Guidelines on identifying young people at risk of early school leaving

For further information, please contact:

The School Completion Programme

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Introduction

These guidelines have been produced for Local School Completion Programme (SCP) Co-ordinators in order to identify good practices for targeting young people at risk of early school leaving and to offer practical advice on targeting to projects based on the findings of a questionnaire sent to all SCP projects in January 2007.

Section One outlines a rationale to the practice of targeting resources to young people at risk of early school leaving and to communities at risk of socio-economic disadvantage. The rationale attempts to underpin many of the principles of the School Completion Programme.

Section Two identifies the causes of early school leaving and would-be leaving and outlines some of the pitfalls associated with the processes of identifying young people at risk of early school leaving.

Section Three highlights models that have been developed to identify young people at risk of early school leaving.

Section Four identifies good practice for identifying young people at risk of early school leaving arising out of questionnaires sent to SCP Local Co-ordinators in January 2007.

Section 1: Rationale for targeting

The Educational Disadvantage Committee made a submission to the Minister for Education and Science on 'Identifying disadvantage for the purpose of targeting resources and other supports'. The author identified three types of targeting in programmes designed to address education disadvantage:

1. Targeting the individual child
2. Targeting schools
3. Targeting geographic areas

According to the author, the School Completion Programme falls into category two where the school is targeted as a number of children from disadvantaged backgrounds exceed a particular threshold. According to the author:

"Part of the rationale for programmes targeted at school derives from a belief that the disadvantage associated with poverty is aggravated when large proportions of pupils in a school are from poor backgrounds (the 'social context' effect)".

The School Completion Programme, in its wider role, identifies young people at risk of early school leaving and aims to provide a range of supports to them in-school and in the community, through linkages with relevant community, youth and statutory agencies. The arguments in favour of this area-based response to targeting are summarised by Smith [1](1999):

- There are identifiable geographical areas that suffer disproportionately from problems. This places mainstream programmes under pressure so that they operate less effectively than in other, more affluent areas and something 'extra' is therefore needed;

- Problems overlap in geographical areas and they are often made worse when they all co-exist together; the sheer scale of the difficulties means that extra action is needed;

- An increased polarisation between deprived and more affluent areas means it is important for social and political reasons to be seen to be doing something extra for people living in deprived areas;

- Because problems are concentrated, a greater number of deprived people are captured if resources are geographically targeted than if they are spread more evenly;

1. Copyright Gillian R Smith

- Focusing activity on small areas within tight boundaries can, potentially, make more of an impact than if resources are dissipated;

- Unlike national mainstream programmes, area targeted programmes are often characterised by a 'bottom up' approach which is underpinned by partnership working. This can result in more effective identification of problems and delivery of solutions;

- Local programmes may lead to increased confidence and capacity to participate in the community;

- Successful area-based programmes may act as pilots and ultimately lead to changes in the delivery of mainstream policies.

Smith also outlines the arguments against area targeting:

- Most deprived people do not live in the most deprived areas and will be missed by most of the targeted programmes – it has been argued that people rather than areas should be targeted;

- Area targeted policies are unfair on those areas which are not covered by these programmes, despite sometimes having similar needs;

- There are political problems targeting some areas and not others;

- Area-based approaches may simply displace 'the problem' (e.g. unemployment, crime) to somewhere else;

- The problems are generated at the national level – therefore action needs to be at this level;

- Following on from this, area programmes may detract from the need to do more at a national level through mainstream policies;

- Area interventions interfere with the market – areas should be left to decline or recover since interfering with these processes may do more harm than good;

- It has been argued that small area data and intelligence on deprivation is not good enough to back up targeting decisions.

Smith (1999:49) concludes by maintaining that there is a clear rationale for area targeting interventions noting that:

"Although some issues can only be addressed through national level mainstream policies it is the case that some problems occur because of local area related factors and it is therefore appropriate to address them at the local level".

Furthermore, the author notes that:

"A role for area targeted programmes in the future might be to facilitate the development of innovative and different policy and process approaches which could ultimately be incorporated into mainstream programme design and delivery across the whole country".

The arguments set out by Smith for and against a targeted approach underline many of the issues that affect local projects. SCP projects aim to target resources to the young people living in disadvantaged communities found to be at risk of early school leaving. Smith points to the compensatory nature of SCP in her analysis by noting that something 'extra' is needed in communities that present with multiple levels of deprivation. The targeted approach also allows for bottom-up, partnership working, which are central tenets of SCP. However, a targeted approach also requires strong evidence and data to back it up so that the most appropriate targeting decisions are made. The latter presents a challenge to SCP in that the young people most at risk of early school leaving must be identified correctly through projects' targeting procedures.

Section 2: Identifying the causes of early school leaving

According to the SCP specification booklet, projects:

"Must target and focus programme resources in the first instance on the individual young people who are most at risk of early school leaving. Additionally, some strategies may include a wider group (e.g. in the case of sporting and leisure activities) or the entire school population (e.g. where tracking attendance is involved)".

Targeting is a central process to SCP projects in order to:

a) Identify the young people most at risk of early school leaving enrolled in the schools participating in projects

b) Identify the most appropriate supports to address the risk factors identified through the targeting process.

The process of identifying the young people most at risk of early school leaving by using the most appropriate variables / criteria can be a challenging one. Lehr et al. (2004) make a comparison between status variables[2] and alterable variables[3] that influence young people's decision to leave school early. The variables relate to the American context but are in the main translatable to the Irish situation. The authors involved in this exercise identified 23 different variables associated with early school leaving.

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2 Status variables are defined as variables that are difficult and unlikely to change

3 Alterable variables are easier to change and can usually be influenced by students, parents, educators and community members. Alterable variables are the focus of efforts to increase school completion.

Overview of status variables associated with dropout[4] [5]

Age: Students who drop out tend to be older compared to their grade-level peers

Gender: Students who drop out are more likely to be male. Females who drop out often do so due to reasons associated with pregnancy

Socio-economic background: Dropouts are more likely to come from low-income families

Ethnicity: The rate of dropout is higher on average for minority groups

Native language: Students who come from non-English speaking backgrounds are more likely to have higher rates of dropout

Region: Students are more likely to dropout if they live in urban settings as compared to suburban or non-metropolitan areas

Mobility: High levels of household mobility contribute to increased likelihood of dropping out

Ability: Lower scores on measures of cognitive ability are associated with higher rates of dropout

Disability: Students with disabilities (especially those with emotional / behavioural disabilities) are at greater risk of dropout

Parental employment: Dropouts are more likely to come from families in which the parents are unemployed

School size and type: School factors that have been linked to dropout include school type and large school size

Family structure: Students who come from single-parent families are at greater risk of dropout

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4 Also referred to in Macmillan, 1991; Rosenthal, 1998; Rumberger, 1995; Wolman, Bruininks & Thurlow, 1989. These statements apply to groups of students on average.

