has extensive experience of delivering field-oriented research, consultancy and training, with a focus on qualitative, often community based inquiry.
4.4.2 The evaluation team was comprised of experienced evaluators with experience of youth and community work, careers and guidance and Connexions training and education delivery. The team also contributed knowledge about the HE context; learning and teaching theory, and experience of delivery at HE level. This background enabled a greater understanding of the context of pilot sites’ delivery and helped in the posing of relevant critical questions about practice.

4.4.3 The evaluation team were, however, aware of the importance of transparency within the evaluation, particularly given the situation of St. Martin’s College as an existing provider of Connexions training. To this end the operation of the evaluation team was intentionally separate to the St. Martin’s College Connexions training team in order to avoid perceived or actual conflicts of interest.
5. Overview of Pilot Sites

The three identified pilot sites offer different professional academic programmes and operate within various organisational contexts. It is apparent from the evaluation that these contexts have played a significant part in decisions about models of integration.

As was perhaps to be expected for a pilot, changes to the method of delivery were apparent in all sites over the pilot period. For some, this meant significant adaptations to the initially planned mode of delivery and composition of cohorts.

This section provides a brief overview of each pilot site’s institutional context and a descriptive account of the pilot delivery.

5.1  Canterbury Christ Church University College / YMCA George Williams College

5.1.1  Canterbury Christ Church University College (CCCUC) offers a nationally approved Qualification in Careers Guidance (QCG) within the Department of Career and Personal Development at its Salomons campus near Tunbridge Wells.

YMCA George Williams College (GWC) provides nationally endorsed education and training for Youth and Community Workers (Informal and Community Education) through full and part time routes at its campus in Canning Town, London as well as through distance learning. Canterbury Christ Church University College provides academic validation of YMCA George Williams College’s programmes.

The Department of Career and Personal Development at Canterbury Christ Church University College and YMCA George Williams College work in collaboration to provide in-service Connexions training.

5.1.2  The partnership between the two institutions prompted participation in the pilot, with the intention of bringing QCG students together with full-time, part-time and distance learning students from YMCA George Williams College.

5.1.3  The first cohort of the pilot UCX programme was offered as an additional module to both QCG and Informal and Community Education students. The course was taught in two blocks at the Salomons campus, primarily as a residential. Delivery staff was drawn from both programmes and had experience of delivering the UCX course in partnerships. The course was attended by 16 students (3 QCG and 13 Informal and Community Education students).

Staff intended the second cohort to be delivered to a mixed student group at YMCA George Williams College. However, approaching the start in July 2003
only 9 Informal and Community Education students had enrolled. As this number reduced to 4 prior to commencement the course was cancelled. Students at GWC, when asked why they had not signed up to or had withdrawn from the course, identified concerns about an additional assessment alongside other current commitments. For CCCUC students it was felt that the travel demands were too great and students were not prepared to go to Canning Town for the course. Due to the timing of the cohort in relation to the commencement of the QCG programme some students were not informed about the dates of course until their induction week in September 2003.

Following a review, staff at both YMCA George Williams College and Canterbury Christ Church University College decided to deliver the rest of the pilot separately. GWC offered the course to all its year 2 and 3 students in a two-part block course, with an extended assessment period to avoid a 'log jam' of assignments. The cohort was taught by one tutor from GWC and 11 students participated.

For their third cohort, CCCUC mapped Understanding Connexions course content with existing learning gained on the QCG course and offered students an add-on 3-day taught element that met the additional demands of UCX. Assessment of this was additional to the main programme award. 22 students took this route.

5.2 University of Huddersfield

5.2.1 The University of Huddersfield offers three related professional programmes within the pilot: the Post Graduate Diploma in Careers Guidance (QCG) in the School of Human and Health Sciences, Youth and Community Work and Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET), both in the School of Education and Professional Development.

5.2.2 Careers guidance staff and Youth and Community Work staff had been involved in Connexions partnership delivery and sought to integrate UCX into their ‘core’ professional programmes as part of the pilot and extend the availability of the course to PCET students.

5.2.3 The first 2 pilot cohorts contained students from all 3 professional strands together using careers guidance and youth work staff with prior experience of UCX delivery. 18 students attended the first cohort (5 QCG, 7 Youth Work and 6 PCET) and 22 the second (7 QCG, 3 Youth Work and 12 PCET).

Delivery of the first cohort was a one-week block around Easter. However, block delivery was found to be too intensive for students, with little time to assimilate information. For the second, delivery was through two 2-day blocks over consecutive weeks with another training day and action learning set in the third week. The blocks were delivered in addition to youth work and QCG
student's professional programme (with additional teaching and assessment). PCET students were able to include the course as an optional module within their elective programme, thereby contributing towards their overall qualification.

Following logistical difficulties in coordinating the course across programmes and across different Schools (timetabling, assessments etc.)\(^9\), staff decided to deliver the UCX course within single professional groups. PCET students continued to be offered the course as an elective, taught by staff from youth and community work and QCG programmes, as a discrete group. This elective was delivered over 4 days during April and May 2004, with additional tutorial time later in May.

For QCG and youth work students the UCX curriculum was integrated into the mainstream professional programme, primarily through mapping and embedding UCX learning outcomes across existing modules. An additional assessment was still required for those wishing to obtain the UCX qualification (a DfES condition) and this carried CAT points over and above the main professional programme.

When participation in UCX became integral to core professional training (for all youth and community work and QCG students) uptake increased, with 20 QCG and 15 youth and community work students (together with 17 PCET students taking up the elective) studying towards UCX learning outcomes.

5.3 Manchester Metropolitan University

5.3.1 The Department of Applied Community Studies at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) offers a range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses including youth and community work, social work and careers guidance qualifications. The Understanding Connexions module was offered to youth and community work, social work and applied community studies students\(^{10}\) (levels 2 and 3) as well as to postgraduate QCG students.

5.3.2 Students were taught together across the disciplines by one main tutor (from a youth and community background with experience of delivering UCX to partnerships) and other associate tutors from the Connexions, youth and community work, careers guidance and social work staff teams.

5.3.3 Whilst delivery content and timing changed over the pilot, the overall approach of the institution remained the same throughout the programme.

