

# Building on Young Apprenticeships: Equal Opportunities

## Appendix 5: Taster Case Studies and Illustrative Examples

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*Appendix 5: Taster Case Studies and Illustrative Examples* has been extracted from the IES report *Building on Young Apprenticeships: Equal Opportunities*, which can be downloaded from: [www.employment-studies.co.uk](http://www.employment-studies.co.uk).

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## Appendix 5: Taster Case Studies and Illustrative Examples

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Designing and evaluating tasters to encourage wider choices

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## Tasters in Young Apprenticeships

### Case studies and illustrative examples

This document contains mini cases-studies and vignettes to illustrate some of the issues raised in the design and evaluation toolkit. They draw on material reported in the Young Apprenticeships Equal Opportunities study (Newton et al, 2006) as well as material available from the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) and Learning and Skills Network (LSN).

Each case study number identifies the question it relates to in the toolkit. These case studies can be used in conjunction with the toolkit or as a stand-alone document of interesting practice.

#### **Case study 1.1: The aim for the taster**

Taster sessions can be offered for a range of reasons. This case study explores just two.

##### **Increasing understanding via IAG**

Pupils are generally used to classroom-based teaching and the content of traditional subjects which are offered as part of their Year 9 options. They therefore have an understanding of the nature of the course, their previous levels of achievement and interest in the subject, and the progression routes.

In contrast to this one YA partnership found that pupils reported having very little understanding of the progression routes vocational courses offer. Therefore, explaining these and increasing pupils' understanding of the vocational option more broadly was an important aim for the taster session.

*'We get positive feedback from the students about the tasters - they enjoy it, they get an insight into the courses, where they might go, the skills they can develop and what the courses involve.'*

##### **Reducing drop-out**

Retention in learning is a key policy issue. Research has highlighted that inadequate advice and guidance, poor course choice, and lack of understanding about the course, are associated with non-completion (Martinez 2001).<sup>1</sup> Recent research among early leavers from FE and work-based learning highlighted that 43 per cent left for reasons that could have been addressed by IAG<sup>2</sup>. Tasters can be a tool to provide a valuable insight into subjects, with the aim of reducing withdrawal from programmes by raising career awareness and confirming or challenging choices. A partnership in Cumbria felt that tasters decreased drop-out: *'The taster sessions have a clear impact in that there*

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<sup>1</sup> Martinez P (2001), *Improving Student Retention and achievement: what do we know and what do we need to find out?* London: LSDA.

<sup>2</sup> Simm C, Page R, Miller, L (2007) *Reasons for Early Leaving from Further Education and Work-based Learning Courses*. DfES Research Report RR849, Sheffield: DfES

*is very little swapping of courses and options in September. The tasters appear to help the pupils make the right choices.'*

### **Case study 1.3: The information young people need**

During the case study work on the Equal Opportunities report, many young people felt they had received insufficient information.

*'I went to the open day. It wasn't very informative. They just said about the subjects we would be doing, told us to write it down, the times we would be there, when the breaks would be ...'*

What they really wanted was more detailed information about the subject as well as, or rather than, the mechanics of the YA programme. They also need reassurance that the Young Apprenticeship will be valued when they progress into further and higher education. One particularly strong theme to emerge was that young people appreciated being told more about the range of job options available within the industry:

*'We were shown how [the YA] could help us in the future. They gave us a leaflet showing us all the different types of job that learning about catering and health and safety could lead onto.'*

*'We learned about all the different types of job you would not have thought about.'*

### **Case study 2.2: Examples of the equality and diversity challenges faced by sectors and YAs**

Currently, women comprise just under one-fifth of the workforce under SEMTA's remit (the Sector Skills Council for engineering) and their representation tends to be in occupations demanding level two and three skills. Within the YAs, however, female representation is between five and six per cent nationally and this is higher than their representation in post-16 apprenticeship routes.

*'The major thing is to get young people out to employers to see what the sector is really like - by changing their assumptions you are more likely to attract a more diverse group of entrants.'*

Historically, the **Creative and Cultural Skills** sector has lacked diversity: there are few people in the workforce with special educational needs and physical disabilities, and people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds are under-represented. The proportion of workers from ethnic minority backgrounds generally is low, and this is a particular concern in the cultural heritage industry.

There are differences in the gender distribution seen in lower- and higher-level roles in the **Business and Administration** sector. Occupations drawing on qualifications at level four and above are heavily weighted towards men.

If you are unsure of the equality and diversity issues in work and training in the sector(s) of the YA you deliver, try contacting the relevant SSC or your local LSC.

**Case study 2.3: Overcoming misconceptions about the skills needed in sectors**

The motor industry sector is largely perceived as attracting low achievers. **Automotive Skills** (a Sector Skills Council) sees the YA as an opportunity to promote the sector to a different calibre of young person due to the emphasis on recruitment of solid achievers. The sector requires people with higher level abilities in both technical and management roles. This message needs to go out to young people.

**Case study 2.4: The extent to which parents influence young people's choices**

Parental involvement was seen as a key factor in recruitment by delivery partnerships. There was an awareness of the need to engage with parents beyond gaining their written support for YA candidates. The key issue for parents is the parity of esteem of vocational qualifications:

*'We have had kids who were really keen to take the BTEC but parents have put them onto the maths GCSE. We do our best to support the kids and encourage them to tell their parents what they really want - and to tell staff so that they can support those choices when in discussion with parents.'*

Occupation segregation is less of an issue for parents who tend to support their child's choices as long as they are assured that health and safety issues, as well as travel, are properly addressed. However, a parent of an atypical entrant to the YA demonstrates some misconceptions:

*'We let her reach her own decisions [to take the YA in male-dominated subject]. To be honest I was against her choosing [the subject] because it is a tough world out there and being a girl meant she would have to be exceptional to get anywhere.'*

**Case study 3.5: Involving current YAs in delivery**

The best advocate for the YA programme may be a young person who has participated. One partnership who offered a YA in Sports Management was considering whether to involve current students in the delivery of taster activities. More specifically, their plan was to use the current YA students to lead a taster activity about sports coaching for the potential new recruits. It was hoped that this would facilitate conversations about the course between potential and current students and also to demonstrate to potential students some of the learning outcomes from the course. An additional benefit was felt to be the opportunity for the current students to use some of the coaching skills they had developed as a result of the YA.

**Case study 3.6: Involving employers in taster sessions**

There has been mixed experience of involving employers. Typically, employers involved in tasters seem to have been engaged via existing relationships with the college or provider, although there may be scope to approach additional employers through, for example, a Sector Skills Council.

One taster, which involved a range of retail employers, found that overall employer involvement was good. However, using more than one employer made organising the activities difficult. The partnership also found that employers dropped out of the event if something more pressing came up. To try to incentivise employer participation in future tasters, the organisation is considering designing taster involvement as a free training opportunity for employers/employees, which could be certificated.

In another example, the YA partnership lead organisation held a Year 9 industry day in a number of schools. At each, the YA Lead made a presentation about engineering and brought employers to the events. There were in-school activities, such as building a crash barrier or wind-tunnel, and lots of related practical activities. The employers who provide placements went to the event and gave a presentation about the work in the sector. They also answered the questions young people had. Employers helped out with the practical activities, which had the benefit that they got to know the young people who might come to them on placement.

