

LSDA responds

**Social Exclusion Unit  
consultation on  
young runaways**

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Feedback should be sent to  
Information Services,  
Learning and Skills Development Agency,  
3 Citadel Place, Tinworth Street, London SE11 5EF  
Tel 020 7962 1066 Fax 020 7962 1258  
[enquiries@LSDA.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@LSDA.org.uk)

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Author: Sue Taylor

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**Note**

The Learning and Skills Development Agency  
was formerly known as FEDA.

**Further information**

For further information on the issues discussed  
in this publication please contact:  
Sue Taylor, Research Manager,  
Learning and Skills Development Agency,  
3 Citadel Place, Tinworth Street, London SE11 5EF.  
Tel 020 7840 5354  
[staylor@LSDA.org.uk](mailto:staylor@LSDA.org.uk)

*This publication sets out the Learning and Skills Development Agency's response to the Young runaways consultation published by the Social Exclusion Unit in March 2001. The original consultation document can be found at [www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/index/young\\_runaways.htm](http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/index/young_runaways.htm)*

## Introduction

1. The Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) is a strategic national resource for the development of policy and practice in post-16 education and training. This includes addressing the agenda for 14–19 education and work with disaffected young people. Our activities include research to inform the development of policy and practice in this area. We have a clear brief to work across the learning and skills sector, providing support for colleges, work-based training, adult and community learning, and schools post-16, with a particular focus on quality improvement and support for the implementation of policy.
2. We welcome the opportunity to comment on the Social Exclusion Unit's consultation on young runaways. We very much support the general aim of creating a national strategy with greater uniformity of good practice at the local level.
3. Last year, we completed a research project (published under the title *Back on Track*) on ways to improve learning provision for 16–18 year olds who are not in education, training or employment, as well as young people at risk of dropping out of school. This response draws on *Back on Track* and on other research by LSDA.
4. *Young runaways* shows that young people run away for a variety of reasons and often as a result of a combination of factors, with family problems at the top of the list. The consultation document also indicates a clear correlation between running away and disaffection with school. However, for young people whose home lives are difficult or even turbulent, school may be their only stable and secure base. Steps taken by schools to tackle the early signs of disaffection, and to provide continuing support for young people who are vulnerable, should therefore contribute to reducing the problem of running away.
5. Our research supports some of the key conclusions of the consultation document, for example:
  - Evidence of good practice exists, but there is no uniform pattern, and even where good schemes are available, better marketing and outreach may be needed to reach and engage those young people who are most in need of help.
  - The importance of treating young people as partners and involving them in decisions that affect their future. In *Back on Track*, we recommended a learner-centred, intensive but flexible style of working, based on relationships of mutual respect. This may need to be addressed through initial and in-service training for teachers.
  - The need for better local collaboration and sharing of information between agencies.
6. In addition, our evidence points to:
  - The key role played by the youth and community service in responding to the needs of young people who have dropped out of school or are becoming disengaged.
  - The highly intensive nature of work with vulnerable young people, calling for multidisciplinary skills and good resourcing.
  - The importance of strong connections between schools and other organisations. Schools need to link with other local authority services and with expertise outside mainstream education and training - in voluntary and community-based schemes, for example. This is particularly important where schools are working with young people who have multiple problems, for example, those in/leaving care. A recent Ofsted report *Improving Attendance and Behaviour in Secondary Schools* found that 'few schools were in a strong position to identify vulnerable groups such as children in public care and to work systematically with relevant agencies on their needs'. Teachers and schools may need substantial help to make these systematic links. They may also need access to services that provide specialist support for families. Connexions Personal Advisers have a pivotal role to play in ensuring that schools are 'well connected'.
  - The vulnerability of young people who are 'in transition' – for example, leaving care, transferring from school to work, or from an intensive support programme outside school to a mainstream programme. Our research shows that there are many interventions that can impact upon a young person in transition. Well-coordinated, continued support is needed, therefore, together with improved tracking, to help young people manage the transition better. We continue to work on effective ways to identify young people's needs to ensure a successfully managed transition.

