

# Beyond Aspiration: Young People and decent work in the de-industrialised city

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## Executive summary

- This discussion paper is designed to provoke a debate about the work and training prospects for young people in Glasgow. It draws upon recent statistical evidence alongside qualitative data from interviews and focus groups. It highlights the increasing difficulties that young people experience in finding decent training and job opportunities in the city's labour market.
- Like many other cities in the United Kingdom, Glasgow has experienced massive deindustrialisation since the early 1980s. Although the transition to a more service-based economy has resulted in new jobs, the quality of employment and training offered to young people in the contemporary economy is generally of a much lower quality – in terms of pay, job security and job satisfaction – than those lost in traditional manufacturing activities.
- Moreover, as we show below, the shift to services has largely been accompanied by the decline of full-time work and the growth of a part-time labour market. Even prior to the current downturn, the most recent period for which data is available (2001-6) shows a net decline in full-time jobs of over 6,000, whilst full-time employment since 1981 has fallen by over 34,000.
- Deindustrialisation has also contributed to a widening polarisation in the labour market. The largest gap is between those able to secure highly paid and rewarding full-time work in graduate entry work or the diminishing number of traditional apprenticeships and the remainder who are forced to accept more casual, irregular and low paid forms of work.
- For those young people not going on to higher education, job opportunities and the availability of decent apprenticeship or training places has been severely constrained. One of our interviewees from one of the larger training establishments reported over 2,000 applications for just 75 Modern Apprenticeship places in 2007.
- The contraction of job opportunities brought about by the current financial crisis and economic recession is significantly exacerbating this situation, as a growing number of graduates are forced to look

for non-graduate level jobs (e.g. in call centres) in the labour market.

- Our interviews and focus groups with young people, trade union representatives and training practitioners suggest that for those leaving school and not going on to university, the norm is becoming a low wage and casualised work environment or an unregulated and degraded training system.
- The lack of training regulation in particular means that young people are open to increasing exploitation and sometimes abuse by employers. Our research has discovered examples of young people being paid as little as £60 per week in some instances, and in others abuse of the Modern Apprenticeship system where young people leave placements with no qualifications.
- Our report also criticises the current policy regime, which is clearly failing young people. On the one hand they are confronted with the 'stick' of workfare and the increasing pressure to take any job or training opportunity or lose benefits. On the other hand, they are encouraged through the 'carrot' of individual aspiration: the idea that it is relatively easy to climb the job ladder if you can find initial employment, a training place, or even volunteering.
- The evidence – both quantitative and qualitative – suggests otherwise: that decent work and training are becoming even harder to come by. In these circumstances a policy regime that was already heavily criticised during the relatively benign economic circumstances of the past decade, is likely to have disastrous consequences for the most disadvantaged young people in society in the years to come.
- Finally, we offer up some thoughts on what alternative questions should be posed in offering people real choices and opportunities for decent employment. A cornerstone of any alternative must be to recognise individual rights to participate in economic life on equal terms. More practically, young people need to be paid 'living wages' in return for any kind of paid work and given properly regulated training and work placements.

## Introduction

In common with other British cities that have suffered processes of deindustrialisation, the city exhibits some of the worst levels of poverty and social inequality in Western Europe. Since the late 1970s, job opportunities available in the service sector have generally been of a much lower quality – in terms of pay, job security and job satisfaction – than those lost in traditional manufacturing activities. Additionally, the erosion of traditional skilled forms of manual work and the rise of different types of work – based on ‘soft’ skills is posing a number of challenges for particular social groups, especially young men, for whom the pathways into skilled manual labour have all but disappeared. The problem of finding decent and rewarding work, that pays a ‘living wage’ capable of allowing an existence above the poverty line also confronts women of all ages. Whilst there has been a growth in female employment in recent years, accompanying a decrease in work for men, this has predominantly been in low paid, part-time and casual work. This has significant implications beyond individual employment pathways for the household economy and living standards. For those young people not going on to higher education, job opportunities have become severely constrained by the processes of economic restructuring that have brought about a post-industrial Glasgow. The subsequent contraction of job opportunities in the current economic recession will compound this situation even further, as a growing number of graduates are forced to compete for non-graduate level jobs (e.g. in call centres) in the labour market.

There has been concern about this situation by policymakers and practitioners for some time. Successive governments, both at the UK and Scottish levels have expended considerable effort on policy solutions geared towards drawing marginalised groups into work and training. We argue here that the approach pursued by policymakers has considerable flaws in addressing the employment and training needs of young people. From the Government’s New Deal initiative to tighter controls on benefit and welfare claimants, to the concern with ‘employability’, the problem has been posed as one of better inculcating a work ethic, alongside the provision of adequate training policies to correct a perceived mismatch between job vacancies and skill levels.

Understood in these terms, the task for labour market interventions is to equip people with the training for job opportunities in expanding service sectors and use whatever means – both ‘carrot’ and ‘stick’ – to

encourage people into work and off benefits. While training opportunities and providing people with the ability to make a living are critical and should be the central plank of labour market policy, there is a sense that policy is too concerned with narrow outputs – delivering people on to training courses and into jobs – with less of a concern about the nature of these ‘outputs’ and processes behind them. At one level, critical issues concern the kind of jobs and training places that are available. At a deeper level, there is a sense that policies developed by middle class bureaucrats and politicians have little real knowledge of the increasingly difficult conditions facing working class people in negotiating the contemporary labour market.

There is in particular a perceived wisdom about the urban poor as a socially excluded population segment detached from mainstream society. The poor are viewed as lacking the skills and often the behavioural attributes to cope with the shift from a production-based economy to a new knowledge-based economy. Implicit in this line of thinking is a perspective of disempowered and “trapped” individuals, lacking the ability, capacity and indeed the aspiration to shape their own lives. More mendaciously, ASBOs stigmatise some young people as a dangerous and deviant group, decoupled from social norms. In popular and media debates, young people frequently figure as members of territorial gangs, invariably labelled as ‘hoodies’, ‘neds’ or ‘chavs’. Critiquing such stereotypes, our purpose here is to confront these labels and the ideology of the underclass that lies behind them.

