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RICH, STEPHANIE,FRANCES

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**Is Welfare Working? A qualitative longitudinal multi-case study on the experiences of young unemployed people engaging with Active Labour Market Policies, in the North-East of England.**

This thesis explores the lived experiences of 28 young people in seven locations in the North-East of England who were unemployed and engaging with aspects of Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs) between 2012 and 2014. The research set out to give young people who were directly affected by these Active Labour Market Policies, particularly in the context of shifting levels of support for young unemployed people and increasing conditionality and sanctions associated to benefits, a voice about how this was impacting on them.

The research adopted a qualitative longitudinal multi-case study approach. The findings document the young people's barriers to employment and their related perspectives and experiences of the JobCentre Plus in particular as an interface of the government's ALMPs.

It was found that corrective methods to unemployment kept churning these young people between being off benefits, albeit short-term, and back on again as new claimants. It was not a simple case of young people choosing not to work; there was an inter-play between structure and agency. The structure of place and institutions that interacted with these young people shaped the choices the young people chose or were able to make. Here the research argues that the structure of agency needs to be addressed in order to tackle youth unemployment.

**Is Welfare Working?**

**A qualitative longitudinal multi-case study on the  
experiences of young unemployed people engaging with  
Active Labour Market Policies, in the North-East of England.**

**This thesis is submitted to the University of Durham for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**By Stephanie Rich**

**School of Applied Social Sciences**

**May 23<sup>rd</sup> 2018**

**Statement of copyright**

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**For Eve, Jimmy and Hugh**

## Contents page

List of tables	10
Table of Acronyms	11
<b>Part 1</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction</b>	<b>13</b>
Introducing key terms	14
Setting the thesis structure	18
<b>Chapter 2 A review of the literature on the international context of ALMPs comparative to the UK</b>	<b>24</b>
Youth unemployment in an international context	24
ALMPs in OECD countries	26
The different typologies of ALMPs	29
A wider literature analysis and comparison of ALMP's	36
The impact of ideology on ALMPs	38
Young people, individualisation and blame	40
The context of the UK ALMP	42
Youth Training Scheme	43
New Deal for Young People (NDYP) and the Future Jobs Fund (FJF)	45
The Future Jobs Fund	49
The Work Programme	50
How the Welfare Reform Bill (2011) continues to drive the UK ALMP Work Programme Design	51
(1) The Universal Credit (UC) system	52
(2) The Youth Contract	53
(3) The new JC+ design	54
Conclusion: Summarising the effect of UK ALMPs on young people	57
<b>Chapter 3 A review of literature on the needs of young people</b>	<b>59</b>
The particular needs young people have in the labour market	59
How youth unemployment is affected by wider economic conditions and ALMP interventions	60
The precarity of young people	63
Mapping young people's experiences of place	67
Young people and spatial disparities	68
The impact of sanctions and conditionality on young people	70
A divergence in the concepts of young people's needs and the delivery of ALMP's	72
Structure and Agency explanations of youth unemployment	73
Gaming the system?	78



Control: realist governmentality and the role of regulation and resistance	80
Realist Governmentality	81
The role of rights and responsibilities in control	85
The role of classification in control	86
The role of resistance against control	88
Relevance to the research	91
<b>Part 2</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>Chapter 4 Methods and Methodology</b>	<b>94</b>
Overall Research Aim and Associated Rationale	94
Comparative multicase-study	97
Sampling	98
Introduction to the 28 cases in the research	101
Cases from East Durham Partnership (EDP)	101
Cases from New College	103
Cases from Albert Kennedy Trust (AKT)	106
Cases from Newcastle college	109
Contact with the young people	110
Setting the geographical context of my research	111
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	112
Elswick	113
County Durham	114
Easington	115
Horden & Cassop	116
Peterlee	117
Why ideology reflexivity matters	118
Understanding the young person's perspectives	121
(Re)presenting the young people's views	122
Were the young people presenting themselves in an authentic way?	122
Were the young people presenting their experiences honestly?	123
Should their truth be assumed as more or less true?	123
Use of qualitative methods and data collection	124
Focus groups	125
Interviews	126
Semi-structured interviews	129
Unstructured interviews	131
Facebook, email and phone	131

Additional interviews	135
Ethical considerations	136
Informed consent	136
Analysis	139
Transcription	140
Challenges	141
Change to original research strategy	141
Not getting too involved and keeping young people’s confidence	142
Conclusion to the methods Chapter	144
<b>Part 3 Findings</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>Chapter 5 What the young people said- barriers and experiences</b>	<b>145</b>
Overall introduction part 3	145
Introduction to this chapter – key themes in the young people’s perspectives	146
1. Public transport	147
2. Lack of qualifications or experience	149
3. Lack of jobs	152
4. Immigration/immigrants	157
5. Criminal record	159
6. Illness	161
Conclusion	163
<b>Chapter 6 Young people’s interactions with ALMPs</b>	<b>164</b>
Introduction	164
Fake/ irrelevant jobs	165
Qualifications, training and JC+ employability services	168
Conditionality and Sanctions	174
Voluntary unemployment	181
Selectivity of young people	187
Benefits over low-level jobs	193
Analysis	196
<b>Chapter 7 Control: interaction, surveillance &amp; resistance</b>	<b>198</b>
Interaction between the young people’s agency and attempted strategies of control	198
Normalisation and self-regulation	199
Surveillance and control	202
Loss of control	205
Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA)	206
Resistance to Control	208

Analysis	213
<b>Part 4</b>	<b>215</b>
<b>Chapter 8 Conclusion</b>	<b>216</b>
Introduction and revisiting the aim of the research	216
Summary of the findings	216
The impact of structures and how individuals respond and act to systems	218
The ALMP and the JC+ system	223
What the UK can learn from other countries' ALMPs	224
What the UK could learn from the German model	226
How the UK could improve aspects of its ALMP	227
Job creation, education and training	227
Acknowledging the structure of agency	230
Surveillance and policy discourses in the JC+ system	231
Recommendations looking forward	235
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>237</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>255</b>
<b>Appendix 1</b> NDYP phased approach	<b>256</b>
<b>Appendix 2</b> Work Programme support and referral by customer group and 3 main principles	<b>257</b>
<b>Appendix 3</b> JC+ work related requirements	<b>260</b>
<b>Appendix 4</b> Profile of the organisations used	<b>262</b>
<b>Appendix 5</b> Breakdown of research contact with each case	<b>266</b>
<b>Appendix 6</b> Comparative table of qualifications	<b>267</b>
<b>Appendix 7</b> Semi-structured interview aides memoire	<b>269</b>

## List of tables, figures and graphs

<b>Table of Acronyms</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Table 1</b> Youth unemployment and working age unemployment in selected European countries 2014	<b>25</b>
<b>Table 2</b> ALMP spending by across selected European countries, 2009	<b>27</b>
<b>Figure 1</b> Berry's typology of ALMP approaches across Western Europe	<b>34</b>
<b>Graph 1</b> Unemployment rate and unemployment proportion of young people in England	<b>47</b>
<b>Graph 2</b> UK Unemployment rates by age group 1975-2009	<b>61</b>
<b>Table 3</b> Labour market activity and qualification level of area population by Ward	<b>112</b>
<b>Table 4</b> Breakdown of the stages of research according to the organisations the young people attended	<b>126</b>
<b>Table 5</b> Contextual themes	<b>146</b>
<b>Table 6</b> Issues addressed Chapter 6	<b>165</b>
<b>Table 7</b> Job density figures by Local Authority, March 2015	<b>186</b>
<b>Table 8</b> The outcome of the young people at the end of the research	<b>211</b>

## **Table of Acronyms**

ALMP	Active Labour Market Policy
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ESA	Employment Support Allowance
FND	Flexible New Deal
IB	Incapacity Benefit
IS	Income Support
JC+	JobCentre Plus
JSA	Job Seekers Allowance
MSC	Manpower Services Commission
MWA	Mandatory Work Assessment
NDYP	New Deal for Young People
UJM	Universal JobMatch
WCA	Work Capability Assessment
WP	Work Programme
WSM	Work Service Manager
YC	Youth Contract
YP	Youth Programme
YOP	Youth Opportunity Programme
YPG	Young Person's Guarantee
YTS	Youth Training Scheme

## **Part 1**

### **Chapter One**

#### **Introduction**

Youth unemployment is a persistent issue across many countries (Bell & Blanchflower 2011, Crisp & Powell 2016), affecting 431,000 young people aged 18-24 years in the UK in 2017 according to official statistics (Powell *et al* 2017: 2). Active labour market policies (ALMPs) have increasingly been used by governments to respond to the issue of youth unemployment, typically consisting of a range of interventions including job creation schemes, employability courses, education, training, jobs- and skills-matching initiatives, increased conditionality for welfare claimants, benefit reductions and sanctions (Bonoli 2010, Crisp & Powell 2016). However, the strategies enacted by these policies, and the implementation and effectiveness of ALMPs are widely contested (Card *et al* 2010, Kluge *et al* 2012, Rueda 2007, Wiggan 2015). In particular, there are questions about how young people experience and interact with ALMPs, and whether the policies sufficiently address structural and geographic constraints affecting employment rates for specific groups of young people in a given local context.

My thesis follows the experiences of 28 unemployed young people, aged 18-24 years, as they encountered ALMPs in a local context -the North East of England- and includes the welfare-to-work interventions put in place to implement these. The Government defines young people as being aged 18-24 years and uses this age criterion to determine eligibility for Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA) benefits and the public employment services<sup>1</sup>. My research adopts the Government's definition of young people.

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<sup>1</sup> At £57.90 in Job Seeker's Allowance per week for the 18-24 age group, this payment for this category is lower than for those 25 and over at £73.10 per week ([www.gov.uk/jobseekers-allowance](http://www.gov.uk/jobseekers-allowance) accessed 3rd April 2018 ).

My thesis is concerned foremost with the perspectives of the 28 young people who participated in the research, as they narrated their everyday experiences over an extended period concerning various aspects of their relationships with the labour market and ALMPs, including unemployment, and the processes of getting a job and keeping it in the local context of the research. Through observing the young people's accounts, the thesis also explores how they responded to these experiences within a wider local context. A particular focus when analysing these accounts involved the experiences of the young people with the Jobcentre Plus (JC+), a service set up by the government to help those who are unemployed back into work. In this context, the JC+ was a key point of interaction between the young people and the wider ALMPs interventions implemented by the state, as the JC+'s role was being fulfilled through a range of measures which were claimed by the government to be aimed at attempting to activate young people into getting a job, including through employability measures, increased benefits conditionality and the implementation of sanctions to penalise young people who fail to fulfil imposed conditions. A particular focus of the research was on how the young people perceived their experiences of the local context, as well as interactions with the JC+, influencing their choices as they negotiated their relationship with the labour market over the period of the research.

### **Introducing key terms**

To address this topic, Labour Market Policies (LMPs), ALMPs, activation strategies, welfare-to-work interventions, and JC+ services are all key concepts in my research. As such, they need to be defined and contextualised before their impact on the young people can be considered.

LMP interventions are defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development as "Public interventions in the labour market aimed at reaching its efficient functioning" (OECD 2014: 3). These typically include interventions targeted at groups of people with difficulties in the labour market: the unemployed, people employed but at risk of involuntary job loss and persons inactive in the labour market who would like to enter the labour market (*ibid*). LMP services cover

all services and activities of the public employment service, together with any other publicly-funded services for jobseekers; the type of action adopted classifies labour market interventions, such as training and employment incentives.

The standard classification of labour market policies followed by the OECD and Eurostat database<sup>2</sup> distinguishes between so-called 'active' measures (e.g. job-search assistance, training, public sector job creation and subsidised employment in the private sector) and 'passive' measures (e.g. unemployment insurance and related welfare benefits paid to the unemployed) (Martin 2014: 5). Martin (2014) concedes that there is no agreed definition of the concept of activation regarding LMPs; however the OECD describes activation strategies as typically aiming:

*“to bring more people into the effective labour force, to counteract the potentially negative effect of unemployment and related benefits on work incentives by enforcing their conditionality on active job search and participation in measures to improve employability, and to manage employment services and the other labour market resources so that they effectively promote and assist the return to work”*  
(OECD 2013:132 in Martin 2014:3)

The underlying idea with activation has been to shift the balance of public spending on LMPs away from passive spending, such as expenditure on unemployment insurance and other related welfare benefits, towards spending on ALMPs and other activation strategies, and in that way help to reduce structural unemployment (Martin 2014). ALMPs have a broad spectrum of characteristics within Labour Market Policies (LMPs); these can include incentives, training or education and subsidies.

An “active approach to labour market policy has been promoted by international agencies and adopted in several OECD countries” (Bonoli 2014:6) since the 1980s. In the context of the UK, the UK is an OECD member with a long history of

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<sup>2</sup> A dissemination database that provides official statistics in the EU, EU member states and sub-state regions.



activation policies dating back to the 1980s to promote quick entry or re-entry into the labour market, starting with requirements for claimants of unemployment benefits to actively seek work as a condition of their benefit (*ibid*). As ALMPs have since evolved in this context, a stricter benefit regime from the late 1980s informed the introduction of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) in 1996 (Watts *et al* 2014) with increased conditionality and job search monitoring incorporated from 1999 (OECD 2016). Over the course of this evolution, previously exempt groups, including lone parents and other inactive groups, have been required to take part in some form of active job-seeking (Martin 2014). There have been considerable debates over the effectiveness of ALMPs, as the thesis will consider.