5 The term 'dropout' is common currency in U.S. literature on early school leaving. The terms 'early school leaving' , 'early school leaver' or 'would-be leaver' are used in the remainder of the document.

Overview of alterable variables associated with dropout

Grades: Students with poor grades are at greater risk of dropout

Disruptive behaviour: Students who dropout are more likely to have exhibited behavioural and disciplinary problems in school

Absenteeism: Rate of attendance is a strong predictor of dropout

School policies: Alterable school policies associated with dropout include raising academic standards without providing supports, tracking and frequent use of suspension

School climate: Positive school climate is associated with lower rates of dropout

Parenting: Homes characterised by permissive parenting styles have been linked with higher rates of dropout

Sense of belonging: Alienation and decreased levels of participation in school have been associated with increased likelihood of dropout

Attitude toward school: The beliefs and attitudes (e.g. locus of control, motivation to achieve) that students hold toward school are important predictors of dropout

Educational support in the home: Students whose families provide higher levels of educational support for learning are less likely to dropout

Retention: Students who dropout are more likely to have been retained (held back) than students who graduate

Stressful life events: Increased levels of stress and the presence of stressors (e.g. financial difficulty, health problems, early parenthood) are associated with increased levels of dropout

These variables and others identified through research and / or practice can inform the identification of young people at risk of early school leaving in local SCP projects. However, the vast number of causes and effects of early school leaving can potentially pose difficulties to local projects, as the potential is there to target widely based on the array of variables documented on early school leaving.

Hull (2005) identifies a number of risk factors associated with potential early school leaving under the headings: school-based factors; community and family factors; school-based factors and indicators for the individual students; and personal factors. According to the author:

"It is not possible for schools to resource and implement strategies that assess every student against every one of these factors and indicators. The focus of schools on those factors / indicators that are present in *most* early school leavers, leaving the rest to teacher judgement, is a logical use of available resources."

Hull (2005: 14) also identifies a number of potential pitfalls in the process of identifying young people at risk that must be considered:

1. **Some young people have the resilience to overcome a raft of demographic, financial or personal barriers.** To identify them as 'at risk' on the basis of a quantitative or 'tick box' approach is inappropriate. At worst it could encourage such students to self-identify as 'precariously engaged' or trigger a school response that 'nudges' them down a pre-determined path for 'at risk' students. Processes that allow for teacher and parent input into assessing risk are more likely to recognise resilient students;

2. **Any identification of a student 'at risk' should be regarded as a snapshot in time and not a label or a determinant of the future.** Some risk factors come and go in a student's life and some students benefit from the opportunity to make a 'fresh start' with a new teacher, a new subject or a new year. Expecting and facilitating future resilience and success should always be the school's starting point;

3. Some of the current discussion about 'risk' is focused on whether the causes of disengagement and 'risk' are to be found primarily in the students (here are the things that are 'wrong' or 'lacking' in some students leading to disengagement) or in the school (here are the flaws in programming, structures, support services or teaching quality that can lead to increased student disengagement). **The quality of schooling, the expectation of teachers and peers and good teacher-student relationships have been identified as significant protective factors.** The focus on identifying which individual students are 'at risk' should not replace reflection on how school should operate to engage the greatest possible number (not simply the majority) of students.

The documented pitfalls of targeting must be taken into consideration when reviewing targeting processes in local projects and should inform good practice for identifying young people at risk of early school leaving.

Section 3: Identifying models to target young people at risk of early school leaving

Hull (2005) documents five strategies for identifying young people at risk of early school leaving used in Victoria, Australia[6], namely:

1. Common practice

2. 'Aspects of Life' questionnaire designed by La Trobe University

3. Brimbank Melton LLEN strategy

4. Teacher – student connection strategy

5. Checklist strategy

Common practice model

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Referrals from teachers

⇩

Referrals from parents

⇩

Self-referral from students

⇩

Review of literacy and numeracy levels

⇩

Review of school reports and assessment outcomes

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Review of attendance patterns

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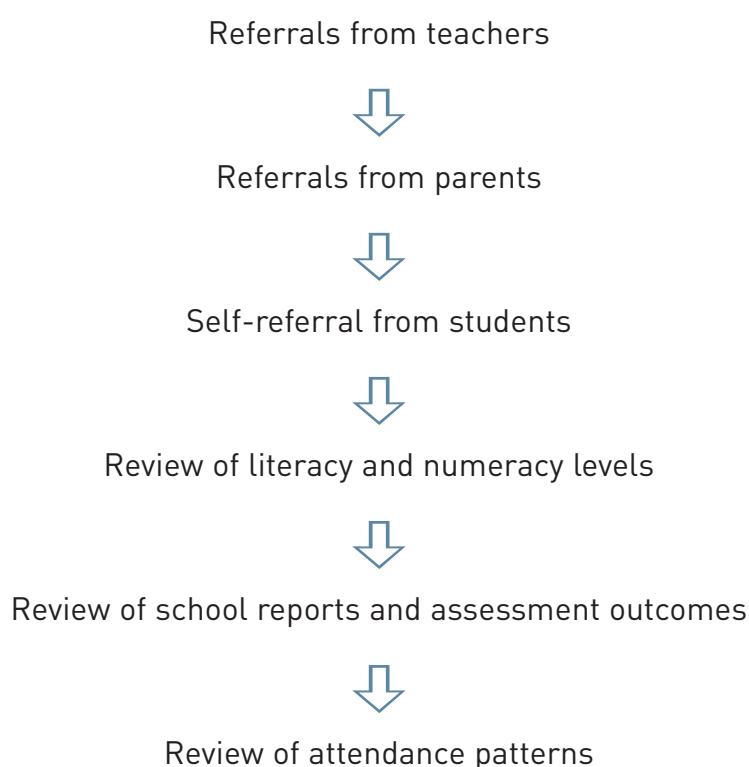
6 Models highlighted in the report 'Identifying students at risk of disengaging from education and training' have been reproduced with kind permission of the Victorian Department of Education.

Hull notes the following features of the Common Practice model:

- Schools use one or more of these 'risk factors' as a trigger for closer monitoring of a student's progress;

- The relevant stakeholders (welfare co-ordinator, year level co-ordinators etc.) collate referrals and undertake data analysis to identify those students who are deemed 'at risk';

- The model acknowledges research that indicates absenteeism / truancy and low levels of academic achievement as the most significant common characteristics of early school leaving;

- The approach assumes that someone notices when a student is struggling or is dissatisfied with school and that clear processes to channel that 'noticing' into the school's formal consideration of 'risk' are likely to catch many of the young people who are experiencing personal difficulties or behavioural problems.