The most recent wave of welfare reforms is encapsulated in the Welfare Reform Bill which passed into legislation in November 2008. Based on the Freud report (Department for Work and Pensions, 2007), this presents the clearest case yet of the introduction of a comprehensive workfare regime by abolishing incapacity benefits and by developing a work-ready approach to increasingly wider social groups, beyond the existing focus on the long-term unemployed and young people to include ex-prisoners, ex-addicts and single parents. Such ‘activation’ is accompanied by a recasting of the relationship between state and citizens where ‘aspiration’ has entered public debate as a key value and component of welfare reform. Aspiration framed in these terms is defined as “a strong desire to achieve something high or great” (Merriam-Webster 2009) and marks the continuation of the prevailing rights/responsibilities narrative. Thus, behind the apparently innocuous label, there lies a more sinister attack on those deemed not to have the right values to participate in a capitalist market-based society. From this perspective, the ‘good’ citizen is redefined in terms

of a narrow economic notion of individual advancement in the labour market, rather than a more collective and socially-based set of values and shared meanings about work and employment.

The purpose of this report is to challenge the dominant assumptions that inform current policy and stimulate a debate about providing decent work and training opportunities for young people in cities that have undergone deindustrialisation processes. Drawing upon ongoing research and experiences in Glasgow, we set out two critical points of departure.

1. How do we go beyond the mix of market individualism and moral authoritarianism that informs the current policy regime and its attitude towards the urban poor, the unemployed and the young? What are the possibilities to develop a politics that offers an alternative set of ideas concerning individual and social needs, desires and ambitions?
2. How can we build on the growing number of progressive campaigns around a living wage or Citizen Income to provide a more interventionist politics; in particular at a time when many of the foundations of mainstream economic thinking are both in crisis and open to question?

We are particularly interested in understanding how young people's understandings of the contemporary world of work mesh with reality, the opportunities that are open to them, the strategies they pursue and the support networks available to them. Beyond simplistic employability agendas, our broader concern is with the provision of decent jobs and training opportunities. These have to provide living wages and the ability for young people to realise their aspirations and develop their potential, whatever *they* conceive that to be, as the measure against which we hold labour market policies and outcomes to account.

In this respect we are concerned here with developing a definition of decent work and training that recognises individual rights to participate in economic life on equal terms and goes beyond the aspirational agenda outlined above. This involves a shift in policy away from the narrow concern with placing people in work or even on a trajectory of upward mobility, but instead is concerned with human dignity, needs and flourishing. On the one hand this involves the right to respect at work and freedom from abuse and manipulation from employers and other workers. On the other hand, this also involves providing young

people with the ability to develop and achieve their own goals, rather than ones imposed upon them.

Our report is based on research undertaken across Glasgow between summer 2006 and summer 2008, involving 15 interviews with practitioners from training and employment initiatives, unions and voluntary sector organisations. A further series of seven focus groups with young people was conducted, three with students in Higher Education and four with young people involved in volunteering across a range of sports and social inclusion initiatives or undertaking Modern Apprenticeships.

The report begins with a summary of the current labour market situation facing young people in Glasgow, before moving on to consider their experiences of paid work. We then report upon experiences of training before examining the forms of support that are available to young people in negotiating the labour market, accessing opportunities and planning the future. Here, the role of peer, family and community networks figure prominently. The report concludes with a call for taking seriously young people's experiences of limited mobility and opportunities, often in the context of considerable social networks and personal commitment. The report thus critiques simple notions of aspiration and highlights the need for a debate over decent work and choiceworthy lives.

## **Employment and income in Glasgow: an overview**

Like many other British cities, Glasgow has witnessed a growing polarisation of the labour market over the past three decades. Not only has there been a growth in the number of households living in relative poverty, but also a growing divide in absolute levels of income between the upper and lower quartile of wage earners (Nickell, 2004, Hocking, 2003). Economic deprivation also contributes to severe social and medical problems; in Glasgow this is reflected in appalling differences in health and mortality rates between the more prosperous areas such as the West End and some neighbourhoods in the east of the city where average life expectancy for men is below 60. Glasgow warranted an unwelcome mention in the national press recently as the city having 9 out of the bottom 10 areas of the country with the worst premature mortality rates (Shaw et al., 2005).

Table 1 Components of change in the Glasgow labour market 1981 – 2006

Sectoral change	1981 (% total)	of	2006 (% total)	of	% change 1981- 2006	Net job change
Manufacturing industries	23.2		6.1		-72.8	- 63,932
Services	68.0		88.8		+35.7	+ 91,575
Construction	7.2		4.5		- 35.3	- 9,580
Male	54.3		48.1		- 8.0	- 16,414
Female	45.7		51.9		+18.1	+31,316
Male f/t	52.0		40.4		- 19.2	- 37,704
Male p/t	2.3		7.7		+240.0	+21,289
Female f/t	29.3		29.0		+2.9	+3,237
Female p/t	16.4		22.9		+45.5	+28,079
All f/t	81.3		69.4		-11.2	-34,467
All p/t	18.7		30.6		+69.8	+49,368
<b>Total jobs growth</b>					<b>+3.9</b>	<b>+14,892</b>

[Source: Office of National Statistics (ONS), NOMIS database, ABI Employment Census, <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk>, based upon 1992 Standard Industrial Classifications]

Like many other cities, Glasgow has undergone profound change since the late 1970s from a local economy based around manufacturing (particularly heavy engineering and shipbuilding) to one increasingly driven by service sectors, particularly financial services, tourism and entertainment and call centre working. The public sector is also an increasingly important employer through local authorities, the NHS and the education sector, which account for 31.2 per cent of total employment (Office of National Statistics, Annual Business Information



database). These changes reflect growing disparities in employment opportunities between different social groups in the labour market. While there has been an overall increase in jobs in the past quarter of a century (Table 1), there has been a massive decline in full-time jobs (a loss of around 11 per cent) and a rise in part-time work. There has also been a considerable 'feminisation' of the labour market with a marked increase in the number of women in work but a decline in male full-time work. Perhaps most significant in relation to the historical structure of the labour market are the growing number of men working part-time.

