



Office of the  
Deputy Prime Minister

Creating sustainable communities

# Transitions

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A Social Exclusion Unit  
interim report on  
Young Adults

# Introduction

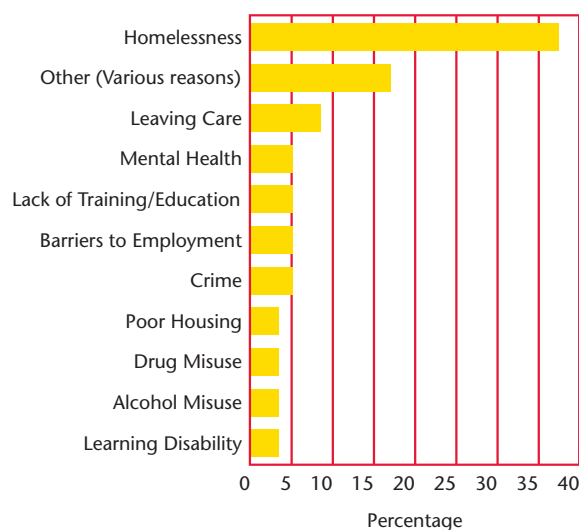
The Social Exclusion Unit's new work programme aims to narrow inequalities and improve opportunities for the most disadvantaged people, with a particular focus on improving service delivery. As part of this work, the SEU is examining the effectiveness of services for young adults with severe or multiple problems.

Our report *Breaking the Cycle*<sup>1</sup> recognised that young people's lives change rapidly and dramatically between the ages of 16 and 25. A move towards independence – the transition to adulthood – generally occurs during this time. During the transition there is an increasing need to access services personally rather than through parents or carers. There is often a greater need for services and advice as well because the decisions young people make during this time – particularly on education and work – can affect the rest of their lives.

But *Breaking the Cycle* also found too few arrangements to support young people making this transition. This is particularly true for those with severe or multiple problems.

Young people with severe or multiple needs in areas such as homelessness, substance misuse, offending or mental health will need access to a range of services in order to address the range of problems. But too often services will approach someone's problems as individual issues rather than looking at them as interlinked. As a result, individuals can find themselves pushed from pillar to post on unpredictable and repetitive journeys around different agencies and on a downward spiral of social exclusion. Such people will struggle to progress into independent, fulfilling adulthood.

## Reasons Young Adults Access Services



Source: SEU Young Adults Questionnaire, Interim Analysis, 2004

**Our questionnaire also found that 98 per cent of young adults accessing services had more than one problem or need.**

<sup>1</sup> Published in September 2004, the report takes stock of the Government's strategy to tackle social exclusion and identifies future priorities.

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## **Making the Transition: Young Adults with Troubled Lives**

This project focuses on the delivery of services aimed at young adults with severe or multiple problems as they make the transition to adulthood. Its aims are to:

- Find out what causes young people to experience problems in their transition to adulthood;
- Identify what services are available to support them in that transition;
- Assess the effectiveness of these services; and
- Agree practical actions to improve these services.

A final report will be published later this year.

### **Young Adults: Key Statistics**

In autumn 2004, there were around 5.5 million people aged between 16 and 24 in England. Of these, around 750,000 were not in employment, education or training.<sup>2</sup>

Up to 20 per cent of 16- to 24-year-olds have a mental health issue, mostly anxiety and depression.<sup>3</sup>

Young men aged between 16 and 24 were most at risk of being a victim of violent crime in 2003/04. Over a 12-month period, nearly a third of 16- to 17-year-old males reported committing a violent crime.<sup>4</sup>

A third of all problem drug users are homeless or in need of housing support and a third drop out of treatment within the first 12 weeks.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Office for National Statistics, Labour Force Survey, Autumn 2004

<sup>3</sup> Office for National Statistics, 2000

<sup>4</sup> 2003 Crime and Justice Survey

<sup>5</sup> Drug Misuse 2004, Reducing the Local Impact, Audit Commission, November 2004

# Emerging findings

As well as reviewing the available research and evaluation evidence, we have gathered new evidence from field visits, 150 responses to a questionnaire, regional road shows and discussions with colleagues inside and outside Government.

