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**THE CENTRALITY OF PROCESS IN ARTICULATIONS
OF ACCOUNTABILITY IN TRAINING PROGRAMMES
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

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ABSTRACT

The context for this work is training programmes for young people aged 16-18 who were previously disengaged from mainstream provisions. This work critically explores assumptions in social policy discourses in relation to social exclusion and disengaged young people and the accountability mechanisms which govern training programmes based on successful transition to education, employment or training.

Young people have been placed at the centre of this study to engage them in the research process in a participatory way using visual methods, over a two-year period. This approach highlighted that young people gave priority to relationships with workers and often related their progression to the development of confidence, aspects currently concealed through accountability mechanisms. Furthermore, observations of programmes and interviews with workers confirmed the significance of recognising both process and wider social context to develop understandings of the performance of programmes.

The central arguments emerging from this work consider the contradictions between the bespoke programme to address complex needs identified in policy discourses and what becomes of value in accountability mechanisms. Fundamentally, policy interventions are based on assumptions of young people which may not provide an accurate starting point for the programmes and which may then create unrealistic targets. This is further complicated by the way in which programmes have to account for their performance which relies on aggregated levels of understanding of programmes and oversimplified definitions of success or failure.

While this work has communicated the significance of process to develop enhanced understanding about the performance of programmes it also recognises that this is not unproblematic. This work suggests the development of a process-based model of accountability in practice, to inform the current approach, and communicate understandings of programmes that reflect the realities of practice and young people's experiences. This involves young people as 'active participants' in accounting for their development on the programmes and a shift towards thinking about accountability as a process of learning rather than one of scrutiny and control.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Young people disengaged from education, employment or training have been the focus of government policy for many years. This work is located within recent changes aimed to address this concern, one of which has been the introduction of the 'Learning Gateway', which is the context for this work. The aims behind the 'Learning Gateway' initiative are to:

'...target[s] those 16-18 year olds who are vulnerable at this transitional phase. The priority is those who are disengaged from learning but the Learning Gateway also aims to help those who are in danger of dropping out of learning because they lack the right skills, qualifications or attitudes, or because they face significant personal or social obstacles...The Learning Gateway reaches out to such young people and makes contact with them on their own terms, and offers them a way back into mainstream learning' (Department for Education and Employment, 1999a: 2).

The initiative attempts to re-engage young people outside of mainstream education, employment or training by providing individually tailored support to assist them through this 'transitional' period (Department for Education and Employment, 1999a: 2) to ensure they continue in education and training until the age of 19. This is in an attempt to overcome the problems associated with the pre/post 16 education divide by moving to a more integrated 14-19 education/training model.

The young people who are identified as being in the target group for this initiative are those who are excluded from school, non-attenders, care leavers, teenage parents, young offenders and all those young people who are disengaged from learning. The young people are described as being either:

'Disaffected by attitude – e.g. as a result of school exclusion, long term truancy or low levels of school achievement, or
Disadvantaged by circumstances or characteristics – e.g. homelessness, health problems, care history, family difficulties, offending behaviour' (Department for Education and Employment, 1999a: 2).

The aim is to achieve this remit by adopting a multi-agency approach to engage young people and key roles fall to:

Careers Services and Connexions Services who are responsible for the 'front end' covering the vital processes of outreach, initial and basic skills assessment, guidance, support and *planning*, in which every young person is assigned a Personal Adviser and which leads to an Individual Development Plan.

Local Learning and Skills Councils who are responsible for a set of menu options *including* the new customised Life Skills packages designed to help young people improve their self-esteem and motivation, develop their basic and key skills and make vocational choices. The Personal Adviser will continue to provide individual support during Life Skills' (Department for Education and Employment, 1999a: 2)¹.

On entry to the 'Learning Gateway', every young person is allocated a Personal Adviser. This is their initial point of contact. Personal Advisers are employed by Connexions to provide holistic support for young people. It is their role to bind together the 'front end' and 'menu' options of the 'Learning Gateway' by providing seamless support for young people. They are also responsible for developing an Individual Development Plan (IDP), which is used to monitor and review the progress of the young people. Some young people may move directly from the 'front end' into mainstream education or training or other initiatives, but many move onto 'Life Skills' training programmes. The young people meet with their Personal Adviser once a month to review their progress whilst on 'Life Skills' programmes.

The research setting for this study has focused upon one specific aspect of the 'Learning Gateway', 'Life Skills' training programmes². A brief outline of 'Life Skills' programmes is provided below.

Young people may be referred to 'Life Skills' programmes, by their Personal Adviser once they have moved beyond the initial 'front end' of the 'Learning Gateway', where they receive additional support to develop motivation and self-esteem (Department for Education and Employment, 1999a). This 'menu' option is available to young people

¹ Since the introduction of the Learning Gateway in 1999, a number of modifications have been made, notably, the implementation of Connexions to deliver a more integrated service to young people taking over the Careers Service. An evaluation of the Learning Gateway noted 'it is a cause of some concern that the Learning Gateway has been so clearly overshadowed by Connexions which was announced when the Gateway was just a few months old' (Barnes and Mackinnon, 2001: 1, In Bysshe and Hughes (2002)). The Department for Education and Employment changed to The Department for Education and Skills.

² More recently there has been the development of Entry to Employment (E2E) which began towards the end of this research (see Appendix Six).

who are not yet ready to engage in mainstream provision. 'Life Skills' programmes provide sixteen hours a week of training for young people, including I.T., Maths and English (basic skills). This is delivered over a twenty-six week period, generally accompanied with a training allowance of £40.00 a week. However, it is not uncommon for a young person's attendance to extend beyond this initial period at the discretion of the programme workers. The 'Life Skills' option aims to capitalise on young people's interests to engage them in learning which may involve media, arts or sports. The intention is to provide an informal and friendly environment to increase self esteem, confidence and give them a sense of achievement. The purpose is to facilitate personal development in the young people by focusing learning activity on active citizenship and developing employability with the view to progression to mainstream learning or employment.

Literature relating to 'Life Skills' programmes describe them as a 'customised option' which provide an individual and 'flexible, tailor-made package' (Department for Education and Employment, 1999a: 2) for young people. The main areas to be covered through 'Life Skills' programmes are highlighted below:

Key and basic skills: developing and building upon key skills and personal effectiveness skills; assist in improving basic skills in literacy and numeracy;

Pre-vocational and work related opportunities: providing opportunities to sample different work and learning opportunities, including work 'tasters' and placements; and

Personal development: improving motivation, confidence, and self-esteem (Department for Education and Employment, 1999a).

Other requirements of the programmes are that the learning is to be delivered in ways that are different to formal education. The location of the programmes needs to be considered informal and welcoming and innovative approaches are to be employed to engage the young people.

The descriptions of programmes set out above espouse bespoke support and training for young people with an emphasis on personal development. However, the accountability mechanisms, which govern the training programmes, are based on successful transition to education, employment or training. Current conceptions of accountability have been criticised for expressing ex-post, aggregated and mainly quantifiable understandings of an organisation which limit the potential for accountability to inform practice (Power, 1994, 1996, 1999). This is seen as a significant limitation because accountability, as a potentially important element of learning, is diminished and often lost.

This research takes a multi-disciplinary approach in its argument. Whilst engaging in social policy and educational debates around the implementation of government policy and sociological discourses to understand contemporary issues around young people and notions of accounts, it also integrates literature from the accounting and critical accounting discipline to explore the area of accountability. This approach aims to locate the individual and their accounts at the centre of the work and argues that current conceptions of accountability fail to consider the individual in their mechanisms.

The literature review begins by providing an overview of the developments in relation to training and welfare policies from the late 1970s, leading to welfare-to-work policies for young people. This is followed by a discussion of the origins and establishment of the concept of social exclusion within political discourses and the links between this and welfare-to-work policies. These opening sections provide the context for the current research which follows.

This work draws upon sociological youth literature specifically related to the construction of young people as socially excluded and critical social policy literature related to assumptions underpinning policies aimed to assist young people. One assumption is that paid employment is the way to forge social inclusion for disengaged young people, neglecting consideration of other aspects of their lives. Those who are not engaged in employment are defined as 'socially excluded' (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001) or 'non-participants' in society's workforce. Policies draw upon a linear concept of transition, which is contested in youth research for failing to

consider the experiences of young people's lives (Ball, *et al.*, 2000; Cohen and Ainley, 2000). Government policies based on the economisation of youth, where successful transition is related to economic independence, have an underlying assumption that the root of the problem lies in young people's lack of employability (Williams, 2002).

The focus is placed upon individual deficit and the need to provide bespoke support and programmes for young people. However, policies present aggregated concepts of young people, relegating them into categories and stereotypes, which deny diversity and individuality (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001). There is much discussion in sociological youth literature and policy criticisms exploring how young people disengaged from mainstream provision often have complex lives. This is also recognised by The Social Exclusion Unit (1999). While policies set out the development of personal and social skills in their remit they do not consider these developments in reporting processes. Even though they are set out as a necessary dimension of the original specification (Bysshe and Hughes, 2002) such developments are subsumed by the defining performance indicators which are seen to account for performance but which do not show subtle changes (Bentley and Gurumurthy, 1999). The problems that are to be addressed are dismissed in the process of giving accounts, reinforcing the invisibility of the individual.

This work will explore young people's experiences of the programme within the wider context of their lives (Kushner, 2000) to communicate the importance of this recognition in relation to the performance of programmes and progress made by young people. Exploring social context and accountability in this way takes a broader framework of how accounts are used. While policy is criticised for the negative construction of young people the argument is furthered in this work by suggesting that assumptions of young people upon which policy is based may not be accurate, which will lead to unrealistic targets being placed on programmes.

The current focus on targets and performance indicators in education, and increasing demands placed on youth work to meet externally defined targets, have provided relevant debates to this work. These debates had similarities to themes that I was already identifying through my fieldwork particularly the critical role of process and

development of relationships which does not receive recognition within current forms of accountability.

Some commentators argue that the main endeavour of government funded initiatives is simply to meet the output measures set for them (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001) and display a critical stance towards interventions. While there is strength in their analysis, this argument underplays the role of 'street-level bureaucrats' (Lipsky, 1980). These are the front-line workers who, while having to meet these output targets, take advantage of their autonomy to assist young people. Failing to recognise the significance of young people's problems and the wider context of their lives highlights tensions in what programme workers do to achieve the outcomes and questions whether the policy assumptions are creating unrealistic targets. There is also a need to explore the notion of 'successful' outcomes (Williams, 2002) and the way 'success' is defined in relation to young people within the wider context of their lives as well as current externally defined notions of failure (Mann, 1994).

By focusing upon the views of young people and programme workers this work highlights that developments which young people and programme workers identified as significant are not given consideration by outcome measures which provide an oversimplified account of complex services and needs. The working reality is not conveyed through current measurement tool and the complexity is lost within current forms of accountability.

This research developed a participatory approach in an attempt to engage the young people by using a 'visual method' where the young people were the ones who could lead the areas of discussion. While I recognise that the researcher's agenda will inevitably inform the research to some extent, I aimed to explore how feasible and useful it would be to conduct a piece of research with young people using their authority to share with me what constituted their identities at that particular point in time.

This work argues that there are currently many aspects of the programmes being made invisible through current accountability mechanisms, which are based on externally defined definitions of success. It also raises questions about whether the assumptions

underpinning policy are creating expectations of programmes, which lead to unrealistic targets. To develop an advanced level of understanding about the performance of programmes and the young people's lives would involve young people and programme workers being engaged in the dialogue of understanding programmes. This work aims to highlight the strength of an approach to accountability, which places both process and the wider context of young people's lives as key to understanding the training programmes.

While this work suggests a move towards such an approach would provide a more rounded understanding and assist in the development of realistic policies and targets it does not suggest that this would be unproblematic as it would involve reconsidering the way in which such public services are managed. However, it highlights that current forms of accountability do little to communicate the realities of practice which may impact on the setting of realistic targets. This in turn may mean that programmes are seen as failing when considerable progress is being made with young people at the practice level.

The structure

The following chapter begins with a historical discussion of developments and continuities in relation to young people, training and welfare-to-work policies and outlines the origins of the concept of social exclusion. This provides the background for the detailed discussion which follows, on the assumptions underpinning current policies related to disengaged young people, drawing on critical social policy and sociological youth research literature, to emphasise the need to explore the wider context of young people's lives. Chapter three introduces accountability literature and outlines the current forms of accountability within public services. This is followed by a critical debate of current forms of accountability and progresses to debates within educational and critical accounting literature to consider the development of a more inclusive form of accountability. Chapter four debates the methodological approach to the research followed by a detailed account of the research process. The following four chapters, five to eight, discuss the empirical findings of this work. Chapters five and six explore the significance of understanding young people's experiences of education and the wider context of their lives. Chapter seven focuses upon young

people's and workers experiences of the programme with particular emphasis on the process and identification of aspects not currently given attention in accountability mechanisms. Chapter eight critically discusses the way in which success and performance of programmes are defined and locates this within the wider social context. Chapter nine concludes with an overall discussion of this work and suggests the need to move thinking forward in relation to accountability of training programmes for disengaged young people.

CHAPTER TWO

YOUNG PEOPLE, TRAINING AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Introduction

This chapter begins by discussing the historical developments and continuities in welfare, education and training policies and the succession of programmes aimed at addressing unemployment among young people. According to Keep (2002) the pace and scale of change in vocational education and training, since the early 1980s, is a problem in its own right, creating difficulties for employers, parents, teachers and young people to understand how the system operates. The main criticisms of previous policies and youth training provision, some of which are unresolved in the current context, are then outlined. Understanding policy developments around welfare-to-work initiatives allows for the introduction of the origins of the concept of social exclusion which is a dominant feature of New Labour's policies and discourses. It is significant that New Labour's rhetoric of 'modernisation' is identified as being underpinned by a continuation of Conservative policies (Blackman and Palmer, 1999) and a 'managerialist' doctrine to public services (Dean and Wood, 1999), discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. The review progresses to discuss current policy discourses, related to this research, around social exclusion and disengaged young people. This is followed by a critical discussion of the underpinning assumptions of policy integrated with sociological youth research, which provides a detailed understanding of issues related to disengaged young people. This chapter emphasises the significance of previous educational experiences and the need to understand young people's experiences in social context.

The development of welfare-to-work policies

While there is no coherent 'youth policy' in Britain young people are implicated in policy measures and legislative provision, distributed between government departments, including employment, education and training, housing, social security, criminal justice, family law and civil law. These policies have implications for the 'structuring' of youth and shape dependency in the relationship between young people, their families and the state. Young people and training are inherently linked

in policy terms of social security and welfare (Bell and Jones, 2002) and changes related to benefits, training and housing are difficult to separate because a change in one impacts on other areas in young people's lives (Craig, 1991).

Allard (1996) traces the link between employment and education legislation to the Industrial Revolution which changed British working patterns, introducing compulsory schooling and limiting the working hours of young people. However, it was changes implemented under the Thatcher Government, linking receipt of welfare benefit to an individual's willingness to participate in government-sponsored employment or training schemes, which had a significant impact on all people in Britain, with young people being particularly vulnerable. Policy transfer relating to welfare-to-work, from the United States and Sweden, played a significant role in the development of the British employment and training system in the 1980s based on two key attitudes. The first was blaming the unemployed for their position and the second was the rhetoric of dependency (Dolowitz, 1997; Fergusson, 2002), while portraying a positive image of the labour market. Dolowitz (1997) argues that Britain's welfare-to-work system was far more punitive than the systems it drew its inspiration from.

The mid-1980s showed unprecedented levels of unemployment in Britain (Dolowitz, 1997). Unemployment among young people was particularly high and by 1987, 34% (1.1 million) of the unemployed were under 25 years old (Craig, 1991: 9). The periods of recession in the 1980s and 1990s had a huge impact on levels of unemployment and youth employment failed to recover to the same extent as adult employment (Allard, 1996). Unemployment among under-18's rose 57% between July 1990 and July 1991 (Maclagan, 1992: 17).³ These periods of recession also led to training provision contracting (Maclagan, 1993). This was combined with structural changes in the economy and labour market, industrial decline and rise in the service sector (Ashton, *et al.*, 1989), leaving limited opportunities for young people, especially those with few educational qualifications (Allard, 1996).

³ Allard (1996) informs us that tracking unemployment figures over the past twenty years is problematic, as since 1979, there have been more than thirty changes in the way the Government has calculated unemployment figures.

Young people entering the labour market were in a particularly vulnerable position (Craig, 1991; Maclagan, 1992, 1993; Chatrik and Maclagan, 1995; Allard, 1996) and while research found the main aim of young people was to get a job (Banks, *et al.*, 1992; Chatrik and Maclagan, 1995; Allard, 1996) they faced the brunt of changes in welfare-to-work policies. The rise in youth employment meant focus was placed on education and training policy initiatives and their relationship to a competitive economy (Allard, 1996). It is argued that the effects of the recession and structural changes in the labour market were compounded by series of incoherent and fragmented employment, education, training and welfare policies (Chatrik and Maclagan, 1995).⁴

As Craig (1991) explains the result of the policies left many young people in dire situations which were 'in no way offering them the start towards a life of responsible independence so vigorously championed by Government' (p. 6) and the welfare system failed to address the social and economic ills of those displaced by the decimation of industrial industries. It is argued that the policies of the 1980s were based on incorrect assumptions about young people's willingness to work and their personal circumstances, using benefit withdrawal to coerce them into work. As Maclagan (1993) argues young people cannot be blamed for youth unemployment, insufficient jobs and training places. According to Roberts (1995) policies implemented in response to youth unemployment compounded structural problems and the focus on training schemes and further education 'normalised the exclusion of 16/17 year-olds from full time employment' (in Allard, 1996: 12).

The history of Youth Training programmes

Youth unemployment has been recognised as a problem since the late 1970s where focus was placed upon the reinvention and improvement of vocational education (Allard, 1996). This section outlines chronologically some of these policy developments and various incarnations (Allard, 1996) of training initiatives for young people, focusing mainly on 16-18 year-olds.

⁴ The Coalition on Young People and Social Security (COYPSS), a group established over concerns with the policy changes, provides useful evidence of the situation during this period. Their reports present a disturbingly bleak picture of the implication of the policy changes on the lives of 16-17 year-olds entering the labour market and the hardship they faced.

In 1978, the Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP) was developed, for young people aged 16-18. Albert Booth, the Secretary of State for Employment in the Labour Government at the time, called the programme a 'New Deal for the Unemployed' (Bell and Jones, 2002). The YOP was introduced as a temporary response to unemployment with Manpower Services Commission (MSC) (1977) stating:

'We must not lose sight of the fact that the ideal situation is one in which a young person gets a satisfactory job and does not enter a programme at all' (in Allard, 1996: 12)

However, in 1980, the White Paper 'A New Training Initiative: A Programme for Action' (Department of Employment, 1981) set out the plans for a Youth Training Scheme (YTS). A one year YTS was introduced in 1983 aimed at young people who were unemployed in their first year after leaving school. This was different to the temporary response of YOP, as it was 'promoted as vocational training to provide a bridge between school and work' (Allard, 1996: 15), to be of particular benefit to those disadvantaged in the labour market.

In 1982, the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) was launched and administered by the MSC. It provided money to schools to improve the technical and vocational education for 14-18 year-olds (Allard, 1996). It was suggested that these courses should dovetail with YTS to create an integrated vocational route for 14-18 year-olds (Bell and Jones, 2002).

The 1985 Green Paper, 'Education and Training for Young People' (Department of Employment, 1985), announced the expansion of the YTS from April 1986. The scheme was extended to two years and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) were also announced aiming to strengthen vocational qualifications (followed by the introduction of GNVQs). Allard (1996) argued that while 'such initiatives are increasing the number of qualifications held by young people' (p. 14) this may not be recognised by employers. She also states that 'YTS quickly became the usual intermediate stage between compulsory education and employment' (p. 15).

Finn (1998) argues that it was following victory at the 1987 General Election that the Conservatives embarked upon radical changes to the welfare state, employment and training, based on a critique of welfare dependency. 1988 was a significant year in terms of policy relating to 16-18 year-olds. First, the Employment Act introduced a Bridging Allowance for young people waiting to take up YTS places, and those unemployed after starting YTS or a job, if they were registered with the Careers Service or a Job Centre.

Most significantly, April 1988 saw the provisions of the Social Security Act (1986) brought into force. Income Support (IS) replaced Supplementary Benefit as the main means-tested benefit available for social assistance. An aim of this was to make social security more consistent with other government economic objectives including the reduction of public expenditure and the strengthening of work incentives in an attempt to reduce the 'benefit culture' (Craig, 1991: 12).

A subsequent Act in September 1988 withdrew the entitlement of means-tested benefits (IS) for those under 18 years of age. This Act legislated that 16-17 year-olds were compulsorily required to register for a YTS, although there were some specific exemptions. The YTS 'Guarantee' guaranteed that no 16-17 year-old would be without education, training or employment. This 'Guarantee' and the YTS Training Allowance replaced social security benefits. The issue of youth training took on new resonance with these changes as young people entering youth training were doing so under the threat of withdrawal of financial support. The administration of YTS was devolved locally to Training and Enterprise Councils (TEC's) in England and Wales and Local Enterprise Councils (LEC's) in Scotland. These were independent companies who entered into a contract with the Secretary of State for Employment which included ensuring to meet the 'Guarantee'.

It is argued that the Government aimed to 'target' public expenditure to contain costs and young people were not seen as a priority. Craig (1991) identifies that savings made by the 1988 changes were between £88 million and £200 million (p. 14). Maclagan (1992) states that when the 'Guarantee' was made in September 1988 economic circumstances were relatively favourable and there were jobs and training available for young people, however, the recession of the early 1990s invalidated

these assumptions. Placements with employers and their involvement to provide good quality training were meant to be a key aspect of YTS but this was lacking after the recession (Maclagan, 1992). In 1989 Severe Hardship Payments (SHPs) were introduced for 16-17 year-olds in exceptional circumstances. However, because of problems to meet the 'Guarantee' the numbers applying for the payment grew significantly. It is argued that the Severe Hardship Payments was not an adequate solution (Maclagan, 1993).

Welfare-to-work policies, based on compulsory participation, for those over 18 were also introduced. In 1988, two White Paper's, 'Training for Employment' (Department of Employment, 1988a) and 'Employment for the 1990s', (Department of Employment, 1998b) set the Employment Service (ES) the aim of finding jobs for the unemployed and re-motivating those not looking for work into employment. This was coupled with the implementation of a stricter benefit regime and the need to meet annual performance targets. Compulsory courses were introduced to re-motivate those unemployed and not in government schemes and refer them to a 'positive outcome' (Finn, 1998: 108)⁵, which was employment or training. The role of the ES was perceived as policing the jobseeking activities of the unemployed as well as encouraging them to take low paid jobs. Finn (1998) argues that, by the end of the 1980s, such new legislation redefined the position of people without work.

In May 1990, YTS was renamed Youth Training (YT) and the 'Guarantee' was reinforced. The stated aims for YT were to provide help for young people to acquire the broad-based skills necessary for a flexible and self-reliant workforce; to meet the skill needs of the local and national economy, including in particular the need for technical and craft-levelling training; and to provide participants with training leading to NVQ or equivalent, at or above Level 2 standard (Maclagan, 1992: 7). YT expenditure was also cut by 20% in 1990 (Craig, 1991) and there was a reduction in employer contributions. The cuts saw the closure of many schemes, several of which

⁵ Finn (1998) informs us that this is the background in which unemployed people in Britain were refined as 'jobseekers' by the Jobseekers Act (1996), replacing unemployment benefit and income support, with Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) (p. 109). This was sanction based and created a new contract between the individual and the state where unemployed people had to enter a Jobseekers Agreement outlining the weekly steps they agreed to take to find employment. Finn (1998) states that this made a significant reduction to unemployment levels.

catered for young people with Special Training Needs (Craig, 1991). Again, the most vulnerable people were affected by the changes (Dexter, *et al.*, 1994).

In May 1994 the minimum YT allowance was set at less than Income Support (IS) for 16-17 year-olds living away from home. The implications of the structural inadequacy of the schemes and their relationship to benefits have been well documented (Craig, 1991; Maclagan, 1992, 1993). The following section outlines the main criticisms of the two main schemes, Youth Training Schemes (YTS) and the subsequent Youth Training (YT), which are generally discussed together, YT(S).⁶ The most fundamental implication is that whilst YT(S) was implemented as a voluntary scheme the way in which it proved the only source of income for 16-17 year-olds made it effectively compulsory (Maclagan, 1992). Maclagan (1992) argued that the link between training needs and welfare needs led 'to a two-way corruption of purpose' (p. 34) which also affected the quality of the schemes.

Failure of the 'Guarantee'

The withdrawal of benefits for those under 18 was compounded by the failure of the 'Guarantee' of a place on a training scheme. This left many young people in difficult circumstances with no income. Even those within the system struggled to manage under the conditions of the schemes. It was argued that the allowance was inadequate to support a young person which meant many ended up in poverty. Furthermore, there was no market pressure for the standards of training to increase (Maclagan, 1993) which meant young people were bound in their choices by their need for an income. The purpose of training was compromised by the link to young people's income entitlement (Maclagan, 1993). Attempts to meet the 'Guarantee' led to more poor quality training for young people as the Government gave attention and resources to 'shoring-up' short term problems rather than addressing the long term planning or the problems underlying YT(S) (Maclagan, 1992).

⁶ There were other schemes for unemployed young people during this period including 'foyers' to assist with homeless young people finding employment (Chatrik, 1994) but there were no significant differences to YT(S).

Quality of training

The significant variation in the quality of training generally failed to improve young people's employability and rarely led to employment (Allard, 1996). The compulsory element meant that young people were entering unsuitable courses to ensure they received their Youth Training Allowance. It is argued that the decline in the quality of training is a reason for youth unemployment (Allard, 1996). The devolution to TEC's/LEC's in 1988 was identified as having an impact on the quality of training due to little central regulation and minimum standards set for training providers to receive subsidies (Roberts, 1995; Allard, 1996). Moreover, there was a contradiction in the operation of the TEC's/LEC's which were established to foster local enterprise rather than respond to national training needs (Chatrik and Maclagan, 1995). Fundamentally, Maclagan (1992) identified the amount of money invested in training was too low and states the amount of money spent per YT place had reduced by 52% since 1988 (p. 41).

Quality training also relied upon quality placements and there was little consistency (Raffe, 1988). In some schemes employers offered YT(S) on an apprenticeship basis with employment at the end of the placement. Other employers would take on too many trainees and offer employment to the best performers at the end of the placement. Some schemes offered quality training but without employment at the end. In such cases it is argued that employers simply provided 'parking spaces' for young people (Roberts and Parsell, 1992). Quality placements with employers were difficult to secure during the recession. Furthermore, while the Government requested employer involvement they only relied upon market forces to deliver this (Chatrik and Maclagan, 1995; Allard, 1996).

No consideration of young people's circumstances

The government understood the transition from home and dependence to work and independence crudely and the benefit system tried to create disincentives for young people to leave home (Craig, 1991; Maclagan, 1992, 1993). This assumption took no account of the realities of many young people's lives where some were unable to live at home. Broad categories were used based on age groupings or family circumstances which took no account of individual needs. This was changed in 1989 for young people aged 16-17 living away from home. Maclagan (1992) identified that the

corruption of the purpose of initiatives meant that many young people were being assisted with their welfare needs at schemes, including dealing with various personal and social problems, as these were more pressing than their training needs.

Targeted funding – selective training

It is suggested that towards the end of the 1980s Youth Training Schemes began to reproduce existing inequalities (Allard, 1996). The introduction of Output Related Funding (ORF) had further implications on training for young people. The policies of the majority of the TEC's placed great emphasis on the completion of a full NVQ as the outcome of a training programme (Dexter, *et al.*, 1994). This led to employers and training providers being selective about the young people on their courses with reasonably qualified school leavers being favoured (Lee, *et al.*, 1990; Maclagan, 1992; Allard, 1996). These young people were more likely to achieve 'outcomes' so the schemes would receive outcome points (Meager, 1995). This pressure meant that young people who needed extra support, were low achievers or had Special Training Needs, were further marginalised and not seen as employable (Dexter, *et al.*, 1994; Allard, 1996). Training for young people with Special Training Needs (also called Additional Needs), who could not meet the YT attainment targets without extra support, had already faced cuts. Young people on these initiatives received additional support with welfare issues including health, housing, personal and social difficulties (Dexter, *et al.*, 1994). Dexter, *et al.* (1994) recommended that the Employment Department and the TEC's consider how progress and units towards an NVQ could be recognised and valued as an outcome of YT for young people with Special Training Needs.

Reputation

YT(S) had a poor reputation among young people (Craig, 1991; Maclagan, 1992, 1993), which did not improve over the years (Allard, 1996), with young people and employers regarding schemes as the last option (Roberts, *et al.*, 1987; Allard, 1996). It is argued that, for many, YT(S) became a 'work for benefits' scheme rather than a training scheme to develop skills and employment opportunities (Craig, 1991). Roberts (1995) argued that most NVQs provided 'warehousing' for young people until they could find a job with the only value of schemes being prevention of de-

motivation. He recommended that the Government needed to take responsibility of marketing the value of NVQs to employers as well as young people.

The hardship of so many young people led COYPSS to argue for benefit entitlement (IS) to be reinstated to those 16-17 year-olds unemployed who could not find work or a training place (Craig, 1991; Maclagan, 1992, 1993; Chatrik and Maclagan, 1995). While making it clear, with substantial evidence, that YT was not working (Maclagan, 1992) they also called for an increase in the YT allowance and IS as they argued the current levels of income were inadequate to meet everyday needs. This included removing the rule of age-related benefits, with those under 25 receiving less. They argued there was little justification for this as they had the same needs and subsistence levels (Maclagan, 1993; Chatrik and Maclagan, 1995).

Further changes

In 1995 The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) was launched and in the same year Chatrik and Maclagan (1995) announced that the future was bleak and difficult for many young people leaving school. They questioned whether the options available offered young people realistic means to enter the labour market. Also in 1995, Youth Training changed to Youth Credits in some areas. Under this new initiative young people had the power to 'purchase' approved forms of training (Allard, 1996). Dexter, *et al.* (1994) argued that Youth Credits led to the further exclusion of young people with Special Training Needs because of the focus on training with NVQ targets. This increased emphasis on the attainment of specific goals, within restricted time periods, was unsuitable for some young people.

Modern Apprenticeships (MAs) were also introduced in 1995, as quality training on a work based route to NVQ Level 3 (Bell and Jones, 2002). However, according to Allard (1996) education became the positive alternative to youth unemployment in the mid 1990s (p. 18), encouraged by the Government, who were focusing on Training Targets to improve the qualifications of the workforce. She identified this focus on education as 'warehousing' of young people, which could lead to their disillusionment if subsequent employment prospects did not improve. Furthermore, proposals were centred on improving young people's skills and increasing qualifications in an attempt to make them more attractive to employers with little regard to the economy (Allard,

1996). In reviewing youth unemployment strategies, Allard, in 1996, concluded that they 'have done little to alleviate the problem of youth unemployment, despite offering many young people alternative ways of occupying themselves' (p. 20).

In January 1997, the Commission on Public Policy and British Business (CPPBB) produced 'Promoting Prosperity: A Business Agenda for Britain' which argued for a flexible, skilled labour force and identified poor education and training as responsible for unemployment (Bell and Jones, 2002). Research had already noted that the shift in labour demand had particular implications for youth employment and the numbers of young people able to enter employment on leaving compulsory education (Allard, 1996).

Criticisms of previous youth training provision

In reviewing the various policies and criticisms it is important to consider that education and training have long term impacts whereas focus is usually placed on the short-term impact of the latest policy initiatives. This means that mistakes are repeated (Croxford, 2006) when there is rapid policy turnover (Raffe, 2002). Raffe (2002) noted a sense of *déjà vu* with recent debates of 14-19 Education and those of the 1980s and early 1990s, including the weakness of vocational pathways, suggesting that previous reforms failed to address this effectively. Fergusson (2002) argues that 'each successive re-invention of youth training has carried the taints of its predecessor', what he describes as 'sink' schemes, serving no economic purpose (p. 178).

One of the main conclusions to be drawn is that strategies to improve youth training or levels of employment are not enough, even futile, without equivalent economic transformation and investment in work opportunities for young people (Roberts, 1995; Allard, 1996). Questions were raised before Labour's victory in 1997 about their proposals to restructure youth training without a substantial increase in resources (Chatrik and Maclagan, 1995; Allard, 1996). Recommendations were also made for the development of a coherent national training policy (Dexter, *et al.* 1994; Chatrik and Maclagan, 1995). Craig (1991) argued that 'rather than attempting to fit young people within an inappropriate policy framework, it is time to recreate policy with young people's *real* needs in mind' (p. 7; emphasis in original). Importantly, Allard

(1996) reminds us, 'In searching for solutions to youth unemployment it is important to remember that it is a problem *for* young people, not a problem caused by young people' (Allard, 1996: 31).

It is argued that both the Conservative and Labour government's benefits linked training schemes are based on a deficit model of the individual (Brine, 2002; Salisbury, 2004). Unemployment is individualised and located in lack of employability, underpinned by a moral discourse. Furthermore, such schemes are not enough when policies are aimed at the supply-side of the labour market without considering the structural side. The imposition of taking up employment and training opportunities by welfare claimants is not reciprocated by the government providing these opportunities (Dean and Wood, 1999). While education, employment and training are important, a strategy cannot succeed if just reliant on market forces, or without a welfare safety net, because people may not experience a secure, linear progression (Benington and Donnison, 1999) into education, employment or training.

The needs of young people within economic and social policy were low priority throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s (Craig, 1991). Many questioned whether Youth Training was an alternative to unemployment, at a time of high unemployment and benefit cuts, rather than a training package for employment (Raffe, 1988; Allard, 1996). The YT(S) 'Guarantee' focused upon the quantity of people in training rather than the quality of the training (Maclagan, 1992). In addition young people who had welfare needs to address before being able to benefit from training were being pushed out by selectivity, even though they may be the ones in most need of extra support. It is argued that the element of compulsion created by linking training and welfare was counterproductive and for training to be delivered effectively the two must be separated. Maclagan (1992) states 'Youth Training cannot and should not be expected to solve the problems of poverty and homelessness' (p. 43). He also argued that every young person should be entitled to vocational training, leading to a useful qualification and employment, not only to benefit the young person, but also to provide value for money and benefit the future economy of the country (Maclagan, 1993).

Although there is significant commentary on the situation there was limited data available about the position of unemployed young people aged 16-18 as there was no incentive for young people to register as unemployed because they were not eligible for benefits (Allard, 1996). The Government justified not collecting figures for unemployed young people by citing the 'Guarantee' of a training place. In this sense, they were 'counted out' of official statistics in relation to benefit, housing, employment and training (Craig, 1991; Maclagan, 1993) giving them a further marginalised and invisible position in society. Thus, YT(S) was criticised as a way to remove young people from the unemployment statistics (Craig, 1991). Allard (1996) believes that the increasing numbers of young people continuing in post-16 education or training schemes disguises the changes in employment opportunities for young people.

The main criticism of the reports presented above, and the picture painted of the history of Youth Training, is that there is little consideration of the 'agency' of the young people. It could be argued that young people are not always passive recipients and play an active role in some decisions about their lives.

The origins of the concept and discourse of social exclusion

This section discusses the origins of social exclusion and outlines the main social exclusion discourses in relation to welfare-to-work policies to supplement the specific application within the current policy context presented later in the chapter. The origins of the concept of social exclusion are identified in the political philosophies and social policies of Europe, in particular France, with the more recent introduction into Britain (Byrne, 1999). The European conception is identified as being underpinned by social purposes, the commitment to social rights and citizenship, solidarity and social cohesion, to maintain an inclusive and socially equitable society (Silver, 1994; Fergusson, 2002). During the 1970s, Renee Lenoir, the French Secretary of State for Social Welfare, talked about 'les exclus' as people disconnected from mainstream society in ways which extended beyond poverty to include non-participation in politics, poor health, geographical isolation, and attributed to the effects of the rapid-post war transition from agrarian to urban society in France (Davies, 2005). The solution proposed was in line with a social democratic response,

increased public investment and redistribution, but also measures to re-engage and empower 'les exclus' through civil and democratic renewal (Davies, 2005).

However, Levitas (1998) argues there is no unified European definition of social exclusion but national discourses which employ social exclusion in different and sometimes competing ways. It has been suggested that the shift in language from poverty to social exclusion in the UK may be a trend following the EU's promotion of this rhetoric since the mid 1980s (Benington and Donnison, 1999). It is also argued that the conception of social exclusion described above has been diluted within Europe, with the social and cultural dimensions eclipsed by the pressures of changing socio-economic conditions, leading to a focus on policies for employment for long-term unemployed (Atkinson and Davoudi, 2000; Beland and Hansen, 2000; Fergusson, 2002). While this is debated, such changes are attributed to New Labour's influence on the concept which 'transforms or distorts the baseline conception' (Fergusson, 2002: 175). While the UK has drawn on European responses it is argued that the policies developed by New Labour to address social exclusion also have considerable resonance with US welfare policies, which are in tension with the European conception (Fergusson, 2002).

New Labour has transformed the discourse of social exclusion for a different purpose, focusing upon participation in the labour market as the way to achieve social cohesion and inclusion. This retracts from the understandings of inequality underpinning the original conception (Levitas, 1998) and links mainly to the importance of the economic state. New Labour's discourse of social exclusion departs from values about income distribution and focuses upon the social problems of the 'excluded'. While the current discourse of welfare-to-work policies have adapted to incorporate social exclusion instead of poverty, and attempted to distance themselves from the US term 'underclass', the two are closely aligned (Peck and Theodore, 2000; Fergusson, 2002). It is argued New Labour's combination of European and US discourses allow the government to retain the rhetoric of social justice with economic policy determinations, even though this leads to contradictory outcomes (Fergusson, 2002). This argument suggests that the main concern is the reduction of the welfare bill and regulated wage levels, what Davies (2005) calls the 'political economy' of social exclusion (p. 3), rather than the social rights of citizens.

The concept of social exclusion is understood as being multi-dimensional as opposed to previous emphases on poverty (Byrne, 1999). On the one hand, it is welcomed for its focus on processes, policies and institutions that can reinforce poverty. On the other, it is criticised for its abstract nature and concealing the harsh facts of poverty as well as diverting attention from economic and political exclusion (Benington and Donnison, 1999).

Levitas (1998), in her analysis of discourses of social exclusion and inclusion, discusses her difficulty in locating the meaning of the term espoused by New Labour, because while often used in conjunction with poverty New Labour were preceding with benefit cuts set out by the Conservative Government. The contested meaning of the concept is identified through Levitas' (1998) introduction of three competing discourses of social exclusion within British politics to assist her analysis. While they all have moral content and stress paid employment as a way to social inclusion, without considering the value of unpaid work, they present different versions of what the excluded are lacking, what inclusion means and to whom is it meaningful. The three discourses are outlined below.

The first is a redistribution discourse (RED) where social exclusion is interlinked with material explanations of poverty, providing a critique of inequality, and including the redistribution of power and wealth. This discourse gained currency during the years of Conservative rule where it is argued redistribution was to the wealthy (Levitas, 1998: 11). Citizenship rights reversed through the effects of Thatcherism, and poverty and inequality led to the exclusion of many, to what has been described as partial citizenship⁷ (Golding, 1986; Lister, 1990; Levitas, 1998).

The second is a moral underclass discourse (MUD) which centres on the moral and behavioural delinquency of the excluded. As previously discussed, unemployment increased sharply in the 1980s, as did the numbers of people in poverty, and social security spending. A 'culture of dependency', created by the benefits system itself, became embedded in a discourse of social order and moral integration which

⁷ The concept of 'citizenship' is subject to its own significant debates. Craig and Reiter (2005), discussed below, present an argument about the 'second-class citizenship' of young people within current discourses.

dominated the public domain (Levitas, 1998: 14-15). This used the notion of an 'underclass', proffered by Charles Murray (1990) from the situation in the US, and closely related to developments in welfare-to-work policies. Social exclusion under New Labour has been used in conjunction with the term 'underclass', carrying both structural and cultural meanings, which Levitas (1998) warns implies co-option into the highly problematic moral discourse (p. 20). This will be discussed later in the chapter in relation to young people.

The third is social intergrationist discourse (SID) where the central focus is inclusion through labour market attachment. Levitas (1998) discusses this in relation to the growing importance of the European Union. As mentioned, the notion of social exclusion originated in France. Levitas (1998) discusses how the opposite of exclusion was insertion related to moral integration. In this context social exclusion was concerned with the structural, cultural and moral ties believed to bind the individual to society, with measures introduced to increase social integration, stressing the reciprocal nature of solidarity. However, there was also a strong focus on employment and its economic, social and moral functions aligned to US workfare programmes (Levitas, 1998: 22). Levitas (1998) argues that the discourses of the EU present a narrow definition of exclusion focusing on paid employment as the route to inclusion rather than wider aspects of exclusion to promote solidarity. While agreeing that employment is a significant factor in social integration it is problematic to treat them as synonymous. Paid employment also dominates the legal definition of citizenship within Europe. The implications of this SID focus 'reduce the social to the economic, and simultaneously limits understanding of economic activity to market activity' (Levitas, 1998: 26).

Levitas (1998) argues that New Labour abandoned redistribution as a means to reduce poverty including a change in definitions of 'equality' to 'equality of opportunity' (p. 12) and 'security' to 'employability' (p. 156). Flagship, and to some extent linked, policies were developed to address social exclusion, in particular welfare-to-work. These were New Deal, driven by the Treasury to reduce social security spending, and the Social Exclusion Unit, driven by issues of social order (both discussed later in the chapter). Both combine elements of, and slippage between, the moral underclass discourse (MUD) and the social integrationist discourse (SID) (p. 138 and 150).

While emphasising groups identified as potential workers or a moral danger (p. 150) many others in poverty were marginalised further. Levitas (1998) argues that 'the statement that exclusion was about 'more than' poverty became the justification for not addressing poverty directly' (p. 149). She concludes that the combination of the two discourses provides a specific understanding of inclusion 'as an active obligation, in which opportunity is the crucial term' (p. 156). The emphasis of inclusion through paid employment is not addressed through the provision of employment but employment opportunities (p. 156). This places the responsibility to achieve inclusion directly with the individual.

Byrne (1999) suggests that social exclusion may be welcome replacement for the 'underclass' in debates about 'the poor' in 'post-industrial' society (p.1). The popular use of 'underclass' is based on self-imposed conditions. The concept of social exclusion places society together and draws attention to the dynamics of social structures and agency, of those who are included and those who are not, as he argues that exclusion is 'something that is done by some people to other people' (p. 1). Byrne (1999) traces the notion of blame, moral order and exclusion of 'poor' people to the 'possessive collectivism' of early industrial capitalism and notions of a surplus population (p. 16). He states there is nothing new about the notion of an underclass, even if it was called something different.

He goes on to argue that the above ideas informed the Conservative and current public policies on social issues of 'benefit dependency' and welfare-to-work (p. 19). However, his argument questions the identification of a separate underclass and significantly, the aim of an inclusive society, drawing on Marxist theories of capitalism. The argument underpinning Byrne's (1999) discussion is that since the mid-1960s there has been a 'categorical' change in the nature of capitalist social order in advanced industrial societies (p. 5) and that social exclusion is a necessary and inherent characteristic of present conditions (p. 128). This change, often called 'post-Fordism', to post-industrial social structures, is the crucial element in understanding social exclusion. He argues that 'advanced industrial societies are converging on a norm of social politics organised around a flexible labour market and structural social exclusion' (p. 70) where low wages, insecurity of employment and closure of

opportunities for social mobility are a feature. Within this, current conceptions of citizenship are individualised.

In this argument, those identified as socially excluded are a 'reserve army of labour' (p. 44), located at the bottom end of the labour market, moving in and out of employment, depending on the economy. There is no remedy for this as it is part of the mode of production that reproduces it. In fact, capitalist societies rely upon the class elements and forces of production. In this view, decreasing unemployment is not so much to do with government policy but the routine fluctuations of capitalism (Davies, 2005). For Byrne (1999) the term 'underdevelopment' is synonymous with processes that constitute social exclusion based on parts of the population having been actively underdeveloped, equating exclusion with exploitation (p. 55). He argues that the exploitation of parts of the population are crucial to current forms of capitalism where the social proletariat plays an active role (p. 56).

It is important here to refer to Veit-Wilson's (1988) distinction between 'weak' and 'strong' conceptions of social exclusion:

'In the 'weak' version of this discourse, the solutions lie in altering these excluded peoples handicapping characteristics and enhancing their integration into dominant society. 'Stronger' forms of this discourse also emphasise the role of those who are doing the excluding and therefore aim for solutions which reduce the powers of exclusion' (Veit-Wilson, 1998: 45).

New Labour have a minimalist, 'weak', conception of social exclusion, redefining what non participation means, pathologizing it, and failing to include other aspects of exclusion such as poor housing and high crime (Levitas, 1998; Fergusson, 2002). Training is founded on a supply side notion that equipping people with certain skills required by the labour market will be the solution, but this is not done in conjunction with job creation. Byrne (1999) argues that social exclusion policies simply move people to contingent domains of training, education or employment with low wages. Social exclusion cannot be constructed only on income or only on unemployment, particularly of those at the bottom end of income distribution and the economy (Byrne, 1999: 127). He states, 'if social exclusion is inherent in a market-oriented flexible post-industrial capitalism, then it is impossible to eliminate it by any set of social policies directed at the excluded alone' (p. 130). As social exclusion derives

from inequality (Byrne, 1999: 137) it is necessary to employ Veit-Wilson's (1998) 'strong' conception of social exclusion to include the affluent and their obligations in discourses of social exclusion (Byrne, 1999; Davies, 2005) in a redistributive discourse with increased taxation on high incomes.

In relation to young people, Craig and Reiter (2005) demonstrate a number of tensions and contradictions facing young people making a transition to the labour market. They argue that the current youth labour market, 'embedded' in a welfare context, has implications for the 'nature and quality of citizenship of young people' (Craig and Reiter, 2005: 15). Employment and employment-based contributions are the main features of social citizenship and inclusion, which is the consequence of the economic reproduction of capitalist welfare societies (Craig, and Reiter, 2005). This is reinforced through recent EU social policy where activation-dominated employment policy strategies are a significant feature (Craig and Reiter, 2005). Youth labour markets are particularly vulnerable and the most vulnerable to unemployment and economic conditions are young people without post-compulsory education (Craig and Reiter, 2005).

Within this context, 'active citizenship' has been reconceptualised with both labour market and youth policies stressing individual responsibilities, or a citizen's active duties, towards society as opposed to 'activation through rights to participation' (Craig and Reiter, 2005: 24). The 'ideal worker' has a high level of skills and attributes and the notion depends upon 'good behaviour', understood as contribution through employment, rewarded by entitlement to welfare benefits. They argue that youth (social) citizenship is second-class citizenship, where young people are disadvantaged by their position in the lifecourse, unlikely to have made any contributions yet, but needing to actively show their willingness to this by engaging with activation policies. These take the form of 'transitional labour market measures', by temporarily 'parking' young people to disguise levels of youth unemployment (Craig and Reiter, 2005: 26), fundamentally failing to meet young people's citizenship rights. The macroeconomic determinants of unemployment trends in the labour market are ignored and assumptions are made about young people's willingness and motivation to work (Craig and Reiter, 2005: 25) emphasising young people's agency as the dominant factor in transition to the labour market. Craig and

Reiter (2005) argue that young people should be entitled to benefits because they have engaged in their citizen duty of compulsory formal education. Young people cannot be made responsible for the creation of work and training opportunities, an assumption which underpins European labour market policy measures for young people (Craig and Reiter, 2005).

There is an inherent contradiction, which young people have to manage, in attempts to be recognised as ‘social citizens’, between the focus upon employment as the route to social inclusion and the emphasis upon extended participation in education and training, and therefore dependency. Whilst emphasising participation in employment, advanced market economies have decreasing employment demands for school leavers with few qualifications. High levels of unemployment and the recognition of the need for developed skills lead more young people to continue in education or training post-16 to increase their opportunities (Craig and Reiter, 2005: 32). Youth unemployment is a highly complex and politicised issues, concerning social, education, employment and labour market policies, as Craig and Reiter explain, ‘it is a political and policy battlefield where quick and unsustainable solutions are offered, tending to neglect the fact that the problem, like so many other societal issues, can only be tackled through a careful coordination of different policy areas within a long-term perspective’ (p. 37).

New Labour’s continuation of welfare-to-work policies

This section moves towards the context of the current research and outlines developments introduced by New Labour including an overview and critique of New Deal for Young People (NDYP) which although not a feature of this research highlights some similar implications. The initial months of New Labour’s term in office, in 1997, witnessed more changes to training for young people. National Traineeships were introduced, to provide progression to MAs and work-based routes, offering broad, flexible learning programmes in partnership with FE colleges. ‘Investing in Young People’ was also announced in 1997 by the DfEE. The aims were to increase participation from age 16, tackle the variable quality of post-16 training and education and reduce the numbers of young people dropping out. The long-term aim was for as many young people as possible to achieve NVQ Level 2

standard. Part of this strategy was 'New Start' which was aimed at engaging 14-17 year-olds who had dropped out, or were at risk of, in learning (Bell and Jones, 2002).

From 1998 onwards the Government's drive in policy was to tackle social exclusion, disaffection and disengagement, including the development of the Social Exclusion Unit. The 1998 Department of Social Security (DSS) Green Paper 'A New Contract for Welfare' set out the Government's analysis of the connections between the benefit system, poverty and social exclusion. The aim was to 'rebuild the welfare state around work' and to break the culture of a passive, benefit system (Bell and Jones, 2002), similar to the rhetoric of the Conservative government. Blackman and Palmer (1999) argue that the Social Exclusion Unit reports were similar to those reports produced in the 1970s.

Welfare reform is at the top of New Labour's agenda, to attack unemployment and reduce social security spending (Finn, 1998). To tackle poverty, it was made clear that there was no commitment to redistribution, via the tax and benefit system, or the direct creation of jobs. In the 'modernisation' of the welfare state, jobs and inclusion would be created through a flexible labour market assisted by a highly skilled workforce and employment opportunities (Finn, 1998; Dean and Woods, 1999). The emphasis upon 'employability' aimed to reduce contradictions between reduced welfare and social exclusion, and training linked with benefit entitlement (Salisbury, 2004). It is argued that many other countries were moving in this direction before New Labour due to the changing nature of the economy upon which social structures are built (Benington and Donnison, 1999).

New Deal for Young People (NDYP)

The New Deal for Young People (NDYP) was introduced in January 1998 as part of the government's welfare-to-work strategy to address social exclusion, and is just one of the New Deal welfare-to-work programmes. The aims of the programme were to help unemployed 18-24 year-olds, who had been claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) for at least six months, into work and increase their employability (Wilkinson, 2003). The programmes begin with a 'Gateway' period, of up to four months, where young people receive support from a Personal Adviser (PA) to find employment. If they do not find work in this time they are directed to one of the New Deal Options.

The compulsory Options, which last six months, are subsidised employment (with training), full-time education or training, work in the voluntary sector or the environmental sector (with a training element) (Wilkinson, 2003). There is no fifth option (Williams, 2002). At the end of six months it is expected that those in subsidised employment will continue in that job and others may return to receive JSA with follow-up support from their PA to find employment.

The government committed to moving the 250,000 young people under 25 off benefits and into work or training, employers would be offered subsidies, and young people would be penalised if they did not comply (Blackman and Palmer, 1999) strengthening Conservative policies. The aim was to end the 'dependency culture', established in the 1980s, through an active benefits scheme (Finn, 1998). While New Labour are critical of the Conservative's benefit system and employment programmes it is argued that their current approach is underpinned by many similar assumptions (Finn, 1998) and their policies are in fact a continuation of many of the policies implemented by the Conservative government. However, while NDYP is a mandatory programme it is argued that it can be distinguished from previous Youth Training programmes because it is set out to be client-centred and individual focused, (Williams, 2002). Its rhetoric offers real jobs, matched placements, market rates of pay and certificated training (Fergusson, 2002) to move from accusations of dependency on benefits by promoting self-sufficient earners. The language of responsibility was a key feature of 'New Deal for a New Britain' (Labour Party, 1997). It placed responsibility for employment with young people and the market, rather than the state for creating jobs. Fergusson (2002) argues that the central achievement of programmes could be to serve a regulatory purpose at the bottom end of the labour market.

Criticisms of NDYP

Similar criticisms are emanating to those of previous youth training programmes. Concerns have been raised over the success of the programmes and, although there is some job creation, it is argued that programmes are not a cost-effective means of achieving job creation (Williams, 2002). It is also argued that young people with multiple problems gained little from New Deal interventions (Williams, 2002; Dean, 2003). A particular criticism is the unrealistic way in which the initiatives treat the

age 18 as year zero for young people (Fergusson, 2002). The comparisons with US workfare are significant (Fergusson, 2002), of compulsory programmes, based on a sanctioning policy of benefit withdrawal, within a prescribed policy framework (Salisbury, 2004). Welfare is not an automatic entitlement of citizenship but a conditional feature of state provision dependent on engagement in paid employment. It is argued such initiatives could be creating a new form of exclusion where young people will no longer be the formal responsibility of the state if they chose to reject New Deal (Fergusson, 2002). The employment focus could also obscure other forms of exclusion (Fergusson, 2002). While New Labour acknowledges structural factors, as opposed to the Conservatives, for such policies to work they need to be supported by significant financial investment, in employment creation, health and housing (Gerwitz, 1999).

As managerialist target-setting and monitoring are clear features of NDYP (Fergusson, 2002) there is a concern that programmes may recruit the most employable young people. There are pressures on professionals delivering the programmes to demonstrate tangible, quantifiable outcomes reflecting the post-16 sector's preoccupation with audit culture (Salisbury, 2004). This rigid climate 'recognises only that which is measurable [and]...externally imposed criteria privilege aspects of performance which can be quantified' (Salisbury, 2004: 101). Delivery and throughput are the highest priorities compared to the value added through training and long-term benefits to the young people and the outcome figures, including low achievement levels, are unimpressive (Fergusson, 2002). Salisbury (2004) discusses the tension between the identification of 'claimant' and 'learner', for both young people and professionals, and argues that 'New Deal was seen as being too employment focused and too orientated to the achievement of short-term job targets' (p. 98), contradicting the rhetoric of the individual as 'learner' (p. 95). Such issues will be discussed in more detail in the accountability chapter which follows.

New Labour's response to disengaged 16-18 year-olds

Following this background, the current policy discourses around social exclusion and disengaged young people will now be discussed, followed by a critical discussion of the underpinning assumptions of policy. This is integrated with sociological youth

research which provides a detailed understanding of issues related to disengaged young people, focusing on education and the significance of understanding young people's experiences in social context.

As discussed, the Labour government has made social exclusion a particular focus of their policies (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999), with young people at the nexus of this discourse (Archer and Yamashita, 2003). Recent years have seen a major policy shift and changes in provision for 14-19 year olds particularly with the movement of resources from pre-16 to disengaged young people aged 16-18 (Britton, 2000; Bysshe and Hughes, 2002; Fergusson, 2002; Welsh, 2003). These inter-related developments in educational provision for 14-19 year olds, include the interest in widening post-16 participation, concerns about social exclusion and disengaged young people's participation in learning, and discourses around the shift towards 'lifelong learning' and the 'Learner Society' (Williams, 2002; Archer and Yamashita, 2003; Attwood, *et al.*, 2004). It is argued that education is:

'...now taken to be a panacea for a vast array of social and economic problems confronting the UK, from poor productivity and weak competitiveness through to unemployment, poverty and community disintegration (Keep, 1999, Wood, 1999)' (Lloyd and Payne, 2003: 86).

The years after leaving compulsory education have been identified as paramount in the process that can lead to exclusion and there are longstanding educational issues and concerns over disengagement from education, employment and training (Attwood, *et al.*, 2004). Disengagement is linked to the identification of young people as 'Status ZerO' (Roberts, 1997a; Williamson, 1997; Bentley and Gurumurthy, 1999) or NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) (Craig and Kelsey, 2000; Attwood, *et al.*, 2003). Characteristics of these groups are young people who leave school with low exam results or no qualifications at all (Bentley and Gurumurthy, 1999). Previous research suggests that these young people are in need of most help and support but, paradoxically, they are the ones who often slip through the net or fall outside the framework of mainstream society (Williamson, 1997; Bentley and Gurumurthy 1999).

The Social Exclusion Unit have produced a number of policy documents, notably the report, 'Bridging the Gap: New Opportunities for 16-18 Year Olds Not in Education, Employment or Training' (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999), which proposed solutions to bridge the gap between social exclusion and inclusion. Underpinned by a body of research examining the barriers young people face in the transition from school to work, 'Bridging the Gap' found that at any one time 9% of the 16-19 age group are outside of education, training and work for long periods after the school leaving age of 16 (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999)⁸. The report described the 'serious consequences for the individual and society' of these figures (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999: 31). It also highlighted the difficulties that young people may face in their experience of post-16 education.

Further research estimated the current, medium and long-term costs, to individuals, families and society, associated with young people being NEET across the lifespan of this group compared to a non-NEET group (Godfrey, *et al.* 2002). Groups overrepresented in this were young people in care, young parents, young carers, young people with physical and mental health problems and young people involved in crime (Coles, *et al.* 2002). The total estimated additional lifetime costs of the NEET group, estimated above, were £7bn in resource costs and £8.1bn in public finance costs, based on 2000-01 prices. The average per capita costs over a lifetime are £45,000 resource costs and £52,000 public finance costs. The research argued that if 10,000 people were removed from the NEET group, less than 10% of the estimated population, the long-term savings would be £450 million in resource costs and £520 million in public finance costs (Godfrey, *et al.* 2002). The main costs were medium-term and related to educational underachievement and unemployment. Data was not available to investigate all aspects of longer term.

The 1999 White Paper 'Learning to Succeed' (Department for Education and Employment, 1999b), set out the framework for post-16 learning, which pointed to a number of reforms including the 'Learning Gateway' initiative and the Connexions service, to tackle social exclusion among young people. Following on from this the

⁸ It is problematic to rely upon statistics for young people aged 16-18 and different sources use different ways to calculate the numbers. Problems include transient young people, the fact that they are not eligible to claim benefits and those who leave school early are rarely counted (as in the Youth Cohort Studies).