Table 2 provides more recent information on employment change in Glasgow. It shows that during a period of relative economic prosperity, between 2001 and 2006, job creation was extremely limited. It also shows that three sectors: distribution, hotels, restaurants (which includes the key sector of retailing); banking, finance and insurance; and public administration, education and health were the main sectors of job growth. The construction sector which has been lauded as a possible source of demand for the type of traditional manual work lost through deindustrialisation, created less than 200 jobs during that period.

Even more critically, the banking sector (much of which in the Glasgow case represents call centre work) was the only one to see a growth in full-time jobs, suggesting that the long term trend towards part-time work has continued in the recent past: in both the public sector and distribution etc there was actually a decline in full-time work. Clearly, this has serious implications for household income as the 'employment growth' recorded actually represents degraded and less well remunerated work than full-time. Part-time employees typically have fewer employment and pension rights than full-time employees as well as lower union membership, with the latter often (in itself) resulting in lower wages.

Given the concentrated effects of the recent economic downturn in the building and construction sectors, future employment prospects for Glasgow look bleak. Indeed, the most recent evidence bears this out with unemployment in Glasgow rising sharply in the sixth months to February 2009 (see below). A situation of very limited decent work opportunities is likely to be made worse as competition intensifies for a diminishing number of jobs.

Table 2 Recent sectoral employment change 2001-6

	Number of jobs		% change	Net job change	
	2001	2006	2001-6	All jobs	Full-time
Manufacturing	30,280	23,865	-21.2	-6,415	-6,523
Construction	17,365	17,564	1.1	+199	-367
Distribution, hotels and restaurants	80,925	82,146	1.5	+1,221	-828
Transport and communications	23,625	20,805	-11.9	-2,820	-3,347
Banking, finance and insurance, etc	94,089	102,026	8.4	+7,937	+7,487
Public administration, education & health	114,868	122,624	6.8	+7,756	-128
Other services	21,905	20,760	-5.2	-1,145	-1,539
<b>Total jobs growth</b>	<b>387,739</b>	<b>392,836</b>	<b>+1.3</b>	<b>+5,097</b>	<b>-6,567</b>

N.B. Agricultural and mining employment omitted due to confidentiality clause in database. Figures are relatively small anyway.

[Source: Office of National Statistics (ONS), NOMIS database, ABI Employment Census]

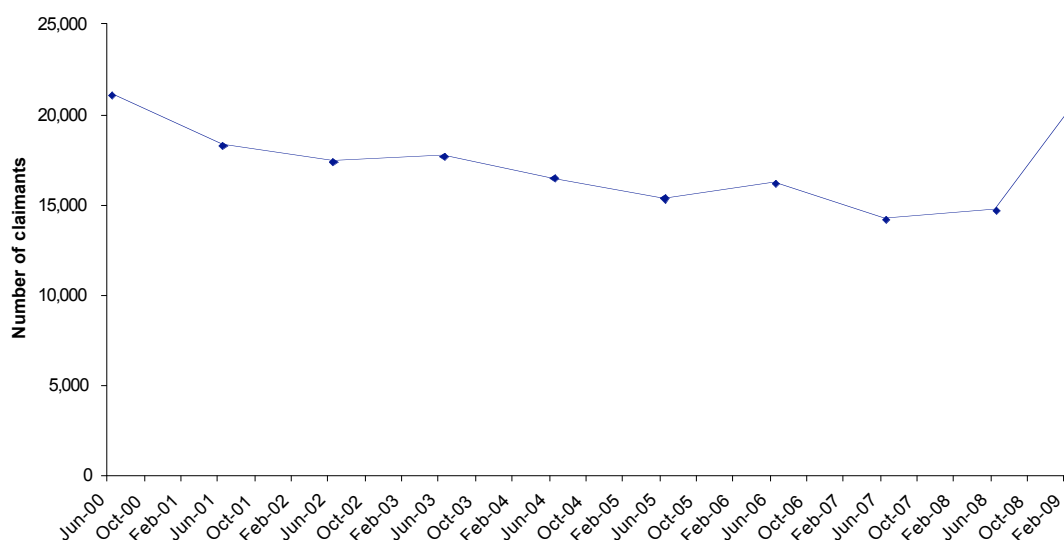
Given the context set out above, there is a sense among many of the practitioners we interviewed that, for all the labour market policy initiatives and regeneration funds that have been invested in deprived areas, there are substantial numbers of people that continue to live in conditions marked by poverty and multiple deprivation. This quote summarises the perspective of many of the agencies and support workers we talked to:

‘...one of the lessons that I learned when I worked in Castlemilk is, you know, the partnership would do the annual or biannual survey of people’s satisfaction surveys. What the researchers would do is they would go into the areas and the people who’d be selected to do this would be people who had been actually, either they’d got a job or they’d got a new house or were fairly happy or had been engaged in the process. What they didn’t tend to do is get under the surface of that and, you know, ask people, you know, and try and follow people through the process over the two or three years to say, right, this is what it’s like, state of play in 1989, what’s the state of play in 1992? What’s the state of play in 1995, you know? Have you genuinely benefited from this, has your household income benefited? As I said earlier, your house may have been improved, you might have a new house, but can you heat that house, can you still put food on the table, you know, all the things, essential things that you’d want to make sure they can do in a deprived community, and it’s those kind of issues that you sometimes get filtered through because they don’t wanna hear the harsh reality that they’re met with, as we’re finding out in the recent report in Easterhouse, that despite all the money that’s been spent, the real impact hasn’t been, really, hitting the people where it was meant to target.’ (Scottish Low Pay Unit staff)

The point alluded to here is that the raft of area-based initiatives in deprived areas are failing because they are not addressing the root causes of poverty and labour market disadvantage, such as the structural problems of inequality within cities, between social groups and between different areas in terms of income, job opportunity and life chances.