**Case study 4.1: Selecting employers to involve in tasters**

Amongst your placement employers there may be some (or someone on their staff) who are particularly keen to be involved in reaching out - perhaps due to their own experiences at this age:

*'I know that was missing when I left school, the actual guidance on various types of jobs and the ins and outs of them and what they entail. We got very, very little information and so you made a decision based on not a great deal of thought. That's why I am keen to be involved now.'*  
(Employer - Placement Supervisor)

When involving employers it is important to provide them with guidance about what they should cover. Many do not know what it is young people want to hear about or, if they do, they may not have considered providing this kind of input before. You might ask employers to speak to young people about the range of occupations in their company, what each does and how they interact. You might ask them to talk about the kinds of skills they value in their employees.

It is also a good idea to consider whether the employers you are hoping to work with are comfortable making presentations. Young people are more likely to find the session engaging if they are.

#### **Case study 4.4: Employer-led activities**

Once engaged, employers can fulfil a number of roles:

**Practical activities:** In one partnership the majority of taster activities were provided by the teaching staff. However, they brought in a painter and decorator, as they did not have this expertise within the school. The employer then ran a practical activity.

In another example, a small group of employers who had agreed to provide YA placements were invited to the taster to explain what the placement would be like in their organisation. They covered issues such as what young people would be likely to do and what they would learn as a result, but also covered the expectations employers had of things such as behaviour and time management.

**Source of practical IAG and role models:** Other partnerships have involved employers as a source of information, advice and guidance and as role models. One college ran a two-day programme called 'Women in Science and Engineering' where female pupils had the opportunity to meet female engineers and to visit employers in the sector.

#### **Case study 4.5: Ensuring employers present an inclusive view**

From an equalities perspective, it is important to ensure that employers are aware that equal opportunities are on the agenda and that hidden messages in their language may give the wrong impression, for instance, if nurses are always referred to as 'she' or engineers as 'he'.

You will already know from your discussions with them that some of your employers have a more traditional view of the sector, whereas others are more interested in attracting atypical entrants. Those who are already thinking in terms of diversity are likely to present a more inclusive view.

#### **Case study 5.1: Selecting pupils for the tasters**

The resources available and where the taster is held influence whether or not places for taster sessions are limited and thus whether selection is necessary. In one example from a school where a Year 10 vocational option was compulsory, there was no selection for taster participation, although there was some selection to ensure each pupil's abilities were matched to the demands of specific options.

In another example, and in light of the limited number of places available on the YA, only pupils who met the entry criteria for the YA were able to attend the taster. Another partnership held tasters only for pupils who had expressed an interest, in or had applied for, the YA. In a further case, the YA taster was offered only to those who had already opted for the relevant subject.

**Case study 5.2: The number of schools participating**

Partnerships in Cumbria and Otley have run tasters for several schools at the same time. In the partnership in Cumbria, 12 schools were involved over a four-week period. One benefit of delivering tasters to pupils from several schools at a time was that it enabled pupils to mix with students from other schools, as they would during the YA. You may also want to consider running the same taster programme on more than one occasion, particularly where there is limited capacity for certain activities.

**Case study 5.3: Duration of tasters**

A **one-day taster** had a specific focus on the skills required by the retail sector. It involved a blend of whole-group and break-out/team activities. The day started with an introduction to careers in the sector and this was followed by a team activity to identify the skills required by retail and to present these on a t-shirt. Representatives of each team then presented back to the whole group. The teams were then challenged to come up with an idea for a product, and to design a business plan and marketing strategy. Some role-play was involved as they were asked to present their business plan to the 'bank manager'. At the end of the day each team presented their product and strategy to the whole group. A facilitator finished with a plenary of the skills they had used. (CRAC, Retail Interactive)

This large-scale taster implemented aims to help pupils decide upon a range of vocational options for Year 10. The regular timetable is suspended while the pupils take part in the tasters. Each pupil experiences eight subjects over the course of a week, with each taster session lasting around two hours. Subject tasters involve a presentation either from staff or an employer as well as practical activities in the subject. (Derby).

This large-scale **extended tasters** implementation works across a range of vocational options at Year 10: the YA, IFP and vocational GCSEs. Each school is offered a block of time at the college for their pupils. Each pupil will attend tasters in three subjects. The tasters in each subject last for one hour and involve a relevant practical activity led by college delivery staff. In the automotive sector, this might be changing a car tyre, in food and drink they might prepare a dish. Care was taken to ensure that activities could be completed by students within the allocated time. (Cumbria)

While the previous study did not find specific examples of **shorter-duration** tasters, the examples above give some ideas of what a one- or two-hour session would contain. A primary focus of tasters is on practical activities with which information-giving can be integrated.

**Case study 5.9: School staff attending the tasters**

One partnership ran tasters attended by several schools. School staff also attended and were responsible for the young people whilst on the college site. It was also useful to have the teachers involved as this:

*'...[teachers] provided consistency for young people should they have any concerns or issues. Similarly, if there are any behavioural issues in the college environment, teachers are likely to be better equipped to deal with them as they know the young people.'* (Cumbria)

**Case study 5.10: Involving parents in tasters**

The involvement and support of parents was seen as critical to the success not just of tasters, but also pupils' achievement and retention in their options. A variety of methods of communication and involvement were tried: In some cases parent could join in taster activities, in others they were involved in information sessions about the YA - either at tasters or at separate events.

*'We do Lads and Dads days in the catering department. These take place on Saturdays in October and are advertised through the schools. They normally get a good take-up. They are aimed at kids from seven and eight up to kids who are 14 or 15 and, of course, their dads. We offer them because we have found that at the younger age boys may not consider getting involved in catering as it is seen as a girls subject. We invite their dads as a support to them, but so that they get a feel for what the subject is like too - that it's not just for girls.'* (Croydon)

*'We ran the taster for food and drink on a Wednesday with 23 pupils. Activities included sausage making and fudge preparation. At 3pm the parents were invited so they could see what the YA would involve and ask us questions about it. We chose this time as we felt more parents were likely to be available rather than at an earlier part of the day.'* (Otley)

**Case study 5.12: Attendance of pupils at the tasters**

In many instances places on taster provision were limited and therefore decisions were made about which pupils could attend the taster. This was usually based on pupil performance, or interest in the subject.

However, in a school in Derby there was no selection process for participation in tasters (although there was an intensive selection process to ensure that pupils were of the right level of ability to take up any chosen option). This model allowed all pupils to try all options, and therefore girls had to try non-traditional subject areas, such as construction, and boys had to try subject areas such as health and social care.

**Case study 5.13: Resourcing tasters**

In most cases the schools, colleges or training providers funded the tasters themselves. Some had received specific funding to develop vocational taster work perhaps from the local LSC, although in others, funds associated with the IFP or YA were directed into resourcing the tasters. In one example, ESF funding had been mobilised.

The relative expense of the tasters depended on location. If the taster was held in the school venue costs were not an issue. However, if the taster was at the training provider or college, transport costs had to be considered. In some of the extended taster implementations, while colleges charged schools for participating in the tasters, others viewed the tasters as a form of marketing and absorbed these costs. If a taster was run as part of a summer school, one college reported that parents were used to paying for the time their children spent in the summer school.

**Case study 6.3: Setting learning outcomes**

CRAC designed a full-day taster in the retail sector which it ran in four schools. The learning outcomes were configured around the employment in retail and the skills that are valued. As a result of attending the taster, the pupils would:

- Know the skills that are important for the world of work generally, and specifically for retail.
- Understand the importance of developing these skills and have a chance to use these skills.

