Charlie Lloyd chaired the day’s proceedings and opened the seminar by referring back to the small programme of projects on mentoring funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, two of which were represented in this seminar.

After round table introductions, the main business of the day began with a paper presented by Tony Jeffs of the University of Durham, who attempted to provide some contextual background in wider youth policy for the mentoring movement. His personal experience led him to comment on the very different mentor-rich environments he had observed in American high school settings where BBBS initiatives were taking place, despite Putnam’s negative view of social capital development in USA. Tony was struck, not so much by the rapidity of the growth of mentoring schemes in the UK as by how ‘slow and tardy’ mentoring development had been, offering, as reasons for this, lack of sustained funding and a culture where service now follows money rather than need – a Cantona-type analogy with herring gulls and trawlers was established for the rest of the day!

He felt this was paradoxical to some extent, given the development of ‘therapy culture’ and the growing emphasis on on-to-one helping rather than group work in youth settings. He commented on the growing individualisation of learning programmes and youth and social work interventions, and worried that the high percentage of teaching in FE (and HE) now delivered by part-timers and ‘buy-ins’ also reduced the likelihood of young people developing sustained relationships with tutors who knew them, pondering on the likelihood of natural mentoring relationships being able to develop in this changed context. Young people, he felt, were often alone in their relationship with welfare services and schooling because of this trend towards individualisation.

At the same time, the need to keep costs down often involved low cost or voluntary workers being used to guide young people through the welfare maze, acting, as it were, as ‘interpreters’, e.g. the Connexions mentors. Tony contrasted Bauman’s views of such interpreters as ‘wise organic intellectuals’ with the reality of semi-professional people being employed simply to guide young people through the process. The potential for true mentoring developing in such relationships was, he felt, slim, compared to the group work that used to be a more common part of youth work. He referred to Hirsch’s work evaluating after school programmes in the USA, where the most successful relationships (and outcomes for youth) were found where a) mentor rich environments were provided, b) where relationships between adults and young people were not predicated on a notion of deficit on the part of the young person, and c) where long term sustained relationships were allowed to develop.
He concluded with a plea for professionals to reconsider whether individualised therapeutic working with young people was really the best way to interpret the mentoring concept. Group work with young people in their friendship groups might ultimately help in forging more natural and stronger forms of adult-young person mentoring.

Tony’s view that mentoring had been slow to get off the ground in the UK was challenged somewhat by Kate Philip (University of Aberdeen), who took the spotlight next. She felt that, on the contrary, a veritable industry had grown up around the concept with a whole range of different agencies becoming involved in mentoring (often with a barely concealed subtext about ‘controlling youth’) and that the proliferation of validation schemes, training modules, conferences and journals that had been spawned made it all look like something of a new social movement, albeit one with a very hazy set of definitions and boundaries. She was more surprised at its continuing appeal to policy makers and practitioners despite the lack of systematic evidence that it worked. Perhaps its appeal lay in just this fuzziness – it allowed people with interests in social capital, with theories about resilience, with an agenda about strengthening relationships between adults and young people all to lay claim to it. All of these would be interrogated through the course of the seminar series.

The systematic evidence for the effectiveness of mentoring had been reviewed by Pawson, and Kate displayed Pawson’s model derived from this process, which attempts to capture the complex, lengthy and iterative nature of the formation of successful mentoring relationships. Kate pointed to the lack of evidence from young people that informed such model building. Young people tended to emphasise the importance of negotiation, trust and control in forming satisfactory mentoring relationships with adults, but these develop over time, and so short term functional relations with adults tended to subvert rather than support the development of such connections.

She concluded by questioning what the literature tended to identify as the successful outcomes from mentoring schemes. Successful outcomes for children living in disadvantage or in troubled circumstances, were often measured in terms of ‘moving up and moving out’ indicators (e.g. percentage accessing FE or HE). Kate pointed out that this rather blinded us to the ‘horizontal gains’ that might be achieved through mentoring. Young people’s own accounts, for instance, often spoke of the principal benefits being in terms of better relations with parents and siblings, for instance. Thus the gains from mentoring might be slower to accumulate or require measurement on a much longer timescale.

The discussion that followed these two papers was led by Tom Wylie of the National Youth Agency. He queried whether, embedded in the mentoring discourse, was evidence of a wider societal fear about the young, and our relationship to them. Referring back to Tony’s depiction of the new individualised mentoring relationships evident in schemes like Connexions, he noted that these looked more like systems of ‘triage’, than true mentoring.
Despite this, he saw hope in several new government papers which acknowledged the role of the trusted adult in youth transitions. He concluded by asking whether the role of mentor was a new profession, in and of itself, or whether it was part of a good practice toolkit for all those working with young people. Whichever of these it was, it was clear that questions needed to be answered about what ethical principles should be laid down to guide those working with young people in such ways.

Bob Coles responded to Tony's paper, agreeing on the importance of the social and cultural context – patterns of working would not simply transfer from one environment to another – but he questioned what he felt was Tony's 'overstatement of the bleak individualisation in the UK'. He retained some optimism that the advent of children's centres and integrated schools might offer new contexts within which mentoring could take place. However, he heartily agreed with Tony that what we actually needed were 'agencies that have a lifetime interest in people' – the Henry Morris vision, rather than the Estelle Morris vision!

Janet Shucksmith, commenting on the notion that 'mentor' might become a separate professional role, felt that it was impossible to explore this without looking at the extent to which professionals who traditionally had contact with young people (e.g. teachers, youth workers) were giving up on close contacts with young people, 'ditching the dirty work' or the caring aspects of their roles, and leaving behind much more 'hollowed out' professional roles.