For students studying at level 2 of their programme (the second year of full-time undergraduate study), UCX was offered as an elective that contributed to

\(^9\) More about this is included in the main body of the report

\(^{10}\) The Applied Community Studies course is a non-professional study route.
the student’s main programme, albeit with a slight discrepancy in CAT award points\textsuperscript{11} due to the composition of modules on the programme. For those opting to take the course whilst on level 3 of their programme, the course was additional to their main studies. This was also the case for postgraduate QCG students.

The mode of delivery was adapted over the course of the pilot to accommodate the needs of students. For the first cohort it was a one-week block, however, as was the case with the University of Huddersfield’s first cohort, this was found to be problematic. For cohort two the course was delivered in two 2-day blocks over consecutive weeks followed by an additional day concentrating on APIR and two days focusing learning and preparing for assessment (including action learning sets).

In response to demand, the institution offered cohort 3 in two groups (named in the report as 3a and 3b). In order to meet timetabling and placement demands, the first of these courses was delivered over a number of weeks, usually with one input day a week, prior to spring term placements. The additional 3b cohort was delivered after placements as a block during the Easter vacation.

\textsuperscript{11} CAT (Credit, Accumulation and Transfer) award points or credits are the HE standard for crediting modules and programmes. Modules are usually validated in 10, 15, 20 or 30 CAT point blocks depending upon the size of content (amount of teaching and independent study) and assessment.
6. Findings

This section draws together findings from documentary analysis and interviews/focus group with staff and students.

It is worth noting that, though many of the emerging themes generated from the research are specific to the integration of UCX in the HE context, the pilot also highlights a wide range of issues relating to the UCX course in general and the integration of specific training into HE programmes. Some of the findings should therefore be considered in this broader context and not simply seen as issues that are solely relevant to the pilot or the HE context itself.

6.1 Methods of Delivery

The pilot provided the opportunity for exploration of a wide range of models of integration, both within and across sites. All sites adapted elements of their delivery during the course of the pilot. Two pilot sites (GWC / CCCUC and Huddersfield) made considerable amendments to the way in which the programme was delivered from cohort to cohort. This included changes from multi-disciplinary teaching and learning groups to a single disciplinary teaching and learning context on some programmes.

Over the course of the pilot programme delivery models have included:

- Elective delivery as part of core professional programmes
- A ‘bolt-on’ approach with teaching and assessment taking place in addition to core professional programmes
- Embedded approach, with learning outcomes and relevant teaching content incorporated into one or more modules of main programme. An additional optional assessment was still required to be completed in order to comply with DfES requirements for the UCX course (assessed route)
- Part embedded approach with learning outcomes mapped against existing core programme, with supplementary teaching to top up areas not already covered by students. An optional assessment provided the opportunity for participants to comply with DfES requirements for the UCX course (assessed route)

In some instances teaching groups comprised of students drawn from a combination of programmes following different models of delivery (particularly the ‘bolt-on’ and elective approaches), based on their level of study and the level of flexibility of core programme (i.e. whether it allows electives).

A mapping exercise of cohort delivery models is included within Appendix
Two and consideration of the implications of delivery models for integration is considered later in this section.

6.1.1 Changes in Overall Approach to Delivery

All pilot sites experienced logistical difficulties in delivering across academic and professional programmes. Issues included:

- Co-ordination of timetabling across programmes, levels of study and different sites (including clashes between term and semester timings)

- Co-ordination of programmes to fit with placements across different professional programmes in a way that ensures full availability of students to participate in the UCX course

- Availability of staff to deliver programme and / or support study outside conventional academic timetable (for example, in non-teaching weeks)

- Co-ordination of different approaches to administration, arrangement of staffing, recruitment, examination boards etc. across sections, faculties and institutions

- Avoiding a build up of workload and assessments for some students, particularly those seeking to study UCX in addition to their core professional programme.

Some of these issues were exacerbated by a short lead-in for the pilot and, with time, were addressed internally. Others were felt to be too problematic in the long-term and several pilot sites decided to re-structure delivery towards models of integrated delivery that fitted existing academic systems and professional programmes more effectively.

The proximity of professional programmes, both geographically and in relation to the academic structure, appears to be a factor here. Although logistical problems were apparent within all sites (arguably inevitable when initiating cross-programme activity), problems appeared to be compounded when programmes were seeking to work co-operatively across faculties or indeed across institutions.

Changes to delivery approaches were not solely made on the basis of convenience, however. Reasons also included:

- The recognition of the need to integrate a sustainable approach in the long-term (after the funded pilot). This includes the desire to integrate teaching into existing timetabling and ensure staffing levels are reflective of general HE funded provision
- The need to recognise prior learning taking place in the core programme and to avoid duplication of input.

For youth and community work and QCG students at Huddersfield changes to the programme meant that the learning outcomes of UCX were embedded into their existing professional course, with only an additional assessment required in order to meet DfES requirements for the UCX course (assessed route). PCET students were still offered UCX as an elective with staff from youth and community work and careers delivering it. However the course no longer involved students from the other professional groups.

YMCA George Williams College and Canterbury Christ Church University College also chose to offer single professional delivery of UCX. At GWC this was offered as an additional ‘bolt-on’ module, whilst CCCUC operated a part embedded model.

6.1.2 Changes to Mode of Delivery

Pilot sites provided training input to the UCX course in different ways throughout the pilot. When delivered in a ‘conventional’ manner (i.e. with discrete content delivery and not through embedded or part embedded models) sites commenced with the delivery of the course in teaching blocks, partly due to the short lead-in for commencement. This approach was found to be too intensive for students and, where possible, delivery of the programme was spread over several weeks with the assessment deadline arranged so as to avoid clashes and conflicts with core programmes.

Several sites highlighted the importance of delivering the UCX programme in periods when teaching and assessment on main programmes was reduced. Students who were able to undertake the assessment as an optional extra appeared more reluctant to complete the assignment if workload on their core programme was high. The creation of additional time for assessment appeared to improve student’s willingness and ability to participate in the course and undertake the UCX assignment.

