



Careers advice for 14 – 19 year olds in Dorset:
Parents' perceptions and needs

June 2014

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This report provides the results of a research study exploring parents' perceptions of careers information available to their teenagers.

Objectives

The objectives of this study were to:

- a. understand parents' perceptions of the careers information their teenagers receive;
- b. document how parents currently support their children with career planning;
- c. explore the needs of parents to better enable them to provide accurate and appropriate careers information to their children.

Rationale

The rationale for this study is to provide Dorset Young People's Forum with information about the perceptions and needs of parents to guide future service provision. Due to the reduction in statutory careers information services, it is recognised that parents are increasingly acting as the primary source of information for their children, thus it is essential that they are adequately equipped with accurate information in a format that best suits their needs.

Method

A qualitative, narrative method was used to collect data. Initially, this involved focus groups with parents from five schools in Bournemouth, Poole and Dorset. However, parent engagement in focus groups was low so a secondary data collection method involving parents e-mailing the research team was undertaken.

Findings

Findings show a variety of experiences from parents. Key themes that emerged from the study are that parents:

- Want information to be available to their children earlier in their school career and before selecting GCSE subjects;
- Had a low awareness of the careers support available in schools and some were unaware of where they could find information to support their children;
- Perceived that there was a lack of information, guidance and support available from schools and where it was available it was not well used and was sometimes perceived by pupils as being for less able pupils or as 'pressure to choose a career now';
- Indicated that they needed a suite of resources to provide them with information this included a:
 - 'road map' outlining the options throughout school and information on employment, training and education beyond school, supported by an on-line resource;
 - dedicated careers advisor who would build a rapport with pupils and offer them 'mentorship' at regular intervals throughout their time at school;
 - series of presentations by local employers providing information on different careers: in respect of the qualifications needed, associated training programmes and availability of apprenticeships;
- Indicated that the best format for them to access information would be written information in the form of a booklet- 'road map' with a supporting website and phone-line;

- Recognise that their teenagers would prefer to access information by engaging with smartphone application and websites to stimulate interest and motivate them to look for further information;
- Indicated that not all teenagers are suited to continuing their education at university and therefore they would like more information to be available on vocational courses, apprenticeships and other training schemes.

Discussion

Parental engagement with this research was hugely challenging, despite schools demonstrating interest in the research and inviting large numbers of parents to participate. Qualitative research, to explore the in-depth perceptions of adults was specifically sought. Schools, the local authorities and researchers may need to consider a range of alternate methods to gather this in-depth information.

Despite limitations in terms of parental engagement, the findings show that there is a need for additional information to support parents and teenagers with careers advice. The finding that parents feel underprepared and uninformed to support their teenagers corroborates other research, thus a key conclusion must be that further, clear sources of information for parents are needed.

Recommendations

- Schools need to find creative ways of engaging with parents to raise their awareness of the availability of the careers support and information provided by schools.
- Provide a 'road map' booklet(s) for parents outlining secondary education as it relates to future careers. The 'road map' should run through the typical milestones in a student's secondary education, such as subject

selection and methods to enhance their employability. The booklet should be supported by an on-line resource. This information should be available at the start of secondary school.

- Parents feel that smartphone applications and websites would best suit their teenagers in order to engage them, stimulate interest and motivate them to look for further information. A website and application could be created to work with the roadmap booklet.
- Individual pupils should have a named person within school whom can support them at key decision-making points in the career planning process.
- Parents would like more information on vocational courses, apprenticeships and other training schemes from local employers providing information on different careers: in respect of the qualifications and skills needed, associated training programmes and availability of apprenticeships.
- Follow up the findings of this study with quantitative research to find out the extent to which other parents would prefer information in booklet formats.

Introduction

Aim of the report

This report provides the findings of a research study conducted by Bournemouth University on behalf of Dorset Young People's Forum, to explore parents' perceptions and needs relating to careers advice for 14 – 19 year olds in Dorset.

Aim of the research

The research aims to inform Dorset Young People's Forum of parents' awareness and understanding of the careers advice available for young people aged between 14-19 years and also what parents need and want as information to support their teenagers. This research will support future careers information service planning.

