KEEPING TRACK OF VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE:
A Policy Agenda

ANGELA CANNY, ANNE E. GREEN AND MALCOLM MAGUIRE

There has been significant change in the lives of young people in recent years. Increasingly, young people are remaining longer in education, with only a minority making the direct transition at 16 years from school to work (Gray and Sime, 1990; Roberts, 1995). Young people are remaining longer in a period of dependence, which has permeated all areas of their lives (Jones, 1995; Wallace and Kovatcheva, 1998). Research on young people since the 1980s has devoted considerable attention to describing and interpreting 'youth transitions', which are recognised to have become more prolonged, complex and less predictable (Cote, 1995; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Wyn and White, 1997). The transition from youth to adulthood is described using terms such as 'extended', 'protracted', 'fragmented' and 'destandardised' (Bynner, Ferri, and Shepherd 1997; Chisholm, 1990; Evans and Heinz, 1994).

It was recognised that while the range of opportunities for young people may have increased, so also has the risk of failure. There was increased concern in both academic and government circles for those young people who were failing to make a successful transition from school to work and ultimately into independent adult lives, and the growing polarisation between those who were succeeding and those who were failing (NIERC, 1997; OECD, 1998). Indeed, social exclusion and the need to both address and combat it has, over the 1990s, become a central element of government social policy. This is particularly evident in the establishment of the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) and publication of *Bridging the gap*, which highlighted the significant number of young people who were not in education, employment or training (SEU, 1999a). Within academic research much attention has focused on those 'vulnerable' young people who have become 'detached' from mainstream traditions (Johnston et al., 2000; 1997a; MacDonald, 1997b; 1998; Newburn, 1999). There is also debate surrounding the concept of 'vulnerable' young people, and the recognition that 'vulnerable' young people are a heterogeneous group, often facing multiple problems in the transition to adulthood (Newburn, 1999; Piper and Piper, 1998). Consequently, one of the issues emerging from this debate is centred upon service delivery to 'vulnerable' young people and the fragmentation of policy thinking and service delivery. The Social Exclusion Unit pointed out that at least eight departments have an interest in policies and services for young people, and at least four local authority services work directly with young people. There were calls for greater multi-agency co-operation and partnership between the different statu-

tory and voluntary agencies to deliver more effective, coherent, seamless and effective service support to young people (DoE, 1999).

In was in this context of increased awareness of the complexity of issues confronting young people in the transition from school to work that the *Learning to Succeed* White Paper DfEE, 1999b (now DFES) was published. The White Paper outlined the government's commitment to establishing a Connexions Strategy to support the foundation of a single support service for all young people, with an explicit aim to raise post-16 learning and reduce the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training. The ideology informing the Connexions Strategy can be conceptualised in terms of tackling disaffection through prevention, recovery and re-integration (Connexions, 1999b).

The Connexions Service, a central element in this strategy, phased in across England from April 2001, is a new advice, guidance and support service designed to integrate existing careers advice and support service for all young people aged 13 to 19 years (Connexions, 1999a). While the service is to be available to all young people, particular emphasis is to be placed on helping those young people considered at risk of dropping out of education, training or employment. The central support mechanism in this service is the personal adviser whose remit is to provide young people with individual advice and support, which is accessible, consistent and co-ordinated in order to ensure that they stay in a 'positive' learning environment. The emphasis is centered upon the individual young person and their individual needs. Consequently, there is increased emphasis on keeping in touch and keeping track of young people.

This paper reports on the main findings of a study funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which examined the increased emphasis in policy and practice on keeping track of 'vulnerable' young people, and the corresponding importance placed upon 'partnership working' and 'joined-up' policy delivery (Green, Maguire and Canny, 2001). To date there has been an absence of debate in academic circles surrounding the growing emphasis on tracking young people. This paper seeks to address this by exploring the extent to which tracking mechanisms are in place across England, the rationale behind tracking, some of the advantages and limitations of current tracking methodologies. It identifies the difficulties encountered by agencies in building reliable, accurate, up-to-date and robust tracking systems.

There were a number of elements to the research. Due to their central location in the delivery of advice and guidance to young people, a pro forma was sent to all Careers Service companies in England in order to identify the extent and level of

tracking taking place within the Careers Service. In addition, contact was also established with a number of relevant voluntary and statutory agencies to establish the key issues in tracking. Eight case studies were then selected, of which seven were Careers Service Companies and one voluntary multi-agency group who were identified as undertaking interesting work in the field of tracking. The main focus of the case studies related to process and operational issues, to identify the key issues for tracking and examples of good practice.