'Aspects of Life' questionnaire – La Trobe University Tool

The tool is a 48-item questionnaire (37 questions that seek information on risk factors, another 11 seek information on parent education level, ethnicity (or aboriginality), perceptions of academic achievement, attitudes to school subject choices and intentions regarding school leaving or completion).

The questions are grouped into five 'factors' for analysis:

• Academic – schoolwork, concentration, reading and writing skills and overall success as a student;

• Home life – home life and parental support;

• Rebel – getting into trouble, skipping class and associations with friends who drink, smoke and don't care about school;

• School commitment and satisfaction – school belonging, satisfaction with school and commitment to completing an education;

• Loner – problems with coping and feelings of loneliness, insecurity and isolation.

Hull notes the following features of the 'Aspects of Life' questionnaire - La Trobe University Tool:

- The tool was piloted to a small group and subsequently administered to 356 students from 5 secondary schools plus another 14 young people who had left school early;

- Student responses to the questionnaire were added together to form scores for each 'factor'. Analysis of the tool identified as 'at risk' those young people who ranked in the bottom 15% in two or more of the 'factors';

- Teachers were also asked to identify the students in Year 9 (third year of post-primary school – approximate age group 14-15 year olds) who were 'at risk';

- The tool is grounded in research and fine-tuned to suit its target cohort;

- It is designed to predict which young people are at risk of early school leaving but not which young people are at risk of disengagement from education and training;

- It would represent a significant addition to the administrative burden of schools and is as yet unproven in its ability to predict early school leaving.

Brimbank Melton LLEN Strategy

The strategy was developed from the longitudinal study by the Australian Council of Educational Research into the characteristics of early school leavers. From this research, the following profile of a likely school leaver was developed:

Demographic
- Male
- Low socio-economic status
- Parent(s) are early school leavers
- Koori
- From English speaking household
- From non-metropolitan area

Schooling
- Government schools
- Low levels of literacy and numeracy
- High absenteeism
- Poor relationships with teachers
- Poor relationships with peers
- Low self-esteem, depression

Guided by these risk factors, a tool that is essentially a spreadsheet was developed. The information in each column is:

1. Attendance
   - Number of unapproved absences
   - Attendance rate

2. Literacy
   - CSF[7] Reading level
   - CSF Writing level

3. Numeracy
   - CSF Chance and data level
   - CSF measurement level

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7 The Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF) II, published in February 2000, describes curriculum and standards in eight key areas of learning from Prep to Year 10. The eight key learning areas are The Arts, English, Health and Physical Education, Languages Other Than English (LOTE), Mathematics, Science, Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE) and Technology.

4. Suspensions
    - Number of times
    - Number of days

5. Parents
    - Occupation code[8]

Hull notes the following features of the Brimbank Melton LLEN Strategy:

•   The strategy is influenced by the belief that schools will only adopt an approach that minimises the burden on staff, particularly classroom teachers and minimises the duplication of data collection;

•   The rest of the strategy relies on teacher knowledge of the student, parent referral and self-referral by the student;

•   One column of the spreadsheet is a checklist of known risk factors;

•   One column of the spreadsheet provides an opportunity for the school to allocate each student a rating to show the extremity or urgency of the risk. This process allows the school to acknowledge the resilience of some young people and the vulnerability of others;

•   One column of the spreadsheet records the intervention strategies, alternative programmes or special support service brought in to assist each at risk student to remain in school. School management team can scan the spreadsheet for each student to assess whether the support offered is appropriate to the risk factors;

•   This allows the school to review the effectiveness of the support offered to a student at risk. A thorough analysis by risk factors, risk rating, supports offered and subsequent retention outcomes can tell the school in quantitative terms whether what they are doing is working and which aspects of their approach are proving most effective;

•   The strategy relies heavily on how much teachers know about the home circumstances and peer relationships of all their students.

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8 The use of parents' occupational code as part of a model to identify young people at risk should be given careful consideration. Using data relating to the parents' occupational code may not be appropriate in the Irish context.

Teacher – student connection strategy

This strategy is based on the assumption that:

"Someone always knows when a student is at risk and that if the appropriate school structures, relationships and communication channels are in place, the news will reach the people who can do something about it" (Hull, 2005: 25).

Hull notes the following features of the teacher – student connection strategy:

• For each student there is one staff member whose job it is to monitor his / her progress and his / her well-being and communicate with family;

• This structure ensures that when a classroom teacher has concerns about a student's academic progress, attendance, behaviour or peer relationships, there is a natural person to whom those observations should be made. Similarly, when parents wish to flag their concerns or provide the school with information about home circumstances, there is a natural person who knows the student to contact. When the student wants to talk to someone about issues of concern, there is someone they know whose job it is to help them;

• The identification of students at risk under this strategy is a process of consultation between teachers / year heads, welfare co-ordinators etc. This consultation might be structured around a checklist of known risk factors to ensure each student is thoroughly considered and not simply passed over because they are doing well academically;

• Schools that have implemented this approach believe that it is proving effective in identifying at risk young people and improving retention.

Hull notes that this approach:

"Does not allow for detailed analysis of which risk factors are more likely to lead to school leaving nor for follow-up analysis of the effectiveness of intervention strategies" (2005:25).

However, if the contact person in this model is the SCP Co-ordinator rather than a teacher, the model could potentially go one step further in terms of understanding the effectiveness of the supports put in place when risk factors are identified.

Checklist Strategy

The Gippsland Regional Office of the Australian Department of Education and Training has developed a detailed checklist of known risk factors for teachers and year level co-ordinators to use. The use of the checklist to identify 'at risk' students was integrated with a process for referral to alternative programmes, support services and transition assistance.

Checklist
-   Learning difficulties
-   School refusal, chronic absence, stated intention to leave school
-   Chronic failure at school
-   Alienation – dislike of teachers, anger and resentment about school
-   Disruptive behaviour
-   Passivity
-   Frequent changes of school
-   Lack of interest in obtaining a satisfying job / pathway
-   Unstable home situation
-   Family conflict or feeling that family is not supportive
-   Alienated from home, homeless
-   Conflict with peers, gangs
-   Pregnancy and motherhood
-   Offending, vandalism and grafitti
-   Financial insecurity
-   Socially withdrawn
-   Self harm
-   Poor self-image, low self esteem
-   Poor social adjustment
-   Poor organisational skills
-   Trauma
-   Psychological difficulties
-   Drug or alcohol problems
-   Medical difficulties

Hull notes the following features of the Checklist strategy:

- At the end of the checklist, the relevant team is required to make a 'global judgement' on the overall level of risk;

- There is significant teacher input and the final assessment of the level of risk remains in the hands of the school staff;

- This strategy relies on the extent to which teachers know about the details of a student's home circumstances or peer relationships;

- It requires a commitment to staff time to complete the checklist for each student.