One member of delivery staff identified the importance of timing the delivery of the UCX course at such a point in the academic programme to ensure that students were sufficiently familiar with their main profession and professional identity. This then enabled students to fully participate in the course, and particularly in the exploration of multi-disciplinary practice, in an effective manner. Too early on and some students lacked the confidence or ability to engage in discussions about the profession to which they were planning to enter.

6.1.3 Staffing

All pilot sites initially aimed to provide a skill mix within the teaching team
comparable with, or indeed exceeding, that of partnership delivery. Initial cohorts across all pilot sites included a co-tutoring approach that reflected the breadth of participating professional groups as well as experience of delivering UCX training within partnerships.

The involvement of specialist staff drawn from relevant teaching programmes to deliver specific inputs was also seen to add particular value to the course. For example, at MMU the involvement of a social worker to situate APIR into the broader context of assessment was considered to enhance the students’ understanding of APIR and the purpose of assessment in general.

For GWC / CCCUC and Huddersfield, the move towards single professional delivery streams and embedded learning outcomes often meant that teaching was provided by a lone tutor, often drawn from the same professional background as students. Most staff did, however, have experience of partnership delivery, which assisted in placing teaching and learning in the broader Connexions context.

6.2 The Nature of Integration

6.2.1 In conversation with pilot sites and in the development of a thematic framework for the evaluation, it became apparent that the notion of ‘integration’ was a complex one involving a wide range of sub-themes, including:

- questions about the practicalities of integration
- what is being integrated
- the extent to which integration takes place at an ideological level consistent with the rest of core programme content.

6.2.2 Institutional Working

In a short period of time, the pilot successfully secured the commitment of a range of programmes within institutions to UCX and to greater cross-programme co-operation. Although the development has proved difficult and at times frustrating, all sites are keen to continue some form of integrated delivery beyond the pilot. Programmes that would traditionally have been peripheral to Connexions, for example PCET and social work have also become involved in the training for the first time. There has been some resistance to this involvement where the course has placed additional pressure on student workload (for example with third year social work students approaching the end of their course). However, there is a general recognition of the added value of the course, both in terms of opportunities for students and what staff can offer to the programme itself.
Common to all pilot sites was the presence of a pre-validated UCX programme and experience of delivering the training. Whilst some sites amended the validation to fit the pilot programme (for example by including APIR), the presence of a familiar product and a pre-existing Connexions delivery team meant that UCX was a known quantity within the institution, thereby reducing the time taken to get cross-programme delivery off the ground.

The availability of separate funding for the pilot initiative enabled pilot sites to develop different delivery models without passing additional costs onto students. This meant that sites could offer UCX’s delivery, assessment or both outside the core programme, thereby generating CAT award points in excess of those required for student’s main qualification. Outside the pilot this is likely to incur additional cost to institution or to the student. Sites also used the funding to mirror partnership delivery by using two tutors or providing refreshments for students on full day sessions. The extent of funding available to delivery teams to operate flexibly in this way did appear to vary from site to site.

6.2.3 **Integration into Academic Systems**

The extent to which UCX could be integrated into academic programmes and systems varied from site to site and from programme to programme. The necessity of a discrete assessment also made full integration into programmes difficult.

Where electives were not available at level 2 (the academically validated level of UCX) or on post-graduate QCG programmes, sites could look to integrate UCX learning outcomes and teaching into existing modules (if there was sufficient cross-over and flexibility). The stand-alone assessment was still supplementary, generating additional CAT points.

The UCX Course was also validated slightly differently at each site, sometimes carrying 20 CAT point credits (to take into account the inclusion of APIR) and sometimes 15 points. For elective programmes, the point allocation of the module does not always match other electives, causing potential logistical problems and the possibility of abundant CAT points. Where this has caused concern the site has sought to address this issue for future delivery.

For an embedded approach, if UCX learning outcomes (or equivalent) are not present in a course and need to be incorporated or made more explicit, there may be implications for the re-validation of one or more models in existing programmes.

6.2.3 **Positives and Negatives of Integration Models**

Following interviews with staff and students the evaluation team sought to
draw out key positives and negatives of the different models of integration adopted throughout the pilot (see Table 1 overleaf).

The extent to which models of integration are effective depends upon:

- the context of the delivery (situation of course, type and level of programme etc.)
- how the term integration is defined
- what value is attached to the positive and negative attributes of each model.

The implications of different models, and the potential risks and benefits within each, raise questions about what the UCX course is and what parts of the course should be central to future delivery, whether in HE or partnership settings. These issues are discussed further in the later stages of the report.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Positives</th>
<th>Negatives</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electives as part of core programme (only available on some programmes)</td>
<td>- No additional work for students.</td>
<td>- Optional: not everybody does it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Timetabling can be managed more easily.</td>
<td>- Potential that other profession specific options are dropped.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- UCX has an explicit identity (a course in its own right).</td>
<td>- Usually requires wider programme to operate an elective system at level 2.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Accounted for in core staffing allocations.</td>
<td>- Not all courses allow electives or are able to accommodate level 2 study (e.g. post-graduate QCG).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Enables students to choose the course (or not).</td>
<td>- Logistical problems still exist if intending to coordinate across professional groups, particularly if placements are not timed to allow joint study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Enables specialisation in Connexions related areas.</td>
<td>- Students must complete assessment if they choose the elective (threat to core qualification)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Can be made available to external bodies (incl. Partnerships) and to students on other programmes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Bolt on' at level 2 or above</td>
<td>- Enables students to choose the course (or not).</td>
<td>- Optional: not everybody does it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Enables specialisation in Connexions related areas.</td>
<td>- Additional work for students over and above main professional programme (increased workload pressures and risk of low submission).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- UCX has an explicit identity (a course in its own right).</td>
<td>- Suitable period in academic year must be found to deliver without impacting on other studies (staffing during non-teaching weeks may also be an issue).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Can be taught in more flexible ways</td>
<td>- Requires non-core funding and institutions may need to pass fees directly to students as the course is additional to programme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(potentially more scope for non-traditional teaching methods).</td>
<td>- Students who do not progress to DPA have ‘extra’ level 2 CAT points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Can be made available to external bodies (incl. Partnerships) and to students on other programmes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embedded Learning</td>
<td>- No additional attendance requirements.</td>
<td>- Could become invisible if over embedded (at what point do students cease to be aware that they are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Accounted for in core staffing allocations.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Outcomes (currently with additional optional assessment) | - Prior relevant learning can be recognised (avoidance of duplication).  
- Timetabling can be managed within existing programmes.  
- All students receive taught input relating to the course.  
- If assessment becomes integrated the model is sustainable within core HE funding.  
- Model can be used in all courses where learning is similar enough to UCX content. | studying UCX?).  
- If prior equivalent learning within programme is limited, the addition of learning outcomes may place pressure on existing programme content.  
- May be viewed as re-defining core professional programme.  
- Additional assessment is still over and above existing course requirements and therefore potentially incurring additional resources and costs. Hence institutions may need to pass fees directly to students.  
- Students who do not progress to DPA have ‘extra’ level 2 CAT points (with completed additional assessment). |
| Part embedded learning outcomes with additional teaching areas not covered in existing programme (with additional optional assessment) | - Enables some choice about whether to take the course.  
- Retains some explicit identity.  
- Prior relevant learning can be recognised (avoidance of duplication).  
- Model can be used in all courses where learning is similar enough to UCX content. | - Additional attendance requirements (though less that full bolt on).  
- Additional work for students over and above main professional programme (increased workload pressures and risks of low submission).  
- Suitable period in academic year must be found to deliver without impacting on other studies. This time must be coordinated with embedded elements of learning.  
- Additional assessment is still over and above existing course requirements and therefore potentially incurring additional resources and costs. Hence institutions may need to pass fees directly to students.  
- Students who do not progress to DPA have ‘extra’ level 2 CAT points (with completed additional assessment). |
6.2.4 Teaching and Learning