Context

There have been profound changes in the experiences of young people over the past three decades as they make the transition from school to work (Evans and Furlong, 1997; Gray and Sime, 1990). In the early 1970s two-thirds of young people left school at 16 years and all but a minority obtained full-time jobs almost immediately (Roberts 1995; Wallace and Kovatcheva, 1998). With the collapse of the youth labour market from the late 1970s onwards, young people found it increasingly difficult to negotiate entry into the labour market. Mass youth unemployment presented a huge problem (Ashton, Maguire and Spilsbury, 1990; Ashton and Maguire, 1989; Raffe, 1985). In an effort to contain rising unemployment, there was a significant expansion in government training schemes, which were largely criticised for not presenting young people with increased opportunity but rather acted as a 'warehouse' for young people who would otherwise have been unemployed (Coles, 1988; Hollands, 1990; Mizen, 1995; Riseborough, 1993). Moreover, this 'mass' response to youth unemployment was criticised for ignoring the complexity of issues facing young people. Consequently, over the 1980s there was a growing disenchantment with training as a secure and permanent bridge to work, which was further reinforced by the erosion of the value of training allowances.

Post-16 Educational Participation

The most dramatic change in the youth labour market has been the increased participation in post-compulsory education. Figure 1 shows that in 1979, 42 per cent of 16 year olds were engaged in full-time education, this proportion increased substantially over the 1980s and by the early 1990s, 70 per cent of 16 year olds were in full-time education. The trend has remained fairly stable over the 1990s. In 1999, 71 per cent of 16 year olds were participating in full-time education in England. Figure 1 also shows that the participation rates for 17 and 18 year olds have also risen sharply. In 1979, just 27 per cent of 17 year olds and 15 per cent of 18 year olds were in full-time education, by 1999 the figures were 58 per cent and 37 per cent respectively.

**Figure 1: Participation rates (%) in full-time education in England, 1979-1999**
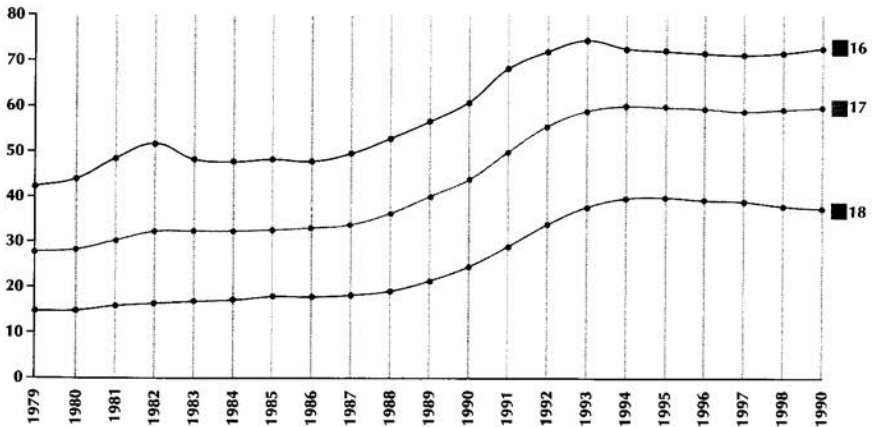
Post-16 Destinations

Examination of the destinations of Year 11 school leavers confirms this trend away from employment and training. Figure 2 shows that in 1989, 39 per cent of Year 11 school leavers were engaged in employment or government supported training. By 1999 this proportion had declined to 17 per cent. The proportion of the Year 11 cohort entering full-time education increased from 48 per cent in 1989 to 71 per cent in 1999. Explaining the rise in educational attainment, Brown (1990) has argued that as society becomes more qualified, this in turn raises expectations and creates a higher demand for education. There is also evidence that educational credentials are increasingly being used as an insurance policy against the vagaries of the labour market (Brown, 1995; Brown and Scase, 1994). As a result, those vulnerable young people who are unable or unwilling to participate in post-compulsory education are facing a higher risk of failure and exclusion in a labour market that is increasingly demanding higher skills and qualifications.

