

Careers education for exceptionally able girls

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This article focuses on the development of Careers Education Information Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) for exceptionally able girls at Newstead Wood School, a state girls' selective school, in Bromley. There are approximately 1000 students aged 11-18, entering via competitive tests from a 9 mile radius in SE London. In league tables the school is usually among the top state schools. For the past decade about 97% of year 13 students have gone into higher education. The average UCAS points total per pupil in 2010 was 470. It has held the Investors in Careers quality award for the past 14 years, with careers being judged 'outstanding' in the last three Ofsted inspections.

I must acknowledge that not all students at the school are equally talented (experience as well as research from the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth (NAGTY) (Campbell, et al. 2006) shows a very wide range of abilities, talents and interests), but on a national scale they all have the potential to achieve academically to an extremely high level in single or multiple fields. In spite of the work of NAGTY, and perhaps because of it, there has been the perception especially among those working with exceptionally able young people that we and they are peripheral to the education scene. Even such a well-researched, practical and useful document as *Better Practice* (Donoghue, 2008, pp 50-51) devotes a mere page and a half to CEIAG for gifted and talented students. As far as careers are concerned, as in so many other areas of provision for young people, the general assumption seems to be that 'bright' students can look after themselves and do not need specialist support or adequate funding. I would like to argue that this is not the case. As Donoghue (2008) points out,

the multiplicity of choices available to gifted and talented individuals, pressure from high expectations (their own as well as others'), and difficulty in accessing support (especially for non-academic paths or careers) can make decision making and life around transition points particularly stressful.

In considering CEIAG in relation to the exceptionally able student, there are some challenges, not least being the lack of agreed criteria behind the phrase 'exceptionally able'. Since this article is not intending to weigh up the merits of different versions of giftedness, I shall use the conclusions reached in *Understanding the Challenge of the Exceptionally Able Learner* (Lowe, 2006). This research was partially conducted at Newstead Wood to explore issues of exceptional ability.

Exceptional ability

I maintain that it is not possible to separate learning about careers from any other type of learning. Consequently, this article focuses on those cognitive and personal characteristics revealed by Lowe (2006) which are particularly relevant to progression into adult life. Lowe found that exceptionally high-achieving students showed some or many of the following traits:

- Depth, complexity, speed and sophistication in their comprehension and thinking
- Originality, creativity and intellectual curiosity
- Excellent oral ability and advanced vocabulary
- Self-motivation and independence in learning

- Energy, enthusiasm, conscientiousness, occasional perfectionism, sensitivity
- A tendency to be easily bored.

Exceptionally able learners have particularly demanding learning needs which can be very challenging for schools to meet, and I argue that this is just as true for learning in relation to CEIAG as it is in academic subjects. Students need:

- High levels of challenge and pace but time for reflection
- Personalisation of learning, with feedback and flexibility
- A variety of teaching styles, including lots of discussion
- To be developed to the limits of their ability, as a whole person
- To be helped to leave school with confidence in their social skills.

To quote the Head Teacher of one of the schools involved in the study:

One striking feature of exceptionally able girls is their ability to...recognise the environmental, physical factors conducive to good learning. They understand how and when they need to relate to others to learn well. Most importantly, they are extremely self-aware, knowing the personal conditions that they require in order to learn best...They moved from a personal analysis to strategic thinking with enviable alacrity...Their thinking about solutions was pragmatic yet impressively creative...they demanded outcomes.

(Allen, cited in Lowe, 2006 p.9)

Pedestrian work sheets, tick-box activities and facile career scenarios which do not relate to the career hopes and ambitions or the sophisticated understanding of really able students do nothing to aid their confidence or engage their imagination. Key Skills were too obvious and the ASDAN suite of awards became meaningless as its focus increasingly moved to a paper-based model. Such activities do not enhance the credibility of careers education for very academically able students. Interview training

is another case in point. Many scenarios shown in DVDs designed to help year 11 students handle interviews are obvious or so extreme as to be laughable. (Able girls do not need to be told not to turn up to an interview breathing curry and beer fumes from the night before over the interviewer, nor do they need to be reminded not to stick their chewing gum under their seat during the interview). I find that exceptionally able students in Year 11 learn far more effectively from discussion and analysis of more subtle scenarios involving graduate recruitment, even though I recognise that these are designed for students who are at a later stage in their education and career development.

