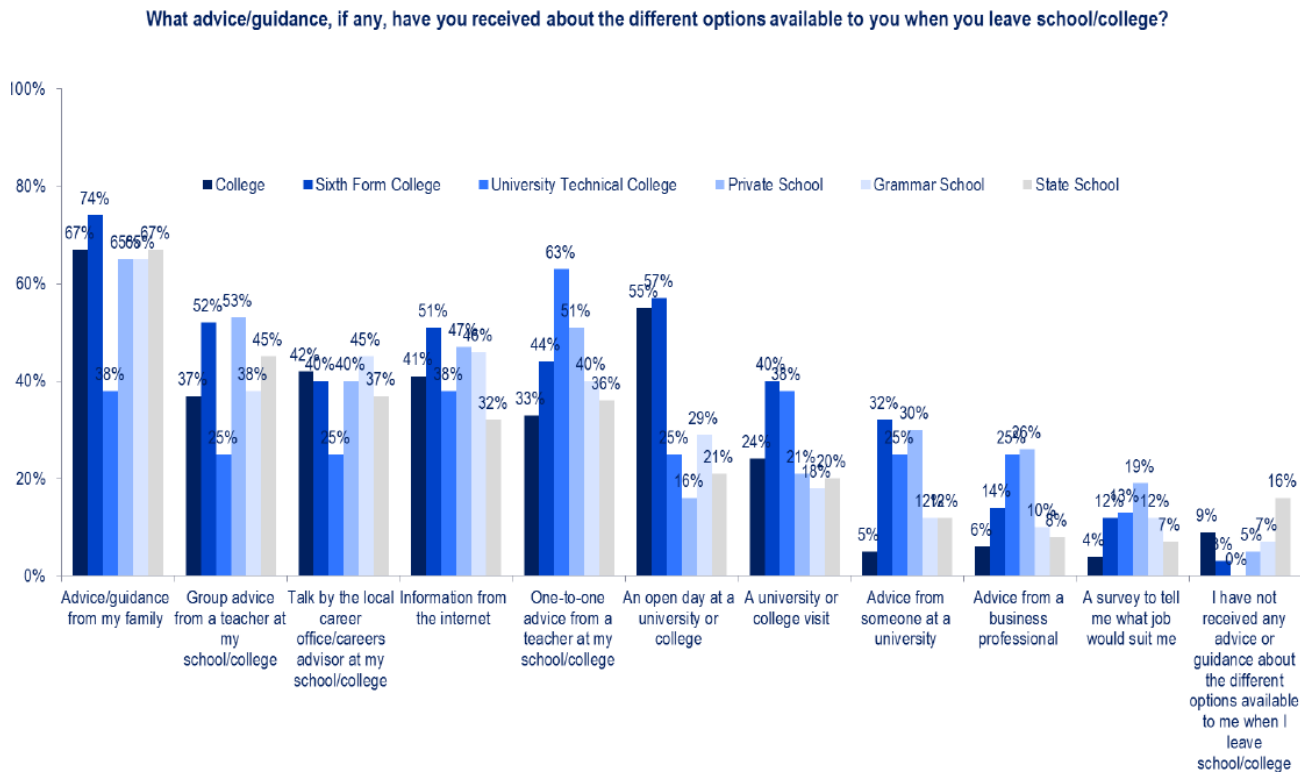


Submission to careers advice inquiry launched by the new parliamentary committee on education, skills and the economy

1. UCU is the largest trade union and professional association for academics, lecturers, trainers, researchers and academic-related staff working in further and higher education throughout the UK.
2. UCU welcomes the joint membership of this new committee formed of members from both the Education Committee and the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee. We are grateful for the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry.
3. UCU has long raised concerns about the quality of advice and guidance available for learners. Most recently, in December 2014, UCU published research based on the polling of 2000 young people conducted by ComRes on our behalf. *Young People's Perceptions of post-18 education and training options*¹ looks at young people's perceptions and aspirations in relation to post-school education and training.
4. The research identified huge variation in the information, advice and guidance (IAG) received by socioeconomic background and type of education institution attended. Those attending state schools and colleges were much less likely to report that they had received each of the different forms of IAG. 16% of learners who attend state school say that they have received no information, advice or guidance. Just 5% of learners attending a private school said the same.

¹ <http://www.ucu.org.uk/7337>

Figure 1:



5. Our report found that one in six (17%) of those from social grade DE say that they have not received any advice or guidance, compared to just 9% of those from social grade AB. The majority of young people say that they have not received personalised support from an information, advice and guidance professional. Learners are most likely to have received advice or guidance from their family, and older learners are more likely to have received advice or guidance than younger learners

6. Further findings include:

- Just 39% of respondents said that they have spoken to a careers advisor
- Just 38% say that they have accessed information on the internet
- Less than half (46%) of young people had received group advice from a teacher at their school or college
- Only 10% of respondents said that they have spoken to a business professional.

The quality and impartiality of current provision

Fragmentation and accountability

Funding support for young people to access independent and professional information, advice and guidance has significantly declined since 2010. In addition to funding cuts for Connexions, AimHigher funding was also reduced – this led to a combined loss of agencies which effectively guaranteed a national entitlement to post-school advice and support. As such there has been a significant reduction in the quality and quantity of post-16 support for young people in recent years.

It is important to highlight that careers education is a professionalised career, however, there is no formal requirement for IAG professionals to be qualified to level 6 and as a result there can be no guarantee of quality where this is not the case.

UCU would like to highlight its concerns that reduced funding, fragmentation and marketisation of the careers service that has led to a lack of coherence and huge variation in the offer particularly for young people. These variations manifest both regionally and locally. The overall lack of coherence, and the potential for some young people can slip through the gaps in provision lead us to argue for the development of a national offer for young people. It is felt that this would ensure a baseline for the minimum offer that young people can expect to receive. This a brokerage role to support institutions and establishments to manage the range of IAG options open to them. This in addition to the single point of contact could work quite effectively.

In 2013, UCU published *Engaging young people not in education, employment or training The case for a Youth Resolution*, a reportⁱ which highlighted that most young people outside education and employment are not 'long-term NEET'. The pattern observed was '*more often non-participation interspersed with short-lived participation in insecure and poorly-paid work and low-level vocational training programmes*'. Young people who 'churn' in this way are less likely to gain access to vital information, advice and guidance services because they prove 'ineligible'. This is because most support is available when an individual is in education. It is more rare for these young people to encounter the Work

Programme or similar where they would have the opportunity to receive information, advice and guidance, highlighting again the need for more provision, and its availability in a wider array of establishments.

There is also an important role for employers to play in supporting good IAG. However, without a brokerage role, it is very difficult for individual institutions and organisations to manage the range of organisations offering their services. There is good existing evidence from the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission and the Royal Society of Arts about how personal links make all the difference in finding and succeeding in a career path. More needs to be done to encourage employers to provide more work experience and mentoring opportunities for young people, site visits and project based activities to make the advice come alive.

We would like to see greater coordination between government departments and school, college and higher education institutions – particularly to support widening participation and the promotion of apprenticeships if the new targets for progression to these areas are to be met.

It is important that everybody has access to support with their educational and career choice-making and greater investment is required to facilitate this. We welcome the announcement made by David Cameron on 11 January 2016 to say that £70m would be directed towards careers in this Parliament. Whilst additional funding in this area is to be welcomed, it falls well below the pre-2010 investment figure of £500m.

ⁱ Simons, R. et al., (2013), *Engaging young people not in education, employment or training The case for a Youth Resolution*, London.