Figure 2: Year 11 Destinations, 1989-1999
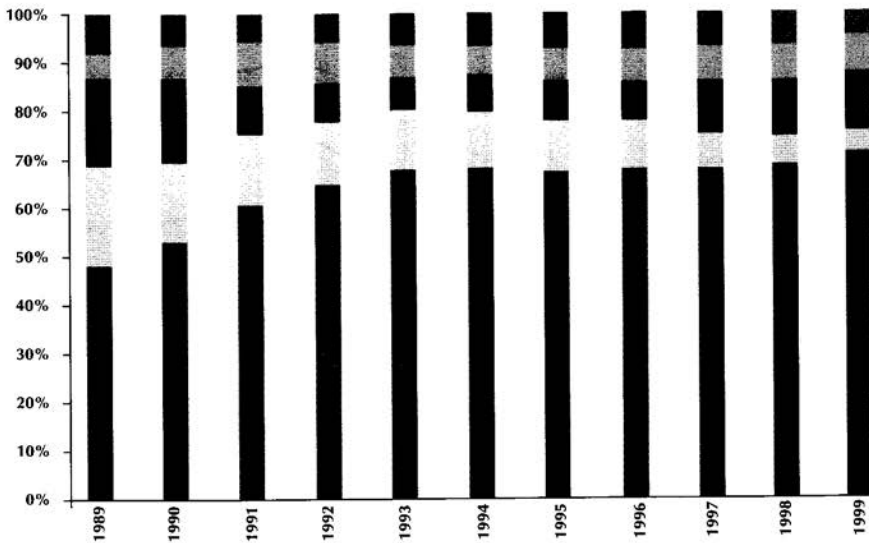
Source: Careers Activity Survey 1989 to 1999

■ Full-time Education ▨ GST Training ■ Employment ■ Unknown ▨ Not in Full-time, Education or Employment

These transformations in the transition process cannot be viewed in isolation from the main developments which have occurred in the wider labour market. The most profound features of labour market restructuring have been the sectoral shift from manufacturing to services sector employment, and the decline in opportunities for young people to enter traditional apprenticeship type training. This has in turn altered the types of skills and attributes that employers now demand of their employees (CBI 1989). Indeed, Crompton et al (1996) define this transformation as the shift from a largely homogenous, skilled and semi-skilled workforce towards a more segmented, fragmented and heterogeneous workforce.

There is increased demand for inter-personal skills and less upon traditional manual skills. Moreover, entry into organisations has become increasingly segmented by qualifications. Opportunities for a young person to work their way up the organisational career ladder have diminished, which is due both to changing employment profiles within organisations and changing recruitment strategies (Brown, 2000; Halford and Savage, 1995; Halford, Savage and Witz, 1997; Heery and Salmon, 2000). While the expansion in personal service and leisure occupations provide employment opportunities for relatively unqualified young people, the general trend has been towards higher demand for qualified workers (Maguire and Maguire, 1997).

Amongst those young people aged 16-19 years who do manage to get jobs outside government supported training, the majority are in poorly paid, insecure jobs, which lack any real training or long term career opportunities (MacDonald, 1997b).

The widening gap between qualified and unqualified young people
While the economic situation improved in the late 1990s, it is possible that unqualified and early school leavers face greater risk of exclusion and/or marginalisation than previous generations. Indeed, Payne (2000) concluded that while young people who left school at the minimum age in 1995 faced less risk of becoming unemployed than those ten years previously, they were more likely to be economically inactive and not engaging in either education, or employment and training.

There is a growing body of literature which raises concerns about young people who have failed to make the transition from education to employment, who face exclusion from full citizenship and life on the margins (see Pearce and Hillman, 1998; Williamson, 1997). During the 1990s several studies focused on young people not participating in education, training or work, who were referred to as 'Status 0' or NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) (Instance and Williamson, 1996). There have been difficulties in quantifying the proportion of 16-19‾year olds falling into this category, but the SEU (1999a) estimated that at any one time, 161 thousand 16-18 year olds (9 per cent of the cohort) were not in education, employment or training, with a further 20-25 per cent experiencing some degree of vulnerability. Wilkinson (1995) estimated that about 5-10 per cent of young people aged 16-17 years had dropped out of school having neither found employment or training. It was also recognised that those young people are disproportionately concentrated in disadvantaged neighbourhoods who experience fractured family lives, enduring poverty and alienation from the labour market (Coles, 1999). Most importantly, it was recognised that fragmented social policy delivery to these young people failed to make any real difference to their lives (Newburn, 1999).

The policy response and the emergence of the Connexions Strategy
In the 1980s and for much of the 1990s the principal policy response was one of 'containment': various training initiatives were established to deal with the problem of mass youth unemployment and exclusion. However, Williamson (1997) has argued that policies directed at young people increasingly worsened opportunities and possibilities for this age group and contributed to further polarisation (see also Riseborough, 1993; Stafford, 1991). Similarly, Craine (1997) contended that vulnerable young people became trapped in a 'black magic roundabout' where they are circulated through an array of training schemes, casual work in 'McJobs', petty enterprise, quasi criminal activities, cash in hand fiddly jobs and further unemployment (Craine and Coles, 1995).