ALMPs are commonly used to “fight youth unemployment and improve future labour market prospects” (Staneva 2015:7). Youth unemployment has risen sharply since the 2008 recession level of 14.8%, in a context of lower labour market demand, rising to 19.3% at the time of my thesis research in 2013 (ONS 2013); this has “given impetus to implement youth ALMPs” (*ibid*:5). Activation policies “draw on many tools that can be assembled in different ways” (OECD 2016: 3). Political determinants of ALMPs shape the aims, nature, process and outcomes of ALMPs, as do the relationships between ALMPs and wider forms of economic organisation (Berry 2014a); political and economic factors interact to affect each other. As a result ALMPs change over time as economies change, and vary between countries as welfare states do. This makes comparison a complex task: as welfare states' conditions differ, so ALMPs impact differently in different contexts. There are causes of youth unemployment that need to be understood, as well as lack of demand for labour, “in order to design an effective ALMP” (Staneva 2015:5) such as lack of education and experience of the young person. Nevertheless it is still important to understand how welfare states have responded to youth unemployment and what the impact has been to try and find out what works and what doesn't, in what contexts, and why.

Bonoli illustrates these variants with the difference between objectives in the pioneering scheme in Sweden in the 1950s from “current British or German or even

current Swedish policy” (Bonoli 2010: 6). Furthermore, ALMPs have also evolved and developed with differing degrees of endorsement by different countries. Whilst OECD countries are increasingly promoting and adopting ALMPs, Rueda (2007) argues that these policies are not employment friendly as they undermine workers’ power and autonomy; ALMPs are “designed to promote entry into the labour market of outsiders who will underbid insiders’ wage demands” (Rueda 2007: 74). Despite varying degrees of enthusiasm or criticism of ALMPs in different contexts, they have become implemented across a wide range of different countries. Yet the notion of ALMPs can cover a range of different potential interventions, and also varying ideas of and levels of successful outcomes (Card *et al* 2012). Evidence for the impact of different ALMPs on unemployment will be considered further in Chapter two. To begin to illustrate the importance of recognising different types within these overall definitions, Card *et al*’s (2012) meta-analysis of ALMPs measured their success of lowering long-term unemployment on a short-term and long-term basis. They found that ALMPs that invested in human capital and labour creation showed slow short-term success but strong long-term success as the initiative came into fruition. ALMPs that focused spending on incentives and behaviour modification recorded good short-term results but disappointing long-term outcomes. Likewise, Griggs & Evans’ (2010:5) systematic review of international evidence on the use of sanctions as a form of activation intervention within the welfare benefits systems concludes that: “sanctions for employment-related conditions strongly reduce benefit use and raise exits from benefits, but have generally unfavourable effects on longer term outcomes (earnings, overtime, child welfare, job quality) and spill-over effects (i.e. crime rates)” (Griggs & Evans 2010:5).

Numerous models have been formulated and adopted for the ambiguous term “ALMP” in order to devise an analytical tool to classify their many forms. These have included dichotomous models looking at positive and negative activation (Taylor Gooby 2004), human investment versus incentive-based activation (Barbier 2004), Dean’s (2007a) two dimensional analysis according to rights or responsibilities of the recipient, Bonoli’s (2010) four ideal types based on spending

classifications, and beyond (Kluve *et al* 2012; Berry 2014a).

It should be noted here that this is by no means an exhaustive list; indeed, the nature of ALMPs and their implementation may change over time and according to political and economic change and interactions (Bonoli 2010), leaving the possibility for further future reclassifications. The wider economic environment has wider implications for ALMPs as in times of economic recession and retrenchment, most recently seen in 2008, there tends to be an increase in unemployment amongst particular groups such as young people.

This variation in ALMPs and some of the frameworks being used to classify and analyse them are introduced here to illustrate the range of interventions being adopted under the term “ALMP” in order to stimulate active labour market participation, including the measures taken, the processes involved and the subsequent outcomes. This has been further complicated by the ways in which countries have learned from how others have developed ALMPs and then adapted theirs accordingly. Germany, for example, adapted its unemployment policy in 2002 based on research into ALMPs in Denmark, The Netherlands and in the UK (*ibid*: 9); “the UK, in turn found its inspiration in the US Clinton reforms of the early 1990s” (*ibid*). The UK spends relatively little on supply-side Labour Market interventions compared to European neighbours and what it does spend is highly concentrated on a particular form of intervention: employment support and job searches. In the UK context, features of changes to ALMPs during this period have included a stronger focus on claimants’ rights and responsibilities, and increased benefit conditionality and sanctions, to promote active labour market participation (as discussed further in Chapter two). These approaches seek to generate a greater supply of labour for the labour market, known as supply side policy. The drivers for this have been an austerity-led deficit reduction strategy and neo-liberal ideology, firstly New Labour and then Conservative.

Welfare-to-work interventions that encourage unemployed people receiving welfare benefits to find a job are only one such intervention; there are numerous political initiatives which could be used to address youth unemployment. Another

example is education to generate a greater supply of labour qualified for a certain labour market service (Berry 2014a); this will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 2)

Young people are a distinct and varied group that are in a particularly challenging position as they are more likely to lack experience and qualifications needed to compete in the labour market; this “lack of employment experience acts as an acute disadvantage for young people” (Berry 2014a: 9). Young people are nearly three times more likely to be unemployed than any other age group (Boffey 2015) and in 2015 while unemployment overall decreased, youth unemployment went up (ONS 2015).

My thesis focuses particularly on young people in relation to ALMPs because, in the context of austerity and post austerity measures, the experiences that young people have of unemployment and entering employment are therefore going to be significantly influenced by the type of ALMP interventions implemented by their governments. In the UK context, this policy model is focused on “improving the employability of individuals rather than enhancing opportunities for employment available to them” (Berry 2014a: 10). Exploring how young people are identifying with and experiencing these interventions is therefore critical in order to examine properly what is working for young people in this context, what isn’t and why.

### **Setting the thesis structure**

The rest of this introductory section will set out the organisation of the thesis. The thesis has four core parts; part one contains a review of the international situation and academic and political debate surrounding these issues. I then critically examine literature around present active labour market policies and the context of these policies today by mapping the evolution of ALMPs in the UK since 1983. Part two explains the methods and methodology used in my research, part three presents and discusses the findings over three Chapters and part four draws conclusions.

**Part one** has three Chapters.

**Chapter two** introduces the 'International Context'. I examine how ALMPs feature in other welfare states and chart the international variance in ALMPs and their impact on youth unemployment. I review international literature that compares different countries' approaches and situations in relation to youth unemployment, and the impact of the 2008 recession on an international scale, to gauge the vulnerabilities of young people to a changing labour market. I argue that although the vulnerabilities of young people to the changing labour market are not restricted to the UK, these problems impact youth differently depending on what type of ALMPs are being implemented. I then look at the way UK ALMPs, in particular in England, have been implemented. I look back from the Conservatives' (2015) ALMP reform and chart both (i) how previous governments' ALMP responses to youth unemployment have changed since the inception of the YTS in 1983; and (ii) the impact that ALMPs have had on youth unemployment itself. This is in order to give a background to the most recent policy reform by setting this in the context of how governments have consistently developed UK ALMPs over years and decades to become increasingly incentive-based, punitive and conditional. Despite these reforms, I show that youth unemployment in this context continues to persist.

In **Chapter three**, I address the different issues that young people face when unemployed and seeking employment. I review literature concerning the multiple nature of disadvantage that young people can face, and thus the diversity of contexts that young people can be in. I also explore why this direction of ALMP development has persisted despite the persistence of high youth unemployment by critically reviewing literature with a specific focus on how ideologies may inform ALMPs and the complexities with implementing them. Subsequently, I study the differing arguments that explore the implications of debates over the relationship between structure and agency to explain youth unemployment and young people's actions.

I use the rest of this Chapter to examine literature regarding the concept of control in relation to young people who are unemployed and their interactions with ALMP-

related institutions. In particular, I review literature concerning the effects of the element of control, both in how it is exercised over the young people and how the young people interact with it. This includes examining this literature in relation to how young people are assessed by policies, how they are treated and how they are expected to respond, and furthermore how the young people themselves actually respond to these types of control. Here I argue that the already complex issues of youth unemployment and the use of ALMPs as a solution are made more complex when ideological assumptions, structural factors and the nature of young people's agency are taken into consideration.

The purpose of the critique of UK ALMPs developed through this literature review is to open up new possibilities for alternative approaches rather than just consider this well-worn discussion in another format. I argue that one crucial part that is missing from UK government considerations of ALMP implementation is the voices of the young people affected by these policies.

**Part two** (consisting just of Chapter four) focuses on the methodology and methods of my research as a whole, in which I discuss how I conducted my research into the perspectives of some young people in the particular context of the North East of England, and how this may add to existing understandings of these issues.

In **Chapter four** I therefore detail the methods and research design used, and outline the research aims. I explain and justify my use of the chosen qualitative methods, data collection and analysis alongside how I selected the 28 young people and the importance of understanding their perspectives of the system they were experiencing. In doing so, I acknowledge and discuss the presence of values in research and method selection, including within my own research. I also reflect on the relevance of policy and ideology in research, specifically my research, and the significance of research to policy. I describe the process of my field study and explain how I used a series of focus groups and subsequently individual interviews with young people experiencing unemployment and engaged with ALMP initiatives in the chosen context to ground the research in the experiences of the young people. I spoke with most of the participants at least three times over a six-month

period. I contacted these participants after eleven months to catch up with what their circumstances and employment statuses were. I kept in touch with each participant via phone, email and Facebook, which made this contact possible. I go on to explain my sampling process, including profiles of the organisations I used to gain access to my participants. I then discuss any ethical considerations I had throughout my research and how I complied with ethical guidelines, specifically concerning potentially vulnerable groups. I conclude by assessing and reflecting on the challenges I faced during my research before evaluating the original contribution to knowledge that my research generated as a result of the research design and method that I used.

In **Part three** I describe, examine and then analyse my findings. The findings are organised into three main segments.

**Chapter five** lays out the young people's perspectives of their barriers to employment. The young people's narratives are presented using six contextual barriers; these are: public transport, lack of qualifications or experience, lack of jobs, immigration/immigrants, criminal record, ill health. The cumulative nature of these barriers on the young people's experience will then be introduced.

**Chapter six** looks at these barriers and their cumulative effects in a wider critical context with comparison to data from an interview with a JC+ work service manager (WSM), further policy documents and wider evidence. I build upon the findings in Chapter five to examine the young people's interactions with ALMPs and the effect that these interactions had on the young people's behaviour in getting a job. I examine the role that structure and agency played in the young people's experiences of the benefits system, labour market and ALMP measures in place to modify behaviour in order to make them 'more employable'. I argue that there is interplay between the structures and young people's agency in that the structures and ALMP interventions implemented by the JC+ have impacted on the young people's agency without 'correcting' their behaviour. The extent to which structure or agency dominates in explaining youth unemployment in this interplay, is down to

whose perspective is being taken. In the case of the young people in this research, the dominant perspective being applied is that of the Government.

**Chapter seven** observes the role that ideology and control have been found to have on the young people in my research. I study ways that ALMPs exercise control through normalisation and self-regulation and the role of surveillance in maintaining control. I then address the ways that the young people in my research have responded and adapted to these strategies and loss of control. I identify these responses as: cost benefit analysis and resistance to control. I draw further upon the significance of structure in relation to the young people's agency in these situations and suggest that these ALMPs are framing the problem and hence the solution wrongly, which therefore stifles the young people's agency as they are controlled by an ALMP that is not working. The recommendations from these findings are then discussed in the concluding Chapter eight.

**Part four; Chapter eight** is the concluding Chapter that ties the threads of the three findings Chapters together (Chapters 5, 6, 7). In this Chapter, I conclude that the structure of socio-geographical factors impacted greatly on the transitions, trajectories and precariousness of the young people in my research. The barriers to employment that the young people cited throughout the research support this. I deduced that where the young people live is important to their experiences with the labour market, past and present, and to their opportunities and chances. Where they live also impacts on the choices they are able to, and decide, to make. This is what I identify as the structure of agency: how structures are impacting on the young people's agency and therefore how transitions, trajectories, and precarious situations are also shaped by the evolution of neo-liberal ALMPs.

This concept of the structure of agency is also found through the relationship between ALMPs and young people, in this case the role of the JC+ that delivers the frontline services to the young people is significant. The ways that the JC+ meets its aims through exercising control to regulate the young people, despite the young people's resistance, again shapes their agency. In this instance, I found young



people's resistance to be a coping mechanism to deal with their situation; unemployed and on benefits, rather than a form of striving for liberation.

I therefore conclude that a primary problem is that the ALMPs are based on the framing of a problem of youth unemployment that assumes young people are free agents. The policies do not take into account the interplay between structure and agency and so the solution to youth unemployment does not fit and isn't working due to the mismatch between the service provisions expected by all of the young people in the research and the service provision on offer to them. We need to reframe the problem by listening to and taking into account the experiences of the young people in order to understand the problem better and then come up with a more informed solution based on these insights.