Hull has identified a number of different approaches to identify young people at risk of early school leaving. The approaches attempt to identify some of the main causes of early school leaving and to set up appropriate procedures to identify, support and monitor the young people identified through the processes. Each model can stand alone or elements of each one can be combined to suit local situations. Central to each strategy is the collaboration of key stakeholders in the process; collection of relevant data through referrals; identification of pertinent risk factors and utilisation of processes that do not pose a significant burden on stakeholders. Hull also notes that while targeting models have been identified, additional work needs to be carried out on whether they are the most effective and appropriate tools for identifying the young people most at risk and whether they can impact on improved educational outcomes.

Section 4: Results from the targeting questionnaire: guidelines on identifying young people at risk of early school leaving

Local Co-ordinators were sent a questionnaire on targeting in January 2007. To date, 63 questionnaires have been returned representing a response rate of 77%. The questionnaire set out to explore a range of practices within SCP to identify young people at risk of early school leaving. The responses are analysed with a view to providing projects with guidelines for improved practice.

Issue 1
How many young people at risk of early school leaving should be targeted by SCP projects?

Projects were asked to identify the number of young people identified in their cluster as being at risk of early school leaving (as per the last Retention Plan) as well as the overall number of enrolments in all the schools participating in the cluster (as per the last Retention Plan). Taking the number of young people identified at risk of early school leaving as a percentage of the number of enrolments, a clear variance emerges in the numbers targeted in each individual project. Overall, 19% of young people enrolled in these 63 SCP clusters are considered at risk of early school leaving but this percentage figure varies from 5.4% to 55%. As SCP targets, in the main, young people **most** at risk of early school leaving but still in the formal education system, it is difficult to adhere to a numerical guideline as to how many young people should be targeted in each cluster as the risk factors in each locale or the criteria chosen to identify most at risk in each locale differs. te Riele (2006:141), for example, quotes Dwyer (1996) who estimated would-be leavers in Australia as 25% of students in senior high school. However, research in Victoria (Kirby, 2000) found that 45% of low achieving students in Year 12 (last year of formal post-primary education) would prefer to be in work than at school. With such variance in defining and measuring risk factors, it is difficult to accurately measure the number of would-be leavers in the Irish education system. However, clusters should be aware of published retention figures by the Department of Education and Science (1996 cohort) and the county-by-county breakdown included in this report. Census figures should also be reviewed so that local targeting is in line with published statistics on retention.

A guideline has never been issued to projects as to how many young people should be targeted per cluster; as clusters have historically targeted based on criteria identified in research and practice that cause young people to be at risk of early school leaving. This approach allows local flexibility and local knowledge to inform the process of identifying young people at risk of early school leaving and is considered an acceptable practice in research (see Section 3). However, in order to provide a critical level of support to young people most at risk of early school leaving, a guideline should be set that clusters target young people at risk of early school leaving in line with published local and county breakdowns of early school leaving.

Issue 2:
Should SCP projects adopt a quota system for targeting young people at risk?

Co-ordinators were asked to identify whether a quota system had been established in their cluster. Out of the 63 responses, 15 projects had established a quota system. A quota system is a system whereby each school in the cluster targets a set amount of young people known to be at risk of early school leaving. According to open-ended responses by Co-ordinators, quota systems were established for the following reasons:

- "Limited resources and budget = limited cohorts. Those who need it most"

- "The system was adopted based on the number of children deemed 'most at risk' in each school and on the number of children the project staff could provide quality support for. The Local Management Committee favoured targeting 30 children in each primary school and 60 at second level"

- "The quota system means we can do intensive work with the students most at risk"

- "A quota system is in operation in each school and is worked out approximately on a pro-rata basis, on overall school enrolment. The quota is roughly 1:14 or 70% of the school cohort. Secondly, this keeps the numbers targeted relatively small allowing specific targeted interventions to occur"

- "There are 10 schools with an overall enrolment of 2098 students. It would be impossible to target all of these students for the staff. Each school is therefore allowed 20 students, with some leeway given in many cases"

- "This system was adopted into practice prior to my commencing in the post of co-ordinator. Therefore, I am not fully aware of the rationale other than a reported difficulty in the allocation of the activities budget (also pro-rated) in the interest of equity to all participating schools"

- "This is based on overall numbers enrolled in each school"

- "We have adopted a general policy of including 20% non-nationals and 20% Travellers when targeting. We also aim for a gender balance. However, this is strictly secondary to a potential candidate being at risk and most in need of the services and supports we provide. Above all, we are needs focused"

- "The reason for doing this is to work realistically within our funding boundaries"

- "It was decided by the schools together and depends on the level of disadvantage and numbers"

The open-ended responses elicit views on the reasons for adopting quota systems in SCP. The main reasons focus on limited funding, limited staffing and the ability to focus more funding and / or staff on intensive support for targeted young people at risk of early school leaving. Other projects seem to have adopted quota systems so that equal allocations could be made in each school in the cluster.

Evidence shows that only 24% of projects adopt a quota system in SCP, yet it does have some merit in that it allows for more intensive support to fewer numbers of young people targeted at risk of early school leaving. However, the approach runs the risk of 'cutting off' young people at risk of early school leaving who do not make the threshold and it does not allow for projects to offer whole class / whole school supports that might benefit young people at risk who may be on the cusp of the quota. Quota systems need to be flexible enough in order to include young people who present with risk factors during the school year and / or to allow for some initiatives that adopt a wider approach.

Issue 3
Who should be involved in establishing the target list?

A wide variety of stakeholders are involved in drawing up target lists in SCP clusters. These include, in the main:

- Barnardos
- Behavioural support teachers
- Care teams
- Chaplains
- Class teachers
- Counsellors
- Deputy Principals
- Educational psychologists
- Family Support Workers
- Gardai
- Guidance Counsellors
- Home Visitors
- Home School Community Liason (HSCL) teachers
- Health Services Executive (HSE) personnel
- Learning support teachers
- Link teachers
- Local services
- Members of Local Management Committees
- National Education Welfare Board (NEWB)
- Parents
- Principals
- Resource teachers
- School Management
- SCP Co-ordinators and SCP team members
- Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)
- Social Workers
- Students
- Teachers
- Vice-principals
- Visiting Teachers for Travellers
- Year Heads
- Youth services
- Youthreach

As research suggests, it is beneficial to include relevant stakeholders in the process of identifying young people at risk of early school leaving. Hull (2005) identified that the most optimal strategies for identifying young people at risk involved the stakeholders most closely associated with the students, for example, teachers, year heads etc. Without exception, principals / deputy principals / vice principals are centrally involved in drawing up target lists in SCP. SCP Co-ordinators and their staff, HSCL teachers and class teachers are also commonly consulted when drawing up the target list.

