

YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE LABOUR MARKET

PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

Andy Furlong, John Goodwin,
Henrietta O'Connor, Sarah Hadfield, Stuart Hall,
Kevin Lowden and Réka Plugor

YOUTH, YOUNG
ADULTHOOD AND
SOCIETY SERIES

This pathbreaking book provides a way out of the conceptual and policy cul-de-sac on precarious work for young people, that has dominated research and policy formation. Driven by the question ‘how did precarious work come to be the “new normal” for young people?’, the authors trace changing working conditions in the UK, Denmark and Germany from the mid-1970s. This ‘long view’ exposes the suffering inflicted on young people by successive government policies and sets a new research and policy framework within which young people’s lives can be built.

Johanna Wyn, *Director of the Youth Research Centre, Australia*

Some of these authors have been holding the flame for youth studies for the last thirty years. Here, in a new must-read book analysing changes over that time, they show how vulnerable youth should no longer be regarded as a generation ‘lost’ to the labour market. Instead, they are now a ‘liminal’ generation in the labour market, caught betwixt and between by precarious employment.

Chris Warhurst, *Professor and Director of the Warwick Institute for Employment Research, Warwick University, UK*

An ambitious contribution that will shape how we understand the worlds of work of young people. From YOPs and YTSs in the 1980s to zero-hours contracts in the contemporary post-‘great recession’ UK marked by youth unemployment, underemployment and economic instability, Furlong et al. unpack the alternatives to long-term full-time employment that have been available to young people. Their empirically-grounded analysis of change, and continuities, in the labour market offers a critical engagement with the influential notion of ‘precariat’. They develop instead a new model, with three ‘zones of (in)security’, to provide a more nuanced theoretical approach to the diverse working lives of young people.

Tracey Warren, *Professor of Sociology, School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Nottingham, UK*

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Young People in the Labour Market

Levels of suffering among young people have always been much higher than governments suggest. Indeed, policies aimed at young workers have often been framed in ways that help secure conformity to a new employment landscape in which traditional securities have been progressively removed. Increasingly punitive welfare regimes have resulted in new hardships, especially among young women and those living in depressed labour markets.

Framed by the ideas of Norbert Elias, *Young People in the Labour Market* challenges the idea that changing economic landscapes have given birth to a 'Precariat' and argues that labour insecurity is more deep-rooted and complex than others have suggested. Focusing on young people and the ways in which their working lives have changed between the 1980s recession and the Great Recession of 2008/2009 and its immediate aftermath, the book begins by drawing attention to trends already emerging in the preceding two decades.

Drawing on data originally collected during the 1980s recession and comparing it to contemporary data drawn from the UK Household Longitudinal Study, the book explores the ways in which young people have adjusted to the changes, arguing that life satisfaction and optimism are linked to labour market conditions.

A timely volume, this book will be of interest to undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as postdoctoral researchers who are interested in fields such as Sociology, Social Policy, Management and Youth Studies.

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Preface

Working with Andy Furlong on Young People in the Labour Market: Past, Present and Future

... we have seen that some of the problems faced by young people in modern Britain stem from an attempt to negotiate difficulties on an individual level. Blind to the existence of powerful chains of interdependency, young people frequently attempt to resolve collective problems through individual action and hold themselves responsible for their inevitable failure.

(Furlong and Cartmel 1997: 114)

Andy Furlong was at the forefront of youth studies in the UK and beyond from the late 1980s. He was an intellectual leader for the discipline and someone whose drive and commitment to understanding the problems of youth brought many academic colleagues along with him. At the heart of his research was a grave concern for, as the above quotation suggests, the problems experienced by young people themselves as they made the increasingly complex transitions from education (in all its forms) to employment. It was these problems, and the question of how the powerful chains of interdependency had continued or changed over time, that we envisaged as being central to the arguments developed in this book.