All pilot sites used the national UCX delivery materials, though these were adapted in different ways. Much of this adaptation was related to staff making general perceived improvements to materials and was not a consequence of the move to the HE setting.

In some instances materials were adapted to take into account the fact that very few participants were employed within Connexions and, even with placements, did not have the day to day experience of the service that participants in traditional partnership delivery have. Such amendments included the adaptation of exercises around joint working to include broader experiences and to situate placement and other experience in the context of Connexions and the service’s underlying values and principles.

When embedded into existing programmes, some of the UCX materials were used to support additional teaching and learning and to ensure that the Connexions elements of the programme were explicit for students.

Some staff and students suggested that UCX course materials, though bulky, were not at a comparable level to similar modules on their programme (including those studying at level 2). Several students commented on the relative absence of theoretical demands and expressed concern about the presence of un-referenced material in the packs provided. This was inconsistent with the expectation upon students to source theory when used in core programme assessments.

With the exception of embedded models, teaching approaches tended to differ from the usual modular delivery for many students, with full delivery days and teaching blocks, rather than the more common pattern of weekly taught sessions over terms or semesters. Other than some timetabling clashes, when sessions overlapped with other teaching days, this did not appear to be a problem in itself for the students who were able to undertake the module. Sites did, however identify that future UCX courses were likely to involve more conventional academic approaches to modular delivery.

6.2.5 Ideological Integration

The concept of integration was also explored in terms of what could be

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12 HE operates courses at different levels of study. Typically a full-time year one undergraduate course will operate at ‘level 1’, and second year ‘level 2’ etc. The demands upon student in terms of evidencing learning and developing critical analysis increase from level to level. Postgraduate study usually operates at a higher level still (level 4). Teaching style and assessments reflect the level of study.

13 A different model clearly operates for distance learning students, however this is still different from the full day delivery of UCX.
considered as an ‘ideological fit’, that is the extent to which the Understanding Connexions programme and the values and principles advocated as part of Connexions fitted with what was taught on the rest of student’s academic programme. Whilst there was some concern about the penetration of Connexions (service and strategy) into professional programmes the general feeling amongst those interviewed was a positive one. This was perhaps due to the fact that all pilot sites had already embraced Connexions at least in part, due to their partnership delivery.

This was not to say, however, that there were not concerns expressed about the material and its situation within professional programmes. Several staff did, for example, express concern about the “propaganda” like nature of the content in some areas and the lack of criticality within the module compared to other level 2 courses.

Those students interviewed identified few concerns about the ideological fit of the course in their overall programme, though several did express concerns about the extent to which Connexions based training should impinge on their core professional course. This was particularly the case with QCG students who expressed concerns that their course, with the majority of placements now taking place within Connexions, was already becoming too young people-oriented and that a number of people undertaking the course did not wish to pursue careers in young people’s / Connexions services.

Many staff and students identified Understanding Connexions as a course that:

- prepared people with a background understanding of Connexions in order to enter the service
- provided the knowledge and skills with which to critically engage with debates about the Connexions context
- enabled practitioners to work effectively with Connexions staff once in their chosen field.

In this context UCX was seen as preparing students to engage with the issues without necessarily being ‘groomed’ for employment within the service. Such critical engagement was seen as important by a number of students who did not actually wish to work in the Connexions service.

6.3 The Student Learning Process and Student Outcomes

6.3.1 Perceived and Actual Benefits to Participation

Students identified two main reasons for participating in the course. The first was in relation to employability, with students identifying that the course gave
them greater opportunity to gain employment in Connexions partnerships. This was often linked to the notion of UCX as a qualification, though more than one group of students expressed uncertainty about what the course actually qualified them to do within the Connexions service.

Some students who had approached partnerships to find this out (usually within a placement) had received conflicting information about the worth of the course without the full Diploma for Personal Advisers and sensed that the ‘qualification’ did not actually qualify them to do anything. Several members of staff from pilot sites echoed this view. They believed that for the course to be valued by participants (whether as part of HE delivery or in-service training) it also needed to be valued both locally and nationally, with national parity and value in the workplace.

Some sites did, however, have positive feedback from students in early cohorts who had gained employment in Connexions Partnerships and cited the course as beneficial to both their interview and subsequent appointment. One pilot site also observed that a local partnership had spoken positively of the course and about the increased preparedness of students to enter the workplace.