'14-19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards' document discussed the need for coherent provision responsive to individual needs (Department for Education and Skills, 2002). This report argued that the long-term decline in the number of unskilled and semi-skilled jobs means that young people who fail to acquire skills relevant to the 'knowledge economy' (Department for Education and Skills, 2002: 5) face ever-reducing prospects for employment (Attwood, *et al.*, 2004: 76). The 'Learning Gateway' initiative was introduced in September, 1999 as part of:

'...government proposals to reform training programmes for young people via the establishment of a 'vocational ladder', the first rung of which would be a 'Learning Gateway', leading to a Foundation Modern Apprenticeship, then Advanced Modern Apprenticeship and culminating in a Foundation Degree' (Blunkett, 2001: 21)

As stated in the introduction, the overall aims of the 'Learning Gateway' are to:

'...target[s] those 16-18 year olds who are vulnerable at this transitional phase. The priority is those who are disengaged from learning but the Learning Gateway also aims to help those who are in danger of dropping out of learning because they lack the right skills, qualifications or attitudes, or because they face significant personal or social obstacles...The Learning Gateway reaches out to such young people and makes contact with them on their own terms, and offers them a way back into mainstream learning.' (Department for Education and Employment, 1999a: 2)

Personal Advisers (PA's) are identified as the crucial figure to bring different services together on behalf of young people (Young, 2000; Ainley, *et al.*, 2002). Previous research conducted into the 'Learning Gateway' has highlighted that many young people face major challenges linked to multiple disadvantage including accommodation problems, coping with poverty and unstable family environments. Some young people had serious personal problems related to a history of offending, substance misuse, pregnancy and parenthood. Many young people had left school early and were disengaged from education, employment or training prior to entering the 'Learning Gateway'. The determining characteristic of most young peoples' career histories was the sporadic nature of their lives since leaving school. Low levels of self-confidence and self-esteem were also common. Young people were reported as exhibiting poor motivation and time-keeping (Sims, *et al.*, 2001). However, another piece of previous research indicated that 'there was a "substantial

variation’” between services in their interpretation of young people’s eligibility for the Learning Gateway, with some taking a far broader definition than others’ (McGregor, 2000 in Bysse and Hughes, 2002: 4).

The problems and criticisms of training initiatives were discussed earlier in the chapter. Many of these criticisms are still levelled at current training provision including the ‘warehousing’ and ‘cooling out’ role that post-compulsory education and training plays (Roberts, 1995; Reid, 1999; Colley and Hodkinson, 2001). Others argue that such policies problematise young people by identifying them as requiring a level of state intervention to bring them in line with the mainstream (Wyn and White, 1997; Milbourne, 2002; Raffo, 2003). Stone, *et al.* (2000) found that due to a lack of job availability, careers advice given to young people tended to focus on training courses, with no guaranteed job at the end. This lack of job availability is significant as young people are discouraged by repeated negative experiences of the labour market, educational institutions and training programmes (Pearce and Hillman, 1998). Social policy commentators have criticised the ‘government’s obsession with solving social exclusion for young people by the age of 19’ (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001: 353) given the complexity of some of the young people’s lives.

Both Ball, *et al.* (2000) and MacDonald and Marsh (2001) are dismissive of the solutions and initiatives that government has implemented, particularly where experiences of exclusion are long-standing and often generational. Ball, *et al.*, (2000) argue that there is a need for different types of understanding and different strategies to address issues around social exclusion and disengaged young people. However, much of this commentary does not acknowledge that it can be difficult for initiatives to help the most marginalised people. Others have suggested that the problem may be not with the initiatives as such, but because the people who access them have problems which require ‘far more fundamental interventions’ (Williams, 2002: 68) beyond what the initiative is able to offer (Dean, 2003). This raises the question whether such initiatives can deliver for the most marginalised people (Fergusson, 2002; Williams, 2002). It must be also be acknowledged that some people will not respond to interventions (Dean, 2003) and will exclude themselves (Bynner, *et al.*, 1997; Bentley and Gurumurthy, 1999). Dean (2003) proposes a ‘need for personalised, intensive and flexible forms of support for people with multiple

problems and needs' (p. 445). In the context of young people up to the age of 19, Connexions has been set up to meet this need.

This research aims to provide an understanding of programmes at the 'micro' level to explore the experiences of those involved in the delivery, including young people, programme workers and Personal Advisers. This review will now consider some of the criticisms in more detail, particularly in relation to assumptions underpinning policy, and the way young people are constructed in this context. This will be integrated with sociological youth research which provides detailed understandings of some of the issues raised in the policy criticisms, particularly around the concept of 'transition' and understanding the social context of young people's lives.

Assumptions underpinning policy

Commentators have based their analyses of recent policy documents and initiatives to address social exclusion on the assumptions which they argue underpin them. This section draws on some of the previous discussion about the background to social exclusion within the specific context of young people. Young people are identified as socially excluded because they are not engaged in mainstream education, employment or training. However, the policies that are set out to address social exclusion among young people are based upon the negative construction of young people. In relation to this work, three of the main criticisms will be explored; the individualisation of social exclusion, the aggregation of young people, and addressing social exclusion through education and employment.

The individualisation of social exclusion

Recent policy analyses recognise the complex networks of interconnected problems facing socially excluded young people (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999; 2000). However, whilst policy recognises that disengagement of young people may have a variety of causes the problems of social exclusion are identified in an individualised way. The debates around the use of social exclusion as a concept are well documented and it has been criticised for its use as a 'catch-all' phrase to identify people (Halpern, 1998; Ball, *et al.*, 2000; MacDonald and Marsh, 2001; Macrae, *et al.*, 2003; Stephen and Squires, 2003). MacDonald and Marsh argue that social

exclusion is a 'short hand label' to describe particular places *and* people who live in them (2001: 374). The term social exclusion 'carries a set of assumptions about the characteristics of the people involved and the circumstances of their lives which may well not be true of the young people categorised in this way' (Attwood, *et al.*, 2003: 77).

Social exclusion is an applied concept rather than one used in self-definition and it is not mediated by young people (Ball, *et al.*, 2000). Defining young people as socially excluded not only places an 'Othered' identity on them, which may impact on a persons' sense of self, but depends on reference to the 'included' (Sibley, 1995). There is limited literature which takes young people's views of exclusion into account (Sellman, *et al.*, 2002). Young people's views are 'often absent from discussions around policy and practice' (Archer and Yamashita, 2003: 55) and it is suggested that there is a need to look at the nature and extent of disengagement and the reasons young people give for it (Attwood, *et al.*, 2003). It has been suggested that the concept of social exclusion needs to be overhauled to incorporate the far more subjective evaluations of those presumed to be experiencing it (Stephen and Squires, 2003) extending beyond the context of employment and training (Ball, *et al.*, 2000).

Assumptions underpinning policy are based on a 'model of deficit' (Williams, 2002: 56) which is dominated by discourses of individualisation (Archer and Yamashita, 2003) and is identified as a sign of late modernity (Ball, *et al.*, 2000). The assumptions of policy become apparent when the Department for Education and Skills state that:

'Disengagement is usually associated with dysfunctional family relationships, emotional or behavioural difficulties, educational failure, homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse and criminal activity' (Department for Education and Skills, 2000) (in Welsh, 2003: 5).

Policy assumptions imply that young people are socially excluded because of their attitudes, beliefs and lack of employability. The focus on identifying few or no academic qualifications as the reason for not being in education, employment or training, and the suggestion of being involved in petty crime (Pearce and Hillman, 1998), having poor skills, bad health, and family breakdown show the narrow

specificity of the constituents of exclusion emphasising ‘individual pathologization’ (Fergusson, 2002: 175) and are criticised for ‘potentially pathologising social problems upon “deficit” individuals’ (Ainley, *et al.*, 2002: 383). This individualisation could place a further burden on young people (Thomson, *et al.*, 2003) and risk their further alienation (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001). Furthermore, many of the issues, such as family breakdown, are beyond the control of young people and there is significant variation between petty crime and bad health.

As discussed, these debates have parallels with ‘underclass’ theory and the behavioural approach associated with Murray (1990) where the behaviour of some people is viewed as deviant to that of mainstream society. Murray (1990) argues that even if structural impediments were removed some people would still be excluded because of their own behaviour and culture. This debate has a contentious place within youth research. Criticisms illustrate that ‘youth’ and ‘underclass’ are symbolic social constructions, the latter symbolising socially constituted definitions of failure (Dean, 1997) and masking diversity (Baldwin *et al.*, 1997). It has been argued that the processes leading to exclusion of young people are too complex and numerous to be understood just within the ‘underclass’ theory (MacDonald, 1997).

However, MacDonald and Marsh (2001), like Byrne (1999), argue that it is the concept of social exclusion which has replaced the ‘underclass’ theory as many of the connotations and arguments in discourses of social exclusion still allude to a negative social representation of this group of young people within society. According to MacDonald and Marsh (2001):

‘Ruth Levitas (1998) argues cogently that New Labour thinking on social exclusion fuses together competing (and contradictory) political philosophies... never far from the surface of the New Labour approach, she argues, is the suspicion that the socially excluded (like Murray’s underclass) are morally and culturally responsible for their predicament.’ (MacDonald and Marsh, 2001: 375)

In relation to the ‘model of deficit’ policies have been criticised for being enveloped in ‘metaphors of descent and fall’ and for describing young people in ‘terms of their lacks and needs’ (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001: 338). The barriers to engagement are the young people’s attitudes and behaviours and they will receive support in working

towards removing these barriers (Department for Education and Employment, 1999a; 1999b; Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). However, Stone *et al.* (2000) discuss how there are generally a number of factors contributing to a young person's circumstances and young people might experience 'layers of disadvantage' before the age of sixteen.

Despite the current emphasis on social exclusion, MacDonald and Marsh (2001) question whether the social exclusion paradigm can help in understanding what possible changes have occurred in society and what implication this may have for young people. In MacDonald, *et al.*'s (2001) study of young people in an area defined as socially excluded they found that respondents who were 'objectively' classified as excluded did not identify themselves in this way 'subjectively'. Many felt included in their communities. Importantly, this was outside of education. However, being included in a community could be a barrier to being in education as young people identified that having aspirations or being seen to study were often not acceptable within their community. Young people 'felt the area in which they lived circumscribed their life chances' (MacDonald, *et al.*, 2001: 11). Stephen and Squires (2003) use the term marginalisation rather than exclusion because young people in their study also did not see themselves as excluded. Although they recognised their marginalisation, they did not express any sense of alienation usually associated with social exclusion. Other research has identified that most young people do not want to be viewed as different from other people or a problem to society (Bentley and Gurumurthy, 1999) and many share conformist and conservative aspirations (Pearce and Hillman, 1998).

Furthermore, the governments approach to social exclusion and young people, proposed in 'Bridging the Gap', has been criticised as a missed opportunity to look at the multi-dimensional aspects of inequality and social exclusion. For example, gay and lesbian young people are not considered yet they often face marginalisation. There is also little consideration of disability and ethnic minority young people: 'in contrast to detailed descriptions of dysfunctional youth' (Colley and Hodgkinson, 2001: 342-3). Britton (2002) comments that few research studies have given sufficient attention to ethnic minority young people and a review of literature could lead to the conclusion that NEET is a mainly white (male) issue, a consequence of de-industrialised working class communities. She argues that while the latter is the case

it is far from the complete picture. This is a clear and convincing argument and the way in which NEET young people are characterised does present this picture. The young people are seen to be in need of intervention more so than other young people who may also be marginalised under the rubric of social exclusion. This is further compounded by the assumptions that they are in this position because of their own attitudes, beliefs and behaviours.

The aggregation of young people

From this focus upon individual deficit, policies have identified that bespoke support and programmes for young people are needed in order to address issues of social exclusion and disengagement. However, within the rhetoric about combating social exclusion through tailored interventions to meet complex problems, policy presents aggregated concepts, relegating young people into categories and stereotypes which deny diversity and individuality (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001). Ball, *et al.* aimed to avoid this in their work:

‘In our research we increasingly felt it necessary to eschew the overly simplistic characterisations of young people evident in policy documents – as individual, rational calculators or human capitalists’ (Ball, *et al.*, 2000: 147)

Critics argue that young people classed as belonging to ‘Status ZerO’ do not constitute a homogeneous group and they often slip in and out of non-participation (Pearce and Hillman, 1998). Some young people may have chosen this status as a result of disillusionment with repeated negative structural experiences (Bentley and Gurumurthy, 1999). It has been recognised that some young people did not expect to be in this position (Williamson, 1997) and, therefore, the question of structure dominating over agency needs to be acknowledged.

Youth researchers have explored structure and agency to varying degrees in their analyses. The concept of ‘structured individualism’ (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997) dismisses the duality of structure and agency and sees them as interlinked (Pearce and Hillman, 1998), unlike some policy discourses. This concept is based on the agency of young people being bound by structural determinants. Youth researchers have discussed individualisation in relation to the Risk Society thesis (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992) but many conclude that class, gender and ethnicity are still the main

determinants in young people's lives (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Green, *et al.*, 2000; Mitchell, *et al.*, 2001) which can help in understanding the marginalisation of some young people. The situation is more complex than that presented in the theorisations of Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992) which have been criticised for placing too much emphasis on individual reflexivity (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997) and overestimating the role of agency in constructing people's identities (May and Cooper, 1995). It is argued that the abstract individualisations that they present do not consider the practicalities and expectations faced by people and the 'fixities of labour market structures and demand for qualifications' (Ball, *et al.*, 2000: 39). This is similar to the criticisms within social policy of the way in which agency is reinforced without consideration of structural determinants or available employment opportunities.

Furlong and Cartmel (1997) introduce the idea of an 'epistemological fallacy' (p. 2) to debates of individualisation. In this understanding, individual choices and responsibility are reinforced but structural determinants are not recognised. Failure in this context becomes an individualised experience. However, people cannot be detached from structural constraints which still have a bearing on life chances and forms the 'surrounding opportunity structure' (MacDonald and Marsh, 2001: 383) in which decisions are made.

The 'Learning Gateway' programmes are aimed to engage young people who are identified as 'disadvantaged' or 'disaffected' (Department for Education and Employment, 1999a: 2). By making the decision to engage in a programme, young people are labelled and aggregated into these negatively constructed groups. 'Disadvantaged' has connotations of structural impediments that cause problems for young people, whereas, 'disaffected' relates more closely to 'agency', where the choices and attitudes of young people are the deciding factor in their disengagement. Hodkinson (2000) argues that government initiatives reverse structure and agency where the root of disadvantage is located in the individual which assumes that if they achieve qualifications the disadvantage would disappear. The terms are seen as being mutually exclusive and do not reflect that there may be many factors which could contribute to a young person's position.

Debates surrounding terminology used in the policy context have highlighted the simplistic categories (Milbourne, 2002) and different ways of quantifying those suffering from disadvantage (Morris, *et al.*, 1999; Britton, 2000). This categorisation of young people is a familiar one, with press reports and official accounts often portraying them in a 'dehumanised' manner (Pearce and Hillman 1998). The above labels are 'generalised and pervasive', often focusing on control and blame if young people step out of normative expectations (Stacey, 2001). In line with the individualised way policy is presented, the aggregated concepts imply that young people are classed thus because of their individual attitudes and decisions, which in turn deflects attention from the wider social and institutional determinants (Pearce and Hillman 1998). It could be argued that the aim of treating the young people as individuals is negated through the partial meanings conveyed about them (MacDonald and Marsh, 2001) which, although often not complete, become 'propagated as dominant discourses' (Stacey, 2001: 220) denying consideration of individual circumstances and simply viewing them as people who need intervention. While 'on a personal level expert discourses are not always accepted or viewed as relevant...this does not deny the power of expert discourses' (Mitchell, *et al.*, 2001: 231). The development of identity in some young people may be dependent on, or informed by such constructions and discourses, which are 'loaded with meaning' and have a 'strong, normative content, in the form of expectations, that accommodate and reward conformity as they resist and sanction deviance' (Willmott, 1996: 28).

Recent policy documents have adopted the more neutral term of 'non-participants' in place of 'disaffected' or 'disadvantaged' to describe young people outside of mainstream education, training and employment. However, this is still underpinned by assumptions which reinforce non-participation as 'self-exclusion' (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001: 340) with young people's 'agency' determining their positioning. This in turn deflects attention away from wider social and institutional determinants (Pearce and Hillman, 1998; Colley and Hodkinson, 2001). This not only ignores structural inequalities in the analysis of social exclusion (MacDonald and Marsh, 2001; Stephen and Squires, 2003) but also the complex interplay of social institutions and individuals (Sellman, *et al.*, 2002).

Addressing social exclusion through education and employment

As discussed earlier in the chapter, the main assumption of policy discourses is that social exclusion can only be addressed through education and employment. This assumption posits a causal relationship between educational underachievement, school exclusion and non-participation and longer term social exclusion (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001; Macrae, *et al.*, 2003; Raffo, 2003). It assumes that participation in the labour market is always beneficial and the only means of inclusion for young people in mainstream society:

‘The best defence against social exclusion is having a job, and the best way to get a job is to have a good education, with the right training and experience’ (Tony Blair, Foreword to *Bridging the Gap*) (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999: 6)

While emphasising education and employment as positive, little consideration is given to previous experiences of education which may have been negative for young people and may be significant in understanding disengagement. The following section will discuss literature relating to young people’s experiences of education.

Experiences of education

Many authors talk about young people’s ‘disillusionment’ with school and formal education (Bentley and Gurumurthy, 1999; Ball, *et al.*, 2000; Colley and Hodkinson, 2001). It is argued that compulsory education is failing badly for some young people (Pearce and Hillman, 1998) and young people have identified school as hindering their academic success (Archer and Yamashita, 2003). Educational underachievement is often the outcome of a combination of factors including non-detection of poor literacy and numeracy skills that may lead to truancy and absenteeism (Kinder, *et al.*, 1999; Welsh, 2003). However, this does not consider the detrimental impact this may have on the young person. While issues of low attainment may arise prior to secondary school for some young people (Pearce and Hillman, 1998) it is secondary education where it is identified as potentially having negative consequences affecting young people’s orientation towards education. The decision to leave compulsory education can have repercussions on every detail in the individual’s life course and how the young person adapts to education is central to their relations with institutional orders of society in general (Emler, 1993).

Attwood, *et al.*'s (2003; 2004) study of early school leavers re-engaging in an educational based programme found that negative experiences of school, problems with teachers and or other pupils, troubled personal backgrounds, low income and limited material resources and also special education needs were common, highlighting significant variation in young people's experiences of education. Young people who left school early often did so in difficult and stressful circumstances. For those young people the most significant aspects of their re-engagement were good relationships with college tutors and the supportive context (Attwood, *et al.*, 2004).

Hodgson (2002) identifies three categories of young people who did not make a successful transition from school into education, employment or training. They are low attainers, underachievers and people with learning difficulties (p. 15). There is significant diversity in the three categories which allows for consideration of different factors of disengagement among young people. This presents a different picture to the government's focus on young people who need assistance to make the successful transition. The above categories are not based on individual deficit and show that young people may not be in education, employment or training for many reasons which are not explored in policy.

The categories above all have implications for academic attainment. The specification for 'Life Skills' programmes outline assistance with and development of basic and key skills as a core part of the programmes, which shows recognition that many young people need to develop these skills. This is currently high priority within many government policies and Norman and Hyland (2003) look at the massive drive to solve basic skills problems for all people. However, understanding the issues around the basic skills of some people appears to be an under-researched area and only a few studies, including Bewick (1997), Bynner (1998) and Hodgson (2002), explore the lack of basic skills for some young people. Bynner (1998) argues that the debate around social exclusion does not acknowledge that without basic skills any job opportunities for young people are going to be limited. He suggests that this is made more difficult because many young people have grown up in families which do not value formal education.

Previous research with young people on 'Learning Gateway' programmes identified that many young people had low levels of confidence and self-esteem (Sims, *et al.*, 2001). Again, Life Skills programmes are aimed to assist in personal development, in which confidence and self-esteem is included. There is a lack of literature available which explores the impact of confidence, or lack of confidence, on a person. This is an area which should receive attention as Lakey, *et al.* (2000) identified that lack of confidence was a significant factor contributing to the problems faced by young people compounded by limited opportunities for work and made worse by a lack of skills, experience or qualifications. According to Stone, *et al.* (2000) confidence issues can manifest themselves as young people being prone to bullying and individuals who were bullied described themselves as being not very confident. This is another area which could impact on engagement of young people but there is little literature that considers this. Stone, *et al.* (2000) suggest a more rigorous follow up of truancy and the need to tackle bullying in schools.

Negative experiences and marginalisation in education can make young people doubt their future prospects of what they can achieve. While in such circumstances some young people may choose to rebel, others may choose to leave education and go on to avoid the education system in the future. While both choices would be identified through policy as self-exclusion there is failure to consider that:

'Opting out' (or as it was more often termed, 'not bothering' with education), therefore, provided a way to avoid being further blamed for educational 'failure' (Archer and Yamashita, 2003: 59)

As has previously been discussed the impact of the individualisation of failure for young people means that their experience is constructed in terms of personal deficit. This can impact upon their sense of identity and what they believe they can achieve, which has a further marginalising effect:

'...contrary to dominant assumptions, the young people did not demonstrate a lack of, or low, aspirations *per se* – they listed a range of high money/status jobs as desirable (if distant) goals. However, they recounted coming to recognise their 'limits' in relation to particular (professional) jobs...The identification of themselves as 'low grade' people also led to several respondents ruling themselves out of being able to go to college' (Archer and Yamashita, 2003: 59)

Within this context, the end of compulsory education can offer an 'escape from learning' (Ball *et al.*, 2000: 130) and many young people have 'damaged learner identities' (Ball *et al.*, 2000: 56). For some young people:

'Learning and life are antithetical, mutually exclusive. 'Choice' becomes an absence of choice, a filtering out of alternatives' (Ball, *et al.*, 2000: 151)

The notion of 'choice' post-16 is highly problematic and complex (Bloomer and Hodgkinson, 2000a) for all young people and 'choices' that young people make can build or undermine further a person's engagement. With this in mind, the next section will look at the way in which the concept of 'transition' is used when explaining young people's 'choices' when they leave compulsory education.

Understanding 'transition'

As part of the government assumption of education and employment being the way to achieve social inclusion, the aims of policy initiatives draw on a linear process of transition. The assumption is that the young people need assistance, for example from the 'Learning Gateway', to make the 'transition' to become socially included through education, employment or training (Department for Education and Employment, 1999a: 2). Here, 'transition' is used as an aggregated concept to categorise and depict young people, thereby making them identifiable (Moscovici, 1984). According to Furlong and Cartmel (1997) 'the introduction of government training schemes must be regarded as one of the most significant changes affecting transitional patterns' (p. 31).

The 'extended transition' into further education or vocational training, from which Ball, *et al.* (2000) claim the 'Learner Society' is born, is at the forefront of policies for 16-18 year olds. The focus on the 'Learner Society' impacts on opportunities for some young people (MacDonald and Marsh, 2001). Young people who have had negative experiences of education are at risk of becoming 'others' to the 'Learner Society'. Due to their previous experiences of learning this often means 'more learning is the last thing they are interested in' (Ball, *et al.*, 2000: 8) and it can reinforce personal inadequacies (Baron, *et al.*, 1999) through individualisation which may lead to further marginalisation:

'...groups excluded from the economy may be caught within a cycle which deepens the exclusion. This is nowhere more clear than in the experience of people with learning difficulties of 'lifelong learning', the proffered panacea for social exclusion...The individualising tendency of the lifelong learning discourse, that individuals need to change, take responsibility for their own employability, be flexible, etc., glosses over structural issues about the distribution of economic and social power' (Baron, *et al.*, 1999: 496).

Government policies are based on the economisation of youth where successful transition is related to economic independence (Williams, 2002). It is argued that the main incentive of training programmes is the 'pursuit of economic efficiency' (Lloyd and Payne, 2003: 88) using a 'market-based approach' (Cregan, 2002: 42). The economic purpose of government policy is criticised by educationalists who stress the multi-dimensional role that education can play in people's lives (Lloyd and Payne, 2003). However, while education policy is criticised for being located in a narrow, instrumentalist set of assumptions to meet the needs of the economy (Lloyd and Payne, 2003) many young people often wanted to only gain employment and did not favour further study (Dean, 2003; Hodgson, 2002; Raffo, 2003).

Before Connexions was established, Colley and Hodkinson (2001) questioned whether Personal Advisers would be able to work with the young people on young people's terms. Given the focus on educational achievement and employment would a Personal Adviser help young people drop out of an unsatisfactory educational experience or job? They argued that: 'given the structural problems that lie behind non-participation this solution [the role of Personal Adviser] seems naïve and inadequate at best' (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001: 351). Furthermore, problems were identified in some training initiatives when there was a 'lack of a common definition and shared understanding of 'readiness' in regard to transitions' by service providers (Bysshe and Hughes, 2002: 5).

On first reading, the 'Learning Gateway' is positioned to support young people in a holistic way by developing employability but also focusing upon active citizenship and personal development (Department for Education and Employment, 1999a). Colley argues that while the promotion of 'personal development' or 'active citizenship' are not evidence of employment-dominated goals, a Department for Education and Employment commissioned evaluation of 'Learning Gateway' pilots

illustrated the fact that outcomes related to personal development or active citizenship may be dominated by employers' requirements rather than young people's needs (Colley, 2003). The development of 'Life Skills' is defined in the early evaluation of the 'Learning Gateway' as:

'...improving the personal effectiveness of young people in the workplace by assisting them to gain skills in areas such as problem solving, confidence building, development of interpersonal skills, team working, punctuality, diagnoses of personal strengths and areas for personal development and life skills, which employers regard as essential for applicants to have in order for them to seek employment (GHK Economics and Management, 2000: 56 quoted in Colley, 2003: 530)

Colley argues that:

'The subsumption of the personal into the work-related is striking in this extract...and raise[s] critical questions about the way in which claims for empowerment frequently underpin these employment-related goals' (Colley, 2003: 530).

This would correlate with the focus upon achieving economic independence where outcomes are prescribed externally with little consideration of the young people and their needs. In fact, Lloyd and Payne (2003) identify these skills as what employers want:

'...many employers admit that what they really want is a modicum of literacy and numeracy, together with the requisite behavioural skills like punctuality, smart appearance, enthusiasm and a simple willingness to get on with the job without questioning things (Dench, *et al.*, 1998, Payne, 2000)' (Lloyd and Payne, 2003: 98)

Lloyd and Payne argue that previous research has found that to gain employment only a low level of basic skills is needed. In this sense, it is not necessary to focus on 'The Learner Society' as not everyone needs a high level of education. However, they claim that it is implied that everyone in the workforce must improve their general level of education and 'social skills' to ensure customers are satisfied and competitive advantage maintained. This includes people 'at the bottom end of the labour market' (Lloyd and Payne, 2003: 89). They approach this in an unquestioning manner without considering that the requirements listed above, such as modicum of literacy and numeracy or punctuality, may be very demanding for some people.

There is a fundamental issue with the way in which initiatives are designed to facilitate transition to education, employment and training. The assumptions of the policies to address social exclusion, and notably 'Bridging the Gap', have been criticised for the positive view of current labour market conditions despite evidence of large scale, structural unemployment, particularly in the youth labour market (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001). Policies assume that jobs are available for young people when they finish education and training programmes. Furthermore, in this context, youth unemployment is considered to be the young people's fault as they are not prepared for work (MacDonald and Marsh, 2001). There is an underlying assumption that the root of the problem lies in the young people's lack of employability (Williams, 2002):

'Young people's beliefs about the labour market are highlighted as a cause of non-participation and social exclusion. The way in which these beliefs are described invariably implies that they are false, young people thinking there are no jobs, as if their beliefs are unfounded and irrational!' (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001: 339-40).

Although many challenges have been levelled at government policy, the use of the aggregated label 'transition' has been relatively free from criticism within social policy critiques. However, it has received considerable attention within youth research. The traditional model of transition from school to work has received the most attention. Youth research which has focused on this notion of 'transition' (Willis, 1977; Poole, 1983) has offered contestable insights into young people's experiences, but has faced criticism for being unhelpful in describing the changing situations of young people (Jeffs and Smith, 1998; Cohen and Ainley, 2000), especially in the new century.

Social transformations have occurred in family life, in education and training, in social welfare policy and notably in the labour market (Pearce and Hillman, 1998; Ball, *et al.*, 2000). It is argued that the labour market today is significantly different from when the traditional model was developed and applied as a way to conceptualise the pathway for young people. Previous empirical studies on youth transitions have been criticised for failing to reflect the experiences of growing up because, it is argued that, young people do not view their lives as a linear sequential pathway (Cohen and Ainley, 2000). It is acknowledged that a neat, normative and mainstream transition is

hard to identify for some young people (MacDonald *et al.*, 2001). The concept of straightforward youth-adulthood transition is no longer acceptable and has been described as 'too simple, too crude' (Ball *et al.*, 2000: 18). As Furlong and Cartmel explain 'the restructuring of the adult labour market and the decline of the youth labour market have important implications for the way young people experience the transition to work on a subjective level' (1997: 38). This has created increasingly 'extended transitions' for young people, which have an impact on patterns of dependency, and also increase both risks and opportunities (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; MacDonald, 1997; Mitchell, *et al.*, 2000; Green, *et al.*, 2001). This has led to a call for the reconceptualisation of youth transitions (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Roberts, 1997b; Bentley and Gurumurthy, 1999; Wyn and Dwyer, 1999; Ball, *et al.*, 2000).

Various metaphors have been used to describe this period including niches, pathways, trajectories and navigations. Some of these aim to show non-linearity and unpredictability, highlighting complex and interconnected experiences involving false starts, and explore the role of structure and agency in the 'transition' from school to employment (Dwyer, 1995; Evans and Furlong, 1997; Looker and Dwyer, 1998; Rudd and Evans, 1998; Wyn and Dwyer, 1999). However, while there have been changes in the labour market and aspects of social life this is not to say that the transition from school to work was necessarily a straightforward process in the past. There is a common assumption in post-war literature on youth of transition from one stable state to another:

'It is a truism of classic 'youth' studies of different theoretical persuasions that the term refers to a stage of life which is essentially transitional... Behind these varied accounts of youth lies the assumption that the transition of youth is, in general, a transition to a relatively stable adult status and identity which will provide the basis for the rest of the lifecourse... For none of these theoretical positions is the outcome of the transition automatic or unproblematic but the underlying image is shared: the lifecourse as a series of stages, linear, cumulative and non-reversible, with youth as the stage, which makes the transition from childhood to adulthood, a state centred on more or less stable subjectivity and social being.' (Baron, *et al.* 1999: 484)

It is argued that the main concern for youth sociologists is still the economic transition from school to work, reinforcing this as the key to success, adult citizenship and

independence (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; MacDonald, 1997; Ball, *et al.*, 2000). Within the theory of the underclass, there is the assumption that 'the transition to adult citizenship is not a function of age, but of employment and dependency status' (Dean, 1997). This seems to be in line with the government's thinking about assisting young people through the 'transition' to entering employment.

In a broader context, it is argued that changes in transitional patterns can increase possibilities and choices for young people (Hollands, 1995; Roberts, 1995; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Du Bois Reymond, 1998). In this sense, young people are not bound by the same constraints of previous generations and they have the space to experiment and establish their self-identity (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997: 51). Some argue that transitions for young people may be based on leisure, lifestyle and consumption rather than employment status (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Miles, 1998; Ball, *et al.*, 2000). In discussions of increased choices for young people it has been argued that some youth transitions studies underestimate the degree of choice or agency of young people. Furlong and Cartmel suggest 'everything is presented as a possibility' (1997: 7).

However, this may not be accurate as consideration needs to be given to the availability of resources, support, opportunities and developed skills to ensure 'anything is possible' which is not the case for many young people. There is recognition that emphasising 'free' choice taken by individuals glosses over questions of power and disadvantage (Rudd and Evans, 1998: 98). Some young people, with limited resources, are often excluded from participating in consumer culture (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Ball, *et al.*, 2000). It has been argued that the interactions of the end of compulsory education with other factors associated with social exclusion (Bentley and Gurusurthy, 1999) are where some young people may face problems. Previous research has described the 'effects of this disintegration of traditional routes of transition to adulthood and the resultant social exclusion of vulnerable youth' (MacDonald, 1997: 21).

While it is not always possible to disentangle agency and structural influences (Rudd and Evans, 1998) Furlong and Cartmel address claims that, while school to work transitions have become more complex for young people, 'the essential predictability

of transitions has been maintained' (1997: 7), with class, gender and ethnicity defining life chances. Previous research has found that young people often thought they had choices and did not consider structural disadvantage (Attwood, *et al.*, 2003; Ball, *et al.*, 2000). For many young people there is a lack of choice and agency (Attwood, *et al.* 2003; Solomon and Rogers, 2001) or a 'limited, personal form of agency' (Wyn and White, 1998). Evans (2002) concept of 'bounded agency' is useful in being able to capture some of the more intricate aspects in the structure and agency debate. This concept highlights that young people can exercise agency in their lives but this is often bound by structural determinants.

A further aspect of this debate is discussed by Baron, *et al.* (1999) in relation to their ethnographic piece of work with people with learning difficulties. They defined the participants as at risk of becoming increasingly marginalised by the efforts of the 'Learning Society'. They explored whether identity for these young people could still be conceptualised in terms of transition from youth to adulthood. One of the main points illustrated is that all participants: 'are constituted as having 'learning difficulties' as the master category of their identities' (Baron, *et al.*, 1999: 492). They discuss how this is an imposition of identity upon them by others, 'rather than being playfully constructed by the actors themselves' (p. 493). None of participants referred to themselves in this officially defined way but Baron, *et al.* maintain that the 'discourses of everyday life firmly constitutes them as such' (p. 493) and there were few opportunities for them to contest this. Some discussions on transition presume an already powerful social position, where young people are the central actor, which is not the case for marginalised groups especially where identity is imposed by others:

'All three people seem to be caught, on an ongoing basis, in midst transition. Our data suggest, therefore, that the idea of a transition from childhood identities and roles to those of adulthood through a phase of youth, even when blocked, is still a more fruitful way of thinking about the identities of people with learning difficulties than the *pastiche* of post-modernity.' (Baron, *et al.*, 1999: 493, emphasis in original)

This dilutes the argument of some youth researchers who suggest there is a need for more research to explore the degree to which young people have become navigators of their own destinies (Roberts, 1997b). However, it is important to engage young people in sharing their narratives. Green, *et al.* (2000) adopt the term 'transitional

markers' (113) to identify the stages through which young people move in attempting to achieve adult status. This develops in a step-by-step process. From the literature, it is evident that understanding and documenting young people's transitions are far from straightforward and that there needs to be consideration given to subjective experiences:

'...to ignore the subjective aspects of transition, or to reduce them to the simple social effect of class, gender or ethnic position, is *really* to throw the baby out with the ideological bathwater. For there are dramatic variations in the way these positions are individually assumed and lived, as we discovered with our group. These 'little differences' can make a big difference to outcomes within limits and conditions fixed by social formation. But they are not random or unique to particular lives, they are not reducible to 'personality types' ...' (Cohen, 1997: 367, emphasis in original)

There is more to 'becoming an adult' than the transition from school to work and experiences external to this transition can have a dramatic impact on individual biographies (MacDonald, *et al.*, 2001). For some, the transition perspective does still have value, if it is broadly conceived, and can be applied outside the fields of education and employment. There is a substantial body of research exploring other areas of transitions (Ball, *et al.*, 2000; MacDonald and Marsh, 2001; MacDonald, *et al.*, 2001), including criminal and drug-using careers which are explored in an attempt to illustrate a more integrated view of young people's transitions. MacDonald and Marsh argue that this was essential as their study revealed that the young people had 'virtually empty school to work careers' (MacDonald and Marsh, 2001: 380). In one example, they discussed how one young man's biography could only be understood in relation to his drug use.

More instrumentally, Bynner argues that while there may be theoretical problems with the concept of transition in terms of policy discourses and initiatives, the concept may have a use:

'...transition, albeit mainly to work, is the topic through which policy makers become engaged with the wider set of problems confronting young people from which additional resources flow (SEU, 1999...2000)' (Bynner, 2000: 6)

However, it is clear those who are not engaged in employment are defined as 'socially excluded' (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001) or 'non-participants' in society's workforce.

In this context, 'non- participants' are relegated to 'other' status because they are not in paid employment (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001). The focus on entry to education and employment neglects the consideration of individual circumstances and other aspects of young people's lives (Levitas, 1998; Colley and Hodkinson, 2001; MacDonald and Marsh, 2001; Fergusson, 2002; Milbourne, 2002; Gleeson and Keep, 2004). This could, in turn, marginalise other aspects of exclusion (Ball, *et al.*, 2000) which, if left unaddressed, could counteract positive interventions to attain employment. Policy is criticised for not addressing wider socio-cultural aspects of young people's lives and 'how various networks to which young people belong influence their norms, values, outlooks, aspirations and actions' (Raffo, 2003: 72). In this sense learning experiences for young people:

'...are constituted as much by chance and risk as they are by rational deliberation and effort. False starts seem almost the norm, set-backs are common and the social and domestic aspects of 'choice-making' are often more important than the educational' (Ball, *et al.*, 2000: 40).

As Ball, *et al.* (2000) highlight above there is a need to explore and understand young people's experiences within the wider context of their lives as education may not be as significant to them as is suggested.

The significance of social context

To move away from aggregated assumptions that underpin policy, based on negative constructions of young people, the importance of the wider social context in developing an understanding of the young people's lives must be explored. In this sense, both structure and agency need to be understood in context:

'It is our view that young people negotiate their own futures, lives and meanings, but they do so in the context of specific social, political and economic circumstances and processes. However, much of the analysis provided in contemporary youth research still tends to ignore this complexity, either emphasising the deterministic nature of social life or relying on a voluntaristic conception of youth. We suggest that a third option, a 'contextual' model of young people's agency, is useful, but has yet to be developed fully' (Wyn and White, 1998: 25)

Subjectivity and context are key concepts employed by youth researchers attempting to explore aspects of young people's lives (Green *et al.*, 2000; Hubbard, 2000;

Mitchell *et al.*, 2001). Without exploring young people's subjective understandings and everyday experiences, there is a risk of providing a simplistic assessment. Engaging with subjective experience often offers a perspective of young people which is different to how they are identified in official discourses. Therefore, what needs to be developed is understandings of the micro social, economic and cultural context and the importance of economic and cultural capital (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000b). Rudd (1997) argues there is a scarcity of research into young people's subjective perspectives despite increasing literature on individualisation.

An important feature in learning about young people's identities is gaining an informed understanding of the diversity of social contexts within which they find themselves (Jackson and Rodriguez-Tome, 1993, MacDonald *et al.*, 2001) exploring young people's 'situated vocabularies' (Mitchell, *et al.*, 2001: 219). Green, *et al.* (2000) claim we cannot 'overestimate the significance of 'context' when researching young people and their behaviour' (p. 115). Youth researchers communicate the importance of considering the wider context of young people's lives, for example, questions of labour market attachment can not be addressed without acknowledging multiple problems intimately bound up with family and social context that shape young people's lives (Dean, 2003). It is essential to explore the social relationships of young people and the way in which these dimensions affect the continuing formation of their identity. It is important not to overplay the importance of education in some young people's lives as their lives are about more than education:

'Work-place identities may just not be anywhere near as central and powerful as emotional and 'relational' identities such as daughter, mother, girlfriend. Social exclusion itself needs to be extended beyond the employment-training context to include critical factors such as family disruption, poverty in childhood and the loss of confidence and self-esteem which can often accompany these debilitating life experiences' (Ball, *et al.*, 2000: 57).

Young people's identities are discussed as complex, fluid and fractured components (Ball, *et al.*, 2000; Green, *et al.* 2001) of multi-dimensional lives. Many researchers have noted the difficulty in accounting for young people's identities and how research can only provide a limited account of complex and fragmented identities (Ball, *et al.*, 2000) and complex, often chaotic biographies (Dean, 2003: 444) in situated social contexts (Raffo, 2003). Identity in social theory is widely conceptualised as having

no fixed or permanent character (Fortier, 1998) and the origin of identity is always in a social context (Kronqvist, 1996). Identity development can be viewed as construction work and as an ongoing process (Kraus, 2000). Beck sees the individual as 'a self-critical actor, actively engaged within the construction of a personal biography' (Green, *et al.*, 2001: 111) where 'individuals must produce, stage and cobble together their biographies for themselves' (Beck, 1992: 13). Giddens (1991) views an individual's sense of identity as a reflexive project.

While these are dominant discourses in this area Baron, *et al.* (1999) highlight that this may not be the case for all people and their study highlights concerns with the idea that young people can playfully construct identities for themselves. Abstract concepts of identity do not consider the realities of people's lives. It is important to recognise the extent to which young people can contest identities that are imposed on them and whether this limits their capacity to reproduce their own identities. Although a considerable body of research has already addressed questions of identity and transition in relation to young people there is a lack of research that has engaged the young people to explain their identities.

Policy does identify young people's lives as being constructed of complex networks, however, this is only portrayed in a problematic and negative way, which reinforces the deficit model. Stone, *et al.* (2000) provide a list of factors, which affect young people's participation in education, training or employment. The list, presented below, has a great deal of variety and covers a multitude of needs:

'Recurring themes of factors affecting participation in EET including adverse family circumstances, traumatic events (including bereavement), personality/behavioural difficulties, disaffection with school, learning difficulties/disabilities, truancy, health problems, bullying, being in care, drug abuse, crime, homelessness, immaturity, support, lack of money' (Stone *et al.*, 2000: 2)

The variety of factors listed above confirms the arguments that it is not possible to use aggregated concepts to understand young people. While there are factors that policy relate to individual deficit there is a need to understand how this relates to the wider context of young people's lives. MacDonald and Marsh claim that '*something* profound has certainly changed in the social and community life in Britain's post-

industrial areas and young people are *implicated* in these processes' (2001: 374, emphasis in original). According to Williams (2002) in many areas of high unemployment where old industries have gone so has the expectation of work. It has been argued that there is a historical culture of not working or participating in education and training in some communities where some young people look down on work (Williamson, 1997). Local inequalities remain a crucial determining factor for young people (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Green, *et al.*, 2000; MacDonald, *et al.*, 2001; Mitchell, *et al.*, 2001).

One way to explore young people's experiences and positioning is through the concept of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). This concept is significant as it recognises that choice and agency are accompanied by the availability of resources, which can enhance or limit achievement and ambition (Skeggs, 1997). Previous research has found that families and friends often provided emotional and social capital for young people (Thomson, *et al.*, 2003) contrary to the identification of dysfunctional families. It also recognises that structural inequalities circumscribe the range of options open to some young people as there is unequal access to social capital (Ball, *et al.*, 2000; Archer and Yamashita, 2003). Those without social capital are subject to the greatest insecurities (Stephen and Squires, 2003).

The concept of 'critical moments' can be a useful way to understand young people's subjective experiences (Coles, 1995; Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997; MacDonald, *et al.*, 2001; Thomson, *et al.*, 2002). Young people often identify a significant moment in discussions of their lives and this concept is used as a way of locating the young people's understanding of their experiences. In Stone, *et al.*'s study they describe how a significant factor can then lead to a 'chain of events':

'Many of the young people we spoke to described a chain of events, for example bullying that led to truancy, which might lead to involvement in crime and arguments at home, then being thrown out of the family home and becoming homeless. Many factors contributed' (Stone *et al.*, 2000: 3)

Significantly Stone, *et al.* found that due to the 'chain of events':

‘...young people often make far-reaching decisions, such as leaving home and school, at a very young age and without any advice or support’ (Stone *et al.*, 2000: 1)

Importantly, through developing understandings of young people’s experiences in context and disaggregating negative concepts it may become evident that many do not fit into the characteristics applied. Britton (2002) highlights that while the focus of policy is on the most disadvantaged other young people not identified in this way could be marginalised even further as a result:

‘Much of the literature, policy and otherwise, about the NEET population has focused on the ‘most disadvantaged’. Clearly those with multiple disadvantages are more likely to become NEET and remain so. However, there are a sub-group in the NEET population of those who do not have a catalogue of misfortune in tow and are not easily sympathised with as ‘tiny Tim’ cases. Some of the disengaged may seem at first sight to be unproblematic. They may live at home with parents and receive financial support from them. They may not have been excluded from school nor been involved in offending or have any of the typical risk signs. But it is more likely to be the case, that they come from estates characterised by worklessness, low educational attainment and low expectations. As they currently stand, they do not represent the kind of policy problem that do their more disadvantaged counterparts. This sub-group, particularly post 16, will represent a real challenge to Connexions in terms of identifying them as a group to target. Aspects of their lifestyle suggest they are destined to eventually join the ranks of the long term unemployed. They may well turn out to be the new group of ‘hard’ to ‘help’ who will leave New Deal without a job’ (Britton, 2002: 2)

This is a significant observation as it suggests that there are many young people who may not be accounted for within policy discourses or initiatives because they do not fall into the categorisation identified as needing assistance.

Summary

This chapter began by outlining chronologically policy developments and continuities in training for young people and the main criticisms thereof. The link between welfare-to-work policies and the origins of the concept of social exclusion were then discussed. From this overview, the discussion moved to the context of this research by critically exploring the assumptions which underpin current policy and initiatives for disengaged young people. This has been strengthened by debates from

sociological youth literature and research. There is little consideration of the complexity of young people's lives and the problems they often face or the initiatives that are put in place to deliver to address these complex needs. The debates highlight that the aggregated concepts applied to young people do little to understand their experiences or whether initiatives could have a positive impact. There is a need to understand young people's experiences within the wider social context and to consider the interplay of structure and agency. The official discourses of policy and structures of implementation conceal a complex picture and this chapter has highlighted tensions between the complex causes of disengagement and the simple solutions that policy proposes. The next chapter discusses the dominant form of accountability in public services and suggests that this is an inappropriate way to account for performance of programmes. There are similarities between the policy approach and forms of accountability which rely upon aggregated notions of young people, only consider entry into education, training or employment as successful and fail to consider the significance of social context.

CHAPTER THREE

MECHANISMS OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

Introduction

This review will now move on to introduce accountability into the discussion. The debates around current notions of accountability correspond with the criticisms of policy assumptions based on aggregation and the focus on end results. There is a contradiction between what the policy discourses present and what becomes of importance and value within the accountability process. This chapter begins with a discussion of the concept of accountability and the main forms of accountability in public services and progresses to locate the notion within the context of training programmes. This is followed by some criticisms of the dominant forms of accountability and the impact of this on understanding the performance of programmes involved in this study. This chapter draws on literature from public administration, accounting, critical social policy and public service evaluation which discuss the new significance of accountability in line with the dominant approach of measuring performance of public services. It is argued that the preoccupation with specifying targets and measuring outcomes distorts the practice of public services as quantifiable models of quality (Ranson, 2003).

Accountability does have a useful function in public services and the chapter moves on to discuss ways in which a broader conception of accountability may be used, to enhance understanding and promote learning, and to complement the current ways in which services account for their performance. It is often identified that evidence can be used to facilitate accountability (performance information) or to promote improvement (to enable effective policies and practice) (Boaz and Nutley, 2003; Sanderson, 2002). Although this chapter uses this artificial divide to facilitate the discussion it is argued that they are not mutually exclusive and should inform each other to optimise the value of accountability as a form of learning within organisations. The chapter introduces the idea of an alternative approach to conceptions of accountability exploring themes in critical accounting literature, sociological youth research, social policy and evaluation literature where the notion of understanding individuals within social context is emphasised. Whilst various forms

of accountability are highlighted this review focuses upon aspects relevant to the argument presented, of the 'micro' aspects of accountability within programmes, and explores the significance of what an account is given of, to whom it is given and how it is given.

Understanding accountability

Accountability is a much vaunted and referred-to concept in relation to public investment. Whilst the concept can simply mean to 'give an account', in the context of public services it is more readily understood as 'being held to account', with the implication that this would also involve sanctions. According to Mulgan (2000) the core sense of accountability has a number of features:

'...it is *external*, in that the account is given to some other person or body outside the person or body being held accountable; it involves *social interaction and exchange*, in that one side, that calling for the account, seeks answers and rectification while the other side, that being held accountable, responds and accepts sanctions; it implies *rights of authority*, in that those calling for an account are asserting rights of superiority over those who are accountable, including the rights to demand answers and impose sanctions. (The inclusion of sanctions in the core of accountability is contestable on the grounds that it may appear to go beyond the notion of 'giving an account'...) (pp. 555-6, emphasis in original).

However, lack of clarity about the concept leads Day and Klein to assert that accountability is a 'chameleon word' (1987: 32). Kramer and Grossman maintain that 'definitions of accountability vary greatly' (1987: 40) and Leat sees accountability as having a 'variety of meanings and applications' (1988: 1). Rowe, discussing the concept of accountability within the context of public services refers to it as a 'contested concept' (1999: 92). Hayes (1996) notes that it is a complex term and Kramer claims that the concept's 'popularity in the human services is exceeded only by the lack of agreement about its meaning' (1981: 290).

Mulgan (2000) argues that the concept has lost its straightforwardness and that the practice of accountability, along with its prevalence and meaning, has changed over time. He argues that it is now a common term, employed in analytical and rhetorical ways, whereas only a few decades ago the concept was rarely used and when it was, it

was with restricted meaning. It is commonly recognised that there are both external and internal pressures driving the agenda for improved accountability and a rise in demand for measured evidence of performance. It is clearly important that the actions of those in public services and positions of authority are legitimate and open to scrutiny and accountability can be understood to serve many purposes:

‘It must be open and fair. It must be efficient and effective. And there must be sanctions and safeguards which ensure the rights and duties of all concerned in the “contract” to which it relates are adequately upheld’ (Simey, 1985: 24)

‘Accountability is [therefore] closely related to responsibility, transparency, answerability and responsiveness, and these terms are often used interchangeably’ (Oliver, 1991: 22)

The above quotes demonstrate that there are many beneficial characteristics of accountability. The argument developed in this chapter is that current forms of accountability conceal many of the dimensions listed above. Significantly all of the above criteria depend upon ‘trust’ and it is argued that the strict accounting regimes and systems currently in place have been employed because of a lack of trust in public services (Ranson, 2003).

Hierarchical accountability

In the context of publicly funded programmes the dominant form of accountability is hierarchical accountability (Roberts, 1996) or what Leat (1988) calls structural accountability. At a theoretical level, it can be understood in terms of a relationship involving the ‘giving and demanding of reasons for conduct’ (Robert and Scapens, 1985: 447), having responsibility for your actions, and the liability to be called to account and be answerable for those actions (Stewart, 1992). This understanding of accountability, ‘to be held to account’, locates accountability in the hierarchical practices of bureaucracy where data is presented for evaluation, usually involving an account of quantifiable performance (Ranson, 2003). For Leat (1988), accountability is an attempt to establish control at a distance, where ‘full accountability’ is accountability with sanctions, involving the right to require an account and the right to apply sanctions if the account provided is not adequate; for example, it may result in loss of funding.

This relationship is based on the assumption that one party has the responsibility to provide information about performance to another, identifying a 'principal' and an 'agent' in the relationship (Gray, Owen and Maunders, 1987: 2-3). This is a formal process involving a relationship of control and scrutiny (Roberts, 1996) and in this sense accountability reflects the inequality of the relationship; for example, the 'principal' is the one who holds to account the 'agent', who is accountable for their actions, what Ranson (2003) calls 'hierarchical answerability'. Although necessary in terms of public investment it is nevertheless an unequal relationship. Day and Klein (1987) assert that all accountability relationships involve power and authority. There are a number of relational classifications of public accountability, and although it is argued that accountability to whom is often covered in broad statements rather than being clearly defined, the dominant forms are those of political and organisational accountability.

Hierarchical accountability is understood as a 'top-down' conception with a vertical reporting line to the top of the hierarchy. Political accountability relies upon a pyramid image in which ministers are at the top of the pyramid with ultimate responsibility, and where those with delegated authority are answerable, for example, elected representatives to political parties, local government to local electorate. In this form, to gain an account of a public organisation it is possible to go to the top without looking into the intricacies of the organisation. However, in terms of public services vertical accountability is problematic because of multilateral accountable relations. Furthermore, the length of the lines to the top of the pyramid may mean vital information will be lost in this process. This form of accountability does not give any consideration to discretionary powers within an organisation. While accountability is linked to transparency, hierarchical processes work at a high level of aggregation and often conceal a great deal.

Within public services there is reliance upon organisational accountability based on a strong hierarchical relationship, also in a vertical line, to the top of the organisation. Whilst there may be a degree of autonomy there is also pressure to be accountable. In this sense, middle management are both 'accounter' and 'accountee'. 'Agents' are given responsibilities by 'principals' and their accounts ensure these obligations are delivered. Current understandings of accountability have a distinct relationship with

notions of blame and forms of accountability are often only tested when there is non-performance. The emphasis is on holding to account to optimise performance and measures of productivity (Ranson, 2003). The answer given, 'the account' is then evaluated (Ranson, 2003; Elliot, 2001; Dunsire, 1978).

Changes in understandings of accountability – the move to 'performance culture'

Public service reforms have changed some of the understandings of accountability, in what has been described as a shift from democratic government to managerialist governance (Salisbury, 2004). With relevance to this work, reforms began in the 1980s with the rejection of outmoded welfare structures, in the globalised economy, and the integration of social security with training and labour market policies. Clarke (2003) argues that until the 1980s the dominant organisational form of public service provision was professional bureaucracy and hierarchical administration of policies where there was space for professional autonomy in practice. This model of accountability, described above, is a vertical chain through the levels of bureaucracy to senior officials and upwards to politicians. This was supplemented by ethical codes of practice, and subject to audit, in its traditional accounting sense, to ensure financial scrutiny of public funds. It is argued that the reforms of public services led to decentralization, marketization and privatization where shifts occurred to hierarchical processes and led to more horizontal pressures for accountability (Clarke, 2003). This was coupled with mistrust of hierarchical processes and the introduction of market forces. The need for financial scrutiny was strengthened in the 1980s over concern with public spending and the drive towards 'business like' methods in public services (Clarke, 2003: 151).

Many authors align this change with the growth of New Public Management (NPM) and the commitment to performance management (Dean and Wood, 1999; Blackman and Palmer, 1999; Ranson, 2003; Schofield and Sausman, 2004). According to Blackman and Palmer (1999) NPM revolutionised the way in which public services were run, curtailing professional autonomy. This was replaced with the introduction of performance culture, with the targeting of specific groups and the focus on the user as customer. While Clarke (2003) emphasises a shift from hierarchical accountability Barrett (2004) argues that the dominance of managerial forms of accountability and 'new managerialism' have strengthened a 'top-down' approach.

NPM and the dominance of performance management

It is argued that the function of performance management has also changed. The main objective of performance management in the late 1980s and early 1990s was to identify how to increase efficiency and/or cut spending. This focused upon inputs and efficiency, within a discourse of reduced public budgets, and the need for less government (Bouckaert and van Dooren, 2003). In the mid to late 1990s, performance was a key component in the competitive economy and minimising the public sector was no longer targeted. In this context effectiveness and quality concerns became dominant, including the removal of Compulsory Competitive Tendering and the replacement with Best Value reviews, where quality was to be assessed (Bouckaert and van Dooren, 2003). However, the Conservative approach to social policy equated the profit motive with efficiency and quality (Blackman and Palmer, 1999). There was a preoccupation with a managerialist approach in Conservative education policy, which focused on measurable activities and hegemonic notions of success and public indicators, to the detriment of other benefits (Gerwitz, 1999). Barrett (2004) argues that financial stringency and economic efficiency have dominated since the early 1980s where performance comes to mean conformance with policy targets. Success and failure are judged on meeting preset targets for ensuring delivery of policy targets.

Certain features of accountability dominate within the context of NPM and accountability is often understood in relation to performance management. NPM is criticised for its focus on economic norms, performance and output control created by a tension of combining economic organisational theory and management theory. It is argued that economic theories are too simplistic for the public sector (Christensen and Laegrid, 2002). At an organisational level, NPM focuses on strengthening managerial accountability, which is described as a neutral, technical exercise, to ascertain whether what is being done is being done effectively and efficiently. Components of NPM include a focus on centralisation, explicit standards of performance and greater emphasis on output control which has led to ambiguities in the meaning of accountability.

Performance information

Performance information can be used to facilitate accountability, to hold people or organisations to account. NPM emphasises performance measurement as a management tool in government (Bouckaert and van Dooren, 2003). The current context dominated by performance management and measurement have been modelled on accountability within the private sector based on legal and fiduciary requirements. In this sense, accountability is based on output measures and performance metrics to demonstrate performance and efficiency. Jacobs and Manzi (2000) assert that performance indicators (PIs) have played a key role in the establishment of a culture of measurement in the public sector. Public services thus have to conform to this approach but it is argued that public services often have more demanding and complex accountability requirements. Carter, *et al.* (1992) identify the features of performance information below:

‘If there is a unifying theme to performance measurement, then it lies in the genuflection to the objectives of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness, and to the production of measures of input, output, and outcome’ (Carter *et al.*, 1992: 35)

It is worth briefly outlining the main indicators within performance management, which highlight their technical function and approach. Input indicators refer to resources committed specifically to a service, usually expressed in financial terms referring to cost of acquisition or use but may also be measured in other ‘physical’ units such as numbers of staff and staff time. Output indicators are the end product from the inputs, for example, the units of services delivered to users which may be measured in terms of capacity provided (e.g. facilities and places), and throughput, e.g., customers/clients using facilities or occupying places) (Sanderson, *et al.*, 1998).

The distinction should be made between outputs and outcomes and the key question is whether and what outcomes then result from the outputs. Outcomes are the effects produced by the organisations activities and can be intermediate or end outcomes. Intermediate outcomes are interim results which should reach an end outcome. It is argued that the causality of outputs to end outcomes can be difficult to establish because there may be considerable time lapse between the two. In the context of ‘Life

Skills' programmes a positive outcome is understood as a young person's entry into education, training or employment and performance is measured on this.

The approach, based on an input-output model through performance indicators, enable ratio indicators to be established. Ratio performance indicators include 'economy', the cost divided by input; 'productivity', the output divided by a specific input; 'efficiency', the ratio of output to input, commonly that of unit cost; 'effectiveness', the outcome divided by output, and 'cost-effectiveness', the ratio of cost to outcome.

Exploring what public services are accountable for relates to the substance of accountability and can be understood in relation to fiscal, process and programme forms of accountability (Day and Klein, 1987; Leat, 1988). It includes accountability for decision-making, performance and results, outcomes and value for money. Accounting for performance and the methods employed to give the account are of greatest relevance to this study. In the three current forms of accountability performance is measured through statistical and financial information, as described above, provided by one party to the other. A number of accountability tools are used for communicating or validating this information, including annual reports, audit and inspections.

Financial accountability is related to how money is spent. In this context, the function of accountability is to ensure that money has been spent in the way that is agreed and in line with whatever rules may apply and that there is value for money. Accountability, in this form, performs a regulatory role (Day and Klein, 1987; Leat, 1988; Hayes, 1996). Financial and performance information are used to judge progress on delivering strategy and outcomes. It is therefore an *ex post* indicator.