**Case study 6.4: What activities to include in the taster**

The taster activities reported in the YA Equal Opportunities study were typically designed to reflect the types of activity a pupil might expect if they select the YA (or vocational option) in that subject. For example, in 'motor vehicle' pupils might take part in changing a tyre, in food and catering a dish might be prepared, and in performing arts pupils might perform in front of an audience - in the style of the 'X-Factor'.

Care was taken to ensure the activities were realistic to the subject and mode. Where written work formed part of assessment of the YA or subject, this was made clear to pupils, and an example of this was included in the taster.

**Case study 6.7: Activities to challenge occupational stereotypes**

Two taster providers used role models such as female engineers and male nurses, in order to show young people real examples of the opportunities and progression routes which they may not have considered.

An employer-led activity in a different taster challenged young people's stereotypes of the sector. The employer was a chemical engineer and asked young people to draw a picture of where she worked. All of the pupils drew a picture with smoke billowing out from a factory. The employer was then able to say it was not like they thought - in fact her company made no atmospheric emissions. This led into a discussion about the kinds of assumptions people make about different jobs and work environment.

This idea from the **Equal Opportunities Commission** aims to challenge occupational stereotypes:

*'An E2E programme in Birmingham and Solihull, called 3Es, includes a regular tutorial session on equal opportunities. As part of this, the young people take part in an exercise called 'What's my job?' in which they match pictures of individuals to various occupations: model, doctor, nurse, cleaner, chief executive, and so on. The tutor then uses this as a basis for exploring issues of stereotyping and challenging the young people's ideas about who can do certain jobs. One young man on the course was taking an NVQ level 1 unit in childcare. He intended to continue onto the Apprenticeship when he had completed the course.'*

(EOC: Action for Change: How training providers can break down gender segregation in vocational education and training. [www.eoc.org.uk/PDF/action\\_for\\_change\\_occ\\_seg\\_training.pdf](http://www.eoc.org.uk/PDF/action_for_change_occ_seg_training.pdf))

The **GERI project (Gender Equality and Race Inclusion)** has developed interactive learning materials, as well as activities and resources for learning providers, *designed to promote gender and race equality*. More information about this project and the resources available can be found at [www.geriproject.org/](http://www.geriproject.org/)

**Case study 6.8: Single-sex sessions in gender-segregated sectors**

Partnerships had included all-female and all-male groups in their tasters to allow experimentation with subjects that are strongly gender-stereotyped. In one example, the 'construction' teachers noticed that girls tended to work in a different way from the boys. They often worked in concentrated silence and together, whereas the boys were more rowdy and reminiscent of a building site and, given their larger numbers, this was felt to be intimidating. The girls only taster meant girls could work in a comfortable environment; a focus was put on careers in construction beyond the building site, eg quantity surveying, computer-aided design as well as better known about careers in the sector.

Training providers may be concerned that it is discriminatory to offer tasters only to boys or girls, however you can offer the taster to both and then provide single-gender sessions within it. Alternatively, in an example taken from the EOC, a provider provided different tasters to boys and girls:

*'Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Training in 2003 ran an activities event for 500 school pupils. Girls participated in three activities from a choice of nine traditionally male-dominated activities, including bricklaying, tetrahedron building (construction), computing, fire fighting and motor vehicle maintenance. Similarly, boys chose three out of nine traditionally female activities, including childcare, hairdressing, floristry, dental nursing, dance and fashion. The event was a huge success, with bricklaying proving to be the most popular workshop among the girls. Over 40 of the 200 young participants who completed evaluations of the day, indicated that they were interested in pursuing non-traditional careers. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that the event had a significant impact on many of the young people involved.'*

(EOC: Action for Change: How training providers can break down gender segregation in vocational education and training. [www.eoc.org.uk/PDF/action\\_for\\_change\\_occ\\_seg\\_training.pdf](http://www.eoc.org.uk/PDF/action_for_change_occ_seg_training.pdf))

#### **Case study 6.9: Briefing pupils prior to the taster**

In one school where taster sessions were compulsory for all pupils, assemblies were used as a forum to brief pupils about the purpose of the taster session.

*'We have to make sure that the students are in the right frame of mind. We have a run of assemblies prior to the tasters to show that the courses are for their benefit. The assemblies help to prepare them for the sessions, so they know what to expect, their purpose and what we hope they can gain from them.'* (Derby)

Where a more limited number of pupils are attending the taster an assembly might be inappropriate. A taster run by CRAC started with a fifteen minute welcome and introduction to the taster, which involved an introduction to the programme and a briefing about the importance of transferable skills.

#### **Case study 6.11: Assessing young people during the taster**

Tasters provide the opportunity to assess the suitability of young people to the subject area and level of the course, either to inform the selection process or to inform, tailor and pitch, planning and delivery.

One partnership that delivered a taster in performing arts had a session where pupils would perform in front of the group. While they did this the provider assessed the suitability and aptitude of the young person. Other tasters included formal assessments, such as written tests, to inform the planning and delivery for the cohort, and to assess likely support needs.

A partnership in Cumbria included an 'online' literacy and numeracy test and the Connexions online 'kudos' test within their tasters. The tests were implemented so that the college received detailed information about the young people joining their vocational programmes. This enabled better and quicker configuration of pupil support.

More commonly, partnerships used more informal methods of assessment, for instance, observing how skilled pupils were in practical activities or their interest in the subject, as demonstrated by their engagement with the taster.

*'While pupils take part in taster sessions, members of the selection panel will observe them to get a sense of their motivation and attitude towards the YA option and their aptitude for the subject more generally. Following the taster, pupils will be invited to an interview where they will complete a formal assessment too.'*

## Case studies from the evaluation of tasters (2006-07)

### Tasters in Derby (2006)

A school in Derby is the lead school in the partnership of five secondary schools. There are also training providers, a further education college and two specialist secondary schools in the partnership. The 'cluster' is designed to support each other - either by offering tasters or helping each other to develop provision.

At the lead school every pupil undertakes a vocational course in Years 10 and 11. The tasters offered in Year 9 relate to the vocational areas of the curriculum they offer. There is a greater input into the options process to explain to pupils what these courses and subjects are about, the sort of things pupils would be expected to do and what would be expected in terms of levels of achievement.

The tasters are compulsory for all Year 9 pupils, and the regular timetable is suspended while pupils take part in the taster work. This year the taster experience will consist of a carousel, where all pupils take part in tasters for eight subject areas, with a two-hour session in each subject area. A ninth subject area, beauty therapy, is to be offered at the local college, which is part of the partnership, later in the year. There is a week of assemblies leading up the taster session to prepare pupils for the sessions, so that they will know what to expect, the purpose of the tasters and what it is hoped they will gain from them.

For the taster sessions the school brings in one person, a painter and decorator, but all the other courses are now run by people who are part of the school staff. For example, travel and tourism is taught by geography teachers, and performing arts is delivered by music, drama and dance staff.

This year the school ran a 'Girls into Construction and Engineering' taster because in both these subject areas girls are under-represented. The girls-only taster focused on progression through the industry and the types of courses the areas that could lead onto, eg quantity surveying.

Within two to three weeks of the taster sessions the pupils make their initial option choices. However, there is a longer process after that, with more assemblies, an options evening, and form-tutor involvement when options can be re-selected or refined.