The second reason students identified for their participation was to gain greater critical understanding of Connexions to enable them to make the decision about the extent to which they wanted to work with or within Connexions. This was based upon the premise that they should understand and critically analyse an initiative before engaging with it (or not). For some this engagement was from an initial negative view of Connexions and, with additional understanding, concerns about the service had been somewhat allayed. A number of youth work students identified that although they had no intention of working within Connexions they would inevitably come into contact with the service and it would be useful to know something about the service prior to such involvement.

6.3.2 The Student Learning Process

Student focus groups, interviews and analysis of post-session evaluation forms identified that students were, on the whole, positive about the course, its delivery and much of its content. As suggested previously, time and workload was of primary importance to students and where there was successful accommodation of the course into their existing teaching programme the experience was usually a positive one. Students identified ‘successful accommodation’ in terms of no timetable clashes, well distributed learning and assessment and a good fit with field-based study / placements to maximise learning.

Despite identifying that the delivery was good and the course interesting, a number of respondents did say that with hindsight they would not have
undertaken the course. This was due to workload pressures and was mainly, though not exclusively, focused around students undertaking the course over and above their core programme.

Of potential concern, one student who embarked on an embedded delivery model and worked within a Connexions Partnership, raised concerns about the ‘invisible’ nature of the UCX course that they had undertaken, believing that it was not comparable with the in-service training model that they had previously completed.

Evaluations of responses from former cohorts and interviews with those students who participated in multi-disciplinary teaching groups identified the value of such a context for understanding the perspectives of other professional groups. Such an approach was not, however, greeted in a positive manner by all students, some of whom found being in a minority within a vocal group a negative experience.

6.4 Learning Outcomes and Assessment

The UCX assessed piece was retained in its original format for the pilot. For some students this created added logistical problems since the piece was designed for in-service participants and those without day to day contact with the service had to rely on placement experience or, where timing did not allow for placement experience to be used, on research/investigation based pieces. In some cases this did suggest that both staff and students interpreted the assessment flexibly in order to enable students to draw on broader experiences, though staff members did not feel that this affected the students’ ability to achieve the UCX learning outcomes.

The required wordage for assessment differed in some pilot sites due to the different validated ‘size’ of the course (in terms of CAT points) and anomalies in the interpretation of the wordage required for a given level of CAT point credits. Sites with extra wordage demands used the submission of the reflective diary element, to ensure that there was little or no actual disparity in the size of the main written piece (including the submission of the diary as part of the word count).

As is the case with in-service training of UCX, a number of students chose not to undertake the assessment. For those taking the course as part of their core programme, assessment was compulsory (non-submission or failure

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14 It was suggested that this reflects some experiences of in-service training where there can be an uneven mix of professional groups. The newness of students’ own profession is perhaps also a factor here, with a lack of confidence or uncertainty about their own professional position when entering a multi-professional group.

15 Full details of reasons for non-submission were not obtained by the evaluation team since many of those interviewed were not at submission stage. Indications did, however, suggest a high level of intention to submit, workload permitting.
impacted on their main award and qualification). Those with the option to take the assessment appeared to make the decision about whether to submit on the basis of workload pressures (linked to the timing of the piece vis à vis other course demands) and the level to which they intended to work with or within the Connexions service in the future. Time and workload permitting, many students interviewed saw value in gaining accreditation for the course, particularly since they had attended the taught element.

6.4.1 Parity and Comparability Across Programmes

Without a full audit or the use of an in-service control group with baseline assessments it is difficult to establish the full extent to which courses within the HE pilot were comparable with in-service training.

Many of the staff delivering programmes had also delivered in-service training and, whilst acknowledging the different learning context, believed the course to be comparable to that of the in-service training model.

Generally, it was considered that those students submitting assessments (or at least those passing the assessment) met the course’s learning outcomes but in a different way to those undertaking in-service training. Indeed some staff identified that, whilst aspects of the course were inevitably delivered in a more abstract way due to students not being employed within the Connexions service, additional learning and diversity of teaching input on the course enabled a greater breadth and depth of understanding than received on in-service training.

HE quality assurance mechanisms (including validation, examination boards and the involvement of external examiners) can assist in ensuring parity, both in relation to the main academic course and to other UCX module delivery.

The presence of a pre-established infrastructure for Connexions training and assessment was helpful here, though some sites elected to incorporate the assessment into core programme examination boards, ensuring greater integration and parity with the main programme, rather than using the Connexions examination boards that were used to examining and moderating Connexions courses.\(^\text{16}\)

Whilst pilot sites have adopted considerably different models of delivery it appears that assessments are being taken and passed by students in all settings.

6.5 The Multi-Disciplinary Nature of Cohorts and Teaching Teams

Logistical issues of operating across sites, faculties or departments meant that in some sites the multi-disciplinary learning environment was abandoned,\(^\text{16}\) Many staff were involved in both examination boards so the two areas are not discrete.
albeit reluctantly in many places. This also led to the single disciplinary teaching to some cohorts. Whilst this paved the way for different models of integration through the embedding of learning outcomes into existing programmes, it does raise questions about the extent to which multi-disciplinary working and / or teaching is, or should be, an important or valuable part of the UCX delivery. This question is also pertinent for other HEIs who do not have access to multiple professional programmes but might still wish to incorporate UCX delivery into the professional training they do offer.

6.5.1 Advantages and Disadvantages of the Multi-Disciplinary Learning Environment

Many of the students and staff who participated in multi-disciplinary cohorts identified the benefits of this model in terms of group interaction and learning across professional boundaries. This was apparent in qualitative feedback in focus groups and interviews as well as on self-completed post-session evaluation forms.

For a minority of students, however, the experience was a negative one, with feelings that their profession was ‘under attack’. This appeared to be the case when one professional group was in the minority.

Staff interviewed attributed different value to the importance of a multi-disciplinary learning environment for students on the UCX course. One member of staff, for example, felt that such a learning context was vital in enhancing students' understanding of not only the multi-disciplinary nature and partnership approach of Connexions but also to developing a greater awareness and understanding of other professions in general. Other staff felt that although such a context did on the whole benefit students it was not central to the delivery of UCX and that the course could be delivered effectively to single profession groups. Indeed, for UCX to be integrated effectively into some professional courses, sacrificing such a collaborative environment was inevitable.