Current notions of process accountability are also located within hierarchical accountability and relate to an objective, mechanistic approach. Day and Klein explain that process accountability aims to ensure that 'a given course of action has been carried out, and that value for money has been achieved' (1987: 27). This form relies on statistical information as a means to ensure that correct procedures have been followed (Leat, 1988). This is a narrow conception of process different to the idea of process introduced later in the chapter. However, there is a consensus that NPM

changes the focus from process accountability towards accountability for results (Hood, 1995; Gendron, Cooper and Townley, 2000).

The notion of programme accountability, places emphasis upon the quality of work that an organisation undertakes, both generally and also at the level of individual programmes (Leat, 1988; Hayes, 1996). Day and Klein (1987) add the term 'effectiveness' to their definition of programme accountability, the purpose of which is 'making sure that a given course of action or investment of resources has achieved its intended result' (p. 27). Whilst this element seeks to address questions of quality it is still limited to understanding quality within a hierarchical framework where effectiveness will be judged on whether the intended result is reached. This result will be communicated through statistical and financial information and is only required at the end.

Bouckaert and van Dooren (2003), suggest that a performance measurement system which focuses on the input-output model should provide an organisation with sufficient information to plan, monitor and evaluate policy and management. However, performance measurement is only justified if it is followed by a performance management system, acting upon the performance information. Whilst performance information can be useful it may not provide enough information for effective performance management and it is argued that it should also be supplemented with qualitative models to provide in-depth information. There are problems with performance measurement when it is externally imposed as it creates pressures to reach indicators rather than necessarily provide quality. This may lead to clients who are more difficult to assist receiving less attention.

Performance management is considered 'hard' data, focusing on costs and efficiency, which can be at the expense of quality of service (evidenced by the CCT regime) and it is suggested that it be used in conjunction with quality management (Bouckaert and van Dooren, 2003). The dominant view in public services is that quality needs to be measured: 'if you can't measure it, you can't manage it'. Bovaird and Loffler (2003) argue that there is a danger that, in line with the number of auditors and inspectors, reliance upon measurement may create a new bureaucracy without improving the quality of services. It must be acknowledged that not all aspects of quality can be

measured. While 'ready-off-the-peg' quality assessment systems, such as Citizens Charters, are popular in public services (p. 141) it is crucial to remember that the essence of quality lies behind what can be described or measured, and room should be provided for subjective assessment and judgement (p. 147). It is important to combine quantitative and qualitative indicators to find out about the objective and subjective aspects of quality.

The 'modernisation' agenda of New Labour, set out to modernise public services without increasing taxation (Benington and Donnison, 1999), is seen as a continuation of Conservative policies (Blackman and Palmer, 1999). The commitment to performance management is overarching, focusing on objectives and efficiency targets, although the ideological difference should be noted. New Labour's approach to social policy claims to be rational, focusing on performance against explicit targets (Blackman and Palmer, 1999). The context of NPM and New Labour's emphasis on 'joined-up' government, creates different understandings of what public services are accountable for and to whom. The focus on partnership working and increase in contractual relations creates new challenges and tensions for services in the health and social care field working, both in competition and together, to meet targets set out in contracts, identified as 'contract accountability' (Mulgan, 2000). However, contract accountability is still identified as a form of hierarchical accountability. A difference is that the lines of accountability can be understood as horizontal, involving a number of services, rather than directly vertical, but the government are still at the top of the hierarchy and services are accountable to them, having to meet measurable targets set (Salisbury, 2004).

However, in this context public services can also be understood to have multiple accountable relationships including, to local people, to government, to users, to stakeholders, to staff and to partner agencies. These multiple relations may conflict with one another and can create confusion over how accountability is exercised at the local level. It is also argued that current forms of accountability are inappropriate for service delivery in health and education. Professional autonomy, tacit knowledge and measurement of the effectiveness of professional practice (Stenson and Factor, 1995) cannot be set out in contracts or PIs. Salisbury (2004) reports professionals (in the context of New Deal for Young People) juggling the pressures of accountability,

namely meeting performance targets, with professional and personal values. Gerwitz (1999) discusses how Education Action Zone (EAZ) policy illustrates a number of managerialising elements including the use of a contract model of tendering, promotion of performance monitoring, target-setting and action planning, making it possible for the government to ensure that government set goals for education are being implemented (p. 144). There is concern that the managerial emphasis on outputs and outcomes may lead to selectivity or those less likely to achieve targets receiving less support because of the pressure on teachers (Gerwitz, 1999), highlighted with Youth Training and Output-Related Funding. A critical tension exists between emphasis on the innovative development of programmes and marketisation and managerialism, based on centrally-imposed PIs. Practice becomes governed by trying to conform to the technical and instrumental which leaves little discretion for creativity and 'innovative pedagogical practice' or value added activity (Gerwitz, 1999: 156).

Current forms of accountability for 'Life Skills' programmes

This section explains the way in which 'Life Skills' programmes are formally required to account for their performance. Current forms of accountability, outlined above, present problems for understanding the performance of complex provision and current measures of performance communicate little of the work undertaken. The performance of 'Life Skills' programmes are measured through the performance indicator of 'successful transition' into education, employment or training, described as a 'positive outcome'. It is important in the case of training programmes, where a significant amount of public money is being invested, to ensure that value for money is being provided (Hodkinson and Bloomer, 2001) and it is recognised that there needs to be a way in which to communicate whether intended outcomes are being met.

However, social policy commentators have been critical of the way the government has 'enthusiastically embraced the current mania for target setting, testing and performance indicators' (Lloyd and Payne, 2003: 97) where they adopt an 'audit approach' to education and training which rewards retention rates and penalises failure (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001: 347). It is argued that education and training

policies function in a 'marketised' system, of imposed league tables and inspections, target setting and performance monitoring (Gerwitz, 1999). Importantly, it is suggested that the pressure to meet targets, and fear of sanctions, may lead to a fabrication of performance (Ranson, 2003) or the most employable being favoured. There are also tensions, within the pressures of the audit culture in the post-16 sector, between prescription and tailored support. Salisbury (2004) provides an interesting example of these tensions in relation to NDYP where professionals and young people struggled with their position as 'claimant' or 'learner'.

The 'Life Skills' programmes are governed by 'top-down', hierarchical accountability. The line of accountability starts at the highest level with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) politically accountable for the performance of programmes. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) are responsible to the DfES for contracting the delivery of the 'Life Skills' option of the Learning Gateway. This is devolved to Local Learning and Skills Council's (LLSC) who contract with training providers for the delivery of 'Life Skills' in different areas of the country. Connexions are responsible for the delivery of the 'front end' of the Learning Gateway and their responsibilities to the LLSC's are set out in a Service Level Agreement. Keep (2002) argues that the LSC is driven by both self-imposed and external targets, including the responsibility for the National Learning Targets, which he argues have historically been unachievable. The overarching target of all provision of education and training is the government's target of 50% of 18-30 year-olds, participating in some form of further education (p. 50).

Moving down the line of the hierarchical structure the accountability relations are then based on organisational accountability. As this work is interested in the 'micro' level of accountability this would be within training provider organisations and involve Life Skills trainers and support staff being accountable to Life Skills coordinators and team leaders, who share responsibility for the management and supervision of trainers and support staff, and so onwards up the line of management. As the vertical line makes its way upwards aggregation necessarily becomes a feature of reporting performance. In this hierarchical sense, programme workers and young people are at the bottom end of the ladder of accountability (Stewart, 1992). Does anyone, apart from the workers, really feel accountable to the young people? This

work aims to show how the focus on metrics, namely the one main quantitative outcome, and high levels of aggregation do little to communicate the performance of the programmes. Furthermore, the upward reporting mechanisms do not consider those at the bottom who are supposed to be beneficiaries of the programmes. There is no consideration of any accountability on the part of the young people, they are seen as 'passive recipients' of the programmes. A further aspect of accountability in programmes is that of administrative accountability. This involves the audit and inspections of programmes by Ofsted and the Adult Learning Inspectorate.

Criticisms of current forms of accountability

There are issues with the form accountability takes and with what it prioritises. Accountability mechanisms employed to provide scrutiny of public investment can sometimes be seen to confuse rather than clarify, to make opaque rather than inform. Criticisms of current articulations of accountability argue that it is often retrospective, *ex post*, and provides highly aggregated and mainly quantifiable accounts of an organisation (Funnel, 1998; Power, 1994, 1996, 1999), which tend to limit the potential for accountability to inform practice. The *ex post* indicator of performance focuses upon end product. This is regarded as a significant limitation because accountability, as a potentially important element of learning, is diminished and often lost. It is based on an assumption that performance can be reported on, compared and managed through targets and indicators. According to Ranson (2003) the regime of target setting answerability has been damaging to public services, distorting professional purpose through centralised bureaucratic control. Suggestions that accountability should be about an agreed language of conduct or performance, and the criteria to assess them, (Day and Klein, 1987; Ranson, 2003) does not appear to be the case. But as Barrett (2004) states it is difficult to challenge new forms of governance 'without appearing to be "against" improving performance and effectiveness' (p. 259). Even when a critical stance is taken in accountability debates, literature focuses upon public managers and officials, rather than those at the 'bottom-end', which in many ways reinforces the hierarchical notion.

Audit culture

Power critically discusses the preoccupation with financial accountability and what he terms the audit culture (1994, 1996, 1999). Clarke (2003) argues that reforms of public services have driven new forms of scrutiny, particularly audit and inspection, in an attempt to manage new organisational forms and relationships and, in this process, have disrupted systems of accountability. For Power, there are problems with the current understandings of audit and the way it is interpreted and discharged. He argues that, instead of providing greater accountability and efficiency, what audits may actually be providing is problems and mistrust. One reason for this is audits generally do not measure the quality of performance. Rather, they set out to examine the systems that have been put in place in order to measure the quality, described as the 'control of control' (Power, 1994: 19):

'In such a context accountability is discharged by demonstrating the existence of such systems of control, not by demonstrating good teaching, caring, manufacturing or banking' (Power, 1994: 19).

There are issues to be explored about the relationship between accountability, in whatever form it may take, and quality and performance. Audit relies upon statistical and financial information, far removed from the origins of the concept which is based upon the Latin (*audire*) to hear and listen. In his 1996 article, Power maintains that 'making things auditable is also making things measurable' (p. 299). The preoccupation with 'making things measurable' also dominates forms of evaluation and current critical arguments around evaluation in public services (Craig, 2002). Audit practices have expanded from the traditional accounting sense and now provide a range of evaluative functions, linking it to value for money and best practice (Clarke, 2003). This evaluation of performance also focuses upon the production of comparative information, for example league tables in schools, to judge an organisation's success in meeting desired results. The systems of evaluation distort organisational performance by focusing upon what is measurable (Clarke, 2003). However, it is argued that audit can in some cases be beneficial to provide external verification and a lever for change if assessments are weak.

Audit does not fit with the 'top-down', principle-agent relationship in hierarchical accountability and has been called diagonal accountability (Mulgan, 2000). This

creates problems according to Clarke (2003). Although public services are often multiple stakeholder and multiple objective organisations, the audit process focuses upon a limited number of objectives, those most highly valued by central government. The increase of emphasis on outputs and outcomes as well as accounting for inputs has been framed by discourses about accountability and transparency. For Clarke (2003) this poses a number of questions including to what extent can an organisations objectives be clearly and simply specified? To what extent is the performance of an organisation measurable? For example, do exam results measure school success? To what extent is organisational performance a closed system where outcomes can only be attributable to the organisational activity? What unmeasured or unmeasurable factors within and outside of the organisation make a difference to performance? Can auditors and inspectors know the best way in which to judge an organisation's performance, bearing in mind, organisational and local knowledge (Clarke, 2003: 155)? As Clarke (2003) clearly points out in his questions above, the evaluative processes require an organisation that produces auditable information (p. 156). However, Clarke (2003) argues that these criticisms are not taken on board, as audits are still the favoured tool of central government. Instead, the criticisms are construed as defensiveness over being accountable and transparent. Ironically, it is argued that only way in which the current dominance of measurable information can change is if relationships of trust between the public, public services and the government can be reconstructed. Clarke (2003) describes audits as a form of 'control at a distance' over public services, leading to a tension between centralist control and aspects of new governance espousing innovative, participatory and local forms of governance for services (p. 157).

As audits represent a 'very particular conception of accountability' (Power, 1994: 8), Power argues for other ways to achieve accountability. However, because of the predominance of audit, other forms of non-quantified measures have had difficulty in gaining credence. Power calls for a compromise between the two positions with a shift from current audit processes to 'local, high trust, qualitative, enabling, real time forms of dialogue with peers' (1994: 49). He also stresses the need for stakeholder involvement in processes of measurement and accountability as audit shifts power away from such stakeholders to the hands of people who are detached from the situation or organisation undergoing scrutiny:

‘Audit is linked to ideals of organisational transparency and accountability. Yet audits are themselves often very specialised and opaque to a wider public. Audits may provide comfort to stakeholders who are remote from day to day practices but, in doing so, they often deter substantive inquiry which would empower stakeholders’ (Power, 1994: 48).

In discussing Power’s work, in relation to policy implementation studies, Schofield and Sausman highlight how he links audit, governance and NPM within a framework of control comparable to that of corporate governance. Schofield and Sausman (2004) are concerned that, within this context, policy may be implemented only for ‘compliance with prescribed audit tools, rather than for the solution of the policy problem’ (p. 245) and as a consequence:

‘What happens then is a form of regulatory capture, thus ‘what counts becomes what matters’, rather than ‘what matter counts’. The accountability system that follows from this is one that is more likely to measure output rather than outcome’ (Schofield and Sausman, 2004: 245)

They go on to say:

‘Another challenge for policy implementation under these conditions is the possibility of actually losing knowledge and accepting a sub-optimising solution to the policy problem simply because the need to comply with what can be measured...it concerns something that is at the very heart of policy implementation and that is the difference between policy intention and reality. The reality of policy initiatives is experienced by the front-line professionals and public servants who do not generally make up the policy elite. If the elite system has no feedback mechanism by which to monitor and access the policy reality, the whole area of knowledge capture based on experience is lost’ (Schofield and Sausman, 2004: 245)

Others have argued that current forms of accountability can only possibly provide a part of the whole picture in relation to organisations (Gray, 1984; Jones and Pendlebury, 1985; Randall, 1989; Hayes, 1996). Although an organisation may account for all the money spent, this does not communicate what may have been achieved and quality and impact are not considered. Accountability should be expanded beyond the financial and measurable as this reveals little about effectiveness and efficiency. Humphrey and Scapens (1996) take the view that accounting practice needs to be viewed within the wider political, social and economic context of society. Lovell (1995) also argues that accounting practice

cannot be insular and singled out from the wider context as it is not only shaped by this but also sustains developments in society.

Criticisms of accountability in provision for young people

While the defining quantifiable outcome of programmes is important to all parties it is too simplistic, and the restrictive accountability mechanisms and confines of a target driven approach distort performance. Although many criticisms of targets, performance indicators and accountability are based within a formal educational context the criticisms levelled can be applied within the context of training programmes. In the context of further education, Hodkinson and Bloomer (2001) argue that the increased emphasis upon accountability and value for money could make it difficult for further education colleges to offer opportunities to young people with educational or personal difficulties. This increasing focus upon outcomes could have a further marginalising effect for some young people:

‘Education and training providers, whose performance and funding levels, are often determined by outputs, have had little incentive to take on those with lower chances of success’ (Bentley and Gurusurthy, 1999: 51).

The ‘Bridging the Gap’ report (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999), although received with mixed responses, was commended for identifying problems with the narrow nature of the National Curriculum and the way in which league tables in schools create pressures to exclude pupils who may lower their ranking. However, talking about success and failure in schools three years later Milbourne states:

‘Success and failure...are expressed through values embedded in the discourses of the market and performativity, while, for example, the value of interesting a reluctant child in learning is not publicly rated for success...The result may be that a school may not deal adequately with its low attainers who get insufficient attention and may be excluded if they become disruptive’ (Milbourne, 2002: 330)

This raises important questions in relation to policy objectives:

The dominant relations of accountability are not value-neutral but reveal codes that shape the public sphere. This impacts on what is measured and it is important to consider who chooses this. Any framework of accountability reveals the polity it expresses (Ranson, 2003: 467).

There are not only problems with the way in which the current mechanisms focus upon the indicator of successful outcomes but with the way 'success' is externally defined. It has been suggested that there is a need to critically explore both the notion of 'successful' outcomes (Williams, 2002) and socially constructed indicators of failure (Mann, 1994). O'Connor, *et al.* (1999) note individual differences play a large part in 'successful' outcomes. Furthermore, conventional notions of achievement, success and participation may not be adequate measures for some young people (Pearce and Hillman, 1998). Attwood, *et al.* (2003) found that young people were considered as success stories because they had not dropped out of their pre-16 programme. Ranson (2003) argues that in formal education relying on a limited set of performance measures and outcomes, namely exam results, inadequately represents the comprehensive values and purposes of education. He argues that it is about performance marketability and meeting the government agenda rather than developing citizens (p. 467). Ranson goes on to argue that this focus has had the unintended consequence of further eroding trust because:

'...it has embodied flawed criteria of evaluation and relations of accountability. The dominant mode of answerability cannot deliver achievement because it defines a mistaken criteria for evaluating performance, emphasizing the external imposition of targets and quantifiable outcomes as the means of improvement' (Ranson, 2003: 470).

Furthermore, this is done at the expense of what is encouraged in education, of pupils to learn and develop. He sees this as in opposition to the pedagogy of insider knowledge where learners can recognise their capability (Ranson, 2003). Colley and Hodkinson (2001) state that the 'Bridging the Gap' report (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999) identify external causes of non-participation and social exclusion as statements about the failure of professionals and educational and social institutions. However, they argue that this should be treated with caution as the report does not consider the policy driven pressures that have led institutions to fail some young people. This includes the increasing need of education providers to secure funding and produce qualification outcomes to ensure that they retain funding (Hodkinson and Bloomer, 2001).

The impact of policy driven pressures can result in criticisms of government funded initiatives where the main endeavour is to 'simply' meet the output measures set for them (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001). This can lead to criticisms of initiatives, if an uncritical view of accountability processes is taken, where targets and performance indicators are understood as measures of quality and performance. The increased focus on reaching such targets may create a climate of blame, resulting in scapegoating the supposed beneficiaries as well as practitioners and services implementing policies (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001). This approach has further implications for practice as it is argued that attempts are made to:

'...address deep-seated structural problems through a strongly individualistic agency approach, while individually focused agency-enhancing activity is approached through a prescriptive framework. We help those at risk to help themselves...but only in ways that we have predetermined in advance and within an unrealistically short time-scale that we have imposed...many of their current approaches make it harder to help many of those in need. Those working with the socially excluded, however defined, are having to devote much of their attention not upon the actual needs and priorities of their clients, but upon increasingly punitive government targets that derive from the flawed analysis of the problem described above. In other words, successful agency-focused interventions are being undermined' (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001: 354-355)

In relation to education, Hodkinson and Bloomer argue that when using the intended, end result as the indicator of quality, the following considerations should be taken into account:

'In this world of accountability, one concept of educational progress is reified, almost deified, as being superior to all others, to the extent that it is frequently deemed to be the only permissible model. The assumption is that students sign up for a course with clear, predetermined objectives, and that success can be measured by the extent to which these objectives are met. Furthermore, the objectives are closely prescribed: they must include course completion and qualification attainment. Where these are not met, it is assumed that either there was inadequate guidance, selection and induction – the student should never have been on the course in the first place – and/or s/he was poorly taught and supported while on the course. In either case, failure to complete is taken as an unproblematic measure of inadequacy in course provision' (Hodkinson and Bloomer, 2001: 118).

In areas such as education, training and also youth work there are tensions between accountability, underpinned by a commitment to improve public services, and the governments' reliance on accountability through a managerialist regime of target

setting (Hodkinson and Bloomer, 2001; Attwood, *et al.*, 2004; Ord, 2004, 2005). Attwood, *et al.* (2004) consider the demands this creates for both further education and provision for young people outside of mainstream education. They argue that there are further tensions in the latter setting between meeting performance targets and measuring outcomes as these demands are at odds with working with young people with poor histories of attending and attaining. While criticisms have been levelled at the demands of accountability the debates often do not go further to discuss a more appropriate way of dealing with these tensions. Attwood, *et al.* (2004) begin to highlight the need for alternative outcome measures for students attending an early leavers course:

‘This inevitably raises questions of what are appropriate outcome measures for this student group and how measures of performance can take account of the challenges they present. Tutors and managers at the college were highly aware of the potentially contradictory pressures of inclusion and accountability and performance...Tutors also wanted to emphasise that for some students something other than conventional course completion could be regarded as a success and pointed to the many factors that influenced completion or non-completion which were not in the control of the college...provision for challenging young people makes it particularly appropriate to recognise the range and complexity of outcomes which can be regarded as successful and to contextualise indicators in terms of the challenges some young people present’ (Attwood, *et al.*, 2004: 115-6)

Accountability is usually only required as an *ex post* indicator of what has happened to a person once they have finished on the programme. This indicator of success links to the governments overarching concern with the employability of young people on leaving the programme. However, this focus on outcomes is at odds with ideas of accountability linking to transparency as focus is simply on the end product rather than the ‘process’ involved to reach that point.

Accounting for the process

Process is an accepted educational principle of youth work (Jeffs and Smith, 1996; Young, 1999) but Ord (2004) argues that while the government are recognising the role and benefits of youth work they are: ‘denying the main tool utilised for that benefit – the youth work ‘process’’ (p. 57). For Ord (2004, 2005) the problem is not with increased accountability within youth work, but with the form it currently takes, with emphasis on progression of inputs through to outputs, which is removed from the

work and not related to practice. Spence (2004) is critical of the climate of tight control of policy objectives for failing to acknowledge process as a central premise. She argues that the policy framework credits what it sees as the main achievement, entry to education, employment or training, and, while this is not counter to what young people and workers want, it misses crucial aspects of practice which are the foundations of achieving the main aim. These are relational and not instrumental outcomes (Spence, 2004). This in many ways is the very crux of this argument. No one would dispute the main aims of programmes, however, the contention lies in only focusing upon this in measuring their performance. Again, the debate returns to the concept of trust, Spence (2004) argues that to agree that relationships in youth work cannot be objectively evaluated necessitates trust. However, she believes policy is in fact moving in the opposite direction, leading to the current position where workers must comply with inappropriate evaluation regimes, based on outcomes that do not refer to process. Furthermore, the current accounting mechanisms add nothing to understanding long term impact (Spence, 2004). Performance can become conformance at the expense of broader goals (Barrett, 2004).

The focus on targets and pre-determined outcomes in youth work, before engagement with young people, is according to Ord (2005) 'putting the cart before the horse' (p. 2). One of the principles of youth work is the understanding that youth workers need to establish relationships with young people to engage them in the process of youth work before considering outcomes. This is a slightly different argument to that of the training programmes as another guiding principle of youth work is voluntary participation. However, it seems that this field is currently grappling with problems around accountability:

'if youth work is to be brought to account this should be on the basis of what youth work is, what youth work 'is' should not be changed to fit into a system or method of accountability!' (Ord, 2004: 57)

Previous commissioned research into the 'Learning Gateway' identified that:

'In terms of performance measures, the nature of the client group and the requirements for the Learning Gateway to be tailored to specific needs means that it is impossible to make any direct links between resource inputs, outputs and outcomes achieved' (Breen, 2000: 3).

However, this does not seem to have been acknowledged as performance indicators continued to place emphasis on the outcomes. Another study into the 'Learning Gateway' identified that members of staff felt the 'goal posts' had moved, in that increased emphasis had been placed on the attainment of NVQ Level 2 on programme exit, rather than the wider inclusion goals, highlighted in the original specification. They stressed that indicators other than qualification outcomes were necessary to demonstrate the full value of the programme (Bysshe and Hughes, 2002: 7).

Again, this has not altered the performance measures. Research has also highlighted that the less tangible progression made by young people on training programmes can be significant. For example, young people identified outcomes as being enhanced self-confidence; improved communication and social skills; increased motivation to organise their lives more productively and raised aspirations (Sims, *et al.*, 2001). However, this previous research does not suggest that the above outcomes may be at odds with the externally defined outcomes but outlines recommendations to find way in which to 'measure' these aspects.

The current focus to achieve this is upon the concepts of 'distance travelled' (Bentley and Gurumurthy, 1999) and 'soft outcomes' (Dewson, *et al.*, 2000). 'Soft outcomes' have been defined as 'outcomes from training, support or guidance interventions, which unlike hard outcomes, such as qualifications and jobs, cannot be measured directly or tangibly' (Dewson, *et al.*, 2000: 2). They are identified as including achievements related to interpersonal skills, organisational skills, analytical skills and personal skills. They are described as personal outcomes, often depending on the needs of the individual and intermediate as they measure progress towards hard outcomes such as employment and qualifications (Sims, *et al.*, 2001), rather than being significant in their own right. 'Distance travelled' refers to the progress that a young person makes towards employability, or harder outcomes, as a result of project intervention. It is acknowledged that in considering measuring 'distance travelled', it is necessary to contextualise beneficiaries' achievements (Dewson, *et al.*, 2000).

While attempting to measure, record or document the progression of young people and the performance of the programmes these concepts rely upon statistical and quantifiable measures, including attitudinal scales and scoring systems, based on a

positivist rather than a process-based approach. In the development of the above measures consideration will need to be given to the individual young person and the variety within the group of young people. While there is recognition in the above definitions of the personal nature of the outcomes they are still viewed in relation to hard outcomes and as intermediate in the progression to education, employment or training. Moreover, the term 'soft outcomes' has connotations of being less difficult to achieve. Relevant literature about 'distance travelled' advocates the necessity to establish a baseline in the assessment, however due to the individual needs that programmes seek to address this would not be easily achieved. While the development of this concept is an attempt to document the journey of a young person the main focus remains on the end result of employment:

'While it is important to acknowledge that the programme is designed to "re-engage" and "re-motivate"...it should be realised that this is a means to prepare them, ultimately, for the labour market. Consequently, the success of the programme will ultimately be judged by the number of 'successful outcomes' (Young, 2000: 19).

'...despite acknowledging the value of 'soft' outcomes (such as increased self-confidence), policy-makers continue to insist on 'hard' outcomes of progression into formal education, training and employment as the main requirement for funding...the achievement of such prescribed outcomes increasingly requires the prescription of practice...there is no room for emergent novelty or unpredictable outcomes in this approach, despite substantial evidence that young people's careers can be highly idiosyncratic and serendipitous (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997), that crises in their transitions are sometimes precipitated by unpredictable events such as serious accidents, illnesses and bereavement' (Colley, 2003: 84)

Rowe criticises current models of accountability for failing to understand 'the complex patterns of outcomes that emerge from services' and having 'little regard to their outcome and impact upon individuals or communities' (Rowe, 1999: 94). Therefore, he argues for 'the need to reconsider the meaning we attach to the concept of accountability' (Rowe, 1999: 91). The final section in this chapter explores ideas of an alternative approach to accountability in public services.

Developing an alternative conception of accountability

Criticisms of current forms of accountability have been discussed, particularly highlighting the current approaches focus on targets and performance indicators, as providing aggregated and *ex post* accounts which fail to communicate the performance or quality of public services. They also deny the agency of the people involved as the focus is on measurement rather than understanding (Ranson, 2003). This has implications for policy and the assumptions that underpin policy. This section draws on literature from critical accounting, evaluation and social policy criticisms to explore ways in which an alternative approach to accountability and evaluation could address some of the above criticisms and complement the current approach, emphasising understanding rather than measurement. I agree with Ranson (2003) who claims the positive potential of reflexive accountability has been neglected in much contemporary theorizing of accountability.

Within the critical accounting discipline, an alternative approach to addressing issues of accountability has developed, particularly the socialising potential of more inclusive forms of accountability (Roberts, 1991, 1996; Willmott, 1996; Rowe, 1999). The issue of identity within concepts of accountability has been identified as an important element in any critical understanding of accountability (Roberts, 1996; Willmott, 1996). However, a particular criticism of current articulations of accountability is the loss of identity of those on whose behalf the public investment is ostensibly made. The accountability mechanisms in place and measures of performance reinforce the invisibility of the individual. Furthermore, the aggregation of people into categories (Funnel, 1998) may lead to a reductionist programme which risks failing to respond to the individual. Hierarchical accountability processes which rely on aggregation tend to suffocate stories and, although the concept is linked to the ideal of transparency, identity is not exposed; it is submerged in processes of aggregation. The problems that are to be addressed, like social exclusion, are dismissed in the process of giving accounts.

Roberts (1991) contrasts hierarchical forms of accountability to socialising forms, where emphasis is placed on the wider context as a means to understand actions. The

development of a more inclusive form of accountability can assist in communicating an insight into impact, choice and actions, from perspectives not always sought, to advance levels of understanding about the programmes. Ranson (2003) discusses a 'narrative of communicative action', where the language of purpose and achievement of public services should reflect a social and political process. This should concern the 'internal goods of improvement and motivation...rather than the external imposition of quantifiable targets' (p.476).

Socialising forms of accountability draw upon sociological views of identity (Garfinkel, 1967; Shotter, 1984) and discourses of presenting accounts. This could be understood as a dynamic way of viewing accountability and takes a broader framework of how accounts are used. The accounts that people provide represent the ways in which they organise their views of themselves, others and their social world and enables an understanding of how they explain their reality (Shotter, 1984; Orbuch, 1997). Roberts (1996) argues that accountability plays a key role in making the self visible, both to the self and to others, as the self is only discovered in the process of being called to account by others. Socialising forms of accountability relate to the interdependence of the self and others and identity is rooted in the networks of the informal:

'In this way being held to account by others can be seen to constitute the self since we come to recognise ourselves precisely in the ways in which we are made visible to others. The form of accountability, the way in which it is practiced, thereby becomes key in shaping an individual's sense of self and sense of relatedness to others' (Roberts, 1996: 45).

However, Roberts (1991) in an earlier piece, suggests reluctantly that socialising forms of accountability will always be limited to local contexts where there is an absence of power and possibility of face-to-face interaction. Importantly, hierarchical and socialising forms are interdependent and current forms of organisational accountability 'embody a split that falsely seeks to separate these dimensions' (p. 367) to the detriment of ethical and strategic concerns. According to Roberts (1991) 'the search for the possibilities of accountability should be concerned with the reconciliation of this destructive and untenable divide' (p. 367). I agree that there is little point in only criticising current forms and the need to move towards a way where

the two can complement each other, even if socialising forms are restricted to a local level. The key factor is that conditions for trust must be established.

This view of accountability has similarities to the way in which identity is constructed in social identity theory (Mead, 1967; Jenkins, 1996) which also stresses the importance of social context. Munro (1996) describes this process as 'identity work' where a self portrait can be built through giving and receiving accounts. In this context, accountability is 'a form of dialogue, of presenting oneself to others, and at the same time of understanding the world' (Rowe, 2001: 39-40). By involving service users in the process and dialogue of accountability, it is possible to develop an understanding of what shapes that persons' sense of identity (Roberts, 1996; Willmott, 1996). This form of accountability can also reflect the complexity of the service being delivered and the recipients of the service (Rowe, 2001). Socialising forms of accountability move beyond the restrictive confines of hierarchical accountability to uncover the complex patterns that can lie behind outcomes which emerge through the course of the programmes. Taking this view of accountability represents a shift from viewing the organisation as a totality to understanding the organisation as constructed of individuals and based upon their interactions with others.

Furthermore, by placing emphasis upon the interdependence of the self and others and, through the gathering of accounts from a range of perspectives, an organisation can learn about itself and the work it does to advance levels of understanding of the programme (Willmott, 1996; Rowe, 1999). Rowe (1999) argues that 'public services may only be understood through the accounts of users and their experience of those services' (Rowe, 1999: 101):

'Bringing the accounts of citizens back in to our understanding of services will allow the presentation of accounts that reflect a reality at odds with accounts generated by organisations alone.' (Rowe, 1999: 101)

Developing an alternative conception of accountability could address criticisms of current approaches, which rely on statistical outputs and outcomes, and challenge current measures of success and failure (Rowe, 2001). In the context of educational provision, Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000a, b) and Hodkinson and Bloomer (2001)

attempt to locate learning within the broader social, political and economic contexts where the focus is on the person and not on the course. They present cases of young people who have dropped out for a variety of reasons highlighting the problem of using retention rates as a measure of institutional success. They show that factors that influence a person's decision may lie outside the realm of their educational experience and beyond the control of the institution and that unplanned events may also be the significant factors in decision-making. For one participant in their study, the fact that she was living independently since the middle of her final year at school and had responsibilities 'had proved the most significant learning experience of all' (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000a: 592). They criticise the arbitrariness of course completion as a measure of success as their data illustrates that many factors are not taken into account within the measures of success, including the complex array of factors that many of the young people face. They point to evidence of the influence that structural factors, noting particularly social class, gender and ethnicity, play in the cases of the young people. However, they also argue that structural factors alone could not satisfactorily explain why specific young people dropped out while others did not. It is also necessary to consider the role of the individual's beliefs, attitudes, experiences and other significant related factors. They conclude that the discourse and surrounding assumptions:

'...deflects attention from the well-documented deeper problems of social inequality and disadvantage that are linked to class, gender, ethnicity and poverty, and which cannot be corrected through the inflation of retention and completion rates alone. Like the rest of the audit culture, current policy discourse trivializes or renders invisible deep structural problems, making them much more difficult to address' (Hodkinson and Bloomer, 2001: 138)

As has already been discussed it is not possible or desirable to explore young people's experiences of education without locating them within the wider context of their lives. In the context of programme evaluation, Kushner (2000, 2002) discusses an approach where programmes are evaluated and understood within the wider context of people's lives:

'...in treating the program as the primary source of data (rather than, for example, a life) we are dealing with the surrogate, and that what we need to do to properly understand programs is to forget about them for a while and be stimulated, instead, by the lives of program participants –not as role-

incumbents (that is, as defined by the program), but as people and citizens' (Kushner, 2000: 36).

Kushner, in moving away from an 'input to output' approach to evaluation discusses the development of bespoke evaluation strategies which:

'...pulled back from the emphasis on outcomes and from attempting to explain causality, each was designed to open up the black box and to confront its complexity – in relation to, respectively, programme experience, process, politics and multiple aims' (Kushner, 2002: 2).

In this process focused approach to evaluation, the 'black box', which could be understood as the multi-faceted complexities which make up 'process', is opened up and emphasises understanding instead of measurement as the key (Kushner, 2002: 2):

'The intention is to invert the relationship between programme and person in such a way as to capture a more authentic view of the significance of a programme and its impact...Conventionally we portray programmes as context and locate people within them...we lose any sense of scale in attributing significance to a programme. In fact, we are vulnerable to over-emphasising significance through a relentless focus on programme – to the point, often, where we create the impression that a programme may be the most significant event in certain people's lives...the person or event being observed may be more meaningfully located elsewhere...' (Kushner, 2002: 5-6)

This approach could be particularly useful when exploring issues of attribution within training programmes. It allows for consideration of the programme and the impact it may have but this has to be understood within the wider context of people's lives. However, Kushner states that process-focused approaches remain fragile in relation to comparative models of evaluation. Evaluation literature discusses many of these issues in relation to measuring performance (Sanderson, *et al.*, 1998; Craig, 2002). Accountability is closely linked to evaluation in terms of understanding performance although the answer may not be representative of the work:

'The relations and purposes of accountability are inescapably evaluative, but the criteria and judgements vary according to the mode adopted, whether of hierarchical answerability or communicative reason' (Ranson, 2003: 461)

One purpose of evaluation is generally noted as to meet accountability requirements (Craig, 2002). In fact, one of the main reasons why evaluation is understood as important is to provide a basis for accountability by demonstrating how well public services are performing, as well as providing the basis for improvement and decision making (Sanderson, *et al.* 1998). Evaluation is also often understood as being imposed by government in order to secure control and accountability. However, while accountability and evaluation are mutually reinforcing they also have separate functions. Approaches to evaluation will be discussed in the following chapter.

Other forms of accountability have been suggested, each requiring different data and also different expectations. Zadek (1998) introduces the notion of social accountability, which although is recognised as complex to establish in practice, would enable services to respond upwards to funders and downwards to multiple stakeholders. Discussions on alternative forms of accountability often still focus upon those higher up within organisations, such as public managers and their accountable relationships. While this is obviously important it fails to consider the many other stakeholders in public services. The notion of professional accountability, between programme workers as peers, is an important aspect of accountability in practice (Mulgan, 2000). This could be extended to reciprocal accountability involving staff to gain their perspectives to inform decision-making and also young people. Whilst Mulgan (2000) notes these other forms of accountability he argues that they move beyond the true meaning of accountability. However, in understanding accountability as an important aspect of learning the above forms might be part of practice rather than an external feature or formal process.

The approaches discussed so far place greater emphasis on the understanding of process and also exploring the significance of programmes within the wider context of people's lives. Stacey (2001) discusses the way in which a socialising, inclusive form of accountability has been developed in practice, between young people and youth workers, and can become part of the way in which an organisation develops through the introduction of a two-way accountability, called Youth Partnership Accountability (YPA). This approach:

‘...reflects upon the accountability of adult workers to young people in the process of partnership work...YPA is concerned with the lived experience of agency for both young people and adult workers’. (Stacey, 2001: 209).

The focus upon the ‘lived experience of agency’ for the young people and workers is significant as these are the two groups who are often silenced through accountability processes. Following along the lines of ‘structured individualisation’ (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997) this work begins from the premise that young people are active agents who make decisions about their lives and futures, but this is done within their specific structural context. The basis for Stacey’s research was a mix of grounded theory and action research involving young people and people who work with young people. The idea is based on issues of power and accountability to ensure that work with young people develops positive outcomes concentrating on the organisation’s accountability to the young people through partnership working. This approach believes in advocating the views of the stakeholders:

‘Partnership accountability is a term that has been increasingly used to describe relationships between dominating and dominated groups in society that are based on principles of mutual respect, accountability of the dominating group to the dominated group, elevation of the dominated group’s voice, restorative action by the dominating group and empowerment of the dominated group to take action on their own behalf that makes a constructive difference to their lives.’ (Stacey, 2001: 211-212)

This seems to be a case of redressing the balance with current forms of hierarchical accountability. In pursuing this line of thought in relation to young people, the approach emphasises the notion of the agency of young people in making their identities visible, but always contextually. The approach adopts the stance that young people can explain their experiences themselves and that this can go some way to enabling a fuller picture of young people’s lives through assisting them in ‘becoming authors over their own lives’ (Stacey, 2001: 220):

‘Partnership accountability concepts have been articulated by people who have sought to overcome negative socially constructed realities of life’ (Stacey, 2001: 216).

This is then incorporated into working in partnership, with the young people fully participating, and having an influence over decisions that affect their lives. The

involvement of young people in the way that Stacey describes above could be beneficial for both young people and in developing an understanding of the initiatives. This work argues that Stacey's approach could be expanded to include young people's accountability to workers, others and themselves. It is also important to consider the ways in which front-line workers are involved in this process. Social policy commentators are critical of interventions aimed to assist disengaged young people and discuss the implications of restrictive accountability mechanisms:

'Those at risk of social exclusion are dealt with as a category (or several closely related sub-categories). Uniform approaches, rules, targets and time-scales are imposed. As a result, the divergent individual circumstances, strengths and needs of those targeted are lost. Variation is only recognized and addressed when it falls within the tightly drawn boundaries of acceptable behaviour, and within the approved time-scales' (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001: 355)

Even though this raises important points, the deliverers of initiatives, who are working within these confines, need to be considered. This work disagrees that the individual circumstances are lost in practice, it is just that they are not conveyed through the current forms of accountability. Within a socialising form of accountability there may be space for workers who deliver initiatives to play a significant part. A useful concept to draw on is Lipsky's (1980) concept of the 'street-level bureaucrat' where he analysed the behaviour of front-line workers in policy delivery agencies. He states that front-line workers:

'...often enter public employment with at least some commitment to service. Yet the very nature of this work prevents them from coming close to the ideal conception of their jobs. Large classes or huge caseloads and inadequate resources combine with the uncertainties of method and the unpredictability of clients to defeat their aspirations as service workers' (Lipsky, 1980: xiii)

Lipsky (1980) emphasises that 'street-level bureaucrats' often face uncertainty about what personal resources are necessary for their jobs. When considering criticisms of accountability mechanisms and the way in which targets are strived to be met, understanding the role of people who work to meet these targets is important:

'The implementation of policy is really about street-level workers with high service ideals exercising discretion under intolerable pressures. Therefore attempts to control them hierarchically simply increased their tendency to stereotype and disregard the needs of their clients. This means that different

approaches are needed to secure the accountability of implementers, approaches that feed in the expectations of people at a local level (including above all the citizens whom the policies in question affect)' (Hill and Hupe, 2002: 53)

Workers can play an important role in understanding the process of a programme. Issitt and Spence (2005) are critical of the way that while the vogue for evidence-based-practice in educational, health and welfare services puts front-line workers at the centre stage it also implies the quality of interventions have to be evaluated through external research which serves to silence practitioners. Practitioners are often treated as 'gatekeepers' providing access to users, rather than producers of meaning in their own right and that 'practitioner knowledge remains low down the hierarchy of valid data' (p. 8).

A form of accountability in which service users and deliverers are given consideration is important in developing an understanding of the impact a programme may have had but also for the programmes to learn about their practice and a wider range of perspectives are needed to do this (Bentley and Gurumurthy, 1999):

'The main body of available evidence currently resides with young people, practitioners and key delivery partners who provided their own accounts of what constitutes effective policies and practices...In particular they highlighted work in engaging previously disengaged young people, some of multiple-disadvantage, and helping them achieve outcomes such as personal/social development and employment outcomes, as well as learning outcomes' (Bysshe and Hughes, 2002: 59).

Raffo (2003) noted that in his study of New Deal for Young People initiatives the young people valued the programmes and relationships they can develop. This has rarely been noted in the discussion of initiatives. However, he goes on to suggest that initial transition hopes of young people may be unfulfilled in the longer term because of a lack of permanent job opportunities. The social learning and social capital development at the micro, individual level may be significant but the:

'...emerging transition aspirations may in the final analysis be thwarted because the opportunities of making [his] aspirations a reality at the macro level may be limited' (Raffo, 2003: 84)

This is where using a process-based approach to accountability may be beneficial. Colley (2003) argues that the micro-level analysis has worth, as when the ultimate aims of policies may fail (engagement in education, training or employment), there will be examples of positive work at the micro level. This work extends this by suggesting engagement with young people in recognising their development is an important aspect of accountability which could inform more realistic policies.

Summary

The discussions relating to accountability throughout this chapter focus upon a hierarchical form and relate to the accountability of programmes to government. Currently, over-simplified forms of accountability are used to show the performance of programmes. They rely upon performance management information which provides aggregated, mostly quantifiable and *ex post* understandings which do not consider the individual or the wider social context. The problems with current accountability mechanisms may also create problems for service deliverers as they have to work within the confines of a target driven approach which does not consider the people they are working with and the complex needs they may have. The final section discussed the notion of a more inclusive form of accountability which seeks to consider some of the above. Much work in this area, particularly the critical accounting literature is at a theoretical level. Drawing on these discussions, the importance of understanding process becomes clear as well as the benefit of involving young people and service deliverers in a dialogue about the performance of programmes.

This research, through adopting a 'micro' perspective to accountability, will look at the bottom end of the pyramid, the accountability within practice, between programme workers and young people, and young people to themselves, each other and workers. It is argued that accountability of government to citizens may be more effective if citizens are involved in the performance measurement process and in defining the indicators (Bouckaert and van Dooren, 2003). A significant aspect of this is focusing upon the process of programmes which is a challenge to the government focus. In this sense, I am addressing questions of who decides what is valuable and how they communicate this, taking young people to be key stakeholders in

programmes, which is currently not the case. The next chapter will discuss the way in which this research has developed an approach which is based around ideas of a more inclusive form of accountability and which emphasises the role young people and workers can play in this.

CHAPTER FOUR METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH PROCESS

Introduction

The previous chapters have sought to enable the reader to understand the context in which the empirical research is located. The literature review highlighted that current concepts of accountability often present ex-post, aggregated and mostly quantifiable understandings which may be seen as more in line with objective and positivist approaches. However, in order to explore the young people's and workers' perspectives of the programme and to understand the programme within the wider context of the young people's lives, this research adopted an interpretive approach. A further aim of this thesis is to communicate a development in research methods. The research adopted a qualitative approach using 'visual methods' as a tool to engage the young people in participatory research. Using an interpretive approach has enabled the research to be sensitive to the participants, who are often given limited space to be involved in research studies (Allen, 2002). The research attempted to take into consideration that many of the young people had low literacy skills as well as low confidence levels and the development of a 'hands-on' approach aimed to include them in the research process (Earthman, *et al.*, 1999). A detailed discussion of these aspects has been included in response to the lack of literature documenting the research process (Stanley and Wise, 1990; Allen, 2002; Calveley and Wray, 2002).

This chapter begins by discussing the methodological considerations of the study and the way in which, through an interpretive approach, an alternative way to understand accountability within programmes is being considered where understandings are developed within the wider context of young people's lives. This includes an overview of a number of approaches to public service evaluation, some of which the research has drawn upon and others which highlight the problems of evaluation linked to performance management and a more objectivist approach. This is followed by introducing the development of a participatory approach to the research exploring the use of narratives within research and an introduction to the use of visual methods as a research tool.

The second part of the chapter provides a discussion of the research process based on my reflexive account of the research and the young people and workers' perspectives of being involved. I discuss issues of access, informed consent and the ethical and practical considerations of conducting research with young people. The research approach has assisted in my understanding of the process of programmes and enabled the documentation of aspects of process over a considerable period of time. Some of the problems I faced while conducting the research were similar to issues that programme workers were facing in their daily practice and are also discussed.

Methodological approach

As this thesis seeks to explore and communicate both in-depth understandings and the complexities involved in delivering and accounting for programmes, an interpretive approach is used. The aim is to develop understandings of the programme within the context of young people's lives and the meaning of the programmes to the young people within this context (Kushner, 2000). In line with an interpretive approach, the research is not seeking to discover an underlying 'truth' through an objective view of the world as is sought in positivist empirical research but is based on the premise that different knowledges and 'truths' exist (Travers, 2001). In this approach, 'reality' is something created by human beings through their interactions, it does not exist 'out there' separately from the people who bring that reality into existence. The interpretation of the data is used to construct an understanding of how people make sense of their social worlds as something that emerges from human interactions and socially negotiated understandings constructed through social processes (Everitt, 1996).

A criticism of accountability mechanisms is that they obscure practice rather than inform understanding and that any sense of individuality or identity is lost within this process (Roberts, 1996). This can produce highly aggregated accounts which do not consider the individual. This is not only a criticism of the way in which accountability is discharged in the context of the programmes but also concerns the underlying assumptions behind the policy of the programmes. The young people through engagement in the programmes have been externally defined as 'disaffected' and 'disadvantaged'. By involving the young people in the discussion of the

programmes, the research has disaggregated them and has been able to explore young people's subjective experiences at a micro level.

It is important to develop understandings of the context of the young people's lives, acknowledging both the complexity of their lives and the interplay of structure and agency (Rudd, 1997; Pearce and Hillman, 1998), through the young people's narratives while being sensitive to social structures that can still predict life chances and experiences and can make transitions highly structured (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). There seem to be several paradoxes surrounding young people and policy assumptions. For example individual accountability (agency) is reinforced and failure individualised without taking into account that individuals often remain powerless within wider social structures.

It is argued that while there is increasing literature on individualisation there is little research into young people's subjective perspectives on individualisation (Rudd, 1997; Williams, 2002). There is an increasing body of literature which discusses young people's experiences within the macro context of young people's lives, for example in Status ZerO and social exclusion debates (Williamson, 1997; MacDonald, 2001). The research has looked to develop an understanding of the implementation and impact of the programmes at the 'micro' level which is then discussed at the 'macro' level of social structures.

On first reading, the research may be identified as adopting a 'grounded theory' approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) as the young people were asked to take photographs of areas of significance in their lives which then became the focus of discussions. By not prescribing predetermined questions, the young people were free to a certain degree to discuss what they wanted. This approach allowed for few assumptions to be made through a questioning technique. However, my own reflexivity and past experiences of research with young people do not allow me to align myself to this approach, as I did not approach the research without knowing anything about this area. Furthermore, grounded theory adopts a more positivist approach based on the premise that the study of human beings, even through qualitative research, should be more scientific (Travers, 2001) and, therefore, it is not compatible with the approach of this research.

Through spending a considerable period of time with the programmes as a participant observer (Travers, 2001; Calveley and Wray, 2002), the research approach has been of an ethnographic nature. While it is not an ethnographic study exploring the rules and traditions of a group, the study has aimed 'to provide a rich description which interprets the experiences of people in the group from their own perspective' (Robson, 1993: 148) and has explored the everyday meaning that the young people and workers give to their experiences of the programmes. It also shared elements of ethnography in that it was desirable to understand their experiences within the wider context of their lives (Goode, 2000).

My methodological approach has also been influenced by some of the broad principles of feminist methodology, developed from a rejection of positivist methodology, which was understood as patriarchal and oppressive. I see similarities in the way that feminist researchers aim to involve participants in the research process since one specific aim of the study was to give the young people the space and the opportunity to influence the research process. Giving primacy to the young people's accounts and exploring their 'situated knowledge' (Raffo, 2003) allows for understandings to be developed of their experiences (MacDonald and Marsh, 2001; Fuller and Unwin, 2003). In this sense, it aimed to address issues of power in the research context and, in reflecting on the process, the research draws upon what the young people thought about being participants in the study. This is in line with the necessity to ensure that the research undertaken was not seen by any participant in the process as exploitative.

Reflexivity and engaging in reflection about the research process are features of feminist qualitative research (Travers, 2001). Feminist researchers have placed a great deal of emphasis on reflexivity and have looked at the power relations in the research process as well as developing reciprocity with research participants (Oakley, 1981) and ways to conduct research differently to that of traditional research methods. Stanley and Wise (1990) discuss how most research studies present findings so that the researcher disappears from the analysis and that what the research process was like, including any problems, is rarely discussed in written accounts. While there are many useful discussions within feminist texts about these aspects, there is a limit to the way in which reflexivity can be discussed in these terms if it is considered that

reflexivity always occurs out of an unequal power relationship (Pillow, 2003). Despite some alliances, there are fundamental aspects of feminist theory and methodology which are not compatible with my epistemological positioning, most notably, since feminist researchers are part of the field of critical theorists, there is the key epistemological assumption that as analysts they have a superior or more complete knowledge to most members of society (Travers, 2001).

There have been criticisms levelled at the above claims and I have been conscious about claiming too much in the approach I have used. Atkinson (1999) provides a convincing argument based on the discussion of an increasing use of 'life-histories', 'narratives' and the use of 'voice', which are often common features of feminist research. He describes two contrasting tendencies in research and literature in this field:

'The first, more 'sophisticated' approach proposes no special privilege for the collection of lives or the representation of voices. The biographical is one aspect of social life, biographical work is one way in which selves and identities are enacted. Narratives thus constitute one form of among many of social representation. Viewed from this perspective, therefore, life-histories and personal narratives are themselves social products – subject to cultural conventions of style, genre and structure. Seen from this perspective, narratives are far from being transparent accounts of personal experience. That latter view is, however, characteristic of more 'naïve' approaches to narrative. From this perspective, life-histories are especially privileged kinds of social data. They are offered as windows on 'lived experience' giving especially authentic access to informants' lives. Often – though not always – this more naively enthusiastic view is associated with standpoints that celebrate the emancipatory power of 'lives' and 'voices'" (Atkinson, 1999: 196).

While I see a great deal of sense in Atkinson's criticisms, I feel that the way in which this research has used narrative and placed the participation of the young people as central is necessary for the research to achieve its aims.

Reflexivity is not unique to feminist methodology (Travers, 2001) and is often discussed as an essential part of interpretive approaches to research, particularly when involving qualitative research (Aull Davis, 1999; Pillow, 2003):

'Naturalistic research acknowledges the ways in which research activity inevitably shapes and constitutes the objective of inquiry; the researcher and researched are characterised as interdependent in the social process of the research' (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1993: 24)

It is also argued that most researchers use reflexivity without defining how they are using it (Pillow, 2003). Reflexivity allows the researcher to consider the representation of participants and also the subjectivity of the researcher in the research process and the notion that:

'...research is itself socially located. It is therefore necessary for research never to claim the last word and always to be reflexive, to be about itself as well as about its focus of concern'. (Schratz and Walker, 1995: 15)

The focus on reflexivity in this research has been in the documentation of the research process. I feel this is an important aspect that is often left unaddressed in relation to research with young people. Calveley and Wray (2002) in their working paper reflect upon gaining organisational access for research and the issues that arose subsequently as part of their qualitative research. They note that there is very little literature available on these areas which are 'important, though largely ignored, aspects of qualitative research' and stress that 'there are cautionary voices to be listened to' when conducting it (p. 4):

'Silverman (1985) tells us that published accounts of research are often at variance with the reality of the research practice involved, as what is offered as methodology is often a *reconstructed logic* of what will have been a *difficult and often fractured process*. This represents a recognition that social research does not take place in a vacuum - nor indeed is the researcher situated in a vacuum, somehow isolated from the researched (Sayer 1992)' (Calveley and Wray, 2002: 2, emphasis in original).

Research presented as 'reconstructed logic' raises questions about the research process and people embarking on research in the field could often learn from previous experiences. It can be reassuring to learn that other researchers have also experienced difficulties in their fieldwork and in sustaining contact with young people (Ball, *et al.*, 2000). The next section outlines various approaches to evaluation in public services in order to make explicit the reasons for the approach taken in this research.

Approaches to evaluation

Evaluation is characterised as a process by which people make value judgements about the value and worth of performance and public services. This section discusses approaches to evaluation and aims to communicate why this research has adopted its particular approach. As with all social research, approaches to evaluative research are underpinned by different philosophical approaches. Methodological differences between approaches to evaluation can be divided into positivist, using statistical data gathering and analysis, and interpretivist, focusing upon subjective data, including the perspectives of stakeholders. Positivist approaches are often seen as more robust and concrete but they are limited in the information they provide. It is necessary to consider and understand the purpose of evaluation, who it is commissioned by and what it is to inform.

Positivist approaches

A quasi-scientific approach to evaluation is sometimes used in public services and draws on scientific models of testing and hypothesis proving to measure the impact of interventions. Illsley (1980) outlines this approach which begins with clarification of the programme being studied, followed by an experiment, or randomized controlled trial, testing the intervention against alternatives (including non-action). These are precise measures of, and controls over, the inputs to the programme. This form of evaluation generally uses quantifiable measures to assess the situation before and after a programme intervention, to evaluate changes resulting from this. This is done by comparison with a control group who have not been involved in the intervention. Any changes are then attributed to the programme. In this approach the criteria of success is unidimensional and extraneous variables are either excluded or controlled (Smith and Cantley, 1985). Evaluators are identified as the experts within scientific approaches, following a more managerial form of evaluation, and this approach is used to find out about the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of public service programmes (Pollitt, 1999). Robertson and Gandy (1983) identify outcome evaluations as closely aligned to the scientific ideal of verification. This is a common form of evaluation which attempts to assess the effects of policies or programmes and the measure these against programme goals.

Pluralistic evaluation developed by Smith and Cantley (1985), discussed below, originated because of dissatisfaction with existing experimental forms of evaluation in health services. They discuss the presumption in evaluative research of the desirability of experimental and quasi-experimental design, in evaluating health services, advocated by Cochrane (1972), Goldberg, *et al.* (1970) and Goldberg and Connelly (1982). Smith and Cantley (1985) also discuss the presumption of consensus in professional organizations in traditional modes of organizational evaluation. As this generally does not exist, evaluations which focus on the agreed goal or interests of an institution are problematic.

This approach has limited use in public service evaluation for a number of reasons. It does not consider the context of the intervention and so cannot consider any other factors which may affect the outcome. It does not explain how or why an intervention worked, or did not work, or how improvements could be made. Furthermore, it is impossible to study a broad range of provision, and it is problematic to evaluate a programmes objectives based on one set of measures. Conventional evaluative designs cannot assess whether achievements are attributable to programmes or other factors and can only focus on a single dimension in a programme. In practice, evaluation of public service programmes takes place in a political, policy and practice context and therefore an experimental or quasi-experimental design, using a control group, cannot be adopted because variables cannot be held constant (Smith and Cantley, 1985; Craig, 2002). Imposed conditions required by this approach can also create tensions between service practitioners and evaluators as public services do not provide a controlled experimental setting.

Theory-driven evaluation

Theory-driven evaluation seeks to establish a causal chain between the activities in a project and its aims, to establish if the project has been successful. This approach generally does not consider context and other factors that may have impacted on the outcome. However, Tilley (2000) describes realistic evaluation as a 'species of theory driven evaluation' (p. 7). Realistic Evaluation (Pawson and Tilley, 1994, 1997) reflects the paradigms of scientific realist philosophy but is also committed to the belief that programmes deal with real problems. Pawson and Tilley (1997) are critical of the way in which experimentation, as described in the previous section, is

understood and conducted in evaluations. Their understanding of causality is developed in the specific conditions of a programme, which they align to the approach of natural scientists, rather than the way in which experimental evaluation is conducted. Realistic evaluation takes a quasi-experimental approach but also places significant focus upon context to identify contributory and undermining factors to measure the impact in specific circumstances.

Pawson and Tilley (2004) state 'evaluation research is ultimately in the business of making causal links about the impact of programmes' (p. 293). Realistic Evaluation considers organisational culture and aims to explain the results of the evaluation through various perspectives so that the knowledge can be transferred to different environments. They suggest starting from a theory of what makes programmes work and a theory of the circumstances in which such ideas are likely to be effective. This enables them explain why and in what circumstances programmes affect potential subjects before concluding the programmes work (Pawson and Tilley, 1994: 292). They understand evaluation research as informing the realistic development of policy and practice, and therefore, the results of evaluation need to be useful for policymakers and practitioners. While realistic evaluation does recognise the significance of context the scientific approach and methods of such an evaluation are not suited to an approach aimed at the individual level. The 'Life Skills' programmes and the young people's lives are too complex to be understood within a theory-based approach.

It has been argued that the 'language of method' used by government departments and public agencies who commission research is based on a positivist approach (Travers, 2001). This is a central facet of current conceptions of accountability based on assumptions that performance can be reported on, compared and managed through targets and indicators. However, it is also argued that debates around evaluation have moved on from hierarchical or management evaluation approaches, based on a positivist philosophy, to that of a more pluralist approach looking at a variety of views and experiences, within an interpretivist paradigm (Everitt, 1996). However, evaluations of government funded programmes are still dominated by hierarchical and managerial forms of evaluation.