Over 40 per cent of households in Glasgow are living below the poverty line, defined as half of the median income (Dorling and Thomas, 2004). The majority of these are disconnected from the formal labour market and the ability to access decently paid work. Although the claimant count – reflecting those actively seeking work – fell during the early 2000s, the most recent figures suggest a sharp increase as the recession begins to take effect (Figure 1). Economic activity rates arguably provide a more accurate reflection of the health of a local labour market, and in the case of Glasgow remain well below the UK average with 27.1 per cent of the working age population defined as ‘inactive’, compared to the national figure of 21.2 over the most recently available data from the period July 2007 – June 2008 (ONS database)

Figure 1 Claimant Count (unemployed seeking work) for Glasgow 2000-2009



[Source: Office for National Statistics (<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/>)]

The opportunities to find work for those without formal qualifications or higher education are severely restricted. This is of considerable concern for a city such as Glasgow which has a significant number of school leavers without any formal qualification; in 2007 this was 21.3 % (compared to a UK figure of 13.1 % and for Scotland of 13.5%) (ONS Population Census). The disappearance of relatively stable and full-time jobs in manufacturing for unskilled and semi-skilled workers has been accompanied by the growth of more contingent and lower paid forms of work in the service sector. Research suggests that the benefits of the knowledge economy – in terms of creating new forms of well-paid, interesting and rewarding work – have, anyway, been exaggerated ((Hesketh and Phil, 2004, Thompson, 2004), as our local employment figures above also attest.

In Glasgow there is a growing polarisation between the fortunate few who are able to find full-time graduate level professional work and those who leave school with few qualifications and whose job options are confined to deregulated and often highly precarious forms of work. In between these two groups, many more qualified workers – including, our evidence suggests, many with university degrees - are working in financial call centres, restaurant, catering and retail sectors that do not necessarily require high level qualifications and are not paid particularly well by national standards. On the aggregate level, this in fact presents one of the comparative advantages of the Glasgow urban

economy: an abundant highly-skilled workforce that ensure wage levels are kept competitively low. One of our focus group respondents who had completed a degree in social science talked of the difficulties of finding graduate work after university. In her case, prior to taking up a place on a postgraduate course, she had been unable to find work in her chosen profession of social care and had been contemplating a return to her ‘university job’, where she had worked part-time in a betting shop to fund her way through her studies (Focus group, November 2006).

The polarization in income is reflected in income data, where there is a significant gap between full-time and part-time work (Table 3). Glasgow as a whole fares poorly in relation to the national figures with male full-time and part-time work being particularly poorly paid.

**Table 3 Median Gross Weekly Wage rates in Glasgow for different types of employment/occupation and differentials with UK 2008**

Employment category	Average weekly wage (£)	Ratio to GB wages
Male full-time	468.3	89.9
Female full-time	407.6	98.9
Male part-time	129.5	94.7
Female part-time	154.2	102.9

[Source: ONS Earnings data]

The problem is compounded by the lack of opportunities for those school leavers who don't go on to university to find work or training which allows them to improve their employment prospects in the longer term. In turn, this reflects the type of jobs available and the ability to upgrade skills or receive worthwhile training opportunities through the mechanisms of the local labour market. A snapshot of the job vacancies available for the Glasgow area in October 2008 (as reported by Job Centres), compared to Scottish and UK vacancies provides further evidence of these widening disparities (Table 4) (for an earlier snapshot of similar trends, see Helms and Cumbers, 2006). Particularly significant about these figures is the shortage of higher skilled opportunities in the more localised occupational segments of the local market (if we accept that professional and higher level managerial jobs are more likely to be advertised regionally or nationally and by private agencies rather than in Job Centres)

compared to figures for both Scotland and the UK. Whilst there are disproportionately higher numbers of vacancies in relatively routine work available locally, there is a significantly lower number of vacancies for 'Associate Professional and Technical' work and for 'Skilled Trades'.

**Table 4 Job Vacancies by Occupation, October 2008**

	Glasgow		Scotland % of all vacancies	UK % of all vacancies
	No of vacancies	% of all vacancies		
Managers and Senior Officials	137	2.0	3.0	4.1
Professional	131	1.9	1.9	2.5
Associate Professional and Technical	428	6.3	9.2	10.9
Administrative and Secretarial	401	5.9	9.3	12.4
Skilled Trades	437	6.5	9.6	9.5
Personal Service	456	6.8	7.7	8.5
Sales and Customer Service	2,252	33.4	24.5	17.5
Process, Plant and Machine Operatives	326	4.8	7.6	10.8
Elementary	2,174	32.2	27.1	23.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,556</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

[Source: NOMIS database, Job Centre data]

As the figures above suggest, traditional forms of manufacturing work have all but disappeared and therefore the opportunities that would have been available to both skilled and unskilled manual labour up until the 1970s are much diminished. Despite this, many of the young men we spoke to, who were not going on to higher education, still aspired to craft or technician apprenticeships. Recognising this, the construction sector is now seen as one of the few remaining opportunities to provide traditional apprenticeships in this line of work. One youth team leader suggested that as many as 8 out of 10 young

men left school with this aspiration. However, the competition for places is intense and is particularly difficult for young people from deprived backgrounds and with low educational qualifications. In the case of this team leader, his approach was for his clients to send out application letters to 200 prospective employers, typically receiving 8 negative replies, to acquaint them with the harsh realities of the labour market and encourage a search for other kinds of work.

Job opportunities are further restricted for many young men by the territorial limitations of local gang culture within many of Glasgow's poorer neighbourhoods. A recurring theme among all our respondents – young people themselves, union officials, training officers and agency workers – was the extent to which spatial confinement prevents many young men in particular taking up training opportunities.

In the recent past, there has been work available in the broader Glasgow economy (though the quality may be questionable), and it was common for some of the young people we interviewed to place the emphasis upon individual responsibility to find work and training. At the same time it was clear from our research that social background, parental support and broader community networks are all critical to individual prospects.