It was also highlighted that single professional students groups were not without significant diversity. At YMCA George Williams College, for example, students were drawn from full-time and distance learning programmes, many with practice experience in a wide range of settings including Connexions, youth services, the voluntary sector, youth offending teams, substance misuse services and as learning mentors.

6.5.2 Advantages and Disadvantages of Multi-Disciplinary Teaching

Traditional in-service UCX delivery involves co-training by two tutors, usually with diverse backgrounds. Some sites have retained this level of teaching
input for the pilot (though this may not be continued beyond the funded pilot period) whilst others have reverted to a single tutor, often from the same professional background as the students’ main taught programme. For students studying a UCX course with embedded learning outcomes, content was usually delivered within the core professional programme by those tutors.

Advantages of drawing in multi-disciplinary teaching were seen in terms of the richness and diversity of perspectives and the different specialisms that could be brought to the programme by staff. Such an approach also helped to avoid professional bias and to ensure that terminology is understood in a cross disciplinary context rather than defined only through the lens of a single disciplinary perspective.

There is also some suggestion that for sites with single disciplinary learning environments (where students are studying on a single professional programme) a diverse multi-disciplinary teaching team can provide diversity of perspective and understanding of other professions that might otherwise be lacking. One site, for example, identified that with hindsight delivering the course to a single profession cohort using a tutor with a similar professional background meant that students might be disadvantaged in relation to the learning gained from the typical diversity of student groups on in-service training, thereby missing out on depth of understanding and the networking opportunities that exist in that setting. The introduction of more diversity within the delivery team was seen as a way of partly overcoming this, even if it was not practical to operate multi-disciplinary cohorts.

Some respondents, however, also observed negatives of multi-disciplinary teaching. One member of staff, for example, identified that co-tutoring across professions did not always make for coherent programme delivery and that a module taught by a single tutor, provided it effectively addressed multi-disciplinary thinking and practice, could provide a clearer, more consistent teaching approach. Critics of this approach (including some concerns expressed by students) raised questions about the extent to which such a model could effectively address the multi-disciplinary context in a clear unbiased manner.

6.6 Sustainability

Questions to pilot sites about sustainability inevitably raised questions about broader issues relating to the future role of UCX training and the Diploma for Personal Advisers. As previously mentioned, concern was expressed about the need for UCX to be valued locally and nationally, with consideration of national recognition of equivalent training programmes amongst employers and a clear indication to students about what UCX does, or doesn’t, provide them in terms of employability.

6.6.1 Future Delivery
Most sites and programmes within sites are keen to support the continuation of UCX training within HE programmes provided that the course retains a perceived value for students.

It is likely, however, that without specific additional funding, the course delivery and assessment will have to either be fully integrated into existing programme structures (either through electives or embedded learning) or be provided at additional cost (which is likely to be passed on to the student).

A number of institutions are currently mapping the learning outcomes of both UCX and the Diploma for Personal Advisers to see how far learning is already met on their core professional programmes, what is additionally required and the extent to which prior learning in either the professional course (e.g. QCG or Youth and Community Work) or in the DPA can provide accelerated routes to the other qualification.

GWC, for example, have already secured CCCUC and NYA validation for recognition of prior learning of the DPA in their Dip HE in Informal and Community Education\(^\text{17}\).

It should, however, be recognised that this approach to mapping and APL risks losing or diminishing knowledge and understanding pertaining to the specific context of Connexions (or indeed the other professional context if mapped the other way).

For programmes seeking to embed learning outcomes, the presence of an assessment for UCX that is outside the core programme is potentially problematic since it is likely to incur additional cost. This would be avoided if the assessment, or variations on the assessment that satisfactorily measured UCX learning outcomes, could also be integrated into programmes. Such an approach would, however, increase the danger of the course becoming more ‘invisible’ within programmes unless attention was paid to ensure learning outcomes relating to Connexions were distinct and explicit.

Whether as part of an embedded programme or an elective, further integration is likely to mean an increase in consistency of approach with or within other modules. This in turn is likely to mean single tutor teaching and, for electives, the module being subject to the recruitment of viable numbers of participants in order for it to run. Within the site offering electives, consideration is currently being given to mapping some learning within the core programme and offering a module of lower value that corresponds to the size of other electives within the academic programme. This may also involve the delivery of the APIR aspect of the course in another elective around 1-to-1 work and assessment models.

\(^{17}\) APL equivalent to 40 CAT points at Level One and 20 CAT points at Level Two has been awarded.
For sites and programmes offering bolt-on or part embedded approaches where additional teaching and assessment is required, a number of approaches are being considered. In some areas, further integration of learning outcomes into core programme delivery is being explored in line with the fully embedded approach.

At another site there are discussions taking place about whether to offer UCX to students on the course, students from other institutions and partnership staff as an extra course. This is likely to incur cost to students, though this possibly could be reduced or offset by externally generated revenue.

6.6.2 Connexions Resources

All pilot sites have had access to, and have used, centrally produced Connexions resources in the delivery of the pilot. These resources have been an important part of the delivery process for most sites and have helped to ensure consistency of delivery.

Uncertainty about the continued production and updating of centrally produced UCX resources and access to these resources means agreements about standard delivery content may vary in future. In a context where the original training materials are not available or are out of date there is potential for greater variation in delivery, with UCX being defined only by its learning outcomes.

When considering the delivery of UCX by other HEIs, several sites also commented that unless they had delivered training within partnerships they currently would not have access to the training materials in hard copy. They were otherwise only available electronically in a password protected area of the DfES / Connexions website.
7. Conclusions

7.1 The pilot has achieved significant success in its aim of integrating Understanding Connexions training into HE professional programmes. Participating sites have identified and tested a range of different models of delivery and have provided useful learning for those intending to commission or deliver similar training in the future.

The pilot has succeeded in a large part due to HE sites commitment to the pilot and to their ability to respond quickly and effectively to the demands of pilot programme delivery. Sites have also been able to rapidly adapt their delivery mode to respond to changing circumstances and to meet the needs of students.

7.2 The pilot and its evaluation generated considerable learning, not only about delivery mechanisms themselves, but also the significance of the teaching context and the very nature of integration. Whilst the pilot was focused on UCX, much of the learning from the pilot is relevant to the consideration of broader issues in relation to the integration of education and training into HE programmes.