Social policy commentators have been critical of the dominance of target setting, testing and performance indicators (Lloyd and Payne, 2003) and the adoption of an 'audit approach' to education and training (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001: 347). Sanderson, *et al.* (1998) in the context of local government describes the focus on the end result of performance in order to meet the government's commitment to enhancing accountability and improving services, which is generally accepted by those in local government. They argue that evaluation is not a term commonly used in local government where performance of services is understood in relation to performance measurement and review. This is the basis for accountability where performance measurement is employed to demonstrate how services are performing and proper use of public money, often relying upon cost-benefit analysis (Sanderson, *et al.*, 1998). The purpose of such evaluations can be imposed centrally as a way to secure accountability.

The focus on performance measurement in evaluation emphasises the relationship between inputs and outputs. Performance indicator systems are too restrictive in what they can capture and are unable to evaluate outcomes (the wider and longer term impacts), with outputs are often used as proxy measures for outcomes (Craig, 2002). This is problematic for public services which are working with people in developmental ways and where there are often unanticipated or unintended outcomes. This form of evaluation and monitoring is limited in its technical, top-down, approach and performance measurement cannot provide an understanding of why something happened. It cannot cover outcomes, quality, broad impact and aspects of process, possibly underplaying what is of value to service users (Sanderson, *et al.*, 1998). Sanderson, *et al.* (1998) found that, in their study, evaluation was not an effective means of control over services, and while performance management can provide the 'core' for evaluation, the limitations were increasingly recognised. Evaluation worked effectively in services where it was identified as learning or improvement and to be effective there needs to be a culture of evaluation.

Collaborative approaches to evaluation

Collaborative approaches to evaluation emphasise stakeholder involvement and are often compared to experimental and scientific approaches (Pollitt, 1999). Such approaches include fourth generation evaluation, critical evaluation, utilization-

focused evaluation, pluralist evaluation and democratic evaluation (Pollitt, 1999) but there are many internal differences. I have outlined below some of the general evaluative principles of collaborative evaluations, which have relevance for this research, but also discuss why the approaches are not suitable to achieve the aims of this work.

Utilization-focused evaluation (Patton, 1994, 1997) begins with the premise that evaluations should be judged by their use. It is described as 'a process for making decisions about and focusing an evaluation on intended use by intended users' (Patton, 1994: 317) rather than the methods or object of the evaluation. Patton (1997) argues that evaluation users are more likely to use the results of the evaluation if they have been involved in the evaluative process and therefore focuses upon how people apply evaluation findings and experience the evaluation process. In this approach the evaluator aims to be situationally responsive by working with the intended users to determine the most appropriate kind of evaluation for them, offering the possibilities of established evaluation frameworks. Evaluation is understood as a means to an end, rather than the end itself. This can provide people with information needed to make decisions about programmes. However, the scope of this approach within public services is constrained by different agendas and therefore what is given priority in the evaluation will depend on these agendas. This approach argues for an ongoing process of evaluation but practitioners are given authority over beneficiaries.

Fourth-Generation evaluation (Guba and Lincoln, 1989) argues that all 'stakeholders', all people affected by the evaluation, have the right for their perspectives to be heard and considered by others. Guba and Lincoln (1989) reject the notion of cause and effect explanations and all aspects of positivism. The evaluator acts as the facilitator of a negotiation process which is contrasted with three earlier generations of evaluation: 'measurement-oriented'; 'objective-oriented'; and 'judgement-oriented'. The conclusions are arrived at jointly through an iterative process. In this approach evaluation is a continuing process which is never complete. However, this approach assumes that it is possible to reach an agreement through this process about the form of evaluation before the evaluation is carried out which relies upon consensus within an organisation.

Smith and Cantley (1985) in reviewing evaluation methodologies for their study, of a new psychogeriatric day hospital, found there was not a satisfactory methodological approach to evaluation available in health and welfare care. The evaluation approaches available were experimental, rationalist and objective, and founded on methodological weaknesses, as they were underpinned by unjustified presumptions about social policy, social research and organisations. The presumptions were rationality in social policy, the experimental ideal in social research and consensus in professional organisations (p. 4). In this context, evaluations were designed to meet an ideal model, rather than the improvement of information for service providers and clients (Garland, *et al.*, 1981). In response to the limitations of conventional evaluation designs, noted earlier, Smith and Cantley (1985) developed, and argued for the advantages of, a pluralistic approach to evaluation, and a new direction for evaluative research. Although this book was written over 20 years ago the arguments of Smith and Cantley (1985) still resonate in the current climate. Their approach is influenced by subjective epistemology and rejects the presumption of consensus in an organisation. Instead, it aims to involve multiple perspectives, through various methods, in order to explore and account for different values and interests, conflict and context in an organisation.

Pluralistic evaluation emphasises the role of the organisation as well as the origins of a project, its design and development. To evaluate a project it is necessary to explore the influence of the structure, culture and politics of the organisation, upon the perspectives of management and staff. This provides the context to explain the successes and failures of the project, drawing upon different parties criteria for success, as success is a pluralist concept and not a unitary measure (Smith and Cantley, 1985: 13). They stress some important advantages of a pluralistic approach:

‘It is likely to show that in some ways a service is successful and in some ways it is not. That might seem trite. However, it is an advance on the substantial body of organizational research which shows that most organizations simply fail to live up to their utopian ideals. We need to be more precise than that. There is also the point that an inability to show *why* particular failures or successes occur is a frequent weakness in evaluative research. Pluralistic evaluation says a good deal about why some outcomes but not others take place. This opens the way to proposals for change (Smith and Cantley, 1985: 13, emphasis in original).

Smith and Cantley (1985) discuss that the pluralistic approach was difficult to conform to at times and note possible resistance to it because of its reliance on qualitative data which could create problems for policy implementation. There also highlight that the evaluation may reflect the model of the institution being evaluated leading to a problem of excluding some groups. Whilst it was not suitable to involve patients in their study they do not emphasise the importance of the recipients of service delivery in evaluation or focus upon the individual. A criticism of the pluralistic approach is that it could be intensive and expensive to cover all of the above aspects and, therefore, in practice it may not provide such an in-depth understanding.

Developing an alternative approach to accountability of programmes

My approach draws upon aspects of collaborative approaches to evaluation but focuses upon the 'micro' level of programmes. Developed through learning from previous research into young people's experiences it aimed to engage them in the research process⁹. Most of the work previously discussed does not critically approach the idea of an evaluator or researcher being the one who collects the data, which Craig (2002) sees as a significant consideration. The approach developed in my work aimed to release some of the researcher control by young people becoming participant researchers. I have focused upon specific aspects at the lower end of the hierarchy which led to the methodological approach.

It should be clear that an objectivist approach to evaluation which uses quasi-scientific methods is not appropriate for this research. Such approaches to evaluation are about measurement and focus on the end of delivery rather than the means in which the end was met, taking account of the process. The problematic nature and dominance of performance management and measurement processes have been discussed. It must be recognised that current dominant forms of evaluation are unlikely to change and so a way to complement this is needed to offer a workable and practical addition. A qualitative approach is suggested as the means to access meaningful information about programmes, moving from a hierarchical approach,

⁹ I conducted a qualitative piece of research with pregnant young women and young mothers as part of my MSc in Social Science Research Methods. Following this I was employed as a research assistant on a project exploring issues of marginalisation for young Deaf people.

towards learning from the 'bottom-up' by including those lower down the hierarchy whose perspectives are often excluded. It is identified that such an approach can improve the implementation of policy (Barrett, 2004).

Smith (2001, 2006) makes a distinction between programme/project evaluation and practice evaluation, in informal education, both of which are necessary. The former he argues has driven the growth in evaluation. Evaluation in this sense is, as described above, a management tool and concerned with making judgements about effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability and it can provide feedback for necessary developments. Practice evaluation is described as the direct enhancement of the work undertaken and is an integral part of the working process. Such evaluations involve reflective practice and seek to foster learning which is then oriented to future action.

As with forms of accountability the most useful approach to evaluation is argued to be an approach which promotes reflective practice and learning rather than as a form of scrutiny and control. Evaluation can provide a basis for accountability to show how services are performing which is why the approach to evaluation needs to be reflective of the programmes being evaluated (Craig, 2002). There are several dimensions to performance and this work focused upon those which were identified by young people and front-line workers. The young people and workers who participated are the ones who are judging the value of the programme for themselves. The literature on evaluation and evaluation studies usually focuses on the organisational context and is on a much larger scale than this work involving multiple stakeholders. In this sense, the work presented here is a limited evaluation study compared to others. This work is not about reaching a simple verdict about programmes, it is argued that the nature and circumstances of the young people do not allow for this. It provides evidence of what the young people believe to work about programmes and the circumstances in which this happened and the efforts of those involved in the delivery of the programmes.

As stated earlier, current conceptions of accountability have been criticised for rendering the individual invisible (Roberts, 1996). Although auditors and evaluators are increasingly seeking to incorporate the views of service users, it is invariably minimal (Barry, 2001; Rowe, 1999). When they are sought there is little discussion

of how the views were obtained which is one reason why I have paid attention to documenting the research process. While the current performance indicators of programmes are those of 'successful transition' into employment, training or further education, it has been recognised that other outcomes are subsumed by these defining ones, even when they may be a necessary dimension of the original specification (Bysshe and Hughes, 2002; Devanney, 2003).

Even though this is an area receiving increased attention, the ways in which developments have been made to account for these other aspects have been limited. Many reports concerning programmes do recognise the need for the less tangible developments to be accounted for and recommendations include the development of the concepts of 'distance travelled' and 'soft outcomes'. Over the years, various measurement tools have been developed to measure 'soft' outcomes. However, these still rely on using quantitative scores, often attitudinal scales (Rosenberg, 1965; Kent, 2002), which are crude and reductive measures, to evaluate often personal, subjective experiences. These standardised approaches to areas such as personal and social development are limited in use and relevance to young people's lives and they cannot capture the complexities and subtleties involved in practice. There is a need to move beyond only valuing what is easily measured with the use of tick boxes and multiple choices based upon externally defined criteria for success. However, it could also be argued that even quantitative scores are not always easy to collect when working with young people identified as 'hard to reach'.

Evaluation in public services often focuses upon benchmarks and baselines which are difficult to apply to programmes implemented to work in a bespoke way. As the findings chapters illustrate young people are all at different stages, with different issues and levels of ability, when joining the programmes. Through an interpretive approach, this research has aimed to understand the programmes by exploring beyond the measures and indicators', highlighting the tensions between practice and the way in which the programmes are formally required to account for themselves. This has allowed the young people and workers to give their own accounts of their experiences of the programme, including what they understand as success, without reducing achievements to statistics and performance indicators. It is hoped that an interpretive approach can provide an enhanced understanding of the programmes through

examples of subjective experiences that cannot be communicated through a positivist approach.

Developing a participatory approach to the research

This research aimed to develop a participatory approach with young people. Qualitative research can draw on tools to engage young people which may be more inclusive, such as visual methods. This section locates the research within ideas of accounts and narratives and also introduces literature relating to visual methods.

Accounts and narratives

Hierarchical accountability processes suffocate stories and narratives and, although accountability is linked to the ideal of transparency, identity is not exposed; it is submerged in processes of aggregation. Within socialising forms of accountability, the emphasis is placed upon the interdependence of the self and others and, through the gathering of accounts from a range of perspectives, it is argued that an organisation can learn about itself and the work it does to advance levels of understanding (Willmott, 1996; Rowe, 1999). Socialising forms of accountability recognise the significance of the individual within accountability and draw upon sociological views of identity (Garfinkel, 1967; Shotter, 1984; Orbuch, 1997; Stacey, 2001) and discourses of presenting accounts. Through the adoption of an interpretive approach, the research has drawn on the notion of accounts and narratives in the collection and presentation of data:

‘Accounts and other related concepts, such as stories and narratives, represent ways in which people organise views of themselves, of others, and of their social world’ (Orbuch, 1997: 455)

It was intended that, to conduct the research in this way, would not only enhance understandings of the programme but also enable the young people reflectively to consider this period of their lives and the meaning of the programmes to themselves (Roberts, 1996; Willmott, 1996). In emphasising the importance of the accounts of young people and workers it is possible to explore the attribution of the programme with other factors in the young people’s lives. Socialised accounts (Roberts, 1996) or ‘situated vocabularies’ (Mitchell, *et al.*, 2001: 219) place emphasis on social context

and the role of accounts in the wider context of everyday practices and experiences to understand how young people position themselves (Williams, 2002). Often the two areas are not integrated and an evaluation of a programme may place very little emphasis on participants' wider life context. Whereas to develop an understanding of a programme it needs to include:

'...something of people's values, their lives...and to use this as context within which to read programs...from where the people are rather than from where the program is' (Kushner, 2000: 63)

Orbuch (1997) notes that the 'accounts as stories framework' (461) are in general more effective ways of collecting data and gaining increased understanding about individuals than can be obtained from a questionnaire or survey for instance. Orbuch also identifies the connection with symbolic interactionism as narratives and accounts place concepts such as self and identity as integral where identity is produced and affirmed through engaging in story telling (Orbuch, 1997: 465). This is similar to the thinking of Roberts (1996) when discussing identity and making the self visible by being called into account by others.

The developing of narratives by participants is based within post modernist thinking of multiple truths and realities and considers an individual's narrative valid as it is their experience of their life which is obviously 'invariably subjective' (Stacey, 2001: 216-9). I believe this has been an important stance to maintain as Stacey notes:

'In relation to young people there are many partial meanings that are conveyed about them as if they were complete which become propagated as dominant discourses about young people...The narrative metaphor proposes that people construct their realities and truths through storying their lives in ways that are meaningful to them. These meanings become stories or narratives that describe their lives...' (Stacey, 2001: 220).

Stacey (2001) notes the limitations of a narrative approach as providing only partial narratives of an individual's life. I would argue that this can only ever really be the case and that it is indeed up to the discretion of the individual about what they wish to discuss and omit from any narrative. As Ball, *et al.* maintain:

'Generally, we are trying to represent these young people as rounded and socially embedded characters...we cannot pretend to be able to construct holistic accounts of them. We have only glimpses into complex lives...' (Ball, *et al.*, 2000: 19).

This research aimed to communicate insight from a range of perspectives. While a particular focus has been placed upon the views of young people, it was also important to gain the perspectives of programme workers and Personal Advisers in the development of an understanding of the programmes. Some commentators argue that the main endeavour of government funded initiatives is simply to meet the output measures set for them (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001) and display a critical stance towards the intervention. While there is strength in their analysis, there seems little exploration of the views of the front-line staff that work on programmes.

It has been argued that often practitioners are not adequately represented in research (Catan, 2002). A study conducted with detached youth workers found that, while most workers were positively disposed towards the objectives of youth policies, they also referred to the difficulties with the terms of accountability which did not fully seem to capture the nature and meaning of face to face youth work practice (Crimmens, *et al.*, 2003). While stories in practice-focused literature of many professions are not a recent phenomenon, this is not something given a great deal of credence in other domains. It forms a very different discourse to that of the instrumental-rational approach of social policy and structures of accountability. Discourses of practice involve subjectivity and intersubjectivity, as this research has tried to communicate, which is not available for analysis through positivist methods.

Visual methods as a research tool

There are a number of reasons why visual methods were used as a tool in this research. From my previous research experiences I was keen to develop a way in which young people could be more involved in the research process rather than meeting on a couple of occasions, conducting an interview and then leaving. The decision to develop using visual methods was considered after beginning the observations at programmes. Young people were often taken out of training sessions for reviews with workers and Personal Advisers and many of the young people complained about being taken out of training sessions and that they found the reviews

boring. This research aimed to involve the young people in something different that would not be seen by them as boring or similar to a review.

After engaging with the young people in training sessions and also informally a further consideration was that many young people had low levels of literacy, confidence and sometimes problems articulating themselves. I felt that using visual methods could be a way of including young people who may not otherwise have been included in a research study due to their level of literacy or articulation. Other researchers have also found that poor literacy skills or language problems can create difficulties (Ovenden and Loxley, 1993; Earthman, *et al.*, 1999; Allen, 2002) but it is not widely documented. Allen (2002) asserts that previous work has shown that 'vulnerable' young people have been under-represented owing to a number of methodological and ethical problems (Allen, 2002: 276). I also aimed to use visual methods as an attempt for young people to document some of their developments over a period of time and changes in their programme experiences and social life outside the programme were often evident in the photographs. With this in mind, the research aimed to develop a participatory and 'hands on' (Earthman, *et al.*, 1999) approach to actively engaging participants in the research process in an attempt to overcome some of these obstacles. Photography was used in the development of the narratives of young people:

'Most of us, when faced with a photograph, or a set of photographs, have little difficulty in talking about the relation between the photograph and the event, especially if it was an event where we were present or where the people or places are familiar to us' (Walker, 1993: 80).

Visual methods in research are not a new approach. The use of photography and other forms of visual images in research has a long-standing history, most readily in the discipline of anthropology (Bateson and Mead, 1942; Worth and Adair, 1972). Although I was unfamiliar with the field of visual methodology when I began my research, I found that other disciplines used visual methods. In the instance below, motion pictures were used to engage young people:

'Adolescents and young adults who are unable to talk about themselves or write about themselves are frequently willing and even eager to reveal themselves and their world on film' (Worth and Adair, 1972: 14).

They go on to say:

'It has been our experience, and that of others working with teenagers or members of other cultures, that people who are normally suspicious and hostile about being taught - of anything like school - will readily accept being studied and questioned if, as Johnny put it, they "can get their hands on that camera". This unusual motivating factor is worth noting in relation to other possible educational or research attempts with people of other cultures' (Worth and Adair, 1972: 55).

It was felt to be appropriate as visual methods can be used to explore aspects of everyday life and are capable of producing knowledge that is more grounded and symbolic of the life-worlds and experiences of participants than traditional methods of collecting data (Harper, 1998; Rose, 2001). There are many benefits of using photography including 'enabling "unimportant details" to become the main focus of interest' (Schratz and Steiner-Loffler, 1998: 246). The research combined visual methods with the young people with the more frequently used qualitative data collection methods. This tool was only used with young people and not with programme workers or Personal Advisers.

Although there is a body of literature related to visual methods, particularly in educational research, this is mainly concerned with situations where the researcher decides on the visual images to use and then sets the interview agenda based on this. This idea was developed by Collier (1967) in a method called 'photo elicitation' which has been said to have a 'can-opener effect'. This can be seen as a variation of the open-ended interview where Collier used photographs taken by him to stimulate discussion guided by the images. This approach is valuable as it focuses on:

'...the capacity of photographs to open up conversations between people...one of his [Collier, 1967] key themes is the way in which photographs can be used to speed up the process of established fieldwork relationships, of getting to know people and to develop a degree of trust between outsiders and insiders' (Walker, 1993: 84)

'A shocking thing happens in this interview format; the photographer...suddenly confronts the realisation that she or he knows little or nothing about the cultural information contained in the image. As the individual (or the individual from the pictured world) interprets the image, a dialogue is created in which the typical research roles are reversed. The researcher becomes a listener and one who encourages the dialogue to continue. The individual who describes the images must be convinced that

their take-for-granted understanding of the images is not shared by the researcher' (Harper, 1998: 35).

Some argue that, within social research, visual methods are under-utilised (Walker, 1993; Harper, 1998). Walker argues that the visual has been taken over by words and numbers at a point in time when contemporary culture is visually oriented. The use of visual images do not just provide the observer with an insight into the lives of other people but also give some 'glimpse of ways in which individuals create meaning in their lives' (Walker, 1993: 82). He has developed these ideas in an attempt to think about and understand 'social life that escape the traps set by language' (Walker, 1993: 72). He advocates the use of photography in educational research which he believes can give a unique qualitative voice:

'There is rarely an attempt to use photographs to provide complex information, to stimulate discussion or sustain engagement or to play a part in encouraging participation or self-reflection...Paradoxically, these more complex functions are all things that photographs can do well' (Walker, 1993: 73).

Photos can show complex information. Previous research has already outlined that young people can often have complex lives. This research approach allowed the young people to direct the discussion and therefore it would be their decision if they wanted to introduce areas of their lives to discuss. Harper believes there is a great deal of potential in using the 'photo-elicitation' approach in social research and points out that this may also involve a collaborative approach with the participants although it has not really been used yet:

'This method has yet to catch on as a recognised sociological method, yet its potential is nearly endless...the method may stretch the collaborative bond, so that the subjects direct the photography before interpreting them in interviews...The photo-elicitation interview may redefine the relationship between subjects and sociologists, and the interview material may be presented in any of a number of creative ways' (Harper, 1998: 36).

This research has attempted to develop such an approach by engaging the young people in taking the photographs, although it is based on a variation of Collier's development. The work of Cohen (1997), which I only discovered after I had completed my fieldwork, developed a similar approach in which photography was used in the development of an alternative approach to vocational education with

school leavers to examine transition from school from the point of view of the young people. According to Harper, this direction in research could be seen as a move towards 'creative and engaged visual ethnography' (Harper, 1998: 36) where 'the researcher becomes a listener' (Harper, 1998: 35). Photography has been traditionally used in ethnography to gather information. However, according to Harper there has been a shift from this traditional use of photography in ethnography, which can be seen to be in line with feminist methodology:

'The new ethnography asks for a redefinition of the relationship between the researcher and the subject. The ideal suggests collaboration rather than a one-way flow of information from subject to researcher' (Harper, 1998: 35).

Such an approach also has resonance with the 'therapeutic uses of photography' (Cronin, 1998: 71) where photographs are used to gather information about a client's background:

'The 'information' which has been obtained from photographs by therapists ranges from inferring of socio-economic status and home environment of the client, based on, for example, the appearance of the neighbourhood, the physical state of repair of the home and the depiction of domestic possessions. Other factual information might include family topography, i.e., networks of relatives and generational links' (Cronin, 1998: 71).

Photographs in this therapeutic context gain their meaning within a narrative context and the photographs are used 'as springboards for narrative' (Cronin, 1998: 76). By focusing the discussions on the content and context of the photographs, this in turn 'triggers into other narratives with people in photos' (Cronin, 1998: 76). As has been maintained by many writing about visual methods, 'only that which narrates can make us understand' (Sontag, 1973: 23). Schratz (1993) believes that visual methods play an important part in:

'...a strong quest for democratizing the research process. It is no longer the researcher's voice that should be heard but that of the subjects under study' (Schratz, 1993: 180).

In line with an interpretive approach it is recognised that:

'The 'information' which photographs seem to yield must be treated with caution...Photographs shouldn't be treated as 'mirrors' held up to reality:

reality itself is a product of social processes, and photographs can be part of the process, as well as a product, of reality construction' (Cronin, 1998: 80).

It is through the interview process that the photographs are explored with the participants:

'...photographs get their meaning from the way the people involved with them understand them, use them, and thereby attribute meaning to them.' (Becker, 1998: 84)

The main aim of the photography was to enable the young people to be pro-actively involved in the research process by asking them to take photographs of areas of significance in their lives. Thereby they would take the lead in subsequent discussions and talk about areas of relevance and interest to them. This is significant as Cronin points out:

'A further consideration is that 'the purposes for which photographs are both taken and used will have an effect on their meaning' (Cronin, 1998: 80).

Involving the young people in this way was an important ethical consideration as many of the young people were dealing with complex social and personal problems. This method allowed the participants control over what was disclosed and what they felt comfortable talking to me about. They were generally confident in this situation and able to talk at ease and with authority throughout the discussions. Inviting the young people to take photographs involved them in the research process and the results that have been produced have been very personal to them. The visual material produced has been used to stimulate conversation in discussions, allowing the young people to discuss issues of relevance and importance to their identities. This is the main justification for not including any of the photographs within the work, which was debated for a long time, and which ultimately I did not feel comfortable doing.

I have always been hesitant in using the term 'interview' when engaging the young people and the workers in the research process as 'language such as 'interview'...can have threatening and negative connotations' (Calveley and Wray, 2002: 5) and have in the main used 'discussion' in its place. This was a time to sit down informally and discuss the photos with the young person. The aim was for the young people to be the ones to direct the conversation. They were the 'experts' on what they were presenting

to me. I was able to ask questions and probe further once they had introduced the photographs and their relevance. My aim was similar to Collins who states:

‘...I hope to show that interviews are social interactions in which meaning is necessarily negotiated between a number of selves (and in which power may be *more* or *less* shared). The interviewer need be neither ‘objective’ or ‘detached’, but should rather be ‘engaged’. Engagement implies a willingness on the part of the interviewer to understand the interviewee’s response to a question or prompt in the wider context of the interview(s) as a whole’ (Collins, 1998: 3).

Allowing the young people to direct the discussion and develop their ‘meta-narratives’ goes some way to negotiate the power relations of the interview scenario ‘in which neither participant is assumed to be more passive than the other’ (Collins, 1998: 16). The interviews being conducted in this way enabled ‘narrative that is emergent and indexical’ (Collins, 1998: 4). It became apparent that as Collins (1998) maintains ‘each interview is an occasion for the elicitation of many selves’ (p. 5) as ‘the interview is a complex social construction’ (p. 15).

Whilst the research aimed to develop a participatory approach it is also evident that, unlike conversations in daily life which usually involve reciprocal exchanges, interviews involve an interviewer who is often in charge of structuring and directing the questioning and conversation (Sewell, 2001). The approach in this research tried to reduce this to a minimum.

Similarly to Ball, *et al.* (2000) I am pleased that the young people were the ones who could introduce issues to the interviews and develop them through their narratives as the:

‘...focus on education, training and work marginalizes or obscures other points of focus that may be ‘really’ much more important in the lives of the young people certainly, over a 4-yr period of interviewing, our ‘control’ over focus has deliberately weakened. The topics of the interviews conducted with the young people have become broader, the style more open...topics were of more ‘interest’ and relevance to the young people, in other words, we are in danger of making these young people sound more serious, more organised and planned than they really are’ (Ball, *et al.*, 2000: 146).

Involving young people in the research process and not having a fixed questioning agenda allows for consideration and understanding of what is significant to them at this point in their lives.

The research process

It has been important to reflect upon my position as researcher within this process. This section aims to communicate aspects of the research process that are often not considered in research literature. As mentioned earlier, the difficulties of conducting research and problems that occur when doing fieldwork are often not communicated. I think that a great deal could be learned from people's experiences of fieldwork which may benefit future research.

This research began in September 2001 and ended in September 2003, although informal visits were still made to programmes after this date and I am still in contact with a number of programme workers.

Negotiating access

This research was developed in relation to an earlier piece of research through which I met the manager of the 'Life Skills' programmes. The previous research was a qualitative evaluation of a number of projects which were part of an EU funded regeneration programme (Rowe and Devanney, 2002). I took responsibility for the two youth projects, one of which aimed to work with young people disengaged from formal learning to facilitate progression into learning or employment. The outputs for the project were based on the numbers of young people participating and the numbers entering education or employment.

Respondents in the evaluation described the project as 'pre-empting' the Learning Gateway, which was implemented whilst the project was running. The evaluation aimed to examine each project in its context, from inception through to implementation, to provide an understanding of the projects and explain successes and problems. The youth project had experienced a number of problems during its two year delivery but despite this still achieved a considerable amount with a small number of young people. Problems included creating partnerships with other

agencies, establishing the provision and notably trying to work and engage transient young people. Most of the young people they worked with were not ready to engage in the process of learning so it was difficult to measure the developments made by the project through the outputs set.

One of the main successes was a video project in partnership with an arts and drama programme where young people were involved in the design, development and delivery. After an interview with one of the partners in the youth project I was provided with contact details to arrange to speak to the workers and beneficiaries of the video project. A number of the young people had moved on to the arts and drama programme, which was in the process of becoming a 'Life Skills' programme. I expressed my interest to this partner in looking at more detail at the developments made by the young people, which did not seem to be formally recognised, and found out that this was an issue currently being debated with a number of projects. I told her that I had recently been given the opportunity to register for a PhD and that I wanted to develop my ideas in this area. She thought that it would be worth discussing my ideas with the manager of the 'Life Skills' programmes and was an excellent first link in the research process and provided contact details. As part of the evaluation I visited the arts and drama programme on a number of occasions to talk to the young people and workers about their involvement. I arranged a meeting with the manager of the 'Life Skills' programmes at this project to discuss my ideas for developing a small-scale research project.

We shared an interest in the way in which programmes were able to account for their performance and she was keen to develop a piece of research to document aspects of the work that she knew were happening but were not being acknowledged. She felt that the research could provide qualitative evidence of what happened in the programmes which could be disseminated to the Local Learning and Skills Council and others, to show what was involved in working with the young people and what the young people gained from participating. We discussed the mutual benefits of the research including being able to provide the basis for my PhD proposal. The manager took an interest in reading my proposal and provided comments based on her experience which was useful. After a number of discussions with the manager, it was

agreed that this research study would develop and three 'Life Skills' programmes would be involved.

This research project began as a small-scale qualitative evaluation of 'Life Skills' programmes. The aim was to document the personal and social development of the young people and the impact of programmes by spending time at programmes observing and conducting focus groups with young people and interviews with workers and Personal Advisers. The idea for the use of photography was also developed at this stage to engage young people to enable them to record some of their developments on the programme. This resulted in the production of a report (Devanney, 2003) but I continued my engagement with programmes to further document some of the developments in relation to my PhD work.

From the beginning, I have been extremely fortunate to have been allowed considerable access to the programmes. This initially involved attending the programmes with the manager and being introduced to the workers and the young people. The manager could be identified as the 'primary gatekeeper' (Heath, *et al.*, 2004: 12) as she had overall responsibility for the research project. We had regular meetings in which I would update her on my progress and she was involved in reading and commenting upon the interim report produced. The manager had discussed at a number of 'Life Skills' team meetings that I would be attending the programmes for a period of time to conduct the research. This proved to be of great interest to a number of the workers which was clearly shown in their responses when I interviewed them and when I was attending the programmes.

As noted by Heath, *et al.* (2004) it is not uncommon that once initial access is gained researchers have to negotiate the details of access with 'secondary gatekeepers', usually employees (p. 12). 'Secondary gatekeepers' can provide invaluable knowledge which assists in tailoring the research (Heath, *et al.* 2004). From my initial introductions to each of the programmes it was then left to me to arrange further contact and future visits with the programme workers. From my first meetings with the programme workers and the young people the manager told me that I needed to get involved with the programmes to get to know the young people and the

workers, and not to stand on the sidelines, in order to conduct the research we had set out to do.

From the point of this initial access and establishing an understanding relationship about the research with the workers, the issue of access to the programmes did not pose a problem. I visited each of the programmes once a week, usually either a morning or afternoon. Sometimes I would spend the full day depending on what the programme had scheduled. The visits were always planned around the programme sessions so the programme workers and young people knew when I would be present. As the directed data stage began we always agreed specific times in which I would be able to speak to the young people considering what else was happening on the programmes.

At the initial stages of being introduced to the young people some thought that I was actually joining as a trainee and were surprised to learn that I was actually working at the university. Others have, at times, teased me about being a student; others questioned why I was 'wasting three years of my life'. I have also been perceived as a Personal Advisor from Connexions and a new worker on the programme. I always presented myself as a researcher and explained the research project to the young people. The programmes are quite small with between six to twelve young people present at any one time and two to three workers. Anyone unknown to the programmes was always conspicuous and there would always be someone in the group willing to enquire about a person they did not recognise before the workers or myself had chance to do any introductions. Although I aimed to get involved it was clear that I was not a worker as I was not at the programmes every day, like the young people and workers. Once the directed data stage began it became more obvious that I had a distinct role at the programmes.

Informed consent

Informed consent was sought at various stages of the research. This is understood as 'process consent' where consent is negotiated as an ongoing process (Heath, *et al.* 2004: 14). When I first attended programmes it was necessary to introduce myself to the young people and explain my position. On my first visits time was generally put aside for me to introduce myself and discuss the aims of the research with the young

people. I explained to the young people that I would be spending some time at the programmes so I could find out what was involved and then I would like to speak to some of them about their experience of the programme. It was made clear that this would be a voluntary process which would be discussed in more detail at a later date. The time spent as observer and participant observer was most useful in getting to know the young people and the workers, by 'being there', and it gave me a chance to develop a good understanding of the programmes. As the programmes work on a 'roll-on roll-off' basis a further consideration in relation to informed consent, and the research in general, was young people joining and leaving the programmes. When new people joined programmes at different stages throughout the research project they were individually informed of the research.

Research is often conducted in contexts where it is difficult to secure informed consent in the outlined way (Heath, *et al.* 2004). Only oral information about the research was provided which is not unusual in youth research settings (Coomber, 2002; Ensign, 2003). Formal consent was only requested for those taking part in the recorded discussions. Although part of the research was participant observation this was much more about getting to know the participants and giving them the opportunity to get to know me rather than always documenting what was occurring to then be used as data. The research was explained in understandable terms to the young people and often seen as a separate project for them to participate in, clearly distinguishing it from other activities. I explained that I wanted to find out about their experiences of the programme and how they were benefiting from their involvement because this was often not recognised. In introducing the photography I explained how it would be useful to look at other aspects of their life that were important to them at the time and we could then discuss where the programme fitted within that. The photography acted as a facilitator in this process and young people understood why they were taking photographs.

Informed consent is concerned with agency and competency. It is based on research participants being able to express their agency in the research process, rather than being treated as the 'subject' upon whom the research is 'done'. The ability to express agency arises from competence at decision making and is based upon adequate information about the research and its intended uses (Heath, *et al.* 2004: 3).

There is debate over informed consent in relation to children and young people and the guideline age limit to give informed consent is 16 years-old. All of the young people on programmes were 16 or over. Research with children and young people is often dependent upon access mediated by 'adult gatekeepers' (Qvortrup, *et al.*, 1994). This was the case in this research as the programme workers acted as gatekeepers. The benefits of this are discussed later in the ethical considerations section. It is agreed that young people need to have time to consider if they want to be involved in the research and I took the responsibility of ensuring that consent was understood. This was facilitated by the research being separate from the programme.

There can be difficulties with process consent when research is longitudinal and aims to engage people on a number of occasions. It is argued that rather than giving informed consent young people may instead show 'informed dissent' to being involved (Edwards and Alldred, 1999), an example of this is provided later in the chapter. This was also seen on a number of occasions when cameras were not returned. The use of cameras also ensured that the young people understood their involvement. They were given time to look at the photos before the discussions so they still had the ownership over them. Issues of anonymity were discussed before the recordings began as well as explaining the right to withdraw and the right to stop or pause the recording at any stage.

Observations

With hindsight, the six months I spent as observer and participant observer with the programmes before carrying out any directed data collection was very beneficial. I was given an insight into the daily workings of the programmes which was essential in formulating the approach to the research. I became aware that the work at the programmes was intensive and difficult; that the young people could be unpredictable and that no two days would be the same. I was aware that the young people were subject to various review meetings which took them out of the training sessions and which many did not like, which had some impact upon the way in which I collected the data. I was aware of their behaviour and reaction to outside trainers when they came to deliver sessions. I was able to spend break times with the young people which gave both parties a chance to get to know each other better. I believe that this time established a situation where young people and workers were comfortable with

me 'being around' at the programmes. This time has also been beneficial in developing an understanding of the everyday practice and process of programmes.

During this time I was also involved in assisting in some sessions. This was useful in many ways and it was clear from initial observations that I could not remain detached from either the workers or the young people. I needed to gain their trust in me as a person and in what I was doing. I have often struggled with being regarded as a researcher who comes in and collects data and then leaves the scene and the 'guinea pigs'. I was also aware that the workers may have thought of me in this way at the beginning. A number of workers had told me that this had been their previous experiences of evaluators and researchers. However, participant observation can be challenging as Calveley and Wray's experience reflect when one of them took up the position of classroom assistant:

'Participant observation also involves the additional challenge of remaining constantly aware of what is taking place around you; one has to be continually alert but at the same time not look like a researcher!' (Calveley and Wray, 2002: 16)

The regular contact with programmes was useful in being able to hold a conversation with a young person as I was able to discuss specific topics with them in relation to the programme and also things they did outside of the programme. For instance, if I knew they were going to a birthday party or family gathering I could then discuss this when I next saw them. However, as already explained I was not present all the time and so my role as researcher and not worker was clear.

Being invited to attend residential with the programmes was an important aspect of my 'acceptance' by the programmes. The manager encouraged this and suggested that this may be beneficial to illustrate what the young people get out of such experiences and also to continue to develop my relationships with the young people and programme workers. I attended two residential with one of the programmes. The first was an overnight stay in London. The second was a week in France. The latter experience was particularly valuable in developing my understanding of aspects of the work outside the programme setting. I observed and was part of an intense, week-long experience with the young people and programme workers. Some specific

aspects I recall were the group going for a meal in a restaurant and the workers encouraging the young people to order their own meals. For some this was a daunting experience but everyone managed to do this within this supportive setting. The young people were given the responsibility with travel tickets, passports and assisting the programme worker in reaching our destination (which took seven train journeys). It gave an insight into the work of the programme staff that I would not have obtained otherwise. They had to be constantly aware and responsible for the wellbeing of the young people, dealing with any discrepancies within the group and the overall over-excitement of a group of young people who had never left the country before. In a sense, they were at work every hour we were on the residential and I could see the continuation of the developmental work that happened at the programme base. I was identified as an extra 'adult', that the young people already knew, rather than a worker. I did not have any authority as the workers did and the young people were aware of this.

The effect afterwards also proved beneficial as the young people now had something that they could always talk to me about: 'do you remember that time in France?' and so on. I was part of a very important experience for them as none of the young people had been abroad before. I was in the photographs that formed part of the evaluation of the residential and it was, overall, an invaluable experience for me. I also got to know the workers better after spending such an intense period of time with them on a more informal basis and got a further understanding of the work they did.

At times I was conscious of my ambiguous status as a researcher (Goode, 2000). On occasion, the responsibility of assisting in sessions was something that I was not entirely at ease with at the beginning but which I grew more used to over time. On the other hand, this was probably one of the main ways in which I was able to get involved so closely with the programmes. The workers saw my interest and willingness to be involved. Calveley and Wray (2002) discuss the importance of spending time developing the access gained:

'In this organisation I was given almost *carte blanche* access and was able to use this freedom to overcome initial suspicion by spending considerable time with individuals from all levels of the organisation, sometimes working alongside them, in an unquestioning way. In the case of the shop-floor

workers I spent a lot of time as a participant observer working 'on the line' with them as part of the team. My introduction to the organisation was initially as someone *'from the university doing a Ph.D. on how managers organise things'* but quickly became known as *'the bloke who is writing the book'* and eventually as *'oh, that's just Davy, he works here sometimes'*. (Calveley and Wray, 2002: 6)

As above, I also went through a similar process to the point where I was acknowledged as an 'accepted presence'. This was assisted by the programmes being so accommodating, though at times this made me wonder if this was because I was there initially to conduct an 'evaluation'. By facilitating in sessions, helping out as support when other members of staff were on leave and attending residential:

'I became a fixture within the organisation, 'in it' though not part 'of it'; but most importantly not associated with management, and consequently, non-threatening'. (Calveley and Wray, 2002: 7)

Calveley and Wray (2002) make an important distinction above, of being 'in' the organisation but not 'part of it'. I believe that I was in a similar position, programme workers and young people knew the reason I was attending the programmes and even though I was actively involved I was not 'part of' the programmes. While such an approach to research can be beneficial the tensions of maintaining such a high level of engagement with programmes does need to be considered. With hindsight, time should have been allocated during the research period for more reflection of the research process and my role within the programmes.

Focus groups

After spending six months as a non-participant observer and participant observer, the directed data gathering began with focus group sessions with young people. This was to form the basis for the interim evaluation report. I conducted the focus groups with young people independently as the young people and workers felt comfortable for me to facilitate the group alone. The maximum number of young people in a focus group was four. Focus groups were conducted with twelve young people, three of which were not interested in taking part in the next stage of the research. Three other young people who agreed to take part in the next stage of the research later did not participate, this is discussed as the young people are introduced in the following chapters. I was aware of the limitations of focus groups, and specifically in this

context after being present at many training sessions, including whether people were comfortable to talk about their experiences, people talking over each other and distractions from other participants.

As a method for the evaluation stage, they were beneficial in developing an insight into the young people's views of the programme. The young people had the opportunity to share and compare their experiences and discuss aspects of the programme that they may not have done before. Even though the focus groups were a useful mechanism to engage young people in discussing the programme, after consideration I did not feel it was appropriate to use this tool for the following stages of the research. A number of the young people on the programmes have low levels of confidence and it was clear from observations that they were not comfortable speaking out in a group. Moreover, they were given the freedom to choose their subject matter when taking photographs and it would be impossible to develop this approach through focus groups.

Groups were also used when initially explaining to the young people about using the cameras, which allowed for questions to be asked and group discussions of possible topics to photograph. These sessions were an important part of the process as I was given a session to enable me to explain to the young people clearly what I wanted to achieve and gauge their responses to the objectives and to the idea of using cameras.

Participants in the study

The focus groups were a distinct, initial stage of the research and aimed to assist in the development of the individual work with the young people. A number of the participants in the study became involved after the focus group stage. As stated earlier, as the programmes worked on a 'roll on-roll off' basis young people would join and leave the programmes at various stages. Therefore, over the two year period of the research many other young people were asked to be involved in the research, which is detailed below.

The table below outlines the young people, their age and gender and also shows the reader when the interviews were conducted. This not only assists in terms of understanding the timeframe of the research but also assists the discussion. The table

illustrates that the research process was not straightforward and unpredictability was a feature of this research. It will be used to highlight some of the problems and reasons for the problems and dilemmas encountered as the fieldwork progressed. All of the names of the young people have been changed.

Table One: Participants in the study and dates of data collection

Name	Age at first discussion	Gender	Dates of the discussions
Adam	18	Male	05/09/02
Anna	17	Female	19/06/02* 08/08/02 26/11/02
Jack	17 At the final stage he was 18	Male	13/06/02* 04/07/02 22/08/02 26/11/02 19/03/03
Jane	16	Female	19/03/03 24/04/03 22/05/03
Jasmine	18	Female	31/05/02* 23/08/02
Jess	17	Female	13/06/02*
Jodie	18	Female	13/06/02* 26/07/02
Joe	17 At the second stage he was 18	Male	12/02/03 10/04/03 24/06/03
Kate	17 At the second stage she was 18	Female	19/06/02* 22/08/02 25/09/02
Lara	17 At second stage she was 18	Female	12/02/03 10/04/03
Lisa	17	Female	01/08/02

Mark	16	Male	25/09/02 11/12/02 24/06/03
Narinda	19	Female	10/09/03
Paul	18	Male	15/08/02
Peter	17	Male	24/02/03
Polly	17	Female	12/06/02*
Sam	18	Male	08/01/03 02/04/03 22/04/03
Sarah	16 At the third stage she was 17	Female	10/09/02 26/11/02 24/04/03
Simon	16	Male	03/04/03
Tim	16	Male	12/06/02*
Tom	17	Male	12/06/02* 11/09/02 31/10/02
Will	16	Male	24/02/03 31/07/03 10/09/03

* This date was a focus group session. When cameras were distributed in the focus group sessions, the dates give some indication as to how long it sometimes took for the cameras to be returned.

Along with weekly attendance at programmes, the above table shows that thirty-eight individual discussions were conducted with young people as well as focus groups which involved twelve young people. As well as the interviews with the young people, twelve in-depth interviews were conducted with programme workers and also Connexions Personal Advisers, eight and four respectively.

The interviews with programme workers were conducted at the programmes at a time when the young people were not in attendance to allow for an uninterrupted discussion. These interviews involved asking a number of questions relating to the

delivery of the programme and the circumstances of the young people (see Appendix One). I believe that, due to the established relationships with programme workers, I was able to communicate well with them in this setting and they were also able to relate examples that I had knowledge about.

The interviews with Personal Advisers were arranged to seek another perspective of the work of the programmes. These were more difficult to arrange and were often through contacts at the programmes. However, the Personal Advisers that did agree to participate brought a useful insight and perspective to the research, especially in relation to the circumstances of the young people and their views on the provision that the programmes were delivering and the targets that were set.

It was important to gain an understanding from the service deliverers for a number of reasons. One reason is that they were able to communicate a perspective of the programmes from a 'professional' point of view. They knew what was meant to be delivered and also explained the demands of the work. They were able to provide an in-depth insight into the work conducted in the programmes, how the policy was put into practice and issues related to young people they worked with.

The main study

After the focus groups the aim of the next stage of the research was to engage the young people on three separate occasions to develop their narratives. This was to enable the documentation of the impact of the programme over a period of time and also to develop the meaning of the programmes within the wider context of the young people's lives (Kushner, 2000). Initially, the aim was to involve the young person when they joined the programme, again when they had been attending for a number of months and, finally, when they were reaching the end of their time on the programme. Once the fieldwork began, this was not always possible. As discussed, it was necessary to get to know the young people before involving them in the research. So the first stage of the research often began once they had been on the programme for a couple of months, were familiar with me being around and understood what I was doing. This initial period sometimes made the following stages of the research less problematic. While the aim was to conduct interviews at three stages with the young people this was not always possible.

At each stage the young people were given a disposable camera and asked to take photographs of areas of significance in their lives. It was made clear to the young people that, whatever they decided to take a photograph of, they needed to remember that this would be used in the discussion at the next stage. Developing this format for this part of the research enabled me to work with the young people and to develop further questioning based on the previous interviews as well as for them to introduce any new areas. Many young people volunteered to be involved in the research. As Calveley and Wray discuss, the initial period of time spent at programmes may have assisted in this:

‘When eventually asked if they were willing to be interviewed, the individuals to whom I had become familiar responded willingly, and the information offered was, I believe, of greater value than would have been elicited in different circumstances. It reached the stage where some individuals were asking me when I was going to interview them’. (Calveley and Wray, 2002: 7)

Whilst the use of photographs has not always been as conducive to discussion as was hoped for, in the main it has been a useful means of access to aspects of young people’s lives that may not otherwise have been as readily accessible. To this extent, the young people have become an integral and defining part of the research, leading discussions and introducing areas of importance to them.

To facilitate discussion in some areas of interest to the young people, I believe my position as a relatively young person with an interest in popular culture enabled us to build upon common interests and concerns (Collins, 1998). This ranged from hobbies and interests, social life and discussing nightlife, music and films. Collins (1998) reflects that:

‘...the interviews were sites not so much for the exchanges of facts, but of stories and the interviewer became, of necessity, a *story-teller*. Carrithers (1992: p. 1) observes that ‘We cannot know ourselves except by knowing ourselves in relation to others’. The interviews often involve a stream of narrative, involving an intricate braiding of stories. Interviewees, in telling stories about themselves in relation to others, reconstitute themselves. As the interviewer I am not, I cannot be, merely a passive observer in all this, even though it is primarily the interviewee’s life which is under scrutiny...I am increasingly moved to contribute my own stories, to hold them up for contrast and comparison with those of the interviewee’ (Collins, 1998: 7-8, emphasis in original).

Programme workers, who were often important links in ensuring the return of the cameras, have welcomed this method and the approach taken with the young people and it may have even assisted them in their practice as the following excerpts communicate:

‘I think that it’s been really interesting and I think also that the young people and the feedback that I’ve got from them...they’ve been really looking forward to it and the picture side of it. They’ve been ‘oh yeah I can’t wait to see these pictures’. Really looking forward to it and dying to show us when you’ve finished with them. Like ‘look at these’. I think it’s worked really well...From the feedback I’ve got back from them they’ve really enjoyed doing it and I’m really pleased with them. And I’m surprised that they’ve come back the way they have with the stuff. I thought you’d get one film back’ (Programme Worker)

‘I think from my side of it I can definitely say that the work that you’ve done and especially the photographs has really sort of opened my eyes a lot more. I’ve heard of the environment that they live in and I’ve heard about all the politics that goes off at home and all that. Fully reported on all that but to actually see it has really opened my eyes, completely. Just how they live, the conditions they sometimes live in. I think that’s really important and I think it’s something that I’ll carry with me. I don’t know what we could do in the future. I’m not saying that looking around someone’s house is going to help you do your job better but it bloody opens your eyes to how they live. And it explains a lot. You can almost let certain things go’ (Programme Worker)

The discussions sometimes prompted the young people to offer to bring in other photographs that they had to show me. Some young people had a diverse range of photographs, which adds to the value of the approach as it has allowed access to things that an interview may not have been able to address. Some had given certain photographs to friends and family and one young person had pinned her photographs up in her bedroom.

Another important point in relation to my reflexivity as a researcher and to research conducted over a period of time has been identified by Ball, *et al.* (2000). They raise the point that in their study the researchers’ relationships with the young people changed over the course of the research. This was something I was been aware of when spending considerable periods of time with the projects (Goode, 2000). I have been asked advice on various issues at times, which in a way could be seen as illustrating that the young people had some degree of trust in the relationship. However, I have always been aware that, as a researcher, I am neither qualified nor

equipped to give advice. In the main, advice was related to relationships they were experiencing at the time or it was to find out my experience of issues they were going through. This may also be seen as a further indication of the way in which unequal power relations manifest themselves and are an inevitable part of the research process.

Although positive aspects can be drawn from the above comments it is also necessary to think about the impact of the researchers' presence in such situations, both on participants and also the researcher, and elements of role conflict. While people were familiar with my presence at the programme it was clear that I was not a worker there. I would tend to talk to young people about what they had been doing at programmes when I had not been there and workers would often tell me about what had happened on days when I was not present. I do not think I reached the level of trust with young people that they had established with workers. If a young person did ask me a question or ask for advice I would always suggest they spoke to the programme workers and would try to ask them later, where possible, if they had done this. I was able to discuss my experiences at programmes with my supervisors at the university which assisted in focusing my thinking and also enabled me to reflectively consider my role as a researcher in the setting.

Practical considerations

There have been many practical considerations in the research process. At the beginning, it was very much an unknown what the young people were bringing back to be developed. One consideration is that the focus of the discussions was often dependent on whatever was occurring in the young people's lives at that time and was considered by them as of primary importance. As with Kraus (2000), I have noticed a change in the focus of some of the young people in subsequent interviews.

As mentioned earlier through observing programmes I was aware and explicit in my intention to them, that I did not want young people to think of the research as similar to the reviews that they had as part of the programmes. I sought their opinions on the interview process and any suggested adaptations to it whenever possible. Another aspect is that, as with reviews, the young people and the staff complained that it takes them out of their training. I was conscious at all times, while making appointments and conducting interviews, that the young people were being removed from their

training and that this could perhaps affect their mood in the discussion if it was part of the training they enjoyed.

However, this was the only feasible way to conduct the research, as it would have been impossible to attempt to plan sessions outside of the programmes. On one occasion, a young man (Tim) who was leaving the programme and was taking part in the research had not attended the programme for a few weeks. He turned up on his last day and a programme worker asked him if he would be willing to talk to me one last time. He agreed, so she called me and I stopped my work and immediately travelled to a pottery workshop the programme was attending that day. I knew this young man really enjoyed pottery but the programme worker had assured me that he was willing to participate. We were given a private room to discuss his photographs and, as I began to initiate the discussion his mood dramatically changed and he no longer wanted to talk to me, saying he had nothing to say and he wanted to get on with his pottery. This was an unpredictable reaction I had not anticipated, as I had known this young man from the beginning of visiting the programmes and he was always very talkative and friendly. This could be seen as informed dissent explained earlier in the chapter.

It was important to be aware of the often transient (Sims, *et al.*, 2001) and sporadic nature of young people's lives and their often 'fluid and marginalized lifestyles' (Goode, 2000: 13) as well as the need to expect unpredictability and unique interview experiences. This is an issue that I have become increasingly familiar with and one that was anticipated. It is necessary that, due to the complex and often unstable nature of their lives, careful consideration was applied at every stage. Again, these aspects of the research process also mirror aspects of the work of programmes. Being consciously adaptable and flexible in my approach has been necessary. Timescales were affected by having to depend on the young people to return the cameras prior to the discussions taking place. Cameras were sometimes lost but, in the main, it was trying to ensure that the young people remembered to return them, which has sometimes taken up to two months. The research had to adapt if young people moved on, either to education, training or employment or leave the programme of their own accord. Once this occurred, it was predominantly the case that no further contact was possible with this young person.

An important issue, that is not really addressed in literature, and a further difficulty that was not fully anticipated has been, after obtaining young people's informed consent to participate, attempting to engage them in discourse. The educational level of some of the young people has been an issue throughout both the focus group and interview process. This was the case with Kate (see Appendix Four). She was always very willing to be involved in the research but, when it came to sitting down and talking, it was often a difficult process. Many of the young people commented that they were relieved that being involved did not mean that they would have to read or write:

'The use of qualitative research interviews have been recognised as a useful tool to overcome some of the problems identified above when working with this group of young people (Ovenden and Loxley, 1993). A key feature that these researchers identified is that language can be adapted to match the educational level and colloquialisms of the group.' (Allen, 2002: 279)

The above issues were not the case with all. Some young people fully engaged and articulated their experiences without any problems, as quite a diverse group of young people volunteered to participate, as is clear in the cases of Paul and Lara. It would not have been possible in this research, along with others, to aim for a representative sample (Collins, 1998; Goode, 2000). Discussions with the young people often digressed as the young people moved from one point to the next and I took the opportunity to enquire further into areas they were introducing.

I was also faced with the issue of retaining the attention of the young people to keep them engaged, particularly as the aim was to engage them on three separate occasions. In Britton, *et al.*'s (2002) research study, many young people had 'disappeared' when they went back to conduct the second stage of the research. Allen's study (2002) engaged youth workers and young people in constructing questionnaires and notes that:

'It has been identified that, when carrying out research with illicit drug users, there is a need to involve participants and to make the experience more personal if you are to motivate them (Van Meter, 1990) and the results will be of interest to them (Manheimer, *et al.*, 1972)' (Allen, 2002: 278).

Visiting the programmes on a weekly basis has allowed me to follow the young people regularly and sustain their interest and involvement in the research. The use of cameras was also a tool to sustain young people's engagement in the research. Table one can be used in explaining some of unpredictability of the young people and how the process was not straightforward. For example, Adam was very quiet for a long time on the programme, as will be discussed in later chapters, and it was only towards the end of his time on the programme that he became involved in the research and he moved on shortly after. Although I aimed to engage young people three times the table shows this was not always possible, this was usually because the young people left the programme, for example, Jasmine, Jane and Jodie. Jack was on the programme for a long time and therefore his involvement was more sustained, the reason there is an extra data is because on one occasion he wanted to take part in a discussion but did not want to use a camera. At a later date he decided that he wanted to do the camera work again and this was agreed. Dates were arranged on a number of occasions to speak to Paul and for a variety of reasons this did not happen. On one occasion he did not turn up, on another the programme workers took the young people out for the day and forgot I had arranged to visit. Paul also had increasing work commitments which made arranging a date more difficult. Simon was initially keen to be involved but took several months to return the camera. One discussion was conducted but he moved to a different programme shortly after as he and his family moved to a different area.

The process was by no means linear as proposed. In practice I had to take opportunities to speak to the young people when available. The 'roll on-roll off' nature of the project meant that young people were joining and also leaving and the research had to fit in and adapt to the circumstances.

Another practical consideration of using visual methods, which cannot be avoided, is the possibility that photographs may not turn out in developing. This occurred on a few occasions and the young people were very disappointed about this, even though it was unavoidable. Sometimes, the young people were not the ones who took the photographs, which made it difficult to talk about them. On a number of occasions, their parents had used the camera to take to events such as school plays or birthday parties to take photos of other members of the family. An unusual occurrence was

that Lara insisted on collecting the photographs herself when they were developed and censored them before we conducted the discussion and did not show them to the programme workers either. A further consideration has been that, although having the photographs has been a useful tool, I had to be constantly aware that the young people tend to trail off by getting engrossed in the photographs.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were high on the agenda for this research project and aspects of this have been discussed throughout the chapter. This includes the commitment of respect for participants, which was a key aspect of the programmes, and commitment to participant rights including the responsibility to ensure anonymity of participants, projects and locations. The development of trust and rapport were essential prerequisites to the use of photography that asked the young people to share their experiences. I was constantly aware not to exploit the young people and for the research not to work in any detrimental way. The study was explained and reinforced formally and informally on several occasions to ensure informed consent from both programme workers and young people. This has included discussing issues of confidentiality and the right to withdraw (Goode, 2000):

‘The need for trust, rapport and candour when working with young people in this context has been identified by Fontana and Frey (1994) and Manheimer, *et al.*, (1972). The researcher must be flexible in their approach and seek pragmatic solutions when problems arise’ (Allen, 2002: 281).

As with Goode ‘the relationship between the researcher and the gate-keepers became a key aspect of the research’ (Goode, 2002: 2). The programme workers did act as gatekeepers in some circumstances as I always asked permission before giving the young people visual equipment. Programme workers felt that some young people were not in a position to participate, either due to having too many personal issues at that time and therefore could be seen as extremely ‘vulnerable’ or too transient and therefore too unreliable to engage for the sake of the research. Jane had been on a programme for six months at the point of the first discussion. She had always been eager to be part of the research but the workers did not think she was ready until this point and she was asked to leave a couple of months later. I appreciated this as part of

the process of engaging the young people who then still had the choice to be involved or not:

‘...the women selected themselves into the research process and only those women who were comfortable being interviewed were in fact interviewed’ (Goode, 2000: 7).

A further ethical consideration is related to the content of the photographs as the young people often chose to take the photographs within their own homes and included friends and family members. The young people often freely offered information when describing the photographs and their reasons for taking them. It did appear that having the photographs as a focus point for the discussions made them more at ease rather than a more formal interview situation. There is a need to consider at all times whether this method is too intrusive as the camera ‘reveals more than other methods’ (Prosser, 1998: 30). For the most part, there were at least a number of photographs of the young people’s family and friends and they were often taken in their private space, such as their homes and bedrooms. This was one of the main reasons I made the decision not to ask the young people if I could include any of the photographs in this work. It was a tool to facilitate the discussions which could possibly be further developed and incorporated in future research. This research argues that it could be used in practice as a tool to record developments.

At times I was aware of ethical issues arising from what the young people chose to disclose to me (Goode, 2000). I was surprised, at times, at the openness of some of the responses. Reflectively I believe this is through knowing the majority of the young people for a length of time before the interviews took place and spending time talking with them on an informal basis during break times. As expressed by Goode (2000), informal encounters were an integral aspect of the research process. I have already described above the importance of stressing to the young people that as a researcher I was not in the position to offer advice and if necessary would recommend that they speak to the programme workers.