These girls, in career terms, are, or could be, the potential leaders of the near future: the business managers, politicians, opinion formers, doctors, judges, scientists, engineers, etc. as well as the parents. I believe that what they make of their lives, and whether they reach their full potential, could have a major impact on society, inside and outside the sphere of employment.

Careers education (CE)

There is no agreed definition for what constitutes 'career'. There is also an active debate about what a CE programme for especially able students should contain, in schools and as a career studies module in higher education, as is clear from the *2009 Reading International Career Studies Symposium* (McCash, 2010). Arthur (2010 p.4) considers five definitions of 'career' and settles on 'the evolving sequence of a person's work experiences over time' claiming that this definition 'opens up a wide variety of disciplinary perspectives.' As he points out, it can accommodate careers in organisations, occupations, public service, and industry clusters, as well as allowing examination of 'more recent ideas such as career-relevant networks, knowledge-based careers, web-enabled careers, and so on.' To this list, I would add family-based careers, portfolio careers and self-employment or entrepreneurship. This seems to be a practical approach to preparing exceptionally able young people for the challenges of adult life.

Inkson's (2007) view of careers as a variety of metaphors is also useful here. One cannot

ignore the interrelationships between personal dynamics, context, and the complexity of social relationships. Possibly because of the large amount of happenstance in my own life, I have never, perhaps ironically, followed a planned career 'path' of my own devising. I tend to see a career as crazy paving with a large area of stonework laid by us, and not as a path with a definite beginning and end. This area does not have to be a specific shape, although it can travel in one direction if we wish, but it is full of different stone fragments held together by our skills and past experiences. Although other people can provide sand, cement and even the stones, we have to lay it ourselves, if it is to be truly ours. The fragmentary nature of careers work is one of the things which makes it so difficult to evaluate because the definition of 'success' will be different for everyone. One of the challenges for career education in schools is to enable students to develop and have confidence in their own career metaphors, according to their own personalities, circumstances and value systems.

The last government's approach to CEIAG was utilitarian, focused on national employment and community cohesion. I maintain that this is a valid set of concerns for a government but it is far from being the,

...lifelong process of working out a synthesis between individual interests and the opportunities (or limitations) present in the external work-related environment, so that both individual and environmental objectives are fulfilled.

(Van Maanen and Schein (1977) cited in Arthur (2010 p.5)).

I believe it is this latter approach which will maximise the outcomes for exceptionally able students. The former careers companies, having had their funding absorbed, and constrained by the setting up of Connexions, are of limited use to exceptionally able students. In spite of the supposed provision of a universal service, their funding led to a focus on NEET students.

Able students, who arrive in year 7 expecting to go

into higher education at 18, will usually achieve well academically. They are convinced both by parental pressure and school ethos of the importance of good qualifications, and they can put themselves under great pressure to achieve the highest grades. For them, the idea that careers is about raising attainment and becoming employable is useful only in general terms. The real question for such students, and their teachers, is whether they will do justice to their abilities and achieve the level of employment and the quality of life that will enable them to fulfil their potential.

In the wider sense of the word, any effective programme should make students aware of the varied interpretations of the word 'career'. In addition, in terms of employability, the challenge is not, 'How do we get our able students to the 'best' universities?' but, 'What does this student need to do to stand out from the graduate crowd and how do we as a school, educate, prepare and support her to do this?' I feel the degree is a fundamental stepping-stone, but is not an end in itself because with a mass higher education market the mere possession of a degree is no guarantee of a graduate-level job. Exceptional personal competencies are all-important at this level, as UCAS's analysis of the employability skills recognises (UCAS 2010). However, the development of high-level skills cannot be left until the student begins year 12 or a degree course. Ideally, an effective CEIAG programme will begin in year 7 and be delivered through a whole-school curriculum and ethos.

I maintain that this programme for exceptionally able students should recognise the complexity of their intellectual needs (while also recognising that emotionally they may not be so advanced). It should provide a learning environment which is challenging, coherent and varied in the form of a spiral curriculum tailored to collective and individual need. It should be explicit about options, occupational information, and the varied nature of work environments and business structures, with students being helped to evaluate, analyse and apply this information. Although a certain amount of reflection is needed, a career is for practical living, and the programme for able students in

years 7 – 13 should, above all, be experiential, skill-based, stimulating and confidence-building to enable students to develop high-level career management skills. It should be relevant to rapidly-changing life in the 21st century and provide opportunities for teamwork and leadership, and financial capability practice. I think that such a programme ought to be delivered by all who have the responsibility of educating the exceptionally able including academic, pastoral and support staff. In addition, students who are developing their own skills in extra-curricular activities such as music, sport, volunteering and part-time work, must also be enabled to recognise and build on the personal and career management skills they are sharpening in these contexts, irrespective of the knowledge which may also be acquired.