## **Chapter 2**

### **A review of the literature on the international context of ALMPs**

#### **comparative to the UK**

In my introduction, I began to highlight how youth unemployment remains a global issue, whilst particular levels of unemployment between different countries and the types of ALMPs implemented by them vary. In this Chapter, I will review in more detail the impact of the changing labour market on young people by introducing youth unemployment in an international context. In particular, I will critically analyse different types, typologies, and ways of implementing ALMPs in further detail, including exploring the impact of ideology on ALMPs and young people when they involve elements of individualisation and blame. This comparative analysis of ALMP types, their objectives, results and outcomes will offer an international context in which to map and place the evolution of ALMPs in the UK. I will look back on UK ALMPs since the 1983 Youth Training Scheme (YTS) which, as Watts *et al* (2014) argue, have successively and collectively marked substantial increases in conditionality and the severity of sanctions for non-compliance. This Chapter will form the basis of my argument that we need to understand the different contexts of ALMPs to appreciate the political structure that shapes the evolution of UK ALMPs and the effect they are having on young people.

#### **Youth unemployment in an international context**

As highlighted above, youth unemployment is an endemic problem across many countries, and leaves young people particularly vulnerable to changes in the wider economic context. The OECD acknowledges that the youth labour market internationally is “hugely cyclical and young people are disproportionately affected by the impact of the 2008 recession” (OECD 2016: 45). This can be problematic if more young people are impacted by this labour market event and find it difficult to escape the effects of this cycle. The International Labour Organisation has called the situation of youth unemployment a “global crisis” (ILO 2012: 1). This crisis not

only impacts singularly on countries but also interacts and cumulates amongst countries (Lanning & Rudiger 2012). The degree to which countries were affected by the recession, and how they responded to it, varied greatly.

The trend in the UK has been a decline in youth unemployment, but at 17% in 2014, over twice the UK working age unemployment rate of 6.1% (ONS 2015), youth unemployment is still comparatively high compared to the working age population. Although the level of spending by countries on their ALMPs differs, Table 1 shows that the UK is by no means alone in its problem of youth unemployment:

**Table 1- Youth unemployment and working age unemployment in selected European countries 2014,**

Country	% Youth (18-24) unemployment 2014	% Working age (16-64) unemployment 2014
UK	17	6.1
Denmark	12.6	6.6
France	24.2	10.3
Germany	7.7	5
Italy	42.7	12.7
Sweden	22.9	7.9
Greece	52.4	26.5

Source: ONS (2015)

Bell & Blanchflower (2011) claim that the adverse effects of the recession on youth unemployment have been especially felt in countries affected by national debt crises such as Greece, Ireland, and Spain. Unemployment disproportionately impacts on young people compared to other age groups. In 2012, “the unemployment rate among young persons was higher than the rate among those aged between 25 and 74 in all of the EU Member States” (Eurostat 2012 online).

The OECD Outlook (2016) reports that economic recovery is continuing in OECD countries post-recession; however “vulnerable groups such as low skilled youth neither in education, employment or training are at risk of being left behind” (OECD 2016: 17).

At the time my research started, the European Commission (2011) reported that educational qualifications are still the best insurance against unemployment<sup>3</sup>. The average unemployment rate in the EU-27 for those having attained at most a lower secondary education was 16.7 %, much higher than the rate of unemployment for those that had obtained a tertiary education qualification (5.6 %) (*ibid*). The same correlation has also been found in the US and Australia: “youth unemployment has broadly similar features across countries, being heavily concentrated among the least educated” (Bell & Blanchflower 2011: 2). Addressing this issue therefore becomes a larger process which includes acknowledging the impact of wider factors such as education in contributing to distributions of unemployment in the population.

### **ALMPs in OECD countries**

Between the 1980s and 1990s, OECD countries have made a progressive shift from passive income support<sup>4</sup> to active measures to install ALMPs (Bell & Blanchflower 2011). Governments across Europe have devoted resources to setting up and promoting active labour market programmes designed to increase the proportion of the population in employment and endorsed in the 1997 European Employment Strategy (EES 1997 online). “Spending across the European Union on activation policies increased fourfold overall between 1980 and 1999” (Taylor-Gooby 2004: 20). However ALMPs have been implemented differently in different countries, including a difference in spending on these policies, as **table 2** shows.

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<sup>3</sup> This was found to be so in all Member States except for Greece and Cyprus in 2011 (European Commission 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Passive income support measures involve extra money being given to help people on a low income, who are unable to work or don’t work many hours, particularly carers and parents.

For Berry, there is therefore relatively “limited value in assessing headline spending rates alone” (2014a: 6). Berry’s (2014a: 12) analysis of ALMP spending by type across selected OECD countries from 2010, highlighted in **table 2**, shows that it is not just the amount a country spends on ALMPs that is important, but the types of interventions in which a country invests.

**Table 2 ALMP spending by across selected European countries, 2009**

Active labour market policy spending by type across selected European countries, 2009					
		Labour market services	Training	Incentives (i.e. job subsidies)	Supported employment
Austria	% GDP	0.2	0.5	0.1	neg
	% total	22	60	6	5
Belgium	% GDP	0.3	0.2	0.5	0.1
	% total	16	12	36	10
Denmark	% GDP	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.7
	% total	21	20	13	46
France	% GDP	0.3	0.4	0.1	0.1
	% total	26	37	10	8
Germany	% GDP	0.4	0.4	0.1	neg
	% total	38	36	10	4
Italy	% GDP	neg	0.2	0.2	-
	% total	9	45	40	-
Ireland	% GDP	0.2	0.3	neg	neg
	% total	23	39	6	1
Netherlands	% GDP	0.4	0.1	0.2	0.5
	% total	32	11	15	42
Poland	% GDP	0.1	neg	0.2	0.2
	% total	16	6	26	34
Sweden	% GDP	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.2
	% total	24	7	42	25
Spain	% GDP	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.1
	% total	17	22	28	9
United Kingdom	% GDP	0.3	neg	neg	neg
	% total	90	4	3	2

Berry (2014a:12)

In 2009, the UK was one of the lowest spenders on its ALMPs in terms of proportion of GDP and what little is spent was focused almost entirely on labour market services. Denmark, whose labour market is closest to that of the UK’s (Dean 2007, Berry 2014a), “is at the opposite end of the expenditure table” (Berry 2014a:12). Austria has one of the lowest unemployment rates but is not amongst the highest spenders, with 0.8% of its GDP going towards ALMP’s in **table 2**. Spain on the other hand spends more of its GDP on its ALMP, at 0.6%, but has the highest

youth unemployment of the countries in **table 2**.

This lack of a pattern between overall spending on ALMPs and youth unemployment suggests that ALMPs cannot be understood as “simply a response to unemployment or particular forms of unemployment” (Berry 2014a: 12). ALMPs can shape particular labour market practices; however, for Berry (2014a) this does not mean that countries with similar labour markets will have similar types of expenditure on ALMPs. For example, ALMPs also respond to wider economic conditions such as recessions, and ALMPs may differ according to different welfare states; explanations for variations may differ also. In comparative public policy, the political determinants of ALMPs are very much contested (Bonoli 2010: 7). As Bonoli understands this, ALMPs depend on the developments of the type of welfare capitalism and their different emphasis on ALMPs. The characteristics of Social Democratic Welfare States have focused on employee-friendly policies to ensure full employment in a changing labour market structure, whereas for example “Christian Democratic regimes have focused on job protection and increasing early retirement” (Huo *et al* 2008: 17). The type of spending within the ALMP also impacts on young people’s experiences of unemployment, as does the nature and structure of the ALMP.

Bonoli states “ALMPs have different origins and take different shapes” (Bonoli 2010: 10) from a focus on human investments and improving the match between demand and supply of labour through vocational programmes (Swenson 2002) to more active measures that combine sanctions with benefit limits and reductions and measures to create stronger work incentives (Peck 2001). To this extent, this makes the term ‘ALMP’ an ambiguous one (Clasen 2005, Clegg 2005). The OECD (2000) encourages the implementation of activation policies, but it is recognised that ALMPs can have mixed successes; whilst they can enable the “unemployed to keep in touch with the labour market” (OECD 2000:3), certain types of ALMPs can “distort the functioning of the labour market” (*ibid*) that it is designed to serve.

I am not suggesting that the only explanation for the variation in youth unemployment is the type of ALMP. If this were the case, it could be suggested that

every country adopts the one ALMP that delivers the highest success in reducing youth unemployment and improving prospects in the labour market. ALMPs do, though, have an impact on young people's experiences of unemployment and gaining employment. For Staneva (2015), the right mix of passive and active ALMPs is essential to solve the problem in each geographical and economic context. Staneva's research has found that a mix of positive interventions are deemed by the ILO as the most effective type of ALMP in the shape of wage subsidies and training to ensure skill development with wage subsidies. Programmes depend on "how they are combined with individual skills and employer involvement" (Staneva 2015:71) and with other follow up measures. I will now explain some of the different typologies of ALMPs.

### **The different typologies of ALMPs**

Numerous models have been formulated and adopted to devise an analytical tool to classify the many forms of ALMPs; Kluge (2014) classifies ALMP programmes in OECD countries into six categories, four program types and two target groups that correspond to those identified by the OECD and Eurostat (Kluge 2014: 4). The first type is Labour Market Training, such as classroom and on the job training and work experience, to provide recipients with general education or specific vocational skills. The main objective of this type is to "enhance the productivity and employability of the participants and to enhance human capital by increasing skills" (*ibid*). The second, demand side, category is the 'Private sector incentive program' with the objective of getting employers to hire new workers or maintain jobs through wage subsidies. A direct contrast to this is the third program type, 'Direct employment programs in the public sector'. This focuses on job creation and provision of activities that produce public goods or services and are mainly targeted at the most disadvantaged individuals. The objective here is to keep recipients in contact with the labour market and preclude loss of human capital during a period of unemployment. Nevertheless, the created jobs are often "additionally generated jobs not close to the ordinary labor market" (*ibid*: 5). The fourth program type is 'Services and sanctions'. This program aims at incentivising more efficient job

search behaviour through job search courses/clubs, vocational guidance, monitoring and sanctions. Kluve identifies that this tends to be carried out by a country's public employment service and is usually the least expensive program of these categories. Kluve distinguishes between 'carrot' and 'stick' approaches with these programs. He regards the first three program types as encouraging desirable behaviour ('carrots') and the fourth program type as being one that "exerts threats" (*ibid*) ('sticks'). Kluve further classifies two target groups for ALMPs: 'youth programs' (specifically for disadvantaged and unemployed young people), and 'measures for the disabled' including "vocational rehabilitation, sheltered work programs or wage subsidies for individuals with physical, mental or social disabilities" (*ibid*). He notes that these six are not mutually exclusive, as a youth program may constitute training and youth programmes, and national programmes often use multiple categories or programs, in conjunction with each other; for example Sweden has used job creation and training programs in its training replacement schemes (Calmfors *et al* 2002).

Taylor-Gooby (2004) makes distinctions between 'positive activation' types (involving, predominantly, Kluve's 'carrots' to improve skills for the unemployed and skills match to jobs), and 'negative activation' (Kluve's 'sticks', that concentrate on sanctions and benefit reductions to bring about behaviour modification of the unemployed).

Barbier (2004) takes a similar approach, in distinguishing between two types. Firstly, 'universalistic activation' (like Taylor-Gooby's 'positive activation') is concerned with human investment via job creation, skills matching and education and training. Barbier identifies this type of ALMP as present in Nordic countries. This is distinguished from the 'liberal activation' type, similar to Taylor-Gooby's 'negative activation that Barbier identifies in western liberal countries such as the UK and US with amongst the lowest expenditure of % GDP of OECD countries (OECD 2016). This is typified by sanctions and conditionality to incentivise work entry.

Dean's (2007a) model sorts countries according to the extent to which each country's ALMPs are egalitarian or authoritarian, the difference between the



entitlement and the duty to work, and the extent to which they are competitive or inclusive. Countries with ALMPs that are egalitarian and competitive, such as Denmark and the Netherlands, focus on human capital development, where the state helps people gain the skills they need to compete for work. Authoritarian and competitive ALMPs, such as that of the US, focus on a duty to work and focus on competition. Dean classifies Nordic countries as implementing ALMPs that are egalitarian and inclusive, as the state subsidises those who are unable to find work, which in turn shapes the labour market (Dean 2007a). France is defined, by Dean, as having an authoritarian and inclusive ALMP as there is conditionality on individuals to work, however jobs are created through the public sector. Dean did classify the UK as egalitarian and competitive until Freud's (2007) White paper that reformed welfare; Dean has since classified the UK as being in line with the US type.

These models allow us to begin to map and compare different countries' ALMPs in order to gain an insight into what works where and what doesn't in terms of policy implementation and reducing unemployment. However, if countries use ALMP programmes in conjunction with others, as Kluge (2006, 2014) and Dean (2007a) identify, then these typology models of ALMPs with two classifications at polar opposite stances will come unstuck if a country implements a carrot/ positive/ universal strategy alongside a stick/negative/liberal one. It is not that ALMPs cannot combine 'carrot' and 'stick' initiatives but that the number of variations in the combination of interventions in ALMPs is more than carrot or stick initiative, or both. There is also significant room for ALMPs to be classified within the same typology yet to have significant variation in its spending and policy implementations. As a result, these models could be vague or inaccurate when classifying some countries that use ALMPs.

Berry (2014a) notes that Dean's (2007a) approach does not take into account that many countries will straddle regimes. As a result, Dean fails to place Germany in his classification of countries' ALMPs and in doing so could miss what is distinctive about its ALMP, which could skew comparative analysis (Berry 2014a:13). Significantly, these models do not take into account spending on ALMP

interventions; for example, within Nordic countries, whilst Sweden spends a large amount on employment subsidies, Norway and Finland do not.