However, even when I knew the young people well, on some occasions they created barriers within the discussions by giving monosyllabic replies or not paying attention. In some senses, the discussions were dictated by the mood of that young person on that day. Throughout the period of directed data collection, I recorded field notes as

soon as possible after leaving the research site. The diary has been useful in supplementing information that was generated in the discussions (Collins, 1998). I tried to make sense and interpret some of the complexity I have experiencing through observations, interviews, photographs and field notes. The following are taken from notes after leaving the programmes when I had time to reflect and consider the research:

‘At the time of the second interview with Sarah there had been a bereavement in the family and there was a number of photos of the wider family (photos could depend on what occasions had happened around the time). In this discussion Sarah told me that her dad died when she was one years old and how her uncle, pointed out in the photos, is like her dad. At the end of the interview Sarah told me that she was feeling down and not very talkative because her cousin is in prison and she was going to visit him tomorrow. This discussion with Sarah had been scheduled to take place on an earlier occasion, however, her set of photos did not come out in development. She was very disappointed about this at the time: ‘they was fat [good] them photos was but they didn’t come out’ (Field notes, 26th November 2002).

‘It was interesting to note a discrepancy in what Sam said today. He had previously talked about going to see his dad on a weekend. However, before we began the discussion today a young person came over and looked at his photographs and asked if he had a photograph of his dad. Sam replied: ‘chance would be a fine thing’. Sam had been asked to do a speech at a presentation event the following week. I spoke to him outside after the discussion and he talked about how he would like his dad to know that he was doing this to prove to him that he had achieved something. It is difficult to know how much to ask on some occasions with young people when they may have personal issues with their family. On this occasion I just listened to what Sam said and did not feel it was appropriate to question him about this’ (Field notes, 22nd April, 2003)

Allen (2002) noted that ‘predictably, the use of a tape recorder was immediately met with some resistance by the group’ (Allen, 2002: 280). I was, on occasion, questioned by the young people about who would subsequently listen to the recording even after reiterating on every occasion that I would be the only person accessing it. Only once did one young person refuse to allow the tape recorder to be used. Interestingly, he had already been involved in one discussion that was recorded and he also agreed to let me use it on a future occasion. Such factors cannot be predicted. Another young person, who had also allowed a recording on a previous occasion, was unsure about permitting the discussion to be recorded a second time. After a lot of reassurance she decided to allow the recording to take place.

Young people's responses to the use of visual methods

As has been noted, the young people were always receptive to using cameras. It was always an important consideration of the research process to gather the young people's understandings and views of taking part in the research. It was interesting and useful to get their feedback on their experiences of being involved in the research.

Most of the young people, at the end of the sessions, commented that they were not quite sure of what to expect at the beginning of the process but had enjoyed taking the photographs and discussing them. A number of young people commented that they had enjoyed it because it was 'easy'. Some shared that they had been apprehensive to begin with:

'I was scared of doing this at first because of, like, talking and I didn't know what to say and then I thought yeah' (Anna)

'I found it pretty easy to do. I like taking photos of people and I like doing things like talking about them and telling what they mean to me, it feels good to do that, it gets it off my chest' (Sam)

'I managed it alright, I got used to it straight away' (Will)

'I love taking photographs. I actually enjoyed talking to you and I actually enjoyed looking at the photos and actually taking the photos and I'm quite surprised at how they've turned out' (Jodie)

Some of the young people did not have very much experience of taking photographs:

'I don't use cameras that much, only when I'm on holiday I use cameras' (Simon)

It was encouraging that, at the end of the discussions, most of the young people already had lots of ideas about what they wanted to take photographs of for the next stage. A number of young people stated their disappointment when the research ended. One commented that 'it gives me something to do when I'm at home'. Some young people had photographs that they particularly liked enlarged. It was encouraging that a number of the young people carried their cameras around with them for a few weeks when they went on day trips and to their work placements; this seemed to show that they were putting thought into the research. The one-to-one context of the discussions was important for the young people and it was aimed to ensure that a sense of informality was maintained throughout, with one young person

stating: 'it didn't feel like an interview or nothing'. Goode (2000) found that the women in her study 'welcomed the opportunity to narrate their experiences' (Goode, 2000: 11). As one young person rightly commented:

'You've got to build up a trust as well for them to be able to show you pictures of their outside life...Its good because now you know, like, all my family...Not as in you're someone new who's come in. You'd go that's my sister der, der, der, you would just say it like that. You wouldn't say nothing else about them' (Lara)

The discussions often became more in-depth after the young person had been on the programme for a while and their confidence was increasing:

'That's the confidence thing...because like the first time I did it...I was just looking at the photos and just like saying different things but then as its gradually went on I've been able to talk more about what I've been doing...Because when we first did it I was like fairly new and like I'd never sat down and talked to someone over photos' (Joe)

The research process was intended to assist the young people in reflexively considering their lives and one young person commented that:

'It's weird because this is my life at the moment. That is my life on that table at the moment' (Lisa)

A number of the young people felt that the photographs were particularly valuable as memories of their time on the programmes and that point in their lives, and responses included; 'I said to them to sit down and take a photo so I can remember them'; 'its been alright to look back at what you've done, like your photos and everything'; 'I like them. It's nice to have pictures and that'; and 'memories for when I leave'.

Most of the photographs were of events or situations that were significant at that point to their lives and personal development. One young person commented it was useful to see 'how I'm getting on with my life, to keep track of life and that'. This method was definitely a useful starting point for the discussions. One young person felt it had been effective for themselves and other young people in their group: 'because they're taking photos of what they've done and in just talking to someone without the photos they may forget something and then they can just look back on the photo and say oh I did that.'

Analysis

The fieldwork produced a substantial amount of data, of varying qualities at times, but in the main it was rich. The majority of the discussions with young people and workers were recorded and subsequently transcribed. It is not assumed that the words spoken in the research context constitute 'data' and were unproblematic statements. The discussions were interpreted as part of the analysis process. Schratz and Walker (1995) state perceptions are always partial and social research involves the negotiation of meaning among the people involved. However, I am also aware that ultimately it will be: 'my representation of their lives that is finally fixed in print' (Collins, 1998: 9). In the analysis it is also important to remember that:

'Lives do not consist of data; they consist of stories and stories are negotiated during social interaction. And the stories (along with the selves they constitute) continue long after the writing is finished' (Collins, 1998: 16).

It has proved a dilemma as to the best way to represent the data gathered from the fieldwork. I initially planned to present the young people's narratives solely as individual cases in an attempt to communicate to the reader the complexity involved in understanding their lives and the role of the programmes in this wider context. I later decided that it would also be beneficial to the argument of the work to use themes developed through a thematic analysis of the data. This also enabled the perspectives of programme workers and Personal Advisers to be included more effectively than when only presenting individual cases. I am aware that there is a danger that by presenting the findings in this way the young people appear fragmented and I may run the risk of categorising their experiences in the way that I have been trying to avoid. While I feel that the development of themes assists in the development of the argument at times it has been impossible to separate the young people's interlinked experiences.

To illustrate this, a selection of individual cases are presented as appendices (Appendices Two to Five). It was a further complicated decision as to which cases to present in the appendices. I decided to include two where young people were involved in the research on a number of occasions (Appendix Two and Appendix Five), one case which highlights the problems of the research process (Appendix

Four) and one which was based mostly on one discussion with a young person and also observations (Appendix Three). The remaining individual cases are available but for length purposes of this thesis have not been included.

This work has focused upon certain themes to assist in the developing argument of the work. There were many other themes emerging from the work, including popular culture, further developments on the programme and in other parts of their lives, and further experiences of programme workers and Personal Advisers, but for the purpose of this dissertation they are not fully addressed. The main themes introduced and discussed are educational background, personal background and circumstances, the young people's experiences of the programme and the relationship of the above to the forms of accountability and current measurements of performance of the programmes.

Summary

This chapter has discussed the methodological considerations of this research and the reasoning behind the adoption of an interpretive approach. It introduced the use of visual methods within research and how they can be a valuable tool when adopting a participatory approach. Due to a lack of literature which documents the research process, particularly in relation to engaging disengaged young people in research, this chapter then discussed aspects of the research process that have had an impact in this study. As well as reflexively considering the approach taken in the research the responses of young people and workers to the research process were also discussed.

Chapters five and six begin the discussion of the empirical findings of this study. While presented as separate chapters it needs to be highlighted that many of the themes discussed throughout are interwoven, spanning the young people's educational background, family background and domestic circumstances. The complexities of some of the young people's biographies were, at times, confusing and fragmented as found by Ball, *et al.*, (2000). These complexities play a significant role in understanding the young people's experiences. For certain young people, the defining points in their lives have been upheaval and instability in their family and housing circumstances. For these young people and for workers this can be more significant than is currently recognised and is difficult to account for, both in the current

accountability mechanisms and because of the often sensitive nature of such issues. Issues surrounding this aspect of their lives were often of key importance in understanding a young person's sense of identity. This was often combined with a difficult, fragmented school history and other negative experiences of education.

Chapter five focuses upon young people's experiences in education and communicates that understanding these previous experiences are important when considering a young person's re-engagement in the training programmes.

CHAPTER FIVE

PERSONALISED CONTEXTS – YOUNG PEOPLE’S ACCOUNTS OF EDUCATION

Introduction

It is important to locate the young people’s experiences of the programme within the wider context of their lives to develop an understanding of their view of the programme and the impact it may have had (Kushner, 2000). Research with young people, by Ball, *et al.* (2000), Green, *et al.* (2000) and Mitchell, *et al.* (2001), identifies the need to understand the young people’s lives in both the wider and specific context. In developing an understanding of the programmes which the young people were participating in, this chapter explores the young people’s previous experiences of education. This aims to illustrate that re-engagement in programmes can be a significant step for young people who have had previous negative experiences of education and have often been out of learning for a period of time.

Themes discussed include the experiences of young people with learning difficulties and the significant effect of bullying on a number of the young people’s educational experiences. Some young people identified their disruptive behaviour while at school and for many this was in relation to problems they were experiencing in the wider context of their lives. There is also a discussion of young people’s experiences of college, although this is brief as many of the young people did not continue in education after their experiences at school.

Experiences of compulsory education

The government agenda of a move towards a ‘Learner Society’ and the promotion of lifelong learning may impact further on the exclusion of certain people. Baron, *et al.* (1999) and Ball, *et al.* (2000) discuss the idea of ‘fractured learner identities’ where because of previous negative experiences in education young people often decide to disengage from formal education and learning. This is a useful way to explore many of the young people’s experiences in this study as many were disillusioned with education because of their previous educational experiences. This chapter aims to highlight that because of previous educational experiences acknowledgement should

be given to young people's re-engagement in a training programme, which for many is a significant step. Only one participant, Lisa, did not identify any problems when discussing her previous educational experiences. The rest of the young people's educational experiences held one common theme, that they had in some form been negative.

In this research, young people discuss non-participation in relation to their previous experiences of education and employment which are often disjointed and interrupted. Their reasons for not being in education and their individual circumstances differ considerably from the government assumption of non-participation stemming from individual deficit and self-exclusion (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001). Attwood, *et al.* (2003) found young people who left school prematurely often did so in difficult or stressful circumstances. The government's perspective presents an over-simplified view of young people that does not communicate or develop understandings of the diverse needs and circumstances of the young people they aim to assist. While self-exclusion is evident, there are often complicated reasons behind this. One of the findings of this study is that many of the young people's disengagement was for reasons which were beyond their control or which may not be widely acknowledged as reasons for people to leave education or disengage from it.

For a number of the young people, re-engagement in any form of formal learning marks a significant change in their everyday lives when some have been out of any form of routine or learning for up to four years. A common situation was that the young people had left school before the compulsory leaving age of sixteen, which is identified as the 'transitional' point, and some have what MacDonald and Marsh (2001) describe as 'virtually empty school careers'. In their study they focused upon wider notions of transition because the school-to-work model was not applicable for many young people who had limited school experiences.

While Ball, *et al.* (2000) discuss that the end of compulsory education can offer an 'escape from learning' many of the young people in this study had 'escaped' before this point. Some young people in this study described their decision to no longer attend school as based on disliking school, while others discussed not learning in school and, therefore, it was viewed as a waste of time. It was common for the young

people who left school early to have been regular truants, which they attributed to not enjoying or having problems at school. All of the young people who left school early did not sit any exams. It was surprising that there was a lack of consequence to the decision to leave school for many of the young people. The young people did not make a link between the possible benefits of staying in education as a means to increase future opportunities. For example, Adam did not enjoy school and found it boring and did not sit any exams before he left. He also talks about his perception of the school and links this to his reason for leaving. It seems that Adam believed no one else involved was bothered so he could not find a reason why he should be. He did not think that it would be worth staying at school:

‘I’d had enough. Half the teachers had left. It was closing down anyway’

Hodgson (2002) identified three categories of young people who did not make a successful transition from school to further education or employment. These are low attainers, underachievers and young people with learning difficulties. These are similar to the themes identified in relation to young people’s experiences of education in this study. However, this study focuses on the young people’s individual reasoning for leaving education.

Learning Difficulties

It was common that young people had learning difficulties of varying degrees. Again this is not the impression given in the policy documents or programme specifications. This is where the notion of an assumptions gap first becomes apparent. Young people attend programmes, initially for six months, where they will receive support and assistance in developing their basic skills. Many of the young people identified the help with basic skills as the key reason for joining the programme. This raises the question of whether this a realistic aim to be achieved in six months? As will become clear this period of time is not long enough to address some of the young people’s rudimentary levels of ability.

Having learning difficulties had an impact on some of the young people’s attendance and performance at school. Some of the young people who had learning difficulties were annoyed that their needs were never addressed or taken seriously at school.

Jasmine did not enjoy school at all: 'I think it's crap. They just tell you what to do'¹⁰. She does not have any GCSE qualifications. She stated that she preferred the learning environment of the programme as she received more individual support which she contrasted to school:

'Because you sit with a teacher and there's probably about four of us so she can help more because there's only four of us. But at school they don't know if you've got learning problems or nothing. They don't pick up on it...And some kids just copy don't they? Because I just used to copy off people'

For some young people it seems that, because of their learning difficulties, choices were often made for them by others. This complicates the idea that there are increasing choices available to all young people (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Baron, *et al.*, 2000). In some situations the young people had limited choices because of how they were identified and perceived by people in authority. Sam joined the programme to mainly improve his Maths and English skills. He had:

'Left school a bit early because I wasn't enjoying it at school. I wasn't learning. Plus I've got learning difficulties.'

He described how his learning difficulties are a result of complications when he was born. He did not describe getting any help with his learning difficulties while at school. Instead, it was decided that he would not sit any of his GCSE examinations. The teachers and his Personal Adviser made this decision, but he felt that he did have a choice in this:

'I didn't do none of my exams because they thought I'm not smart enough to do it. I admit I'm not that smart...They took me out of my exams...I had a choice to do them but I chose not to because I wouldn't be able to pass them anyway. So I thought there's no point doing it. Even my mum said there's no point doing it because you won't pass. You'll probably fail.'

Once Sam was aware that he would not be sitting any exams, he did not see the point in remaining at school, a place that he did not really like anyway. He left school before the end of year eleven and spent his time at home until his Personal Adviser suggested attending one of the programmes. While he stated that he would like to

¹⁰ ' ' denotes the young person's own words. Some of the young people did not expand a great deal on some of their answers and they have been incorporated into sentences.

achieve some qualifications, his main aim was to get a full time job. Although Sam felt he had a choice in the decision not to sit his exams, it seems that the decision was made for him by both his teachers and his Personal Adviser. As his words above describe, his family also thought that this was the right decision.

Another example of the way in which young people with learning difficulties were managed within school was the use a form of exclusion within the school. This involved removing them from their classroom environment to 'The Place' which is an area pupils are sent to if they are disrupting the class or are unable to participate at the same level as the other pupils¹¹. Jack is dyslexic and had problems with reading and writing at school which he still struggles with now. He had recently been diagnosed as dyslexic, which was not the case while he was at school. The reason he enjoyed school was because he was with his friends. At school, he was often excluded from the main classroom and sent to 'The Place'. Jack did not like being sent there as he felt he did not learn anything and was not given any extra help or support and so he often argued with the teacher to allow him to stay in the classroom. He eventually refused to leave the classroom as he felt he could at least learn a little there.

Jack reiterated negative experiences of school throughout and appeared to be very disheartened by his experience of education, creating a fractured learner identity. He reflected that he did not have any ambitions or aspirations at school: 'All I cared about was leaving and having a long rest' and 'I didn't used to want to think about it basically'. He talked about being good at art at school¹²:

'C. D. Do you like art?

Yeah I was one of the best in my class but yet I didn't get the high marks. I really fucked up on that.

C. D. Why?

Well he said you had to do like loads of pictures and stuff...

¹¹ It seems that there is little consideration that 'The Place' (name changed) is a mix of young people who may have been disruptive and are there because of their behaviour as well as young people who are identified as not being able to participate at the level of the rest of the class. This research is unable to explore this in any detail although it would be interesting to understand more about the role of 'The Place' for such a variety of young people.

¹² This was prompted by some photographs he had taken of his drawings at home.

C. D. Like coursework isn't it?

Yeah, I did loads. He wanted all of my stuff from year 10 and all my stuff from year 11. I had loads. I did more, took them in. He thought I'd get good marks. Got them back. I think I got a C and he was really disappointed, my teacher was. He said he really would of thought I'd get good marks.

C. D. A C's still quite good...

Yeah, but I mean I was expecting better and they'd turned around and written there's no written work about it or whatever. So I goes, I basically just went, I said oh I'm going then I'll see you around. And basically I'd done all that and all I get is a C and I was really disappointed'.

The above extract illustrates Jack's experiences of education. Art was the one subject he was good at and had worked hard at and he felt the mark he received did not justify and reflect this. His inability to complete the written part of the assessment let him down, but he felt he was never given the support to improve his literacy, typifying his experience of school: 'I found it difficult and school didn't really give me no help'. Jack's perception of the experience was that the school did not help him, although it cannot be clear how accurate this is. He said he was not supported by his teacher who would have been aware that the coursework also required a written element. Jack in turn, ended up doing what many of the young people discussed, in that he walked away. He would not stay in this situation any longer which he felt was negative towards him. This was his way of dealing with the situation in the immediate instance and it is apparent that other young people also acted in this way. The only way they felt that they could deal with situations that were negative was to remove themselves from the environment. It is clear that Jack felt let down by his school experiences:

'I was meant to have a dyslexia course and they told me this at the end of my year 11 when I was just about to leave. And they said "well we're going to put you on one for the last couple of weeks". I said "yeah alright". Then, about two weeks later, they said "we can't be bothered, we're not doing it now". And when I went on the dyslexia course here and found out I was dyslexic, well I already knew I was and that's when it basically kicked off¹³. Because the school knew I was dyslexic but they didn't do nothing about it so and they tried to do the same thing to her [points to a photo of his sister]. And they're going to try and do the same thing to my other sister. But my youngest sister is probably the smartest out of me and my other sister. I mean she can read, write perfectly but they still try and put her in all these special needs

¹³ He discusses how his parents are in the process of suing the school.

places. And she don't need it because they think she's related to me and [name of sister] they think that she'll probably be thick.

C. D. It's not thick though is it?

No, but that's the way they look at it...I mean all it was you go down to this little place in school. All they do is put all these daft kids and trouble makers down there and they take them out on trips'.

Jack was aware of negative stereotypes surrounding this area and the way in which he described 'The Place' is a cause for concern as it seems that a variety of young people were 'lumped' together and sent there for many reasons, from behaviour to level of ability within the classroom. The next section introduces another significant aspect of young people's school experience, that of bullying.

Bullying

Bullying was an overwhelming feature of some young people's experiences and one that was not anticipated to this degree, as previous research had not highlighted it as a major issue in reasons for disengagement. Young people are not portrayed as vulnerable in the policy documents due to the focus on individual deficit. There is little research that has explored the impact that bullying may have on young people's experiences and choices in the longer term. It often took a number of discussions with the young people before they shared that they had problems with bullying at school and to relate this situation to their negative perception of school and learning.

These young people often felt that their exclusion from education was 'imposed' upon them, even though they were the ones who ultimately made the choice not to continue at school. To a degree, the exclusion was imposed by peers who bullied them but also by teachers within the school who were identified as doing very little to address the problems. When exclusion due to bullying was the case, some young people often moved to a local college to continue from year 10 onwards. Some of the young people were able to study for their GCSE's while at college. However, on occasion, bullying ended in non-participation. It is significant to consider that this is often the young people's background and experience of education and therefore hardly surprising that re-engagement could be difficult. The following sections discuss some of the young people's experiences of bullying. A number of examples are included to illustrate the different impact that bullying had on their lives.

Simon was not in education, employment or training immediately before he joined the programme, although he had had a job for a while previously. Simon had left school in year ten, attended college for a year and then got a job. His experience in education at the stage of joining the programme had been negative. He said that he did not have any career ambitions while he was at school:

‘Because I wasn’t at school most of the time so I didn’t really care what I wanted to do, due to bullying and everything like that...I used to skive every day...That’s why I went to college for the last year. I tried getting out at the end of year nine but they said I wasn’t allowed so I stayed for another year and I finally got out at the end of year ten.’¹⁴

This is a depressing situation which was common among the young people. It appears that they did not have time to think about what they would like to do in the future as they were occupied with trying to use their coping strategies for dealing with the daily issues they were facing. Simon worked towards his GSCE’s at college but failed his exams. He was already in a difficult position and became behind with his work from truanting to escape being bullied.

Will also left school early due to problems with bullying and stated the main reason he joined the programme was because:

‘I missed out on my last half year at school because I was out one night and most of the people that were my friends they all went against me and tried to, well they all assaulted me really. They just all went against me...I got into a fight with some of them. I’m not really a fighting person...I don’t really like fighting. And then all of them came on me. Someone like punched me, well pushed me and then I fell down this hill and shattered all my arm. And that was with my drawing and things¹⁵ and it shattered, about last year, about April. And it broke the bone in the hand...I didn’t go back to school and missed all my exams and everything.’

Not only did Will not return to school or sit any of his GCSE exams, the incident also significantly affected his confidence. To some extent, it could be seen as circumstances beyond his control that dictated the position he ended up in. Will did

¹⁴ It is interesting to note that Simon uses the words ‘tried getting out’ and ‘got out’ in relation to leaving school. Such words seem to indicate how trapped he felt, Ball, *et al.* (2000) talk about young people escaping from learning but here Simon is escaping from more than learning, it is the whole school environment.

¹⁵ Will was a talented artist. Like Jack, he had taken a number of photographs of his drawings and art work. He had taken these photographs because this is what he spent most of his spare time doing and he discussed the photos in relation to his grandmother who enjoyed the same pastime.

not feel that he had a choice in his 'transition' from school to the training programme and what he wanted to do after his early departure from compulsory education. Again, while there is a great deal of literature on transitions and risk society which emphasises the increased choices for people, this does not seem to be the case for many of the young people in the research. External influences, such as bullying, which seem to define a number of the young people's experiences, are not always recognised. For Will, it was as if he had the choice taken away from him. This was a traumatic experience which left him disheartened with school and with negative views of people in authority:

'No, the teachers didn't do owt. The police don't do owt. No one seems to care so I thought I'm not going back then. Because when we phoned the police and things they didn't do owt. They said, "oh yeah, we'll check" ...And then we said to the school, they didn't do owt. They didn't seem bothered. I'd been there all those years. I'd never missed like a day and then when something happened to me they was like nah, we're not helping you.'

Will felt that by being on the programme he would have the support and help to be able to get into a job that he would really like to do. He was an optimistic young person and he reflected that:

'I don't think of that as like a bad thing really because I'm here and I've done loads of things so I suppose there was a purpose for it.'

Mark had experienced problems with bullying since he was in junior school and the school often sent him home. He said 'ever since I was in juniors, I always used to get picked on'. He reflected that, up until the bullying began, he had enjoyed and was doing well at school. Mark explained that the bullying got worse as he entered secondary school and he began to lose his temper with the people who were bullying him. The school continued to send him home and he was expelled on a number of occasions due to fighting. Mark believed the reason for the bullying was because other people in the school did not like his family.

The significant point for Mark was when his mum died during the summer holidays after his first year at secondary school. He felt that the problems with bullying worsened when he returned to school during year eight. He described how people used to comment on his mum and Mark continued to get into trouble for retaliating:

'It is really hard. Still is. Four years ago it's been since my mum passed away. And so, in year eight, people started to call my mum and it got me so wound up. I didn't want to do it. I just carried on walking off till they kept calling me and all that. And I'd just had enough and I just went mental and lost it.'

Mark discussed how he has a bad temper and how he used to get very angry and 'flip'. An attempt was made at school to address his anger issues, through attending a support group, but Mark did not feel this worked and he also did not like the teacher who led the group. Mark had a serious fight at school at the beginning of year nine and did not attend school for the rest of that year. He recalled 'I just stayed at home and I was being bored out of my skull'. His father became involved to address the issues with the school but, as the situation did not improve, he became more infuriated with the teachers and ended up not pursuing it any further. Mark left school in October of year eleven after a serious fight. He described how he took himself out of school and, in the following January, he said he 'got took off the roll because I was being picked on all the time'. He said:

'I took myself out of school. Bullied. Done my head in so I took myself out. I had more bullies when my mum passed away than when my mum was alive'.

He was contacted by the Local Education Authority but he claimed that he was told that, if he wanted to get a job instead of returning to school, he could do that: 'because, at the end of the day, at least I'm off the streets and out of trouble and that's all that matters'. He got a job working as a door-to-door salesman. However, he said:

'One of my ambitions was to get qualified. To get my GCSE's. But I never done them. I didn't do none.'

Mark did not feel like he could return to school because of the constant bullying which, in turn, took the choice of his participation away from him, what he calls 'a nightmare, a living hell'. He discussed how he felt that it was unfair that he was the one who had to leave the school when the people who bullied him were allowed to continue with their education:

'I just didn't want to go in because of it. Because there's no point going in and getting into fights and that when you're just going to know you're going to get sent back home. Because I used to always get sent home for it and they

used to get slapped on the hand and get off, that's it. And get to stay in school. And I don't.'

Although Mark did have parental support and involvement, the situation was not resolved. As well as the problems at school, Mark and his family were grieving the loss of their mother and wife. His choice to stay at school and his aim to sit his exams were compromised to the point where he felt there was no option but to leave. The choice of gaining qualifications was outweighed by his personal unhappiness.

There are many ways in which bullying impacts and it can force the exclusion of the young people being bullied. Problems with bullying significantly affected the young people's confidence and self-esteem and created barriers in terms of re-engaging. Some young people reflected that they were disappointed that they did not have the opportunity to sit their exams. All of the young people who discussed being bullied identified parental support and involvement in addressing the bullying problem. However, this does not seem to have had an impact in any of the cases and the evidence suggests little was done to address the problems within the school.¹⁶ This must be a significant area to be addressed in policies and further research when the detrimental effect on the young people is considered.

Disruptive Behaviour

Some of the young people admitted that they were disruptive at school and had disengaged with learning while still attending. For these young people, their experience of education was very different and they played an active role in their negative experience of education.

Paul had a negative experience of school and learning and did not enjoy school, spending most of his time being disruptive. He had known the workers at the programme and his Personal Adviser since he was at school as he was often sent by the school to the local youth club to prevent him from disrupting the rest of the

¹⁶ While this may seem a highly speculative statement it is also based upon my experience as a mentor in a secondary school where one young woman I mentored was bullied and she, similarly to the experiences of some of the young people above, was the one who was excluded from school rather than the bully.

class¹⁷. Both Paul and the workers confirmed that he did not behave any better there and consistently caused problems for the staff:

‘The bad people from school, they’d take us canoeing every Wednesday just to get us out of the school and give the school a break from us. Because like there, there wasn’t a day went past when you wouldn’t see me standing outside the headmaster’s office. The only day you wouldn’t see me standing outside the headmaster’s office is for two reasons. If I wasn’t there or if I was excluded. That’s the only time you wouldn’t see me.’

In some ways Paul may be seen as the sort of young person that Jack identified as a ‘daft kid’ or ‘troublemaker’ when talking about ‘The Place’. Although Paul did sit his GCSE exams, he did not feel that he achieved much academically at school and reflexively commented:

‘I mean, if I could go back now and change, I would. I would really sit down and concentrate on my exams but I walked away with hardly anything. I think the highest grade I got was a C. And I only walked away with 3 GCSE’s, a C and 2 G’s and my C was in drama. I mean I did like drama. That was one of my best subjects at school. My acting was the best at school. I was thinking about doing that at college but then I thought no.’

As well as being disruptive at school Paul used to go out stealing and committing burglaries with his friends. He had to go to court on a number of occasions and was fined for his offences, which his mother paid for him. During the time of the research he was in the process of paying her back weekly. Paul continued his negative behaviour and would not let anyone stop him doing what he wanted to do. Although he remained in school officially until the end of compulsory education he could only talk in a limited way about his educational experiences as they were formed around disruption rather than learning.

Sarah provided a very different experience of disruptive behaviour at school. She was also quick to assert that she did not enjoy school. Her experience of school was:

‘It’s boring. All you do is go to Maths and that lot. Then you get into fights. Get into a fight nearly every single day.’

On a later occasion, when Sarah talked about her experience of school again she said:

¹⁷ The youth club run a group during the day for pupils who are disruptive in school. The young people spend time with the youth workers and it is mostly activity based.

'I never went to school. I always skived. Smoking and that shit. Go to people's houses. I never went to school. I never learned. I didn't give it chance.'

From Sarah's descriptions, it would seem that she often got into trouble at school for fighting but also because she struggled with the work in class. She explained that she found the other pupils too disruptive in the classroom, which made it difficult for her to learn, and to which her response was to be aggressive:

'I just feel like putting their head down the toilet and make them learn. Because they're all like, you know when we was doing our work they all ran around like lunatics.'

It could be argued that on some occasions this is where two separate issues are interlinked but not addressed. As with other young people Sarah struggled to do her school work in the classroom and possibly needed extra support. This manifested itself as disruptive behaviour but this was not related to the need for help with her work. Sarah remembered one particular incident with a teacher where: 'he had a mouthful at me, making me look dead small in front of my mates'. After this incident her mother and stepfather went to the school and had an argument with the teacher which caused further problems. Sarah recalled 'so they brought the police in. Then we was going to get arrested for nothing, so I left.'

She stated that she did not return to school after the summer holidays to begin year eleven, which her mother was unaware of:

'They used to send letters and, if I went downstairs and there was a letter in a brown envelope with [name of school] on it, I ripped them up and put them in the bin. And the school board didn't come out.'

While Sarah was not attending school, she got into trouble with the police who: 'just gave me a slap on the hand and that's it'. However, she was threatened that if her behaviour continued she might end up an electronic tag on her leg when she was in trouble for stealing cars. Sarah stated that it got to the point where she did not want to keep stealing cars and getting into trouble. She said that she realised that the people she was hanging around with were 'prats' and 'they just grass you up anyway'. Sarah reflected about whether she would have returned to school and was undecided saying:

‘I wish I did and wish I didn’t because of the people.’

For some young people disruptive behaviour at school often related to changing or disruptive personal circumstances or personal problems. A number of the young people discussed how they had enjoyed primary school and enjoyed the first few years of secondary school. Most identified problems beginning when they started year nine or ten.

Lara’s disruptive behaviour at school was related to personal and family problems. Lara maintained that she liked school and was always the one in her family destined to go to university. During her teenage years, Lara went through very difficult personal times. She has a very problematic relationship with her mother and, when she reached the age of fourteen, she began to stand up to her. She also described how her mother was quite strict with her which caused arguments while they were living together. Once the problems with her mother escalated and she began to stand up to her, her attitude towards figures of authority in school also changed. The problems that Lara experienced at home had a significant and detrimental impact on her school experience:

‘I was really good at school for the first three years. By the time I got to year nine I just changed. It was nothing to do with...everyone said it was like my attitude, but it wasn’t. It was just like my mum, that was it. And that was why I was bad at school...She’s always hit me and stuff. She’s always been, all my life, like by the time I got to fourteen I started standing up for myself to her. And she didn’t like it because I stood up to her it was like, she was like God to me, do you know what I mean. She only had to look at me and I knew. So when I got to fourteen I started, like after she’d hit me like “did that make you feel better?” And she was like “what?” And she’d hit me again. But I’d just sit it out and then when I went to school the teachers was like nothing to stand up to against her. Because I’d stood up to her like they told me to shut up, like “don’t talk to me like that”...I never got expelled because my head of year used to always say to me “I never even knew your name until year nine”. That’s how school rang social services, because it got to year nine and he was like “I don’t know, where has it come from?” and all this. And I just said like about my mum and everything and he said “do you want me to ring social services?” I was like “no, no, no”. And then he rang social services and it all changed from there. But because I was in a children’s home, I used to have to get a taxi to school and it was like, I dunno, a lot of it was like the light was on me, do you know what I mean. I was the one coming to school in a taxi. I was the one in a children’s home and I was the one who always got the police

at school every morning and everyone was like, I dunno, not encouraging me but I played up to all of the attention.'

This example highlights the impact that other areas of a person's life have, such as home life, affecting behaviour and attitude at school. Lara began to take drugs (she explains later that this was her way of dealing with her situation). While at school her ambition was to join the army. She attended work experience at an army base for a week where she excelled. This all changed when social services became involved and she was taken to a children's home. She threatened to commit suicide and took an overdose, which affected her medical records and impinged on her ambition to join the army:

'I wanted to join the army and I would of. And I did my work experience for a week in the army, we lived there for a week. Had all the interviews to join the army and everything but then the social services told me I was going into a children's home and I said "if you put me in there...I'll kill myself". And they was like "whatever, you're an attention seeker". I said "whatever then". They said I had to go the next day so I took an overdose that night. And then when the army did the medical records they said I couldn't join till [date] which is now. But now I can't join anyway because I had an allergic reaction to the [amphetamines] that time so that's just messed it up...I'd done all the interviews, did all the tests and I was joining the army foundation college and everything. Even though I was still in school it was like all my predicted grades were enough to get me so they just kept pushing it as far as they could until they got the results. But then, because I took an overdose, they just sent me a letter saying something like can't accept you because you took an overdose, the reason you took an overdose was due to a stressful life and the army is very stressful so you need to wait till three years after.'

Understanding Lara's personal situation is essential in developing an insight into her current position and the issues she is addressing while on the programme. Lara explained that:

'My problem's my mum. Just everything from the past. She's never said she's sorry. She's still, well up to like two weeks ago, she still always made me think it was my fault. And the only way that I could deal with it without getting all depressed and upset and wanting to kill myself and all that shit was just to take that [amphetamines] because that made me think, yeah, I might be ok about her. Forget about it.'

Just before her GCSE examinations, Lara had further disruption by moving to a different city to live with her sister. While living with her sister, she worked in a fast food restaurant and spent a lot of her time in the pub. Her sister allowed her to do

what she wanted when she lived with her: 'I was just in the pub from 11 till 11'. She sat her exams but states: 'I didn't do them properly'. Lara used to travel back on the day of her exam and turn up either hung-over or 'stoned'. She explained her situation at the time:

'I always did nights but I'd only work three days and then I'd give my sister some money and then just spend the rest in the pub. And then, when I had an exam the next day, it was like on the train with a hangover, you're not going to revise nothing are you? So I never did revise anything and then I'd have a spliff to wake me up, not wake me up because I know it makes you tired but when you've got a hangover I think it does help. So I'd just go in and I was stoned and I used to write I don't understand the question so I can't write the answer. And because I was really bad at school they used to let me go early. They wouldn't even let me take the exam in the hall with everyone else because the time before I had a fight in the hall.'

Despite all of this, Lara maintained that she liked school. As with many other young people (Attwood, *et al.* 2003), she wished she could go back now:

'I liked school but like I don't know, I wish I could go back now, I'd do everything totally different. Like with my mind now though. Not with my mind then.'

Lara's family problems had taken over other aspects of her life, for example her interest in education. It was common for education to be the area that young people would give up when they were having problems. The above discussions show that young people may have had negative experiences of education for many reasons. While there were a number of examples of bullying they all provided a unique context that could not be generalised.

Experiences at college

A number of young people made the 'transition' from school to college courses (some transferred to college while they were still of school attending age due to bullying). Some of the young people said they had left college because they did not like the environment and, for some, it had a negative impact on their confidence. This created

further barriers where young people refused to return to a formal learning or college environment while on the programme after their experiences¹⁸.

Financial reasons were given by both Paul and Peter for leaving college as neither received their Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA)¹⁹. Paul at this time also owed money to his mother to pay back his fines. Peter had been working towards his NVQ in catering after he left school but he:

‘Just walked out and didn’t go again, because they weren’t paying me.’

It seems that the money was distributed according to where a person lived and he did not qualify for a training allowance whereas a lot of other people on the course were eligible to receive it. He had joined the course thinking he would receive an allowance and claimed that he enjoyed the course. He said his mother only wanted him to go to college to ‘get my books back’. He explained this as:

‘My child benefit books, but that’s one of the reasons why I stopped it because she was getting money, I wasn’t.’

While he aimed to get a job at a ‘car mechanics place’ when he finished on the programme, he did not attend the placement that had been arranged for him in a motorbike shop because he ‘couldn’t be bothered’. He said he did not want to go to college and just wanted a job doing mechanics: ‘I’m not going to college, nah I’ve done it before’. Due to his previous negative experiences, he refused to go back to college to gain any qualification.

It is unfortunate that Peter and Paul made their decision to leave college based solely upon financial reasons. This highlights that financial security is necessary and for some young people it has to take priority. Again this offers an alternative view of non-participation and the way in which decisions and choices are limited. Archer and Yamashita found that ‘participation...was not a ‘neutral’ or uncomplicated choice – attendance has to be financially ‘worth it’ (2003: 66).

¹⁸ Some of the programmes ran sessions at a local college often because they would have access to an IT suite.

¹⁹ Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) is mentioned on a number of occasions by the young people. This is similar to a training allowance and it provides young people with financial assistance while they are studying.

Joe had negative experiences of education at school which continued at college. He compared his previous educational experiences to his current situation, attending the programme, and he believed the environment at the programme was more suited to his learning needs:

‘It’s so much better than college and at school. Because at college and school you feel pressured to do things, but here you’re not. It’s different to college...we was in a group, we was always in the same classroom and everything and I don’t like that kind of thing. I didn’t like school either because I never went so I don’t think I like indoors. I like the outdoors better.’

Joe spent a year at college but did not enjoy his time there. He was studying intermediate leisure and tourism. However, he is not sure what qualification he achieved. It seems that he also had problems with bullying at college:

‘I was in the Academy when I was there as well, and I didn’t like that. The football Academy at [name of college] and I got forced out of that by the other people because I got called every time that I played. It was like I was the youngest person there because everyone was a year above me and I was always getting picked on and everything so I quit.’

He also reflected that:

‘I wish I’d stayed on now, but it was just something I did at the time.’

Again this response illustrates the lack of consequence that young people had for their actions. It also shows that with hindsight many of the young people claimed that they would have dealt with situations differently. This was often in relation to gaining qualifications. This section is limited in its evidence or discussion as many of the young people did not have any experiences of post-compulsory education.

Summary

This chapter has discussed the young people’s previous educational experiences in order to illustrate the significant step made when engaging in training programmes and the diversity of the young people’s circumstances. Workers highlighted that education is not always valued within some of the young people’s families and, sometimes, education proved to be an obstacle and negative time in their lives. It is

difficult to pinpoint but the lack of empathy or enthusiasm for education plays a significant role in the young people's lives.

It appears that the young people often made the decision to leave education but the choices available to stay in education were limited. The young person's agency in this decision was often 'bound' (Evans, 2002) by their experiences and therefore their decision may have been a reaction to the situation they were in. In relation to bullying parents were involved in the process, but for many of the other young people they describe how they made the decision to leave education alone. The form of resistance adopted by these young people was to get out of the formal education process. It seems that, on occasion, very little was done to prevent this by teachers or other professionals, sometimes family, as in Sam's experience where the decision was made for him.

The 'carefreeness' discussed by researchers (Ball, *et al.*, 2000; Du Bois Reymond, 1998) about young people making decisions in relation to transition is very different for these young people. 'Carefree' in this context may relate to not thinking about consequences of their actions and the impact of the choice to leave education. The idea that the end of compulsory education is an 'escape from learning' is less relevant as many had 'escaped' before this point.

Many of the young people who remained in education to the compulsory school leaving age described negative experiences explaining that they were often marginalised and 'alienated' within the school environment due to their level of ability. These young people were often disheartened by their experience of school and relationships with people in authority. They did not leave school with qualifications and often stated that one of the key areas they wanted to work on at the programmes was improving their literacy and numeracy. This could be related to the 'assumptions gap' suggested within policy. There is little consideration that young people may have been outside of formal learning for a considerable period of time before engaging in the programmes and they often had limited learning experiences. In this sense, the design of the programmes do not recognise the level at which young people are at when they join the programmes.

It is argued that a feeling of 'alienation' is reproduced and reinforced by the experiences that some young people have of formal education throughout their lives (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001). This research argues that this sense of 'alienation' from formal learning and previous negative experiences often impacts on a young person's confidence and self-esteem, which increases the likelihood for young people not to engage at a later stage. This is closely linked to the work that the programmes do to foster and develop the confidence and self-esteem of the young people. This will be discussed in more detail in the 'experiences on the programme' chapter.

Many of the young people did not feel ready to enter employment when they first left school. This was often related to not having the confidence or the qualifications to enable them to gain employment. Some of the young people had attempted to move into further education by joining a college course. However, all of the young people in this study had subsequently left their courses and it was here that the role of the programmes became a feature in their lives. Very few of the young people had any previous experiences of employment. Some described work placements while at school. Most of the young people identified that they would like to enter employment when they left the programme, rather than further education or training. This differs from the government's focus of increasing the numbers of young people in education.

While some young people described how they regretted their decision to leave education, others did not consider this due to the extent of their negative experiences and the lack of investment in education by both themselves and others around them.

Non-participation in education from before the compulsory school leaving age complicates the 'linear concept of transition'. Many of the young people spoke, in a matter of fact way, about leaving education. For many of them, the decision and action to leave education did not hold many consequences in terms of future aspirations. It was an immediate decision that was taken. Many of the young people claimed not to have any career aspiration or ambitions while they were at school. As the cases cited illustrate, it seems that, at whatever cost to their future, their sole aim at that point was to leave education.

This chapter has aimed to set the background to the young people's engagement in the programmes and to demonstrate the need to understand their previous experiences of

education in relation to the programmes. However, as can be seen in the narratives so far, their life experiences are complex and diverse with a prevalence of other issues, which do not revolve around education. It is to those issues that the next chapter will turn.

CHAPTER SIX

PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES – UNDERSTANDING THE WIDER CONTEXT OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIVES

Introduction

Following on from the previous chapter, this chapter discusses the diversity of the young people's personal circumstances and the need to understand the wider context of their lives in relation to their position when entering and attending the programmes. In sociological youth literature and research there is a body of literature, which emphasises the need to locate young people within their situation specific context (Ball, *et al.*, 2000; Green, *et al.*, 2000; MacDonald and Marsh, 2001; Mitchell, *et al.*, 2001).

In this study, young people's circumstances varied from being in a secure family environment, a controlled environment at home, to situations where they have faced significant upheaval and often family problems and are now independent. For some young people, the reason for their discontinued participation in education stemmed from their personal circumstances. A young person who has left, or been 'kicked out' of their parental home has immediate instability and uncertainty to deal with. For these young people, education and attending school daily at this point in time becomes a secondary concern. Some young people did sit exams at school but described the difficult personal circumstances, which were concurrent at the time. They identified this as a major obstacle to achieving what they were predicted and aimed to achieve. Most of the young people were still experiencing difficult personal circumstances when they joined the programme and a great deal of the assistance they received was support to deal with these issues.

This chapter begins with examples of young people's experiences which highlight the complexity of some of their lives. It is within this context that the process of being involved in the programmes needs to be understood. The concept of 'critical moments' is then applied to some of the young people's experiences to explore specific incidents in detail. The chapter ends with a discussion of the labels applied to young people which highlights the way in which young people are often aggregated into pre-determined categories.

When discussing re-engagement in the training programmes it is necessary to explore the wider social context of young people's lives. The responses of young people, programme workers and Personal Advisers, made it apparent that it was the personal problems and concerns within young people's lives that made the work of the programmes more complex. For example, one Personal Adviser felt that the current measurement of 'achievement' espoused by policies did not really correlate with the young people's backgrounds:

'They don't come from backgrounds where education is seen as something to aspire and achieve. Training, what do they want training for? Its only forty-odd quid a week. You can get more standing on a Sunday morning on the market selling hooky gear and fags and tobacco from the continent. I think it's a very middle class way of looking at what actually is an achievement.'

This highlights that the current measures of success and achievement may need to be reconsidered to reflect young people's lives.

The significance of young people's home environment

Family is significant within all the young people's narratives, although this can be positive and negative. Many of the young people in this study mentioned several resources, which provided social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988) to support them. This often included complex family networks and large extended families²⁰. These young people did come from supportive and stable home environments where family members provided assistance and positive role models, for example Will and Sarah. Jack discussed his parents' involvement in trying to move him into some form of activity and they sent the letter for him to join the programme. So while the young people may be identified as socially excluded, they do not subjectively identify themselves in this way and are 'included' within their communities and families (MacDonald and Marsh, 2001). However, as the Personal Adviser above states, this inclusion may limit what some young people do if education, employment or training is not valued within their network of family and friends.

²⁰ It was common for the young people to have complex family networks and structures which were at times difficult to follow and understand. Through the photography method, it was possible for the young people to bring this range of people to the attention of the research.

Other young people did not have the same resources and support to draw upon and family relationships created part of their problematic situation. Structurally, all of the young people could be identified as socially excluded. As there is a lack of consensus about this term, it is difficult to encapsulate an exact meaning, but all of the young people were identified by programme workers and Personal Advisers as belonging to areas and/or families which showed attributes identified as socially excluded:

‘There’s a lot of issues about poverty I suppose. A lot of parents they can’t read and write so that’s an issue. Mental health that can be a major issue as well. Then crime and custodial sentences, drug issues, housing and money’.

The above response was from a Personal Adviser. While it highlights crime, custodial sentences and drug issues, very few of the young people in this research were involved in anything like this. It could be argued that many of the young people in this study relate more to the young people identified by Britton (2002) as at risk of being missed because of the fact that they are not engaged in such activities.

Problems while living at home

In some cases, where the young people were still living in the parental home, there were significant family problems which they had to deal with. Many of their family circumstances were troubled and complex, which meant that the young people lacked support from their family, as one programme worker explained:

‘I’ve spoken to some parents and they are really not interested and they [young people] must get that at home. They must get that they’re not really bothered so, when they come here, they’re dying to tell you what they’ve been up to. What they’ve been doing and you know, blatantly not interested as well. I mean I’ve reported back on how well someone’s doing and they’re [parents] like ‘oh right’. Great.’

Young people provided many examples of how problems at home have impacted on their lives. Many of the young people lived with one parent and they often had younger siblings. Some of the young people played a key role in the household where they were the oldest sibling, which some of them complained about during discussions.

Through observing at the programmes and also by talking to programme workers it was clear that Tom had a number of personal problems at home. This impacted on his engagement with the programmes as on occasion he was permitted to leave the programme and go home because he felt that he could not concentrate. In the early stages of meeting Tom, he was open to me about some of the problems he was having at home and how his father was depressed. I had to make sure that the workers were aware of this and referred him to them as I was not able to deal with this situation.

Kate had a disruptive housing situation where she was constantly moving between her parents home to her grandparent's home. She was also heavily relied upon to provide childcare for her siblings. The workers had to keep a close eye on the wider context of Kate's life and there were issues that they did not and could not disclose to me. Kate had hygiene issues, something which the workers thought may have been simply due to never being taught how to be hygienic by anyone at home. This was finally brought to a head on a swimming trip when the workers decided that it was necessary to intervene as there were health implications for Kate. The following week the workers, after much debate, brought some of their own clothes to the programme to give Kate and a bag for Kate to keep in the office and access which included soap, deodorant, toothbrush and paste and hair brush. Kate could then, when she arrived at the programme, go to the washroom and use the above.

Another aspect of the workers action to address some of these issues was that they proposed to some of the young women on the programme that they would have a 'girly day'. This was ultimately for Kate's benefit. I went along while they went to the local college and got their hair washed and cut and then went underwear shopping where the programme bought some underwear for Kate and one item for the other girls. The day ended in a café with a drink and a chat. There were lots of opportunities during this informal outing for the worker to introduce discussions related to hygiene issues. While this can only provide anecdotal evidence of one situation this was a very sensitive issue that needed to be addressed. It is a powerful example of the way in which it is necessary to look at the wider context of a young person's life. It also shows that being able to account or even explain to a person who was not there the significance of the work that was done with Kate that day would be difficult and is something that may not get recorded.

The backgrounds of the young people play a key role in shaping their values, perspectives and aspirations. It seems that the programmes may offer the young people forms of capital that they do not receive in the home environment. Workers discussed the necessity to understand young people's backgrounds in order to be able to attempt to offer support and assist them with the issues they have. One worker felt the programmes could offer an 'escape' from their personal circumstances:

'There's a massive amount of poverty and I see it all the time when I'm driving through the estates. It's just like a general malaise amongst working, not even working, underclass, who live on these big flat estates. There's a massive amount of poverty, hence lots of crime, lots of drugs. Coming in here away from all that gives them an escape for a bit. I don't want to paint a drab picture, but I think most of the young people we've got are undernourished because they've not had good diets when they were younger. They're poorly dressed. They've got bad hygiene and I'm talking in general. I mean we can't eradicate poverty. We can't because you know their parents don't go to work and most of their dad's go down the pub every day and they're living on subsistence. We can't eradicate that, but we can give them some form of there is better than that if you work hard and you attend and you've got a reasonable personality you'll get on. We've seen it and I think it's by people like [name of young person] and all these ex-trainees and seeing positive things coming out of their lives...they're getting on with it. They can see that there is a route and a progression because they'll say to me "oh [name] when am I going on work experience"? And I'll say "just when you're ready, when we think you're ready". Because they want to do it yesterday but you have to, we professionally have to think is he ready yet? Most of the time we get there...we just try to give them a place where they can meet up with young people...They come here and they look at us and we're like here everyday and its like something permanent in their lives.'

This worker highlights the importance of recognising that programmes are only one part of young people's lives. Young people spend sixteen hours a week at the training programmes and it needs to be considered that the rest of their time may be spent in circumstances like those described above. However, it also details very well many of the beneficial aspects of the process of being on the programme.

Anna has the role of carer to her mother in her family. This specific context for Anna, who is seventeen years old, had a significant impact on her situation and the choices she felt she had open to her. Anna lived with her aunt (her mother's sister). She was in a long-term relationship and engaged to her boyfriend who also lived with her. They were planning their wedding, which was arranged to take place the following

year. Her father was considerably older and did not live with her mother. She talked about the reason behind her living circumstances:

‘My mum was jealous of my dad giving us two attention. And my mum got jealous and pushed me and my sister out so my aunties brought us up. So I’ve got a bond with her [pointing to photograph] and she’s got a bond with her because my mum didn’t want to know us... I lived with my mum until six but my sister lived with them [aunt] since a new born baby. Because at first my mum didn’t want her because she was jealous and then she had me. She had me until three and my sister brought me up and then six my aunty did’.

Anna had a number of issues to deal with in her family life and had been under a lot of pressure at home. Her mother was anorexic and had recently been admitted to hospital to try and improve her health. On a number of occasions Anna had to cancel activities arranged with the programme because she had to look after her mother. Although Anna spent her time caring for her mother she did not feel her mother appreciated her help or considered how difficult it was for her:

‘My mum’s ill. Look at her there [pointing to a photograph] and she wants the attention all the time. And because my dad gives it her and she’s moaning that, because she don’t eat she’s worrying my dad. And my dad’s old. My dad’s nearly seventy. And it’s killing my dad so I’ll lose both. I’ll lose my mum and my dad if my mum carries on.’

The staff at the programme arranged for Anna to talk to a counsellor to try and help her with these issues. She said:

‘I’ve got to this point where I think forget you, I don’t care. But I can’t really do that because she’s my mum.’

The problems Anna faced with her mother were the main focus in her life at the first stages of the research and took up a significant part of our discussions. Anna did not have a strong relationship with her sister, who was twenty-five, as she felt she often left her to look after issues with the family. However, from Anna’s comments below it seemed that there were further family problems with her sister:

‘We always argue. Well, when I was little never could get on with her. And now I’m much older I do get on with her a bit better than we used to, but we just clash together when we’re together...She’s got a lot of stress on now...She took an overdose the other day because she’s that stressed out. My

aunty's up there though. One of them's looking after her house till she comes back...She's suicidal. She's always ringing up and things.'

Anna had many problems to deal with at a young age and the programme did provide support for her. On many occasions her aunt would ring the workers to discuss particular issues.

Disruptive personal circumstances

A number of young people described disruptive personal circumstances and the impact that this had upon them. Peter experienced disrupted housing circumstances which stemmed from problems with his mother. Due to these problems, he moved in with an aunt where he again had problems so from there he moved into a hostel:

'It's because I moved to my aunty's and my aunty kicked me out because I wouldn't babysit so I moved to an homeless place.'

Peter had just moved back in with his mother after living in a hostel for a year. However, he was now facing debt problems because, when he was living in the hostel, he struggled to afford to buy food and pay his rent and had to borrow money. These are significant experiences, Peter talked about his experience of living in the hostel negatively and he was still not free from this experience as it was now in debt. He was also addressing further issues with his mother at the time of the research.

While providing many examples of young people's experiences one of the aims is to communicate the complexity of their personal circumstances. From previous discussions and the photographs Mark had taken, I had thought that he lived with his father. However, in his last discussion with him, Mark told me that he lived across the road from his father in his father's girlfriend's house. His father's girlfriend lived with his father. He lived in the other house with his friend. He still always used his father's address²¹. He did not pay any rent for the house but he paid the utility bills. He said he has lived there for two years. Before we began the discussion, Mark told me about how his father's house had been raided by the police because someone had tipped them off that he had some 'dodgy mobile phones' there. Mark also told me how his sister's boyfriend had escaped from prison and was: 'on the run for [a long]

²¹ I think that Mark may have deliberately wanted to keep this information from me to begin with.

time'. This person was apparently infamous in the area and was hiding out at Mark's father's house. The police raided the house and found him there and arrested him.

From speaking to the young people it would seem that events such as the one described above are everyday occurrences in the young people's lives. They are the backdrop to whatever else is going on, and attendance at the programmes must be understood within this context. Often young people would have arrived having had a 'rough night'. Jane was eager to tell me about one of these as I arrived at the programme one day. Jodie also talked about serious family matters, including how her brother had just been sent to prison, and her best friend had been 'kicked out' of her parent's house with her newborn baby. It was surprising to me how the young people often talked about such issues in a matter of fact way.

Lara has had a particularly troubled relationship with her family. As with other young people who have had a problematic relationship with family members, Lara had already moved out of her family home into a hostel and then rented accommodation. Lara related everything back to the way her mum has treated her in the past although they were trying to sort out their problems:

'That's why I couldn't get a job in a shop, because if someone come back and complained I just wouldn't, I just don't like when people talk to me like shit, I hate it. It just all goes back to my mum. She used to talk to me so like shit. Now she never would...If my mum ever hit me again I'd hit her back because I just think there's no reason. No need for it, so she needs to stop...we've made friends now because she said sorry about all the past and admitted that she was wrong...about two weeks ago, we went for another little talk like that. For about half an hour I was crying saying "why can't you just admit it", do you know what I mean, "if you just admitted it then my life could go on better and you won't hold me back". Because it always comes to her. She's always like prove me wrong, prove me wrong, get a job. And I always get compared to my sister because she's at university. Its like I haven't got a job, I'm not at proper college, like proper, proper college, to them this is like I dunno what they think it is.'

It seems that her family have expectations for her to achieve academically, which Lara herself thought would be the case. Lara had a lot of responsibilities as she lives independently. She was cautious about telling me about the benefits that she received as she: 'shouldn't be getting the social'.

When Jane was in her final year at school she experienced a number of problems at home and she ran away. It is not clear what the problems were with her mother, however, she often talked about how strict her mother is²². After returning home, she was then 'kicked out' later in the year because she stayed out all night. As the problems at home with her parents were worsening, her attendance at school became more infrequent. Jane reflected that at this point she was very down and said she took overdose in an attempt to commit suicide:

'I was stressed out. Don't know why I was stressed out, but just felt stressed. And I had my GCSE's and that was stressing me out even more.'

She eventually moved in with her grandmother, where she stayed for four months, but also discussed having problems there. Due to this instability, as well as the distress of falling out with her family and the dramatic change in her circumstances, Jane had to focus her concerns on finding somewhere to live as well as attempting to concentrate on revising for her exams. She went to a housing trust that placed her in a hostel for a month and she then got a room in a shared flat where she currently lived. She said the past year had been really difficult, particularly because she did not spend Christmas with her parents:

'They first put me in [name of hostel] and I told them I'm not going in there because it's full of druggies in there and prostitutes and that. So I said no and I got that shared flat so. I talk to my mum and dad anyway because, after Christmas, I phoned up and I went up and now I go up to see them and they come to see me so we get on better now than what we did so.'

Jane felt that her relationship with her parents was gradually improving and she hoped to continue to develop this over time. The last two examples communicate how it is not possible to separate many of the young people's experiences as they are part of complex networks in their lives. Both Jane and Lara's GCSE results need to be understood within the context of the other issues they were dealing with in their lives at the time.

²² Jane describes a complicated family situation which is at times difficult to follow.

Critical moments

The concept of 'critical moments' can be used in discussing some of the young people's experiences (Coles, 1995; Hodgkinson and Sparkes, 1997; MacDonald, *et al.*, 2001; Thomson, *et al.*, 2002). A critical moment is identified by a person as a point of significance in their life. For some young people being engaged in the programme was because of these 'critical moments'. The majority of the 'critical moments' seem to be beyond the control of the young people. For some, their critical moment was when they were 'kicked out' or left their family home. As discussed earlier, Mark's 'critical moment' was when his mother died. This had a significant impact upon his future experiences within education, which subsequently led him to exclude himself from school. Jasmine's critical moment was when she became pregnant²³.

Lisa's 'critical moment' was getting arrested by the police, which ended up changing her career path at that point in time. It was because of this critical moment that she was engaged in the programme and Lisa's engagement was much more instrumental than the majority of young people. She was engaged because she had to be in relation to her probation and suspended sentence. Before joining the programme Lisa worked as a nursery nurse. While Lisa was at school, she did two weeks work experience at a nursery. During her work experience, the nursery offered her a full time job to begin after she left school: 'so I went straight from school into a job'. She began working full time as a nursery nurse and attending college one evening a week studying towards an NVQ level 2 in nursery nursing. Lisa said:

'I've always known what I wanted to do. I've always wanted to work with children. That's all I ever wanted to do.'