Hull also identified in the Teacher – Student Connection strategy the desirability of a central contact person to co-ordinate the process of identifying young people at risk of early school leaving. The School Completion Programme Local Co-ordinator and his / her teams are centrally positioned to co-ordinate this function. In response to this issue, Co-ordinators were asked in the questionnaire to identify what level of influence they currently have on drawing up the target list; the following responses were recorded.

Table 1: Local Co-ordinator's influence on drawing up the target list

Current level of influence	Number	Percentage
No influence	1	2
Little influence	3	5
As much influence as other stakeholders	38	61
A lot of influence	15	24
Complete influence	5	8
Total	62	100

Note: One project did not answer this question.

Local Co-ordinators were also asked to indicate what level of influence they would like to have on drawing up the target list.

Table 2: Local Co-ordinator's indication of how much influence they would like to have on drawing up the target list

Desired level of influence	Number	Percentage
No influence	0	0
Little influence	2	3
As much influence as other stakeholders	33	54
A lot of influence	23	38
Complete influence	3	5
Total	61	100

Note: Two projects did not answer this question.

Table 1 indicates that thirty-eight Local Co-ordinators currently have as much influence on drawing up the target list as other relevant stakeholders. 24% of Local Co-ordinators noted that they have a lot of influence over drawing up the target list. Only four Local Co-ordinators indicated that they have no influence or little influence over the target list. In comparison, Table 2 indicates the desired level of influence Local Co-ordinators would like to have over drawing up target lists. Co-ordinators indicated a preference to have more influence over the drawing up target lists, with a shift away from having as much influence as other relevant stakeholders to having more influence over the target list.

As the data indicates, as well as research on good practice approaches to identifying young people at risk of early school leaving, the personnel who play a central role in identifying and supporting young people at risk of early school leaving should play a central role in the process of drawing up target lists. SCP Co-ordinators must continue to play a central role in drawing up target lists alongside other relevant stakeholders.

Issue 4
When should target lists be drawn up?

Ideally, target lists should be reviewed in May, when the Retention Plan for the next academic year is discussed and revised in September when the intake of new Junior Infants and first years is known to the project. The process for drawing up the target list may take time; a process that can start in April / May and end in the following academic year September / November.

Target lists should be open to revision when additional information becomes known to the project, through consultation with relevant stakeholders or when relevant data pertinent to young people identified at risk of early school leaving is obtained.

Issue 5
Should there be flexibility in the process of identifying young people at risk of early school leaving?

Local Co-ordinators were asked to indicate if there was flexibility in their targeting procedure to include or remove young people on the target list if needs emerge / risk factors cease during the academic year. According to the questionnaire, 62 out of the 63 projects that responded indicated that there was flexibility in their cluster's targeting procedure.

Co-ordinators provided commentary as to why this is the case:

- "Education Welfare Board Attendance Report, consultation with class teachers, HSCL may recommend inclusion of students due to changed circumstances"

- "If a pupil requires supports however short term, they are added to the list and withdrawn when and if supports are no longer required. List has to be open to accommodate newcomers and unforeseen circumstances"

- "There are frequently young people who move into the area e.g. international students who by nature of their level of English, family circumstances, need to be included. Likewise young people may move off if they leave the area or reach specific targets in terms of attainment / academic achievement"

- "Stakeholders have regular meetings to discuss the progress / situation of the targeted young people. If a student is not on the list and there are changes they can be added to the list"

- "The list is added to at second level as new targeted young people emerge. Students are not removed during the year"

- "Because of interagency approach, new information can come to light, for example, a student is currently receiving support from another agency or have been brought to the attention of another agency. In rare cases, some students do not wish to become involved in our after school programme so we replace them with another child and try to provide alternative supports. The out-of-school group can change regularly throughout the year depending on circumstances"

- "We do not expand or reduce our target list but there is flexibility. Through our care team we have a list of other children that we monitor and if a crisis occurs we would cater for this child. If we feel we have catered for the needs of a child and child and family are doing well we would remove them from our target list but would monitor for a short period after this"

- "Sometimes a situation will arise where a child / young person needs to be temporarily monitored i.e. bereavement in family, illness etc. Sometimes a child / young person will no longer be at risk due to a positive change in his / her circumstances"

- "We would expand our target list in areas of support where we feel we have the capacity to do so, without reducing the quality of support provided. We feel it is imperative to maintain as consistent a target list as possible in order to achieve long-term improvements in the targeted students. Reducing the target list would occur if we felt that the quality of the supports and service was suffering"

- "During the year the numbers expand as absenteeism, truancy, suspensions become of concern. Students who are struggling to achieve are often brought to our attention. Students post-JC who drop out or pre-Junior cert. are automatically followed up on"

- "Different children's needs require different levels of support and intervention. It is felt that once a student feels ready to come to school without the support he should be encouraged to do so. Teachers also want the flexibility to refer students, if a situation occurs throughout the school year"

- "In many cases, students can vary throughout a given academic year. In some cases a student's circumstances and progress may improve significantly, while for others these may deteriorate. On this basis, it is crucial to have flexibility in terms of target lists in order to meet the needs of students who present at high risk"

- "It is frequently expanded to accommodate students who experience crises throughout the year. Its reduction is an ongoing issue in a cluster with 10 schools and two project workers"

- "When we discover a young person showing themselves to be at risk of leaving school early we believe it is appropriate to put interventions in place to support that person to remain in or return to school i.e. add them to the list. We are however slower to take someone off the list on the basis that it is good to keep an eye on those who have struggled but have improved to the extent that they no longer need support. These are few and far between as most continue to need support. There is also the matter that their parents have signed them up for support"

- "At second level there is continual movement of target group. Various factors apply i.e. crisis, life circumstances etc. At primary level, the target group does not move"

- "The target group can be maintained or reduced depending on the emergence of 'at-risk' factors, similarly a young person may be omitted from the target group, should they present at risk. However, once targeted a person tends to remain on in the target group until they reach the age of 18, complete the Leaving Cert., leave the area or go on to full-time employment"

- "Generally the list may have to be expanded as young people present difficulties which we weren't previously aware of. Also, as adolescence is a difficult time, we need to be adaptable"

- "Young people's needs change, development or improvement should occur (this must be a main aim / objective for any targeted young person). Young people targeted are individually reviewed by SCP staff three times during the year (Christmas, Easter, August). Staff may recommend that a student no longer needs the programme thus allowing flexibility during the school year for change in cohort but not normally numbers targeted"

- "The project in conjunction with the schools monitor the progress of all individuals on the target list. As a result, there are times when it is necessary to increase the level of input for one student and appropriate to decrease it for another. If a student is a new referral the current needs of the target group is reviewed along with the project worker timetable. Any decisions to expand, maintain or reduce the target list is decided between the project worker, the SCP Co-ordinator, the Principal and the HSCL Co-ordinator. Note: it rarely happens that a student is removed from the programme."