In addition to this learning the pilot has also provided UCX training to around 200 students who would not have otherwise received it and who are now better equipped to either work with or within a Connexions context. Some of these students have entered the Connexions Service, identifying the training as useful in their recruitment and / or their work practice.

7.3 Models of integration have varied both within and across pilot sites. The level and extent of cross-programme integration appears to have been influenced by a number of contextual factors, particularly the nature of the existing professional course and the institutional proximity of different professional programmes.

Existing programmes without electives, or with other constraints on content, are limited to developing models whereby UCX is offered as an additional module or through an approach that maps existing learning against UCX learning outcomes, either in part or in full. Where electives are available, the course can be offered as an option that contributes to the overall existing programme, provided that the course size fits with other modules on the elective programme and that the elective system accommodates level 2 study.

Cross course working has provided logistical difficulties at all pilot sites, whether in terms of coordination of timetables, the arrangement of tutors or the alignment of administrative systems. These logistical issues have influenced how sites have delivered the course, with some pursuing single group teaching as a consequence of the barriers experienced. The proximity
of professional programmes appears to be a factor here, with sites where course are located more closely together within the academic structure being more likely to overcome barriers. This is perhaps due to the increased likelihood of previous working and the consistency of administrative systems and structures.

7.4 The pilot suggests that there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to integrating UCX into programmes and that there are advantages and disadvantages to each approach. These include:

- The danger that mapping / embedding learning outcomes could mean that the original sense of ‘Understanding Connexions’ becomes lost in the overall programme, thereby potentially losing parity with the in-service delivery model.

- That, whilst retaining a clear identity, a ‘bolt-on’ approach is likely to incur extra cost, workload and CAT credits for students.\(^{18}\)

- That an elective approach is not available on all programmes and, whilst a mapped learning outcome approach recognises previous learning and locates UCX as central to the core professional programme, the elective is only an optional component.\(^{19}\)

7.5 Through its diversity of delivery, the pilot has raised some significant issues about models of integration and also questions regarding what it is that is being integrated.

Understanding Connexions, as delivered through in-service training, was prescriptive in assessment, learning outcomes and programme content.\(^{20}\) In the integration of the course into professional programmes greater emphasis has, arguably, been placed on learning outcomes alone (and the assessment of these outcomes).

Whilst sites are still using the UCX course content (to differing degrees depending upon delivery method), ‘Understanding Connexions’ itself becomes defined by its assessed learning outcomes, whether they be part of a stand-alone module or embedded into one or more existing modules within the professional programme.

Whilst both integrated approaches and in-service training are assessed against the same learning outcomes (and parity is therefore present), this

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\(^{18}\) The acquisition of additional CAT points may in itself present no problem. However, students may feel that are gaining additional credits that do not, in themselves, form part of an academic award towards which they intend to study.

\(^{19}\) This may be appropriate for UCX, though might be significant when considering the integration of other learning that is intended to be considered core to all professional programmes.

\(^{20}\) Although materials could be used flexibly by tutors.
raises questions about whether the learning outcomes reflect what understanding Connexions is, or should be. There is, for example, some suggestion that a multi-disciplinary environment was originally viewed as being core to the UCX course, though it is apparent from the pilot that the course can be delivered and assessed within a single professional context.

The question, therefore, is how significant are the aspects of the programme that are contained within the original programme content but not clearly evident in the learning outcomes themselves?

Other significant questions that are raised through the pilot include:

- To what extent is the original course content important to the nature of UCX and the understanding of the Connexions context?
- Can UCX be reduced to their learning outcomes? If so, are the UCX learning outcomes as they stand at present sufficiently fit for purpose?
- How important is the Connexions context within the learning outcomes? (for example, is an understanding of the ‘young person-centred approach’ in another professional context equivalent to the Connexions context?)
- Can UCX learning outcomes be met with parity without an in-depth knowledge of the Connexions context?
- Is the common assessment an important part of the course or can this also be assimilated into the mainstream programme and assessment strategies?
- Is the UCX course intended to be a recognised qualification?

The pilot suggests some conclusions in this area, however, many of the answers to such questions depend upon exactly what the intended purpose of the course is and how prescriptive those promoting the course or employing from it wish to be about both content and mode of delivery.

7.6 Whilst the presence of an in-service training comparison group and greater scrutiny of assessments would have further illuminated issues of parity and comparability\(^{21}\), it is apparent that all integration approaches have enabled students to demonstrate learning outcomes through a common assessment. Though students’ experiences of studying Connexions and the Connexions context differ from those working within the Connexions Service, most students engaged with the course and have succeeded in gaining a common

\(^{21}\) These methods were not contained within the evaluation brief due to the scope of the study and the potential sensitivities in acquiring and ‘assessing’ such data.
set of knowledge about Connexions and understanding the skills needed for working in the Connexions context, the overall stated aim of the UCX course. Whilst for many the more theoretical or abstract setting meant that students were less able to apply practical experiences within Connexions to the course and assessment, the setting has offered students the opportunity to contextualise their learning within broader policy and practice areas.

7.7 Students’ experiences of the course appear on the whole to have been positive, other than expressing frustrations about additional workload and timing of the programme. Most sites have responded to such concerns by ensuring an appropriate fit with placements, teaching and assessments coordinated within students’ core courses.

There is, however, some concern about the value of the UCX course, both amongst students and staff. This perhaps reflects ambiguity, uncertainty and disparity in the Connexions field in general. Many students, who were under the impression that the course was a qualification, raised questions about what it actually qualified them to do. A number of them were no clearer about this after speaking to Connexions Services in their local area.

For courses to generate enough future demand to be viable, the UCX course will need to retain its perceived value, both amongst prospective students and with employers. There was some anxiety amongst staff from sites that the uncertain future of Connexions training and the cessation of a coordination body might, with the absence of any national endorsement body or other means of achieving national parity, mean that UCX loses its identity and value.

HE quality assurance systems achieve parity in terms of academic standards. However, for qualificatory equivalence across the country it may be necessary to explore additional systems such as the establishment of an endorsement body or the development of Connexions occupational benchmarks, to provide a tool for quality assurance audit and inspection.