One of the main problems with service delivery was its treatment of 'vulnerable' young people as one homogenous group, and its failure to recognise the variety of issues affecting young people (Berthoud, Burton and Taylor, 2000; MacDonald, 1997b; Morris, 1994; Morris and Irwin, 1992). There was increased recognition of the need for an individual led policy response to the needs of young people and more inter-agency co-operation (Coleman and Warren-Adamson, 1992; Coles, 1995). Indeed, Pearce and Hillman (1998:2) argue that policy making has been constrained by a failure to recognise the variety of interconnected issues concerning young people and by 'professional, institutional and organisational boundaries that prevent an integrated approach to individual needs'.

The Employment Support Unit (ESU) recommended the development of inter-agency networks to provide a co-ordinated response to the needs of young people. They promoted the idea of the 'one stop shop' where 'all relevant services are located under one roof' ((ESU 1999: 12). Similarly, the TEC National Council (2000) called for more effective and proactive partnership arrangements to deliver better support for young people with special educational needs. The Social Exclusion Unit (1999a), identifying weaknesses in the existing support mechanism for young people, pointed to institutional fragmentation and the vast array of individual agencies providing often overlapping services (see also Coles, England and Rugg, 2000). It was within this environment that the Connexions Strategy was conceived.

The Connexions Service

The Connexions Service is designed to be more coherent across current service boundaries in order to provide a more holistic response to the individual needs of young people by providing one single 'seamless' support service (Connexions, 1999a). It is envisaged that flexible and innovative delivery structures will connect the public and private sector, community and voluntary sector to deliver a more effective 'joined-up' service. It is intended that the Connexions Service will work with parents, carers and a wide range of partners such as schools, pupil referral units, youth work organisations, probation services, local community and voluntary organisations, employers, health service, police and social services to establish more imaginative ways of delivering services to young people. Within this partnership, the personal adviser is intended to play a pivotal role in connecting young people with the appropriate guidance and support services. The Connexions Service aims to embrace a more individualised response, where the needs of the young person are placed in a central position.

Keeping track of vulnerable young people

Closely allied to this individualised service, is the need to have readily accessible, organised and accurate information to provide the young person with the most

appropriate advice which will allow them to achieve their full potential. It is also recognised that this is crucial in enabling more effective service provision. At the heart of the Connexions Strategy is the establishment of a comprehensive and 'live' register of the 13-19 population which will ensure:

> *that young people do not fall through the net, or become lost to the Connexions service, a database to track their progress through their teenage years... It will maintain the record of the services support to the individual and referrals to other agencies. It will allow monitoring of the help provided to those not in learning or at risk of becoming disconnected from their current learning or work*
> (Connexions, 19996b: 57).

It is envisaged that the database will have national, local and possibly regional components. At the national level, it is proposed that key data will be available for national monitoring and, although anonymised, there will be a need to identify young people who move between areas. At the local level, it is envisaged that the database will be accessed by a number of local agencies. Regarding access to client information, it is proposed that clear protocols will be established to govern data exchange and access to information. However, while this service will be provided to all 13-19 year olds, the focus will be particularly upon:

> *keeping track of the most disadvantaged young people and helping those at most risk of dropping out*
> (Department for Education and Employment 1999b: 52).

Thus three key activities relating to tracking are associated with the Connexions Strategy. The first is to maintain contact with young people. The second is increased inter-agency and partnership working. Third, there is an emphasis on the continual monitoring of young people's progress as they move into adult life. There is increased pressure on Careers Service to maintain contact, monitor and track those groups of young people who are not engaged in a learning outcome. This is particularly exemplified by the targets set by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) for Careers Service companies to reduce the number of 'missing'/'unknown' young people in the Careers Activity Survey. Additionally, with inter-agency co-operation being a central component of connecting up support services, partnership co-operation and consultation will become increasingly more important issues of debate.

The Concept of Tracking
'Tracking' is a difficult concept to define, primarily because of its negative connotations with cries of 'surveillance' and 'big brother' being quick to surface. Such is the

contentious nature of the concept that the term is being replaced within the Connexions Service by the term 'Client Information System'. At its most basic level, the Oxford dictionary defines a track as a mark, or a series of marks/footprints left by a person, animal and thing. Tracking can be defined as the process of tracing that series of marks/footprints. Inserting the term 'tracking' into an Internet search engine produces terms such as 'tracking parcels' and 'hurricane tracking', and while seemingly unconnected both of these metaphors are interesting from the perspective of this study. Tracking parcels is concerned with tracking the progress of a parcel from origin to destination, whereas 'hurricane tracking' is concerned with changing meteorological conditions which are continually assessed and monitored. The overall aim of 'hurricane tracking' is designed to inform preventive action, so that negative consequences can be minimised. In this way we can see similarities with this and with the tracking of young people. Sheffield Strategic Education Forum describing tracking in an education, training and labour market context as: '...the planned, systematic updating of knowledge of the status of a person's attainments measured in qualifications, and their participation in the education, training and employment market' (Sheffield Strategic Education Forum 1998:2).