7. In our view, the two most critical elements of a strategy to respond to the problem of running away are:
- Adopting a preventive approach (including making support available through schools). Prevention must be better than cure. We must ensure that those supporting young people (whether Connexions Personal Advisers or other professionals) are genuinely in a position to help tackle the problems that lead to running away. There is much evidence that some young people will persist in running away when problems are not addressed effectively.
  - Improving multi-agency collaboration at local level. Joining up services is an essential step, both in preventive action and in responding to runaways. The Connexions Service has a vital role to play in promoting and facilitating improved collaboration at local level, ensuring that all young people make a successful transition from one service or programme to another. This should increase the support available and reduce the number of young people in crisis and at risk of running away. Connexions Partnerships are also responsible for auditing/mapping provision in their area and should be aware of the need for services such as drop-in centres where there is a significant history of runaways, either from or to their area.

8. Two recommendations from *Back on Track* would help promote multi-agency collaboration:

- cross-sector staff development workshops to encourage better understanding of the roles, responsibilities and cultures of different professions and to develop skills in joint working. Workplace trainers and assessors should be included, since they may be dealing with young people in need of substantial help to stay in work.
- using the Connexions Inspection Framework to examine how well the partners in multi-agency relationships work together and whether there are weaknesses in partnerships or gaps in services which affect young people's success in engaging or re-engaging with education, training or work.

9. We comment below on selected questions from the list in the consultation document.

#### QUESTION 1

#### **What is the role of personal, social and health education (PSHE) and Connexions in providing information about the risks and dangers of running away, and where to find help and advice?**

10. A key aspect of the Personal Adviser's role relates to curriculum development and delivery. Dealing with the causes and potential dangers of running away may not be within the experience of the PSHE teacher. Here is a good example of how Personal Advisers can contribute, by using their expertise to help develop and deliver an engaging curriculum in schools and colleges, where this advice and guidance is needed. It is essential that all Personal Advisers are able to offer this kind of advice, as no school would be exempt from the risk of young people running away, although some would clearly be more vulnerable than others. Sharing resources and guidance notes across Connexions Partnerships would be an economic way to support Personal Advisers in this task.

## QUESTION 2

**What measures are needed to ensure that young people feel that their views are listened to and that they have greater influence over the decisions that affect them?**

11. As recommended in *Back on Track*, professional training standards should give due emphasis to skills, knowledge and understanding for effective working with disaffected and disengaged young people. This should include a learner-centred approach, emphasising the need to engage young people as genuine partners in the endeavour to improve their educational success and life chances.
12. The youth and community service has a key role in promoting young people's influence and place in society. Youth workers have valuable complementary skills to offer in working with teachers. We noted, for example, the proposal made by DfEE (now the Department for Education and Skills, DfES) in *Transforming Youth Work* (March 2001) that the youth service should develop 'democratic and representative forums for young people'.
13. Citizenship education can play an important part in teaching young people how to express their views to good effect and develop skills to negotiate, based on knowledge of their rights and responsibilities.
14. The process of needs assessment within the Connexions Service is designed to be a dialogue. Personal Advisers, therefore, must be skilled in listening to young people and hearing what they say. An approach that is life-affirming and encourages aspirations, rather than one based on a deficit model, will help young people grow in self-awareness and recognise that they have a voice and a role to play in society.

## QUESTION 6

**Which agency should be responsible for providing young runaways with an interview and follow-up support – is it Connexions? What are the resource and cost implications of ensuring that this support can be carried out?**

15. To enable Connexions to fulfil its remit as a support service for all young people aged 13–19, its funding must reflect the resource-intensive nature of successful practice with those who are disaffected and disengaged. Follow-up support for young runaways would fall into the latter category.
16. The nature of support will depend on the reason for running away. A support mechanism for the young person concerned is essential. It may be appropriate for the Connexions Partnership to be responsible for ensuring that support is in place. However, Personal Advisers may not always be in the best position to help young people come to terms with their difficulties and work to overcome them. It is absolutely essential that young people feel safe and secure with those supporting them in this way. If a young runaway is found and befriended by another professional, such as a youth worker, who has already established a relationship of trust, this person may be better placed to offer follow-up support than a Personal Adviser who intervenes in an 'official' capacity.
17. The notion of 'an interview' sounds too strong, especially if this is intended to occur immediately after the young runaway is 'found'.
18. In addition to resource implications, there will be questions relating to the transfer of information, as well as 'out of area' issues, as a young person may be 'found' in another area and wish to remain there. The need for another Connexions Partnership to 'pick up the tab' will need to be addressed. There may be implications for transferring funds from one Partnership to another.