The reason she joined the programme was because she had been in trouble with the police and had a two-year suspended sentence. She was involved in a drugs deal with her partner and they were arrested by the police on their way back from the deal in another city. Her partner was sentenced to six years in prison and Lisa also thought she was also going to be given a custodial sentence. Instead, she was given a two-

²³ Jasmine attended a programme which was specifically for young pregnant women and young mothers. One of the key aspects young women on this programme highlighted was the free crèche facilities which made it easier for them to attend. Jasmine also commented that she enjoyed the programme because it gave her a break from her child.

year suspended sentence. This was a significant event which changed her life considerably and interrupted her chosen career path. She reflected that:

‘I’ve lost my boyfriend. I had a house. We’d moved in and everything... We had a house together. A dog. I had a job.’

Due to her criminal record and being on probation, she was no longer allowed to work with children and lost her job at the nursery. She talks candidly about the experience and the uncertainty of knowing whether she would also be going to prison:

‘It was going to court once every couple of weeks. All the way up in [city] though... Because we got caught in [city], we was like, they wanted to hear the court case in [city] so we had to go all the way to [city] every single time I was in court. And it got referred from like the magistrates to the crown, and then from crown back to youth, and then from youth to magistrates, and then from magistrates to youth. And, in the end, it ended up in the youth court in [home city]... But on my sentencing day, no one knew what was going to happen. It was like going to prison or not? So I had to pack up all my stuff, take all my stuff with me to court and everything, just in case I was going... I was in the court room and everything and the judge went back out and came in. She stood up and she started talking and you know when you can tell in her voice, she sounded so like, I was like I know I’m going to prison and I just started to cry. And she goes “Lisa you’re a very lucky young lady. We’re sentencing you with nine month referral order, two year bound over”. And I was like “my god”... Even my probation officer she said her heart skipped a beat. She said she really thought she was going to say, you know.’

Lisa and her boyfriend had a house together until they were arrested. When her boyfriend was sent to prison she was unable to stay in the house and had to move back into her mother’s house. She was grateful to her mother for allowing her to move back in and for the support she provided. However, this was another significant change for Lisa who had been used to living independently.

Jodie provides a very different example of a ‘critical moment’. Jodie had been through a traumatic experience but she had previously attended a performing arts course at a local college. She stated that the reason she left the college course was because:

‘I lost a baby... And I went on a depression and I was going to the doctor like three times a week, so I wasn’t allowed to go into college so I had to leave’.

She was pregnant and went into labour six months into her pregnancy. The baby survived for three days but then died. Jodie stated:

‘I was also so young at the time. I was only sixteen when I caught for her and I was seventeen just after. I’d only just turned seventeen myself.’

She had since had another miscarriage and during the research she said that she was slightly worried that she might be pregnant again. However, she said that she did not want a baby at this point ‘I just don’t want one, because I don’t want to go through what I have’. Despite this, she talked a lot about having a baby and her plans for when she has one. For Jodie this was obviously important and said that her boyfriend ‘wants one more than me’. They had been going out for eight months and were planning to get engaged.

Simon already discussed how he had faced problems with bullying at school and finished compulsory education at college. Simon and his family had also experienced disruptive housing arrangements. The reason for this was:

‘I got beat up by twelve lads on a field and I took them to court and they threatened to smash all my windows and stuff like that. And then, every week, we’d get a window put through and my mum just got fed up of it because she had it for about two years so she just said leave it.’

At the time of taking the photos, his family were all living in a family hostel. By the point of the discussion they had moved into a house in a different area. Simon believed that this ‘critical moment’ and the disrupted domestic arrangement have inhibited him from moving on to what he wanted to do:

‘The trouble I had at my house. That’s why I did move my house from [name of area] to [name of area] so that stopped me from doing what I wanted to do because I didn’t know where I was moving to. I was living with my next door neighbour at the time, and then I moved with my mum to this place here [photo of family in family hostel]. I think that stopped me doing most of the stuff that I wanted to do.’

He spent most of his free time playing on his computer because he did not know anyone in the area they had moved to. He wanted to ‘get out of my house, make some

friends'. This was difficult for him as his family had to move to a different part of the city and he said:

'I don't like going out where I am now...There's loads of trouble down there...I'd rather stay in than go out and cause trouble with all the other people.'

Lara's 'critical moment' could be seen as the point when she was taken into care. Her life changed considerably in a number of ways. Shortly after this, she moved in with a foster family but, as discussed earlier, she began to take drugs and her behaviour in and out of school deteriorated. Lara reflected upon how difficult and disruptive it has been to move around so much and not have a stable home environment while continually dealing with problems with her family. She reflected that she had 'lived with all of my family. Every single one of them but it never worked out'.

The individuality of young people's experiences and their 'critical moments' further highlight the diversity of their lives and the variety of their needs. They arrive at programmes with these issues and workers have to address them individually while working with the rest of the young people.

Understanding stereotypes and labelling

The aim of presenting the young people's narratives, accompanied in places by the workers' thoughts, is to be able to argue that the labels applied to the young people are of little use. Young people do not belong to pre-determined categories and to view them in this way can only give a simplistic analysis. Part of the problem of labelling is that of aggregation. The starting point of highly aggregated concepts offers little in being able to understand the work of the programmes. Policy documents label young people as 'disaffected' or 'disadvantaged'. The Connexions guidelines and referral process categorise young people into 'priority groupings', with 'priority one' being the most 'in need'. Young people are labelled in this way in order to be offered a place on a programme which does little to understand the individual context of their lives even though the policies espouse a bespoke approach. A Personal Adviser explained that:

'You have priority 1, priority 2 and priority 3 and the Connexions service will now receive funding on the top two priorities...16% priority 1's, the real hardcore, hard to help and then I think its 37%...priority 2's are regarded as those at risk, need extra help. But the criteria that they've given by Department for Education and Skills for priority 2's cover all manner of things. They go from essentially confused, well that could mean... what does that mean? It could mean I don't know what university to choose, what GCSE's I want to do and it is, as a careers adviser, you see that regularly. Or it might go to I've been offered drugs, I'm knocking around with a group of young people who are into TWOCing²⁴ and the rest of it, ringing vehicles or whatever. The priority 3 are those that, essentially, don't need that much help, got a pretty good idea. The arguments rage why are we not seeing them. Its not really fair, but we are a finite resource and we only receive funding on seeing the priority 1's and 2's so the emphasis is on seeing those young people and it's essentially priority 1 and 2 kids that we put forward to the Learning Gateway, sorry E2E.²⁵ Not always, but usually.'

By placing all the young people at this one starting point it is difficult to then understand the meaning of the current outcomes and the impact the programmes may have. One Personal Adviser felt that there were issues with young people who were placed in certain categories:

'If you were considering a young person who was in the priority 1 group, I would have to ask myself what motivated them to come to the Connexions centre and I don't think, in most cases, that's an absolute passionate desire to find work or training or employment. I don't think that's the motivator. I think they'll probably be motivated either because somebody's brought them in or for benefit purposes.'

Programmes workers identified problems with the criteria Connexions adopt to decide a young person's eligibility for a programme:

'We had this young woman contact us a couple of weeks ago who wanted to come here. She's 17. She sent us an email...Saying help, I'm 17. I failed my GCSE's. I don't know what to do next so [name of manager] arranged for her to come here and she had a look round, nice young woman. And, the next day, I took her down to Connexions to get her fixed up with a PA because you know they have to have one first before they come here. And we waited hours to see this woman and then she gave her a brief interview and said "you can't come on Life Skills, you don't fit the criteria". And I said "well, what is the criteria"? And she said "well, she's got a GCSE". And I said "yeah, but she's got a grade G" or whatever it was...She has other issues, she's slightly

²⁴ TWOCing is Taking Without Owners Consent and refers to stealing cars.

²⁵ Some of the interviews took place during the transitional period of Life Skills to Entry to Employment (E2E). This area was part of a pilot scheme.

autistic, she's got this, that and the other going on in her life. I said "surely its not just about academic qualifications"? So she said "no, no, she can't come she doesn't fulfil the criteria"...It's terrible...'

C. D. So what do you do now then?

'Well, apparently this young woman went... I think [name of manager] phoned up Connexions and said "this is ridiculous. This young woman has got issues that make her a candidate for Life Skills". So I think she will come on board with us but I thought it's awful...She's not ready for college...It's too much of a leap isn't it to leave school for some of them and then go straight to college? They can't do it.'

This is a serious consideration, due to the eligibility criteria created this young woman was not going to be eligible for a programme as she did not seem to fit into the predetermined categories. The description above shows the way in which the individual is not considered. It also shows different criteria being adopted by different professionals. The fact that this young woman was being denied entry to a programme on the basis of having one GCSE further reinforces that the targets of the programmes are unrealistic.

Young people were aware of the stereotypes and labelling of them, which occurs on a regular basis. Jack, like other young people in this research, was aware that young people are often represented in a negative way. He believed that having employment status can change people's perceptions. In his experience, young people are seen as 'criminals':

'Yeah, I mean that's what I get judged on wherever I go. I'll be walking down and I'll intimidate, say if there's an old woman walking past she'll get really intimidated... I mean I remember this one time I was coming down here and I was walking past two old ladies. She grabbed her handbag just like that, right in front of me. I goes "I'm not going to nick it, I'm just walking by, I'm going to work". Soon as I said I'm going to work it was "oh, oh I'm sorry". I mean, my wallet's gone missing and my mum goes, I only had about fifty quid in it, but I said there was about a hundred and she said its my son and the coppers were really questioning her trying to see if she was lying and they goes "oh well, it'll be better if we can actually speak to your son", so if I say something wrong, but she goes "he's at work". And as soon as she said he's at work they goes "oh right we'll put you through to this then..."

C. D. That's interesting isn't it...do you think it happens to all young people then?

'Yeah, mainly people who wear hats, its true, if you wear a hat you're an automatic thug.'

C. D. So do you think that has an effect on you?

'What? People calling me a thug? No, I don't really respond to it. If I said owt, I'd say that's what you think. Basically I wouldn't really say nowt.'

Problems may arise with negative labelling if it links to a young person's sense of self (Jenkins, 1996), however in this research many of the young people did not seem to be affected by the views of others. Some of the young people had their own perceptions about what they thought the programmes were going to be like:

Jack: 'When I first started, people thought that it was like something for kids who were on drugs or something.'

Jess: Yeah, and if you're thick or something.

Jodie: Yeah, that's what my boyfriend thought. That it was all for people who either don't know how to read or write, which is mainly what it is, but he just thought it was for people who needed more help than he thought I did. So he was telling me not to come here. But since I've been here for a while, he like says "well you really enjoy it don't you"? And I says "yeah"

On one occasion programme workers told the story of visiting a castle and gardens with the young people in the summer. One talked about the reaction that the young people received from other people and how the workers were defensive of the young people. The young people had been perceived as 'really bad kids':

'You look at them, and they're lads and even the girls are a bit like that because they're disenfranchised basically. They've never been to these places so they do stand out a bit because they haven't got confidence to sway in... We were like "what do you mean there's something wrong with them", because there's nothing wrong with them really. They're just young people who've got issues. They're teenagers at the end of the day. All teenagers have problems. There's loads of problems with kids who go to college isn't there? It's people isn't it at the end of the day?'

On another occasion I was present when the group were on a painting and decorating course with outside training facilitators. The facilitators had not worked with a 'Life Skills' group before and were uncertain of how they would behave during the session. The young people noticed and commented to the workers about the facilitators' reaction to them. The facilitators expressed their surprise that their perception of the

young people had changed after working with them in a session. Workers thought, all too often, young people were only viewed negatively and to them this is an uninformed view of the young people. One worker commented:

‘Disaffection doesn’t breed disaffection. It breeds a nice group of young people.’

Workers discussed the way in which their work is sometimes questioned and they receive negative responses from outsiders, but how they truly believed in the benefits of, for example, a residential or activities, because they can see the positive benefits through giving the young people a chance and an experience that they have generally not had before.

Summary

This chapter has aimed to communicate some of the wider context of the young people’s lives to develop an understanding of their circumstances and positioning. There is a great deal of diversity among the young people who attend the programmes and among the circumstances they face. Where young people had experienced problems at home or with their family they are often too complex to be able to communicate in detail. Young people often explained significant experiences in a matter of fact way which was a surprising observation. Many of their lives seemed to be characterised by problems and upheaval. As was discussed, school was usually the aspect of their lives which became a secondary concern when this was the case.

‘Critical moments’ have been a useful way to look at how the young people have identified certain experiences as being significant. Again, there is significant diversity among the young people’s ‘critical moments’ and not all young people’s narratives identified with this concept. The final section highlighted some of the ways in which young people are labelled into pre-determined categories in a variety of ways by a range of people, including other young people, Connexions, older people and other agencies. It is interesting that the young people had their own negative perceptions of the programmes before they joined. Again, the two categorisations mentioned earlier are dominant, those of ‘troublemakers’ or ‘dumb kids’ which in this instance was described as ‘thick’.

This chapter and chapter five have aimed to provide an understanding of the young people's previous experiences and the wider context of their lives. With this in mind, the next chapter develops the young peoples' and workers narratives within the context of the programmes. The following chapter focuses upon the process and progress made by young people while engaged in the programmes.

CHAPTER SEVEN

EXPERIENCES ON THE PROGRAMME - THE CRITICAL ROLE OF PROCESS

Introduction

Very little is mentioned in the documentation about the programmes of process, what happens during the time the young people attend the programme, from initial engagement with the programmes, to the gradual development of relationships and development of young people's skills. This thesis aims to communicate the importance of 'process' as in current concepts of accountability and articulations of programmes the actual process is not considered. Without understanding that process is integral to the programmes the outcomes lose significance and impact. In this sense, it could be argued that the outcomes of the programme are not reflective of the inputs. Within youth work there are currently similar debates taking place, where it is argued that there is a need to move away from the 'product', which is measured by a successful outcome, to a more rounded understanding of the 'process' (Ord, 2004).

These are developments that need to be considered before young people progress to education, employment or training, which are the defining outcomes of the programmes. These aspects are significant in terms of understanding the impact and value of the work. By communicating the process some of the ways in which the programmes are beneficial to young people are considered. Without consideration of the process the reality of the work of the programmes is ignored and actively misunderstood. Within the current climate of accountability and transparency there needs to be an understanding of the 'reality of practices' and an understanding of the 'everyday' to give 'meaning' to the work undertaken (Ord, 2004).

This chapter focuses upon aspects which are not considered through current accountability mechanisms. Many of these are identified in the original specification of programmes, linked to employability, but not communicated through the mechanisms used to measure the performance of programmes. The chapter begins by considering engagement in the programmes and argues that for many young people this is a significant development. The chapter then moves on to discuss the relationships between young people, Personal Advisers and programme workers.

Relationships are the basis of effective delivery of the programmes and are not given consideration currently. The chapter then focuses upon areas where young people and workers note that progression has taken place, highlighting the critical role of process over a period of time. This includes developing basic skills, confidence and addressing personal and social problems young people may have. These aspects often need to be addressed and developed before young people are considered to be ready to progress to education, employment or training. The examples provided illustrate the 'assumptions gap' between what the policy sets out to do and the needs of some young people on the programme and thus raises a fundamental question about whether the targets set for programmes are realistic.

Engagement in the programmes

While not currently recognised as warranting discussion it is essential to understand the background to young people's engagement in programmes. Chapters five and six aimed to provide some understanding of this, particularly the significance of previous educational experiences, when attempting to engage young people in the provision.

Engagement is a dynamic concept and can be identified at many levels within the research. All of the young people, by joining the programme, have made the decision to re-enter an education-based programme. This can be identified as a significant step as most of the young people were not engaged in any form of education, training or employment before they joined the programme. A number of the young people were not concerned that this was the case, for many this was linked to negative previous experiences in education, and did not think they would have been doing anything else if they had not joined the programme. By exploring the young people's previous experiences of education the concept of engagement becomes more important in understanding the significance of re-engagement.

Participants often responded negatively when asked if they may have alternatively joined college or pursued employment. Many of the young people had a negative self-image, leading to a lack of confidence, stemming from previous experiences. Understanding this background highlights the significance and achievement of engaging with the training programmes and also reflects some of the challenges and

complexities of engaging young people. Re-engagement can mark a significant change in young people's daily lives. The following examples communicate some of the common responses from the young people.

Peter decided to join the programme because it was 'just something to do to get out of bed'. He was not involved in any form of mainstream activity and said he was bored with watching television all of the time.

Joe was not engaged in anything before he joined the programme, although he was looking for employment. He had previously been at college but, due to a number of problems, had left some time ago.

A very different example of why a young person is engaged in the programme is Narinda whose family and cultural background determined her decisions and reasons for engagement. Narinda was nineteen years-old and she was Pakistani Muslim. She lived with her parents, seven brothers and one sister. She looked after her younger twin brothers. Her older sister was at university and still lived at home with the family. Narinda had a controlled family environment which she found restricting.

Narinda believed that, if she was studying or working, then she would be able to postpone an arranged marriage. She shared with me that she believed she was supposed to be getting married within the next three months as she had overheard a number of her father's telephone conversations to someone in Pakistan and believed that this was an attempt to arrange a marriage for her. It is apparent that she was nervous and unhappy about this: 'oh, we're going to come in three months and then just get married. Yeah, great'. One of Narinda's friends, who was seventeen years-old, had recently gone to Pakistan to get married. Narinda described it as being 'forced' and said that, when she spoke to her, she 'didn't sound happy'.

Narinda 'used' education and employment in an attempt to postpone what she perceived as her father's attempt to arrange a marriage for her. This was a significant reason for her engagement in the programme. The programme, which is specifically

for young Asian women²⁶, had enabled her to share her experiences with others in a similar situation as well as develop her independence, denied within her family environment. The notion of 'bounded agency' (Evans, 2002) is significant here. Many young people exercised a limited form of personal agency in their lives often in relation to structural factors. In Narinda's case, she was aware of the plans for an arranged marriage and trying to postpone this as much as possible could be perceived as an indicator of her exercising agency to a degree while bound within her overall familial and cultural structures. She also had a lot of responsibilities in the home and she enjoyed attending the programme because:

'It keeps me out of the house. My mum and my sister have gone Pakistan so I have to cook and everything, clean and everything. And I've got seven boys in the house, including my dad, eight boys... Well the dishes my aunty makes for us because I don't know how to cook, but like japaties and everything I do for them. And I have to wake up at half six in the morning to wake my brother up for work and make him stuff and I'm like oh god... Lately the house has been in, well, I've left it in a tip because I just want them to know that if they're not going to do it I'm not going to do it. And I think my dad's been cleaning up [laughs].'

Narinda had different barriers and obstacles from the rest of the young people:

'We can't even, you know, just walk out. We can't say, ok, I've had enough I'm going... It's everything in the way really so. I mean, I'd love to have my own flat and that. Doing my own thing, but I can't. Too many barriers... You can't move out. Girls can't move out until they're married, that's the only way. And I do want to get married but, if I say to them I want to get married, they'll think that I want to go to Pakistan and get married. They're not even going to ask me "who do you want to get married to"?''

She did have a boyfriend, however this was complicated and neither of their parents were aware of their relationship:

'I want to get married to him, not that I can... because he's, we're Muslim and he's a Bengali. He's a different race. I'm a Pakistani and he's a Bengali, so that's not going to... they don't allow it, but I'm hoping to marry him'.

²⁶ This programme was set up by one of the Life Skills coordinators due to identifying a need for separate provision for young Asian women in the area. At the stage of this research the programme was in the early stages. It was sharing premises with the other programme that the coordinator worked at. The coordinator suggested the involvement of a number of the young women in this research. Narinda was the only one to engage with the research.

Narinda's father was strict about all aspects of her life and prohibited her from going on excursions organised by the programme most of the time. She was not allowed to attend a residential because her father would not give her permission to go which she was really disappointed about 'he thought I was going with a guy so I couldn't go'. She had to ask the programme coordinator to write a letter to prove she was going on excursions with the programme and arrange for a worker to pick her up from her house to reassure her father.

Engagement in the programmes is the beginning of the process of working with the young people. The policy literature identifies young people as 'vulnerable at this transitional phase' (Department for Education and Employment, 1999a: 2) but there are many reasons behind this. The majority of the young people had been disengaged from learning for some time. It is important to consider the possible hurdle young people are overcoming by attending and engaging in a programme when they had only ever had negative experiences of education and the difficulties workers faced in engaging them. One Personal Adviser commented that:

'I would say, for the majority of young people that come through on the Learning Gateway, it is an enormous leap even to Life Skills which is in itself quite a supportive environment, absolutely...I have found that initial contact to be quite a babying experience, sort of nursing people along really.'

This became clear through observations and identifies an 'assumptions gap'. Some young people have very basic needs, which are being met by programmes. It is debateable as to whether this is the right place for this to be happening but it is the reality of practice and it should be recognised as it suggests that the aims of the programmes may be unrealistic. It provides a different understanding of what people might regard as a training programme for 16 hours a week (Department for Education and Employment, 1999).

Jack left school with few qualifications and did not know what he wanted to do as a career or job. He did not do anything for the first few months after leaving school and was just 'hanging around' as he did not feel ready to enter employment. His parents persuaded him to join the Life Skills programme and he agreed:

'Yeah, they were pushing me to get a job, but I didn't want to do a job. I didn't feel ready for work and a letter came through from [careers service]²⁷ about this course. And I just looked at it, put it down on the table and didn't think much of it. Went out, came back and my mum said "I've filled that in for you". I goes "what?" She goes "I've filled it in and you go and send it off". I was pretty angry about it because I thought they were trying to put me on a dumb kids' course or something. So I thought I might as well just take a look, sent it off. A couple of weeks later, I had to go down [careers service], had an interview with my PA. Like this was the first time when I'd met my PA. Spoke to [name of programme worker] on the phone, came down on the Monday...Had a look round. Spoke to [name of programme worker] for a bit, then [name of programme coordinator] came and I spoke to her and I started on the Tuesday.'

From the above it would seem that Jack was coerced into joining the programme and his lack of interest is obvious. As mentioned at the end of the previous chapter the perception of 'a dumb kids' course' can create barriers to entering such a programme.

Through exploring young people's experiences it became clear that reasons for engagement are often diverse. Lisa's engagement in the programme was for very different reasons from all the other young people involved in this research:

'I went to my careers adviser because I lost my job and I told them that I really did want to do nursery nursing and I didn't want to get into any other career. So she suggested this until my referral order's over, which is in January, to support me at the moment and look at other careers and everything. And I've decided that I still want to do nursery nursing. I'm still determined in that.'

Lisa thought of herself as different to a lot of the other young people on the programme and she commented that 'I know I don't need the support that a lot of them do'. It was noted that she was often late and complacent and her attendance at times was low, though this would occur sporadically. Sometimes she would not attend for weeks and she did not turn up for a residential to France, only letting the programme workers know an hour before. However, she did acknowledge that it was important for her to attend to maintain a sense of routine in her life and to make sure that she would be able to get back into employment at a later date:

'Otherwise, I'd just be in bed all day sleeping. Or smoking weed all day or something like that. All day long, doing sod all. But now I'm here and they

²⁷ The Careers Service before the implementation of Connexions.

got me the interview and I'm just waiting till January till it's totally cleared off my sentence. But now I'm doing something about it.'

As the majority of the young people were not engaged in anything before joining the programme it could be argued that engaging them in constructive activities is in itself positive. For others the empirical evidence shows that programmes can have an impact particularly when considering the benefits beyond education, employment and training. Furthermore, whilst programmes are criticised it needs to be considered that many of the young people, like Jodie, felt that they only had two choices available to them:

'That was the choice of coming here instead of going on the dole. You earn more on the dole than you do coming here.'²⁸

The difficulty in engaging some of the young people once they join the programme was a prominent feature of workers discussions:

'The first meeting would be a meet and greet and trying to establish some sort of rapport and just get them to talk to you for gods sake. I mean, the number of times I've had people allegedly speaking to me and just staring at their feet with their hood up, these things often happen. Many of the client group we're dealing with aren't the most erudite and articulate and will still see you as... regardless of how open and available and friendly you are, will still see you as them, them to be worried about and that you're going to be trying to nick them or find out some information that they don't want to give you or whatever... Obviously, it might be a lot more of an in-depth process. It could involve you contacting the relevant experts in whatever issues they've got, whether it be mental health or homelessness, and acting basically as a liaison and a coordinator between partner agencies. If, however, there is some sort of, for want of a better word, a learning need, I don't just mean in an educational sense but learning about life skills and confidence building.'

The view of engagement as a dynamic process impacts upon accountability mechanisms and performance indicators. It shows the importance of looking at accountability as in-process, in context and as a learning mechanism. There are many levels of engagement and the focus upon the number of young people joining and attending programme does not take this into account. The workers highlighted that they can only work intensively with young people if they have a manageable number

²⁸ It is interesting to note that Jodie comments that she can '*earn* more on the dole'. One of the reasons for young people engaging may be that they are not old enough at this stage to claim Job Seekers Allowance.

where they are able to provide one-to-one support. This is set out in the policy documents, however, the numbers of young people expected to be 'recruited' to programmes was increasing. This is significant as the ability to work with individual young people or small groups may assist in ensuring that the young people are actually engaging with the programme as opposed to just attending. The programme workers recognised the importance of providing an environment for the young people that was often different to other environments in their lives:

'This is a place, its free of drugs, its free of all that kind of things that are out there and its like an oasis in the middle of...quite a masculine, aggressive place and they're coming from those backgrounds to here and we're trying to create an atmosphere...where young people can feel comfortable with other young people so they haven't got people screaming and shouting at them all day, so they can come. That's why they come early. I mean, the strength could be just in the fact that young people turn up every day, on time and early... It's about education and it's about preparing them for the real world as well. I don't give them any illusions about the real world when they're here, so we're always saying to them, you know, 'you wouldn't get away with that in work'. This is training for work.'

There are many aspects considered in the above quote. The programme worker discusses the background that many of the young people come from as playing a decisive role when it comes to engagement, while recognising that the young people will go back to their home environment at the end of the day. To this worker, it is significant that young people attend every day and sometimes arrive early. This was a positive sign that the young people were engaged in the programme and could mark a significant change in their lives where they have not had a sense of routine for a long time. This is also contentious as the training allowance involved has to be considered in relation to young people's attendance. Some programmes were quite strict about withholding the training allowance for non-attendance.

For this worker turning up is recognised as an achievement but this does not have to mean engagement in the programme and engaging with staff. For example, Paul was not engaging in the programme for the first six months, he talked about how he was messing around and being a joker in the group. He did later make the decision to engage with the workers and the programme and had since benefited from this engagement. However, workers also asserted that programmes would not work for all

young people and those who do not engage, which may also be for a variety of reasons, often do not stay on the programmes.

The role of programme workers and Personal Advisers in the delivery of the programmes to the young people is very demanding. Personal Advisers have large case loads of young people and have to negotiate their case loads in this unpredictable environment:

‘Obviously, that causes complications with your other bit of your case load and, even for a targeted PA with a full case load, its going to be hard. Because five could kick off in one week, or one day. And then you might have two people starting on a Life Skills on the same day. You usually want to go along with them. Just sometimes PA’s couldn’t and that’s always a shame. Or someone’s desperate to start and you may of only met them once, so the relationship isn’t as strong as if you’d met them a few times before but you can’t, everyone’s different.²⁹’

‘Their mobile phones change and then their addresses change. Then they leave the city, off to [seaside town], then they’ll be back. They’ll be in custody and then you wouldn’t really be contacting them. And then they’ll come back in.’

All participants involved in working with the young people commented on the demanding nature of engaging and retaining contact with them as they are often transient. The difficulty in maintaining contact and the tendency of young people to miss appointments were related to the time consuming nature of the work. Personal Advisers stressed the need to persist in contacting a young person, even if they fail to attend for a period of time. One of the main observations has been the unpredictable nature of the programmes and the complex and changeable behaviour of the young people³⁰. Workers and Personal Advisers noted that it is a major achievement for many young people to return to a learning environment. Once young people have decided to engage in a programme the workers then have to begin the process of developing relationships with the individual young people.

²⁹ They noted a positive change in the addition of more targeted Personal Advisers and area based outreach workers to engage young people.

³⁰ This also had a significant impact on the research process as discussed in the methodology chapter.

Supportive relationships

Youth work literature identifies ‘relationships’ as the key part in the process of effective youth work, built on trust, mutual respect and communication over time (Young, 1999; Crimmens, *et al.* 2003). This is not recognised in the setting of the training programmes even though the relationships developed are significant to young people and workers. It is important to highlight the significance of the development and maintenance of relationships in achieving success with the young people throughout the ‘process’ of being on a programme.

The role of Personal Advisers (PA)

The literature identifies the role of the Personal Adviser as integral in supporting the development of the young people, even whilst on ‘Life Skills’ programmes. All of the young people were positive about the fact that their Personal Adviser had referred them to the programmes. However, apart from this, a lot of the young people did not have any further positive comments about their Personal Advisers and did not feel that they had an established relationship with them. Negatively, some felt that the monthly reviews took them out of their training. Personal Advisers were aware of this, but it is difficult to envisage an alternative process.

Some young people complained about trying to contact their Personal Adviser and the procedures that they had to go through to arrange an appointment with them, often being passed to different people. A number of issues are raised in the excerpt below, including not being able to be honest with their Personal Adviser and ‘feeling pushed’ into employment³¹:

Jess: ‘I can’t really talk to her. I can’t really talk to [name] because its like she’s making up your mind for you. Like if say you want to do something, she’ll suggest something else and you don’t want to do it. And you don’t like saying no to her...

³¹ This excerpt is taken from a group discussion with young people at the evaluation stage. Jess was involved at the beginning of the research and she agreed to take part in the further stages and was given a camera. However, shortly after the group discussion she left the programme and therefore she had no further involvement in the research.

Jack: Yeah, that's what they keep saying to me. "Do you want to do warehouse work"? And I'll stupidly say "yeah", but in my mind I'm thinking no I don't want to do that. I mean, they give you all these jobs and they give you too many. It's like "oh, I'll give you a week to think about it". And it's like I don't want any of them really at the moment because none of them are really for me.

C. D. Do you think that you can't say no then?

Jess: Yeah, you're sitting there and, like he said [Jack], you say yeah, but you don't want to do it. And then they get on your back about it.

Jack: And, if you say no, she just gives you a whole load of new ones.

Jess: Yeah, and she gets like sheets out and says "right, have a look at these". And you don't really want to get into a job yet if you're not ready. But she's like pushing you whereas [name of Life Skills staff] they don't...'

It seems that the Personal Advisers are still career focused rather than providing a holistic service to young people. Young people meet with their Personal Adviser once a month where the main focus is employment. However, as the Personal Advisers do not have an established relationship with young people they are not aware of what areas of employment interest them. This reinforces what Colley and Hodgkinson (2001) questioned before the establishment of Connexions and their argument that the role set out for Personal Advisers seemed ill-informed and naïve only focusing upon moving young people into employment. There seems little recognition by the Personal Adviser in the above example of the young people's circumstances.

Despite this, a number of young people had a positive relationship with their Personal Adviser. Anna felt that she could communicate well with her Personal Adviser and appreciated the support and advice that they provided:

'Mine's really good. She really helped me when I didn't want to go to the nursery open day on my own. She took me and she stayed with me and she brought me back because I had [name's] bus pass, so she was really supportive and everything. And she knows that like me and [name of boyfriend] are really close, if you know what I mean, and she said that [name of boyfriend] could start this course with me...Not this course, but a computer course... It's really good because you can talk to her about anything and it just gets it off your chest. And it's good because I can communicate with her good and I can communicate with [names of Life Skills staff] good as well.'

Paul had received extensive support from his Personal Adviser for a considerable amount of time and had had a relationship with him for a number of years, since he was at school. Paul has been involved with a number of different agencies and knows a number of Personal Advisers. Paul had a very strong and positive relationship with his Personal Adviser who he felt helped him to get out of trouble:

‘They tell you to your face what they think you need to do. He said to me, he goes “Paul, you need to f-ing calm down”. He swore at me. He said “you’re getting old and you’re doing this but you don’t need to be doing this”. I mean, you listen to them. You haven’t got no choice but to listen to them. I mean, some people just go [moan] but I knew what he was saying and I understood, so I just broke out of it.’

Paul was seeing his Personal Adviser once a week or fortnight when he was in trouble. When he was sixteen, he enrolled on a ‘Life Skills’ programme, but his behaviour did not improve and he continued to steal. His Personal Adviser helped him look for jobs and would pick him up from his house and take him to interviews, but Paul saw the obstacle being ‘grades let me down’. At this point, he was still getting into trouble and the programme he attended at the time did not have an impact on changing his behaviour:

‘They didn’t want to know. They just wanted you to turn up so they could give you the money and then go. It was just boring. Crap.’

This training provider arranged for him to enrol at college to do a motorbike maintenance course and he attended for about twelve weeks. But, as stated previously, he had problems concerning the Educational Maintenance Allowance and did not receive his grant for a number of weeks. He found it difficult to manage as he owed money to his mother for board and the money finally arrived about a month after he had left the course. This experience meant that he dropped out and was once again lost and disheartened with formal education and learning. He said he then went on a ‘tearaway session again’ for about a month and then back to the first training provider where he was still committing robberies. He described his behaviour:

‘I was just a little tearaway. I mean, I got caught various times by the police. The police were just getting sick of me. Sick of giving me chances...I was robbing and stuff like that. Robbing sheds, robbing houses and getting caught.’

I was virtually ready for going down until my careers adviser got in touch with me. He goes, "I haven't been in touch with you for ages". Because normally I go down and see him every month but I didn't go down to see him for three months because I was just rallying around, didn't give a damn. So, went down to see him...It took him three months to get me down there and I went down and he was helping me and helping me. And my careers adviser's always been there for me. Whatever the problem, he's always been there. I mean, he's sorted me out and he's saw me do everything and in my eyes [names of Life Skills staff and PA] have done unbelievable stuff for me. They've helped me really through. And, like I say to them lot out there [other young people], if you want a job, they can find you it. But you've got to put the willpower in as well.'

Paul had support and offers of help for a long time, but did not take it. He found out about this current programme from a friend who was attending. He felt this provider would be more suitable because it was closer to where he lived whereas he thought the other one was too far to travel to be there early on a morning. He asked his Personal Adviser whether he would be able to join this programme but, for the first few months of attendance, he continued his disruptive behaviour. The training allowance helped him with his responsibility to give his mum board money:

'Some of it was to get me off the streets and give me something to do in the day because, if not, I'd go robbing. Like the training allowance helped a bit as well because I was getting paid for doing something which I thought was good as well. It kept me busy.'

While some young people did have positive relationships with their Personal Advisers there do appear to be discrepancies between the role of the Personal Adviser as described in the literature and the experiences of young people's relationships with them. The literature presents the Personal Adviser as the crucial person in the programmes whereas often in reality young people identified the relationship with training programme workers as where they received most support. Personal Advisers, while aware of this expectation, were reflective that this was the case in practice. Many Personal Advisers had previously been careers advisers, although due to the extensive recruitment of Connexions people from a variety of backgrounds were encouraged to apply for the roles. The Personal Advisers who were previously careers advisers were occasionally criticised by programme workers for not being sensitive to the needs of the young people. It seems that this may unfair as Personal Advisers who were trained as careers advisers may not have the background to deal with the

issues that now needed to be addressed in their new role. A high level of expectancy had been created by Connexions, particularly in the Personal Adviser's role, where in reality many were not equipped to deal with the cases or able to meet the young people's needs.

Relationship with 'Life Skills' programme workers

There is very little mention in the policy documents about the role of the training programme workers, as the emphasis is placed on Personal Advisers. The relationships between programme workers and young people are not recognised yet this relationship is essential to understanding the process of the work that is undertaken. One of the key observations that I have made since being involved with the programmes is the relationship that the staff have with the young people and the effectiveness of this to the work that they do with them, a lot of the time on a one-to-one basis. Programme workers had to develop a trusting relationship to address the individual issues that many young people bring with them to the programmes. It was clear that the young people themselves regarded this relationship as significant. Workers provide the young people with social and cultural capital, but the emotional capital that was invested was most often mentioned:

'Giving them stuff that they don't get at home sometimes. I mean, we did a certificate presentation a couple of weeks ago and we gave this lad a certificate and made a fuss of him and he took his certificate home. He said he pinned it up on the kitchen wall and I said "what did your dad say?" And he said, "oh my dad said huh what's that?" And it's like they don't get that kind of proper parenting, do they? So we're kind of like ma and pa...It's like saying to them, you know, "I've got toothache". Well "do you know how to get in touch with the dentist?" "Have you been to the dentist?" "No." So we've arranged for some oral health nurse to come in and talk to them.'

While recognition should be given for their work with the young people, it may be questioned as to whether a training programme should be providing this level of support. The way in which the programmes work with the young people is in no way conveyed through the programme specification or the current forms of accountability. This support was individually based and the young people were the ones who identified aspects significant to them. This varied from training in basic and key skills, to providing advice on further education or employment, listening to and

supporting young people with problems and assisting them with issues related to family, housing and health. Workers are aware that for young people attending programmes they often have not received support in the past:

‘We’re dealing with young people that haven’t had any support for 16 years of their life. So, when they come to us, they’re suddenly... Yeah, they want the support from us, but they don’t know how to use the support that we’re giving them because they’re not used to that. So they find it hard that, when we are supporting them, they sort of shy away thinking hang on, I’m not comfortable with this...I’m thinking about one particular young girl at the moment who is very, very difficult at times. And she sort of latches on to us as workers because, suddenly, she’s not had attention for 16 years of her life and we’ve gave her that attention. But now we’ve had to sort of back off a little bit because we can see that she’s taking too much of our attention. And it’s reflecting on the other young people. So we have to treat everybody equally but also give her that extra support. But we might not be the right people to give that support so have somebody else in to support us supporting her. And I think that’s really important, that when you have a young person, that you recognise what their needs are because you never know in the first couple of weeks. You never know in the first couple of months sometimes. It’s issues come later when they trust you and you build up a good relationship with them...It’s really, really hard at times here. You’re taking so much home with you. You’re taking so much in that, really, I think all of us benefit from counselling. And, because you have to take away what this young person is telling you, you don’t know whether that young person or their family want them to share that with us or share it with other people. So you can only do so much and I think I’ve probably come to that stage where I think well, you can only do so much and that’s it. Somebody else needs to take over from there. You can’t mother every single young person because it won’t work. You’ll just come out real burn out.’

Some workers described their job as the ‘role of counsellor’ and commented that delivering sessions was not the main part of their role. Workers noted that the young people can rely on them a great deal, ‘almost like we’ve got twelve children that you have to look after’:

‘They are going to come in and they are going to have had a bad day. They might have had a bad weekend. Tom, for instance, disappeared for two weeks. You can’t just say “ok, we’re going to get you into a job when you come back”, you know. “Where have you been, what’s happened, you look thin, have you been eating?” Counselling might be an option... And every single one of them in some form, whether it be big or little, whatever, has an issue.’

These aspects are not communicated anywhere, the workers often go above and beyond what they are required to do for the jobs:

'I think it's just when you ask them "have you had a good weekend?" It's like they never shut up and they're all fighting to tell you...So you're almost needed, and that need can be so draining as well. And you can guarantee that, after the weekend, something's always happened with each individual and they're all desperate to tell you.'

'You get phone calls when you're at home... If someone rings you and they're really distressed, you're going to help them, aren't you? It's very difficult to be able to switch off...I went out last Saturday and I had a text message at 10 o'clock at night. One of the young people had text me. Now, obviously it wasn't anything serious, it was just passing on information that could've waited till Monday, but that's a regular process. Or I'll be driving home and I'll have people ringing me going "I don't want to go home, I don't want to." It's very difficult and they're of an age as well where there's only certain things you can do... But it is very difficult, and some of the things that they tell you... It consumes you so much that you've got to have some sort of outlet, whether its sport or whatever. You've got to have something. You couldn't go from here at the end of the night, every night, and not go absolutely mad I think. It wouldn't be possible. You've got to have something else in your life.'

The following quote, taken from a group discussion, highlights the difference one young person found between the programme and her previous experiences³²:

'When I was at college, like when people spoke to you and that, like the staff, they made you feel small and like you was stupid. But here they'll say, yeah, we'll help you. Like when I was doing IT yesterday and I felt stupid asking, but they made me feel comfortable and it made me feel better that they'd not spoke to me like I was really stupid or something. And they told me and said 'look, this is how you do it' and I felt a lot happier and I enjoyed it better...and you don't feel like you're stupid or put down because they don't talk to you like you're downwards and they're up. They just talk to like you're normal and that's what I like about it as well.'

Young people often stressed that 'they're more like us than they are teachers'. This comparison of programme workers with teachers links again to the negative experience of school. It is clear that many young people had not had this level of support before and that it was really valued. They understood and appreciated the effort of the staff to provide them with this level of support. As Anna explained:

³² This quote is taken from a group discussion. Polly was involved in this stage of the research and agreed to take part in the next stage. Her behaviour towards the staff at the programme changed rapidly and she became very rude and disruptive and decided that she did not want to attend any longer.

‘It just helps you a lot because they just help you go through it and you’re not there by yourself. And, you know, someone’s there to help you. And especially when you’ve got interviews and you’re panicking. They talk you through before it and it’s just good to know that you’ve got support behind you to do things what you want.’

This does raise the question of what happens when this level of support may not be accessible for the young people when they move into mainstream provision or employment. The workers understood that there needed to be a balance between providing support and ensuring that young people did not become too dependent on the support they received. The programmes do need to be developmental so that a young person is making progress. This could be difficult to balance as to engage and work with young people and support them in their problems they do need to take become intensely involved.

The young people appreciated that they were given the chance to have some influence in the programme delivery and that workers encouraged their ideas on what to choose for activities. Their opinions were also sought on whether to continue with certain training to ensure the young people were kept engaged. Some groups vote on activities, which the young people identified as encouraging them to negotiate decisions within the group.

The young people also identified that they received support from members of their peer group. The groups did appear to be self-regulating which meant that, on occasions, workers were confident to give increased responsibility to some of the young people, which seemed to work well. The impact of the group experience is important as many of the young people had been bullied at school. Jane called the other young people on the programme her ‘work colleagues.’ The excerpt below shows how making new friends was one of the most important aspects of the programme:

C. D. ‘What sort of things do you like doing while you’re here?’

Kate: It’s good. You make new friends and stuff like that.

Anna: I like all of it. You get to do your confidence and things like that. It feels like, you just feel different because you can just go out there and talk to

people without feeling stupid and you can say what you want and things like that’.

Anna also raises some important points. For her, being able to ‘say what you want’ in a non-threatening and comfortable environment were significant features of the programme. Having this environment is essential when aiming to increase the confidence of young people.

The critical role of process in young people’s progression

Young people build upon and develop many skills while on the programmes. Basic and key skills are integral parts, but the young people also build upon life skills and personal skills such as confidence and self-esteem, as set out in the policy specification (Department for Education and Employment, 1999a). These are closely linked to the support that young people receive as their confidence is fostered and built upon. What became apparent, through spending time with the programmes, is the need for social and personal skills to be developed prior to any attempt to engage the young people in the outcomes of further education, employment or training. However, this does not appear to be recognised as being important in terms of being able to record or account for this. This seems to be missing the point as without the time and effort of workers to assist in these developments a lot of the young people would not be able to reach a point externally identified as an outcome. While policy documents recognise that disengaged young people often have complex problems there is little recognition of young people’s problems being addressed on the programmes. There is no mention of the programmes assisting in this in the programme specification, as although social and personal skills are mentioned, this relates to developing confidence and self-esteem and raising motivation. While these aspects are addressed the underlying reasons for the lack of these are often related to the personal problems young people have in their lives. It has been difficult to separate these issues in attempting to communicate the work of the programmes. The following sections are an attempt to explore some of the main areas young people and workers identified as significant parts of the process of the programmes but many of the themes interlink.

While many of the developments the young people make while on the programmes are often regarded as intangible and subjective, such as increased confidence or motivation, communicating the process in which these developments take place could reflect a more rounded version of the programmes and progress of young people. Through doing this, the circumstances of the young people and the intensive work carried out might be recognised. As one worker stated:

‘A lot of these young people, they’ve not got little problems. They’ve got massive problems... There’s not one of them that hasn’t and, normally, it’s on quite a high level... I mean, the young people that I’ve worked with ... and to see them progressing and actually being able to hold a conversation and look people in the eyes and pick up the phone and speak to a stranger is absolutely amazing.’

This again relates to the idea of an ‘assumptions gap’. While the government policy and implementation of programmes work on underlying assumptions of young people, which are highly aggregated and for the most part negative, there is another fundamental issue that is not acknowledged. By focusing on these criticisms it is not realised that there are further underlying assumptions based on the young people’s capability before joining the programmes. These are a very different set of assumptions, which complicate understanding the performance of programmes.

The targets and expectations of programmes are based upon assumptions of the level some young people will be at when they join. This evidence suggests that there is a lack of understanding around this and in some cases it is assumed the young people have more advanced skills than is the case in reality. This is demonstrated by the worker identifying that for some young people making eye contact is a significant progression.

The way in which social exclusion is debated focuses upon ‘educational underachievement’ of young people. While this may be case for some, this is not applicable to many of the young people in this research. Many have a low educational attainment level which is not recognised. The programmes are set up to facilitate the transition to education, employment or training by engaging young people in programmes for six months. It would seem that in following this aim there are certain criteria assumed of young people when they join programmes. Therefore,

the actual achievements and progress made by young people are not reflected in way the performance of programmes is measured. There appears to be an inconsistency here. The programmes are addressing both basic and complex issues. How can this recognition be serviced? How can accountability measures allow it to be revealed and therefore addressed? If these questions are not addressed then either the policy or programmes may be seen to be failing. There needs to be a move towards accounting for the performance of the programmes which is not solely based on transition to education, training and employment which can better understand the young people and the nature of their problems on entering the programmes. This could then make it possible to show where workers are making a difference.

Basic Skills

A consistent feature was that some of the young people's reading and writing ability is at a basic level and many of the young people need assistance in this area. This is often because of the problems young people had in education and many also have learning difficulties, discussed in chapter five. In light of this need, workers felt that the outcomes set for the programmes were unrealistic:

'A lot of our young people are dyslexic. You can't cure, you can't just wave a wand and say "there you go, you've worked with me on maths and English. You can spell a bit better. There you go." It doesn't work like that and I think it's unrealistic.'

The following example, provides the views of two young people about English and Maths and highlights problems the programme workers face in engaging them. They also illustrate how the programmes cater for a variety of needs and interests, combining basic skills with other practical and creative work, such as pottery:

Tim: 'Least...Shall I tell you the thing that I hate, to be honest, Maths and English. I know it has to go in, no matter what, but I hate it anyway. IT, I don't mind it sometimes...Pottery, I absolutely love that because it's like dead good, my sort of thing. Gardening, like that, activities like that. And that's about it really.'

Polly: Maths, I never liked Maths at all. I was never good at it. Here they make it a bit different though. Because when I done a Maths lesson, they make it a bit more interesting a bit. But normally I hate it and I would of never of touched a paper. I wouldn't of done any of it. I done some work,

which I was surprised about that, but I think it was because she made it more, come across to me so I understood.'

Often young people identified a main reason for attending programmes was to improve their basic skills. While Sarah aimed to either enter college or get a job when she left the programme, she felt that she needed to work on her basic skills before she could do this. She had a basic level of literacy and numeracy and said she could read 'only a bit, but I can't do my words'. She described an example of how this made things difficult for her. Sometimes her friend would write her letters about her problems but Sarah said 'I can't write back...so I can't tell her about mine because I can't write'. When she received these letters she would ask another friend to read them because she is unable to do so. Her mum gave her a lot of support and encouragement:

'My mum said I can read and write if I put my effort into it... Mum said that if I can read and write it'll be more better. Like last night [name of friend] couldn't believe that I can't read or write, so he asked my mum and my mum said "no, why are you taking the piss out of her or something." [Name] said "no I'm not" like that... He thought I was lying.'

Sarah had already stated earlier that she had struggled at school to concentrate because she felt other pupils were too disruptive. Due to being disruptive and excluded from the classroom at school, Paul struggled with reading and writing. He said that he had the reading age of a nine year-old. He refused to take part in the basic skills sessions on the programme because he was too self-conscious to read in front of other people:

'Because I don't like looking stupid in front of people...I know that, if I got a word wrong, I was most scared of people calling me dumb or things like that. I don't like being called dumb.'

Again a young person uses the 'dumb' label. This relates to the negative perceptions of how Paul thought other people would view him. Looking back he realised that he may have benefited from taking part in the sessions: 'I just used to walk away from the problem, which was bad'.

All of the programmes include Maths, English and I.T. in their timetables and the young people receive certificates for the modules and courses they complete, which

also include accredited courses in health and safety and food hygiene. The young people seemed to appreciate and value the certificates they received as it showed their achievements:

Jess: 'We've got first aid ones and health and safety and a cooking certificate. And, when we've finished this cookery, we'll get another one. So it proves that we've been all the way through and done it and achieved something.'

Jodie: So you have got something to show at the end of the day'.

There seems to be a difference between young people who need assistance to develop their basic skills as set out in the specification of the programmes and young people who require greater assistance to develop in this area. One worker stated:

'It is very individual based. So, when you do your programme, it has to be catered for the group that you've got and individuals that you've got in it. I mean, even down to basic skills. Somebody could be absolutely brilliant at maths and somebody else can't even put two and two together... You can't always work in a class. You have to work with an individual and, sometimes, that can be a problem with the staff that you've got. Twelve young people and two workers, it's not a lot.'

The young people were themselves aware of the improved skills they developed on the programme. Through recognising their achievements in basic skills, the young people were also building confidence to handle different situations. When asked what they would like to do after they had finished the programme, one young person identified that he could take forward the new skills he had developed on the programme to help him when looking for a job.

Personal and social skills

Some young people who identified assistance with basic skills as important also had personal issues in their lives that the programme workers were helping to address. Other young people on the programmes who already had qualifications were attending to receive support and assistance in addressing personal problems. When this was the case, engagement was usually to build upon personal and social skills such as confidence and self-esteem while getting assistance with personal problems.

This demonstrates that there can be very different levels of ability within a group of young people in a programme.

Personal and social skills does not really cover the fact that behind the need to develop these there are often significant personal problems which have attributed, in some cases, to the need for personal and social skills to be developed. A key issue is that there is no indication of how far the workers need to go with addressing personal problems. Workers did not feel that they had any indication of how much depth they should go in addressing these which implies that this is secondary and of less importance when they often need addressing first and without them little could be done:

‘I think what people don’t realise about Life Skills is... They want us to support them in personal and social issues but there’s no clear guidelines as to how far you need to go with these personal and social issues... Where you can fail then, with young people, because you’re not being able to tick that education or employment box. And you know that you’ve done as much as you can with that young person for six months and they’re a better young person than when they came here. But other people looking at them stats will think “oh, he went on to do nothing.” But that means that that young person might of just wanted six months break to find out what they really wanted to do and they may come back to you, because they’re not ready to go into anything else because they just haven’t got anything about them to be able to do that because they’ve been told all their lives that they’re crap, they’re a waste of space. And that’s mainly at home and then at school, they’re like saying you go in the lower class because we can just exclude you because you’re not going to be doing any exams... I mean, luckily, we only deal with twelve young people at a time so we can give them that little bit extra support but, even with three members of staff, that’s hard because its draining because the issues that are coming out they’re so... You know, a little thing can multiply into like ten bits and you’re thinking which bit do I start with first? ... I think it is really, really hard to measure the outcomes that young people take away with them in Life Skills and I think all the Life Skills are doing a really good job... I mean some of the things that they might gain here might not come in useful next week, the week after or next year, but three or four years down the line they’ll be thinking back and thinking “oh yes, I know how to do that.”’

Workers were reflexive about young people’s circumstances and the impact this had in relation to the aims of the programme and highlighted the complexities in delivering programmes:

'The people I've got at the moment, because they're very complex, it's not just a case of sitting down and going "oh yeah, you've improved on your Maths and English, you're confidence is a bit better, see you next week." It's not that at all.'

Workers discussed that many of the young people needed support and assistance over a considerable period of time before they would consider it appropriate to look into the possibilities of moving into further education, training or employment. Moving them on prior to this ran the risk of having a further detrimental impact on their lives:

'There are other young people who you know are going to be here for a long time. There's absolutely no way they're going to get on work placements or college yet. You're looking at a couple of months down the line, if not a year, before you would even consider putting them in that environment because you'd probably destroy them as people. But that's the problem with the programme. You're supposed to gear them up for that. Well some young people aren't ready at all. Not even close.'

Again there seems to be a fundamental issue with the implementation of the programmes here. Would some of the young people ever be ready to enter the labour market or further education or training after six months on a training programme? Would they not just go back and 'sit at home' as they had been doing before? Workers felt that the objectives of the programmes did not recognise the realities of the work or the circumstances and needs of some young people. The workers perform the role of 'street level bureaucrat' (Lispky, 1980) in that they are aware of the externally imposed aims and targets of the programmes but try and work with them within the everyday context of the programmes and with the young people's issues, which can be unpredictable.

Confidence building

Confidence building has been the most prominent theme with young people and their experiences on the programmes. All the young people talked about how their confidence had increased. These were small steps that young people had taken including travelling alone, participating in a group situation and meeting new people. As this is often a major obstacle for young people it is important that the advancements made are recognised. Programme workers asserted that most of the time issues related to young people's level of confidence need to be addressed first.

Confidence building can only be achieved in a process over a period of time. It is not tangible but a personal outcome which is difficult to attribute (Ord, 2004). Many workers described the challenges this entailed, including developing young people's confidence so that they can make eye contact, get on a bus on their own or make a telephone call. These are significant steps to take for many young people and again highlight a possible 'assumptions gap'. Workers recognise the importance of these steps but were concerned that these personal outcomes, while important, may not be enough to assist young people in gaining employment. They stressed that employers are not going to know the significance of the progress young people have made. This relates to the argument made by Lloyd and Payne (2003) who identify that many employers want potential employees to have basic skills and attributes such as a modicum of basic skills and punctuality. Their argument fails to realise that such attributes can be significant and many young people do not have them when they join programmes.

As described earlier, bullying has been a key reason for young people leaving education early. The workers recognised this and the impact it has had on the person when they arrive on the programme:

'If you've been bullied all the way through school, you're really nervous to go out in the world again. And then, when you do, you need to feel safe and I hope that we provide that here. And we are leaned upon and we are relied upon for certain things.'

The excerpt below communicates how one young person credits their increased maturity to attending the programme, which is then related to having supportive people around who are willing to listen, which is contrasted to the experience of school³³:

C. D. 'Do you think you've changed in any ways since you've been on Life Skills?'

³³ Tim was involved in the group discussions. He also agreed to take part in the next stage of the research. He took photos which were developed but when we arranged to meet to discuss them, which was his last day on the programme, he refused to take part (see methodology discussion). He began a full time job. In the past year he has returned to the programme for some additional help with Maths and English.

Tim: I think I've grown up a lot more, like compared to before. Ask Polly, she knows.

Polly: Yeah, I knew him before. I think he's matured a lot and he's more confident with some of these things. Like when I used to know him and that, he's alright and everything.

C. D. So why is that then?

Tim: I don't know. Its like when you come here you feel like you're wanted anyway and people take notice of you and listen to what you've got to say and at school no one did really. They didn't have time for you.'

From attending the programmes for a significant period of time as an observer, it was clear to see the changes developing in some of the young people's level of confidence. An example of this is Adam who has developed from being very quiet and unwilling to join in with the rest of the group to becoming quite loud and confident amongst the group within a couple of months. When Adam joined the programme, he was a very quiet member of the group who did not really talk. He would always sit with his head down and not take part in any group session. It was clear that his confidence was low and he was a shy person. Over the following months it was observable that his confidence increased greatly. He gradually became quite outspoken and always joined in group discussions, which was a very apparent change in him. He had also secured a part time job which has since turned into a full time position and he left the programme to pursue this³⁴.

The development of levels of confidence in turn has an effect on the way the young people progress in many aspects of their lives as the following excerpt illustrates:

Tom: 'It's making people concentrate more to aim for their goals...

Polly: Yeah, and it's making you more confident and comfortable doing things like what we was doing yesterday [playing a game]... It was just like putting you in a situation where you'd have to do something and then you was getting more comfortable and going along with it and I think at the end of it, if you start thinking like that...

³⁴ The interviews with Adam were very difficult at times. He often had problems articulating himself in relation to the photographs he had taken and rarely expanded his comments beyond a few words.

Tim: All I can say is I'm not afraid to go to no job interview or anywhere. And before I was sort of like, I'm not doing this. But it's changed me in a way because before I wasn't so open. I can actually have fun now and before I wasn't like it.'

The above are not tangible outcomes but are essential in the process of moving young people on. One young person linked their increased confidence to an increase in independence whereas another young person related increased confidence to having more motivation and determination to move back into mainstream opportunities. Young people themselves are realising that the programme has had a positive impact on their confidence.

Anna felt her lack of confidence and qualifications held her back before joining the programme. She had been at college previously, but she did not enjoy it and she felt it 'didn't help me'. Talking of her brief time at college, Anna said:

'I wouldn't even dare to walk in a room with people there in [name of college]. I used to feel stupid, but now I'm just... Just come as normal. I used to feel, like on the bus and stuff, "oh god, I'm scared" and stuff like that. But now, I'm just not bothered and I can just come in and just walk in'.³⁵

She described how being on the programme helped to build up her confidence and she felt she could now 'just go out there and talk to people without feeling stupid'. Her increased confidence made her feel better about all aspects of her life and gave her confidence in her own abilities:

'It's good because they help you, they listen. That you can, you can do what you want, that they're really good to communicate, that it's only a small group and that its good to join...Trusting people and that's a whole group and I wouldn't like to stand up and talk and things like that, but here you're ok because its only a small group... And you can just ask for help without the teacher saying hold on, hold on. You can get more work done in the time.

C. D. It sounds like it has helped you a lot.

Yeah it is really because you don't know what to expect and you're thinking is it going to be the same and what they're like and all this lot and I came all by myself to my interview here and I was really, really scared but it was alright. And then I came when I started and I was scared then as well... It's just your

³⁵ This was a major change for Anna as she often relied on her boyfriend to come with her on the bus to the programme and pick her up to take her home as she did not like to travel on her own.

confidence. You've got to say right, I'm going to do it. I'm going to do it. Keep telling you're going to do it and you'll do it. It's a good thing to do.'