This is quite a tall order unless the governors, head teacher and senior management of a school provide the time, resources and leadership necessary. I maintain that the programme will only be effective if it is integrated with Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) and Work Related Learning (WRL) programmes as well as with the academic curriculum and extra-curricular activities. True personalised learning should not carry the labels; 'academic', 'pastoral', 'vocational', etc., because it concerns the whole child. One must, however, be realistic and pragmatic about a school's ability to manage all this amid competing priorities. The CEIAG guidance issued by the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF, 2009 and 2010a) was very welcome because it was intended to be statutory and placed clear responsibility for resourcing the delivery of CEIAG on Head Teachers and local authorities. It seems that the present Government intends to continue this approach for schools under LEA control, but not for academies.

Another complication for CEIAG planning is that we try to prepare students for adult life without being certain about the component aspects of that life. As we can see from the works of Chaucer and Shakespeare, essential human nature has not changed much over the past few centuries. However, society and its working environment have changed out of all recognition and, for able students, the potential working world is now global. The one thing we can be sure of is that the

medium-term future will offer opportunities and constraints difficult to imagine. To deal with adult life and work in an unknowable future, the student will have to contextualise her decisions and be prepared to confront what Laws calls this 'protean' question 'manifesting itself differently to each rising generation' (Laws, 1996. p. 95). I believe, however, that the approaches he proposed then are not now adequate for effective career development in the 21st century. They also have the disadvantage that they allow CEIAG to be relegated to the periphery of the curriculum, if a school feels so inclined.

Most schools claim to educate the whole child. Nevertheless, with the present focus on league tables, there is a tendency to equate 'education' with 'high exam grades' and this can be especially true of schools with academically able students where high grades can become an end in themselves. It is very difficult, for example, to measure numerically how successful a school has been in helping a student achieve her ambition of becoming a doctor or a successful entrepreneur. In the first case, academic ability by itself is no guarantee of a place at medical school, and in the second example, one could argue that a high grades are not as important as the development of superb people and organisational skills. Although Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1999) is controversial, from a practical careers perspective, it has much to recommend it as we try to help students develop self-understanding. Psychometric career tests such as those developed by the Morrisby Organisation measure intellectual talents and abstract reasoning. However, the Morrisby Profile also assesses: spatial and mechanical aptitudes; planning style; preferred learning style; awareness and flexibility; commitment and confidence; team and leadership style; and manual speed and skill. The lack or possession of these attributes will have a major impact on career development.

I maintain, then, that careers work needs to be embedded in a school ethos which focuses on the development of the whole young person as she moves towards adulthood. CEIAG thus becomes a core activity. In the rest of this article I would like to focus on some relevant aspects of the whole-school CEIAG provision at Newstead Wood School to very

able students from years 7 - 13.

The CEIAG programme at Newstead Wood in brief

In addition to a biennial Careers Convention and termly Careers Seminars, largely organised by the Parents' Careers Committee, activities delivered or overseen directly by the Careers Department include:

Year 7

- The Real Game (WRL, careers concepts, financial awareness)

Year 8

- Group work on career concepts (Connexions advisor)

Year 9

- Group work continues
- Options advice (individual if required)
- Carousel of CE lessons delivered by Form Tutors, including careers library, Fast Tomato IT program, and web sites.
- Enterprise activity

Year 10

- Work related learning lessons
- Work experience preparation delivered by form tutors
- CV preparation
- 2 weeks work experience with briefing and debriefing in relation to the CBI's employment skills (CBI 2007)
- Morrisby Psychometric Testing
- Enterprise activities
- Be Real Game

Year 11

- A 13 week CE programme (delivered in general education lessons) which covers

options at 16, mock interview preparation and practice, CV updating, personal skill assessment, job application, use of the UCAS and other web sites and understanding graduate career skills (AGCAS 1995). This programme also enables students to reflect on how their work experience has altered their perceptions of 'work' and 'career' as they make decisions about their futures.