The deputy and assistant head, alongside the vocational course tutors, manage and organise the taster sessions. The head teacher oversees the process and heads the partnership with the other schools in the area. A large amount of time and effort is needed to plan and manage the tasters.

The Learning and Skills Council has funded some of the school's taster work to help with the set-up costs, for example developing a construction and an electrical facility. The taster and the vocational courses themselves are expensive to run, and the school has operated the rest of it through the school budget. Funding associated with the YAs helps fund the tasters in the area of health and social care. They are a specialist vocational school and have £90,000 a year for four years and this also helps towards the costs.

### **Tasters in Cumbria (2006)**

A college in Cumbria leads a partnership of 12 secondary schools, and provides taster sessions in vocational courses for their Year 9 pupils. The tasters include art and design, hairdressing, beauty therapy, motor vehicle, and construction. The college also offers tasters for subject areas offered by other training providers by inviting them into the college to work with pupils. This enables pupils to sample and gain information about the range of options available to them in the local area.

The tasters provide the basis for pupils likely to take vocational GCSEs, NVQ1 and YAs to choose their options. Each school sends a different number of pupils to the college taster days, but usually between 30 and 50, depending on the size of the school. Schools select pupils for the tasters based on academic ability and the results of a selection test. They choose pupils who are likely to get D-G grade GCSEs as they feel these pupils are most likely to benefit from undertaking vocational GCSEs and NVQ level 1 courses and that it will not negatively affect their position in the league tables of the percentage of pupils gaining at least five GCSEs grade A\*-C. However, if other pupils request to take part in the tasters then they are allowed.

In recent years, tests have been implemented which pupils undertake before the tasters. The college found there was a need to have more detailed information about the young people joining its vocational programmes in order to enable better and quicker configuration of support. The tests help to identify any literacy, numeracy or other support needs before pupils join their vocational route. The initial assessment has been 'seed' funded by the local Learning and Skills Council under the Pathfinder scheme to enable it to be incorporated this year. In future, the college will resource it.

There is a taster booklet for pupils which explains the options in depth, the qualifications that will be awarded and the typical 'routes of progression'. It also details contacts at the college, should pupils want to discuss the tasters or vocational areas in more depth.

The college offers each school blocks of time for their participation in the taster event (normally two half-days across two weeks). Taster sessions are run on the college site, by college lecturers and last for one hour. Pupils miss timetabled lessons in order to take part in the sessions.

Each school has a co-ordinator who attends the tasters, and they are responsible for the young people while at college. It is useful to have the teachers involved, as this provides consistency for young people (should they have any concerns/issues, there is a familiar face); similarly, if there are any behavioural issues in the college environment, teachers are better equipped to deal with this since they are familiar with the young people.

The tasters are run in May and then the pupils choose their options in June, to start courses the

following September. It was felt that the tasters might help to meet their aims better if they were run earlier in the academic year so that the tasters can help pupils with their decisions before the Year 9 option process.

While out on tasters, pupils miss out on the content of their everyday lessons and this can create tensions. Therefore, it was reported to be vital to communicate to the pupils that they must make up for any work that they miss, and get the support of teachers before the start of the process. In one school, teachers reported to the staff member responsible for organising the tasters if pupils participating in the tasters had failed to catch up with work missed during taster sessions.

In one school the tasters were initially 100 per cent funded by the school. Now there is some funding via the increased flexibility programme, but this is a small amount. The schools have signed a contract with the college and have targets for the number of pupils who will undertake a vocational GCSE, and the number that will undertake a YA.

#### **Tasters in Norwich (2006)**

The partnership, led by a college and involving a number of local secondary schools, began delivery of a YA programme last year, with the introduction of YA in performing arts. This is the first year the partnership has run the taster events, and hence this case study illustrates the initial set-up stages of planning, resourcing and managing taster sessions, early implementation issues and design principles.

The partnership has developed taster sessions to help make pupils more aware of the opportunities and options that are open to them, including progression and work demands, and to help assist with selection for the YA programme. At the time of writing, these events were in an advanced stage of planning for three occupational areas: performing arts, construction and health and social care, and the tasters are solely for those pupils who have expressed an interest in undertaking a YA. An express purpose of the taster sessions is to challenge gender-stereotypes in the subject areas.

The taster sessions are being designed to try to accurately simulate what the course would be like in order to avoid giving pupils false perceptions. At the end of the sessions the application process will be explained. Pupils will miss lessons for one day in March to attend the taster event. Parental permission will be sought for pupils to make their own way to the college, and if that is not forthcoming, or if there are a large number of pupils, then the schools will consider arranging a coach, although this will have cost implications.

The tasters for each YA area will be run on the same day. It has not yet, however, been confirmed whether they will run in sequence, giving pupils a more in-depth experience, or parallel to each other, allowing pupils to experience just one of the three options.

A sample of employers who are likely to provide placements for the YAs will also attend the taster sessions so they can input into the taster and explain what the work-based side of the process will be like. Employers have been engaged with the programme via word of mouth from pupils and parents, and via the college's brokerage team, which has a good employer network.

Pupils are not selected for the tasters; rather the YAs are marketed to all pupils. However, there are ability criteria for the YAs, and pupils must meet these to be able to take part in the tasters.

College and school liaison has been fairly informal so far, but there are plans to increase the number of YAs available, and thus the number of tasters will also expand. This may mean that relationships have to become more formalised in order to effectively manage the process.

The funding for the taster session has so far been accommodated within funding for existing provision at the college. However, as taster provision expands, then it is anticipated that a more formal approach to resourcing will be needed.

### **Taster Day at Telford College of Art and Technology (2007)**

#### *The 14 - 16 offer and tasters*

Telford College of Art and Technology (TCAT) has offered Young Apprenticeships (YA) for four years in Engineering and, from 2007, is offering the YA in Sports Science. In addition, TCAT has been involved in the Increasing Flexibility Programme (IFP) for considerable time and offers Entry level, level one and two courses in a range of subjects for 14 - 16 year olds.

The College has been running taster days since 2001 when tasters were initially implemented for the IFP. In 2007, the tasters available included the YA in Engineering, and IFP courses in Engineering, Childcare, Health and Social Care, Sport Science, Public services, Motor Vehicle, Hair & Beauty, uniformed services and the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

#### *Who are the tasters for?*

Pupils hear about the opportunity to study on the courses and attend the tasters through a booklet produced by TCAT and distributed through schools in the early part year 9. TCAT staff attend Year 9 assemblies, option talks, and parent evenings for its partner schools to ensure both pupils and parents have the opportunity to gain the information they need about the range of courses. During these school events, the opportunity to attend 'informing choice' tasters is raised and these are offered throughout Year 9.

The opportunity to participate in a taster session was offered to all pupils who had applied to the relevant courses. In this sense the role of the taster was to confirm choice rather than support decision-making. In addition, some selection processes were included as part of the tasters, such as interviews and 'Target Skills' assessment. At the 2007 event around 270 pupils attended the 'confirming choice' tasters from a range of schools.

#### *What are the aims of the tasters?*

The tasters have two key aims: to allow the young people to see and experience the College and course environments but also to allow staff some early information about their next cohort.

'It is a two-way process, it's for the young person to get a feel for the scheme and for the college to get a feel for the student'

Beyond this, ensuring the right match between pupils and courses is key since it reduces drop-out and changes in the early part of the academic year. The opportunity to ensure that pupils have a realistic idea of the work involved in the courses is also important, as is the opportunity to market the college and its benefits.