A number of themes emerge in the comments made by the Co-ordinators. The need for flexibility is paramount. However, flexibility is more apparent in terms of the varying levels of support given to young people rather than flexibility in dramatically altering target lists. Once a young person has been placed on a target list, it is unlikely that he or she will be removed from it unless the relevant stakeholders can clearly show that that the risk factors have dissipated. This may only be the case for young people targeted short-term, for example, if he / she experiences bereavement and / or a crisis situation that can be successfully resolved. If the young person is supported through this experience, through counselling or other supports, and the outcome is considered successful, he or she will be removed from the target list. However, the Co-ordinators seem to make a distinction between young people who are targeted in the short-term and young people who are targeted in the long-term. In the main, young people who are identified at risk of early school leaving remain on the target list for the duration of his or her educational experience.

Flexibility must be an integral part of the targeting process due to the number of relevant stakeholders involved in the targeting process. When working in an interagency capacity, young people who are not on the target list may come to the attention of the SCP team through formal and / or informal linkages. Due to the nature of the initiative as a school-community partnership, it is important that relevant information and / or referrals are taken into consideration. However, in order to manage target lists, consideration should be given to this scenario when target lists are being drawn up so that target lists do not expand beyond the capacity of projects to offer young people most at risk of early school leaving a critical level of support.

It is important to emphasise that projects are aiming to provide a critical level of support to young people identified as being most at risk of early school leaving. While flexibility must be inherent in a system that is dealing with human behaviour, projects must have upper and lower thresholds in their target lists so that they do not expand or reduce support to young people at risk of early school leaving to the point that services are compromised.

Issue 6
Should targeting be based on foot of a formal referral procedure?

Co-ordinators were asked to indicate whether their target lists were produced on foot of formal referrals. Table 3 indicates the level of formal referral in SCP in order to identify young people at risk of early school leaving.

Table 3: Targeting based on formal referral

	N	Percent
Yes	36	60
No	22	37
Both	2	3
Total	60	100

Note: Three projects did not answer this question.

As Table 3 indicates, 60% of Co-ordinators target young people on foot of a formal referral procedure while 37% claimed that they did not target using a formal referral procedure. While the majority of Co-ordinators target using a formal referral procedure, Co-ordinators in their written responses shed some light on the complexities involved in the referral process in SCP.

- "Checklist type of form signed by either teacher or signed by SCP staff member in consultation with teacher(s). No formal referral for other agencies. Where young person is out-of-school, visit home and fill out referral form with parent and young person"

- "HSCL and SCP team would liaise with teachers re. referrals"

- "Referral forms are available at SCP office for teachers and principals. Phone calls from outside agencies and SCP staff complete the referral form"

- "Word of mouth generally – but we recognise that this needs to change and more structure needs to be put in place. This will be of more benefit – so that schools will have to recognise that they cannot just keep adding to the list – more of a definite process needs to take place"

- "Initially either directly or through the principal. In a number of cases it's self-referral by clients or their families. We then ask that the person making the referral fill out a referral form or we complete one based on the information provided"

- "There is no actual referral form; this is currently under review in light of the CDU profiling guidelines. Referrals are made through regular meetings with schools, agencies and the SCP team. Essential information is gathered through this means. Parents and students themselves approach the SCP team and ask to be involved in our supports"

- "Referrals can be made verbally or in writing, once referred the person referring the young person must complete a target profile – for SCP files and review meetings"

- "School principals fill in a referral form and return it to the SCP office. Parental consent is sought and recorded"

- "All students are referred using SCP pupil evaluation referral form – principals, teachers, HSCL, Special Needs, Resource, Visiting Teacher for Travellers are invited to make referrals during first term"

- "We used to have meetings in September and go through the previous year's target list and make changes deemed necessary. This year we are using the profiling forms and are introducing a referral procedure. We have decided to begin this process in May i.e. class teachers will be consulted and asked to fill out referral forms. These referrals will then be considered at a meeting of the key stakeholders"

- "Some are formal requests from the Health Boards or other schools. Many are informal – i.e. requests from parents, teachers, SCP counsellors or HSCL"

- "We are in the process of creating a formal written system. However, at present teachers, principals etc. approach the SCP if they have concerns. Feedback on students is also sought at Care Team meetings. The system is one of open communication"

- "Teacher observation, family history, knowledge of co-ordinator. Consent forms must be signed by parents / guardians before children can participate in activities"

- "We have devised our own referral form which is complete. We also have a student profile form which we complete with family. Consent for inclusion on programme is also gained"

- "Young people are referred or targeted from keeping attendance / punctuality records. Early indicators are usually quite clear. Also – from behaviour reports. But by close observation of students and liaising key personnel"

- "Usually by meeting a teacher / year head / principal in the corridor"

- "Some referrals are formal and some may be in the form of a teacher coming to me informally with concerns about a certain child. I take both just as seriously".

As the comments highlight, the majority of projects accept referrals based on a formal and consultative system. Some projects who currently accept referrals informally are moving towards a more formal referral system. In the targeting models identified by Hull (2005), there is no indication whether referrals should be made formally or informally. However, on closer examination, many of the models require a considerable amount of detail, so it would seem likely that formal referral systems would be most appropriate.

The written comments provide some insight as to why a formal referral procedure might be more appropriate for SCP projects. Informal methods of referral might allow target lists to expand at a greater pace than formal methods as stakeholders can refer ad-hoc through word-of-mouth. **Formal procedures require SCP projects to consider each referral and might therefore be a useful form of control over the target list. Student Referral guidelines were recently sent to SCP projects and projects are encouraged to adopt an appropriate formal referral procedure that suits the needs of the cluster.** If appropriate, the model adopted could be a combination of both formal and informal channels of referral.

Issue 7
Should targeting favour certain gender or age groups?

Co-ordinators were asked to identify which gender and which age group was most represented in the project (as per the last Retention Plan). The questions were asked in order to ascertain if targeting should be weighted in favour of any gender or any age group. As in Section 2, research indicates that would-be leavers are more likely to be male and more likely to be older. Table 4 indicates which gender is most represented on target lists drawn up by SCP clusters.

Table 4 Gender profile: Gender "most represented" by SCP projects

Gender profile	N	Percent
Male	46	75
Female	12	20
Both equal	3	5
Total	61	100

Note: Two projects did not answer this question

Table 4 indicates that targeting in SCP is in line with research that indicates that males are more likely to be at risk of early school leaving. However, the results of this table are not in line with the most recently published figures on retention by the Department of Education and Science, which notes the gender breakdown in retention as follows:

Table 5: Retention based on gender (1996 cohort)

Gender	Junior Certificate 'sits' (%)	Leaving Certificate Retention (%)
Male	93.4	72.1
Female	95.8	83.8

Source: Department of Education and Science.

Table adapted for analysis purpose.