Bonoli (2010) regards the “dichotomies between human investments and incentive based approaches to activation” (*ibid*: 10) regarding ALMPs as useful to start to get to grips with it but an oversimplification<sup>5</sup>. Just as there can be a diffusion of policy ideas and countries taking inspiration from models that do or don’t work in other welfare states, the creation and evolution of other types of ALMPs are inevitable. Bonoli identifies four types based on the extent to which ALMPs show pro-market alignment and the extent to which they invest in human capital (*ibid*: 11). He concedes that, just like Esping Anderson’s ideal types of welfare capitalism, these ideal types are “unlikely to exist in their pure form in the real world” (*ibid*: 10). However looking at the extra element of spending in his analysis could make this model more applicable to real-world implementation of policy.

The first of his four ideal types consists of ‘Incentive reinforcement’ to strengthen positive and negative work incentives via tax credits, benefits reductions, increased conditionality and sanctions. Bonoli recognises this type as present “everywhere” (*ibid*) but predominantly found in English speaking countries, namely the UK, US and Australia. The second ideal type is ‘Employment assistance’ to remove obstacles to employment without necessarily affecting work incentives. Offering job subsidies, counselling and job search programmes to those who have been outside the labour market for a long time or never entered the labour market does this. This type is common in Nordic and Continental Europe and also used alongside ‘Incentive reinforcement’ in English speaking countries. The third ideal type is ‘occupation’ to keep unemployed people busy and minimize the human capital depletion that unemployment can cause. This is done through job creation schemes in the public sector and non-employment related training programmes. Bonoli identifies Continental European countries as the main user of this type of ALMP from the 1980’s and 1990’s. The fourth ideal type is ‘human capital investment’ to offer a second chance to people who “were not able to profit from the education

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<sup>5</sup> Barbier does recognise that a third typology may exist to account for Continental Europe (Barbier 2004, Barbier & Ludwig-Mayerhofer 2004).

system or whose skills have become obsolete” (*ibid*: 12); the aim is to up-skill the jobless through basic education and vocational training (*ibid*). Bonoli found that this type of ALMP is most developed in Nordic countries.

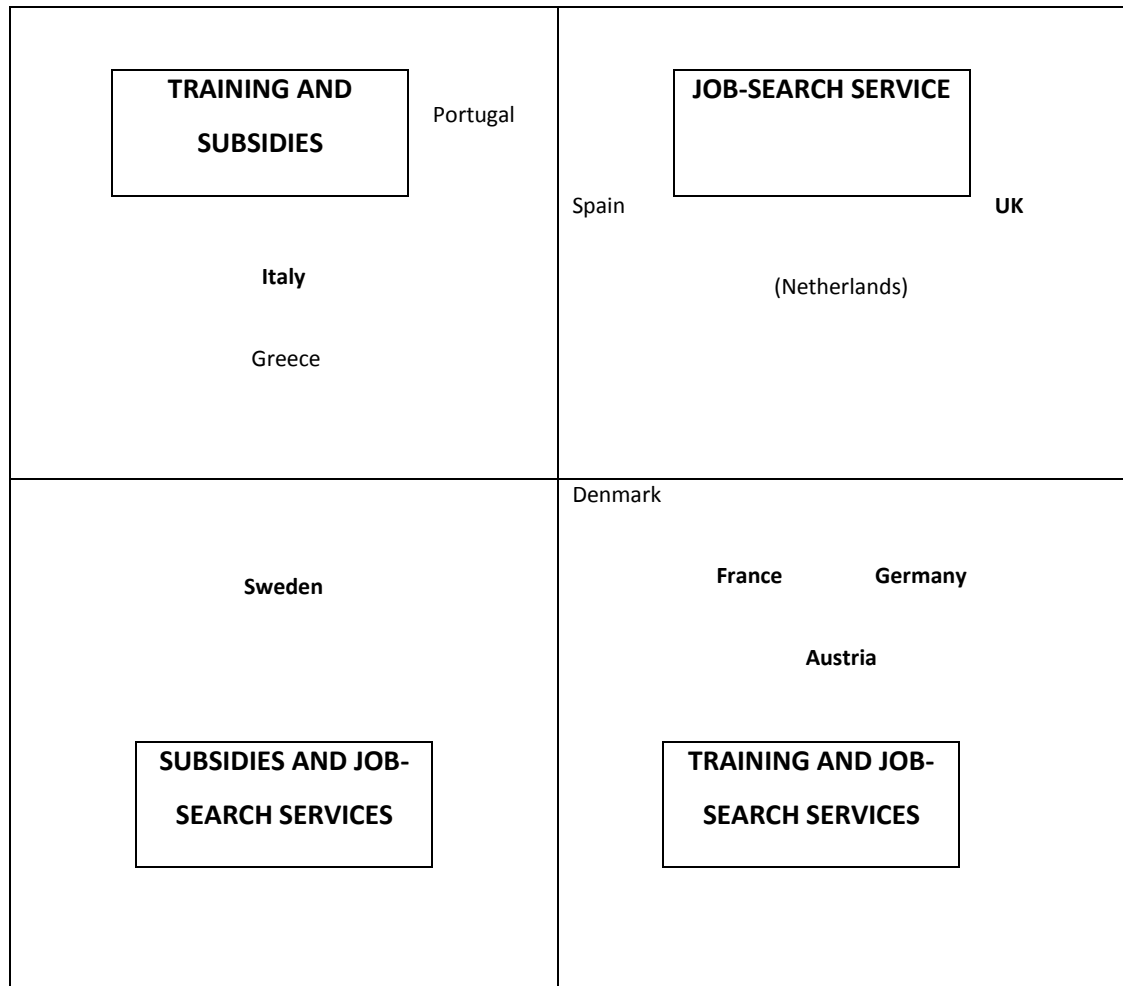
Here Bonoli seeks to address the issues concerning how political determinants shape ALMPs and how the interaction of these determinants and other contextual factors contribute to the configuration of the type of ALMP that is adopted by a particular country.

Berry (2014a) takes Bonoli’s (2010) spending based classification further and focuses his typologies more directly on the type of expenditure within the ALMP a country adopts. For Berry, any typology that focuses on ALMPs in “isolation from wider economic statecraft would confront the danger of over-simplification” (*ibid*: 14). Berry regards Bonoli’s typology as “problematic” (*ibid*) as three of his four ideal types are skewed towards a strong orientation to the market. Similarly Bonoli’s ‘human capital investment’ typology is not necessarily “anti-market but rather extra-market” (*ibid*), as this seeks to protect people from the demands from the market rather than shape it. Furthermore, Berry stresses that some countries focus human capital investment through “universal education programmes that would be difficult to classify in terms of supply-side employment policy, although they fulfill similar functions” (*ibid*). Although Berry does recognise ALMPs are considered as inherently pro-market, what is fundamental in understanding the difference between countries is to look at the nature of the economic context within which the ALMP interventions are made. This then explains why countries that have the same ALMP type, according to the typology models, will have different outcomes as they have, for example, different labour markets, employment policies or industrial policies.

Berry offers an alternate approach to classifying ALMPs for Western Europe by analyzing the different types of expenditure and the influence of policy areas that transcend ALMPs but nevertheless impinge on them. Berry begins by using four types according to the focus of the ALMP: (i) job-search and related services; (ii) training and employment subsidies (both classified as low level expenditure); (iii)

training and job-search services and (iv) employment subsidies and job search services (both classified as high expenditure)

**Figure1- Berry's (2014a:7) typology of ALMP approaches across Western Europe**



**Figure 1** shows Berry's typology of ALMP approaches across Western Europe. It shows each typology approach and maps the countries on the figure according to how close they are to other approaches. For Berry (2014a) the most important approach is one that focuses on Training and Job-Search services, taken on by France and Germany, although Germany has concentrated more spending on Job-search services and France has increased spending on training since the economic downturn and spends more on job creation in the public sector (*ibid* 15). The second approach, 'Job-search Service' is typified by the UK where the focus is on enabling people to find and take on any work as quickly as possible, Berry also notes Sweden and Germany as moving towards this approach post-recession 2008.

The Netherlands has aspects of this approach in its welfare provision, but Berry stresses that this has “little bearing on its approach to enabling employment in the mainstream economy” (*ibid*: 16). Where these countries are placed in these types needs to be understood according to their wider political and economic contexts. Although Germany’s ALMP framework has taken a direction towards Job-search service provision, its and France’s ALMPs “operate within a strong tradition of industrial policy” (*ibid*) based on job creation; Germany’s move towards Job-search Services is, according to Berry, a symptom of the partial decline of active industrial policy. In contrast, in the UK and Netherlands the level and type of labour demand is mainly through private institutions. ALMPs operate alongside “a complex benefits structure which incentivises work through the threat of sanctions and, increasingly, the promise of supplementary low wages” (Berry 2014a:16).

In the third type, ‘Subsidies and Job-search Services’, Berry bucks the trend and classifies Sweden as standing alone from other Nordic or Scandinavian countries. Where their welfare regimes may be grouped together, their ALMP focus differs. Sweden’s approach focuses on employment subsidies, whilst Denmark concentrates on training and job-search services and Norway and Finland spend more on training (*ibid*). Moreover, Sweden, as noted before is moving increasingly towards a UK style approach. The fourth approach, ‘Training and Employment Subsidies’ is most accurately represented by Italy and Greece. Berry also classifies Portugal and Spain as partially applicable to this type but they also focus on Job-search activity; albeit spending significantly less than the UK. Berry distinguishes this fourth type as “relatively inactive” (*ibid*). Italy and Spain spend relatively little on ALMPs, about the same as the UK. Italy and Greece also have amongst the highest levels of unemployment and youth unemployment in Europe (see **table 2**). This exemplifies Berry’s point that ALMPs do not “simply respond to labour market conditions but also help to shape them” (*ibid*). That the UK spends as little on ALMPs but has significantly lower unemployment than those clustering around this fourth type further illustrates the importance in the type of spending a country adopts within its labour market but also the flexibility of the UK labour market based on its policy focus. Berry (2014a) argues there is strong evidence of the cost-

effectiveness of using 'Job-search and Related Services' and a sharpening of focus towards this approach (Card *et al* 2010, Dolphin & Lawton 2013, CESI 2012, Wilson 2013) in the short-term. The shifts of countries such as Denmark, Sweden and Germany towards a UK type ALMP could therefore be indicative of their labour markets and economic strategies becoming anglicised, or at least a sign of homogenization across Europe. Despite the differences of ALMPs and policies these typologies are helpful for those trying to understand the labour market situations as they allow a comparative analysis that uncover the variations in the mix and wider intricacies of ALMPs so that we can strive to do better. Although there may be a homogenisation of economic strategies across some European countries, there will be variations in rules in each labour market and the contexts the ALMPs operate in are different and so individual experiences will be different.

The UK's unemployment rate could also represent the types of work and situations that are re-defined as employed, for example individuals on zero-hours contracts, and mask problems within the UK labour market such as underemployment and precarious employment, problems that "generally afflict the young disproportionately" (Berry 2014a: 17, Staneva 2015). Inequality in Germany may have grown considerably since 2000 with low-skilled workers experiencing substantial underemployment (OECD 2011) and the link between work and social inclusion may have been significantly weakened in Denmark (Nielsen *et al* 2010). Yet youth unemployment is still lower in these particular countries than in the UK.

### **A wider literature analysis and comparison of ALMPs**

Card *et al's* (2010) meta-analysis of ALMP's from 97 studies, found mixed results from the policy evaluation literature. There were some short-term positive effects in countries that adopted a UK based approach, such as decline in unemployment benefit rates and quicker movement of people off benefits and into work, but there was no upward trend in positive long-term outcomes over time. Similarly, the increased conditionality typically associated with 'Job-search and related services', namely the obligation to search for work and sanctions for non-compliance, showed mixed outcomes. Assessments of the use of sanctions in Germany, the

Netherlands, Denmark, Norway and Switzerland found positive correlations between sanctions and quicker exit from benefits into employment, but sanctions were also linked with lower-paid, poor quality unsustainable employment over the long-term (Arni *et al* 2009, Grigg & Evans 2010). Card *et al* (2010) also found that almost all evaluations showed that special measures taken by these types of ALMP measures were not effective for disadvantaged youths, who were experiencing more barriers to employment. There are some distinct causes of youth unemployment that need to be understood in order to design effective ALMPs (Staneva 2015).

Other countries may have adopted some measures apparent in UK ALMPs, but in these countries, one or more of the following four factors seems to have an impact on their outcomes: their ALMPs (i) are grounded in other ALMP types; (ii) straddle other ALMP intervention types; (iii) vary in their volume of spending on these different ALMP measures; and (iv) are set in a different economic and labour market and wider policy context (Kluve 2006, Kluve *et al* 2012, Bonoli 2010, Berry 2014a). Germany, for example has had low youth unemployment, but Germany's success is also down to a nationally recognised and universally accepted accredited skills certificate with a high degree of standardisation (Staneva 2015): "Young people acquire institutionally certified and nationally recognised skills that are highly portable within (and in some cases across) occupations. This facilitates labour market matching and, in principle at least, labour's market mobility" (*ibid*: 74).

A significant characteristic of UK ALMPs to date is that job creation or demand-side interventions have not been a focus (Martin 2014, Berry 2014a, Clayton & Brinkley 2011, Griggs & Evans 2010). Government focus on non-compulsory education has caused further detrimental impacts on young people choosing to look for work instead, or unable to stay in non-compulsory education (Lee *et al* 2012). The transition for young who do not continue into further education may therefore be difficult (Sissons & Jones 2012). For young people with low or few skills in an increasingly competitive labour market, this is likely to put them at a disadvantage

(Bivand 2012). The impact that this has had and is having on the UK itself is something that will now be examined.