Yet, current experiences were marked by increasing competition from highly qualified graduates, who are looking for summer work and are preferred by employers:

One of the things that came up was the competition for those low level entry jobs within some of these areas. For example, what might be seen as a more lucrative sort of low level entry jobs, working in hotel work, chamber maids and stuff like that. Some people see themselves as unable to compete in the market at particular times of the year – for example, when the universities shut, during the summer months, the students are seen as much better employees. (Interview with Labour Market Project staff member)

## Training and volunteering on the margins of the labour market

Three routes marking the transition from secondary school into the labour market were prevalent in our research: Modern Apprenticeships (MA), volunteering (in settings with various levels of support) and training initiatives. All young people who took part in the focus groups were either involved in MAs or volunteering, and many had experiences of other mainstream training initiatives (such as *Training for Work*). After discussing first training experiences, this section examines people's aspirations, their future plans and the role of community and support networks.

### *In training and apprenticeships*

The pivotal role of the public sector in providing a stable training environment with decent wages and high quality training is important in an economy such as Glasgow where similar opportunities in the private sector are few and far between. For example, the City Building programme guarantees a four-year training for apprentices with wages well above the statutory minimum. Although rates vary depending on the type of apprenticeship, most apprentices now earn over £100 per week in their first year, rising to over £160 per week by year four. Additionally, the scheme offers sick pay which is denied to most private sector apprentices (Authors' interview). However, even City Building does not guarantee jobs at the end of the scheme; in 2007 most of the final year apprentices were laid off at the end of the training whereas 2008's final year apprentices were likely to be kept on. Nevertheless, the view of most of our respondents was that the public sector is one of the few ways in which non-graduates can enter into jobs that provide clear career pathways, a recurring theme in focus groups with both graduate and non-graduate young people (ibid).

A further training stimulus from the public sector is promised through the City's hosting of the 2014 Commonwealth Games with the City Council promising that 5,000 Glasgow school leavers in 2008 would be 'given the opportunity to apply for' apprentices. The commitment extends to 2,000 construction apprenticeships which would indeed be a step forward if it could be delivered. However, given the collapse of the housing market and the poor record of the construction sector in



recent years in creating jobs, these claims should be treated with considerable caution. As union representatives have told us, the construction sector throughout Scotland has only around 2,500 apprentices in total (Interview, Union Construction Industry representative). Even if the City Council were able to deliver on its rhetoric (and our interviews with training officers and union officials suggest this is highly unlikely given the enormity of the increase in training provision it would require) there would once again be no guaranteed jobs at the end. Apprenticeship – in its new form – is being applied fairly loosely, compared to the traditional form where it was the norm for time-served apprentices to pass into a firm's permanent workforce.

There is in this sense a deeper hypocrisy and cynicism about the way both UK government and local authorities such as the City Council promote the modern apprenticeships scheme, given its past associations with stable lifetime employment and the current reality of more flexible and insecure forms of work, particularly in the construction sector. Our focus group with young craft apprentices showed that they were only too aware of this, with importance attached to getting placed into stable and secure apprenticeships rather than an employer who would 'dump you if you broke a leg', or would make you work for 'peanuts' before being paid off after the probationary period.

The experience of training varies widely with some examples of recommendable practice sitting beside some highly exploitative employers who provide little real training or qualification, largely using young people as a source of cheap labour. Our interviews revealed cases where young people had been taken on for up to two years by employers on what they were told was an apprenticeship but receiving little in the way of training and no qualification at the end of the 'training period'. One support worker was particularly scathing of the Individual Learning Account scheme where young people receive £60 per week but with no guarantees about the quality of training being received. The lack of regulation of training providers was a recurring theme in discussions with support workers with stories of young people receiving as little as £40 per week for training. We also found many examples of apprentices being paid off before the end of their training: in one case an electrician apprentice had been paid off on three separate occasions with different firms.

An accumulation of bad experiences across a neighbourhood and among peers lead to a cynicism and disenchantment about the realities of training more generally which can in turn shape people's subsequent decisions and choices. A negative training experience – on £60 per week – even if it holds out the prospect of a recognised qualification at the end which might lead in the longer term to better job prospects, higher wages and career progression, compares unfavourably to a minimum wage cleaning, retail or catering job. For hard-pressed individuals and families with rising household bills, the opportunities to earn over £5 per hour without qualifications against the derisory levels of income on most training schemes is incentive enough.

Our evidence suggests that the level of competition for the diminishing number of apprenticeship places in traditional forms of manual work, (e.g. electricians, plumbers, joiners) is such that employers are able to pick and choose from the most highly qualified school leavers. For Glasgow City Council's four-year apprenticeship scheme, City Building, there were 2,000 applications for 75 places in 2007 (Authors' interviews).

### *Promoting whose aspirations?*

For many young people the lack of knowledge and information about work and training are important factors in their disempowerment. The failure of the school system to provide adequate career advice for those not intending to go on to higher education and university was widely criticised and derided. Almost every young person we talked to had negative experiences of school, from the relatively advantaged apprentices on the City Building Scheme to the young people from care homes, to those working in a voluntary capacity on local community projects.

While there is a mainstream agenda of promoting and increasing young people's aspirations, encouraging people to aim for something higher than a trade, this conflicts simultaneously with the expectations – or indeed aspirations – of what constituted good training and employment practice in the past. Here, young people's experiences are at odds with those of their grandparents' generation.