The origins of *Young People in the Labour Market: Past, Present, Future* are based on ideas first aired in 2001, and again in 2006, when we had discussed with Andy the possibility of revisiting legacy data from research projects and themes he had been associated with while he was at the University of Leicester in the 1980s. These ideas were finally crystallised in 2011 when we applied to the Economic and Social Research Council for funding. The aim was to examine what we could (re)learn from 'legacy' datasets in relation to 'past' youth transitions. Also, when combined with contemporary data, what this data could tell us about longer-term change and transformations in youth employment between the 1980s recession and the Great Recession of 2008/2009 and its immediate aftermath. More specifically, by linking past and present data through our research *Making the 'Precariat': Unemployment, Insecurity and Work-Poor Young Adults in Harsh Economic Conditions* we sought to examine how the lives of young people changed between these two important periods of economic instability in

the UK. This research lasted for 3 years and, despite the complexities of the data (see main text), together with Andy we felt that there was a clear story to tell, so we began to work on the book. After a slow start writing progressed well, and we were hopeful that the book not only had something important to say but would make a distinctive contribution to the field. By October 2016 we had a full draft and, shortly before the school half-term holiday, we travelled to Glasgow to finalise the draft chapters of this book with Andy. We spent a productive and enjoyable day working through each chapter line by line – with Andy perfecting each sentence (typically), hammering the keyboard as he went. We broke for lunch and spoke of half-term holiday plans with our respective families – Andy characteristically describing how he had work to complete before leaving for Italy the next day. We returned to Leicester, energised and happy that the book was fully drafted and excited about the plans for our latest project focused on the long-term impacts of youth participation in youth training schemes. Of course, we were unaware that this was to be the last of our meetings in person.

Work continued on the book up to Christmas with regular email exchanges, Dropbox updates and conversations about the plans for a book launch event for 2017. Shortly after the full draft was submitted to the publisher, and we had corresponded on the final corrections and proofs, we received the devastating news of Andy's unexpected death. On hearing this news, we initially lost all motivation and interest in continuing with this project or finishing the book. It somehow seemed wrong to do so without Andy leading the way. It was Andy's drive and commitment to the book, and to the research project which preceded it, that kept us moving forward. Despite being over-committed elsewhere, Andy kept us in check and (largely) on track with the writing. In return, it was our commitment to him as a friend (first and foremost) and colleague that maintained our enthusiasm, determination and motivation. So how could we carry on this work without Andy? It would be hard and emotional with a clear feeling that the book was coming to represent something else to us, other than a piece of research. However, in the few months since his death we have had much time to reflect on the work, Andy's other work and his legacy. What emerged was the sense that he would now be telling us to stop being sentimental and to get the book finished – 'Get on with it,' he would email, 'it needs to be finished!' Knowing that this was clearly an important book for Andy and ourselves – as well as the subsequent realisation that this volume has far more significance than any of the team could ever have imagined, since this may well be Andy's final publication – we knew we had a responsibility to Andy to move forward and to complete the work as soon as we could. For us, the book is also important as its core themes encompass Andy's wider body of work in single volume, encapsulated perfectly in the title: *Young People in the Labour Market: Past, Present and Future*.

Past

We had known Andy personally and professionally since the early 1990s via his associations with our former department, The Centre for Labour Market Studies. Andy had long and deep connections with the University of Leicester. He studied Sociology there, obtained his PhD from Leicester under the supervision of Professor David Ashton, and was also awarded a DLitt by Leicester in 2012. His style of working, as well as his core academic concerns, were evident during this early phase of his work, with his PhD thesis coming to exemplify Andy's subsequent career. As his PhD supervisor notes:

It was typical of Andy that he succeeded in finishing his PhD well within the three years while also holding down part-time jobs to support his family. His studentship was linked to a Department of Employment financed research project on Young Adults in the Labour Market which examined the labour market experience of the YTS generation. That PhD provided the spring-board from which Andy moved forward to create a reputation as one of the leading, if not the leading authority on the transition from school to work, the youth labour market and youth studies, both nationally and internationally.

(David Ashton, 2017)