Table 5 indicates that at junior cycle, retention is more or less gender neutral. At senior level, males are only 11.7% more likely to leave school early than females. A further investigation of open-ended comments in the questionnaire shed some light on the gender differential as noted in Table 4:

• While Table 4 shows that males are more likely to be targeted than females, many projects noted that the actual numerical differential between the two genders was in most cases minimal.

• Targeting in SCP is dependent on how many all-girls / all-boys / mixed schools are included in the cluster and / or how many males and females are enrolled. It makes sense that targeting is based on the gender demographic of the school population.

• Some Co-ordinators noted that targeting is based on need and not gender. Therefore targeting is not gender specific and depends on the needs of the target group. While females are more likely to be retained in the formal system, a significant number are still vulnerable to early school leaving, SCP projects should ensure that their targeting criteria is not gendered biased and / or gender neutral. Males might present with more risk factors that fit project's targeting criteria but projects should be aware that risk factors for females might be less visible or tangible.

In terms of the age breakdown, Table 6 notes the age breakdown of the target group in SCP. The response to this question was more complex in that many projects target different age groups.

Table 6 Age Profile: Age Category "most represented" by SCP projects

Age Breakdown	N	Percent
4-7	7	11
8-9	4	6
10-11	6	10
12-13	9	15
14-15	16	26
16-18	0	0
10-11, 12-13, 14-15	2	3
10-11, 12-13	3	5
4-7, 12-13	1	2
8-9, 14-15, 16-18	1	2
12-13, 14-15	2	3
4-7, 14-15	2	3
All age groups equally	2	3
8-9, 12-13	1	2
4-7, 8-9	2	3
4-7, 8-9, 10-11, 12-13	1	2
10-11, 12-13, 14-15, 16-18	1	2
8-9, 10-11, 12-13	1	2
Total	61	100

Note: Two projects did not answer the question.

In terms of a single age group that is most commonly targeted by SCP projects, the 14-15 age group is most commonly targeted (26%), followed by 12-13 (15%) and 4-7 (11%). However, the situation is more complex in SCP when it comes to targeting age groups and approximately 19 projects that responded to the questionnaire targeted different age groups in equal measures. In terms of the written responses that accompanied this question, the following reasons for this profile emerge:

- There are two major milestones in particular that SCP projects focus on: transfer from primary to post-primary and retention to Junior Certificate. Both stages present risk factors for young people. The transfer from primary to primary can be an unsettling period for many young people (Smyth, 2004). Added to this is the fact that many of the supports provided to primary level students at risk of early school leaving do not transfer to second level. Ensuring that young people at risk of early school leaving sit the Junior Certificate is one of the main aims of SCP and significant support is provided to young people at this stage in order do so. Both the National Office and the Department of Education and Science have identified these milestones as primary targets for SCP so it makes sense that these are the age groups most commonly targeted by local projects.

- Projects often target younger age groups with the understanding that preventative, early intervention supports can provide young people with the necessary assistance at an early age and instil a positive sense of school attachment that will stay with the young person throughout his or her educational experience.

- Projects noted that the delivery of supports to young people is not age specific but depends on the presentation of risk factors associated with local criteria, demographics and school type.

Based on the assumption that projects target young people based on the presentation of risk factors, demographics and school type, specific age groups still emerge as being most at risk of early school leaving. These age groups (12-13, 14-15) are targeted in order to reach two significant educational milestones: transfer from primary to post-primary and support to completion of Junior Certificate. While the rationale for targeting supports at younger age groups is sound (preventative, early intervention etc.), the transfer from primary to post-primary and retention of young people to completion of Junior Certificate must remain primary targets of SCP.

Issue 8
Should certain criteria that identify young people at risk of early school leaving be weighted in the process of drawing up target lists?

Co-ordinators were asked to name the criteria used to identify young people at risk of early school leaving. Co-ordinators were then asked to put in order the criterion most often used to target young people at risk to the criterion least used to target young people at risk. The aim of this exercise was to identify the most significant factors identified in clusters that place young people at risk of early school leaving. Table 7 highlights the most significant indicators used to identify young people at risk of early school leaving.

Table 7 Most commonly used indicators to identify young people at risk of early school leaving in SCP

Indicator	Number of times indicator identified
Poor attendance	56
Behavioural issues	49
Family history of ESL	42
Learning difficulties (including literacy and numeracy difficulties)	26
Family circumstances	26
Member of minority group	22
Economic stress	14
Poor educational attainment	12
Lack of social skills	10
Substance misuse (in family and / or young person)	8
Lack of participation / engagement in school	7
Lack of family support	7
Experience of trauma (bereavement / separation etc.)	7
Involvement of outside agencies	6
Lack of emotional support	6
Lack of self-esteem	5
Silent / withdrawn	4

Table 7 indicates that a significant proportion of projects identify poor attendance as an important indicator of early school leaving, followed by behavioural issues, family history of early school leaving, learning difficulties, family circumstances and membership of a minority group. Each of these indicators has been identified in research as significant causes of early school leaving (see Section 2). While other indicators as noted in Table 7 are used in SCP to identify young people most at risk of early school leaving, a case could be made for weighting particular indicators in the process of developing projects' target lists. The process of weighting particular indicators means that young people who identify with poor attendance, behavioural issues, family history of early school leaving, learning difficulties etc. should be included on the target list in favour of young people who only identify with one or two less commonly identified indicators.

This system is in practice in some SCP projects whereby a young person identified at risk of early school leaving is targeted as 'high risk' if they meet at least four or more indicators on the criteria list. This system could be beneficial in projects where targeting has become too widespread. It also allows projects to identify young people with multiple levels of risk factors that require the long-term resources of SCP as well young people who might present with only one or two risk factors that might benefit from shorter-term support from SCP (e.g. bereavement support, counselling etc.) and / or a whole school / whole-class support (e.g. breakfast club, attendance tracking etc.). This system also allows for referrals to be treated in order of priority in terms of the number of risk factors that a young person presents with and the ability of the programme to put in place supports to target the range of risk factors identified.

A weighted system that identifies young people at 'high risk' allows for SCP to offer intensive supports to young people who have multiple levels of risk factors. This approach provides a rationale for giving less intensive support to young people who are identified at risk of early school leaving but not to the same extent as other 'high risk' young people participating in the cluster. The system also allows for the project to distinguish between intensive vs. less intensive support and long-term vs. short-term support. The system also allows for flexibility as young people who identify with multiple levels of risk during the academic year can still be referred and targeted by the project as well as young people who are identified as requiring a crisis intervention. An effective review procedure allows for projects to identify whether 'high risk' young people have progressed to a lower risk status during the academic year. This can be achieved by implementing a formal referral and progress report system (see SCP Referral and Support Guidelines).

Issue 9
Are criteria lists reviewed by SCP projects?