- Nine week Institute of Financial Services Level 2 financial capability qualification
- Individual interviews with the Director of Careers and Guidance

Year 12

- Five days self-negotiated work shadowing, to help with decision-making, career management and presentation skill development
- Group sessions on higher education and gap year options.
- Individual counselling on UCAS decisions

Year 13

- Continuation of group and individual UCAS support
- Individual support for students wishing to go straight to work

Post school

- Individual support as required

I would now like to explain six activities in more detail to illustrate how Newstead Wood provides an appropriate CEIAG programme for its exceptionally able students. The first two relate directly to the CE programme but the others come from the wider curriculum and illustrate how the ethos of the school fosters careers skills while emphasising effective learning.

Experience of work

Parents sometimes ask why work experience takes two weeks out of the academic curriculum, especially if the tasks appear mundane and are

not at graduate level. But the work experience programme at Newstead Wood is designed to develop and enhance the employability skills as defined by the CBI (2007) rather than as a career tasting exercise. This 'organizational socialization process' (Maanen and Schien 1979 p. 211) was deliberately placed in the summer of year 10 in the teeth of initial staff opposition to the loss of academic teaching time. Placing it there, rather than tacking it on to the end of year 11, as happens for academically able students in many schools, enables proper briefing, debriefing and evaluation. Maanen and Schien suggest, 'individuals undergoing any organizational transition are in an anxiety-producing situation. They try to reduce this anxiety by learning function and social requirements as quickly as possible. ... They feel isolated, lonely, and have performance anxieties', (1979 p.214). On work experience, students aged 14 or 15 have to function in an adult context about which they initially feel some trepidation. Nevertheless, at this stage they are mature enough to cope with a working environment and with commuting, but they are still sufficiently young for the challenge to boost their confidence if they cope successfully, which most of them do.

Students gain and share experiences of the wider working world, and staff visiting them in their work placements which have 'distinct way[s] of life, complete with [their] own rhythms, rewards, relationships, demands, and potentials', (Maanen and Schien 1979. p. 210) often gain valuable new insights into the capabilities of the students.

Feedback from employers after the year 10 Work Experience is usually positive. The following voluntary additional comments, selected from 120 2010 tick-box evaluation forms, are typical and reflect the exceptional level of maturity, skills and enthusiasm shown by most of the students as they rise to the new challenge of a working environment:

We were particularly impressed with her mini-project presentation during our group meeting. Her presentation was well structured and with the right level of content. Her delivery was awe inspiring, very professional and full of confidence, not expected from someone in her

age group. (Global financial services firm)

She quickly overcame her unfamiliarity with the work environment and was very helpful, professional and enthusiastic in everything she did – especially her significant contribution to a business presentation. (Dental practice)

She was of help to me by explaining how to use Excel correctly. (Dental studio)

She showed strong communication skills and great maturity, matched with attention to detail and eager enthusiasm. (International news agency)

Within a few days she was able to take on the role as junior photographer and do some of our pack shots. And within a week she was one of the team. (International magazine publisher)

She was a highly valued member of a very busy team (Barristers' chambers)

The highlight was a piece of insight she provided into her own media consumption – it was funny, insightful and very entertaining. We put it on our blog to share with clients. (Global cosmetics firm)

It was good to see her grow in confidence over the week. (Accountancy firm)

She produced a briefing for a meeting that one of the Assembly Members was attending; her work was used as the final briefing. (Greater London Authority)

If able students can generate this type of feedback at the age of 14 or 15, it is not surprising that many graduates are dissatisfied with the lack of challenge and stimulation in their jobs and training schemes. In their own evaluations, students who were least happy with their placements were those who felt that their skills had not been utilised or that they had contributed little to their organisation. In work, as in academic studies, the opportunity to achieve is vital, and our experience over the past 20 years underlines the value of appropriate work experience for the development of the students' self-confidence, understanding of and preparation

for the work environment, career management and employability skills. By the start of year 11, students have internalised their experiences and can use them in their future career planning.

