

Involving young people in Commissioning, 2008.

Young people were first involved in the commissioning of the Connexions Service. Since then they have been involved in the commissioning of services for Looked after Children, Substance Misuse and CAMHS.

To involve young people in the commissioning of Connexions we recruited some young people to take part in the process. We wanted the young people to be confident, well prepared and representative of young people who use the service. So we asked a diverse group of young people who we had worked with on staff interview panels and who had been trained in interviewing, and also invited a young person who we worked with who was NEET (Not in Education or Training) to take part.

A training session was run for the young people. It included 'What is Commissioning?', where we used the analogy of a job interview with the tendering organisations being the applicant and the tender being the application form, the process, including the weighting, the structure of the commissioning interview day, staff involved and the young people's role.

As part of this the young people reviewed the service specification, discussed what they thought was important, had the opportunity to ask questions of the Commissioners and devised the questions for the Young People's Panel presentation and interview questions. They focused on the participation element of the specification as they thought it was very important and felt comfortable assessing this as they had knowledge of how young people want to get involved in influencing services.

On the day the young people were well prepared and comfortable having met the key adults before. They took part in the briefing at the start of the day with all the staff involved. The Young People's Panel had an equal weighting to the Adult Panel and they were aware of how the rest of the marks were judged and why. They shared their scores and insightful observations with the Adult Panel, who explained their own decisions to the young people. The scores were then added together and everyone told the outcome of the day.

The young people really enjoyed taking part, some going on to take part in other panels and others continuing to work with Connexions on other participation projects.