Background

The Coalition Government has enacted policies and funding decisions, which have reframed the way in which careers work is delivered to young people. Key reforms include the withdrawal of support and funding to local authorities for Connexions; the responsibility for careers guidance for young people passing to schools (DBIS 2013) and the launch of The National Careers Service, which will provide authoritative information on learning and work, and professional advice on how to use it (DBIS 2012).

Schools

The Education Act 2011 and Careers Guidance in Schools Regulations 2013 place a duty on schools to secure access to independent and impartial careers advice for pupils in school years 8-13, (pupils aged from 12-18 years); placing commissioning of careers advice and guidance in the hands of schools rather than local authorities or central government:

Schools have a role to play in supporting their pupils to make well informed and realistic decisions by providing access to impartial and

independent information and guidance about the range of education and training options that are most likely to help young people achieve their ambitions. (DfEa 2013:3)

This duty is framed very loosely, comes with no funding and offers no clear model of provision (Hooley et al 2012).

It is for schools to decide the careers guidance provision to be made available based on the needs of pupils and the opportunities available. Schools should meet the costs of provision from their overall budgets. (DfEa 2013:3)

In the past, the government set out more detailed policy frameworks and support for schools through a range of partnership agencies to support the delivery of careers work (e.g. Connexions, The Careers Service, Aimhigher) for the most part, these supporting organisations have now either closed down or had their services considerably reduced, and schools will now drive their own policies in this area (Hooley *et al* 2012).

The report by Hooley *et al* (2012), identified that Schools are taking a range of different approaches in order to meet their new responsibilities including:

- Using external careers providers,
- Providing career learning and/or career guidance through internal resources by,
 - employing a professional qualified careers adviser
 - using teaching staff (or other non-teaching staff) with varying degrees of qualification (or none).

Local Authorities

Local authorities retain responsibilities to support all young people aged 16-19 into education or training, through the securement of *sufficient suitable education and training provision*; and to make available to young people aged 13-19 years support that will *encourage, enable or assist them to participate in education or training* (DfEb 2013:4).

Access to independent and impartial careers advice supports the requirement for young people to participate in education or training (i.e. part-time education or training, if a young person is employed, self-employed, or volunteering for more than 20 hours per week; work-based learning, such as an Apprenticeship; full-time education, such as school, college or home education) until the end of the academic year in which they turn 17 from 2013, and to their 18th birthday from 2015.

Local authorities are expected to continue to work with schools to identify those who are in need of targeted support and to have in place arrangements to identify those aged 16-18 who are not participating in either education or training. Schools have a duty to provide career information on all options available in respect of 16-18 education or training, including apprenticeships and other work-based education and training options (DfEa 2013).

National Careers Service

The National Careers Service was launched in April 2012 and aims to provide information and professional impartial advice about education, training and work to young people and adults. Young people can access support online, by webchat and over the telephone. However awareness of the service has been found to be low (DBIS 2013).

Information Seeking

In order to make career choices, young people need the right information and advice; knowing what academic and vocational options are available to them and how they lead to different jobs. Young people are known to value informal sources of advice, including advice from parents (DBIS 2012, Research for Change 2013). However, young people, adults and those who advise them commonly report that it is difficult to find the information they need.

“I think it would be easier if our parents had the information and explained it to us as they are close to us and can then support us. The problem is they are kept in the dark about this. You’re not talking to

someone you don't know so it's less scary. But our parents don't know anything so they can't support or guide us" (Research for Change 2013:13).

Although young people value parents advice, a survey carried out on behalf of the Association of Colleges (2012) found that 'parent's don't feel comfortable advising their children about jobs' particularly as they felt out of their depth when discussing jobs with which they were unfamiliar.

Rationale for the current research

Dorset Young Peoples Forum has identified the difficulties facing parents and their teenagers in providing appropriate careers advice. Given that parents seem to be a key source of careers information for their teenagers, it is not clear what support or information parents need; nor in which format this information would best be. Future service planning can use this information to build resources that the parents in this research identify as important.

Methods

This study used a qualitative narrative approach (Huberman & Miles 2002). The narrative approach enabled investigation of how participants feel about the information available to them and their teenagers, through description of their experiences (Overcash 2003). The value of qualitative research in this instance is that it allows for in-depth exploration of the experiences of parents without prejudicing their ideas, as could happen if a survey method were used.