Joe identified his main reason for joining the programme was to receive support to build on his confidence. He felt the environment of the programme was less intimidating than that he had experienced at college. The workers were aware of Joe's interest in sport and whilst on the programme he had attended Community Sports Leadership courses. Joe explained that:

'It helped me build up my confidence as well because I was like involved in a whole new environment. New people that I don't know...My confidence has grown since I started. It's like, and everyone's noticed it as well, on the course. It's like just been so quick as well. I've just done so much stuff in so little time... I think the first time that I went there it was like I knew what I wanted to do but I didn't think that it would go in the way it has. Like I've just gone into a job and that's it and I thought it would be ages before I went into a job.'

As already discussed confidence is not a tangible concept and the way in which young people and workers identified it varied. A very different example of a young person who identified confidence building as a reason for attending the programme was Lisa. Like Lara, Lisa did not require assistance with her basic skills. Lisa was very different from all the other young people and her attendance at the programme was mainly for a very different reason. While she states that she joined the programme to increase her confidence and to ensure that she received a high level of support from the agencies she was involved with, it also seems that she did need to be engaged in some form of provision as part of her suspended sentence under the close attention of her probation officer. She said:

'I didn't really come because I didn't have the skills. I came because I'd of just been sitting at home all day doing nothing. I just came here to get me out and I needed the support emotionally, so it's given me that. It's built back up my confidence emotionally...When I first started, they were there and they helped me through it and like supported me through everything what I was going through.'

So for Lisa the programme was significant in building her emotional confidence and assisted her through this difficult period.

I met Jack on my first visit to the project. At the time, it was pointed out to me that he was a quiet member of the group who had experienced problems of bullying while at school. I was informed that his confidence was low and needed building up. He was also attending the project to improve his basic literacy ability. A month later, I attended an over-night residential with the project and the workers monitored Jack closely as they were concerned that he was being overly dominated by other members of the group and the workers continually told him to stand up for himself. Over the following months it became obvious that as he grew more familiar and integrated into the group his confidence was increasing. By the time we went on the next residential, he was one of the main members of the group. His confidence had noticeably increased and he, along with his close friend, had become 'leaders' of the group. This change also meant that the workers were now closely watching him to ensure that he was not being too dominant over newer members of the group³⁶.

Since joining the programme, Jack has improved on his basic skills and his confidence increased. He felt that going to college with the programme for one morning a week was helping improve his Maths and English. When reflecting back on school, he felt he had changed a lot, especially since he had been participating in the programme, which he identified as part of growing up:

'When I was in school, I would say I wasn't shy, but I was a bit more quieter... And I wouldn't stand up for myself properly. I would stand up for myself, but I wouldn't stand up for myself like I would now. I mean, I wish I could just go back and have the confidence that I have now'.

There are many different reasons why young people lacked confidence, from extreme shyness and lack of self-esteem to having their confidence knocked as a result of a 'critical moment', such as with Lisa and needing to rebuild it. Therefore, for some young people, developing confidence can take a considerable amount of time, whereas others just need that extra support and focus of attention for a few months to assist them. For some of the young people, their lack of confidence related to their education and their inability to read and write properly, like Paul and Sarah.

³⁶ This could be seen as a role-reversal of the situation he had been in on the previous residential, which the workers monitored.

As is clear through this section it is difficult to be able to attribute confidence and it is often related to many things changing in a young person's life. Confidence is never going to be something that can be measured in an objective way but it does need to be recognised as significant to the progress of young people. Recognising the need to acknowledge and understand the importance of developments in this area is significant although very difficult to do in any measurable way. The personal developments are not straightforward to measure and record even though they are often observable. Tom was proud of the fact that his parents had noticed a change in him:

‘Well, my parents have noticed me, noticed it in a big way... My determination. It's more getting into things and finishing it off without stopping half way through it, which I used to do... More calm where before I used to flare up at the slightest thing, and that's about it.’

Tom's parents had noticed a change in his attitude towards completing tasks and also a change in his temperament which were obviously significant developments to them and to Tom.

Assistance with personal problems

When asked about the most challenging aspect of their job, the workers identified the young people's personal issues although they also explained that in order to work with the young people in developing their skills and finding out their aspirations this was necessary:

‘Straight away the personal issues. That's the hardest bit... If somebody discloses me information that worries me, where do I go? I've got the support of my coordinator and the trainer without a doubt, but that information's confidential as well. It's like “whoa, what do I do?” I'm not a trained counsellor. I wouldn't have the time to counsel them because I've got, what, eleven other young people to think about... It is all very one to one... You're not going to get to know them as people and, therefore, you're not going to get to know what they want to do with their life because a lot of them don't know, so that side of its difficult. And you've got to all the time work with that and that's why communication's the key all the time because some of them get on better with the trainer than, say, the coordinator, or better with the support worker. So, communication all the time.’

One example of a young person who received assistance with her personal problems was Lara. She did not need assistance in basic skills but Lara believed that being on the programmes has helped her to address some of her personal issues. She received one-on-one support from a worker instead of doing some of the main training sessions. This was identified by Lara and the workers who supported her as a positive outcome as she was addressing her alcohol problems and was beginning to deal with some of her personal problems with her mother. Talking of one programme worker she said:

‘She helps me to make sense of things, do you know what I mean. Like with my family, there’s always arguments and they always make me feel like I’m wrong and I always think no, you’re wrong. Like not just to stick up for me, but she’s like “God, its common sense that they’re wrong” and that stops me from thinking that I’m mad... I see her Wednesday mornings instead of pottery and she helps me with my drinking and that, like talking about my family and stuff like that. Not like “oh, you have to go and do this” but we go for breakfast and if something’s wrong I can talk to her about it.’

Lara appreciated the one-to-one support she received and the way in which she could talk about her problems. The programme has also helped her to change the way she thinks about herself:

‘Realised that I’m not like as mad as I thought I was. Not mad as in like mad, but just like little things. My mum’s done things to me and I’ve just thought yeah it’s me. I’ve got an attitude problem and just didn’t care, wouldn’t pay my bills, just take drugs all the time, like drink. I had a really bad drinking problem, like. [Name of worker] she helped me stop drinking and that.’

Lara appreciated the fact that she is not judged on her habits and her behaviour on the programme. Having a sense of routine established has assisted her:

‘Just like being here as well. Like its only three days a week, but in those three days I won’t drink... I’ve started paying my bills and that now, because I don’t want to get kicked out... Now, instead of buying loads of drink, I make sure I pay my bills and that because they was like getting bailiffs and everything to come and I, these [project workers] like help me getting things for like my house and stuff.’

Lara identified the programme as having a positive effect on her life:

‘It takes your mind off everything, all my bills. Like you can come in and just be in the baddest mood for all the right reasons but forget about it by the end

of the day...Because I've only had like two weeks off since I've been here... I'm sometimes late, but I'm never off. But that's how I was at school because I liked going to school, I was just bad when I was there.'

Again the diversity of young people who attend programmes is clear through Lara's example. She was an intelligent young woman but personal problems had taken over her life and she ended up completely out of mainstream provision. Workers have already stated that the personal problems that young people bring to programmes are the most challenging part of their work. Personal Advisers also raised this, often stating that they did not always feel able to deal with some of the serious personal problems young people had. There was one particular example of a young person with mental health problems who was heavily relying on support from a Personal Adviser. The Personal Adviser was not qualified to deal with these issues but the young person refused to talk to anyone else about it. This raises questions about the diversity of young people attending programmes and what programmes can realistically do. Can young people with significant personal problems and mental health problems be assisted by training programmes or Personal Advisers who have large caseloads? This seems to emphasise the blanket treatment of young people with 'problems' and denies any diversity or the degree of the problems.

The Role of Leisure Activities and Residentials in Young People's Development

Young people often identified both leisure activities and residentials as important aspects of the programmes and related them to developing confidence and team building skills. The number of activities that the young people take part in varies with different programmes but, when asked what they enjoyed most about attending Life Skills, all of the young people included the leisure activities. 'Activities' includes going to the cinema, bowling, outdoor activities and also residentials. Some of the programmes provide activities at the end of the week so that the young people have something to work towards and look forward to. The benefits of such activities are not conveyed through current accountability mechanisms. The excerpt below identifies the benefits of being able to enjoy activities within the programme:

Polly: 'I like all of it and I think that we all get along as well and that. I mean, we all have a joke and that. I know like, and it's more better because you get more opportunities to do things and then you get like rewards and that and that

encourages you to go further on and keep doing things... In the activities, you're still learning something though, they might ask you things about it and then it's like...

Tom: It's more like, activities are more for teamwork and that...

Polly: Yeah, and you learn to work as a team and get on with other people and so you learn something there'.

Polly and Tom identified that, in their particular programme, the fact that they generally finish off their week of training with an activity encourages them to do the other work during the rest of the week, which is the 'reward' that Polly refers to. They also acknowledge that they continue to learn whilst doing activities and build skills, such as team building. Those types of activities are also useful in developing a sense of achievement, building confidence and self-esteem as well as, for example, encouraging exercise through sporting activities and having fun.

The young people also identified positive benefits, such as increased confidence, developing group solidarity, friendship and responsibility from going on a residential³⁷:

Jodie: 'I think I started building my confidence up more when we went to France because...

Jack: Yeah, because that's when you got to start to know everyone better...

Jess: Yeah, because everyone was just like joining in with us like, weren't they, and...

Jack: Because everyone looks after each other when we're in a new place, so everyone looks out for everyone, basically'.

The importance of residentials and the way that they can change the ideas and preconceptions of some young people is not conveyed through current accountability mechanisms. They can have a significant impact on a young person (Jack often referred to residentials in discussions). Residentials are an excellent means to raise

³⁷ I also attended both the residentials mentioned above. For one young man, not involved in the directed data of this research, the residential to France seemed to have significant meaning. He absorbed so much of the experience and on a boat trip on the Seine talked to me about how he would love to live in France and about joining the army to save money and be able to travel. He recognised that in order to do this he needed to sort out his drug dependency. Is this raising expectations? Or is it giving young people a broader horizon for aspirations?

young people's awareness of different places, both within the UK and also abroad, as they can challenge preconceptions the young people may have and increase their cultural awareness. For many, it may be their first experience of being away from home. Life skills are developed on residential in various ways including using different types of public transport, e.g. the Underground, and using maps to find destinations, the experience of eating in a restaurant and developing confidence in the ability to order their own drinks and meals. Programmes spend a lot of time before the residential preparing with the young people and evaluating them when they return. They often use cameras as an effective way of recording the experience.

Work Experience

Work experience is an important element of the programme for some young people. It can develop skills as well as provide an opportunity to learn new skills and provides a sense of progression for young people. It is often the workers discretion which decides when a young person is ready to go on work experience. Work experience proved to be significant in Anna's progression. She did not feel that she would have had the same opportunities if she had not attended the programme:

C. D. 'Have you got any plans about what you would like to do when you finish?'

Yeah, nursery nursing and I'm there on a Tuesday already, and I'm going to have a look at the courses for the I.T. there and the nursery nursing for September.

C. D. Will that be at a college?

It'll be at the [name of place where nursery is]. They do an NVQ there, you see, for nursery and I'm going to start that.

C. D. That's quite good because then you'll know people who are there already...

Yeah, so I'm there every Tuesday and I enjoy it.

C. D. Do you think that's been good then, to get the placement?

Yeah, because I've not long, well, I've been here for a couple of months but, when I first started, it didn't take long to get it so...

C. D. So that's what you want to do after then, and will that be in September that you'll start that?

Yeah, hopefully, and it's good that, because I've got low grades as well and no English and maths and I can do what I want.

C. D. Definitely. And you've got experience now...

Yeah, so it's quite good'.

Through the workers at the programme Anna secured a work placement one day a week which led to a place on a nursery nursing course. Anna did not think that she would have had this opportunity otherwise because of her 'low grades'. This could possibly have been the case, which makes her engagement in the programme significant, and achieving the aim of the programme. The opportunity for a work placement also enabled young people to sample working for one day a week and then return to the programmes. This ensures that they receive the level of support needed while being eased into the work environment. Some young people had also secured part time paid employment and combined working with attending the programme for one day a week. Others gained full time employment after performing well on their placements.

At the point of the second interview, Mark has secured a placement at a youth project two afternoons a week. He was helping out with young people from the local secondary schools that had been taken out of school and attended the project instead. He was happy about his progression to this and was enjoying it. His aim is to get a job working with young people:

'You never know, if I keep it up and that and keep going, I'll most probably get a placement here altogether and work with school kids and that... Well, last time we chat I never had the placement did I? But now I've got the placement. It's changed a lot now, and I've more fun now than anything.'

The programme can greatly assist in the arrangement of work placement opportunities which may not have been available to young people if they were not on the programmes. This was often through the links programme workers and Personal Advisers had to various projects and further training courses. Obviously this is also

what the programmes set out to do but this research shows that this is far from a linear process.

Summary

This chapter has been based upon people's experiences and perspectives of the training programmes. Some of the key themes identified as being significant in the process of the programmes have been discussed. Most of these aspects are not accounted for in the measurement of the work of the programmes. The relationship between the programme staff and the young people is essential in the successful work of the programmes and the impact on young people. The chapter has aimed to highlight that there needs to be recognition of the 'process' part of the programmes and just not the outcomes.

Finding ways to measure and record the development of confidence and increased motivation are problematic. This is frustrating for workers as it is these developments that can progress young people towards the defining outcomes of programmes but are not recognised. The vague prescription to develop personal and social skills, and the extent to which workers address these, is denied any relevance in the outcomes of the programme. Programme workers stressed the need to work on the personal and social skills primarily before attempting to progress towards the externally defined outcomes. However, current forms of accountability do not hold any interest in recognising them. Workers also stressed that these are the most difficult areas to work with young people and yet they are not considered to be difficult in the literature. The process is ignored in favour of simply knowing the end product without any consideration of how the end product was reached.

There is a need for recognition that the development of basic skills, confidence or a sense of routine in someone's life involves a process which takes time. The fact that young people are expected to attend programmes for six months and then move on with a positive outcome highlights how little understanding there is of the complexity of the process. Young people often stay on programmes beyond their initial six months because they are not ready for employment or further education, but it can be difficult for workers to justify this. Workers described how for some young people it

was obvious they would not be ready to move on quickly which was sometimes construed as a 'problem with the programme' because they felt they were 'supposed to gear them up for that' when some of the trainees are a long way from reaching this point³⁸. The process to reach the externally defined positive outcomes stage for some young people could take up to two years. The impact of programmes and the developments made by young people are only seen over time which emphasises the basic level that some enter at.

The next chapter considers the notion of successful outcomes in more detail and highlights that this notion fails to consider the work undertaken and progress made by young people.

³⁸ Under E2E there were to be no specified time limit for the young people on the programmes.

CHAPTER EIGHT

UNDERSTANDING OUTCOMES

Introduction

The previous chapters have discussed the wider context of the young people's lives and aspects related to process in the programmes. This chapter moves on to consider these factors in relation to the current outcomes of the programmes. While beginning with discussing three examples of young people who would be identified as achieving a successful outcome the discussion shows that the current form in which it is recorded does not consider the process that has been involved to get to this stage. It has not been possible to discuss the successful outcomes without relating them to the process of being on the programme and the wider context of young people's lives. Furthermore, examples of young people who may not be defined as successful outcomes illustrate that young people have still made considerable progress. In this sense, success is not an adequate description of the performance of the programmes.

This chapter also discusses the current developments to 'measure' the less tangible and subjective aspects of programmes and argues that these measures do little to further communicate the performance of programmes. With this in mind, some of the key factors relating to process and developments made by young people are also reinforced. The chapter concludes with the acknowledgement that attribution and the wider context of young people's lives need to be considered when looking at the performance of programmes. This is not considered within current accountability mechanisms which are detached from the context of the programmes. Fundamentally, workers and Personal Adviser stressed that employment opportunities are limited for young people even if they have made significant progress which needs to be taken into consideration when discussing performance and outcomes.

Successful outcomes

Successful outcomes for the programmes are defined as young people who make the transition into further education, training or employment³⁹. During the research there have been examples of successful outcomes in this sense but as illustrated in previous chapters this narrow focus does not consider the considerable progress made to achieve this. The accountability mechanisms in place make the process invisible. The development of key attributes building towards these outcomes often goes unrecognised and is not communicated beyond programmes. This chapter will now discuss Joe, Adam and Paul who are examples of successful outcomes. The examples consider what was involved in the process of achieving the outcomes and the length of time it has taken.

Joe

Joe would be identified as a successful outcome and he progressed from the programme into full-time employment. Joe attributed joining the programme as a key moment in his life:

‘I’m alright now but I wasn’t before. Before I came here I wasn’t but I am now...I was looking for a job and everything weren’t going right for me...And like home life was bad as well because I was always getting told what to do. And I was the oldest so I had to do everything but its alright. I’m happy’

He contrasted his experiences on the programme to those of school and college and claimed that ‘joining here it’s like work. And that’s a big step forward’. At the point of the second research discussion Joe had begun a part time job football coaching in a leisure centre near where he lived. The leisure centre had contacted him because they were aware that he had completed the Community Sports Leadership Award through the programme.

At the point of the third discussion he was still working at the leisure centre and had recently qualified as a life guard. The programme funded him to take his life guard certificate. Joe had identified that the main area where he wanted support was to

³⁹ The time scale of the research is a key factor here. I am only able to comment on outcomes in relation to some young people as others were still on the programme when the research ended. Kate, for example, had been on the programme for two years. By keeping in contact with workers I have been able to keep up to date on some of the young people.

increase his confidence which he had done on the programme. Once his confidence began to develop he progressed quickly:

‘My confidence has grown since I started. And everyone’s noticed it as well on the course. Its like just been so quick as well. I’ve just done so much stuff in so little time...I think the first time that I went there it was like I knew what I wanted to do but I didn’t think that it would go the way it has. Like I’ve just gone into a job and that’s it and I thought it would be ages before I went into a job.’

Joe excelled at his time on the programme and won a Best Trainee achievement award⁴⁰ for 16-24 year-olds and received £200. He was also involved in a national campaign as a positive example of what programmes can help young people achieve. He said that this was to show ‘how I’ve gone from doing nothing to doing loads’. He identified the point where he felt ready to move on from the programme as there was ‘nothing what I need to learn’. He left the programme, after nine months, to work full time at the leisure centre over the summer holidays in the sports scheme.

Adam

Adam was very shy and quiet when he joined the programme. He thought that he would have been ‘on the dole’ if he had not joined the programme. After he had been on the programme for a couple of months the workers arranged a placement for him in a supermarket. He worked there twenty-two hours over four days each week doing ‘warehouse, unloading lorries, putting stuff away’ and still attended the programme for two days a week. He said that he enjoyed his job a lot and liked working in a team, and although the work was hard at first ‘you get used to it’. Adam identified the main aspects of attending the programme for him were to ‘get some qualifications, first aid, health and safety, working in team, making friends’. He was able to transfer these into his work environment.

Adam believed the programme helped him improve his skills in: ‘getting on with people, confidence, reading and writing, Maths and English’. He felt his confidence has improved a great deal which was evident to observe. He attributed this to going

⁴⁰ This was a county-wide awards ceremony which recognises achievements made by young people. Joe was nominated by programme workers for the award and won out of four people.

to the programme, working at the supermarket and getting the confidence to talk and mix with more people whereas before he said he 'didn't have the nerve'.

Adam was given the opportunity to work towards his driving license at the programme and his fork lift truck driving license at work. His aim while on the programme was to secure full-time employment at the supermarket which he did a few months later. Since beginning his job he has passed his fork life truck licence and completed a four-day health and safety course. He still kept in regular contact and often visited the young people and workers at the programme. His manager at the supermarket had contact the programme workers to ask if they could talk to Adam about taking some of his holidays and he had to be 'practically forced' to take his leave.

Paul

Paul was on the programme for a year and a half and reflected that 'when I first come on I was just like still acting my natural self. Still being a tearaway and stuff'. Clearly at the early stages Paul was not interested in being involved or changing his behaviour and he admitted that for five and a half months on the programme he 'didn't give a damn. I really didn't give anything about it'. He said that the workers were persistent in encouraging him to change his behaviour. Paul left the programme when he was offered a full-time position as a caretaker but this move took a long time and there were a number of 'false starts' (Ball, *et al.* 2000). It took a long time for Paul to engage in the programme but he was eventually given the opportunity to take on a part-time job cleaning at the programme base whilst still being on the programme. He would clean in the morning, then attend the programme, then go to another centre and do another two and a half hours cleaning a day. He said that from that point 'it's just got better and better'. Paul did well in this role, and received support from his supervisor. He took the job very seriously and was offered an interview for a full-time caretaker's position at a local school. Paul got the job and went on to complete his NVQ Level 1 and had begun his NVQ Level 2 in Caretaking. He preferred that he did not have to go to college, the tutor visited him in the workplace, so he was able to work towards a qualification that interested him while gaining experience. Paul had a lot of responsibility and worked long hours each day and managed a team of cleaners. He put himself forward for the qualification:

‘I wanted to be a caretaker. I said to them “can’t I be a caretaker?” They goes “you’ve got to do NVQ’s.” I goes “put me forward to NVQ’s.” And they did.’

He bought a moped with his salary, which one of the workers went with him to buy. He revelled in the fact that he was now doing everything legitimately:

‘I’d love the coppers to stop me because I can’t get done. I can’t get done for nothing on it. It’s taxed, MOT’ed and insured and I’ve got my license’.

Reflecting back on his previous behaviour he said:

‘It does disgust me what I done...Robbing their houses and selling it. breaking into their cars, nicking stereos and selling them. But like then I thought, after I changed, then I thought they paid good money for their cars. They pay good money for all the stuff in their houses and we’re just robbing it. That’s why people throw stones at cars and bikes. Now I’ve got my bike if someone hit my bike I’d be gutted. Its like, it makes you change and it makes you think. It really does make you think and I thought if someone nicked my bike I’d go barmy. Because people pay good money for their cars and bikes and they’re getting nicked’.

He realised that he needed to take responsibility and think about his future. This was combined with receiving support from the programme, which he would encourage other young people to engage with:

‘I’d probably say to them Life Skills is a training programme for young people who the young people if they put initiative in it they can get something out of it. But if they don’t they won’t really get much out of it. It’s through young people and it can really, really help people...The workers will try with them but if they don’t put nowt into it they won’t get nowt out of it. So the workers will just be wasting their time’.

After he left the programme, he still used to visit regularly and considered becoming involved in youth work and also volunteered at a youth project during his holidays. Paul’s recent circumstances are that he moved jobs and was working full-time as a caretaker on the other side of the city. He had passed his motorbike test and recently bought a motorbike. He and his girlfriend were expecting their first baby. He was even looking into the long term future:

‘What are my future plans, still work as a caretaker...and probably work until I’m about 55 and then retire. Because I’ve been told if I work from now until I’m 55 my pension will be about £250 a week so I’ll probably retire when I’m

about 55, 60 if I work till then. If I'm still going strong then which would be quite good, got my own house and everything'.

Paul has come a long way in the last few years. Through knowing Paul's story the progress he made is contextualised and highlights the significant difference. Paul had received support from the programme workers and his Personal Adviser since he was at school and he attributed their support before and during the programme as 'a very big part to play in where I am now':

'Well if I ever was in a bit of trouble [workers and PA] they was there straight away. Helping me out and trying to nudge me on to do stuff. And like [PA] was sending me leaflets through for getting jobs. He was really trying to help me out. I mean and I got an interview, it was the butchers. I wanted to be a butcher at one stage. I didn't get the job but [worker] even took me there. They've done everything. They even took me out and got me interview clothes what I didn't even have. Like they've brought me stuff like that and they was really helping me. So the support you get down here from [workers] I really got a lot off them. I got a lot of support'.

With hindsight he appreciated the support he received and what it had assisted him in achieving. The workers stressed that he was the one who deserved credit and recognition. He felt that if he had not engaged in the programme when he did and changed his behaviour 'I'd probably been in jail now or walking round with a tag on my leg'.

It is difficult to evaluate or understand what made Paul change and he himself found it a difficult question to answer. He said he got to the point where he thought 'I need a job'. He now showed a reflexive attitude and outlook:

'Growing up skills is what I've learned I think. I was just a big baby. Just messing about all the time...I changed because what I was doing before I changed was wrong. And I'm older and I can't be doing with prating around with little kids...You can't just faff about for the rest of your life...It is a massive change but it's something you've got to do. You can't just be a little kid all your life. You can't stay like that for the rest of your life. Times will always change and people will always change. People will always move on that's just the way it is'.

To only use the indicator of successful outcome, although positive, does not give an adequate summary of what has happened in the above cases. However, as highlighted above it can be difficult to define change in young people. While the young people have got a job so much more has happened. The externally defined criteria for

success do not come from the perspective of the young people or workers. The meaning of success to young people and workers can be very different to the externally defined definition. Furthermore, success can mean many things and not just transition to further education, training or employment. Conventional notions of 'success' do not show what progress has been made. One worker argued that the current measurement of 'achievement' is a 'middle class way' of viewing achievement. Workers argued that the outcomes of the programmes may be unrealistic due to the needs and the level of some young people's ability.

Mark's experience shows how the indicator of successful outcome is not an adequate measure of performance of the programmes in a very different way. Some young people who are counted as a successful outcome when they leave the programme may go on to drop out (Hodkinson and Bloomer, 2000a) which also questions the value of using it as an indicator. Despite Mark's negative experience of education, at the first discussion he was interested in going to college to do a course in child care but never pursued it at this point. By the time of the third discussion he was working in a nursery to gain work experience with children and had an interview for a place on an NVQ Level 1 Child Care course.

Mark left the programme shortly after to pursue this. He attended college for a couple of months but his attendance deteriorated and he was asked to leave the course. One of the programme workers highlighted that Mark had always had high attendance while on the programme and the decline could have been because he was no longer receiving the same level of support at college. His declining attendance at college was not detected early enough and by the time it was identified it was then too late. Although he would be counted as a successful outcome, as he made the transition to further education, he subsequently left the course.

On my last visit to the programme I enquired if the workers knew how Mark was getting on. Apparently after leaving the college course he came into the programme on a few occasions in a dishevelled state. One worker commented that it looked like he had been 'sleeping rough'. She had since had a phone call from him and he said that he was in London with his cousin. She stated that he did not ring for a particular reason, he just spoke to her for a while and then ended the call. This was the final

contact she had with him. The programme workers had obviously thought that Mark was ready to engage in mainstream college. While not receiving the same level of support may have been a contributing factor there may also have been other issues in Mark's life that had influenced him in his attendance at college.

While the above cases all provide examples of successful outcomes it could be argued that the outcomes set for the programmes are not realistic. One Personal Adviser stressed that 'there's a huge gulf between doing exceptionally well at Life Skills and then making the transition to the workplace'. The workers were conscious that they did not want their intervention to have a detrimental effect on the young people by building up their hopes and insisted that there is a need to be realistic in their aims. Some advocated: 'some sort of bridge between Life Skills and the real world'. As stated previously it seems that assumptions based on young people's capability when entering the programmes may not be accurate. This is significant as the assumptions have implications for what is being measured in the programmes where measuring performance is based on entry to education, employment or training. There is a need to challenge how realistic the current performance indicators are for the programmes:

'I think the one thing that I would worry about is not being aware of what you can't do or what you can realistically do... You're set work targets and some of them seem just so uncompromisingly unrealistic and you feel that's not going to happen'.

The following extract is taken from a discussion with two workers from the same programme:

Programme worker 1: 'They come here and you do see the positive changes... Sometimes these small, soft options as you call them are really important if you build them things up and just to see... I mean, how would you look at someone like say [name of young person] but put your finger on what has changed. It's difficult... A more positive outlook on life, I suppose... You know, has he got a level 1? That's not the issue. A lot of people who work with young people miss the point...

Programme worker 2: Yeah, because he's staying away from crime. He's turning up everyday. He's taking responsibility and, like you say, they're more interested in what level they've got. For us, that's a result...

Programme worker 1: Results level, what level they're on? You know, what's his cohort? They were talking about this cohort of young people as if,

like you know, somehow they're all ticked the same. They're not. Some young people will get level one and level two and others won't. But it doesn't mean that they haven't moved along that register of improvement in their lives just because they haven't got the level one. But apparently, under the new E2E regulations, that's not going to be good enough. It's all got to be education led, everything...

Programme worker 2: Yeah, but that's going to be a problem for us because a lot of our young people, well the majority of them, have got learning disabilities of one sort or another and some of them can't even read and write. How are they going to get to a point where they're...

Programme worker 1: I'm saying that these are the gamut of things that we have to deal with on a day to day basis. And then someone says try to get them into college. No way. You've got to work out all these other things and the only way you can do it is by sitting down with them and actually talking to them like this. No one's ever listened to young people before, you know.'

The above extract highlights many points in relation to the realities of working in the programmes. The workers stressed that because a young person may not have achieved an NVQ this does not mean that there has not been progression. It also illustrates the notion of aggregated concepts of young people as the workers felt that there is not an understanding of the individual experiences or differing levels of ability. The focus on education and employment does not consider that many young people are far from reaching that point.

Current ways of measuring 'soft outcomes'

The above extract shows workers recognition of the way in which the personal and social development of young people need to be addressed before any attempt may be made to move into education, employment or training. The worker also discussed that these are aspects which are difficult to communicate. There is increasing focus on the need to measure the less tangible aspects of programmes based on the notion of 'soft outcomes'. A new formal assessment process introduced to Connexions and used by Personal Advisers was Richter Scale. This is one of the current tools that were identified as measuring 'soft outcomes'. One Personal Advisor noted that this looks at a number of aspects of the young people's lives, for example:

'We use the life board which covers employment, training, education, accommodation, learning, relationships, influences, stress, alcohol, drugs,

health, happiness. In my experience of using it, it has been very helpful and you can get quite a good assessment, but it is a snapshot... Equally, going on the bus with them to wherever and having something to eat, things come out, so you're assessing in whatever way you feel's best but you have to do some sort of assessment that's in line with this APIR⁴¹ and Connexions.'

The Personal Advisers discussed the use of the tool uncritically and stated that the Richter Scale would help to make the 'soft outcomes harder'. It was seen as important to be able to 'quantify soft targets because a lot of the Learning Gateway is soft'. It seems that 'soft outcomes' has been taken on as an unproblematic term which tends to encompass everything that is not easily measured and available through statistics. However, the main reason for attempting to record these aspects is so that they can then be quantified.

Although proposals are often made in report recommendations to measure 'soft outcomes' and 'distance travelled' and to recognise its importance (Dewson, *et al.*, 2000; Sims, *et al.*, 2001) 'successful outcomes' are still defined by numbers and aggregates. This does not communicate an understanding of the development in young people through the work of all involved. The current measurement tools adopted reinforce the argument levelled at accountability mechanisms and reliance on being able to quantify and measure performance.

While the term 'soft outcomes' has been adopted by many as a term to denote the less tangible outcomes from programmes, there are also problems with the term. It does not provide any clearer articulation of the work undertaken. It could also be suggested that, by using the prefix 'soft', such identified outcomes are easier to achieve and are not as defining as 'hard' outcomes. This could be seen as a derogatory term signifying less importance. However, in practice, soft outcomes are often the harder outcomes to articulate and be confident about. Similarly, while 'distance travelled' is recommended as a way to show a young person's journey this still relies on quantitative measures and does not communicate the process.

A more cynical criticism is that what is currently measured could be an indication only of what is currently valued in government programmes, for example, the number of young people who enter employment, further education or training. This is only

⁴¹ Assessment, Planning, Implementation and Review (APIR) system

related to economic considerations (Cregan, 2002; Williams, 2002; Lloyd and Payne, 2003). By adopting an interpretive approach, it has been possible to engage young people in exploring their experiences, at times recognising positive changes, and develop their narratives. Furthermore, this approach has assisted the workers in the communication of their practice which highlights that understanding performance is more challenging than is currently recognised. The policy context is not sympathetic to the central processes of the work and this research questions the policy which seems to be underpinned with assumptions about the young people which in turn manifests as unrealistic and uniform targets and expectations. The research has communicated aspects often not known outside of the practice arena as such aspects are rarely recorded in evaluations and audits.

The centrality of process

Although the previous chapters have placed emphasis on process it is worth highlighting the main aspects lost within current articulations of performance. These are often subtle developments and progression made by young people. Many young people did improve their reading and writing skills, although this was rarely enough to attain any qualification. For example, Sarah who identified significant problems with reading had got an in-house certificate from the programme for improvement in her reading. Sarah was very proud of this achievement. Young people often improved their communication skills during their engagement in the programmes. This could be a significant development as when many young people joined they would sit with their heads down and hardly communicate with anyone.

As has been previously discussed many of these achievements impact on young people's levels of confidence. Young people often made the decision that they would like to return to mainstream college once their confidence had increased. Another positive aspect of the programmes assisting young people was the opportunities they could provide for work placements. For example, Anna had secured a placement at a nursery which she felt she would not have been able to do without the assistance of the programme as she thought having low grades would have been a barrier.

The following quotes from one Personal Adviser highlight the significance of the progress young people can make. Both include examples of the personal

developments of young people, such as increased confidence and motivation, which develop over time, through the process of being involved in the programmes:

‘I think most of the young people that I’ve worked with have gone on to Life Skills, have done really well. And it’s the soft targets and then the hard targets because a lot of them have gone on and succeeded themselves, personally succeeded as they’ve covered their motivation and they really are committed to getting on and doing this and its made them more confident. Others have learned to read and write. Others have kicked a drug habit. Others may have made friends. Or even got out of the house, might never of even been out of the house...the barriers, writing their name and being able to do basic Maths and English’.

‘It’s just great when something works well and you can see that someone’s actually attending and you know how difficult it was for them to even be motivated to do anything. And that’s brilliant when that happens...Gaining so much confidence. And one young person I was working with, well a couple have just gone on to college and they’ve stuck at it but it’s been a good grounding and it’s worked on all the things that were not right in their lives at that time. And you see them getting either work, college or training, that’s great and I think that the Life Skills trainers and the PA’s you need successes...Just for yourself. You can go yes, they’ve got a job or yes, they’ve got a house or they’re happy or equally then you’ve got people to support you when you go oh god, something’s gone wrong but then try not to give up’.

One of the observations made throughout my time visiting the programmes is the importance of instilling and maintaining a sense of routine in the lives of young people. This is something that many did not have and would be a prerequisite for starting a job or attending college. For some young people the fact that they will be guaranteed lunch on the days they are at the programme was a positive aspect for workers. However, this does raise the question of whether the above developments are acceptable achievements in terms of public expenditure. It seems to point to the ‘assumptions gap’, while there must be some understanding that the programmes are aimed to work with people who may not be motivated in certain areas of their lives, realistically it needs to be understood that this may extend to the basic level of turning up.

Programme workers and Personal Advisers felt it was difficult to measure the outcomes that young people take with them from Life Skills and some may not benefit until the future. Workers commented on the positive changes and often found it difficult to pinpoint what had changed, often it was a ‘more positive outlook on

life'. Positive outcomes for workers include a variety of aspects including young people turning up every day, improvement in appearance to taking more responsibility and a general improvement in their lives to staying away from crime. These outcomes were regarded as major results and progress, highlighting that even though they may not have reached success in gaining employment or education this 'doesn't mean that they haven't moved along the register of improvement in their lives'.

When the transition of young people is uncertain they will not be counted as successful outcomes. In this sense the programmes may be viewed as failing but this fails to consider the process aspects of the work. Young people may still have progressed considerably and this should still be recognised in some way. Some young people did not make it through the programme. In reality, improvements in personal situations, for example with Lara, could be far more significant for young people which may ultimately benefit them in gaining employment or going to college in the long term.

At the point of the third discussion with Anna there had been many changes in her life. Anna and her boyfriend had just got their own house near to her boyfriend's family. She was very happy about it and said 'it's like a big step for me. Moving away from my family.' She felt that the changes over the last few months were positive changes in her life overall. Anna was in the final month before leaving the programme and about to move onto her full time college course in nursery nursing. She felt ready to move on to college and said 'it's all happened quickly, I can't wait'. She would be going to college three days a week, two days placement in the nursery and spending one day on college work, working on her Maths and English. She had help from other students on the new course and the tutors because there course involves an amount of writing. She said:

'It's hard work. Put it that way it is hard. Harder than what I thought but I get help and I get through it. And I've just got to stick it and do it'.

The programme workers supported her by liaising with people at the college. Her aim was to get a job in a nursery. Anna identified some of the training she had already done on the programme, such as equal opportunities, would also be covered on the course. She said she:

'Feels better. You can just walk down the street and you know you're alright without putting your head down and stuff like that. I've got loads more confidence. I feel more confident talking and stuff like that'.

Since the research took place I had not seen Anna much, apart from on a few informal occasions. The programme workers said that her attendance at the course did decrease but she then got back on track. Very recently I was told that this had happened again and it is now nearing the end of the course. She has enquired with programme workers about how she could claim benefits for herself and for her father as she is trying to get a carer for him. The workers felt that she was not going to pursue finding employment when she finished the course. This may have been overshadowed by her personal situation.

Tom aimed to get a job working with computers. After about six months on the programme he began a placement at a computer company. A few months later he left the programme to begin work at his father's friend's company.

The last time I saw Tom was when our visits to the programme coincided. This was six months after he had left the programme. He had come to collect his health and safety certificates and we had a chat. He did not go into detail about the job that he started with his father's friend's company. He did talk about his most recent job which was packing on a production line in a factory but he said 'it wasn't for me'. He is currently studying a computer course and is looking for a job with computers.

At the time of the research Jodie had planned to return to her performance arts course which is what she had been doing before she had her baby. She also planned to get a part-time job as a cleaner or a waitress. However, soon after Jodie became pregnant again and transferred to a mother and baby programme. She had no further contact with the programme and therefore no further information could be obtained from her. I saw her by chance a few months later with her boyfriend. They had been looking at a house to rent. She was quite heavily pregnant at this stage and was looking forward to having the baby. She was not attending the mother and baby programme any more and was planning for when the baby was born.

While emphasis has been placed on process and the high level of support based on relationships between young people and workers it also should be stressed this could create a dependency on the workers which makes the move to mainstream provision or employment difficult for some young people. It is significant how young people often had high level of attendance on programmes but this changed when they moved on. One worker told of a young man who left the programme (Tim) when he got a job on a building site. He had rang her at six o'clock one morning to ask if she would 'ring in sick' for him. She explained that this was his responsibility to deal with this situation. While workers and Personal Advisers recognised the importance of knowing when it was time for young people to move on this was complicated by the fact that there were few opportunities to move them on to. This is problematic as young people may not be developing any further on programmes and young people often got restless.

Attribution and wider context

The previous chapters have all aimed to emphasise the importance of locating experiences within the wider social context. This section considers attribution of the programme and provides examples of how the work of the programmes must be understood within the wider social and economic context. It discusses important points raised by workers which relate to policy assumptions about labour market conditions and instrumental reasons behind the initiatives.

Programmes are only one part of a young persons' life but some young people did identify the programmes as having significant and positive impact on their experiences. For others, it was apparent that there were other areas of their lives that had also changed. This was sometimes in conjunction with the assistance received from programme workers, for example with housing issues or family problems. For some young people 'success' may occur in other parts of their lives which are not related to education, employment or training. Anna's improved family circumstances made her more positive and optimistic which coincided with starting a new college course. Some young people specifically attributed their success to relationships and support from workers. Lara reflected that if she had not joined the programme when she did she would be 'probably dead' due to her lifestyle of drinking, taking drugs and violence.

Some young people, such as Sarah, were involved in negative behaviour outside of the programme. She had recently been cautioned by the police for being a passenger in a car with her friends with no tax or insurance. Workers often stated that they could only do so much with some young people as they were aware that once the training programme had finished they may revert back to their previous behaviour.

Some young people may not be classed as successful in terms of successful outcomes but this does not have to mean that they have not progressed and there have been developments. One worker commented that a lot of young people do make 'small leaps' but do not make it to the 'successful outcome' stage, because of the 'sort of issues that the young people are bringing'. Young people do take the skills they have developed and often get their own jobs or college places at a later stage. This is something that performance indicators are not going to be able to record although suggestions could be made to track the young people to follow their development over a period of time. Young people entering employment without training has recently been recognised as achieving a successful outcome whereas previously it had to be employment with training. It was felt that the previous indicator lacked recognition for young people who did find employment. This is important when considering that young people identified that they would like to move into employment:

'Just because you're working on a market stall, alright you're not working to NVQ level 2 or 1 or whatever but the interaction, and having a job and the dignity and labour that brings'.

As well as recognising that young people may not be ready to enter employment as soon as is suggested in the official discourses, a further significant issue that has been recognised (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001) and was a cause of concern and frustration for workers was in relation to available job opportunities for young people. The programmes have a difficult task in an unfavourable youth labour market, made more difficult by the complexity of young people's lives. As one worker stated:

'The employment market has got to recognise this, a basic example, we've got so many young people, young males in particular, who want to work in motor vehicle, they want to work with cars and understandably so but all the traditional industries that they are still geared into, men's work, have gone. Pits have gone, factories shut down, all the traditional industries caput and they come from backgrounds where either you've got either they've got mass

unemployment third or fourth generation, so the influence they have got is still linked to what their parents and grandparents used to do. They aren't necessarily aware of the other opportunities perhaps that are out there so it's about what's close at hand, cars that's an acceptable thing for a young man to do, fine, often they've been into TWOCing and the rest of it so they can drive, they can do a bit of mechanics. So we look at the vacancies for mechanics, four GCSE's at C and above, now they can go on Life Skills, they can do placements but in the general mainstream they are not able to apply. So what I'm saying is there's got to be some bridge whereby they can get placements, they can build their own personal, you know getting to know people, showing them what they can do but that placement can't just be sold as another training appointment, there's got to be some light at the end of the tunnel, now I know that's asking for, you know we're talking macro economics now and that might not be feasible but there's got to be something I think to be done for young people like that'.

Programme workers and Personal Advisers raised concerns that it is not widely recognised that it can be difficult for some young people to move on. These were often identified as fundamental issues about the economic and labour market context. Workers and Personal Advisers stressed the need to consider the success of the programmes and the young people's positions in terms of what there was available for them to move on to. It was often difficult to find opportunities for young people ready to move on from 'Life Skills' and workers identified a significant gap from being successful on a programme to opportunities available in the labour market:

'It's not easy getting positive outcomes for Life Skills kids. It is not easy. There's a huge gulf between doing exceptionally well at Life Skills and then making the transition into the workplace. And it's not necessarily the fault of the young people. I think the LSC [Learning and Skills Council] has got to be aware that, and DfES [Department for Education and Skills], there has got to be some sort of real work or at least training that leads to real work. The 14-19 recent green paper banged on and on about lifelong learning. I mean it makes it explicit that the governments aims are economic, forget social and the rest of it, they're economic and political. It's structured, it's about getting young people, I think the idea of a significant proportion of our young people having a choice, forget that. They've got to be trained up, able to work and contribute to society and I don't think the government runs Life Skills for altruistic reasons. They're doing it so they'll be able to be trained and move into, the problem is after Life Skills they still don't have GCSE's. And most of our employers aren't necessarily aware of how they've come on leaps and bounds in their confidence and they can now look people in the eye when they speak to them rather than stare at the floor. And I think there's got to be some sort of bridge between Life Skills and its ilk, and the real world, some sort of continuing support. And if that could be linked into vocational education or whatever it is they propose...Its got to be applied to Life Skills because I've had very few young people who've made a successful transition...a successful

transition in the eyes of what the government decide a successful transition is or a positive outcome with education'

Many of the points raised above correlate with criticisms that have been discussed earlier (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001; Williams, 2003). The frustrations that workers and Personal Advisers have are fundamental issues which are not taken into account in the implementation of policies. They become more apparent when the current accountability mechanisms and performance indicators are considered.

Particular concerns were raised about opportunities available for young people who have no or few qualifications as access to most courses requires a reasonable level at reading and writing. The lack of 'achievement' at school can complicate the outcomes that young people and the programmes can achieve. The opportunities that some of the young people may have had in traditional industries decades ago have declined and most vocational courses today require a certain educational attainment. Vacancies 'in the general mainstream' often require GCSE's at grade C or above. Workers criticised the fact that there are not sufficient places in work-based learning or colleges to assist young people. This is a significant concern when young people have notably progressed but it is difficult to move them on and at the same time keep them positive.

Workers talked about the assumptions that they were working within and while they knew what they could realistically do, they still had to try and work to unrealistic targets based on these assumptions, which do not understand the young people:

'They're all challenges...then not having jobs for them to go to because they haven't got qualifications...this work based learning, the NVQ's 1's and 2's, say someone wanted to do childcare, they'd have to have a good ability at reading and writing to go into work based learning so that's hard'.

It is widely acknowledged that the traditional routes into employment for young people have diminished and the school to work transition concept is no longer a useful way to understand the experiences of young people today (Ball, *et al.* 2000; Cohen and Ainley, 2000). The linear notion of transition is still used in policy terms for explaining the role and aims of the programmes and in the linear forms of accountability used to measure the performance of the programmes. It has also been

argued that one of the reasons why this concept is not applicable any more is because young people have increased choices.

This is not the case for many of the young people in this research and both of the above debates seem simplistic and deny any complexity or diversity and the young people in this research do not fit easily into either debate. Specifically in relation to school to work transitions most of the young people had left school early, either through self-exclusion or expulsion or sometimes internal exclusion within the school. So while it is claimed that 'a marginal status becomes uncomfortably evident' at the point of transition (Corbett, 1990: 1) and increases the risk of social exclusion for 'vulnerable youth' (MacDonald, 1997: 21) this thesis argues that for some of the young people their position has been one which could be identified as socially excluded for a considerable period of time and not just at this point. The simplified concept of 'transition' denies the real experiences and attitudes of the young people. It is currently understood as the transition to engagement in the programmes, often from nothing at all, to the defining transition of successful outcomes, without consideration of the importance of the process in between.

Summary

Understanding the process is essential in understanding the work of the programmes. This chapter has given examples of young people who would be classed as a successful outcome but also those who would not. The target of successful outcome does not relate to the work that has been undertaken in the process of being on the programmes. Success is not an adequate description and simple measures are not going to be able to account for the process. There needs to be recognition of young people who may not be classed as successful and the progress made by young people who are still on the programmes. From this we can learn that there is a need for realistic expectations about programmes and how success can be defined and measured. It is much more complex than is allowed consideration through the outcomes measures in place.

The working reality of the programmes is in no sense conveyed through the current tools of measurement which have been described as 'crude indicators' and which show very little in terms of progress and development. These indicators often account

for very little and distort the work that is undertaken. This chapter has highlighted that the outcomes of the programme do not reflect the nature of the work or the nature of young people's needs and problems. This is further complicated by the mechanisms used to record the outcomes which rely on aggregated accounts of performance. In contrast to most previous work about training programmes this research has identified some positive aspects of young people's engagement but this generally relies upon dedicated and committed front-line workers. Finally and perhaps most importantly, the performance and outcomes of the programmes need to be understood within the wider social and economic context in which there are limited opportunities for many young people. The final chapter will reflect upon some of these issues and discuss some ideas of moving thinking towards an alternative approach to notions of accountability in training programmes.

CHAPTER NINE CONCLUSION

Current forms of accountability, which govern the training programmes, are limited in the understanding they can provide of the programmes and the current measures of success are not an adequate way to account for developments made by young people. This is important, as it is the quality of accountability mechanisms and the associated information, which they produce, which informs government policies. The previous chapters have revealed that there is a need to understand the complexities of both the young people's lives and the work of the programmes to enhance understandings of post-16 training. These aspects are not recognised in policy discourses about programmes. Placing emphasis on 'process' and what happens on training programmes is rarely considered, perhaps in part because it is problematic, yet it is aspects of this that young people and workers identify as significant. The previous chapters have tried to make visible and communicate some of what is lost through the current forms of accountability. The findings show current forms of accountability are not appropriate to understand the programmes.

This research has focused on the 'micro' aspect of programmes. Through developing an informed understanding of the young people lives and the work of the programmes, it becomes clear that there is a fundamental issue based on an 'assumptions gap' within policy. Social policy commentators concentrate on the negative assumptions underpinning policy and the way in which initiatives are not able to achieve what they set out to do. They do not consider that policy also makes inaccurate assumptions about young people's competencies. In this sense, programmes face a difficult task in trying to achieve successful outcomes based on erroneous assumptions. Realistic targets need to be informed by both young people's lives and the realities of practice. Without an informed understanding of the problems at hand, either the policy or the programmes will appear to fail. To be able to assist young people, as both policy makers and practitioners set out to do, the two need to inform each other.

As discussed in the literature review, criticisms have been raised of the assumptions and objectives of the government's policies to engage young people in post-16 learning. The previous chapters have illustrated that it is not useful to see young

people as belonging to predetermined categories and they do not fit into the aggregated concepts applied to them. The underpinning model of deficit is not a useful way to understand the complexities of the young people's lives. Assumptions imply that young people are socially excluded because of their attitudes, beliefs, lack of employability and sometimes troublesome behaviour. The starting point of highly aggregated concepts offers little to assist understandings of the work of the programmes or the individual context of young people's lives. This is all the more problematic because the policies espouse a bespoke approach to be adopted in the delivery of programmes.

In considering the individual, this research presents a more complex picture of young people than that presented in policy. The complexities of some of the young people's biographies were, at times, confusing and fragmented and many of the themes presented were interwoven, spanning their educational background, their family background and domestic circumstances. They were alienated, usually as a result of their educational experience and often dealt with this while also having profound problems in their home lives. Many young people needed extensive support with personal and social development. For certain young people, the defining points in their lives had been in terms of their family and housing circumstances where they had experienced upheaval and instability.

Understanding young people's previous experiences of education has been fundamental to understanding the significance of their re-engagement and the issues that need to be addressed on the programme. The policy response does not really consider the reasons why young people have not been successful in education. The assumptions do not consider that many young people have fractured learning identities based on their previous experiences. For these young people, re-engagement is hugely significant. The loss of confidence felt by young people is enormous and complicates assumptions of non-participation stemming from individual deficit and self-exclusion. Young people operated within a system of 'bounded' agency (Evans, 2002) and had limited choices. Policy fails to consider reasons behind self-exclusion which were often linked to negative experiences of school, where bullying was a key factor. Therefore, the assumptions of policy are based on a lack of understanding of the state of development of the young people

when they join the programme. This is always going to be problematic given the variation among the young people but need not be based on a model of deficit.

The programmes are set up to facilitate young people through a 'transitional period' into education, training or employment. From the empirical study, it became quickly apparent that this simplistic aim was far more complicated to carry out in practice.

Furthermore, the linear concept of 'transition' to education, training or employment as the defining outcome fails to consider the experiences of the young people. This concept has little relevance as many young people have been outside mainstream provision for a period of time prior to engaging in the programme. It fails to recognise that disengagement is linked to complex and problematic experiences and not just personal deficit.

The assumption of paid employment as the way to forge social inclusion for young people has been criticised for being instrumental and based solely on economic considerations. It is significant that, for many young people, this was their key aim. Some viewed the training programme in an instrumental way, in order to assist them in gaining employment. Many others felt that they would not have been able to make this progress without the support and opportunities they received through the programme. However, the policy focus takes a narrow approach to this aim without consideration of the wider context of young people's lives and their structural position in society. Social class and structural aspects of young people's lives are still all-defining.

Most significantly, this assumption presents a favourable view of the labour market which does not consider that there are limited job opportunities in the youth labour market. Even if the programmes are successful in improving job prospects for young people, it may not be enough to get a job. A fundamental issue is that, after the training programmes, the young people still do not have academic qualifications, such as GCSE's, which may be advantageous in getting a job. This needs to be given real consideration if programmes are to achieve 'successful outcomes'. Workers commented that employers are not going to be able to see that a young person has made significant progress in their level of confidence or increased motivation. It is important to consider what comes after the training programmes and workers stressed

the need for some bridge between the programmes and quality work opportunities for young people so that the programmes are not seen as worthless. They reflected that they did not want to set young people up to fail, which would have a further detrimental effect on them.

The wider contexts of young people's experiences are integral to developing a more sophisticated understanding of the impact of the programme. This research has aimed to embed the young people's subjective experiences of the programme within the wider context of their lives (Kushner, 2000). Illustrating the wider context of the young people's lives assists in understanding what may be entailed in the work of the programmes and some of the issues that the workers deal with on a daily basis. For example, on some occasions, Anna's engagement with the programme was affected by other aspects of her life which had to take priority at that point. As workers noted, it is difficult to attribute impact to programmes as it may depend on various other factors in a young person's life, where many interrelated aspects have changed which have been positive, even though programmes have often assisted in these as well. The effectiveness of programmes may depend as much upon this wider context as upon their own performance. Furthermore, it is only possible for programmes to assist young people who choose to engage and be supported.

As previously discussed, accountability mechanisms do not reveal the process involved in the delivery of programmes. The engagement with young people during this research often mirrored the challenges that workers faced in engaging young people in the programmes. The methodology used related to and revealed aspects of process. Process is underplayed in the context of understanding programmes, by research reports and social policy commentators, whereas this work communicates its relevance and need for consideration. Observations over the two years have clearly indicated the positive changes in young people over a period of time. Some of these are remarkable and significant within the young people's overall lives including the enhancement of self-esteem, confidence and ambition.

Methodologically this research aimed to develop methods more sympathetic to working with the young people and to communicate the problems associated with conducting such research. There is very little written about this aspect of the research

process. The approach developed in this work has demonstrated that it is possible to engage with young people in research in a way which allows them the space to discuss and reflect upon their experiences. Although it also outlines how this can be complicated in practice. I realise that I have been in the fortunate position to conduct extensive and intensive work with the programmes.

The layers of understanding around the young people's lives, became both clearer as the research progressed but also more complex and difficult to understand. The use of photography gave the young people a tool with which to try and explain some of these complexities. This is the complexity, which is lost within current articulations of accountability. Photography also gave young people some control in the research process. They were given the space to direct their own narratives, facilitating understandings of their experiences and perspectives.

The 'assumptions gap' underpinning policy leads to an expectations gap about what the programmes can achieve. Programmes have to be training-focused whilst addressing personal and social issues. Due to the wide remit of the programmes, workers commented that there are no guidelines as to how far they need to go to address these issues. The idea of bespoke support espoused in policy documents is very apparent in practice. However, due to a lack of understanding of young people's lives and assumptions about their state of development, the extent to which this support is necessary for young people is not recognised. This may lead to profound tensions between performance measures, practice, policy objectives and young people's needs.

There is no 'quick fix' solution for some young people and the implementation of twenty-six week training programmes shows a lack of understanding of the multiple problems and barriers some young people have. Personal problems were often dealt with primarily and as part of the ongoing process of being engaged in the programmes. It also should be recognised that, due to the nature of young people's problems, some workers felt that they were not always equipped to deal with them. Many young people were a long way from entering further education, employment or training. For example, many young people have a very basic level of literacy and numeracy when joining the programme with which they receive assistance.

Ultimately, development in these skills would be beneficial in gaining employment, but this could take a considerable period of time. Some young people had learning difficulties which may require interventions that programmes cannot provide. Again this highlights the 'assumptions gap' where the young people are entering programmes and need considerable time to receive support and work on their basic skills.

Many young people did spend longer on the programmes than the initial six months because they were not ready for employment or further education at this point and needed further support. This was at the discretion of the workers and Personal Advisers. However, workers argued that they felt pressured to 'gear' young people up for employment or education when some of the young people were a long way from reaching this point. The empirical evidence shows that, for the majority of young people, the project intervention replaced a period in their lives when they would otherwise have been totally disengaged from any form of learning activity. However, it may also be argued that it is not possible to bridge the gap in young people's skill levels and state of development with the current approach of programmes.

This 'assumptions gap' has implications for what is being measured which may not be representative of what is happening in practice. Many of the young people have improved considerably but are still not at the point of entering employment or education. Achievements are made but they are not reflected because they fall outside of accountability measures. For example, a young person making eye contact would be a given form of interaction in a policy maker's context. However, achieving this can be a significant development to young people and workers. There is a clear contrast in the way in which young people and workers talk about the achievements and successes of the programmes to the way in which they are identified in policy.

While commentators are critical of government interventions they are also cautious about this as they argue that there is a need to consider policy-driven measures which can create unrealistic timeframes and pre-determined ways of helping people (Colley and Hodkinson, 2001). While there is strength in this argument, the empirical findings of this research challenges these criticisms as often the intervention itself

may be positive, especially when young people were disengaged for a considerable period before. While commentators criticise the government for their lack of understanding of young people, they do not consider that programme workers are often working very hard to support the young people. They do not consider that, due to the nature of the problems and personal situations that they identify, programmes may not always appear to be effective. On a daily basis, workers were dealing with significant issues, which are not considered, for example the support they provided for Kate.

Front-line workers are in Lispky's (1980) terms 'street-level bureaucrats', constrained by targets and budgets and using their discretion to work with young people's multiple issues in an intensive and extensive way. There is a difference in what the policy documents argue is being funded and what the reality of the work is, a difference the programme workers have to manage.

It is recognised that it can be difficult for initiatives to help the most marginalised people who need fundamental intervention (Williams, 2002). However, this work suggests that initiatives can be beneficial with a possible explanation being that workers go beyond the remit of the programmes to assist young people. There is a risk that accountability mechanisms currently in operation can restrict this work by prescribing unrealistic targets that may limit the workers adaptability and responsiveness to young people. Ball, *et al.* (2000) suggests different strategies are needed to address issues with marginalised people. This work argues that initiatives are proving successful in addressing issues and therefore different strategies are needed to recognise, understand and enable this process over a period of time.

Central to current concepts of accountability is the notion that performance can be reported on, compared and managed through indicators and targets. However, targets and indicators do not simply give an account of a service, they can also have an impact on the way in which those services are delivered. Current forms of accountability and aggregation create a distorted picture of programmes and practice may be constrained rather than illuminated by forms of account. The responsibility towards externally-defined objectives obscures many aspects of the programmes. The individual and the process are lost within current forms of accountability.

Whilst a primary focus may be to build upon social skills and personal development and the enhancement of self-esteem of young people (Department for Education and Employment, 1999a), notions of the individual are often concealed from view and lost within current articulations of accountability as a result of the inability of evaluative mechanisms to recognise their significance. The current forms of accountability express ex-post, aggregated and mainly quantifiable understandings which limit the potential to inform practice. This is a significant limitation because accountability, as a potentially important element of learning, is diminished and often lost. Furthermore, the potential of practice to inform policy is also reduced.

While it is recognised that there is a need for aspects that are not quantifiable to be considered, the measures put in place to do this tend to rely upon scales and attitudinal assessments. The current adoption of 'distance travelled' and 'soft outcomes' do little to enhance or communicate the work of programmes and are therefore limited in their helpfulness. There is a necessity to communicate beyond the instruments that measure outcomes. When young people's perspectives are sought, this is limited within quantifiable accountability processes, such as ticking a box or using a scale. The assumptions underpinning these concepts are questionable. 'Distance travelled' assumes a start and end point, which would be difficult to operationalise when all young people are not just at different levels but also on different points on different journeys. 'Soft outcomes' have connotations of being easier to achieve than 'hard outcomes'. Furthermore, 'soft outcomes' are the harder outcomes to articulate and be confident about in practice. Finally, both concepts relate to employability without much consideration for the wider aspects of people's lives or the labour market context.