Financial capability

Sessions on financial capability follow logically in year 11. Some time ago, it became clear that the financial implications of attending university meant that students could find themselves deep in debt if they could not manage their adult personal finances effectively. The problem was how to provide for this need within the curriculum since the school does not have a business studies department or the requisite expertise. Nor was there time in the timetable for another teaching subject. The Personal Finance Education Group (PFEG), an independent charity helping schools to plan and teach personal finance relevant to students' lives and needs, provided some useful support, but again we ran into the usual problem of simplistic scenarios and superficial information in many of the off-the-shelf products. Three years ago we decided to offer the Institute of Financial Services' Level 2 Certificate in Personal Finance which has a suggested 115 hours of guided learning time. Nine hours of support are given within the general education programme in year 11, with the students doing the rest via self-directed study, since all materials are on-line. The course is optional but 80% of the year group took the award in 2010 with a pass rate of over 95%, most being at the top grades. This evidence suggests to me that: these students have gained a much greater awareness and knowledge of the adult financial world and its pitfalls; they have added a GCSE level qualification to the 11 or 12 gained by the end of year 11; and they have improved their ability to self-direct their own studies. This approach is only possible because the school takes advantage of the students' exceptional ability and their need for 'high level of challenge, freedom and flexibility' (Lowe 2006 p.4). It is encouraging that the head of years 8 and 9 has now decided to put teaching for the IFS Level 1 Award in Personal Finance into the PSHE programme to replace the ASDAN Gold Award which both students and staff had come to dislike.

Emotional intelligence

As I assert above, CEIAG must also be delivered on a whole-school basis. Separate from the specific careers programme, PSHE, amongst other initiatives, clearly has a major role to play in the personal and career development of all students, and the school pays much attention to the development of the students' emotional intelligence. From a careers point of view this is vital, as Lunha et al. assert:

Surveys of employers have for many years shown that non-cognitive or social and emotional skills are the qualities they most want from young people coming out of the education system, and employers increasingly use these characteristics, rather than qualifications, to screen applicants. In fact research has shown that non-cognitive skills had more correlation with success in the labour market than cognitive skills, IQ and formal qualifications.

(Lunha et al., (2005) in DCSF 2010b)

To help develop the emotional intelligence (EQ) of its students, Newstead Wood uses Goleman's (1996) five domains of emotional intelligence: the ability to know and manage your own emotions, self-motivation, empathy and managing relationships with others.

These domains are incorporated into the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme delivered to students by Form Tutors in Key Stage 3 PSHE (DCSF 2010b). One example of this is the 'buddying' system whereby year 8 students help new year 7 students settle in during the Christmas term. A programme of peer mentoring for all year groups is also in place, along with external training to support it. From the career skills development viewpoint, this emphasis is important because EQ provides alternative ways of understanding people's behaviours, attitudes, motivations, interpersonal skills, possible management styles and overall potential. It follows, therefore, that human resources departments can find EQ a useful tool in recruitment assessment. The development of these non-cognitive skills is critical if students are to realise their potential in the adult world.

Deep support

Central to the school ethos, is student learning in the fundamental sense of the word. To personalise the learning of its students, Newstead Wood has worked closely with the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) to apply the thinking of David Hargreaves and his design of a 21st century model of education. His vision involved nine 'gateways' which have now been clustered into four 'Deeps': Deep Learning; Deep Support; Deep Experience and Deep Leadership. (SSAT 2010b: p.1)

Part, but not all, of Deep Support involves both advice and guidance and mentoring and coaching.

Ideally, personalising learning will lead to each student choosing a pathway at school that enables them to meet their aspirations the advice and guidance system is crucial, and needs to be offered to younger students than has traditionally been the case. Professor David Hargreaves suggests that this process should begin at the age of 12 as 'deep learning requires deep support'. Deep support may mean more than simply advice and guidance; it also overlaps with the gateways of mentoring and coaching, the new technologies and student voice. ... The whole system must be carefully integrated and starts from an assumption that the aims of guidance are the same as those of teaching and learning.

(SSAT 2010a p.1)

Van Der Stuyf (2002), among many others, summarises the value of scaffolding, and its development from Vygotsky's 'zone of proximal development', in the support of academic learning. At Newstead Wood it is a widely used teaching technique. I suggest, however, that can be just as powerful as a tool to support career development skills. For example, year 10 work experience, is scaffolded by the students' preparation and supporting staff visits. In turn, work experience and its debriefing, together with research skills acquired during general education in year 11, scaffold and support the students' attempts to negotiate for themselves a week of higher-level work shadowing in year 12. This learning experience can, in turn,

support application for higher education or employment, and aid the formation of graduate career skills. In this way, the learners' development is consistently supported via a coherent spiral curriculum.