Initially the intention was to undertake focus group discussions with parents. Focus groups are characterised by interaction between the participants; who often share common experiences or characteristics for the purpose of eliciting

ideas, thoughts and perceptions about a specific topic or certain issues linked to an area of interest, (Holloway and Wheeler 2010)

The initial schools identified by the funders to participate in the study were:

- Poole High School;
- The Bourne Academy;
- Blandford School.

These schools were identified by the commissioners of this research as willing to support recruitment of parents to the study and to provide facilities for the focus groups. These schools were also selected to represent demographic diversity, which it is felt will add to the study.

Due to difficulty recruiting parents from these schools, a further two schools were identified by the funders and approached to take part in the research:

- Corfe Hills School;
- Bishop of Winchester Academy.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was granted by Bournemouth University prior to the study commencing. Further ethical review was undertaken to also allow for e-mail data collection to take place.

Key ethical issues that were considered include:

Informed consent – all parents were provided with an information sheet describing the research process and explaining their rights should they choose to participate. Verbal and written consent was sought at the beginning of the focus group. An updated consent form was used for the e-mail data collection.

Freedom from coercion – parents had the opportunity to participate or not participate as they saw fit and there were no negative or positive

consequences of participating or not participating in the research. Parents, in the first instance, were asked to contact the research team directly to indicate their interest in participating.

Participant confidentiality – participants are not identified in the data; pseudonyms were used in transcripts. Schools are identified in the methods section of this report, but comments from individual parents are not attributable to any individual or school. Participant information sheets and consent forms clearly described the limitations of confidentiality in the context of a focus group. For e-mail responses, the information was stripped out of the original mail prior to analysis, thus the information is anonymised.

Non-maleficence – parents were protected from harm as far as is possible. The focus group was facilitated by experienced researchers. Procedures were in place to manage the situation should a participant become upset, but these were not required.

Beneficence – Parents did not receive any reward for participating. Their contributions have been used to inform the report, therefore alerting policy makers and others to their identified needs.

Recruitment to Focus Groups

Following agreement of the research proposal and ethical approval, the first three schools identified by the funders were sent information about the research. When dates/times were agreed with the schools, they were sent a flyer with the time/venue of the focus group and a participant information sheet to be circulated to parents. Parents were invited to contact the research team if they were interested in participating in the focus group. The schools had a variety of ways to circulate information to parents, including through parents' voice forums, parent-teacher meetings and as mailshots to parents.

One week prior to the date of the focus group, the research team contacted the schools to discuss participant numbers. As these were very low, schools undertook additional actions, such as e-mailing or texting parents to remind them about the focus group and the option of contacting the school directly to confirm attendance was offered.

Of the original three schools, two organised focus groups as agreed. One focus group was conducted and the other was cancelled as no parents signed up to participate. In the further two schools, a focus group was organized in one school but again had to be cancelled as no parents signed up to participate. Thus, out of the five schools, only one focus group could take place.

Only one parent attended the focus group that took place, they were reminded of the purpose of the study and consented to participate in an interview which was facilitated by the two researchers, audio recorded and transcribed.

Interviews by e-mail

A parent from one of the three original schools e-mailed the research team with apologies for being unable to attend the focus group in her child's school. The e-mail gave detailed information of her views and experiences in relation to the topic area.

In consultation with the funders, it was decided to seek ethical approval to use the information contained in the e-mail. In addition ethical approval was sought and gained to use e-mails as a method of data collection.

E-mail interviewing offers an opportunity to access participants over a geographically dispersed area; in an interactive manner, allowing participants' to express their thoughts, ideas, and memories in their own words. It is additionally empowering to the participants because it essentially allows them to be in control of the flow of the interview enabling them to answer at their convenience in a place of their choosing (e.g. home or office). The anonymity

afforded by on-line communication can be a factor in increasing self-disclosure and in facilitating a closer connection with interviewees' personal feelings, beliefs, and values (Meho 2006).

The five participating schools were asked to send e-mails to parents asking them to e-mail the research team with responses to the following questions:

1. What do you think of the careers information that your teenager currently receives?
2. Where and how is the information accessed?
3. How do you support your teenager with careers issues – what do you do, where do you get information from?
4. What support would you find useful to help your teenager with careers information?
5. What would be the best way for you to access this information? (e.g. e-mail, website, booklet, smartphone apps, meetings, careers fairs)
6. Have you any other thoughts about the careers information advice that is currently available?