### **The impact of ideology on ALMPs**

This next section of this Chapter will look more specifically at the role of ideology and use of blame and individualisation in UK policy concerning young people and unemployment, particularly since the introduction of the YTS in 1983. It will then look at the distinctions between the ideas of structure and agency as explanations for unemployment.

The importance of gaining an understanding of the political ideology behind policy decision making, process and delivery for the UK's welfare-to-work ALMPs is imperative in order to be able to get to grips with the what the aims and objectives of policy are that go beyond the political rhetoric. Ideologies come in various forms, not just neo-liberal ones. For Marx (1867), a character of ideologies can be determined by economic arrangements of society; in capitalist societies shaped by class interest, ideas of the ruling class become ruling ideas. Ideology is a debated and contested concept in sociology including the extent to which it is determined by these economic or class arrangements (Scott 2016). More contemporary debates to Marx have looked at the notion of ideology in terms of intellectual property and suggested that ideology can come from ideas of ordinary people and everyday discourse that can prove just as powerful (Gramsci 1980; Foucault 2003). I am locating my use of the term ideology within these broader sociological theories. These understandings of ideology will no doubt have implications on the shape and impact of policy on young people, as discourse and classification and normalisation through surveillance are elements of English ALMPs.

Fletcher (2015) recognises that political attitudes in favour of increased conditionality and workfare policy have "become mainstream" (Fletcher, 2015: 329) with an "increasingly sharp policy focus on individual behaviour" (Fletcher 2015: 329). Conditionality and sanctions are seen to provide a "real deterrent for some people who are either not trying or who are gaming the [benefit] system" (Chris



Grayling MP, quoted in DWP, 2012). Here the hegemonic control of the government and pervasive power of ideology is apparent, as people come to accept these values and political attitudes as common sense, even if they actually work against their best interests (Gramsci 1980, Boggs 1984). For Berry (2014b), such use of discourse is a “telling indicator of the very limited ambitions of ALMP regarding youth unemployment” (*ibid*: 594). The emphasis on correctional measures again assumes a need to mend an individual’s pathological behaviour and instigates more punitive measure to deter unemployment. Slater contends that far from conditions and sanctions being put in place to ‘incentivise’ benefit recipients, it represents “the most punitive welfare sanctions ever proposed by a British government” (Slater 2012:2).

The focus of UK ALMP spending on “JobCentre Plus services and administration and low productivity makes this form of workfare expensive” (Standing 2014:144). Standing (2014) contends that therefore the main intention is to “massage the level of unemployment down, not by creating jobs but by discouraging the unemployed from claiming benefits” (*ibid*: 144-5). In this case, “the policy is impoverishing” (*ibid*). The government is saving by not paying out benefits, although administration costs may negate this; moreover it is shifting ideological mind-sets. King (2015) explains this very well.

*“A major overlying theme of Coalition policy has been to implement cuts that can save money immediately but which will almost certainly result in increased public expenditure in the future...the Coalition has overseen the largest de-investment in young people in living memory with the brunt of welfare cuts and austerity measures hitting this group the hardest”* (King 2015: 143-4).

These schemes are presented as inexpensive, at a time when there are scarce resources due economic recessions that involve complex factors in terms of decisions to focus on reducing public expenditure in the short term. They distinguish the ‘undeserving’ from the mainstream based on a defective culture of worklessness and an emphasis of the responsibilities and obligations of the

recipients. There is a pre-occupation with the moral discourse that surrounds “the motivation and behaviour of the workless” (Fletcher 2015:335) in the Conservative government’s welfare policies. The assumption is that unemployment is a choice as a result of defective moral behaviour or work ethic or aspirations of the individual. This is despite, as Fletcher contends, research to support this being so far unsubstantiated (Digby 1989; Dean & Taylor-Gooby 1992; Kempson 1996; Shildrick *et al* 2012).

I will now consider how this impacts on young people and their experiences of unemployment, as “it is important to situate policies and narratives of youth unemployment within the wider context of the problematisation of youth more broadly” (Crisp & Powell 2016: 5).

### **Young people, individualisation and blame**

Based on research into young people’s experiences of the labour market, Carpenter and Freda (2007) recognise young people are at a disadvantage because of their age. They state that government ALMP interventions to get young people into work discriminate as the government defends age and experience requirements as objectively justified in its policy decision-making (*ibid*: 87). Such justification arguably masks neo-liberal ideology as common sense (Wiggan 2015) and supports how youth is seen as “a problem” (Carpenter & Freda 2007).

This has real implications on young people’s prospects. To view youth as a risk or potential deficit arguably automatically de-stabilizes and distorts the playing field. Just as neo-liberal ideology has been used to individualize blame for unemployment on the unemployed (Fergusson 2004; Patrick 2014), the ‘problem’ of youth unemployment is presented as a problem that belongs to the young unemployed. This inequality and lack of labour autonomy of low or unskilled young people can put young people at a disadvantage.

Fergusson’s (2004) work shows how the cumulative effects of disadvantages have been missed historically by youth policy that individualises blame and disregards

diversity, in work that pre-dates the Coalition's 2010 reforms. Fergusson considers how "varying discourses of social exclusion have informed policies regarding young people's participation in education, training and employment" (*ibid*: 289). He describes these discourses in order to understand New Labour's policy concerning unplaced young people based on mandatory inclusion regarding young people's participation in education, training and employment. Throughout policy reform, key policy issues have been to address the 'problem' of young people who fail to make the step from education into employment (Lee 1991; Robinson 1999; Fergusson 2004).

Fergusson (2004) surmises that this approach to tackle this 'problem' was based on three discourses: exclusion, disaffection, and marginalisation. It views the excluded as socially and culturally closed off from 'normal modes of participation'. The exclusion discourse varies in its sympathies; from regarding those excluded as victims to disregarding structural poverty altogether, instead focusing on how the structure of poverty is allowed to "constrain possibilities" (*ibid*: 290) of those excluded. Within the discourse of social exclusion, Fergusson identifies an 'underclass version' based on long-term non-participation that causes sustained exclusion and forms a discourse of disaffection, "a dysfunctional, pathological alienation from adults, key social institutions and norms" (*ibid*: 291) that would otherwise lead to gainful employment. Within this discourse, young people are understood to create their own subcultures and generate their own meanings, becoming disaffected youths who have alienated themselves. The marginalisation discourse portrays young people as outsider groups "at the margins of their social world" (*ibid*). If these young people are at the margins geographically (Clayton & Brinkley 2011, Simmons *et al* 2014), their position in the labour market again proves to be weakened.

What Fergusson has argued is that these three discourses are distinct in their own right, but not entirely separable from each other. They overlap and can be used to explain each other, and came together as the basis for New Labour's policy of mandatory participation to rectify young people's failure to participate. As such this

element of blame was adopted in policy; for whatever reason, young people have found themselves excluded from the labour market. This also assumes an element of agency on the young person's behalf for their situation: mandatory inclusion suggests punishment for something, and conditionality limits a person's choice. The subsequent evolution of such ALMP's, under the Coalition and then Conservative government, is a much more austere and further reaching ALMP that has intensified the stigmatisation of benefit claimants through increased negative rhetoric (Patrick 2014). This stigmatisation is done by pitting 'passive', 'inactive' state reliant benefit claimants (Patrick 2014), who are described as a problem due to their 'culture of welfare dependency' as they 'sleep of a life of benefits' (Osborne 2012), against 'hard-working families' (Duncan-Smith 2010). Patrick identifies this as the 'strivers/shirkers' discourse, which she recognises as a tool to generate support for the Coalition's welfare reforms, what she calls "welfare residualisation" (Patrick 2014: 708).

### **The context of UK ALMP**

Rather than investment in human capital (Barbier, 2004) or positive activation (Taylor-Gooby 2004), in recent years the UK has adopted a method of using 'incentive based activation' (Bonoli 2010: 10) and job-search assistance to move people off benefits quickly.

The UK's ALMP interventions and expenditure are heavily concentrated on supply-side interventions focused on people making *themselves* more employable. This is mainly delivered through the JC+ service and administration rather than job creation and support and training (OECD 2014: 19). The OECD describes the JC+ as a public employment service that has a "fundamental role in job matching claimants with vacancies, improving the employability of the labour force through specialised services, such as guidance, counselling and referrals to active labour market programmes" (OECD 2014: 118). The JC+ delivers this through "relatively inexpensive 'job search' services, and ... overlaps cost reducing 'welfare to work' initiatives, designed to improve work incentives" (Berry 2014a: 3) of those on unemployment benefits. These welfare to work schemes are designed to provide

“job-searching, CV-writing and interview techniques, [they] are delivered by private and voluntary sector providers via contracts with DWP. They co-exist with the public employment service provided by JC+ the working-age benefits arm of DWP, which processes benefit claims and provides standardised employment support” (Work and Pensions Committee 2015: 5). How well these policies actually deliver on their design is questionable.

I will now look at the development of the last three major UK ALMP policy interventions and the elements within them to chart how each policy has evolved from its predecessor. These are the Youth Training Scheme (YTS), the New Deal for Young People (NDYP) and the Work Programme (WP).

### **Youth Training Scheme**

In 1983, the new Youth Training Scheme (YTS) was introduced by the Thatcher-led Conservative government to replace the Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP). The YTS aimed to provide more work-based training and work experience than the YOP through providing skills training service intervention through training, workplace training and education with the objective to create transferable or general skills to improve employment and employment prospects of young people (YEI 2012). Together with its employment services, offering search assistance, job counselling and placement, the YTS claimed to offer one year of training to school leavers, aged 16-17. The basic training incorporated a focus on quality assurance and increased opportunities to work towards vocational training such as apprenticeships. Trainees were expected to participate in work experience at no expense to the employer, combined with a compulsory 13-20 weeks off-the-job training at training colleges, workshops, voluntary organisations or in full-time education (Corney 2009). Through this, a more mandatory structure was being created and implemented.

In 1986, this scheme was extended to include 18 year olds, and also became a two-year scheme for 16 year olds. In 1990, its name changed from YTS to the Youth Programme (YP), although its objectives and characteristics remained the same,

and this ran until 1998. When the YP was introduced trainees received £27.50/week in the first year and £35/week in their second year; employees on the scheme received a wage that was to be no less than this allowance; this rate of financial support was unchanged from the YTS.

The provisions of both schemes were implemented and funded by government agencies, and were further run through a network of managing agents overseen by the Youth Training Board and Area Manpower Board. These managing agents coordinated work experience and training from an “umbrella of organisations both in the public and private sector” (YEI 2012).

Evaluation of the process of these schemes again has been mixed with more promising results when the course was extended from one to two years in 1986 (YEI 2012c). Early reports for the YTS reported 55% progression to full-time employment after completing YTS between 1983-86 (Corney 2009). However, critics have argued that the initial drop in unemployment for under 18-year-olds could be explained via the expansion of the programme to include 18 year olds and the decision to keep 16 year olds on the scheme for two years. This put this group in the ‘trainee’ category and out of the unemployed classification for longer. It arguably shifted a cohort into another classification for the short-term, rather than tackling the issues of unemployment (Robinson 1999).

Another criticism of the YTS is the market advantage of relatively low payments to young people on the scheme. It has been suggested that such schemes facilitated the exploitation of school leavers as cheap labour, forming ‘surrogate’ labour markets (Lee 1991:98). These temporary spells of non-contracted and non-unionised employment were subsidised by the state, allowing unregulated commercial forces to take advantage (Lee 1991, Novak 1988, Sako & Dore 1986). These short-term interventions arguably only offered short-term solutions, explaining the initial positive outcomes.

Nevertheless other research does contend that the YTS, to some extent, did have a positive effect on the chances of gaining employment and wage trajectories once in

employment; despite this, conclusions concerning results were subject to a number of biases and the YTS could not account for external factors that took place (Main & Shelley 1989, Bradley 1995).

### **New Deal for Young People (NDYP) and the Future Jobs Fund (FJF)**

In 1997, the Labour government came into power. It introduced an ALMP that would include a focus specifically on young people, in the shape of the New Deal for Young People (NDYP). This adopted a 'work first' approach that would 'make work pay' by incentivising people into employment through subsidies and top-ups.

This scheme was based on skills training services, which were provided in the format of in-classroom employability technical and vocational education training, and workplace training. The NDYP targeted young people, aged 18-24 with the aim to place young people more rapidly into employment and to achieve 80% employment amongst young people.

Similarly to previous programmes, the NDYP used employment services to offer search assistance and access to labour market information, and job counselling. However, the NDYP went further to implement official sanctions for non-compliance with NDYP regulation. It also went beyond giving subsidies to employers, by incorporating services in the context of subsidised employment, and this included in-employment wage subsidies such as Working Tax Credits (WTC). It extended its compulsory training component in the YTS (O'Higgins 1995) to comprise all-inclusive mandatory enrolment for 18-24-year-olds claiming JSA for nine months or more. Failure to participate resulted in benefit sanctions; initially a two-week benefit withdrawal period, which increased to a four-week withdrawal for repeated non-compliance. The NDYP effectively further individualised welfare to work policy through a phased approach<sup>6</sup>.

Clients on the NDYP received Job Seekers' Allowance in return for compliance and participation in the NDYP, alongside subsidised employment or training. The NDYP

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix 1

progressed to target young people who were disabled, which earlier programmes had not formally done; its aim was to move young people from incapacity benefit to a position where they were in a position to 'actively seek work' with the support of the NDYP and gain employment (DWP 2007). This moved some young people from Incapacity Benefit to a more regulated, sanctioned JSA and workfare policy, whereby work or attendance was now required in return for their benefits.