Deep leadership

If our students are truly to become the leaders of tomorrow, the sooner they start developing the necessary experience, skills and vision, the more effective they will become. As Digby Jones says about leadership for business:

Business management has changed. The contemporary marketplace demands that leaders of today are visionary, ethical and innovative. This requires a new approach to management training and leadership development ... [Leaders] must possess the traits that motivate others to follow them in new directions; traits such as emotional stability, enthusiasm, conscientiousness, and social boldness.

(Jones, 2009: p.1)

Three years ago a senior teacher was appointed to the management team at Newstead Wood to develop Student Voice and increase the focus on student leadership throughout the school. Now, apart from having a myriad of leadership opportunities, students' views are consulted through and with elected year representatives, and they have genuine responsibility for school projects, such as the workshop delivered in July 2010 by year 12 students at a Learning Plus UK Practitioners' Conference (Baldwin, et al. 2010). Students are now involved in strategic school development planning through the school parliament and discussions with the leadership management group and governors.

These leadership roles are not sinecures. They have real expectations and responsibilities attached to them. For example, in July 2010 the head girl team, supported by the senior teacher, attended the Asia Pacific Young Leaders Summit in Singapore. There, as UK representatives, they debated global issues with teachers and students from several Far and Middle East countries, listened to eminent speakers

and met the President of Singapore. However, able students thrive on real-world challenge. The most powerful experiences of Newstead Wood student leaders have often been the ones which are the most difficult, organisationally complex, and politically challenging. These are the experiences which strongly support their development into sophisticated, empathetic leaders of tomorrow.

Personal Learning and Thinking Skills (PLTS)

A recent whole-school initiative which could have a major impact on the effectiveness of CEIAG is called Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills (PLTS) (QCDA 2010). These skills are designed to enable students to be successful in learning, work and life and have the potential to unify the whole-school curriculum through the use of a shared language. It is argued that students should be:

- independent enquirers
- creative thinkers
- reflective learners
- team workers
- self-managers
- effective participants.

First introduced at Newstead Wood in 2008 to year 7 students to develop academic skills outside the constraints of the National Curriculum, PLTS is taught in a cross-curricular approach called *Journeys of a Lifetime*. One example of this is the *Space Travel and Discovery* module which takes place in the summer term of year 7. Here students are challenged to investigate a 'planetary problem', designing a model to solve it, as well as giving a presentation to engineering expert 'dragons'. Science, Maths and D&T departments provide input as do Year 10 students working on a Philosophy for Children course (Philosophy for Children 2010). The PLTS academic focus is on creative thinking and team working, but the students are also developing career-based skills such as: team working; time-management; presentation; interpersonal; action-planning; decision making; and thinking 'outside the box'.

Although PLTS have been applied in an academic context so far, their relevance to career decision making is clear. Expressed in a slightly different vocabulary, they are the same as the CBI's employability skills (CBI 2007) and, at a higher level, AGCAS's account of competencies valued by graduate employers (AGCAS, 1995). Now that the first cohort of students has reached year 9 option choices, it is to be hoped that PLTS will be applied in this context too, and subsequently in all aspects of VRL and decision making. In this way, students will see the integral nature of their learning.

The above examples show the indivisibility of 'career' and 'learning'. They also emphasise the importance of allowing students to reflect on both their intellectual and practical learning. I believe it is important that they, and the staff supporting them, also recognise the connection. The future is uncertain for schools as well as for individuals. Newstead Wood has moved a good distance towards providing a careers education curriculum to meet the needs of its exceptionally able students, but as circumstances change around us, there will be the need for constant evaluation and change. Lack of time, for both students and staff, is a major constraint. The 2011 reorganisation of the Newstead Wood KS 4 curriculum, to personalise it, and to help students focus on the interrelatedness of all aspects of their learning, will be a positive development. The appointment of a full-time Director of Careers and Guidance (rather than a teacher 'delivering' careers on a part-time basis) is also a major step forward. With the new curriculum in place it may then be possible to explore in more depth with students their own concepts of 'career'. To return to my personal metaphor of careers as crazy paving, I have tried to show some of the building materials provided for the exceptionally able students at Newstead Wood. As educators, I believe we should enable the students to understand the component parts and realise that they can shape their own careers. In this way, in their careers and their lives, they will become 'confident, mature, autonomous, compassionate, resilient, optimistic leaders with the vision, integrity and courage to make a difference.' (Newstead Wood 2009). We ignore their needs at our peril.

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