Andy's PhD was soon followed by a stream of articles and books that firmly established his reputation and set the agenda for over two decades of youth labour market research. It is hard to cover all the key works here, but Andy's notable and influential contributions that have had a clear impact on the field include: *Growing Up in a Classless Society? School to Work Transitions* (1992); *Schooling for Jobs: Changes in the Career Preparation of British School Children* (1993); *Hungary, The Politics of Transition* (1995), co-edited with Terry Cox; *Youth, Citizenship and Social Change in a European Context* (1997), edited with John Bynner and Lynn Chisholm; *Young People and Social Change: Individualisation and Risk in the Age of High Modernity* (1997 and 2007), with Fred Cartmel; *Youth Unemployment in Rural Areas* (2000), with Fred Cartmel; *17 in 2003: Findings from the Scottish School Leavers Survey* (2004), with Biggart *et al.*; *Vulnerable Young Men in Fragile Labour Markets: Employment, Unemployment and the Search for Long-Term Security* (2004) and *Higher Education and Social Justice* (2009), with Fred Cartmel; *Are Cultures of Worklessness Passed Down the Generations?* (2012) with Shildrick and Macdonald *et al.*, as well as many others. The sheer impact of this research is clear and, indeed, one only has to check the bibliography of most papers on youth employment to find at least one, usually more, of these works cited. Of these *Young People and Social Change* (1997) is worthy of special mention here as, for many, it is Andy's seminal text in youth

studies. Co-authored by Andy and Fred Cartmel when both were at the University of Glasgow, this is Andy's most highly cited piece of work and it was this volume, above all others, that secured Andy's place as a leading youth studies scholar and which continues to be highly influential in the field. The sub-title of the book is 'individualisation and risk in late modernity', and this encapsulates its importance to our understanding of youth transitions. Here, Andy and Fred focused their attention on social changes that impacted young people's lives, questioning the emerging and established orthodoxies via their often-quoted position 'life in late modernity revolves around an epistemological fallacy: although social structures, such as class, continue to shape life chances, these structures tend to become increasingly obscure as collectivist traditions weaken and individualist values intensify' (Furlong and Cartmel 1997: 2).

Not content with writing and reporting on his own primary research from the field, Andy also edited substantial and influential collections and textbooks, including *Youth Studies: An Introduction* (2012), the *Handbook of Youth and Young Adulthood: New Perspectives and Agendas* (2009), the *Routledge Handbook of Youth and Young Adulthood* (2016) and the *Routledge Handbook of the Sociology of Higher Education* (2016) edited with James E. Côté. For Andy, these edited collections were not merely banal acts of research dissemination but were, instead, essential vehicles for highlighting the vibrancy, scope, breadth, depth and significance of work in the field of youth studies. Editing collections such as these, containing fifty-plus chapters, and the need to liaise with authors constantly, is more than a labour of love; it represents a commitment to the field and the subject matter in hand so that we can all better understand it. Andy wrote in the introduction to his latest handbook:

the contributing authors are given the opportunity to account for the ways in which modern youth life is played out in a wide range of contexts and to highlight the significant changes in their life experiences. Since the last edition, some of the trends previously identified have accelerated ... As such, there is a real need to draw attention to the ways in which young people are making their lives under these new conditions.

(Furlong 2016: 4)

Our understanding of the ways in which modern youth life is played out in these various contexts, and the changing life and opportunity structures for young people, have also been meticulously examined in the *Journal of Youth Studies* (JYS). This journal was founded by Andy in 1998, and through his sheer energy and commitment as Editor-in-Chief of JYS, Andy moved this journal from humble origins to being the leading multidisciplinary and international journal for the field. Through his efforts with JYS 'youth studies' moved front and centre as an

academic concern within some social science disciplines, as evidenced by the journal's wide readership and successful biannual conference.

Present

While we had many future projects, writing plans and ideas planned, this book turned out to be our last 'direct' collaboration with Andy. However, our collaboration will continue for a good while with Andy in absentia. Before his death, and now poignantly, we had received funding from the British Academy for the research *Youth Opportunities? The Long-Term Impacts of Participation in Youth Training Schemes during the 1980s*. This is a project specifically designed to combine the themes of this current book (continuities and change over time, data reuse, legacy data and the power of large-scale datasets to enhance our understanding of wider issues and trends in youth labour markets, and so forth) with themes examined directly by Andy in his PhD and his earlier publications. Andy began writing at a time when youth training schemes (YTS) had become, in the UK at least, a stock response by governments to 'alleviating' youth unemployment and addressing changing skills and training needs in the context of massive labour market change and transformation. However, these schemes were highly problematic and contentious.

Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that, despite the Government's massive propaganda exercise, the customers of the YTS – the youngsters – do not believe that they will receive that which they most desire, which is full-time permanent employment, at the end of the scheme? Does he further acknowledge that YTS is no longer about providing a permanent bridge between school and work, to use the fine words that were used when the scheme was launched four years ago, but is more a gangway to the dole queue for about one-third of the youngsters, who fail to obtain a job when they complete their scheme?