Essentially, in the context of vulnerable young people, tracking is concerned with tracing pathways through transitions with the explicit aim of informing strategic planning of service provision and intervening on behalf of a young person to facilitate positive outcomes. In the context of tracking young people there are two distinct forms of tracking, which can be compared with tracking parcels and tracking hurricanes.

- historical tracking: *is concerned with tracking the progression of young people with the aim of informing careers education, information and guidance. This type of tracking is exemplified in the previous work of the Careers Service, where they collected information on the destinations of Year 11 leavers.*

- interventionist tracking: *is concerned with tracking in order to work with individuals in priority groups. Compared to historical tracking, interventionist tracking pursues a proactive approach in ensuring that young people arrive at 'positive' destinations (i.e. education, training or employment with training).*

A crucial difference between historical and interventionist tracking is the frequency of information collection and the timeliness of the information held, with more frequent and timely information being required to support interventionist tracking than is needed for historical tracking. The 2000-2001 Careers Service Planning Guidance identifies interventionist tracking as a priority task for Careers Services (Department for Education and Employment 1999a). It outlines the need to establish regular means of obtaining information about young people's current situation in order to

intervene at crucial points and prevent social exclusion. This is not possible with historical tracking. The ultimate goal of interventionist tracking is to achieve 'advance notification' of changes in activity of young people. Indeed, reflecting this trend of looking to the future, the Social Exclusion Unit (2000) highlighted the need for a shift in emphasis from 'crisis intervention' to 'prevention'. Despite this shift in emphasis from historical to interventionist tracking, this study revealed widespread recognition amongst Careers Service Companies of the continuing need for historical tracking in order to set the context in which interventions take place.

Rationale for Tracking young people

The underlying rationale of tracking is seen to be one in which young people are facilitated to make successful transitions into the labour market and ultimately into independent living. Crucially, it is central to both national and local concerns with tackling disaffection, raising standards and addressing and preventing social exclusion. Information from tracking encompasses a number of elements. First, it provides information on the size of the population under consideration, its characteristics and needs. Secondly, it provides information on the activities and achievements of that population. Thirdly, it provides information on the interventions and outcomes of those interventions and finally, it provides information on the destinations of the population, which are essential for policy formulation. By providing such information, tracking activities are seen to have the potential to inform the targeting of resources towards identified groups of young people. The attraction of tracking lies in its ability to facilitate greater inter-agency co-operation to target appropriate interventions towards a specific individual at the right time.

Increasing Tracking activity - 'tracking by stealth'

The amount of tracking activity has increased markedly in recent years, particularly amongst Careers Service Companies. This increasing activity is, in many instances, linked to targets, which are in turn linked to funding; a process which might be described as 'tracking by stealth'. This raises concerns surrounding the reasons and rationale for tracking, particularly if the central focus on helping the young person is lost in the scramble to meet targets. Therefore, there is an important challenge and responsibility in ensuring that any tracking activity is a 'live' process with the young person at the centre, rather than merely a 'statistical' process in which organisational concerns are uppermost. Indeed, this is a concern issued by a number of Careers Service Companies.

Tracking has also been aided by the information technology revolution. Technological developments have enhanced possibilities for connecting databases and linking individual records from different agencies. This has in turn promoted the idea of

multi-agency co-operation and 'joined-up' service delivery, which is after all at the heart of the Connexions Service. Clearly the design and implementation of tracking systems raise issues of 'ethics', 'data protection' and 'confidentiality', particularly in a multi-agency partnership context.

We can identify a number of potential tensions in establishing tracking systems.