The NDYP projected promising initial results; in 1998 the short-term outcomes of the NDYP were positive in relation to a decrease in youth unemployment (Freud 2007). However, wider developments could also explain positive early results. In 1999, the National Minimum Wage Act came into force. It graded levels of pay for 18-21 year olds at £3.00 per hour and those 22 and over receiving £3.60 per hour (legislation.gov.uk 1999). This arguably could have incentivised an up-take in employment of younger people, as those under 21 were a more attractive economic proposition for employers looking for low paid unskilled work. This could also have accounted for the initial boost in employment levels of under 21s during the initial stages of the NDYP.

In July 2000, the Select Committee on Education and Employment issued its eighth report. It reported that based on NDYP outcomes just over 215,000 NDYP participants have found work, and 162,000 young people have obtained jobs which lasted for more than 13 weeks. Of these, 139,000 were sustained, unsubsidised jobs. However, it noted concerns regarding the issue of relatively high levels of moves into unsustainable jobs through the NDYP programme (Select Committee on Education 2000). Further analysis for the period up to March 2000 concluded that the main impact of the NDYP had been to "speed up the rate at which young people left unemployment benefit" (Hasluck & Green 2007), making wage top-ups from the government a central factor in the NDYP. This method arguably produced cyclical patterns of benefit off-flow as benefit recipients moved between temporary employment and then back onto benefits.

In 2004, 44% of NDYP clients entered employment; but only 35% of those 44% remained employed past the preliminary 13-week period (Carpenter & Freda 2007).



The DWP evaluation of the NDYP (Hasluck & Green 2007) stated that the key to gaining employment is speed: the quicker a person enters or re-enters the labour market, the better their chances of staying there. In this period, ‘independent job searching’ was emphasised, as it had “extremely positive and promising results” (DWP 2007:13). In other words, individuals who looked for a job and found a job themselves within 3 months of beginning their JSA claim gave this plan promising and positive results.

The NDYP was good at helping young people who would have been temporarily out of work or education before finding jobs, but outcomes were complex with “difficult clients” (Hyland & Musson 2001: 5), who faced numerous barriers to employment or deemed hard to reach (*ibid*)

**Graph 1**      **Unemployment rate and unemployment proportion of young people in England**



(Source ONS 2011)

At the beginning of this programme, the NDYP shifted its focus on to placing lone parents and Incapacity Benefit claimants into employment through the programme. The shift of emphasis away from young people after 2004, relative to other disadvantaged groups, weakened the youth labour market (Petrongolo & Van

Reenen 2010). Petrongolo and Van Reenen (2010) argue that it ignored the multiple disadvantages of people who are in the long-term unemployed or NEET category by seeking to address the symptoms of one disadvantage before it relieved the symptoms of another.

The working assumption that the NDYP should deal with the most 'employable' youngsters, especially in terms of the national target of 80% employment and placing at least 40% of clients in unsubsidised jobs (Hyland & Musson 2010), followed by the move of the focus away from young people, made the NDYP scheme seem short-term in its action and outcomes. "The New Deal is designed to help quickly those who can be helped quickly, before concentrating on those who need long term help" (Musson 1999:34).

In short-term quantitative terms, the NDYP showed positive effects on unemployment relief "as a system in transition" (Hyland & Musson 2001:63). Melrose (2012) attributes New Labour's relative success to a ten year economic boom between 1997 and 2007, but also their accelerated approach to a consolidation of neo-liberal attitudes in its ALMP intervention such as the New Deal for Young People (NDYP). However, in the long term and regarding qualitative terms of skills training and sustainable labour market activity of young people, the NDYP was arguably limited in its success (*ibid*). As **graph 1** shows despite the drop in youth unemployment post 1998, the unemployment rate began to increase from 2004 onwards

The New Deal was a very powerful political and educational slogan (Hyland & Musson 2001:62), and not a new one (YOP 1978). It gave initial results, which was short-term relief, moving people from JSA to some form of employment. But the success in recovery of educational exclusion and under-achievement by young people and the reform to "remedy the short comings of a system that suffered from under-investment by the state and employers" (*ibid*: 63) was more complex and less convincing.

One frequently-argued positive of the NDYP was the initiation of the Future Jobs Fund, post-recession (TUC 2011, Allaker & Cavill 2011, Fishwick *et al* 2011).

### **The Future Jobs Fund**

The objectives of the Future Jobs Fund (FJF) schemes were to work as part of NDYP provision; non-compliance with FJF requirements could be punished via benefit sanctions (DWP 2012). It aimed to provide young people aged 18-24 approaching over 6 months on JSA with community-based work roles that would last up to 6 months, consisting of 150,000 jobs, with 100,000 for young people and 50,000 extra in unemployment 'hotspots' (DWP 2012). The scheme also offered 3-6 month periods of work-focused training from 2010, or a place on the Community Task Force, undertaking work experience on projects valuable to the local community, developing skills and work habits whilst delivering services in their community. The Connexions service (which provided support and careers advice to young people) was involved in the scheme and the DWP reported to have "proactive involvement with local stakeholders involved" (DWP 2012 online).

Young people on the FJF worked a minimum of 25 hours per week and received minimum wage whilst in this employment. Those on work-focused training received benefits, with young people participating in the Community Task Force receiving benefits plus £15.38 per week (DWP 2012). Funding for the FJF was open to all employers in profit and not for profit sectors, at £6,500 per job that lasted 6 months (*ibid*). However jobs were targeted at labour markets where it was particularly difficult to find employment; therefore there was no flexibility for regions to bid. The scheme was subsidised by the government.

There were no guarantees of employment after the six month period, but it was argued that it provided young people with work experience for an extended length of time, helped them acquire essential skills to participate in the labour market, and make a real difference in the community. It offered more intensive and targeted support at those deemed to be most in need to help them back into employment.

The TUC response to this was positive; it praised the Labour government for acknowledging the problem between supply side workfare policies and lack of jobs. It stated that “the only way long-term unemployed young people are going to be found jobs is by creating the vacancies for them”(TUC 2009); for the TUC, the FJF was creating jobs for young people.

Overall the FJF received positive evaluations of its scheme and in its outcomes relative to its aims. In a qualitative research project for the DWP, looking at customer experiences of the FJF, Allaker & Cavill (2011) reported that there was diversity in the respondents’ experiences of the FJF, but in the most part they were positive. “Respondents reported substantial gains as a result of their FJF post in terms of the breadth and depth of their skills set and the acquisition of a range of qualifications and accreditation certificates” (*ibid*: 34). However there was the noted risk that the softer skills gained by the young people could be lost without quick take up into non-subsidised jobs.

Although the sample of participants did report varying degrees of support by employers on the scheme, respondents reported an increase in confidence and motivation as a result of the FJF. Allaker & Cavill (2011) concede that such a qualitative study could not provide a statistical measure for the impact of the FJF on outcomes (*ibid*). However other independent research based on qualitative and quantitative measures found similar responses and positive, albeit short term, outcomes of the FJF (Fishwick *et al* 2011). The NDYP and FJF formed important aspects of the context in which the current Work Programme has evolved from and been introduced as the Conservative-led coalition government’s flagship welfare to work scheme.

### **The Work Programme**

On 17 February 2011, David Cameron gave a speech outlining the changes to be made to the Welfare Reform Act (2007). Cameron claimed that the previous New Labour ALMP had to change because, “it wasn’t working... People out of work aren't identikit unemployed with the same needs and problems. You can't serve all these

people with a one-size-fits-all system - by the Whitehall blueprint and the national training schemes. But that's what the last government tried to do" (Cameron 2011). The WP was designed to offer personalised services to customer groups who needed support into work<sup>7</sup>.

The WP Prospectus (2010) reported that by using a universal Work Programme in conjunction with a Universal Credit<sup>8</sup> system, the WP would be able to support those "harder to reach" (DWP 2010b:3) by forming an over-arching, more flexible and efficient programme. Young people, under the WP, are deemed as a hard to reach group, and one most in need of support. The WP has continued with the conditionality of benefits and reassessment of IB claimants. It has even taken on Lord David Freud, the former New Labour advisor regarding welfare reform and author of the 'Freud Report' in 2007 that reviewed New Labour's welfare-to-work system, to 'create' the WP and Universal Credit initiative.

### **How the Welfare Reform Bill (2011) continues to drive the UK ALMP Work**

#### **Programme Design**

The WP is delivered for JC+ by specialist organisations called providers. Its commissioning strategy involves a 'Black Box' model, to give organisations deemed to have the specialist knowledge in how to get people into work, in specific areas of needs, the freedom to provide this in ways they see as appropriate, and then judge them on their results. It awarded approximately 40 contracts to 18 "prime providers" over 18 "packages", i.e. geographical areas (DWP 2011b: 13). In each package area, there were at least two providers delivering services to that area. This is claimed to ensure competition of price and quality of delivery and support. It aims to be efficient through an outcome-based framework for these organisations to meet.

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix 2

<sup>8</sup> At the time of this research, UC was being piloted across specific locations in the country. The locations that my research covered were not amongst the piloted areas.

## **The current UK ALMP system**

The current UK ALMP as it affects young people consists particularly of 3 elements: (1) Introduction of the Universal Credit system (2) The youth contract; (3) The new JC+ design.

### **(1) “The Universal Credit (UC) system”**

The UC White Paper (2010) stated that this Universal Credit System would tackle worklessness and poverty. The paper predicted cuts of worklessness in households by 300,000 and cuts of workless individuals by 500,000 by 2016 (DWP 2010a).

The idea behind the UC system has been to “tackle poverty, worklessness and welfare dependency” (Duncan Smith 2010), to ensure work would always be the better option over claiming benefits and make it a simpler way of paying benefits to recipients. However, the pilot scheme was critiqued for being a more complex system whereby people are left for weeks without benefit payment during their transition between work and benefits (Field 2012).

UC is based on a series of means-tested awards to arrive at a combined sum. The qualification criteria for Universal Credit claims starts with single person or joint entitlements based on basic conditions and financial conditions, with further conditions for additional awards and claims (Welfare Reform Bill 2011: p2s3).

Eligibility for other benefits (such as disability related benefits) has been tightened, and existing support services regarding employment were consolidated under the work programme (Clayton & Brinkley 2011). UC will affect all claimants who are young people, as a general cohort, as they affect other working age groups. However the basic element of Universal Credit has raised its age requirement to 18, compared to income support beginning at 16 (Gov.uk 2016).

As part of introducing UC, the government pledged extra support to young unemployed people via three main commitments to deliver this support, summarized below:

(i) Provide more early access support to 18 year olds.

(ii) Additional support, seemingly ring-fenced for those that the government classifies as vulnerable, should they want it.

(iii) An innovation fund to develop initiatives to bring solutions to help and support disadvantaged young people (Welfare Reform Bill 2011: p2s4).

This fund is used by DWP to contract services and support out to private organisations and the voluntary sector. An argued advantage of this is that private and third sector organisations are best suited to identify the most relevant and needed support and services specific to their demographic. This is because they were claimed by the government to have expertise and knowledge of the areas in which they are placed and the needs of the young people with whom they interact, and therefore be best suited to deliver these services and support at a street level to these disadvantaged young people (DWP 2010a).

## **(2) The Youth Contract**

The Youth Contract (YC) is a youth-focused ALMP announced in 2011 to start in 2012 for three years alongside the WP. The objective of the scheme was to engage those young unemployed people who were hardest to reach and support them into education, training or employment. As part of WP provision, once clients were on the scheme, participation was mandatory; non-compliance with YC requirements could be punished via benefit sanctions (DWP 2011a).

It offered 160,000 wage incentives to employers (up to £2,000 per young person) and 20,000 payment incentives for employers to take on young people as apprentices (up to £1500 per young person) from 2-12 weeks. This strategy was not about new job creation but subsidies to make these young people more attractive to employers for this time period to fill current vacancies.

The scheme offered career interviews for every young person, “flexible support”, work clubs and volunteering groups for young people to participate in. There was a proposed Flexible Support Fund to help with the “customer’s” travel costs, training

costs, tool costs for apprentices. Extra support included a compulsory ‘intensive sign on scheme’; requiring young people to sign on once a week. The YC also mandated all work-ready 18-24 year olds, those deemed ready and able to enter employment, to the National Career Service, Next Step; a service that provides information advice and guidance to help “make decisions on learning, training and work” (National Career Service 2017).

There was no guaranteed job at the end of this programme, but ‘customers’ were guaranteed an interview with their employer at the end of this period.

The former Liberal Democrat leader, and former Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg claimed that the YC is a “dynamic approach to tackle the challenge of youth unemployment” (DWP 2011a), and Chris Grayling, Minister of State for Employment, stated that it is a “real practical way to combat youth unemployment” (*ibid*); other reports were not so positive on the outlook.

The YC received criticism regarding its original payment scheme, making young people on the programme work for free in order to receive their benefits prompting accusations of exploitation (Malik 2012). It has received further fresh criticism by a spokesperson from the City and Guilds organisation claiming that the overlap in YC funding with the Work Programme made it bureaucratic and ineffective (Mason 2012) for young people. The YC was scrapped in August 2014 amid claims that poor take up of the scheme meant it had been an abject failure (Pickard 2014).

### **(3) The new JC+ design**

In 2011 the JobCentre Plus became an internal department of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to cut costs and streamline the JC+ (DWP 2014). Once an executive agency that was treated as managerially and financially separate to carry out executive functions, its services are now offered directly by the DWP and it acts from within the government’s agenda. In 2012, the Welfare Reform Act also reformed the JC+.