(Evans 1985: 25)

The concerns of UK Members of Parliament were echoed in Andy's research and, in his 1987 PhD, he argued that 'I would suggest the main short-coming of the YTS in Leicester lies in its failure to attract young people destined for low-skilled jobs, and in its failure to be seen as anything more than second best' (Furlong 1987: 227). Andy returned to these themes in his first monograph *Growing up in Classless Society* (1992), published in 1992 while he was a lecturer in Sociology in the Department of Government at the University of Strathclyde. The book, focused on Scottish school leavers, is a text undergirded with notions of social injustice, social reproduction and the need to document clearly the impact of social

class on the youth transitions in the context of high levels of youth unemployment, the increasing role of government employment schemes and a contracting youth labour market. Here his research reinforced the view that ‘unemployment schemes are experiences largely reserved for those following disadvantaged routes into the labour market’ (Furlong 1992: 152). Or as Kerckhoff (1994: 1692) suggests:

Furlong believes that YTS served to increase the inequalities already found in the Scottish educational system ... Among those in YTS, the most disadvantaged were most often in the kinds of programs that were least likely to lead to employment afterwards. Many employers simply used the program trainees so long as the government was paying the bill but did not keep the trainees on as regular employees afterwards. Furlong argues that such trainees thus became ‘double failures’.

What happened to those who participated in the 1980s youth training schemes? What was to become of these ‘double failures’ Andy had identified? What were the long-term career and life ‘impacts’ for those who participated in YTS? Were these ‘tacky’ job substitution schemes or did they (ever) provide gateways to real and meaningful work? More specifically, and together, we aimed to explore the long-term value of government interventions by interviewing participants more than 30 years after they completed schemes. This approach to understanding the impact of YTS on subsequent employment histories was to combine qualitative interviews with 1980s YTS participants, the secondary analysis of ‘legacy data-sets’ on 1980s youth training schemes and via an analysis of the 1970 British Birth Cohort study. It was in this final area that Andy was to lead, given his previous experiences of working with data such as Scottish School Leavers Surveys and the fact that he had used data from the fourth sweep of the 1970 British Birth Cohort in *Schooling for Jobs* (1993). Andy was to revisit this data and to update the ‘YTS in the BCS70’ story, but mindful of Connolly’s (1993: 82) plea that ‘qualitative analyses to complement Furlong’s work would go a long way in addressing the reasons behind the evidently continued reproduction of existing social inequalities’.

Future: move forward

There are many themes from Andy’s earlier works that are revisited in this book and are perhaps best encapsulated by reference to the opening and closing chapters of this book. David Ashton and Ken Roberts were invited to provide these contributions in recognition of their own considerable influence on the field of youth studies and on the work of Andy over the preceding four decades. Both conclude their contributions expressing hope for young people in the future: that that there

will be ‘an escape ... from neo-liberalism and a vision of an alternative future’ for young people ‘based on broader humanitarian values’. These sentiments without doubt chime strongly with Andy’s own concerns for the future development of youth policy.

Indeed, his concern for social justice for young people continued to the end, as one of his very rare forays into the world of social media soon after the EU referendum suggested:

@Andy_furlong – Brexit: The wrinklies have well and truly stitched us up

Major changes in the political landscape, such as Brexit or Scottish independence represent yet more ‘new conditions’, further ‘significant changes in their life experiences’ and additional ‘collective problems’, all of which still further compound the problems faced by young people in modern Britain and the difficulties they have to contend with. We feel sure if Andy were here he would now be turning his attention directly to these concerns. Alas not. Andy was a friend, a colleague, a counsellor, an advisor and a good man. Like so many others we will miss him immensely and it remains impossible to imagine the world of youth studies without him being part of it. He was a ‘doer’, he got things done, and his international reputation stands testimony to that. Andy’s legacy will be long-lasting and we must move forward to celebrate his life as the leading scholar in our field in the very best way that we can – by carrying on the work. For ourselves, we are happy to have played a small part in helping Andy achieve what he wanted to achieve with this book. Any errors or omissions that remain are ours and not Andy’s.

John Goodwin and Henrietta O’Connor