We have identified three key areas for further work based on our emerging findings: **age boundaries; holistic services and the trusted adult; and thinking and behaviour.** The emerging findings will form the basis for the second phase of the project.

## Age Boundaries

*Breaking the Cycle* recognised that services which are restricted to a particular age group often work against the principle that resources should follow need. For example, the Connexions Service is available to young people up to the age of 19 (or longer for those with Special Educational Needs). However, those we consulted felt that many other vulnerable young people would value such support into their twenties.

Similarly, 16- and 17-year-olds may receive inappropriate mental health services. They can find themselves falling between adolescent and adult services and losing continuity in treatment as a result.

**“The problems associated with youth transitions do not conclude at neat, age-specific points and therefore age-related policies...do not fit harmoniously with the realities of the extended transitions that our sample members have undertaken”**

**Poor Transitions, Social Exclusion and Young Adults, Webster et al, December 2004**

However, not all services are so restricted by age. Entry to Employment, a work-based learning initiative, is a good example of a service which, though aimed at 16- to 18-year-olds, will consider people up to the age of 24 if they are in need of its support.

## Next Steps

Much has been made of the need for horizontal integration of policies through a ‘joined-up’ inter-agency approach. But less emphasis has been placed on the benefits of vertical integration to promote continuity of service. This is particularly relevant with the new Children’s Trusts, which will promote joint working between services for children and young people. It will be very important that they are managed so that vertical transition into adult services is also well supported.

In the next stage of work, we will explore the potential for blurring the age-boundaries of services aimed at vulnerable young adults, and for encouraging more overlapping services so that they work more closely together. This happens already with Connexions (where its advice ends at 19) and the New Deal for Young People (where support starts at 18).

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“Many of the young people we support have extremely poor social capital. In particular they suffer from a lack of a supportive adult. This is particularly noticeable in over 19s” **Questionnaire response**

## Holistic Services and the ‘trusted adult’

Many of those we consulted told us about the benefits of ‘holistic services’ with somebody to guide and advise the young person: this could be a personal adviser, key worker, mentor or an independent visitor. Such individuals can help ensure there is continuity of support, and promote trust between the young person and particular services. They can also develop relationships with local services to allow them to act as a broker for their clients, introducing them to a range of specialist provision relevant to their personal needs.

“Service providers felt that most clients responded especially well when they had an ongoing personal relationship with an individual service provider. A good relationship with a service provider allowed people to develop a sense of being safe and with familiar people, providing an environment in which trust and confidence could be built – especially important for clients with self-esteem problems”

Jenny Graham et al, *Making an impact?*  
National Centre for Social Research, 2003

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It can be daunting and confusing for some young adults to have to work with several different agencies at once. This is where effective partnerships, ‘holistic services’ such as one-stop shops where young adults can receive help and advice on a range of problems, can make a difference.

The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit has identified ‘lack of service co-ordination’ as the biggest barrier to the delivery of effective youth services.<sup>6</sup> Our research also identified separate funding streams and targets as significant barriers to partnership working.

The Government is starting to look at whether Jobcentre Plus and Connexions could work more closely together, even sharing offices. We also see Local Area Agreements, which give councils more freedom to develop local solutions and which have ‘children and young people’ as one of their three key themes, as offering a real opportunity to improve the co-ordination of services for vulnerable young people. They can do this by simplifying funding streams, improving partnerships and giving more flexibility to local partners.

## Next Steps

The project will examine whether better partnerships could be developed if some of the barriers that inhibit them were removed. In particular, we will explore the impact of funding and targets and ways in which they can be used to support, rather than inhibit, partnership working. We will look at the early pilots of Local Area Agreements and work with authorities to see how far they can be used to address these issues.

We will also look at the recruitment and retention of youth workers, and we will examine how their services could be made more accessible. We will promote good practice and explore the potential for more effective and efficient assessment, co-ordination, brokering with external practitioners and advocacy for disadvantaged young adults.