#### *How are tasters resourced?*

The college receives no additional resource for running the tasters. 'We just fit it in, it is done through goodwill'. However, the benefits offered in terms of pupils' improved understanding of the courses and the greater confidence amongst staff that the right recruitment decisions have been made, have led to a positive perception of tasters amongst college managers and tasters receive high level support. The college provides the facilities and equipment for each of the taster sessions, with staff fitting their contributions to the tasters into their existing work patterns. Pupils either make their own way to the taster or their school arranges transportation.

The remaining sections of this report focus on the 'confirming choice' taster visited for the evaluation.

#### *Structure of the taster day*

While there is a shared introduction to the day, pupils are quickly streamed into their subject areas for their taster. Pupils arrive from 8.30, to be registered. Following registration pupils were sent to the refectory to informally meet up with the Lead tutors in their subjects and courses before the formal start at 9.45am. Their subject tasters commence at 10am and end at 2.30pm with a short mid-morning break and longer lunch period.

As part of the registration process pupils were given an arm band to wear, colour-coded to the subject and taster they would be attending. This had been newly introduced in 2006-07 and was an effective method of managing a large group, enabling staff to keep a better track of individuals and ensure that they were attending the right taster.

The welcome and introduction, led by the 14-16 Coordinator, focused on the benefits of study at the college as well as setting the expectations of behaviour while on the taster. Pupils were directed to the relevant lead tutors and led into their subject area activities. During the time in their subject tasters all pupils were taken out so that they could complete the Target Skills assessment which is used as to assess their suitability and to establish a baseline measure from which to measure achievement once on the course. Target Skills assesses pupils' literacy and numeracy skill levels.

#### *The Engineering taster*

Due to an unavoidable clash with the teaching timetable for motor vehicle, pupils interested in this subject attended the engineering taster session so that the final group for the engineering taster was around 100 pupils. This number included the 29 applicants for the 25 available YA places. The taster was delivered in the manufacturing and engineering Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE).

The taster borrowed from a television format, using a 'scrapheap challenge' activity. Pupils were grouped into teams of six to design, build and test an egg-transporting device ready for a competition in the final session. They were supported by nine staff and five student ambassadors

from the ICT programme and nine from the final year of the Young Apprenticeships, two of whom were girls. The student ambassadors were assigned to facilitate and mentor the various groups throughout the design and build process.

The Scrapheap challenge was broken into three sessions with breaks and lunch built in. During each session, which lasted around 90 minutes, pupils were also interviewed, completed their Target Skills assessment and were taken on a brief college tour.

#### *What worked?*

The use of the arm bands, colour coded to subjects was an effective way of keeping track of pupils given the size of the group and the number of tasters being offered. This idea could also work for a carousel-style taster where different groups move around a smaller number of tasters before making subject choices.

The activity itself was highly effective. Pupils understood the format and so were able to move reasonably quickly into the design and build process. The use of raw eggs for the competition at the end of the taster absolutely illustrated whether the machines that had been built were up to the challenge!

#### *Tips for other partnerships*

- Try to keep to a strict timetable if this type of carousel format (between interviews, tours and taster activities) is offered. Agreeing the interviewing sequence and timetable, and giving all pupils an individual timetable with the times for their attendance at interview, assessment and the tour can help with this.
- Try to ensure a balance between practical activities and opportunities for the applicants to obtain in-depth information about the course and the institution. A group question-and-answer session with existing students would be a good way of doing this. The TCAT model of visiting various events at schools prior to the taster is a useful way of providing some IAG ahead of the taster. However there is a need to reinforce IAG and therefore throughout the taster, staff and any student ambassadors involved should be encouraged to approach individuals and groups to talk about the courses and answer any questions.
- Student ambassadors are positive role models for applicants and can be a good source of informal IAG about the college and course experience. Briefing ambassadors about how to manage groups and how to identify individuals who may appreciate some additional help would be a good idea.
- Where it is likely that some pupils will not be admitted to courses because of oversubscription it is important to make sure that information about other relevant courses is made available. However, if this idea is used, it is important that all attendees receive the information to avoid individual students feeling stigmatised.

Report by IES in partnership with TCAT

### Young Apprentice Construction Taster at Cornwall College, St Austell (2007)

The Taster Day was held over two days, the 1st and 2nd of May, due to the large number of students interested in the course. The reasons for the Taster days were two-fold: firstly, to provide prospective students with information about the course and practical workshop experience; and secondly, to assess the students' suitability for the course. This was the second year that a Taster session had been held for this Young Apprenticeship.

The Taster day was attended by a total of 36 Year 9 students drawn from six secondary schools over the two days. This included one girl on the first Taster Day. The majority of students were transported by school minibus. Parents were also invited and some attended on both days. Staff from the partner schools also attended and helped with the delivery of the activities. This included a teaching assistant who worked with two students who required support in the practical sessions.

#### *The programme*

- 9:00 Arrive, presentation about the Young Apprentice Scheme and outline of the day's activities
- 9:15 Initial Assessments
- 10:30 Reconvene in the Construction department. Split students into two groups to "have a go" at some practical activities. Students will be removed from the practical activity for an individual interview with the programme manager.
- 12:30 Lunch (students will need to bring a packed lunch or money to purchase a light snack)
- 1:00 Students will continue with a practical activity and interviews
- 2:15 Students to reconvene in PB005 for debrief and time for questions
- 2:30 Students return to school.

Students were told they would be engaged in light practical activity and so were advised to dress appropriately, in old clothes and sensible footwear. Parents were welcome to attend for all or part of the day.

Cornwall College staff involved in the day included Learning Support, a liaison officer from Cornwall College Business, the Young Apprentice construction course manager, a 14-16 Curriculum manager and lecturers delivering the current Young Apprentice Scheme.

Staff involved in the Taster days welcomed the students. The course manager then outlined the structure of the day and explained that the students would be assessed throughout the day regarding their suitability for starting the Young Apprentice Scheme in September. A brief Power Point presentation was shown to the students featuring photos showing work completed by the current Young Apprentices and an overview of the course.

The students then completed Initial Assessments for literacy and numeracy supervised by the Learning Support staff. The students then split into two groups to allow all students to experience both the practical sessions in carpentry and brickwork across the morning and afternoon sessions. The practical sessions were led by college lecturers and were designed with an emphasis on the

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students gaining experience in using hand tools. After the initial instructions had been given the students were monitored by the lecturers for evidence of practical skills and the ability to work independently. During the brickwork sessions students were interviewed individually by the Young Apprenticeship Scheme course manager, a curriculum manager and the liaison course manager.

As this was a selection process as well as a Taster day, college staff made brief notes highlighting positive aspects about individual students and also any concerns. Information was shared at the lunch break and at the end of the day this information fed into the decisions made by the Course Manager.

Feedback from the students on the day was very positive, especially with respect to the practical sessions. We collected students' responses using a questionnaire and many of the students stated how much they had enjoyed the chance to have a go at the brickwork activity. We also received positive comments from one of the schools saying how much their students had enjoyed the day.

Our own view was that the two days were very successful giving us a chance to select students based on their initial assessment score, practical skills, interview and general attitude and behaviour at the Taster day. In addition, students also wrote a short personal statement explaining why they should be allocated a place on the scheme and this was also useful in deciding who should be offered a place.