- *Who should be tracked? Should all young people be tracked, or just those deemed 'vulnerable'. In the latter case, this is complicated by the definition of 'vulnerability'. Different agencies use different definitions and categorisations, depending upon which groups of young people they concentrate their service provision at. It is also important to consider that a young people's status may change over time, and while they may be considered vulnerable at a particular point in time, this does not necessary mean they will be vulnerable at another point. In a geographical context, more affluent areas may have different conceptions of 'vulnerable' young people.*

- *How long should young people be tracked? What is the most appropriate age to track young people, and when should they be removed from the system or indeed, should they be removed from the system?*

- *Who should do the tracking and how should records from different agencies be shared? Importantly, this raises issues of access and control of client data.*

- *Respecting the provision of the Data Protection Act 1998 and safeguarding the confidentiality of individuals. One of the important issues is the extent to which young people are fully aware that information is being kept (and shared) on them and their knowledge of and access to this information.*

Tracking activities of Careers Service Companies

A survey of Careers Service Companies in England revealed that the vast majority of Careers Service companies (95 per cent) surveyed indicated they routinely collect information on young people additional to the core Department for Education and Employment Careers Service contract to monitor destinations of all Year 11 leavers. The main purposes for this information collection are threefold. Firstly, to monitor destination in order to identify those young people who are vulnerable and at risk of disaffection or exclusion. Secondly, to allocate resources particularly to those at risk and thirdly to facilitate equal opportunities monitoring in order to identify groups of young people who are failing to use their services. In some cases, this entailed the monitoring of service provision in different postal code districts. This has entailed a shift in emphasis from historical to interventionist tracking. Most Careers Service Companies indicated they track young people from Year 9 until 21 years of age or 25 years of age in the case of young people with special needs.

Virtually all Careers Service Companies indicated an increased emphasis on keeping track of vulnerable young people, with the explicit aim being to deliver and target resources more effectively and efficiently. This refocusing has been largely instigated from central government and the DfEE requirement to reduce the number of unknown Year 11 destinations, and to keep records up to date and comprehensive. Career Service Companies were also very aware of the financial implications of not reducing the number of young people with 'unknown destinations'. This has in turned entailed a more proactive approach to keeping in touch with young people, and particularly increased inter-agency co-operation and partnership working. Some Careers Service Companies argued that different agencies are now more inclined to refer young people to them; young people who, in the past would not have come to their attention. Indeed, one Careers Service Company commented that: 'we have "captured" more children that are outside mainstream education. This has been as a result of inter-agency co-operation'.

This pro-active follow-up of young people has entailed more imaginative and innovative approaches to monitoring and keeping in touch with vulnerable young people. Careers Service Companies indicated there is more systematic utilisation of networks, increased use of evening telephone calling, home visiting, outreach workers and community careers officers who focus specifically on vulnerable young people. One Careers Service company indicated it adopted a 'call centre approach' to track young people by employing out-of-hours staff to contact those young people. A number of Careers Service Companies offer inducements to young people in the form of cinema and/or music tokens, to encourage them to keep in touch with the Careers Service.

However, there were a number of particular problems highlighted. Keeping track of young people who move out in and out of their catchment area presented a particular problem for Careers Service Companies, particular those in metropolitan areas. Moreover, it was recognised that vulnerable young people were generally the most likely to move about, because they tend to have insecure accommodation arrangements or may be homeless. While keeping track of young people was deemed essential for the continuity of service and support, the majority of Careers Service Companies had no systematic ways of identifying young people who were leaving or entering their area. In this instance, the importance of inter-agency co-operation was highlighted. Some neighbouring Careers Service Companies indicated they had agreements to share data, if the destination of the young person was known. However, in most cases Careers Service Companies admitted they did not know where the young person had moved to. This highlights an important weakness in the current efforts to keep track of young people and a problem which is recognised to date, to be largely unsolved.

Careers Service Companies argued that the increased emphasis on tracking had led to a number of positive outcomes.

- *They pointed to better identification, targeting and monitoring of vulnerable young people.*
- *There has been increased multi-agency co-operation, which many Careers Service Companies indicated has led to greater respect and better understanding amongst the different agencies. It has led to a significant reduction in the number of 'unknown' young people , which has consequently led to an increase in the number of positive outcomes.*
- *The increased emphasis on interventionist tracking they argued has led to a better understanding of what happens to young people over a period of time rather than one point in time as was the case with historical tracking.*
- *Careers Service Companies admitted that they now have more frequent contact with young people over a longer period of time, which has led to the increase in the number of young people entering positive outcomes.*

However, there were also a number of problems identified.