The complexities of issues such as social exclusion are dismissed in the process of giving these current forms of account. This is significant when related to the social policy debates around the negative construction of young people as there will never be increased understanding if this form of accountability is relied upon. The defining outcomes for a young person, the workers and the programme only provide a partial understanding. Developments made to get to the point of externally defined successful outcomes, if achieved, are significant and mostly *prerequisites* for young people to engage in outcomes such as further education, training or employment.

What is in debate is the weakness of the current understandings of accountability, which do not communicate the realities and process of the programmes and the young people's lives and, therefore, lessons are lost. Accountability is not performing the role of enhancing learning and understanding which it could.

A better articulation of the performance of programmes would be one that considered the centrality of process. This research shows the inappropriateness of current forms of accountability for programmes due to the individuality of the young people, the inability to consider the wider context or the actual work undertaken in programmes. This research calls for an approach to accountability based upon a broader conception drawing on sociological understandings of how people make sense of their actions and explain their reality (Shotter, 1984; Orbuch, 1997) considered in the literature review and methodology chapters. This represents a shift in understanding what accountability means in public services away from scrutiny and control, and involving sanctions, to being based on understanding and learning. This approach changes the focus of what an account is given of, to whom it is given and how it is given.

There is a need to move away from only considering 'product', which is measured through outcomes, to a more rounded understanding of process. This is not based on an end-point analysis of the success of the programme, workers and young people but an ongoing communication of the work and developments made. This would provide a more sophisticated understanding of the performance of programmes and value the work undertaken. It would generate a different view, one which is not ex-post but an understanding which is contextually placed. It is important for the two to inform each other in order to achieve realistic targets and outcomes.

Hierarchical accountability does not promote transparency because of high levels of aggregation, instead it conceals performance. Financial scrutiny of public services is necessary but there are weaknesses to this form of information in relation to the complexity of the programmes described. Whilst the problematic nature of hierarchical accountability and aggregation has been noted it is recognised that this form of accountability is unavoidable and it would be naïve to suggest an approach which did not recognise their dominance. However, this could be complemented and informed by an accountability approach developed in programmes. Working at a

level lower down the hierarchy allows for the possibility of other forms of accountability. If performance information is going to affect change then it needs to be informed by what is happening within the programmes.

As this work has focused on the 'micro' level of programmes it is at this level that a process-based form of accountability is suggested. Emphasis is placed on the delivery end and it is argued that learning from the 'bottom-up' can improve the implementation of policies (Barrett, 2004). Roberts (1991) maintains that socialising forms of accountability are only possible in local contexts where there is an absence of power and possibilities for face-to-face interaction. Accountability has a valuable role to play in this context as a form of learning as well as promoting transparency and responsibility. Those at the 'bottom-end' of accountability relations receive little consideration and are usually only required to account upwards. Previous research describes youth training as something that happens to young people, they are 'passive recipients' and there is no sense of agency, although this is complicated by the relationship to the welfare system. The form of accountability proposed in this research would increase young people's accountability by considering them as 'active participants' in the process of programmes.

A process-based form of accountability emphasises the role of young people, working with programme workers and their peers, to record and document their development and to take responsibility for this. This could take the form of 'developmental portfolios'. This research offers a methodological approach to develop this level of accountability and shows that young people are capable of documenting their progress, with the assistance of photography, and this could be used to demonstrate aspects of process on the programmes. The photography assisted the young people in exploring themselves and identifying their development. Photography would not necessarily have to be the tool and various creative methods could be employed to enable young people to make their developments visible, including video diary work, creative writing and drawing, and to reflectively consider this period of their lives. In this approach young people are given the responsibility to recognise changes in their lives in a step-by-step process and therefore are further increasing their skills and personal and social development. Whilst the audit culture privileges that which is measurable, 'developmental portfolios' could be used in practice to ensure that

developments are documented. This would assist in the documentation of the relational aspects of programmes not currently valued. It is argued that this form of accountability could provide a meaningful form of inclusion for young people. Involving young people in this process develops their ability to identify indicators of success themselves which are relevant and meaningful. This is a reflexive, *ex ante* form of accountability with young people taking ownership and responsibility, linking again to their personal and social development. This 'micro' form of accountability would be an ongoing process which does not rely only on the end product.

Working with individuals in more realistic ways can also improve the aggregates of performance. This could enhance social policy impact and improve policy in post-16 training by providing a clearer understanding of what is happening at the programme level. This approach values practitioner knowledge and young people's experience and promotes reflection. This evidence could be used to re-define policy assumptions and expectations. Importantly, the programmes are not being recognised as process-based interventions when this is what they are delivering. Such a developmental approach could enhance forms of evaluation in programmes as well as accountability of programmes.

The development of a process-based form of accountability focuses upon young people and programme workers working together to recognise the developments of young people. Workers identifying young people's progress and discussing this with them may also be beneficial in terms of their developing relationships and give the young people a sense of achievement. Through the documentation of the progress of young people the programme workers are also provided with information to assist in the development of programmes, their reflective practice and communication of programmes to others. The portfolios can assist in the development of case studies which can be used as evidence to complement the performance information presented of the programme. Developing a process-based form of accountability may also promote reflection for workers and give recognition to the work undertaken. The progress made by young people must be understood within this context where the programmes are facilitative mechanisms within the young people's wider networks. In this approach, it may also be possible to explore the attribution of programmes. Notions of reflection and learning are advocated in evaluation (Everitt, 1996; Smith,

2001, 2006), but because of external pressures for accountability, evaluation is currently not understood in this sense. This form of accountability would change programme workers understanding of the demands and benefits of evaluation which could be developed with young people.

Programmes can only be understood through those who receive the service (Willmott, 1996; Rowe, 1999) and subsequently improvements to services can be made. As part of a developmental process there is also the possibility of giving the young people responsibility in the development of programmes. This may increase their confidence and make them less vulnerable when they are outside of the programmes. In this context, programmes could develop work with peer researchers where young people engage other young people in documenting their progress during their time on the programmes. It would also make them less dependent on the workers who are working within limited resources and reduce the issue of dependency once they move on from programmes. Young people's experiences could inform managers, moving up the hierarchy, which may reduce pressure upon workers and increase young people's involvement, responsibility and influence over decision making (Stacey, 2001).

It has been argued that, within the current climate of accountability, it is essential not to lose the 'meaning' of the work (Ord, 2004). Process shows work undertaken and also the progress made which ultimately define the outcomes achieved. Currently, outcomes do not reflect input or process. If outcomes are to be achieved with more young people they need to be realistically reconsidered and linked to inputs and process. In practice, the outcomes are at the margins of programme delivery and secondary to the daily issues that are addressed. By communicating process, the programmes can give an account of performance that is not just based young people's entry to education, employment or training.

Current forms of accountability place pressure upon workers and often their values in order to achieve targets. Workers are critical of the way in which the outcomes do not communicate the work. The young people and workers do not communicate developments and achievements in technical terms. Workers talked about 'small leaps' that young people often make. The focus upon aggregated outcomes

misrepresents what is going on in programmes. Attention should be given to developing ways of communicating and understanding the developments, which are made by the young people whilst on the programme. The gradual establishment of relationships and development of skills need to be considered within concepts of accountability. Without understanding the process, the outcomes may lose significance and impact.

Current forms of accountability crudely understand success and failure. Within a process-based model, definitions of success could be understood contextually. The current criteria for success is not an adequate representation of the performance of programmes. Programme workers often identified success as the establishment of a sense of routine and daily attendance, or improved health. If young people who do not make a successful transition into education, training or employment are classed as failing, the progress they have made during the time on the programme is lost. Communicating success at this level may go some way to combat criticisms which have been levelled at government initiatives.

A process-based approach would allow for developments to be recognised even if a 'successful outcome' was not achieved. It could be argued that this is a more realistic model, as programmes do not have the resource base for all young people to succeed in the official sense of the programme, at least not in the timeframe, but they are receiving intensive support and are making progress. The policy simplifies and does not understand what is needed for the young people. The reliance on a very limited conception of success, given the aims formally stated for the programmes, disregards a great deal.

This work has aimed to offer a better understanding of training programmes for young people and point to different ways of understanding that can be developed in practice. It argues that the indicators of success make important, and on occasion, life-altering changes invisible. While taking the step to get on a bus or make eye contact with a person may not be measurable or tangible it is necessary to acknowledge that these subtle for many, life-changing for others, steps are vital in moving towards an officially recognised successful outcome.

A process-based approach would involve young people and workers in dialogue to provide information to understand programmes which could be used to assist informed policy agendas and outcomes. Issitt and Spence (2005) stress the important role that practitioners can play in learning and understandings of practice, often unavailable to others. In policy literature, Personal Advisers are identified as the key person to assist young people (Department for Education and Employment, 1999a). However, this work found that the programme workers were the ones who established relationships and supported young people despite not receiving mention in the official programme specification. A process-based approach, involving programme workers, could communicate the complexity that lies behind outcomes and allow for consideration of the programme within the wider context of young people's lives.

Such an approach would need to be understood in the context of wider structural factors, including available employment opportunities, which may inform unrealistic policy expectations. Chapter two outlined the historical developments in youth training which showed the pace and scale of developments in this area (Keep, 2002). Many of the problems identified are similar to those which this research has discussed. This is why accountability needs to be understood as a form of learning rather than just as a form of control to meet targets. Furthermore, the figures for young people aged 16-18 are unreliable indicating that reliance on statistics to judge the performance of provision is problematic. Policies for youth training need investment to create employment opportunities for young people otherwise there is little point in investing money in the training (Allard, 1996; Roberts, 1995). This needs to be recognised as policies will always be seen to fail for the majority of young people. This can not be fully understood with the current forms of accountability which disregard structural impediments.

While it is not suggested that developing such an approach in practice would be unproblematic this work illustrates that it could prove beneficial to all involved. Through a more informed understanding and by giving process more weight in forms of accountability it may be possible to redefine the assumptions and therefore the expectations of policy. Developing such an approach would mean a change in the way programmes are delivered and possibly a fundamental shift in the way policy in this area is implemented. Such an approach could develop the reflective practice of

workers, give young people a way to recognise their development and increase their responsibility and enable practice and policy to inform each other in their understandings of training programmes for disengaged young people.

APPENDICES

Appendix One

Guide for discussion groups with the young people (11/04/02-revised-02/05/02)

How did you find out about Life Skills/the programme? What attracted you to joining?

When did you join?

Describe Life Skills to me...What does it involve?

What were you doing before?

Have you been on anything similar before?

Do you enjoy it? What do you like most?

Do you think you have changed in any ways while on Life Skills? How? Why?

Do you feel it has been beneficial to you to be on it? What new skills have you learnt?

Do you get support/what kind/is it enough?

What do you like least about Life Skills?

Do you think you have any influence over what is in the programme/are your wishes met? Are your views taken into account?

What would you do differently? Is there anything that Life Skills could do better?

What is the most important thing you've learnt on Life Skills?

Do you think you are treated with respect on the programme?

What is the role of your P.A.?

Is the training allowance important to you?

Do you know where to go/who to talk to (other than trainers) if you are unhappy with anything?

What do you hope to do after?

Do you think it is helping you to focus on what you want to do and move on?

What would you be doing if you weren't on Life Skills?

Do you think it is good for young people to have this programme?

How would you describe your role/job? Life Skills programmes?

Strengths and weaknesses

What do you believe is good about Life Skills programmes? What about your programme in particular?

Are there any ways in which you feel that you could build upon these elements to make them even better?

What would you say are the areas that could be improved on? Are there any areas that you are not satisfied with?

Do you think that you receive enough support/from your manager?

What are the major challenges that you have to face in your role?

Are there any major obstacles that you have to face?

How would you describe the impact that the programmes have on the young people that you work with?

Are there any other points that you would like to raise?

How would you describe your role/job? Learning Gateway/Life Skills programmes/Connexions?

What is the relationship between yourself and the young people?

What is the relationship between yourself and the Life Skills staff?

What do you believe works well about the programmes?

Are there areas that you think could be improved on?

Are there any areas that you are not satisfied with? Do you have any recommendations to build upon these elements?

What support are young people provided with in their transition into education, training and employment?

What are the major challenges that you have to face in your role?

Are there any major obstacles that you have to face?

How would you describe the impact that the programmes have on the young people that you work with?

Are there any other points that you would like to raise?

APPENDIX TWO

ANNA

Anna was seventeen years old. She was white English. She lived with her aunt (her mother's sister) and her boyfriend also lived with them. She was in a long-term relationship and engaged to her boyfriend and they were planning their wedding which was to take place the following year. Her father was considerably older than her mother and did not live with her mother. Anna talked about the reason behind her living circumstances:

'My mum was jealous of my dad giving us two attention. And my mum got jealous and pushed me and my sister out so my aunties brought us up. So I've got a bond with her and she's got a bond with her [pointing to a photograph] because my mum didn't want to know us... I lived with my mum until six but my sister lived with them since a new born baby. Because at first my mum didn't want her because she was jealous and then she had me. She had me until three and my sister brought me up and then six my aunty did'.

Anna had a number of issues to deal with in her family life and had been under a lot of pressure at home. Her mother had been ill and Anna had to help to look after her. Her mother was anorexic and was recently been admitted to hospital to try and improve her health. On a number of occasions Anna had to cancel going out with the programme because she had to look after her mother. Although Anna spent time caring for her mother she did not feel her mother appreciated her help or considered how difficult it was for her. Anna identified her mother's problems as stemming from other issues within her family:

'My mum's ill. Look at her there [pointing to a photograph] and she wants the attention all the time. And because my dad gives it her and she's moaning that, because she don't eat she's worrying my dad. And my dad's old. My dad's nearly seventy. And it's killing my dad so I'll loose both. I'll lose my mum and my dad if my mum carries on. And she had a go at him yesterday because he came with me [to a presentation event]. Because my mum don't like my dad bonding with me or my sister and she wants the attention off him...My mum's jealous of us, do you know what I mean? And sometimes we have to be a mother to my mum instead of her being a mother to us'.

It was clear that Anna had significant problems to deal with in her family life. She had to take charge of many aspects to try and help her mother:

‘We have to write like what she eats for like Monday, Tuesday and all that so she has to write them all down...She’s getting worser. She says we’re killing her...Its stuck in her head. Its like a mental illness thing where she thinks we’re killing her and she’s dying and all this...I think why she isn’t eating is because she wants the attention off everybody and because everybody gives it her but she still don’t, yesterday we went out and she didn’t want my dad to come with me so she was jealous of that and she was going on to my aunty and said I want to be in hospital, I want to be in hospital. And there’s nothing wrong with her. She’s had all the tests and everything but something in her head’s telling her that there is so she won’t settle down. She won’t go to bed. She won’t have a bath. She won’t wash her hair. We got her in the bath once and she jumped out...She won’t listen to nobody...It’s like me being a mother to her instead of a mother to us... But like its affecting me more than my sister...Like saying oh you’re killing me and all that lot and its affecting me more because I’m with her 24 hours. I see her every day where my sister don’t and where she’s not eating and she’s being stupid’.

The programme workers arranged for Anna to talk to a counsellor: ‘because of the stress’ to try and help her to cope with the issues. She said: ‘I’ve got to this point where I think forget you, I don’t care. But I can’t really do that because she’s my mum’. The situation also affected Anna’s relationship with her boyfriend:

‘When she don’t eat my dad shouts at her and she shouts at us. It’s just hard if you know what I mean because he shouts at her and then she says you’re killing me. She don’t want to eat because she thinks we’re killing her and she’s just stupid...I’ve just got to this point where I think forget you. You don’t want to eat anymore then that’s your decision but my aunty says if she keeps saying that she’s dying then she’ll end up dying really. She’s been stressing me out really because [Anna’s boyfriend] gets stressed out with me because what she’s putting everyone through. Everyone’s going through it. Its not just mum’.

However, she did discuss her strong relationship with her boyfriend:

‘We’re never apart. Well only when I come here and then he goes out. But when I’m like at home and everything he does go out on his own and things like that so we do spend a bit of time. But if I go on holiday then I can’t go without him. Because I can’t bear it without him. And he can’t bear it without me. And when I was in hospital god I couldn’t sleep at all because even when he’s only over next door I’m like [name] are you coming home because I miss him. I’m used to him being there’.

Her boyfriend was a car valet. In the first discussion Anna talked about problems with her boyfriend’s family who were not supportive of the marriage.

The problems Anna faced with her mother were the main focus in her life at this point and it affected the rest of her life. It was not surprising that this took up a significant part of our discussion. She went on to comment upon how her mother would not take care of herself which caused Anna embarrassment:

‘You can’t take her anywhere because she embarrasses you. All her hair’s getting knotted up and it’s all greasy and horrible. Well you’ve seen it on there. We bought a baby brush for her but she won’t do it’.

Anna did not have a strong relationship with her sister, who is twenty five, and she felt that she often left her to look after issues with the family. However, from Anna’s comments below it seemed that there were further family problems with her sister:

‘We always argue. Well when I was little never could get on with her. And now I’m much older I do get on with her a bit better than we used to but we just clash together when we’re together. Sometimes I can go down town with her and we can have a laugh and everything and it’ll be alright but then the next day its like we’ve fallen out. She’s got a lot of stress on now...She took an overdose the other day because she’s that stressed out. My aunties up there though. One of them’s looking after her house till she comes back...She’s suicidal. She’s always ringing up and things’.

Her sister was moving away to another part of the country with her partner who had an alcohol problem:

‘Because she don’t like the area because my sister’s boyfriend he hangs around with all these lads. Like all the wrong people and it gets him and he starts doing naughty things. Like bad things and she wants him to get away and he leaves her and everything on her own’.

‘She was going to go in homeless. Like to get her house quicker because she like kept going for houses but they kept saying like sorry no because she’s already got one over here. So she thought if she goes by homeless she’ll get a house in two weeks. But my sister’s boyfriend doesn’t want to go so he’s holding my sister back till they get a house’.

Anna found it difficult before joining the programme because she felt her confidence was holding her back. Anna found out about Life Skills through the Careers Service and she ‘thought it would help me with my English and maths and things like that so I joined’ and to improve her confidence and meet new people. She had been at college previously but she did not enjoy it and she felt it ‘didn’t help me’. She talked about being very nervous and scared at the interview and when starting the programme:

‘It’s just your confidence. You’ve got to say ‘right I’m going to do it’. Keep telling yourself you’re going to do it and you’ll do it.’

Anna said that she while she was at college she: ‘wouldn’t even dare to walk in a room with people there’ and was scared to get on the bus: ‘but now I’m not bothered and I can just come in and just walk in’.

She liked being on the programme because it has helped to build up her confidence and ‘you just feel different because you can just go out there and talk to people without feeling stupid’. She preferred the fact that it is a small group and because ‘they don’t take the mickey out of you because they’re all the same average’. These factors made her more confident to participate in the group. She felt it was important to trust people in the group to be able to stand up and talk. Her increased confidence made her feel better about all aspects of her life.

She appreciated the way maths and English were taught, comparing it to just being left to get on with it at school to being able to receive one on one support. Talking about the basic skills tutor she said: ‘she’ll sit there and help you every time you need help so that’s good’ and ‘you can just ask for help without the teacher saying hold on, hold on. You can get more work done in the time.’

Anna’s aim was to get involved in childcare. After being on the programme for a short period the workers assisted her in securing a placement at a nursery. She attended one day a week and progressed really well. At this point she was still attending the programme two days a week and working on her basic skills. Her aim was to get a place on a nursery nursing course at the same place where she was doing her placement. She was really pleased that she has had this opportunity: ‘It’s good because I’ve got low grades as well and no English and maths and I can do what I want’. She already had experience in the nursery and knew some of the people from her placement there. The programme was involved in a virtual babies programme and Anna was going to be involved in that instead of doing some other activities as it was more relevant to her needs.

In the second discussion she had secured a place on a nursery nursing course and was starting her NVQ 2 in nursery nursing in September which she was really happy

about. A programme worker accompanied her to the interview day. She was pleased with the new skills she had learned in health and safety and food and hygiene. She had learned how to work more confidently in a team through the activities at the programme. She took part in all of the activities, even though she sometimes felt nervous before, and she said there was a big sense of achievement after. She was apprehensive about joining the new course but talked about the encouragement she received from the staff who had reassured her. She was still attending the programme for one day a week until she began the course full time. At the end of the second discussion she felt that things were 'looking up now' with starting college.

She appreciated that the programme had been really supportive to her. She has a good relationship with her Personal Advisor who took her to a nursery open day when she did not want to go on her own, stayed with her and brought her back. She described her as 'really supportive' and 'really nice' and she felt she could 'talk to her about anything and it just gets it off your chest and its good'. She identified that she could communicate with her Personal Advisor and the programme staff well:

'It just helps you a lot because they just help you go through it and you're not there by yourself. And you know someone's there to help you. And especially when you've got interviews and you're panicking, they talk you through before it. And it's just good to know that you've got support behind you to do things what you want'.

She did not think she would have been doing anything if she had not joined the programme and she was adamant that she would not have gone back to college because she felt that all colleges were the same. She talked about the obstacles she has overcome:

'It's hard to find a job when you've got low grades and you can't hardly talk and you don't know what to say and you haven't got the communication to do it. So this has helped me a lot to come here'.

Anna discussed how most of her friends from school are also engaged now. She said that in her spare time she would 'normally hang out the gate' and talk to her neighbours. At the point of the second interview she did not want to move into a place with her boyfriend yet:

'I don't want to yet, I want to stay with my aunty at the minute because I'm not on enough money to cope with a house and everything. And my sister, she's only on house benefit and she's always saying I haven't got no food. I haven't got this and that. And its hard so...I want to wait and get some money and everything. Last month I had a scare because I missed my period. And then I think I was ten days late and I started and I was losing clots and like big ones and my aunty thought I'd had a miscarriage with my mum and having stress on and everything but we didn't know what it was...My aunty thinks I did but I said to my aunty I want to wait and have like money and a house and get everything ready. And I don't want it to be like without anything. I don't want to be like where you can't afford nappies, you know like how people do. And she said that was sensible...Because I said to my aunty, because you know how you like see everyone in town with pushchairs and you just think I want one, where's mine, don't you really and then when I started going to the nursery I knew how hard it was then. I knew how hard it was. I came back and I said 'I don't want a baby'. And she said 'what's changed your mind'? And I said 'working in the nursery, it's hard'. And she said 'glad you've learned'...Because I'd seen everyone with one and you know like you do I thought I want one and you think they're cute. I like them when you can just hold them and hand them back, yeah because I've got to change a nappy at the nursery and feed a baby'

Although she talked openly about this experience she did not go to the doctors to make sure she was alright. The experience of working at the nursery has made her not want to have a child yet. She was proud to tell me that she 'got in out of 40 people'. She was busy planning her wedding and had already booked the church and decided on her bridesmaids. Despite all of the problems she was dealing with at home she had a positive attitude and the support of her aunt and other family members. She was paying money instalments per week for the bridesmaid dresses and other items for the wedding.

At the point of the third interview things had changed quite a lot in Anna's everyday life. Anna and her boyfriend had just got their own house near to her boyfriend's family. She was very happy and excited about it and said 'it's like a big step for me. Moving away from my family'. A number of things had changed over the last few months which she felt were positive changes in her life overall. She was previously concerned because she did not have a strong relationship with her boyfriend's family which was causing extra problems for them. However she was spending the majority of her time with them at this stage. She attributed this to her sister moving into her aunty's house and she did not want to spend time there with her so instead she spent most of her time staying at her boyfriend's grandma's house. Her sister has now

moved away. Anna claimed that she gave up her house to try and get another house in a different place.

She was moving into her own house in a few days time. She had been spending a lot of her time there looking after her boyfriend's younger brothers, especially one who has attention deficit syndrome, she said 'I feel for that lad I do'. She was actually moving 'next door but one' to her boyfriend's grandma, in the same street as his mother. She now got on well with his mother: 'I never used to get on with her. I like to get on with her now and put everything in the past. And they've accepted me'. She got support from both families with regard to the house and 'can't wait' to move in. However, there seems to be a lot of extended family problems with both her family and her boyfriend's family. When describing the house she said:

'It's got a bit of joy riders in but everywhere has, hasn't it? But there's lads and they stand outside down the bottom and I'm not bothered about them as long as they don't bother me. But I said anywhere you go, because like [area where she currently lives] we get gangs of lads outside the house'.

She had arranged for her aunt to look after the house while they are both out during the day:

'Because I don't trust the house, I'm not being horrible but its [name of area] isn't it? I've got so much stuff...I don't want them to get nicked'.

She was very excited to move in. They got the house through the council housing list. As her boyfriend only worked fifteen hours a week 'we get some benefit for, they pay for like your housing tax and that and rent'.

'Its [boyfriend's name] house though because I can't get the house because I was only seventeen so that's why they weren't giving it me. But because he's twenty one they've put it in his name and he's got it... We went down before and they says we was at the top. His grandma went down on the Thursday and they offered it us on the Friday. Because she went to us don't you think you better get some better people in than riff raff. She went you've got riff raff in all these new houses. You ought to get decent people in and on the Friday I got the house so I was excited'.

She said they were given priority because her boyfriend's mother was pregnant and having problems with her pregnancy and that she 'can't cope'. Anna was going to help to look after the other children because they were a 'handful'.

At the stage of the third discussion she was in the final month before leaving the programme to move onto her full time college course in nursery nursing. She felt that she was ready to move on to college now and she said: 'it's all happened quickly, I can't wait'. She had got to know a number of people on the new course. She was getting on well with the other students on the course and had become good friends with one girl in particular and she said 'we're at the same level' and she was also moving near to where Anna was moving. She still received her training allowance 'I'll get £40 but its better than nowt. It'll help with the house won't it? Bit by bit, food and that'. She went to college three days a week, two days placement in the nursery and spending one day on college work. She will still be able to work on her maths and English. She received help from others on the new course and the tutors because there was lots of writing. She said:

'It's hard work. Put it that way it is hard. Harder than what I thought but I get help and I get through it. And I've just got to stick it and do it'.

The programme workers were liaising with people at the college. Her aim was to get a job in a nursery. She said that some of the training that she had already done on the programme such as equal opportunities would also be covered on the course.

She believed her major achievements were: 'maths, confidence, getting a house, talking to people.' She said she:

'Feels better. You can just walk down the street and you know you're alright without putting your head down and stuff like that. I've got loads more confidence. I feel more confident talking and stuff like that'.

A lot of things from previously have improved for Anna, particularly that she did not have to spend most of her time worrying about her mother:

'My mum's got better now. My mum's really better now. My mum cleans up. My mum don't go I'm killing me she don't say that. She drinks now and she never used to. She tidies all the house. She goes to the shop. Brushes her hair and goes in the bath and everything. I'm so relieved. Everything's just working out so, so well...She's eating. She's not making herself sick. She's just eating but she's still thin but you'd expect that...The psychiatrist has crossed her off the list and says she don't need it so she's alright now'.

Her mum's health had improved and she commented that: 'I'm so relieved. Everything's just working out so well'. Her improved domestic arrangements and family circumstances made Anna more positive and optimistic which coincided with her course commencing. She was still making plans for her wedding. Her aunty was buying her wedding dress in the coming months as a wedding present.

Anna's future plans were: 'getting married, settling down but not with a baby just with the house. And get the house done. Achieve my NVQ 2 at the nursery and getting a job. And just settling down like that. Doing it bit by bit'. She planned to do the course for the year and then aimed to get a job.

She reflected on how she has had a number of problems and obstacles to negotiate:

'I have with my mum and stuff like that. That was hard. That was really hard but then she told us, she said the only people that got her through it were me and [name], that's my sister. And she told the doctor that it was us two that got her through it. So that was hard. It was hard about my sister because she kept always starting arguments and I was stressed out with her and stuff like that. But I still stuck it out until she went because she used to bully me and say oh look at you and all this lot. I used to give it her back what she gave me and my sister's boyfriend used to stick up for me a lot so that was alright. But now I think now she's away we'll get a bit better. We talk better on the phone we do...As soon as I got home we used to clash...We're alright for like one day and then we'll clash the next day'.

'I have to move on because if I don't take this house, this is my only opportunity because normally you have to have kids for houses don't you? It would be horrible to let it down'.

Since the research took place I did not see Anna much, apart from on a few informal occasions. I was told that her attendance at the course did decrease but she then got back on track. Very recently I was told that her attendance decreased again and it was near the end of the course. She had enquired to the programme workers about how she could claim benefits for herself and for her father, she is trying to get a carer for him. The workers thought that she was not going to pursue finding employment when she finished the course.

APPENDIX THREE

LISA

Lisa was seventeen years old. She was white English. She was an articulate and intelligent person. She lived at home with her mother, brother and older sister.

Talking about her sister she said:

‘She’s my older sister. I don’t really get on well with her but she’s alright... She works at [fast food restaurant] at the moment. She’s more of a younger sister really and I’m more of the elder sister. I look after her more than she looks after me... We argue like cat and dog but if anything ever happened to one of us like when all the stuff happened with me and prison and everything she was there to support me and she was ok. But now everything’s back to normal’.

While Lisa was at school she did two weeks work experience at a nursery. During her work experience the nursery offered her a full time job to begin after she left school: ‘so I went straight from school into a job’. She began working full time as a nursery nurse and attending college one evening a week studying towards an NVQ level 2 in nursery nursing. Lisa said:

‘I’ve always known what I wanted to do. I’ve always wanted to work with children. That’s all I ever wanted to do.’

Lisa’s move directly from school to full time employment may be described as the ‘linear concept of transition’. However, knowledge of her personal circumstances are crucial to understand why she joined the programme and what her ambitions were. She had recently had a number of problems in her life which changed her circumstances. She was involved in a drugs deal with her current partner and they were arrested by the police on their way back from the deal in another city. Her partner was sentenced to six years in prison and Lisa also thought she was also going to be given a custodial sentence. Instead she was given a two year suspended sentence. This was a significant event which changed her life considerably and interrupted her chosen career path. She reflected that:

‘I’ve lost my boyfriend. I had a house. We’d moved in and everything... We had a house together. A dog. I had a job’.

Due to her criminal record and being on probation she was no longer be allowed to work with children and lost her job at the nursery. This was very difficult for Lisa who was passionate about her job. She openly stated the reason she joined the programme was:

‘The reason why I joined was because I got into loads of trouble with the law and I got caught with loads of drugs on me. Got arrested and everything. I lost my job. I used to be a nursery nurse working at [name of nursery] for about six months but because I got caught with all these drugs I obviously can’t work with children. So I lost my job through there...I got two years bound over and nine months referral order. Then I went to my careers adviser because I lost my job and I told them that I really did want to do nursery nursing and I didn’t want to get into any other career. So she suggested this until my referral orders over, which is in January, to support me at the moment and look at other careers and everything. And I’ve decided that I still want to do nursery nursing. I’m still determined in that’.

She talked candidly about the whole experience and the uncertainty of knowing whether she would be going to prison:

‘It was like going to court and like once every couple of weeks going to court. All the way up in [city] though...Because we got caught in [city], we was like, they wanted to hear the court case in [city] so we had to go all the way to [city] every single time I was in court. And it got referred from like the magistrate’s to the crown and then from crown back to youth and then from youth to magistrate’s and then from magistrates to youth. And in the end it ended up in the youth court in [home city] so...But like on my sentencing day no one knew what was going to happen. It was like going to prison or not? So I had to pack up all my stuff, take all my stuff with me to court and everything just in case I was going...I was in the court room and everything and the judge went back out and came in. She stood up and she started talking and you know when you can tell in her voice, she sounded so like, I was like I know I’m going to prison and I just started to cry. And she goes ‘Lisa you’re a very lucky young lady. We’re sentencing you with nine month referral order, two year bound over’. And I was like ‘my god’...Even my probation officer she said her heart skipped a beat. She said she really though she was going to say, you know’.

Lisa’s housing experience was different from all of the other young people in this research. Lisa and her boyfriend had a house together until they were arrested. This was another part of her life which changed dramatically at this ‘critical moment’. When her boyfriend was sentenced to prison she was no longer able to stay in the house and had to move back into her mother’s house. She was grateful to her mother

for allowing her to move back in and for the support she provided. However, this was another significant change for Lisa who had been used to living independently.

She was still in a relationship with her boyfriend and travelled quite a distance twice a month to visit him until he moved to a prison nearer. She joined the programme to increase her confidence and to ensure that she received a high level of support from the agencies she was involved with. She said:

‘I didn’t really come because I didn’t have the skills. I came because I’d of just been sitting at home all day doing nothing. I just came here to get me out and I needed the support emotionally so it’s given me that. It’s built back up my confidence emotionally’.

She felt that her confidence had improved by ‘being together as a group, doing activities together and making us talk’. She appreciated the support that she received from people on the programme, both from the staff and from the other young people, and talks about the group as ‘close knit’:

‘Everyone here knows about it and I’m not really ashamed of it. It happened. I talk about it. I’m never going to do it again’.

She said that after all of the trouble she had encountered as well as having the complete support of her family, ‘my mum’s supported me through loads at this moment’ the people on the programme: ‘helped me through’. She went to the Youth Offending Team once a fortnight to ‘talk about consequences of behaviour and think before I act and everything. And I’ve got to do 16 hours community service.’ She appreciated the support that she received on the programme:

‘When I first started they were there and they helped me through it and like supported me through everything what I was going through’.

Lisa thought she was different to a lot of the young people on the programme and commented that ‘I know I don’t need the support that a lot of them do’. It was noted that she was often late and complacent and her attendance at times was low, this would often occur sporadically. At her own admittance she was a heavy cannabis user. Sometimes she would not turn for weeks and she did not turn up for a residential to France, only letting staff know an hour before. However, she did

recognise that it was important for her to attend to maintain a sense of routine in her life and to ensure that she would be able to get back into employment at a later date:

‘Otherwise I’d just be in bed all day sleeping or smoking weed all day or something like that. All day long doing sod all but now I’m here and they got me the interview and I’m just waiting till January till it’s totally cleared off my sentence. But now I’m doing something about it’.

One of the main reasons Lisa was attending the programme was to receive assistance in her attempt to reengage in employment. She had to adapt her routine from working full time to the current routine of the programme. She was satisfied that she received this from both her PA who sent her job vacancies through the post and the programme workers who helped her to apply for vacancies and prepare for interviews. However, she thought that her PA was ‘a bit naïve in the whole thing’. Lisa stated ‘as soon as I leave here I want to go straight into a full time job, that’s what I want to do.’

She felt that the programme had a positive effect on her life and when discussing moving on she noted:

‘You get attached to it. You become reliant on it. It’s going to be weird leaving and not coming’.

Lisa spent every weekend going clubbing in different cities throughout England with her friends and talked about her ‘clubbing buddies’: ‘clubbing’s like a big thing in my life at the moment’, and most of her friends were people who she met while out clubbing.

The aforementioned events completely changed every aspect of her life. At the first discussion she did not feel able to plan what she wanted to do with her future because of her sentence.

As well as attending the programme she also worked part-time on an evening in telesales selling holidays. She was hoping she would be able to work with children after six months: ‘when it’s cleared off my sentence’. The programme arranged an interview for her at a training scheme where they can assist in finding jobs in nurseries. It would all depend on whether her record was clear. At the second point of speaking to Lisa, which was more informal, she had been accepted on a course

which involved working in a nursery. She seemed happy to be moving on to something relevant to her and felt that the programme has changed, stating: 'its not the same buzz here any more that it used to be'. She left the programme soon after. Lisa attended the programme for approximately eight months.

APPENDIX FOUR

JACK

I met Jack on my first visit to the project. At the time it was pointed out to me that he was a quiet member of the group who had experienced problems of bullying while at school. I was informed that his confidence was low and needed building up. He was also attending the project to improve his basic literacy ability. A month later I attended an over-night residential with the project and the programme workers monitored Jack closely as they were concerned that he was being overly dominated by other members of the group and the workers continually told him to stand up for himself. Over the following months it became obvious that as he grew more familiar and integrated into the group his confidence level increased. By the time of the next residential he was one of the main members of the group. His confidence had noticeably increased and he along with his close friend had become 'leaders' of the group. This change also meant that the staff were now closely watching him to ensure that he was not being too dominant over newer members of the group (a role-reversal of the situation he had been in on the previous residential).

At the beginning of the research Jack was 17 years old. He lived at home with his mother and father and two sisters. He was the eldest child in the family. He had a stable family life and a close relationship with his younger sisters saying 'I've always looked after them'. Jack was dyslexic and had problems at school as he never properly learned to read and write and still struggled with it now. He had been diagnosed as dyslexic which was not the case while he was at school and he had now found and adapted the best way he can learn which has been beneficial. At school he was often excluded from the main classroom and sent to 'The Place' which is an area of the school that young people are sent to if they are disrupting the class or unable to participate at the same level as the other pupils. Jack did not like being sent there as he felt he did not learn anything and was not given any extra help or support and so he often argued with the teacher to allow him to stay in the classroom. He eventually refused to leave the classroom as he felt he could at least learn a little there.

He left school with few qualifications and did not know what he wanted to do as a career or job. He did not do anything for the first few months after leaving school and

was just 'hanging around' as he did not feel ready to enter employment. His parents persuaded him to join the Life Skills programme and he agreed:

Yeah they were pushing me to get a job but I didn't want to do a job. I didn't feel ready for work and a letter came through from [careers service] about this course. And I just looked at it, put it down on the table and didn't think much of it. Went out, came back and my mum said I've filled that in for you. I goes 'what'? She goes 'I've filled it in and you go and send it off'. I was pretty angry about it because I thought they were trying to put me on a dumb kids course or something. So I thought I might as well just take a look, sent it off. A couple of weeks later I had to go down [careers service], had an interview with my PA. Like this was the first time when I'd met my PA. Spoke to [name of programme worker] on the phone, came down on the Monday...Had a look round. Spoke to [name of programme worker] for a bit, then [name of programme coordinator] came and I spoke to her and I started on the Tuesday

The above extract shows how the perception of 'a dumb kids course' can create barriers in entering such a programme. Jack had a close relationship with the workers at the programme, especially the male worker who he mentioned frequently and described him as 'he's like a mate basically'. He had made a lot of friends at the project and his best friend was someone who he met on the programme. Since joining the programme Jack had improved on his basic skills and his confidence had increased. He felt that going to college once a week helped improve his maths and English. He talked about how he was quieter at school and 'wouldn't stand up for myself properly'.

Jack took attending the programme very seriously and called one of the members of staff his 'boss'. He was being responsible and treating it as his first job. He reflected on what he would have been doing if he had not joined the project. However, he went on to say that his parents would probably not let him still be doing nothing:

If I didn't come on this I'd probably be working in some place where I'd be unhappy by now or there'd probably be a chance where I'd still be doing jack

At the stage of the second discussion he was the longest standing member of the programme. The fact that new people were joining the project made Jack a little uneasy and he realised that he needed to begin to make plans for moving on:

I'd say in a way I'm ready but in another I'm not [to move on]... There's still that part of me that don't want to go just yet. But I know I'm going to have to

go soon...I mean this is my second extension. I've still got quite some time left but if I get this job I'm going to have to take that and go.

Jack had a territorial sense of identity and explained the differences and rivalries between the local areas. This again reinforced stereotypes of people as 'Others' and reinforced geographical boundaries. Everything in his life revolved around the immediate context until he joined the project and met people from other areas and experienced residential to different places. However, this did not totally conquer his prejudices. He would not go into town alone, only with his friends. The experience of residential were very important to Jack and he often referred to them in discussions.

Jack had a strong personality (now) and did not feel like he has to conform or give into peer pressure. He had quite conservative and sensible views: 'if I go to have a drink I do it to have a drink. I'm not trying to impress no one that I can have a drink or I can have a fag and that's what some people do'.

Jack reiterated negative experiences of school throughout and appeared to be very disheartened by his experience of education. He reflected that he did not have any ambitions or aspirations to do anything at school: 'All I cared about was leaving and having a long rest' and 'I didn't used to want to think about it basically'. He talked about being good at art at school:

C. D. Do you like art?

Yeah I was one of the best in my class but yet I didn't get the high marks. I really fucked up on that

C. D. Why?

Well he said you had to do like loads of pictures and stuff...

C. D. Like coursework isn't it?

Yeah, I did loads. He wanted all of my stuff from year 10 and all my stuff from year 11. I had loads. I did more, took them in. He thought I'd get good marks. Got them back. I think I got a C and he was really disappointed, my teacher was. He said he really would of thought I'd get good marks.

C. D. A C's still quite good...

Yeah but I mean I was expecting better and they'd turned around and written there's no written work about it or whatever. So I goes, I basically just went, I said oh I'm going then I'll see you around. And basically I'd done all that and all I get is a C and I was really disappointed.

The above extract is powerful in illustrating Jack's experience of education. He felt like although he had worked really hard the mark he received did not justify and reflect this. His inability to complete the written part of the assessment let him down but he felt he was never given the support to improve his literacy, typifying his experience of school. 'I found it difficult and school didn't really give me no help'.

His parents were trying to sue the school:

I was meant to have a dyslexia course and they told me this at the end of my year 11 when I was just about to leave. And they says 'well we're going to put you on one for the last couple of weeks'. I said 'yeah alright'. Then about two weeks later they said 'we can't be bothered, we're not doing it now'. And when I went on the dyslexia course here and found out I was dyslexic, well I already knew I was and that's when it basically kicked off. Because the school knew I was dyslexic but they didn't do nothing about it so and they tried to do the same thing to her [points to a photo of his sister]. And they're going to try and do the same thing to my other sister. But my youngest sister probably the smartest out of me and my other sister. I mean she can read, write perfectly but they still try and put her in all these special needs places. And she don't need it because they think she's related to me and [name of sister] they think that she'll probably be thick.

C. D. It's not thick though is it?

No but that's the way they look at it...I mean all it was you go down to this little place in school. All they do is put all these daft kids and trouble makers down there and they take them out on trips.

Jack was aware of the negative stereotypes surrounding this problem and felt let down that it was never addressed at school. The reason he enjoyed school was because he was with his friends. He would get bored very easily and if he found a task boring he will simply give up and refuse to continue. He was teased at school:

Mainly because I probably can't read and write. But I mean it didn't used to really bother me. They never used to come up and try and fight me. If it came down to that I'd usually be the one to retaliate and they'd be the ones to run off so...I just left it at that really

Jack also said:

I hate everything about my school. It weren't that I was picked on. well I probably was picked on a little bit but I don't really like no one from my school because they're all cocky. And they all think they're great. I can't stand people like that no more.

Since joining the programme he had improved on his basic skills and his confidence had increased. He felt that going to college with the programme for one morning a week helped improve his maths and English. When reflecting back at school he felt he had changed a lot especially since participating in the project, which he saw as part of growing up:

When I was in school I would say I wasn't shy, but I was a bit more quieter...and I wouldn't stand up for myself properly. I would stand up for myself but I wouldn't stand up for myself like I would now. I mean I wish I could just go back and have the confidence that I have now. I'd give more people a piece of my mind now.

In the first discussion Jack was preparing to start a part-time cleaning job at the youth club. At this point he was not overly enthusiastic about it but had no other ideas of what he would like to do. He did not have a positive relationship with his personal adviser as he feels she tries to push him into employment:

Well basically I'm just doing it to get her off my back, she's coming out with these crappy jobs. I don't want to do them they sound like proper dead end jobs

C. D. Like what?

Working in a warehouse, I mean that's alright, I might be doing some of that in the summer anyway with my mate's brother so I might do some of that but I might be working here so I might not be able to do it...I don't know, jobs that don't really interest me that she comes out with and I don't want to do them

C. D. So what would interest you then or do you still not really know?

Dunno, I mean I said if I don't find owt this year I might see if I can, I'll probably do some more on this and then next year I'm going to sign up for college, I'm not going to college this year, I can't be bothered, the money's too good here for now

C. D. Do you think you're ready for college though?

Yeah, I can do it and I mean I've been here. I bet I probably won't get treated as good in college as I do here. I probably won't get paid at college

He knew that he would not get a training allowance, as on the project, to subsidise him if he went to college because his dad: 'gets like quite a bit of money'. He appeared to have a stable and solid family environment.

By the time of the second discussion Jack was working part-time as a cleaner, this was the one significant thing that has changed in his life. He enjoyed working and then attending the project for three days. There was a possible opportunity for him to secure a full-time job at a school working towards being a caretaker like his best friend has done, where he would also be given the opportunity to work towards NVQ's in Caretaking. He was unsure about this because he wanted: 'something more local'. He did not have transport and believed that he would not be able to get to work for early morning shifts. He joked that he would like to go back to his old comprehensive school 'so I can just rub it in their faces'. At this second stage his future plans were:

Um probably now, aiming at to get a job as a caretaker or something like that now, probably I want to try and get somewhere local so I don't have to go out and go rushing round trying to find a way up there so I don't have to keep getting lifts off my dad every bleeding morning

Jack had a little work experience while at school where he worked as a chef for once a week over two years but again: 'I got bored' and he felt 'it was cheap labour'. He appreciated and enjoyed the money from his part-time job. He had more responsibility through working part-time and the programme workers gave him extra responsibility within his peer group to try and foster his responsibility and confidence. His parents were pleased and proud that he had got a job.

Jack, like all of the other young people in the study, was aware that young people are often represented in a negative way. He saw the status of having a job changes people's perceptions of you. In his experience young people were seen as 'criminals':

Yeah I mean that's what I get judged on wherever I go. I'll be walking down and I'll intimidate, say if there's an old woman walking past she'll get really intimidated and she'll like, I mean I remember this one time I was coming down here and I was walking past two old ladies, she grabbed her handbag just like that right in front of me. I goes 'I'm not going to nick it I'm just walking by, I'm going to work', soon as I said I'm going to work it was 'oh, oh I'm sorry'. I mean my wallet's gone missing and my mum goes, I only had

about fifty quid in it but I said there was about a hundred and she said its my son and the coppers were really questioning her trying to see if she was lying and they goes 'oh well it'll be better if we can actually speak to your son', so if I say something wrong but she goes 'he's at work' and as soon as she said he's at work they goes 'oh right we'll put you through to this then'...

C. D. That's really interesting isn't it...do you think it happens to all young people then?

Yeah, mainly people who wear hats, its true, if you wear a hat you're an automatic thug'

Jack did not feel totally independent. He was still negotiating his status as a young person:

I'd say its difficult being a young person because its hard for young people to get a job now because all they want now is people with experience now and if you want a job now, even for the little shitty ones you've got to go through college and everything now...

At the time of the third discussion Jack was eighteen years old. He had spent a number of weeks working a morning shift at a school where he worked two hours and then came to the project after. This was covering shifts rather than a permanent job. He said that he eventually would like to go to college. He was considering enrolling at college whereas he had previously disregarded the idea. He had visited the college his sister and his friend attends and 'it seemed alright'. He had a girlfriend whom he met while on the programme. He was possibly planning to do a morning job and then go to college later in the day. He saw the job as a means of getting money to help him with travel and expenses while he is at college. The college he planned to attend was in a different part of the city. He wanted to take an NVQ art course as well as continue to improve his English. He did change his mind a number of times about what he wanted to do. However, he decided against enrolling at college in favour of gaining full time employment. At this stage his future plans were to:

'I'll probably try and do cleaning or something full time or something and see how that goes. I mean I've enjoyed it so far. I mean I thought I'd find it a bit boring but it's alright actually.'

He was committed to the work he was doing and commented that he had not had a break when the other young people on the programme did because he had to still come to do his job. He was still unsure about his next steps but now he had more

ideas of areas he might like to try whereas in the initial stages he said he did not want to go to work or to college and had no idea of what he wanted to do in the future. His family and his girlfriend are the most important things to him. He felt that he is a lot more confident that when he was at school through meeting new people on the programme.

I spoke to Jack again four months later and he was getting ready to move on from the programme. This time he decided that he would like to take some photographs because he said a lot more things were happening. When it came to the discussion he did not seem to be very happy and was not paying complete attention. He had not been eating properly. At this point he still planned to go to college and work part time. He is no longer going out with his girlfriend because she had had many problems recently. He was spending most of his free time going out with his mates from the programme. The company who his father works for sponsors the local ice hockey team and he has started to go and watch the matches. He said that he is disappointed with himself for starting smoking again.

Soon after, Jack left the programme as he got a full time job working as a cleaner in a shopping centre which he enjoyed. As the position was full time he was not able to also pursue going college at this stage. He had been attending the programme for one year and two months.

APPENDIX FIVE

KATE

At the beginning of the research Kate was seventeen years old. She was white English. I knew that it was going to be a difficult and challenging process to discuss the photographs with Kate. She was not very articulate although she was always very friendly. I had been made aware by the workers that she had a number of serious personal problems and they often had to deal with them while I was at the programme.

It was hoped involving her in the research would be an opportunity for her to be part of something different which might have a positive effect on her. I had spent a lot of time working with Kate in basic skills sessions and other activities and she always responded well to me. The workers at the programme were in the process of finding an arts therapist to try and do some work with her to engage her as she enjoyed drawing a lot and they thought it might be a means for her to express herself. The answers that she gave in discussions were often one-worded and it could be difficult to construct a sentence out of what she said. This often meant that whereas in other discussions a dialogue developed quickly in this case it was impossible to create a conversational discourse.

Many of Kate's photos were taken of her family, in particular one of her younger brothers whom she spent a lot of time looking after. Her mind wandered greatly between responses, something I was aware of from assisting her in sessions. She had six brothers and sisters and she is the eldest. She could not explain/articulate to me why she had taken the photos simply saying 'I just like them' and that they were her 'favourite things'. She also took photos of her bedroom and posters of pop stars on her wall. She often did not answer any of the direct questions and instead would bring up something else to talk about. When asking about buying the records of the pop star she answered by telling me she was 'getting a big stereo on Saturday' with her aunty. She then moved from the questions on this point to having a cigarette, which took her attention away again. Of her younger brother she said: 'he's the best one there' and 'he's the most better in all of the family. Out of my family. He's the better one'. She always talked about how affectionate he is towards her and how she

looks after him a lot. Some of the photos taken had not been taken by Kate but by her parents who had taken photos of a play at her sister's school. Others were also not taken by her. Therefore it was generally impossible to discuss these photos. She had taken a number of photos of people and activities at the project. She said that in her spare time she would 'sit down and watch TV' and her hobby was football.

Kate was firstly involved in a focus group discussion with one of the other young people. She said she wanted to have a job if she wasn't on the programme but went on to say:

'But you need exam results and at school we never did the exams...Because I was in 'The Place' because all my speech and stuff and writing was bad so I was in there'.

Kate seemed to respond slightly better in this setting, possibly because there was only one other young person and they were friends on the programme. At the first session, which took place in June, Kate said that she was going to college in September, but by April the following year she was still on the programme. She was eighteen years old at this stage. The workers told me that she was not at the stage to consider what the options for her future could be and there still needed to be a lot of work and support for her. This was very observable. However, positive work was being done to help her with improving her basic skills. She identified herself that one of the main areas that she wanted to improve on whilst being on the programme was her maths and English:

'I get help with my spelling and stuff and handwriting. I'm a bit good on my handwriting.'

Kate had done work experience at a supermarket stacking shelves and when she finished on the project she wanted to work at a supermarket with her cousin. She identified the programme workers as being important to her on a number of occasions and said 'they're just good friends'. She said 'I don't talk much'. After a disruption in the discussion she was preoccupied by what she would be doing in the next session, as she did not enjoy it. She did not respond to a number of the questions asked and I had to draw her attention back to the interview on a number of occasions. She had a very short attention span and sometimes it was not clear whether she was listening. Almost every question had to be repeated.

Kate said that she enjoyed school and she stayed until the official leaving date in year 11:

‘I used to love school. I used to be in ‘The Place’ because I never used to write properly and can’t understand...’

She was in ‘The Place’ for all her lessons to support her with her reading and writing and Maths. She mentioned that there was one teacher at school who used to help her and who she liked. She said that she thought it had ‘been hard’ being a young person but she could not explain how or why, saying, ‘I just think it’s hard’. She mentioned her dad on a number of occasions as being very important to her, ‘he’s nice, I always get on with him’. Talking about another photo she said:

‘She’s my mum and she’s nice. Because I always care about my mum and dad.’

The workers kept me informed of Kate’s situation. Her domestic arrangements had recently changed and she moved in with her grandmother. It was noted that this had been a positive change as her health and hygiene had improved. The workers tried to address these issues by bringing in clothes for Kate and making sure that she washed, cleaned her teeth and brushed her hair when she arrived at the programme each day. After a short time living with her grandmother she moved back in with her family and it was noted by workers that she seemed a lot happier with this arrangement. It was observable that her behaviour was often sporadic and changeable and she often behaved randomly with the group and the workers. I considered asking her to write about the pictures to see if this would be it easier and more productive but decided not to.

Again in the second interview I had to repeat most of the questions because she wasn’t fully listening. She mentioned one of her brother’s, who is a year younger than her, who works as a double-glazing salesman. There were more photos of her little brother. Her dad worked as a cleaner in a department store and her mum looked after the children. She said that even when she was at school she wanted to have: ‘a job packing. Putting things on shelves. Stacking shelves’. She did not think that anything had changed since the last discussion three and a half months ago.

Kate described herself as:

‘Friendly. Good friend with other people. Get on with [programme worker]. Sometimes I’m quiet and don’t do nothing much.’

She made a good friend with another young woman on the programme. On every occasion she did not give many answers and often answered direct questions with ‘don’t know’, or she would not be listening or simply not respond.

Two years later Kate was still on the programme. She was now nineteen years old. According to the workers her behaviour had been ‘very random’. She ‘disappeared’ for over a month but then returned to the programme. On my last discussion with the workers to get an update on her situation I found out that Kate had now moved into a hostel. She was now seeing an arts therapist who worked with her on a regular basis. The workers were extremely worried about her and her mental health. I was told of an incident where Kate had walked home late one night across a park and was attacked by a man who tried to mishandle her. Fortunately she managed to get away. When the workers tried to address this with her, presuming she would be very distressed, Kate responded in a joking way.

I have learned a great deal from this part of the research process. I think it was worthwhile including Kate in the research. Firstly, she did want to be involved and she has been on the programme so long seeing that many of the other young people had taken part in the research. Secondly, the workers had thought that it may be beneficial to Kate. Thirdly, it has introduced me to some issues that can be discussed in relation to engaging people in research.

APPENDIX SIX

Entry to Employment (E2E)

E2E was nationally introduced in August 2003, replacing Life Skills, preparatory training and other level 1 training, combining them into a single coherent programme. The aim of E2E is to assist young people who are not ready or able to enter modern apprenticeships or employment directly. Young people are to be helped in their preparation to enter employment with training, other employment, modern apprenticeships, further education and training.

Young people are eligible for E2E if they are 16-18 years and are not engaged in any form of post-16 learning if it deemed appropriate in their progression to further learning and/or a job. Older young people may also be eligible provided their programme of learning can be completed by their 25th birthday.

E2E is to be based on the needs of the individual and there are no time limits. This enables individuals to access E2E for either short periods of time but also caters for young people with complex personal and social needs who may need longer in preparation to enter training or employment. Young people will still receive a training allowance, if they attend training for 16 hours or more they receive £40.

Young people are to be made aware of E2E programmes by Connexions staff as part of their careers guidance in years 10 and 11 and as they decide on post-16 options. It is foreseen that Connexions staff will play a major role in the referral of young people to E2E. Young people may also be referred informally from other agencies such as the youth offending team and social services. Young people may also self-refer and providers can recruit young people through outreach.

The client group are:

- Priority One group
- Young people who attained mostly F's and G's at GCSE and need foundation and level 1 provision
- Young people who are unable to make a vocational or educational choice

The learning objectives of E2E are to develop young people's motivation and confidence, basic and/or key skills, build upon vocational knowledge and skills through the sampling of a variety of work and learning contexts. The learning and support needs of the young people will be identified through an initial assessment. This will last between 2 and 8 weeks, the intensity depending upon the needs of the individual. An Individual Learning Plan will be drawn up detailing arrangements of how these needs are to be met. The aim is to have one overall plan for an individual which all partners can contribute to.

It is proposed that the learning programmes will be structured into the following 3 core areas:

- Basic and key skills
- Vocational development
- Personal and social development

Young people with complex social and emotional needs will be assisted in addressing these before any attempt to engage them in vocational learning will be made.

Emphasis will be placed upon preferred learning styles and interests in a variety of settings. It is aimed that ideally all young people will work towards some qualification and there will be flexibility in the variety of qualifications on offer.

Local support agencies, like in the Learning Gateway, will provide a role in ensuring a holistic provision of service is given to the young people. They may be both simultaneously or in a referral capacity.

E2E proposes to offer the young people greater flexibility, increase their level of support facilitating a smoother transition for the young people. This will be achieved through improved working relationships between providers and Connexions.

E2E will also offer 'aftercare' services to the young people once they have completed the programme which is aimed at ensuring sustained progression and retention. This

will be provided for the first 3 months after the transition aiming ‘to make less of an event and more of a process’.

Bonus payments are rewarded to learners:

- Start bonus of £50
- One literacy achievement bonus of £50 (if required as part of the learning plan)
- One numeracy achievement bonus of £50 (if required as part of the learning plan)
- One level 1 achievement bonus of £100 (if required as part of the learning plan)
- Exit bonus of £50 if learner moves on to:
 - Work based learning
 - Further education
 - 6th form
 - Work with learning

E2E providers must be able to meet the needs of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LLDD).

On entering E2E all young people will have a common baseline assessment. It is aimed that each young person will have a single continuous and integrated assessment process involving them in their Individual Development Assessment’s (with goals and milestones) and identifying the learning programme and levels of support they require. Connexions will implement the threshold assessment for all young people within 6 weeks of starting E2E. The literacy and numeracy baseline information is to be used to set basic skills, literacy and numeracy targets in the ILP. Learners will also be screened for dyslexia and any additional learning needs.

During the initial stages of E2E a learners progress will be reviewed at a minimum of every four weeks. Any changes to the plan will be agreed with the provider, learner

and PA. It is the PA's responsibility to arrange regular reviews with the learner and provider. Providers need to illustrate and document continued progress of the learner.

E2E providers will offer a variety of work tasters for the young people to assist them in making an informed decision about their career path. It is aimed that work placements will last longer than a week.

One of the advantages noted in E2E as opposed to Life Skills is that young people can achieve a full NVQ level 1 on the programme and progress to achieve some level 2 NVQ units. As the young people will have spent a greater amount of time with the provider this will also have given time to develop wider skills.

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