Analysis

Thematic data analysis (Overcash 2003) was undertaken by experienced researchers, who sought themes relating to each of the study objectives. Specific focus is on understanding the needs parents identify and the formats for information that would best meet their needs.

Findings

The findings of the research are presented in relation to the questions that focused data collection.

What do you think of the information that your teenager currently receives?

Parents described a variety of experiences relating to the careers information their teenagers received. Some were not aware of what support was provided by their child's school with one parent indicating that they had only recently become aware that schools were responsible for providing career guidance and were not fully aware of how this guidance was provided and whether it was impartial.

Several parents felt that the information available was inadequate, particularly for younger aged children.

It's at best described as rudimentary and perfunctory.

I am not aware of any structured careers advice through the school, especially for year 9 as they take their options.

Even parents whose children attend the same school have different experiences, some aware of support for their teenagers and others not aware. It is possible that there may be a need for schools to further raise parents' awareness of the careers support that is currently available.

A common thread is that parents think that careers information comes too late in their child's education: they would like information as early as possible, at least on entry to secondary school.

Where and how is information accessed?

I have no idea and speaking with my daughter, she has no idea either.

Parents indicated that some of the information provided by schools was accessed on-line, others had no idea how information was accessed with some feeling that there is a lack of information, guidance and support from schools. Where support was available some parents felt it was not well used and was sometimes perceived by pupils as being for less able pupils or as 'pressure to choose a career now'.

It's obviously a concern that direction needs to be reaching the younger years as well as the older ones... the school needs to pitch to the younger years.

School... very good at providing career information to their pupils We have our older son at... University and he arranged all the details and funding from information provided by the school, we only checked occasionally to see how he progressed with the arrangements.

I am certain that the careers guidance service the school offer is adequate, but from what I can gather from my own son, students have the perception that this support is for the less able, and therefore don't access it.

How do you support your teenager with careers issues-what do you do, where do you get information from?

Some parents feel responsible for supporting their teenagers with careers information. This was because they were either unaware what advice was available from schools or they were not satisfied with the provision of advice from schools. The support they provided included: accessing outside support in the form of commercial aptitude tests; drawing on knowledge and support from friends working within a careers role; using knowledge gained through their role as a volunteer and instigating support from the Integrated Youth Support Service. Others indicated that they were unaware of how to access information to support their teenagers in career choices.

What support would you find useful to help your teenager with careers information?

Parents indicated that they feel they need a suite of resources to enable them to support their teenagers with information to enable them to make career choices based on their talents and preferences this included: a generic booklet and website; mentoring-type support and open days/careers fairs in school.

A generic booklet describing the wide range of careers options available to young people. This was described by one parent as a 'road map' which would be available at the start of secondary school, outlining the options throughout school and information on employment, training and education beyond school. The 'road map' would need to provide outline information and be supported by on-line resources.

A prepared set of resources to help stimulate engagement with my teenager and some information resources for us both to refer to. These resources would need to be extensive to embrace as many career or business opportunities as possible with a guide to steer teenagers towards possible option based on their talents and preferences.

Support from schools in the form of a dedicated careers advisor who would build a rapport with pupils and offer them 'mentorship' at regular intervals throughout their time at school; in particular to support them to make informed choices of which subjects to take when key decisions are made in Years 10 and 12.

He would benefit from a 'mentoring' approach, in which he would be in touch with the same person at regular intervals. I think this would help him to find relevant experience and choose part time jobs carefully. Also it would give him advice on what universities are looking for.

Workshops/Sessions at school presented by local employers to provide information on different careers: in respect of the qualifications needed, associated training programmes and availability of apprenticeships. It was not

entirely clear whether these should be targeted at parents, the teenagers or both. Some parents did, however, specify that they would like information evenings.

Parents could do with an information evening; everything has changed since we were 16!! It would be great to know what kind of opportunities are out there, how to apply for university, apprenticeships, work experience etc.

Other parents highlighted the importance of information via the internet and that careers fairs and other interactions are only useful if a child knows what they are looking for and has some understanding of their aptitude.

Internet. Careers fairs tell you very little, what is required is a knowledge by the student of their aptitudes and preferences, which can then be matched to potential careers, whether shown at fairs or anywhere else.

What would be the best way for you to access this information?