Report by Richard Brumwell, Lecturer in Construction at Cornwall College

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## Findings from the National Evaluation of Tasters

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The evaluation aimed to find out what young people seek from a taster experience as well as their perceptions of what is currently being provided. A key purpose of this research was to gain information that would help providers to understand how taster events can be better focused to meet young people's needs.

Providers were invited to participate in the national evaluation and those who did so asked the young people who attended taster sessions to complete an evaluation questionnaire. In the time period leading up to publication of this report, two institutions had responded to this part of the evaluation and these had offered YA taster events in four subject areas. A total of 66 pupil response forms were received.

### Method

The evaluation form is published in Appendix 6 of this report. In essence, young people attended the taster session that had been organised for them and at the end of the session completed the survey. The evaluation form was deliberately short to minimise any impact on the schedule of the day and hence on the experience of young people. In addition a short form was felt to be best in terms of optimising the response rate received. For this reason it was heavily structured with multiple response options to facilitate rapid completion, but also included opportunities for young people to add other relevant information where they wished to do so. Providers were asked to provide the researchers with details of the taster event to enable a richer understanding of the activities the young people were reporting on.

### The respondents

The respondent group comprised 45 boys and 18 girls. The large majority of young people were White with just four noting BME backgrounds. Three young people did not report their gender, race or the subject of their taster. Table 1 shows the characteristics of the respondent group by the subject of the taster they attended.

**Table 0.1: Respondent group by subject**

	N Young People attending	N Female	N Male	N BME
Engineering	23	1	22	1
Motor industry/vehicle	24	0	22	2
Health and social care	16	15	1	1
Missing	3	-	-	-
Total	63	16	45	4

Source: IES 2007

One of the institutions offered tasters in three subjects on the same day, from which a total of 53 survey forms were received. Although the other did offer taster sessions in a range of subjects, survey data were collected from only one of these (engineering and motor vehicle) which 13 young people who had applied for the motor vehicle programme attended. Both institutions were based in the West Midlands region of England.

It is important to note at the outset that the numbers participating in the survey are very small and the responses therefore are unlikely to capture the range of opinions of the Key Stage 4 or even of the potential Young Apprenticeship population as a whole. That said, the young people have made some valuable suggestions for ways in which taster delivery might be improved, which is likely to help providers and policymakers better configure tasters in future to meet their needs.

The study has also provided a piloting opportunity for the survey format. Some amendments have subsequently been made which should enable clearer results if providers would like to use the questionnaire to gain feedback on, and inform development of, their own taster events, or indeed if the DCFS or LSC wish to take the evaluation further.

### What information young people want from a taster

The first section of the questionnaire asked young people about the information they had hoped to gain from attending and whether they felt this information had been forthcoming. Table 2 shows the results of this analysis for the whole group.

**Table 0.2: Information available at the Taster**

	Wanted to know this (%)	Got this information (%)
How I will be assessed on the YA	64	49
What my choices are when I finish the YA	49	59
What the college/training provider is like	47	65
What jobs the YA might lead to	47	68
What these jobs are like for someone like me	47	62
What the YA involves - where & what I will study, placements, etc.	46	73

Multi-response

Source: IES 2007

There are a few points to note regarding the first column in Table 2, which indicates the types of information young people want from a taster. Nearly half were interested in the choices that would be available to them following the YA, with slightly fewer wanting information about the college/provider environment, the kinds of jobs the YA might lead to and what those jobs would be like.

The topic about which the largest proportion of young people had hoped to gain some information was assessment; two-thirds of the young people had wanted information on this. Given that the YA constitutes quite a radical departure from what the young people had experienced up to that point it is understandable that getting more information about how they will be assessed is important to them; in addition, for some the need to try to achieve a balance between the number of courses assessed through examinations in Year 11 and those that are more coursework-based may be an important consideration.

Young people were able to specify any other areas on which they wanted information. Only three responded in this regard and the additional information they identified was:

- basic jobs on a car
- how many GCSEs, and
- how much work is involved

The first of these can be considered as relating to the practical aspects of the Young Apprenticeship and it would be hoped that, if not covered by the taster, the YA in Motor Vehicle itself would cover this. The second two factors relate more to what will be achieved as a result of the YA (how many GCSEs it is equivalent to) and what is involved in undertaking the programme (and this probably relates to the earlier point regarding the extent and nature of assessment involved as well).

The second column in Table 2 relates to the information that young people reported having received at their Taster. What is immediately obvious is that their reports of the information they received is in virtually the reverse order of young people's priorities for information (ie column one). In other words, providers were more likely to provide information about which fewer of the young people were interested. This is not necessarily a bad thing, of course. Around half of the young people had indeed wanted this information and their needs had been met. In addition, it is more than likely that some at least of the remaining pupils found the information provided to be of some use – we did not collect information on this specific point, and this is something that providers might wish to include if evaluating their own provision in future. In sum, providers had largely given information that covered most of the information categories the young people had required.

The notable exception to this was the issue of how the YA is assessed; this was the topic on which the majority of pupils had reported wanting information, but a

minority – less than half – reported having received. While these are small numbers, nonetheless the pattern seems fairly clear-cut: providers could usefully increase the amount of information they provide on assessment as this is a key area of interest (and possibly concern) to a majority of the young people.

Further analysis revealed there existed a fairly sizeable group (18 per cent) of young people who had come to the taster with little idea of their expectations: they identified none of the factors listed in Table 2 as areas on which they would like to gain information. Nonetheless even for this group there still appear to be some benefits to be gained from attending tasters. Table 3 compares the proportions of young people within this sub-group who felt their information needs had been met compared to those who had identified one or more issues of interest.

Inspection of the data in Table 3 reveals that, in fact, considerably higher proportions of the young people without expectations reported that they had gained information through the Taster. While on the one hand this might indicate that they were relatively easily pleased since they did not know what it was they wanted in the first place, it might also indicate that the Taster had shaped their thinking about the YA in a very positive way. This issue could certainly be explored further by providers in their own evaluations or nationally by the DCFS or LSC.

**Table 3: Information available through the Taster for the group with no expectations**

	Some expectation group. Got this information %	No expectation Group. Got this information %
What my choices are when I finish the YA	52	92
What the college/training provider is like	59	92
What jobs the YA might lead to	63	92
What these jobs are like for someone like me	56	92
How I will be assessed on the YA	41	83
What the YA involves - where and what I will study, placements, etc.	70	83
Received other information in addition to the above	15	17

Multi-response

Source: IES 2007

### What young people experienced at the taster - and what they thought of it

Table 4 below shows what the young people said they received as part of their taster. A large majority (86 per cent) noted that presentations were involved; slightly fewer said that practical activities were involved (82 per cent). Similar numbers reported question and answer sessions or a tour of college or provider premises. Fewer reported all-male or all-female group sessions (which can be one mechanism for

helping atypical pupils to get involved in stereotyped subjects). However, since the sessions evaluated had all included one representative of the minority sex, the only way in which the young people who gave feedback could have experienced single-sex sessions in the tasters was if they were a member of a sub-group formed of the dominant sex (see Table 1 earlier). Because of this, the ratings given to single-sex sessions are not discussed in the following section.

The aspects of the tasters that the pupils reported enjoying the most were the practical activities: 77 per cent of the sample rating these as very good; and the presentations (58 per cent of young people rated these as very good). None of the young people rated either of these as poor.

Similar numbers reported that a question and answer session was involved or that a college tour had taken place (70 and 69 per cent respectively). Young people's ratings of these activities were more mixed: while overall more reported them as very good than did not, around one-third did not express much of an opinion about them, and a small number of young people had felt these to be very poor.