#### QUESTION 8

##### **How can information use and sharing be improved? Should information on whether a child has run away be part of the Connexions tracking database?**

19. In the case of prevention, the responsibility rests with all those who are involved with the young person to notice and act on signals that may indicate an intention to run away. This presents a staff development issue for teachers and others who contribute to the learning process. It also raises the question of accessibility to the Connexions Service, as it is possible that the young person has not presented any other needs and is not therefore receiving 'intensive care' from the Connexions Service.
20. Where intensive care is being provided and the risk of running away has been identified, information – together with the adoption of appropriate strategies – needs to be shared among those involved with the young person. The trigger is the effective identification of such a risk.
21. Where a young person has already run away, action will be needed to ameliorate the problem and reduce the risk of recurrence. There will be issues about the transfer of information regarding the cause and the same protocols on confidentiality will need to be applied as for any other young person. However, the nature of future action should be shared appropriately and assurances sought that everyone will play their part.
22. Connexions tracking databases will have limited value unless details are kept on all young people in a given catchment area, whether or not they have been identified as at risk of running away. The transfer of information in cases where young runaways are supported outside their area will be essential, but again the protocols on confidentiality will need to be applied.

#### QUESTION 10

##### **Are any further measures needed to improve 16 and 17 year olds' access to benefits?**

23. The benefit system alone will not provide sufficient support. Short-term emergency financial support for young people has been delivered effectively through Access Funds in schools and colleges and this arrangement should continue.
24. It is important to continue to allocate Access Funds even where the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) is available, since the former can provide emergency support. Emergency financial support must also be available to deal with cases where a young person runs away from an abusive home where the parental income is high and EMA support may be inadequate.
25. Many of the most vulnerable young people may not be in schools or colleges, but rather in work-based training, 'other training', low-paid jobs, or unemployed. These young people should have access to the same financial help as those in mainstream education.
26. Consideration should be given to the potential uses of the Connexions Card as a mechanism for providing both financial support and an incentive for young people at risk of running away – 'something for something'. The notion of the 'electronic purse' is an integral part of the Connexions Strategy; we believe that it is one that would appeal to young people. For example, the card could offer points in return for contacting an adviser, rather than simply running away in response to a crisis, or to encourage a young person to attend a support programme over a given period of time. It could also be a gateway to a range of specialist services.

#### QUESTION 11

##### **What extra funding would be needed to deliver an effective system?**

27. Our research suggests that the level of funding needed to support at-risk groups like runaways is substantially higher than that which is normally required and probably exceeds the range proposed in the consultation document on Connexions funding.
28. In our response to the proposals for funding Connexions, we argued that resources should be calculated using local estimates of the numbers likely to be in at-risk groups, rather than by using proxies. The same argument should apply in the case of funding to support runaways.
29. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) will implement a disadvantage factor that recognises the fact that certain categories of young people present particular challenges for learning providers, and generate additional costs. Young people with a history of running away should be added to the list of vulnerable groups. Postcodes will help only to a limited extent: we recommend continuing the approach adopted by the Further Education Funding Council, of using both postcodes and definitions of vulnerable groups (eg care leavers) in calculating resource needs.
30. Local LSCs and local education authorities should liaise with local funding managers of non-education services (eg housing, social service, health) to coordinate income streams for successful programmes and services offering learning provision for disaffected young people.

#### QUESTION 15

##### **Are there any other issues or ideas that need to be considered in relation to preventing and addressing young runaways?**

31. The resource needs of smaller organisations, particularly those operating outside mainstream services, need to be considered. Drop-in centres and other community-based support services for young people, including those who have no fixed address, may fall into this category. Often, they run on short-term, project-based funds which are inherently unstable.
32. Local LSCs have a role to play in supporting quality improvement in voluntary organisations and community groups working with disaffected and disengaged young people.

#### Reference

Office for Standards in Education. *Improving attendance and behaviour in secondary schools. Strategies to promote educational inclusion.* Office for Standards in Education, February 2001.

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