7.8 Whatever the future for UCX, it is apparent that there is interest in, and commitment to, integrating the course into mainstream professional programmes. As this pilot has demonstrated, this can be operationalised in a range of ways depending upon institutional setting.

Provided that there is still a perceived benefit to offering UCX, future integration is planned by all pilot sites. It is likely that this will increasingly follow patterns of mapping existing learning outcomes and, if possible, integrating the assessment into existing programmes. This would thereby reduce duplication and wherever possible avoid additional workload and cost being borne by the student.

With such approaches and the likelihood of the phasing out of central
resources for the UCX course it may be beneficial to review the programme, both within in-service and HE settings, in order to ensure learning outcomes fully reflect current and future requirements in terms of skills and knowledge.
8. Recommendations

The pilot has demonstrated the potential for Higher Education to deliver Understanding Connexions within or alongside mainstream professional training in a range of flexible and appropriate ways. The current composition of, and requirements for, in-service delivery do, however, militate against this (this may also become an issue for in-service training post 2005).

The evaluation team recommends that consideration be paid to the following areas when considering the future development of Understanding Connexions:

8.1 Consideration should be given to the development of agreed UCX identity (content, process, assessment and award status) that enables flexible adaptation whilst assuring quality, equivalence and fitness for purpose.

8.2 Current training models for Understanding Connexions should be reviewed and / or the role of Understanding Connexions, its purpose, qualificatory status and its core content clarified in order to ensure delivery bodies are able to confidently meet UCX expectations and requirements now and in the future.

8.3 Consideration should be given to the development of quality assurance systems (in addition to standard academic QA processes) to ensure (if desired) national parity and transferability of qualification (e.g. endorsement body, occupational benchmarks etc.).

8.4 Consideration should also be given to the continued provision of up to date UCX teaching, learning and support materials in order to facilitate and encourage consistency of teaching content and shared understanding of the Connexions context. This is likely to be particularly important for new HEIs who have had little or no experience of UCX delivery.

8.5 HEIs, when considering UCX integration, should pay due consideration to the logistics of integrating the course across programmes and the implications for validation, timetabling, teaching, assessments, examination boards and quality assurance expectations and requirements.

8.6 Opportunities should be explored for skill and experience sharing between HEIs approaching UCX delivery for the first time and those with experience of partnership delivery and / or integrated delivery.

8.7 Learning from this pilot should be considered alongside the broader learning generated from delivery of Understanding Connexions and the Diploma for Personal Advisers within Connexions Partnerships.

8.8 Learning from the pilot should also be appropriately disseminated for policy
and practice application in Higher Education and other settings.
9. References


DfES / CSNU (2002) Understanding Connexions Course Guide: A Programme for all those working with or within Connexions, Sheffield: Connexions


### 10. Glossary of Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APIR</td>
<td>Assessment, Planning, Implementation and Referral Framework used by Connexions Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>AP(E)L</td>
<td>Accreditation of Prior (Experience) and Learning (Also APL)</td>
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<tr>
<td>APL</td>
<td>Accreditation of Prior Learning (Also AP(E)L)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAT</td>
<td>Credit, Accumulation and Transfer (the HE points system for modules and courses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCCUC</td>
<td>Canterbury Christ Church University College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CfBT</td>
<td>Centre for British Teachers (the body awarded the central DfES contract to manage the national rollout of the Connexions Service Accredited Training Programmes until 2005)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CNX</td>
<td>Connexions</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSNU</td>
<td>Connexions Service National Unit, part of the DfES (now subsumed into the Children’s Workforce Unit)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DfES</td>
<td>Department for Education and Skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>DPA</td>
<td>Diploma for Personal Advisers</td>
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<tr>
<td>GWC</td>
<td>YMCA George Williams College</td>
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<tr>
<td>HE</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEI</td>
<td>Higher Education Institution</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICG</td>
<td>Institute for Careers Guidance (awarding body for careers guidance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JNC</td>
<td>Joint Negotiating Committee (the negotiating body and recognised professional award for youth work)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MMU</td>
<td>Manchester Metropolitan University</td>
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<tr>
<td>NYA</td>
<td>National Youth Agency (professional validating body for youth and community work)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Personal Adviser</td>
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<tr>
<td>PCET</td>
<td>Post Compulsory Education and Training (qualification for FE / adult education)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Code</td>
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<tr>
<td>QA</td>
<td>Quality Assurance</td>
</tr>
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<td>Qualification in Careers Guidance (qualificatory course for careers services)</td>
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<td>SW</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Understanding Connexions</td>
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<tr>
<td>YCW</td>
<td>Youth and Community Work</td>
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Appendix One

Overview of Data Collection Activity

Data collection activity included the following:

- **Documentary analysis**
  Including, where available:
  - Connexions and Understanding Connexions Policy Documents and Training Programmes
  - Pilot Specification, Project Reports, Arrangement with Professional Endorsement Bodies
  - Course information
  - Evaluation forms

- **Preparatory meetings with three pilot sites and with combined pilot teams**

- **Student focus groups**
  - University of Huddersfield (2)
  - Canterbury Christ Church University College (1)
  - YMCA George Williams College (2)
  - Manchester Metropolitan University (1)

- **Individual interviews with students**

- **Other feedback from students (emails etc.)**

- **Semi-structured interviews / focus groups with staff involved in planning and delivery**
  - University of Huddersfield (2 group interviews)
  - Canterbury Christ Church University College (2)
  - YMCA George Williams College (3)
  - Manchester Metropolitan University (4)
  - The pilot coordinator at MMU (1 interview plus additional informal meetings)

- **Engagement / formative reflection with staff teams at training / review day**

- **Ongoing formative feedback and informal interviews with pilot site staff.**
## Appendix Two
### Cohort Delivery Map

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Integration type</th>
<th>Teaching delivery</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Cohort composition</th>
<th>Teaching staff</th>
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<td>MMU</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cohorts 1, 2, 3a, 3b:</td>
<td>Embedded LOs</td>
<td>Elective</td>
<td>Bolt on extra</td>
<td>Embedded in core programme</td>
<td>Taught as Separate module</td>
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<tr>
<td>For level 3 YCW and SW</td>
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<tr>
<td>For QCG</td>
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