<sup>6</sup> Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, *Youth Scoping Report*, November 2004

“Because looked-after young people are not used to participating in decisions made about their lives they experience difficulty in seeing beyond the immediate future”

**Pregnancy and Parenthood, the views and experiences of young people in public care, National Children’s Bureau, May 1999**

## Thinking and Behaviour

Young adults’ decisions can have important ramifications. Those who drop out of education, training or work – or who drift into crime – can face severe long-term personal, social and financial consequences, as can their families.

Some young people prefer instant reward to longer term benefits. However their priorities can change as they mature. This process occurs at different stages for different people, and some find it harder than others to consider the future impact of their current actions.

Disadvantaged young adults – who may have low self-esteem – can often be least equipped with the skills they need to make the choices that influence their futures. And young people living in deprived areas can face particular problems developing a long-term perspective.<sup>7</sup> Policies aimed at young adults must recognise this, especially where they propose incentives to influence current behaviour.

**“Short-term development of personal and social skills among troubled young adults significantly improves long-term prospects in education, training and employment.”**

**Fairbridge/Charities Evaluation Services**

Some services are addressing this issue. Connexions brings young people into the decision-making process, thereby encouraging long-term thinking. And the forthcoming Youth Green Paper will encourage young adults’ participation in the community, so that they can broaden their horizons and influence decisions affecting them.

Some policy initiatives also appeal to young adults with limited time horizons: for example, Education Maintenance Allowances which provide up to £30 a week to 16-19 year olds from poorer families staying in education, and ‘taster’ learning courses.

**“Taster learning... supplies the instant gratification that young rejectors, in particular, crave. Their lifestyle does not include long-term planning or an acceptance of deferred rewards. They want instant results.”**

**Campaign for Learning, Briefing Note, 2004**

Despite these initiatives, in general, national policy makers have not placed sufficient weight on young people’s thinking and behaviour when they have designed policies aimed at them. This oversight means that policy interventions aimed at young people risk failing.

## Next Steps

The project team will be looking at existing practical approaches that get results by successfully considering how young adults think and behave. We will also look at risk and preventative factors associated with young adults with troubled lives. And we will look further at the available research on young adults’ thinking and behaviour, including how it can be built into policy more effectively.

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<sup>7</sup> Barriers to Employment for 16-25 year old Preston Road Estate residents, Preston Road New Deal for Communities, June 2004

# Further work

During the next phase of the project we will continue to work on the issues under our three main themes: **age boundaries, trusted adults and thinking and behaviour.**

We will consult 16-25 year olds to find out how they feel about the services they engage with – and the services they don't engage with – as well as what changes they would like to see. We will present the findings to our cross-Government and practitioner steering groups.

We will publish an analysis of the responses to the project's online questionnaire, along with feedback from our 2004 regional workshops, on the SEU website ([www.socialexclusion.gov.uk](http://www.socialexclusion.gov.uk)).

We will use action research projects to test our assumptions. Subject to further meetings and consultation, we will also develop and publicise good practice and practical help for service providers.

We will discuss an action plan with other Government departments. We intend to publish our findings in November 2005, together with an agreed Government action plan aimed at improving services for young adults making the transition to adulthood.

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This report summarises the findings from the first phase of the project. It outlines the emerging themes from our initial research and the areas of further work that will be undertaken.

The project started in August 2004 and is part of a larger Social Exclusion Unit work programme looking at improving service delivery for some of the most disadvantaged groups in society. The rationale for this project and the new work programme stems from *Breaking the Cycle* which was published in September 2004.

The project team issued a questionnaire on 21 October 2004 which ran until 15 December 2004. The questionnaire was aimed at those working with young adults from the statutory, voluntary and community sector.

Another important method of gathering information was a series of regional roadshows held throughout England during autumn 2004.

The project has also been advised by two separate steering groups:

- Practitioners who work with young adults; and,
- Civil servants from Government departments with an interest in this project.

We will continue to work with people and organisations that have an interest in the project and publishing this report is part of our work together on this important issue. Please contact us with any comments you may have on this subject. Our address is: [youngadults@odpm.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:youngadults@odpm.gsi.gov.uk)

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