The lack of systematic evidence for the benefits of adults mentoring young people led to some discussion of whether peer mentoring would be more effective. Charlie Lloyd felt we'd been around the houses on this one many times before, and that the benefits of peer interventions (apart from the obvious benefit to the peer educator him/herself) were equally unproven. Scott Telfer felt that there was something to be learned from the business contexts in which mentoring had been tried.

Mike Stein of the University of York then took the floor on behalf of himself and Jasmine Clayden. Their project, funded by JRF, had looked at forms of mentoring being offered to young people leaving care. Evidence shows that many care leavers have accelerated and compressed transitions to adulthood, an anomaly in an era when transitions within a risk society seem to have become longer for most young people. There is also no consistent support in the lives of many young care leavers. Mike and Jasmine has examined 14 projects, looking principally for the longer term impacts arising from mentoring schemes with care leavers.

The study had looked at what made for successful matching in a mentoring relationship. Matching gender, ethnicity and experience of the care environment was often key to success, but so too was an ability on the part of the mentor to engage in a reciprocal and negotiated relationship with the mentee. Interestingly the most successful relationships were construed by both parties as lying somewhere between professional and personal relationships. Working with, rather than on young people was clearly a critical
feature of successful relationships. Mike’s concluding slide quoted one mentor and her example of ‘singing louder’ than her mentee, and how they had both ended up laughing at their own stupidity – an ice-breaking moment from which their relationship developed.

Mike’s presentation was followed by another from **Iain St James-Roberts** of the Thomas Coram Research Unit at the Institute of Education. This work was commissioned by the Youth Justice Board as a large scale evaluation of 80 community mentor projects across England and Wales which had set out to improve literacy, numeracy, social and life skills as a mechanism for improving the prospects of offending or ‘at risk’ young people. The study differed from others reported at this seminar in being quantitative rather than qualitative. The study included a database study of records of programme implementation and outcomes, a depth study comparing attitudes to crime and offending rates of mentees and a comparison group at baseline and outcome, a re-offending study using police records of offending and re-offending and finally a cost effectiveness study. It had used a very minimalist definition of programmes, i.e. any scheme where a mentor had met at least twice for an interview/session with a client was considered a programme. The overall results were somewhat negative in terms of effectiveness of the interventions. Interestingly around 50% of programmes ended early. Those programmes that lasted longest were most effective, as were those that were based in YOT teams. The involvement of young people in these schemes was arguably ‘voluntary’ since it was presented as an alternative to custody in some instances.

**Bob Coles** led the discussion which followed. He noted the similarity of the (negative) findings with those from Shiner and Newburn’s study. He raised three questions however: should we assume that ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ outcomes from such schemes are connected?; does mentoring work better with some young people than with others?; how does mentoring work when it does work – what are the processes? He felt that short interventions like many of the ones include in the YJB study ‘missed the point about mentoring’, given that mentoring by almost any definition, involved the building of a sustained relationship. He called for studies undertaken from a different perspective, which looked not at how children failed but at how some adults had managed to turn their lives around and make a success of it, despite traumatic or disadvantaged circumstances. A critical question he felt was: What is mentoring good for? The answer, on the evidence presented above, was clearly that it wasn’t much good (at least in this dosage) in preventing crime, but that it did seem to have some impact on measures of social inclusion – it helped lock young people into education for a longer period, which might, in itself, ultimately reduce offending and improve life chances.

**Stella Everingham** (Borders Council) queried whether the YJB study was really looking at mentoring programmes, since length of time of the intervention and degree of choice were clearly critical definitional features of any definition of mentoring. **James Cathcart** of the Prince’s Trust picked up this theme, comparing the care leaver study, which clearly arose from needs assessment and in which young people were volunteers, to one like the YJB
scheme which was imposed and ‘top down’ and in which young people had little real choice about their involvement.

After lunch, Howard Williamson (University of Glamorgan) spoke about the extent to which mentoring was embedded in the European context and EU programmes of work. In describing the very heterogeneous conditions in which young people found themselves across both the more developed and new accession states, he raised again the issue of whether results and methods from one context could be transferred across cultures and locations. He raised the question as to whether the purpose of mentoring was advocacy, support or empowerment, and also queried the repertoire of people that might be necessary in a young person’s life. He asked to what extent we are equipping young people to make decisions – should young people use youth workers on a similar basis to the way in which they use lawyers? One mentor was unlikely to be able to fulfil all the roles that were required by the young person. Finally he too raised the issue – echoing the earlier discussion – of the necessity for the mentoring relationship to be a voluntary one. He accepted that there was sometimes a need for young people to be put in places where they could be ‘acted on’ – for their own sake – but an element of choice had to remain through the provision of mentor rich environments in which young people retained some control over who they forged relationships with. Identified a risk that much policy might ‘hit the target but miss the point’

Janet Shucksmith, in opening the discussion following Howard’s paper, noted that different messages were coming through from the day’s papers and discussions about whether mentors were best seen as ‘skilled’, trained people, or rather as people who were marked out more by their ‘match’ with the mentee, regardless of their skill level. Jonathan Roberts felt that the need for clear and structured training for mentors was clear, and Stella Everingham concurred, noting how important it was, in dealing with very difficult situations, for staff to feel that they had an appropriate framework of action and ethical guidelines within which to shape their actions.

The day was wound up by Charlie Lloyd. It had been a day full of interesting papers and discussion, but there was clearly a need for a ‘think piece’ which tied down some of the definitional looseness around the mentoring concept. The next three seminars and the final symposium would begin to address this and he looked forward to these happening over the next year.

The organisers would like to acknowledge the support of the ESRC funding which enabled the seminar to take place. We would also like to thank Helen Jacobs at the University of York whose efforts made the day run smoothly. Thanks are also due to Elizabeth Robertson and Jennifer Boyd at the University of Aberdeen for their excellent administrative back up.