There's a generational gap, in terms of their understanding of what the rights would be, and what young people would be expecting as a wage for doing that type of job. So...the grandparents, especially those who had worked in the industry, are more of a position whereby "this is disgraceful, this is disgusting", whereas some of the parents, because of the generational issue, were basically saying, "Well I suppose ... they've just got to accept that that's what they're gonna get paid." So there are those issues that come up, in terms of a generational perception of what should be good employment practice, and what is you've just got to accept it. (Low Pay Unit)

This leads us to question the nature of the aspirations being considered here. Comments like the above clearly demonstrate notions and understandings of decent work and employment practices held by individuals, households and wider communities. Here, existing training schemes do fall short of the provision of opportunities that might enhance individuals choice and life chances. For us, this clearly implies that it is not a 'lack of aspiration' at play here, but a question over what aspirations are regarded as legitimate – and that those expectations of a decent, quality apprenticeship and training are not being either met, or pursued, by policy. Rather than aspiration being directed towards a discourse of individual achievement and upward mobility, we would suggest that the real issue is the provision of diverse options for young people that might enable them to assess and make their own decisions as 'choiceworthy lives' (Burczak, 2006)

For many respondents, their job horizons are relatively narrow and often shaped by family and peers. Young women from backgrounds where mothers had been cleaners or worked in retail often don't consider other forms of work and existing policy does little to address this concern. While young women with lower educational attainment generally have better employment prospects than those of young men, their knowledge about the employment and training opportunities available is often equally constrained. Further, because it is more socially acceptable for women to go from school to low-entry level jobs in retailing or cleaning, many do not actively seek career advice or interviews with employment advisors that might broaden their employment horizons (Authors' interviews). At the same time, there is evidence that plenty of women are holding down two or more part-time jobs, suggesting that the employment figures probably over-record the net employment gains for the local population as a whole.

It is in these contexts that the agenda around aspirations is aiming to broaden participants' horizons: to make them aspire to more; the

implicit understanding being that if people don't adopt higher aspirations, it is of their own choosing. Here, the aspirations agenda is quite clearly dangerously close to a new incarnation of the culture of poverty thesis (Mooney, 2007). The agenda spells out individual responsibilities to aspire and aim for better employment and career opportunities. However, it is debateable if such 'poverty of aspiration' (Murphy, 2007) is not much more realistically attuned to the circumstances laid out above; of people having a rather clear sense about what is available and achievable, as one practitioner put it:

There is the idea, that what can be imagined very closely corresponds to what's available, the issue between supply and demand, like, for example, Royston, there seems to be a lot of young women doing cleaning jobs and that type of work, cleaning jobs in the morning, perhaps working in retail in the afternoon or evening... – That's the type of work that people see is available in the area, yeah, it is – retail work, cleaning jobs, it's all low level entry work. (Labour market project, researcher)

The role of support workers in some of the local development and training agencies can make an important difference in this respect in advising of the better companies to train with and warning against disreputable employers and training schemes, as well as providing role models for the possibilities open to the young people they came into contact with. Our research revealed many dedicated individuals working at the local level who provide advice and support for younger people, although themselves often constrained by a lack of funding and over-prescriptive targets geared towards narrow and often unrealistic employment goals. While support workers recognised the deep-seated problems facing young people and the need to focus upon individual development and the building of self-confidence, the dominant policy focus remains one of getting people into work with little regard for the quality of training or working life. The more progressive support workers often had to find their own ways of working around training and employment targets to provide for the needs of individuals. Additionally, considerable time is required for some young people who have no experience of work or history of employment within the close family to draw upon.

Instead of a more genuinely supportive and enabling series of measures that can assist younger people from poorer and more disadvantaged neighbourhoods, the prevailing regime's emphasis upon making 'responsible' populations (Neal and Yeates 2008) puts the onus firmly back on the individual to develop their own well-being as

‘enterprising selves’ (Rose 2000), as members of the community and as consumers. Such strategies of responsabilisation are mobilised through a range of policy incentives and disincentives, many of them economic in nature. For most of the young people interviewed the work they are likely to achieve will be dull, repetitive and lacking in the features that would provide personal satisfaction. For most, however, the hope was that they would undertake work that might provide enough money for leisure and family life.

In developing a more progressive approach, we would argue that, at a very basic level, policy and resources needs to be geared far more towards providing young people in disadvantaged areas with information and support about the employment options and training opportunities that exist. This would not offset the advantages that young people from more privileged backgrounds have in negotiating the labour market – which needs a better macroeconomic policy regime (such as a more progressive tax system, and industrial strategy and accompanying active job creation measures) to tackle underlying structural inequalities – but it would at least be a starting point in helping those from poorer neighbourhoods to deal with the system as it is at present. At the moment, a policy that is focused primarily on getting people into work often results in placing disadvantaged young people in training or work placements with unsympathetic employers with negative experiences that lead to even greater alienation from the mainstream labour market.

Beyond providing a more supportive environment for young people entering into the workplace, the issue of respect and the attitudes of many of those in positions of power and authority were recurring themes.

[...] there is that idea you can leave school early, to go into college early and this is one of the other sort of things that’s coming up as well is the quality of the courses available to young people when they leave school, and that affects their perception of future courses and future sort of work, where they can see themselves – so if they go into, again this is a generalisation, I’m talking about one of my young lassie’s experience, she turned up, she would be turning up for classes and she felt it was just a laugh – the people were there because they didn’t have to be at school, and that rebounded in the tutors no turning up, the tutors didn’t think it was serious, so they didn’t turn up, so she eventually packed it in, went back to her cleaning job, she’s now spent, she’s now went into a training job, that’s at 24, now. (Labour Market Project. researcher)

There were a number of similar cases from our research where people were clearly aware that their training was not taken as seriously as they felt it should be by all involved. They also knew that the qualifications they would earn would probably not mean better chances of finding work. It is at this point that questions over demand side policies need to be raised. Placing the explanation of failure onto those young people, their lack of aspiration or their poor employability seems easy but does not provide a good enough answer.(we argue it is unacceptable?)

Placing the responsibility for 'failure' onto young people with regard to a perceived 'lack of aspiration' appears doubly problematic. Firstly, in relation to employability, government rhetoric focuses on 'empowering' young people through 'opportunities' to realize their economic potential, thus, when the labour market fails to provide decent jobs, blame is transferred from government to young people. Secondly, 'opportunities', offered via training schemes, rarely live up to young people's expectations, as many of our focus groups responses attested.