**Table 4: What was involved in the Taster and how young people rated the activities**

	Did this %	Rating		
		Very good %	Neither poor nor good %	Very poor %
Presentations from teachers, employers or someone else	86	58	42	0
Practical activities eg made something, used equipment	82	77	23	0
You could ask questions to people who made presentations	70	61	33	7
Tour of college premises	69	57	36	7
All female or all male groups	42	36	61	4
Some other activity was delivered in the Taster	18	75	25	0

*Source: IES 2007*

Eleven young people noted that other activities were involved in the Tasters they had attended. These included a listening skills session and a session using Computer-Aided Design software, both of which might be assessed as practical activities. Lunch was noted by a few of the young people and was free in some cases. Interestingly, one young person mentioned that the Taster had provided an opportunity to make friends which suggests that the Taster offers an opportunity to bond with other potential members of the YA route. Young people were largely positive about these other activities.

In Table 5 we explore how the ratings of the group with no expectations of the Taster compare with those of the group who had some expectations. For this analysis we have simply looked at the proportion in each sub-group rating each factor as very

good. For each of these items except the tour, a higher proportion of the 'no expectations' group gave 'very good' scores; this was particularly the case for the presentations. While these results should be interpreted with some caution given the small numbers involved, nonetheless the findings suggest there is real value to be gained from participation in Taster events even for those who have little initial idea of what to expect from it.

**Table 5: How young people rated the activities - some and no expectations groups**

	YP with some expectations. Score for Very Good %	YP with no expectations. Score for Very Good %
Presentations from teachers, employers or someone else	56	70
Practical activities eg made something, used equipment	77	78
You could ask questions to people who made presentations	60	64
Tour of college premises	58	55

Source: IES 2007

### How useful it is to have other people at Tasters?

We were interested in young people's opinions about different people (stakeholders) attending the taster. We offered three categories here and asked young people to indicate if they were aware of whether any employers, current YAs or parents/guardians had attended, and if so, how useful it was to have them at the taster event. However young people did not fill out the survey as we intended and some reported on usefulness of these stakeholders whether or not they had attended the taster event. The results are shown in Table 6, with the first column showing the proportion of young people reporting that each stakeholder was present, the second column shows the proportion amongst the sample who thought their presence was useful. The third and fourth columns show how useful each stakeholders' presence was by whether they had attended or not. We might consider the fourth column an indicator of whether young people would value the stakeholder being present.

**Table 6: Who attended the Taster and whether their presence was useful**

	They were there %	This was useful %	Usefulness if YP reported stakeholder present %	Usefulness if YP reported stakeholder not present %
Employers	54	52	79	13
Current YA students	44	25	52	6
Parents/guardians could come	16	15	44	9

Source: IES 2007

Just over half of the young people noted that employers were in attendance (54 per cent), fewer (44 per cent) noted that current YAs students had attended and just 16 per cent said that parents had attended.

The utility of having these different stakeholders involved varied somewhat. Overall only slightly fewer of those who had said employers were involved said having them there was useful. Looking firstly at the young people who had been in taster sessions that employers had attended, the employers' input was thought useful by around four-fifths of the young people. Where employers did not attend the taster, 13 per cent of the sample indicated that they think it would be useful to have them there.

Less than half of the young people reported that student ambassadors had been present at their taster session. Although few of those who had not had ambassadors present thought that this might be useful, when the ratings of the young people who had been in sessions with the YA ambassadors are examined, more than half of them reported that the Ambassadors' presence had been useful.

For parents being present at the session, though, there was less enthusiasm. Few reported parents actually being present at the session, just 16 per cent; of these, only 44 per cent said that having them present was useful and only one-in-ten of those who had been at sessions in which parents had not been present said that it might be useful if they were.

The key messages arising from this part of the analysis are that young people value employers' presence at tasters. Whether that is to talk about work in the sector or perhaps to discuss typical placement experiences is not known; in fact, both are likely to be of interest to the young people. Since the work placement is a key attraction of the YA all providers should consider involving employers in their YA tasters.

Where YA ambassadors attended tasters, their presence was valued by young people. Arranging for YA ambassadors to participate in taster sessions is therefore likely to be a benefit. While there does appear to be some role for parents at tasters, the rather limited support for this idea from the pupils suggests that their involvement should perhaps be restricted to just certain parts of the taster sessions, possibly just the presentation part of the day.

As we have indicated above, we do not have any further data with which to explore these issues further, but it may be something that providers wish to consider investigating in their own taster evaluations.

### Clarity about future career

We asked young people whether they had reached a decision about their future career before the taster and how they felt about this issue following the taster. Unfortunately the question was not well understood and a number of young people gave multi-coded rather than single responses either before or after the taster or at both points

(Table 7). One possibility for this might be that the question that asked if they had some ideas about the jobs they might do could be seen as a supplement to the first and the third questions: 'I know the job I want to do (but if I don't get my ideal job I have some ideas about other jobs I might do)' or 'I have not made any decision about the jobs I might do, (but I do have some ideas about this)'. Based on this outcome we have revised the evaluation questionnaire and the final version incorporates these changes.

**Table 7: Young people's orientation towards their future career before and after the taster**

	Before %	After %
I know what job I want to do	67	30
I have some ideas about the jobs I might do	51	35
I have not yet made any decision about jobs I might do	26	7

multi-coded responses

*Source: IES 2007*

Of the whole group, two-thirds said that they knew what job they wanted to pursue following the taster while half had some idea about jobs they might do. Just over a quarter said they had not made any decision about the job that they might do.

The good news is that fewer said that they had not made any decision after the taster – just seven percent, or around a quarter of the number that had been undecided beforehand. In other words, it would appear that a sizeable proportion of the undecided group had been helped to reach some sort of decision.

These figures repay some closer analysis. Table 8 shows the movement of young people between the 'before' and 'after' questions that asked if they knew what job they wanted to do:

**Table 8: Responses to the statement 'I know what job I want to do' before and after tasters**

	I knew what job I wanted after the taster %	I did not know what job I wanted after the taster %	Total %
I knew what job I wanted before the taster (N = 42)	29	71	67
I did not know what job I wanted before the taster (N = 21)	33	67	33
Total	30	70	100

*Source: IES 2007*

Inspection of Table 6 reveals that, of the 42 young people who said they had known what job they wanted before the taster, some two-thirds had shifted their opinion following the taster event. A majority of those who had previously known what job they wanted now said they did not know. This in and of itself is not necessarily a bad

thing – it may mean that more information has made the young person realise that their initial choice was not a good one. However, more research would be needed to confirm this point. A similar picture is seen for those who did not know what job they wanted before the taster. Although a third of this group now felt that they did know what job they wanted, two-thirds still did not.

The responses of young people to the question about whether they had any ideas about the jobs they might do before and after the taster show a similar pattern. Table 9 provides the breakdown of responses to these questions.

**Table 9: Responses to the statement ‘I have some ideas about the jobs I might do’ before and after tasters**

	I had ideas about jobs after the taster %	I did not have any ideas about jobs after the taster %	Total %
I had ideas about jobs before the taster (N = 32)	25	75	50
I did not have any ideas about jobs before the taster (N = 31)	45	55	50
Total	35	65	100

Source: IES 2007

Before attending the taster session around half of the young people had ideas about the jobs they might do and around half did not. Following the taster session 65 per cent said they no longer had any idea and just 35 per cent said that they did. The largest shift is seen amongst those who previously had an idea about jobs – after the taster session just 25 per cent still said this compared to 75 per cent who said they no longer had any ideas about jobs.