- *The difficulties in tracking vulnerable young people, particularly those identified as being homeless and those with no fixed address.*
- *The difficulties in getting some agencies to co-operate in sharing information.*
- *The need to devote extra resources on tracking vulnerable young people has place financial burdens on most career service companies.*
- *There is a concern amongst all Careers Service Companies and agencies who are involved in collecting information on young people regarding confidentiality, relevance and accuracy of the information. Most Careers Companies had established formal 'codes of practice' outlining the principles and conditions of data sharing. However, some pointed to the need for a common DfEE protocol for data sharing, storing and exchanging information, which they argued would help clarify data protection issues.*
- *Data and computer system incompatibility between agencies were highlighted as being particularly problematic. While many highlighted the importance of a unique identifier in helping to resolve data problems, they were mindful that this conflicts directly with the rules of the Data Protection Act.*

Key issues in establishing Tracking systems
While most Careers Service Companies were undertaking various forms of tracking, it has to be recognised that in the majority of cases these were relatively unsophisticated and were primarily an additional element to their overall DfEE requirement to produce destination statistics. However, eight cases studies were undertaken, of which

seven were Careers Service Companies who were identified as having more developed systems of tracking. Most had evolved initially from government funding. However, the majority were still in their infancy, being in operation for less than 5 years.

Case studies

- Hertfordshire: *Hertfordshire Individual Tracking System*
  - *an example of a strong and committed partnership establishing a stand-alone tracking system covering 'vulnerable young people' with potential for expansion into an 'all age, all agencies' system*

- Nottinghamshire: *Guideline Careers*
  - *an example of an advanced tracking system, with intensive development over the last 3-4 years. A particular feature of interest is the potential of developments relating to a 'Learning Card' to feed into the main tracking initiative*

- Black Country: *The Black Country Tracking Project*
  - *an example of a tracking project towards the forefront of tracking developments in England, providing a practical model of a working tracking project and of the types of information it can provide.*

- Tyneside: *Progression Observatory Project*
  - *an example of a specific initiative developed using SRB funding to identify and track young people who are disaffected or potentially disaffected.*

- Teesside: *Future Steps – mapping and tracking activities*
  - *an example of the development of a bespoke system producing management information and wider information pertinent to social exclusion, as well as information for historical and interventionist tracking*

- Merseyside: *Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership Pilot*
  - *as the title suggests, a Connexions Pilot with a particular emphasis on tracking, providing an example of some of the issues to be addressed in developing a tracking system in an area with a complex institutional structure*

- Inner London: *London South Bank Careers - mapping and tracking activities*
  - *an example of the challenges to mapping and tracking in part of a large metropolitan area with an ethnically diverse and mobile population with high levels of deprivation (i.e. a particularly 'difficult' context for mapping and tracking)*

- Cambridge: *Cambridge Homeless Partnership – Young People's Sub-Group*
  - *an example of a 'bottom up' thematic development, in which front line workers from voluntary agencies have been amongst the key players*

It was a common theme across all the case studies that the establishment, opera-tionalisation, maintenance and development of successful tracking systems involved considerable imput of resources in terms of time, staff and money. This is primarily related to the fact that 'vulnerable' young people are the most difficult to keep track of, and it is possible to spend finite resources on this group of young people, many of whom are hostile to being helped. This raises potential tensions between the objectives of tracking and reality. The object of recent tracking initiatives is to keep in touch with vulnerable young people, in order to intervene and deliver services more effectively on an individual basis. However, the case studies admitted that some young people were proving difficult to track and who were not interested in being helped. Most of the case studies had decided to concentrate resources on helping those young people who 'want to be helped' and although 'leaving the door open' to those young people who were unresponsive to their tracking efforts, it illustrates that no matter how comprehensive or effective a tracking system is, there will always be a minority of young people who for a variety of reasons do not want to be helped. Another source of tension related to who they should be tracking. Most of the case studies highlighted that while resources and efforts were being concentrated upon vulnerable young people, the needs of the majority of young people were being ignored. They were concerned that although not considered 'vulnerable' in the conventional sense, this group of young people could require help at particular points in time, but because resources were diverted elsewhere they would not receive the help they require.

Another issue highlighted by the case studies was the recognition that the race towards establishing sophisticated tracking systems and attention to the technical aspects of tracking could obscure the rationale behind tracking. They stressed the importance of ensuring that helping young people remains the central focus in tracking. In this respect, there was wide recognition that effective partnership within the tracking efforts was central to helping the young person.

Successful partnership working was recognised as a key piece in the tracking jigsaw. Underlining successful partnerships was the concept of trust, which was identified by all the case studies as one of the main reasons for the success of their tracking systems. They also pointed to an understanding of a shared purpose and non-competitive commitment to helping young people. The role of key individuals was also highlighted as being important in setting up, nurturing and driving partnerships forwards. Indeed, this individual commitment to young people emerged in most of the case studies.