### *Progression and plans for the future*

Plans for progression and young people's views on how to achieve these, marked another line of enquiry of our research. Here, plans came in a variety of forms and at various levels of formulation and detail. They were broadly grouped around (a) further or higher education, (b) setting up a business, (c) emigration, or (d) few explicit plans.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, those individuals who expressed plans for further education in general presented the most clearly articulated views of what they wanted to do over the next five years. These plans were notably expressed by those young people who had been heavily involved in the volunteering projects and who also had become part-time youth workers in these programmes. Such progression meant that they saw themselves in a position to apply for University courses – something they had not been able to do at the point of leaving school. Here, the importance of youth projects in providing training and career opportunities is clearly evident, and is mirrored by some of the practitioners' own experiences, many of whom had themselves progressed in a similar way. In a group of 18 young people, this plan was held by three individuals. Furthermore, a small number of young

people were at the point of being offered sessional work as youth workers on the basis of their previous volunteering.

The plans of others involved in volunteering were much more vague and unformulated. Either pinned on distant plans to emigrate and work in the partner's business abroad or to work towards establishing one's own business. These two options came up in various groups, and seem to us indicative of a frustration with the presence and a vague formulation of an alternative elsewhere.

For the group of apprentices, the future seemed somewhat clearer with the prospect of a skilled trade as qualification and hopes for employment in the construction industry in Glasgow or elsewhere.

As for the present, those young people who had been in care were most realistic about their current situation of doing work, whatever work that was available. At the same time, they also expressed most clearly a determination to bring plans to fruition and to seek out opportunities, however limited. It is at those points, that we can begin to clarify how a policy agenda based on responsibilities and aspiration is, of course, clearly filtering down to young people involved in various organisation and volunteering, with statements such as 'I can achieve this if I want to', or 'everyone who wants work gets work' being as frequent as the realisation that discrimination against people with a care background is common:

In 5 years, phew, hopefully done a degree, self-employed, part time because I'll be studying as well and my family are fine, my house, everything's cool. But right now I feel comfortable, I don't feel like you know that there's any sort of unsteadiness I think I probably will be there (Focus Group, June 2008)

### *The resilience of community and social support networks*

Our focus group participants were self-selecting in the sense that they consisted of young people who were active in volunteering and taking part in community projects. Even taking this into account, there was an impressive level of commitment to helping others, rather than the more individualistic ethos which underpins much of the prevailing policy regime. An important value for many respondents was in doing work that 'put something' back into communities in advising and

training other young people, rather than purely about individual achievement and career advancement.

I think you volunteer to show commitment. If you're going and not getting paid you're showing commitment. If you get... you'll not get, aye there's a reward in doing the work, but I get a reward when I come to a session and a young person, maybe he's been there for three weeks, couldn't kick a ball, then four weeks later... they've got a lot more confidence. You see the, benefit from that but still, the pay you're getting, that's a benefit to you. So if you're not getting paid and you're going up every week, commitment's shown. (Respondent from Focus Group, June 2008)

A recent report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Boyle et al., 2006) has suggested that such 'co-production' activities, where the target 'client' groups are involved with professionals in the delivery of services to the community is a positive untapped resource for community regeneration because of the way involvement of local people helps cement neighbourhood bonds and develop social networks. Moreover, this type of volunteering work is becoming critical to the delivery of services (e.g. youth sport training) in areas where local government funding has been cut back.

Clearly, as the quote above suggests involving young people as volunteers on projects has been important for their confidence and self-esteem. It is also preferable to the ASBO approach which treats young people pejoratively as 'problems' to be addressed rather than individuals to be empowered and drawn into community life (Boyle et al 2006). Projects and volunteering may also be important sources of knowledge and support about training and work. However, set against this, these 'volunteering' schemes involve a considerable amount of work (typically 15-16 hours per week) on basic benefits and in a broader sense have an exploitative aspect to them.

Accepting the sample bias of our respondents, organisations such as Glasgow North, GERA, and Drumchapel Opportunities play an important role in helping people into work, providing child care to allow individuals to undertake training and occasionally funding to start small businesses. While these organisations on their own cannot tackle the fundamental structural problems facing Glasgow in dealing with poverty and a lack of decent jobs, they do provide important networks of support and in the better cases community cohesion in the face of broader economic forces driving fragmentation and alienation.



In certain areas it is clear that particular projects have been important in breaking down barriers – for example between young men and women from neighbouring areas – in creating community cohesion and local identity:

He was from Carlton or Duke Street, like he was from that area, the clubs, and I was from Dalmarnock and we ended up walking away being mates and talking to each other a lot more and that's the way a lot of projects work,. The people needing help then there is help going to be there from other projects, they all link in together. And there's hundred of like the East End Partnership, this and that and all the community. (Focus Group, June 2008)

This was particularly evident in the East End of the city in areas such as Dalmarnock and Bridgeton, and in contrast to some of the more dispersed housing schemes such as Sighthill, where a broader (i.e. beyond individual housing schemes) sense of local community was already present among young people. While this could be seen as negative in some senses, particularly with regard to restricting employment opportunities in cases where people were unwilling to travel beyond – or had much knowledge of – the wider Glasgow area, a strong local identity provided both support networks and a commitment to places and other local people.

The gendered dimensions to family and social networks that help young people into the world of education and work are highly prevalent. Mothers and grandmothers in particular are the key social actors for many young people in advising and supporting into better training and job opportunities, as well as providing homes well into adulthood as many young people are unable to afford to rent their own properties. Outside the family, there is also plenty of evidence of female neighbours providing assistance with childcare and even shopping for parents who are at work or training. In this sense, recent attempts by government to target single parents as a key 'inactive' group within the labour market marks a disservice to the role played in providing key support mechanisms for young people who are trying to access work themselves.

It is important, however, not to over-emphasise the strength of local community bonds in helping people to get by and progress in the labour market. Without connection to broader networks of support outwith local communities that can give a broader labour market perspective, they can also serve to reinforce existing social and gender inequalities across the city. This is particularly the case for young

women taking low level entry jobs in sectors such as cleaning and retail because they have developed the perception, from parents and friends, that these are the only jobs available to them.