The reformed JC+ has two core roles in the welfare system: administering working-age benefits; and providing a public employment service for the unemployed. As part of this second role, the JC+ also refers long-term JSA claimants to the privately contracted WP.

(i) Administering working age benefits

The Welfare Reform Act (2012) presents a new enforcement of claimant responsibilities to be imposed by the JC+, in order for receipt of working age benefit.

In order to realise the government's welfare manifesto and ensure the implementation and success of Universal Credit, further-reaching requirements and conditions are put onto the claimant. Within the WRA (2012), section 13 introduces the new claimant commitment, sections 14-18 details claimants' work related requirements, section 96 details the benefit cap, and section 46 details claimants' responsibilities for their sanctions. These are outlined below.

**The new claimant commitment** is a universal prerequisite for receipt of JSA, including new work-related requirements<sup>9</sup>. The premise is that it is tailored and developed according to the individual needs of each claimant; however claimants cannot claim JSA if they do not sign and comply with a claimant agreement which includes "any requirements the Secretary of State sees fit" (WRA 2012:S13).

The claimant commitment "seeks to set out more clearly what each claimant must do to find work and to instill in unemployed claimants the notion that looking for work is a full-time job"(DWP 2014: 7). Jobseekers are expected to use 30 hours of their own time per week searching for jobs, on top of the mandatory Work Programme, or take part in community service. Part of the new claimant commitments includes weekly rather than fortnightly 'signing on' for "half of all jobseekers, and daily signing on for a third of all claimants that leave the WP without a job" (DWP 2014: 7).

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix 3

(ii) Providing a public employment service

The DWP (2014: 5) claims that the JC+, as a public employment service, has three key aims: “to provide effective advice and support for claimants looking for work; to ensure that claimants fulfill their responsibilities to look for work; and to support an efficient and flexible labour market by offering an effective recruitment service to employers and matching unemployed people to suitable job vacancies”.

The stated aim of these reforms and their implementation by the JC+ is to create more incentives for people to get work, and make the benefits system and tax credits fairer and simpler (DWP 2014). However by applying such actions to incentivise people to work implies that unemployed people are unemployed because they have no incentive to work. The upshot of the JC+ reforms have been a much more conditional service that implements much more punitive measures for non-compliance to these stricter and more demanding conditions.

The responsibility for implementing and enforcing higher conditionality and sanctions for not meeting these conditions, and delivery of these services, lies with the JC+ Work Service Managers.

**The role of the Work Service Manager** within this public employment service involves managing the work coaches (formerly called advisers), looking after the ESA register, IS register and half of the JSA register. They are responsible for implementing the new government actions set out in the WRA (2012) and dealing with the front line services the JC+ is meant to provide.

This system is used to apply a ‘work first’ approach to the benefit system. Work is deemed as the way out of claiming benefits. The focus is on people getting a job, any job (Freud 2016). Welfare recipients are required to make all attempts deemed necessary, according to their conditionality category, to obtain any job possible.

Amongst the critiques of this approach is the suggestion that these outcome-based payments can encourage “parking” and “creaming”. This is where programme providers select or “cream” the most likely to succeed on the programme to receive

their payment and leave or “park” difficult-to-place clients where there is an increased risk of them not succeeding, thus providers not being likely to receive outcome payments relating to them (Damm 2012, Berry 2014a). This parking and creaming method is one that is difficult to prove, but basing payments on outcome rewards (even with higher rewards for “hard to reach” individuals) can arguably promote the use of cost benefit analysis in relation to particular individuals for the providers (*ibid*). This effectively renders such interventions problematic, as those who are considered employable get jobs as soon as there is demand in the local labour market, which would have happened regardless of the intervention. Those who are “parked” have multiple and complex needs, which cannot be addressed and overcome by the Work Programme. For Berry (2014b), the focus of this ALMP on solely supply-side interventions regarding the labour market renders this ALMP “impotent” (*ibid*: 592) as the government “abdicates any responsibility for creating jobs- let alone decent jobs” (*ibid*).

### **Conclusion: Summarising the effect of UK ALMPs on young people**

Looking back at the UK’s ALMPS since the YTS (1983) shows that the focus of UK governments has consistently been on employment services and training to supply the market. What can also be seen is an increasing move towards mandating individuals onto programmes, conditionality and sanctions, with training becoming more concerned with employability skills. For Wiggan (2015), this trend demonstrates the tension between training for young people to increase their qualifications and training to answer the immediate demands of the labour market, and the tension between long-term structural working solutions or short-term responses to the labour market; these are concerns echoed by Berry (2014).

The UK approach has evolved to become more market oriented and punitive, in which the UK ALMP also has the “most strict jobsearch monitoring process of all OECD countries” (OECD 2016: 133). The premise of UK ALMPs to get people off benefits, into any work, as quickly as possible by changing their behaviour through job-search activity and up-skilling to improve employability remains constant and yet youth unemployment continues to be a concern in the UK.

What young people need from ALMPs in the UK and how this differs from the policies and interventions that are implemented needs to be assessed so that we can see what isn't working with UK ALMP types of interventions and why such interventions have persisted despite continued high levels of youth unemployment. This is what the next Chapter will address.

## **Chapter 3**

### **A review of literature on the needs of young people**

In the last Chapter, I detailed the progressive shifts in UK ALMPs over the last three major ALMPs up to the 2015 Conservative government. This Chapter will look at the specific needs of young people in the UK and how their experiences of unemployment have been impacted by the shift in ALMPs towards more conditional and punitive measures.

In this Chapter I will critically analyse, in order: the particular needs young people have in the labour market; how youth unemployment is especially affected by wider economic conditions and ALMP interventions; the precarity of young people; mapping the young people's experiences of place and young people and spatial disparities; the impact of sanctions and conditionality on young people; a divergence in the concepts of young people's needs and the delivery of ALMPs as a result of ideology. I will then compare and consider research on structural explanations for youth unemployment. I will go on to explore if young people are 'gaming' the benefits system and review the role of control through literature on realist governmentality and the role of regulation and resistance in the relationship of control between the young person and service provider. In doing so, I will look at the role of rights and responsibility in control, the role of classification in control and the role of resistance in control. From this, I will then discuss the relevance of this to my research.

### **The particular needs young people have in the labour market**

UK ALMP interventions have a significant impact on young people in the UK as young people are more likely to be vulnerable to unemployment than other age groups and so are more at risk of being on JSA or similar benefits. When on benefits, the increased conditionality and differential treatment of groups including young people (Crisp & Powell 2016: 11) through specific ALMP schemes targeted at them makes the effects of ALMPs further relevant to young people. Young people

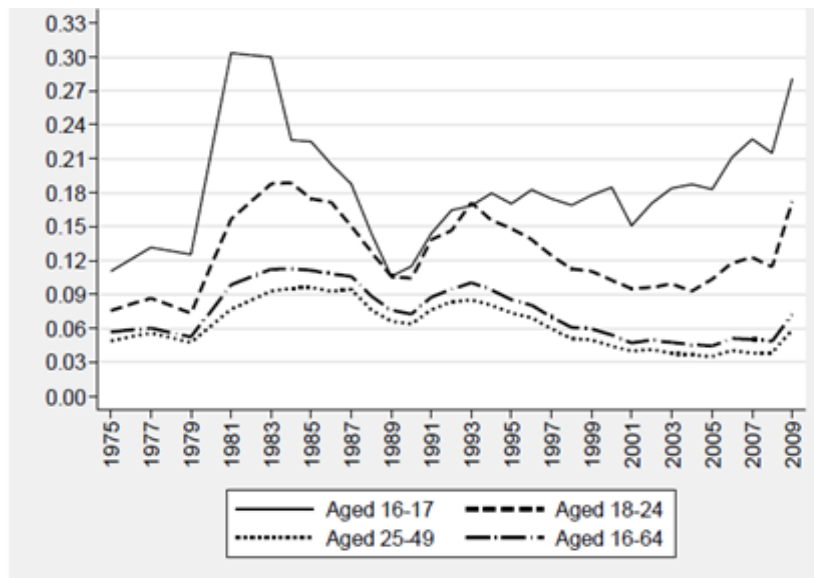
are more likely to be affected by increased conditionality of welfare (Dwyer & Wright 2014) and are more likely to be sanctioned (Peters & Joyce 2006, 2014, Watts *et al* 2014). Young people under 18 do not qualify for benefits such as Working Tax Credits unless they have children or a disability and are eligible for a lower amount of JSA and UC. They are also eligible for a lower level of housing benefits.

They are more likely to have fewer qualifications and less experience by virtue of their youth (Carpenter & Freda 2007, Crowley & Comminetti 2013). As a result, they are more likely to require training. In times of labour market downturn, they can also be more at risk of losing their jobs, as they tend to be the last ones into the jobs and so the first ones out. Youth unemployment also impacts negatively on the life trajectories and labour market opportunities on young people (Crisp & Powell 2016, Furlong & Powell 2007, MacDonald & Marston 2005). If young people don't have qualifications, they may find it harder to get a job; if they can't get a job, then they can't get experience and skills and without that it is more difficult to get a job, so the cycle can continue through their lives.

### **How youth unemployment is affected by wider economic conditions and ALMP interventions**

As youth unemployment intervention reforms built upon previous policies, there is growing evidence to underpin claims that previous policies were insufficient to address these external factors affecting this cohort; not least the cyclical pattern of youth unemployment (Peck 2001). As shown in **graph 2**, the rates of unemployment amongst young people rises leading up to the 1980, 1990 and 2008 recessions and typically spikes just after the recession hits. At the same time, it is noted that these multiple recessions were not all the same in terms of their effects on youth unemployment; some were deeper than others and they had differing long-term effects.

**Graph 2 UK Unemployment rates by age group 1975-2009**



Source: Annual LFS 1975-1991 and calendar quarters 1992q2 to 2009q3. Unemployment rate (ILO) is measured yearly in March/April/May and linearly interpolated.

(Source: Van Reenen & Petrongolo 2010:3)

Current workfare policy is born out of the YTS, NDYP and FND policies that have preceded it, “showing a more gradual shift towards a more punitive regime” (Crisp & Powell 2016:3). Conditionality has increased during economic growth (Peck 2001) and eased during recessions surrounding these three policy programmes (Crisp & Powell 2016). This pattern has “come to an abrupt halt under the 2010 Coalition government which increased both the intensity and coverage of conditions regarding the forms of welfare applied to young people during a period of high unemployment (*ibid*). Governments have learned, from previous policy, how to react to short-term cycles of unemployment. **Graph 2** charts the unemployment rates for the working age population (16-64) and three sub-groups, and illustrates these initial short-term results seen by all initiatives. In particular, it shows:

(i) A sharp rise in unemployment starting in 1979, for all groups, affecting the youngest the most. Immediately before this, the trend for the past 2 years had been a small decline.

(ii) Declines in youth unemployment from around 1983 to around 1989,

(iii) More gradual declines in all forms of unemployment around 1997, but the trend for the youngest aged 16-17 group is much more variable from 1998, and on balance the trend moves upward from this point onwards for this youngest group. Prior to 1997, the trend for 18-24s was already of unemployment going down, with the trend for the youngest 16-17 group less clear. For Van-Reenen & Petrongolo (2010) “young people are much more sensitive to the state of the business cycle” (*ibid*: 2) and the “magnitude of this disadvantage widens during the recession” (*ibid*) as the burden falls on low wage workers such as young people and those with lesser education (*ibid*).

Furthermore, the focus of UK ALMPs on job-search assistance and acquisition of employability skills rather than jobs creation and jobs/skills matching does not take into account the variation within the UK. This raises the question of what the immediate experiences are of young people who lack qualifications and human capital, a problem the ACEVO Commission on Youth (2012) states needs considering.

This is exacerbated by the government’s “concurrent neglect of demand side and structural barriers to work” (Patrick 2014:707) for this group. This neglect of variation by the government is further multi-faceted when regional policy, which has to look at narrower locales, could be argued as needing to offer a joined up service to support the multiple disadvantages of young people in these differing areas. However whether it does this is questionable.

Even though young people are potential assets to the labour market, economy and wider society, they are targeted by spending cuts, less generous benefits and tighter conditionality criteria (Crisp & Powell 2016). The progression to more punitive regimes marks an “emergence of a cohort of young people increasingly at risk of worklessness and poverty relative to older groups” (*ibid*: 3). There is a longstanding trend towards policy increasingly treating young people as one homogenous group (Woodman 2017) despite diversity and disadvantage in and amongst young people (Carpenter & Freda 2007). This trend in the evolution of policy is demonstrated in the way that, from the NDYP onwards, it has been made



increasingly difficult for all young people under 18 to claim independent benefits: Under this scheme, JSA was not perceived as having a significant positive impact on youth unemployment (Manning 2009, Petrongolo 2008), however the NDYP worked to improve incentives to work and sanctions to ensure compliance amongst 18-24 year olds. The NDYP continued the trend of ignoring the differences of outcomes of ethnic minority groups and gender differences in its delivery to young people. It grouped this more varied larger age cohort together because they had one thing in common, youth unemployment. Incentives to shift lone parents and IB claimants onto work-related benefits, such as JSA and work-related ESA and subsidised employment, increased the variance within the cohort of young unemployed; and increased the number of young people now defined as unemployed (Berry 2014a).