Table 8 provides data on whether projects regularly review criteria lists. The following response was recorded.

Table 8 Review of criteria list

Criteria list review	N	Percent
Yes	48	80
No	11	18
Both	1	2
Total	60	100

Note: Three projects did not provide an answer to this question

A large majority (80%) regularly review criteria lists so that the needs of young people at risk of early school leaving match project criteria list. 18% of projects stated that they do not regularly review criteria lists. **It is considered good practice to review criteria so that the appropriate interventions are matched to the young person's identified risk factors.** Co-ordinators were asked to describe review processes adopted by their projects:

- "Each year in preparing the Retention Plan the criteria list is reviewed. The Local Management Group is happy with the criteria"

- "Co-ordinator judges criteria list after discussion with relevant stakeholders in compiling the target list"

- "Each year the schools' evaluate the various programmes and re-look at criteria for targeting"

- "Criteria is being reviewed at present as it is difficult to provide a service to the number on the target list"

- "Our criteria list is reviewed annually at our planning day"

- "Criteria have not been reviewed in 3 years. Management and staff feel they are quite accurate indicators of 'potential early school leavers'. However, at this year's review I will be proposing adding 'high levels of substance abuse / addiction by both parents or students' to the criteria list"

- "Review of sixth class students before transfer to second level. Other reviews carried out when required"

- "At the monthly meeting of Principals"

- "These are considered as we put together our retention plan. Up to this year they were unchanged from the outset of the programme, however this year a number of changes were made. We changed the attendance rate to 90% because at primary level missing 20 days (i.e. the legal limit) is approximately 90% attendance"

- "Annually we look at the criteria in detail at our Local Management Committee meeting but also at our weekly pastoral care team meetings we discuss changes that are occurring within our student body and in their families"

- "The criteria used are established based on the DES SCP's publications and on risk indicators identified in current research (e.g. Boldt, Morgan etc)"

- "We are in the process of restructuring the project to hold formal reviews each term based on 'Individual Retention Plans" which has targeted areas for improvement of students' school life"

- "Once a year we check the target list against the EWB figures to ensure that attendance is the main criterion"

- "Part of planning day (prior to retention plan submission) March / April is spent discussing criteria with local management group"

- "This need for support regarding a child's personal development was identified as a concern. To this end; promoting self-esteem has been an important element of our work this year for shy / withdrawn children. This will be considered for inclusion in our criteria next year; although it has been argued that this area is considered under emotional / behavioural difficulties"

- "Occasionally a pupil will present at risk for different reasons than those listed. We will then add this reason to our criteria list. At the management meeting at the beginning of the year, we also discuss the criteria to make sure they are valid and that we are not leaving any out"

- "We have found that our criteria is a good way of identifying young people to target. However, our challenge has been that in a lot of our schools the numbers of students who meet the criteria is over 50% of the school population. We are not in a position to work with this number of students. So once students have been identified it comes down to prioritising the needs and establishing the degrees in order to establish the 'most at risk' whilst being mindful of the resources available".

Projects have adopted consultative processes to review criteria lists, notably through projects' review days and also through formal and informal meetings with relevant stakeholders throughout the academic year. Local management committee meetings provide an opportunity for new criteria to be added to the list and / or for redundant factors to be removed. The opportunity to review criteria lists also provides space to projects that need to look at prioritising students on the target list. Projects that have adopted formal referral procedures are in a good position to review criteria against the progress of identified young people at risk of early school leaving who are receiving support by SCP.

Projects should review the criteria list at an appropriate stage during the academic year. The annual review day is a good opportunity to review criteria with relevant stakeholders but regular team meetings, local management meetings and / or meetings with relevant principals can provide an opportunity to review criteria lists. Regular review of criteria lists can ensure that the most appropriate factors that affect young people at risk of early school leaving emerge through research and practice. The most relevant factors should in turn inform the factors included on the project's criteria list and in turn the supports provided to young people identified.

Summary of guidelines: Ten points to consider

1. Projects should identify young people at risk of early school leaving in line with published material on retention. For example, the Department of Education and Science report on retention (1996 cohort) and most recent Census figures.

2. Quota systems, while in the minority in SCP projects, do have some merit. Quota systems need to be flexible enough in order to include young people who present with risk factors during the school year and / or to allow for some initiatives that adopt a wider approach.

3. Personnel who play a central role in identifying and supporting young people at risk of early school leaving should play a central role in the process of drawing up target lists. SCP Co-ordinators must continue to play a central role in drawing up target lists alongside other relevant stakeholders.

4. The process for drawing up the target list may take time: a process that can start in April / May and end in the following academic year September / November. Target lists should be open to revision when additional information becomes known to the project, through consultation with relevant stakeholders or when relevant data pertinent to young people identified at risk of early school leaving is obtained.

5. While flexibility must be inherent in a system that is dealing with human behaviour, projects must have upper and lower thresholds in their target lists so that they do not expand or reduce support to young people at risk of early school leaving to the point that services are compromised.

6. Informal methods of referral might allow target lists to expand at a greater pace than formal methods as stakeholders can refer ad-hoc through word-of-mouth. Formal procedures require SCP projects to consider each referral and might therefore be a useful form of control over the target list. Student Referral guidelines were recently sent to SCP projects and projects are encouraged to adopt an appropriate formal referral procedure that suits the needs of the cluster. If appropriate, the model adopted could be a combination of both formal and informal channels of referral.

7. While females are more likely to be retained in the formal system, a significant number are still vulnerable to early school leaving, SCP projects should ensure that their targeting criteria is not gendered biased and / or gender neutral. Males might present with more risk factors that fit project's targeting criteria but projects should be aware that risk factors for females might be less visible or tangible.

8. While the rationale for targeting supports at younger age groups is sound (preventative, early intervention etc.), the transfer from primary to post-primary and retention of young people to completion of Junior Certificate must remain primary targets of SCP.

9. A weighted system that identifies young people at 'high risk' allows for SCP to offer intensive supports to young people who have multiple levels of risk factors. This approach provides a rationale for giving less intensive support to young people who are identified at risk of early school leaving but not to the same extent as other 'high risk' young people participating in the cluster. The system also allows for the project to distinguish between intensive vs. less intensive support and long-term vs. short-term support.

10. Projects should review the criteria list at an appropriate stage during the academic year. The annual review day is a good opportunity to review criteria with relevant stakeholders but regular team meetings, local management meetings and / or meetings with relevant principals can provide an opportunity to review criteria lists. Regular review of criteria lists can ensure that the most appropriate factors that affect young people at risk of early school leaving emerge through research and practice. The most relevant factors should in turn inform the factors included on the project's criteria list and in turn the supports provided to young people identified.

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Students at risk (SAR) Mapping Tool
http://www.education.vic.gov.au/sensecyouth/careertrans/mips/sar/

Notes