At the same time, for young people from family backgrounds where there has been no experience of work, sometimes going back two generations or more, the norm is finding ways of 'getting by' outside formal employment, in cash-in-hand casualised work, or more perniciously through illegal forms of work.<sup>1</sup> Some of the most disadvantaged young people are those with a history of being in care, who very often lack the close familial and extended family support providing by continuing strong neighbourhood bonds. Many of the young people we spoke to who were volunteering on schemes that had given them considerable self-confidence had heard about the project through family and friends. Young people who are less well embedded in communities and family networks are therefore further marginalised. What would be a relatively simple matter for someone else, such as providing a family address on a c.v. to a potential employer is a further barrier to employment for young people with a background of being in care.

## **Beyond aspirations: For a politics of decent work?**

A recent working paper produced by the Department for Work and Pensions (Hoggart et al., 2006) captures the spirit of mainstream employment policy and discussion. Whilst the paper, written by researchers at the Policy Studies Institute, contained much in-depth discussion about the realities and concerns of poorer and more marginalized groups in the labour market, the underlying ethos of viewing people as 'customers', understanding work as being about personal advancement, and a focus upon the 'barriers' to getting people into employment, expose the instrumentality and dehumanizing nature of much current government thinking, in a telling passage about 'customers who rejected the notion of advancement' (p.4), the report notes:

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<sup>1</sup> Regarding the latter, it is possible for a 16 year old to make up to £500 per week in the illegal drug trade which clearly compares favourably with the derisory income from being on some training schemes.

Among these customers there was a strong theme of dislike for managers or supervisors; hence they did not want to advance if it meant assuming such roles. This view was often connected to a strong identity as a manual worker. Other reasons for customers' indifference or *negative attitudes* (emphasis added) included prioritising caring responsibilities, not being 'ambitious' or feeling they were too old to advance. (ibid)

In this view of the world, individuals who reject notions of advancement and career mobility are portrayed negatively rather than trying to understand the motivations behind people's choices and decisions. As we have suggested earlier in this report, such a perspective reflects a malign and wilful neglect among a middle class elite of politicians, academics and policy professionals to understand or engage with the problems and issues facing working class people in poor neighbourhoods across British cities. It also places itself at odds with an impressive continuing commitment to social solidarity and collective identity and the rejection of a more individualist ethos that continues, despite the severe impact of deindustrialisation. Here, our research shows that, in order to make sense of any aspirations, we need to locate these within a network of supply and demand of available work: where else are aspirations formed than in the world we experience? As a consequence, if this is a world consisting of few opportunities for advancement, and marked by poor training and low-level, short-term jobs, this will shape our aspirations.

An over-concern with advancement and mobility not only misunderstands the position facing many people in the local labour market but is arguably wilfully dishonest about the available employment opportunities. As we have shown in this paper, the types of new jobs created in the Glasgow economy in the three decades accompanying the decline of industrial work provide well-paid, secure and interesting work for a small minority. Most of the new jobs created in recent years have been low-paid, low-skilled, relatively routine and with few opportunities for genuine career advancement (e.g. Thompson 2003). As other research has shown, for the UK as a whole, rationalisation of work and the contracting out of employment in many private corporations has led to the collapse of the internal labour market (and the career opportunities within individual firms that this offered) and the employment stability enjoyed by previous generations (Beynon et al 2002). Although the public sector has not been immune to such trends, in a city such as Glasgow the decline of employment in the private sector has meant that it is becoming almost the last preserve of stable and rewarding career paths.

Under such circumstances the task for policy regarding young people and the labour market should be about asking a more fundamental set of questions: to define and realise personal ambitions, to develop in ways that are interesting and life-enriching, and to have access to employment that will provide a living income for them and, in future, their families. It is also at the same time about understanding that individual ambitions are truly socially coproduced – these do not exist outwith the social world in which we live – and are therefore not reducible to atomised individuals with consumer preferences. Current policy definitions of the individual and the citizen in terms of a narrow ideology of market values damage the fabric of old industrial cities and of poor neighbourhoods . Our findings reveal considerable resilience in the way young people, often from very deprived backgrounds, are able to develop their own agendas, often in opposition to those being set for them on high. As the DWP report duly noted, caring for family, putting something back into the community, doing worthwhile jobs are often ranked more highly than a narrow focus on personal mobility and individual advancement. In relation to paid employment, it is not surprising that people tend to privilege earning enough to provide for them and their families over the kinds of higher level jobs and aspirational salaries that they know will be out of reach for most of them. This reflects a realistic assessment of their economic situation and a deeper rooted class divide that they are confronted with, rather than an absence of aspiration.

In this regard, nearly all of the young people we encountered were clear about the need for quality education, training and employment; in the words of one of our respondents:

**Social circumstances stop people having the motivation to do like what they want to do in life. I'm sure everyone would like to have a career. So if you are saying that 'Oh I think everyone should just have a job', it's not the same thing." (Focus Group, June 2008)**

This participant put her finger firmly on what is at stake in the final analysis: the difference between 'just having a job' or the ability to formulate and pursue a career.

For young people in particular, their ability to negotiate the labour market depends largely upon their family and community connections, or the variable quality of support open to them from government agencies and voluntary organisations. Our evidence shows that there remains considerable community resilience and reciprocal networks of

support that help people to negotiate everyday life in the city. These are often at odds with government workfare agendas that at their worst threaten such informal networks. In this regard, a narrow employability agenda that is targeted primarily at getting people off benefits and into work, irrespective of their circumstances, will continue to fail to improve the lives of many vulnerable young people.

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We are very interested in your feedback, comments or questions on this discussion paper. Please contact either Andy Cumbers ([Andrew.Cumbers@ges.gla.ac.uk](mailto:Andrew.Cumbers@ges.gla.ac.uk)) or Gesa Helms ([g.helms@lbss.gla.ac.uk](mailto:g.helms@lbss.gla.ac.uk)).

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