Parents indicated that the best format for them to access information would be written information in the form of a booklet or series of booklets covering key decision making stages (e.g. GCSE and A level options), with a supporting website and phone-line. The website would provide more in-depth and detailed information and the ability to speak to an advisor via a phone-line would offer the opportunity to have questions answered.

Series of booklets and a website/phone app. The benefit of printed material is it provides a more informal way for the parent to engage with their child and can be left around for the child to browse. The benefit of the website/app is that it provides a portal to much more information and resources that could ever be captured and updated in a booklet. The printed material would need to be high level, to capture attention and imagination and the website/app to drill down into the detail of the particular path chosen.

Parents recognise that their teenagers would prefer to access information differently, so recommend a smartphone application and website for

teenagers which would contain in-depth up to date information on career-paths.

Give lots of links in the information, which is essential as this age group use, the internet constantly. Its fast efficient and the pupils would rather view the details on line rather than read booklets.

Teenager information should be engaging to stimulate interest and motivate them to look for further information.

Have you any other thoughts about the careers information that is currently available?

A range of other thoughts were provided; some parents highlighted the importance of parents and schools engaging with all children on a one-to-one basis to understand their interests, aptitude and what the student wants to do with their future. One parent related this to the information resource; if a range of information can be produced it could help students to engage and could equip parents to begin conversations with their teenagers.

Information is only part of the process; engaging with your child about their future/potential career is most important and without a structured/prepared set of resources, as a parent I might find that difficult.

Parents indicated that not all teenagers are suited to continuing their education at university and therefore they would like more information to be available on vocational courses, apprenticeships and other training schemes.

Similarly, some parents wanted there to be more opportunities for teenagers to engage in work experience throughout their time at school.

My son carried out a week of work experience in Year 10 and he definitely benefited from this and I wonder if this programme could be extended into Years 11, 12 and 13 during school holidays rather than term time because of exams and revision. I appreciate not all students would want to do this but an optional programme would benefit young people who want to get on in life.

One parent highlighted not only the need for information on University programmes but also possible careers after University, highlighting that her son was undecided about whether to apply for a specific course because of a misunderstanding about careers that could follow from this option.

The only thing I feel would maybe enhance their decisions is an insight into some of the careers open to them at the end of university dependant on their choice of degree as some degrees are stereotyped for careers.

Discussion

Engaging with Parents

As well as the core findings, the methods employed in this research are worth discussing. The schools that participated in the study describe difficulties with parental engagement. While schools had agreed to facilitate focus groups (and we understand that one school invited more than 100 parents to the focus group), engaging parents in this approach simply did not work. As a survey method would not have best addressed the question and as qualitative information was sought, alternate methods to collect qualitative information need to be considered.

Given the difficulties recruiting parents to focus groups, the efficacy of school-based information evenings need to be questioned. So, while the study design was more complex than initially anticipated, parents' non-engagement with focus groups is a noteworthy finding in itself. In addition the responses to e mails was also lower than anticipated suggesting that schools may need to find more creative ways of engaging and exchanging information with parents other than through parents' voice forums, parent-teacher meetings and mailshots. This difficulty in engaging with parents may help to explain why some parents indicated that they were unaware of the careers advice provided by the school their teenager attended.

Some parents requested information evenings and sessions (like careers fairs) with employers, Given the lack of engagement experienced by schools and as some parents highlighted that these are not helpful, it is recommended that, given the resource requirement for such events, serious consideration of their value be considered before embarking on this type of career information.

Raising the Profile of the Careers Advice provided by Schools

Careers advice has recently gone through an upheaval with responsibility for providing advice being removed from local authorities and placed with schools; this responsibility is not underpinned with any funding and offers no clear model of provision. The findings from this study suggest that parents have little awareness of how individual schools provide careers information and support to pupils. It is of note that even parents whose children attend the same school reported differing experiences, with some aware of the support available for their children and others not aware, some thinking it was adequate or good and others thinking it was unsatisfactory.

Where support was available, it was suggested that sometimes pupils did not make use of it because students felt it was for less able pupils or as 'pressure to choose a career now'. This indicates that there is a need to raise the profile of the careers advice and support that is available in individual schools to both parents and pupils. However it would appear that parents do not always engage with information provided by schools, indicating a need for developing more creative ways of engagement with parents than those currently in use.