Last in this section pupils were asked to say whether or not they had made any decision about the jobs that they might do. Again, they were asked whether this was the case before and after they attended the taster session. Table 10 shows the data for this question.

**Table 10: Responses to the statement ‘I have not yet made any decision about jobs I might do’ before and after tasters**

	(Following the taster) I have not yet made any decision about jobs I might do %	(Following the taster) I have made a decision about jobs I might do %	Total %
(Prior to the taster) I had not yet made any decision about jobs I might do (N = 16)	6	94	100
(Prior to the taster) I had made a decision about jobs I might do (N = 43)	7	93	100
Total	7	93	100

Source: IES 2007

The results from this last question are more reassuring than the previous. Although a quarter of pupils said that, prior to the taster event they had not made a decision about jobs, following the taster event just 7 per cent of pupils (4 individuals) said that they had not made a decision. What we do not know, of course, is the nature of that decision. Again, to gain more information on the way in which taster events are informing pupils' job decisions, more research would be required.

### What and who influences career and learning decisions

A key concern arising from the equal opportunities evaluation of the YA was the influence of other stakeholders (for instance teachers, parents, guidance staff) on the careers decisions young people reach. Therefore, the evaluation questionnaire also asked young people about who, or what, had helped them make their career and learning decisions. Table 11 reports the responses to this question from those young people who attended the taster events.

**Table 11: What and who informs career and learning decisions**

Source of information	%
Taster day	84
Parents/guardians	80
Friends	60
Talking to someone who does the type of work	53
Teachers	50
Career leaflets	49
Internet	48
Connexions	39
Television characters who do this work	38
Other sources	16

multi-coded responses

*Source: IES 2007*

The Taster day therefore can be seen as having had a significant influence on the career thinking of these young people and, it is hoped, on their learning and training decisions as they proceed towards their future career. As noted by providers in the young apprenticeship equal opportunities evaluation, parents are the strongest of the people who influence young people. Peers also appear to have a fairly strong influence young people's decisions, although to a much lesser extent than parents.

Talking to someone in their chosen career or sector was cited as an influence by more of the young people than was seeing characters on the television undertaking this work (53 per cent compared to 38 per cent). Teachers, careers leaflets and the internet were each cited by similar proportions and are influential for around half of the sample. Slightly fewer than four in ten young people noted the influence of

Connexions in their careers decision, although this may merely mean that few of the group had had any interaction yet with this service.

Sixteen per cent of the sample noted that other sources had some influence over their careers thinking. Of those who said that other sources of information had been influential for them, three young people reported that their family had been an influence and two noted the influence of hobbies. One felt s/he had not been influenced by anything but had reached the decision independently. The other two responses were not clear.

### Benefits of the tasters

In the questionnaire we suggested some of the possible benefits that might result from participation in the tasters. There was also an opportunity for young people to list other benefits they had gained as a result of attendance. Table 12 shows the outcomes from this set of questions.

**Table 12: Other benefits of taster events**

	Definitely %	Maybe %	Not really %
I am more likely to go on the YA	83	13	3
I am more confident about my year 10 choices	80	16	3
I have a clearer idea of career options	77	18	5

multi-coded responses

*Source: IES 2007*

Most notable is the extent to which each benefit was endorsed, with close to four-fifths of young people agreeing with each of the three items. The biggest benefit according to the sample group was that they felt they were definitely more likely to pursue the Young Apprenticeship. Only slightly fewer noted that they were definitely more confident about their Year 10 choices. Again, only slightly fewer (and still more than three-quarters) noted that they were definitely clearer about careers options).

Four young people felt they had gained something else as a result of the Taster however only one said what this was. They indicated that it had helped them to decide whether or not they would enjoy the Young Apprenticeship.

### Overall satisfaction with the taster

A space was provided on the survey form for young people to add comments about anything else to do with the taster. Eighty-two per cent of the sample provided a comment and these were overwhelmingly positive. In only four instances was any criticism expressed although at the same time these young people also said how good the event had been.

The range of positive responses related to:

### **Information**

*'Good, gave me more information and a clearer view on what the course includes'*

*'I thought it was very helpful, and it cleared up a few of the worries that I had'*

*'It was good and helped me decide what I wanted to do and gave good information'*

### **Meeting people and working in groups**

*'I thought it was fun and the things I did improved my group work and my ideas of my job.'*

*'I thought it was great especially making friends and working in groups'*

### **Impacts on learning and career decisions**

*'I thought it was very good and useful and has now made me want to do this course even more.'*

*'Very good, had lots of fun and learnt a lot. I'm more happy to join the course now.'*

### **The practical experience**

*'It was very good as shown what would do and got hands on experience.'*

*'It was really good, we got to do some things that we will be doing on the actual course.'*

The small number of criticisms largely related to the length of time spent in the practical activities (in one case too much time in the practical and in two others, too little). The remaining criticism was that *'The taster was very enjoyable but I didn't learn much about the actual course'*.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

A key message from this small study is the extent to which young people enjoyed the taster experience and the way in which it positively influenced their thinking towards the Young Apprenticeship and their future learning and careers options. Tasters are valued by young people both for the practical activities and the opportunity to gain information about the course. Attending the taster was felt by young people to increase their likelihood of joining the YA.

Their responses to the survey suggest that there are some issues for providers to consider:

- **Providers are generally giving the right sorts of information.** Young people may want various different things from a taster day but the survey revealed that providers are, in the main, providing the right sorts of information. Students appreciate receiving information about the YA and gaining some practical experience of what is involved in it. Tours of college or provider environments and opportunities to ask questions are also valued.
- **Some other areas need to be included in the overall package of information given to young people.** Young people may want different things from a taster day but the most important two issues (or at least the two that the greatest numbers of pupils are interested in) appear to be information about assessment and about their options once they have completed the YA. Around half of the students are also interested in finding out about what the college/training provider is like, what jobs the YA might lead to, what the jobs are like and what the YA involves. Generally speaking, though, while providers appear to be giving sufficient information on these last four points, they were doing less well on the two former ones. The findings suggest that if providers were to add some information on assessment and potential learning paths, learners would appreciate this. This does not necessarily mean that this additional information has to be fitted into what was, in many cases, an already tightly-packed day. Such information might be given in the form of handouts, with flow charts or other diagrams to show the key information.
- **Ensure a balance of practical activities and information sessions.** Practical activities are most positively received by young people, closely followed by information sessions. Both elements are valued; however, providers need to ensure that they are *carefully balanced* to ensure that neither dominates the day.
- **Involve employers and student ambassadors** as the presence of these stakeholders was clearly valued by young people. Both employers and ambassadors may require some briefing and development prior to the taster to ensure they are confident to interact with young people and to ensure they have clear ideas on the issues they might cover during the taster.
- The tasters was felt to have had a **strong influence on young people's careers decisions**, although as providers have predicted the young people said that their parents have a strong influence on them as well. What is unknown is whether tasters sessions can help break down any negative views (whether of vocational learning or of jobs in particular sectors) that the young people have acquired due to parental influence. A further interesting question is the extent to which taster sessions have any impact on the views of the parents who attended. Both of these points would benefit from further exploration.