The case studies also highlighted a number of IT and data challenges to tracking. Some partners do not hold computerised records of young people (this was particularly an issue for voluntary agencies). Data may be recorded in different formats, and

there is often no common format for categorisation. There is also a multiplicity of IT systems in use by different partners. Even where organisations/agencies have the same software, they often use it differently to suit the needs of their own organisation.

Data protection and the requirement to comply with the Data Protection Act 1998 emerged as a major issues in the case studies. Many of the case studies had established formal codes of practices with the various partners, which centred upon sharing, access and control of data. Moreover, the experience amongst the case studies was that once formal codes of practice were in place, data sharing became easier. It was suggested that some agencies hide behind data protection issues as a way of not sharing information or getting involved in partnerships.

Indeed, different organisational cultures emerged as one of the main barriers to sharing of information, particularly amongst those organisations that do not record information. Other organisations may be reluctant to share information because their relationship with young people is based upon the premise that information is not recorded. Other agencies may not share information because they fear their own organisational self-interest will be lost or that they will be pushed to the side in the development of tracking systems. Indeed, it was recognised by all of the case study interviewees that the culture of organisations and individual and agency wide working procedures and practices, particularly with recording, storage and exchange of information may prove more difficult barriers to establishing successful tracking systems, rather than the legalities surrounding data protection and confidentiality, and broader technical issues.

One of the most important issues in the establishment of tracking systems, is the level of co-operation received from young people. Most case studies found that the majority of young people did not object to data being recorded about them and shared amongst different agencies. While all the case studies emphasised the need to treat information with respect, sensitivity and ensure that the young person's best interests remain central to sharing of information, concern has to be raised on the methods though which consent is achieved. It is imperative that the young person is fully aware of what kind of information is being shared amongst the different partners and the purpose of this data sharing.

Implications for Policy

The introduction of the Connexions Strategy marks a significant departure from previous service delivery to young people. The intention of the Connexions strategy is to establish an up to date and comprehensive register of the 13-19 population with a national database used for monitoring purposes and local databases accessible to relevant agencies. The two primary aims of this tracking will be to maintain contact

with vulnerable young people and to monitor their progress. A central aspect of this agenda will be to bring together a range of agencies and interest groups.

There are a number of important issues that need to be addressed. First, the strategic role of tracking needs to be clearly defined. Secondly, it is important there is a rationale behind tracking young people and why it is being undertaken. Thirdly, tracking has to be regarded as merely a tool by which support and help may be provided to vulnerable young people. It is essential that it is not an end in itself. Fourthly, there is a danger in the current environment of 'chasing the missing' and the most 'vulnerable' that the needs of more able and less disadvantaged young people who may also need guidance, support and advice are being neglected. This issue of the balance between 'targeting' and 'universality' lies at the heart of the Connexions Service, and raises the question of whether there is a cut-off point at which the costs of focusing on the most vulnerable outweigh the gains. Fifthly, it is essential that the wishes of young people are respected, particularly those young people who do not wish to be tracked or who are not interested in being helped.

Crucial to the development of tracking systems is the establishment and development of partnerships. Central to the development of effective partnerships is the building of trust and co-operation across all agencies, a tangible sign of which may be the construction of a common shared database accessible to agencies at a local level. Moreover, consideration should be given to the introduction of statutory requirements for collecting, sharing and storing information on agencies other than the Careers Service Companies. At present, contractual requirements to undertake tracking activity, and any sanctions which may be imposed for failing to do so, differ across agencies.

The disparate nature of the many agencies who may be involved in a local partnership calls for an acknowledgement and understanding of the fact that, because of their different remits, these agencies often have different target outcomes, and, invariably, contrasting indicators of what may be termed 'success'. Thus, there is a need for the introduction of performance indicators which are relevant to a range of services or agencies, reflecting their common and agreed goals. In this way, 'success' can be measured in terms of the effectiveness of the partnership as a whole. It may even be appropriate to implement funding incentives which rely on collaboration between 'partners' in order for this to be achieved. Therefore, by making progress in this respect, the notion of 'joined-up' government may become more of a reality.

While assertions were sometimes made about the degree to which young people themselves accepted or objected to the collection of information about them, there was a dearth of empirical evidence which would enable decisions about young people's role in the process to be made with any confidence. Therefore, further research which explores young people's understanding of the implications of the

array of data collection with which they may be invited to contribute, and their attitudes towards this, is essential. It is also important that the views of different groups of young people, including some who may be considered to be 'at risk' or vulnerable are considered.

Angela Canny, Anne E. Green and Malcolm MaGuire *Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick, Coventry*

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