Information and Support for Career Planning

Parents indicated that they would like to receive information and support for career planning for their child in a variety of ways: written information, web-based information, access to dedicated careers advisors within school and workshop sessions led by local employers. Parents also raised the concern that not all pupils are suited to university education and called for more

information to be made available about vocational courses, apprenticeships and other training schemes.

Written Information

A key finding that was echoed by several parents is that they want a written booklet at the start of their child's secondary education, to act as a 'road map' to guide them through key stages in the decision making process relating to subject choices and career planning for their child. This would enable them to engage with and support their child to further explore the career options available to them. Some of the local authorities had already provided similar types of booklets in the past, and parents seemed to be unaware of these. Thus, if a booklet is to be created, consideration of how this will be communicated to key stakeholders is important.

Web-Based Information

Parents would also like to access more in-depth information via websites and have the ability to talk to an advisor via a telephone line to supplement the information provided by the paper 'road map'.

Teenagers were thought to be more likely to engage with online media such as websites and smart phone applications when seeking information rather than with paper information. Parents perceived that to encourage young people to engage and interact with this information it would need to be presented in a lively and engaging format.

However there was little awareness of the service provided by The National Careers Service information website whose remit is to provide information about education, training and work to young people through professional impartial advice and to provide online support via webchat or over the telephone. It is not known whether young people engage with this service and if they do whether they do it without the knowledge of their parents either independently or with school support.

Careers Advisors

Some of the parents who responded to the email survey said they had sought advice from independent career advisors while others had used knowledge gained from interaction with voluntary agencies to support their children to make decisions about education choices and career planning as they perceived that this advice was not available from schools. There was support for the provision of a dedicated in-school careers advisor who it was anticipated would build a rapport with pupils offering them 'mentorship' at regular intervals throughout their time at school; in particular to support them to make informed choices at key decision making points in Years 10 and 12. It is possible that this provision already exists in some of the schools in the study but the parents in our survey were not aware of this.

Workshops/Presentations led by local Employers

Parents indicated that they would appreciate more information about job opportunities in the local area and suggested that this could be provided through workshops/information sessions held in schools; led by local employers to provide information on different careers: in respect of the qualifications and skills needed, associated training programmes and availability of apprenticeships. This information would also provide support to pupils who do not wish to continue their education at university by informing them of the other options available to them. Linking with local businesses in this way would also support pupils to make informed decisions about the type of work placement they would like to undertake if work placement schemes are run in their particular school.

Conclusion

Key conclusions that arise from this work include: the need to consider a broader range of methods to inform parents of existing and new resources to support their teenager's career choices; parents most wanted a printed booklet with all of the secondary education milestones and key careers information and options, supported by website information and they thought that their teenagers would most want web-based information and smartphone applications.

This study was undertaken at a time when the responsibility for providing careers information to pupils had recently been passed to schools with no clear model of provision or funding support. It provides a snapshot on how parents currently support their children with career planning; the findings highlight the information that parents told us they would like to receive to support their children when they are making decisions about their choice of career.

Recommendations

- Schools need to find creative ways of engaging with parents to raise their awareness of the availability of the careers support and information provided by schools.
- Provide a 'road map' booklet(s) for parents outlining secondary education as it relates to future careers. The 'road map' should run through the typical milestones in a student's secondary education, such as subject selection and methods to enhance their employability. The booklet should be supported by an on-line resource. This information should be available at the start of secondary school.
- Parents feel that smartphone applications and websites would best suit their teenagers in order to engage them, stimulate interest and motivate them to look for further information. A website and application could be created to work with the roadmap booklet.
- Individual pupils should have a named person within school who can support them at key decision-making points in the career planning process.
- Parents would like more information on vocational courses, apprenticeships and other training schemes from local employers providing information on different careers: in respect of the qualifications and skills needed, associated training programmes and availability of apprenticeships.

Acknowledgements

The research team in Bournemouth University would like to thank the following for their support of the research:

Caroline Foster and Andrew Thomas both for commissioning the research and providing guidance to the research team about what specifically was needed throughout its process.

The contacts for each of the schools, who worked so hard to arrange focus groups and invite parents to participate as well as forwarding mails from the research team to parents.

The parents who gave their time to contribute to the research, sharing their views and experiences of the careers information that is available to their teenagers.

The support services within Bournemouth University, including the RKE team, ethics panel and the research administrator.

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