It seems that as a result of more severe ALMP's, the many important aspects that need to be tackled in the youth cohort, other than youth, that makes their position precarious, such as education, lack of experiences and multiple disadvantages, are being missed in youth policy. The impact on young people may be further deepened now the informal opportunities for learning and self-development via youth projects and youth work setting have also been reduced due to the public spending cuts from 2010 onwards (Unison 2016).

### **The precarity of young people**

Key processes that may impact on young people are recognised in literature include deindustrialisation (Wiggan 2015, Beatty & Fothergill 2017), labour market change (Lindsay & Houston 2011), the change in post-compulsory education and transitions and an increasing individualisation of young people (Crisp & Powell 2016, Thompson 2013). Young people are also more vulnerable to insecure situations, leading Standing (2014) to argue that they are more likely to be part of what he calls "the precariat". As Standing defines it, the precariat is an "emerging class,

comprising the rapidly growing number of people facing lives of insecurity, moving in and out of jobs that give little meaning to their lives”(Standing 2011:1)<sup>10</sup>.

Young people do have things in have things in common because of their age; for example, they are less likely to have work experience due to their age, but this does not make all young people the same in other respects. This is a vastly diverse group of people who are defined by what they lack rather than what they possess, including employment. The precariat is also proposed as a diverse group, however the most common age group within it are people aged 15-25 (Standing 2011:66), although it is recognised that not all young unemployed people are necessarily in or trapped in the precariat. There is perhaps nothing apparently shocking in this at first, as young people tend to start in poorly paid and more insecure positions. This becomes problematic for these young people as more of this age group have nothing to move onto, nowhere to progress and so they stay in the precariat (*ibid*). The transition of youth is therefore extended (Webster *et al* 2004).

Unlike those situations where a young person’s transition may be extended due to their choice to take on longer periods of study, for example, the transitions referred to with the precariat are not ones which may create further opportunities; instead, these situations could be extended indefinitely. They lack labour autonomy and wider agency over their lives. For Standing (2011), the historical swing in England towards ALMPs has helped produce this precariat. There is no solidarity within the precariat. Standing (2011) identifies that members of the precariat are connected via what they lack, namely stability and predictability in their lives; however they are a fragmented group.

By ignoring the multiple disadvantages and vulnerabilities of young people and requiring specific employability skills, could it therefore be that workfare style

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<sup>10</sup> For Standing (2011), this group is a distinct socio-economic group but one that is by no means homogenous. The precariat is not the same as being work poor or having insecure employment, “although these dimensions are correlated with it (Standing 2011:9). The precariat lacks secure work based identity, where “those experiencing poor work or low paid jobs may be building a career”(ibid). He argues that the precariat lacks seven forms of labour market security: labour market, employment, job, work, skills reproduction, income and representation.

benefits programmes are part of the problem (Carpenter and Freda 2007; Goujard *et al* 2011)?

For Standing, this workfare policy is delivering services based on the ideological assumptions that recipients need monitoring, surveillance and controlling, so that they don't get out of hand, because they can't help their own behaviour. The increased conditions, judgements and sanctions put on recipients have meant "it can be a fulltime job looking for a job" (Standing 2011: 48). Recipients are consumed with looking for any job, no matter how unpleasant, which can cause what Standing calls a 'precarity trap'. He reasons that people don't necessarily rush to be on benefits; they hold off, doing temporary jobs and go on benefits reluctantly and when there is no other choice. Standing explains that for many, entry or re-entry into the benefit system comes after "hardships have set in so debts and obligations to relatives, friends and neighbours mount and loan sharks lurk" (Standing 2011:48).

Standing argues that the precariat must do much more unpaid 'work for labour' than the proletariat ever has. Now that benefits have become a seven-day benefit, their work is to job-seek seven days a week, by whatever means possible. According to Standing (2011), they are working and working hard at finding a job. It is unclear here on how Standing gauges or assumes that all or most members of the precariat are working hard at finding jobs. Nevertheless if we take into account those who want to work and the need to work harder to find work, an important distinction therefore emerges between work and labour. Standing emphasises this as a key issue which changes the nature of what we define as work. Here 'work' is unremunerated, work that is not labour, that is given in exchange for income, is not recognised. The precariat are expected to do labour whenever required, often in conditions not of their own choosing (*ibid*: 13). Under ALMP's then, the precariat 'work-to-labour'; furthermore they work to look for labour, and for receipt of their benefits.

Critiques of Standing's view of precarity question if the precariat can be viewed as an emerging class when precarity can be found right up the chain of class strata

(Seymour 2012) to the extent that we could all be precarious in this respect; and so perhaps this identification of the precariat is misused. Breman (2013) asks whether this is a new phenomenon, especially if it involves “the notion that those on temporary and part-time contracts will be forged into a single-class” (*ibid*: 134). Breman (2013) takes this element further and asks if the precariat is a bogus concept? He carries this question forward to scrutinize Standing’s (2011) definition of the precariat as a “peculiarly restrictive definition” (Breman 2013:131) which identifies what it is not. He contends that Standing’s definition of the precariat has become ambiguous as he defines it in different ways; by seven forms of labour security that “were being eroded in the new era” (Breman 2013: 131), to identifying six components of social income and how each is shifting in different ways for different groups, to Standing replacing ‘flexi-workers’ in his 2002 book as a crucial group with ‘precariat’ in ‘Work after Globalisation’ (2009). Breman suggests that Standing is “rehearsing these [three] themes” (Breman 2013:132) in ‘The Precariat’ (2011) to put forward the argument that there is a new class, but Breman (2014) also argues that the contradiction in Standing’s work is apparent when Standing (2011) claims that the precariat comes in many different varieties yet could comprise everybody (Breman 2013: 134).

Standing’s (2014a) reply to Breman’s critique argues that the term ‘the precariat’ is not a bogus concept. He contends that “as more people come to understand their situation” (Standing 2014: online), recognition translates into a common consciousness and a force for change. Standing continues that the precariat shares similar class features: distinctive relations of production, and distinctive relations to the state, which make it a class in the making. Standing further distinguishes the precariat from the proletariat by stressing that although there has always been casual labour, the precariat have come to expect a life of unstable labour and living. He continues to make this distinction by highlighting the increasing need for the precariat to work-for-labour, or engage in unpaid work to get paid labour; a point made throughout his work in ‘The Precariat’ (2011; 2016) and ‘The Precariat Charter’ (2014b). Standing (2014a) makes a further rebuttal to Breman’s critique by clarifying that in the labour market changes, we are not witnessing “jobless growth

but growthless jobs” (*ibid*: online), which can compound the precariat when interwoven with the other features that make up the precariat. The implication of this is that the precariat and what it consists of remains contested by some. What also remains is that there is a cumulative effect of multiple factors that impact on people to make them part of the precariat or not. These are therefore open to change as ALMPs and labour market systems change, and so people’s responses to them. This is evident through Standing’s (2016) updated edition of ‘The Precariat’ that acknowledges the precarity in the benefits system as conditions and sanctions make being on benefits increasingly insecure. Here then the precariat are now experiencing insecurity before they enter employment.

I will now discuss how young people’s experiences of unemployment and ALMP delivery may be impacted by place, or where they are placed.

### **Mapping young people’s experiences of place**

Another critique of the impact of the UK’s ALMP system on young people is the different impact it has on young people living in different locations, particularly disadvantaged locations. Most policies of youth unemployment “are determined and applied nationally” (Crisp & Powell 2016: 5). However, statistics on youth unemployment may hide “substantial variations in performance at the regional level, and still bigger variations between cities and local areas” (Crowley & Comminetti 2014: 3). Beatty & Fothergill (2013) found that experiences of welfare reform would “vary enormously, not least because benefit claimants are so unevenly spread across Britain” (Beatty & Fothergill 2013: 5). Moreover one of the reasons some places are poor is “that they have so many people claiming benefits” (*ibid*). Together, this indicates that young people and their employment opportunities are particularly affected by place they live in. Labour challenges are spatially concentrated “as demand and supply side processes interact to maintain high unemployment and low wages locally even when the labour market has become more buoyant at the aggregate level” (*ibid*:3). As such these arguably narrow supply side focused policies seem to be based on “historically and geographically inadequate knowledge” (Crisp & Powell 2016: 8) about local labour

markets and individualised assumptions about young people. This also means that the “impact of reforms will hit the poorest parts of Britain hardest” (Beatty & Fothergill 2013: 5).

### **Young people and spatial disparities**

There is also an inter-play between individual young people and place, in which “the picture is more complicated at the individual level” (Clayton & Brinkley 2011: 44). The context of place in terms of where the young person lives is essential in understanding their longer-term trajectories and experiences of youth policy and social exclusion (Webster *et al* 2004). The “rapid and widespread de-industrialisation of a place that was, until relatively recently, one that had ‘worked’ is central to any understanding of contemporary extended transitions of its young adults” (Webster *et al* 2004: 42). As these deindustrialised areas have continued to contain higher rates of people claiming unemployment benefits (Beatty & Fothergill 2013 and 2017), this impact of structure on young people in these places remains. Structural factors have “made the transitions of all young people, but particularly those who may be thought of as vulnerable, more difficult and complex” (Simmons *et al* 2014: 3).

Young people with higher qualifications do better than those with low or no qualifications. However, young people with low or no qualifications have better employment outcomes in stronger economies (Clayton & Brinkley 2011, Crowley & Cominetti 2014). This is due to two main reasons: the concentration of higher skilled workers in strong economies “generates improved demand for low skilled work” (Crowley & Cominetti 2014: 12). Secondly, low skilled young people are less likely to be able to move, including from weak economies to strong economies; there is therefore less competition for low skilled young people in strong economies for these jobs. The young people in weaker economies are “much less mobile” (*ibid*: 12) and so less able to leave in search of work or to benefit from stronger economies; they then become limited to what the weaker economies have to offer them. Ultimately Crowley & Cominetti’s (2014) research found that “where you live matters” (*ibid*: 13).

Within this, Crowley & Cominetti (2014) found that there are wider spatial barriers to youth unemployment that endure and are shaped by the structure of place. Notwithstanding the different case of London, they argued that different cities would face distinctive challenges due to their circumstances that would affect youth unemployment.

They recognised these as:

- Poor transport infrastructure: young people are more likely to rely on public transport, and for those living in rural or poorly connected areas, transport can act as a real barrier. Related to this challenge is the issue of migration for work (Hudson 2005), it may be difficult to commute due to poor transport infrastructure. Crowley & Cominetti recommend that in areas where economic recovery is not occurring, young people need to be supported to look further afield. The problem is that young people may not want to or be able to travel further and for longer, especially for a job that is unpleasant, low paid and 'out of hours'. This is where tackling the other two challenges that Crowley & Cominetti address is essential:

1. The provision and quality of careers guidance, availability and quality of services to support young people - Good careers advice can inform young people before the transition into work and make them better informed about the labour market and what career to pursue.

2. The availability, and competition for, vocational training - The pattern of availability of this training, from which young people can benefit, varies considerably over the UK, and reductions in availability have been "exacerbated by government cuts" (*ibid*: 15). Crowley and Cominetti found that a high level of competition for such training would make it difficult for young people to compete for this type of training.

## **The impact of sanctions and conditionality on young people**

What has become apparent through welfare reform, according to Dwyer, is that the creeping conditionality he cited in 2004 has become ubiquitous (Dwyer 2017) as conditionality and sanctions have increased substantially since the 1980s (Watts *et al* 2015). Universal Credit has extended the reach and amplified the severity of sanctions and conditionality as Individual Claimant Commitments increasingly personalise conditionality and increases expectations for most claimants (Watts *et al* 2014: 04). This can become constraining for claimants. Opposing arguments to the nature of this type of welfare conditionality warn that it is built on “flawed individualistic assumptions” (*ibid*). In particular, it assumes that people can respond rationally to conditions and sanctions and could end up punishing vulnerable people, such as young people, through such punitive measures that intensifies personal conditionality and responsibility (Dwyer 1998, Wright 2012).

Evidence from the first wave of findings of Dwyer’s larger scale research, looking at the change in welfare conditionality between 2013-2018, has found that so far the evidence that sanctions have a positive impact on moving people into paid work is at best limited. Studies regarding the intermediate outcomes of sanctions on ensuring compliance with conditions are mixed (Griggs and Evans 2010). Threat of sanctions has been found to act as a useful tool to persuade participation in work and employability programmes and further job search activity (Joyce *et al* 2005). Yet sanctions have little impact on recipients unwilling or unable to comply with conditions (Dorsett 2008, Joyce *et al* 2005). This approach assumes all recipients respond to conditionality and sanction based on economic rationality. However evidence suggests that very few people “make an active choice not to meet the conditions of benefit receipt” (Goodwin 2008 in Watts *et al* 2014: 08).

Watts *et al* (2014) note that what is most clear from UK statistical evidence is that “young people are more severely affected by the rapid growth in benefit sanctions than other age groups” (*ibid*: 06). The under-25 group has had consistently higher sanction rates accounting for 41% of all sanctions issued October 2012 to December



2013 (*ibid*). Sanctions affected 8% of claimants in this age-group in 2010-11 and this rose to 8.4% in 2013-14 (*ibid*).

Explanations have been given that young people are less likely to take conditionality and sanctions as seriously due to financial security offered by their family networks (Peters & Joyce 2006). Further research by Mitton (2009), commissioned by the UK government, argued that the complexity of the benefits system enabled some users to use it as an excuse for not understanding the process. Conversely, evidence has been found that young people may be more likely to live in insecure and chaotic circumstances that prohibit compliance with welfare conditions (Fitzpatrick *et al* 2014). Another potential explanation is that vulnerable young people with low educational attainment may have a limited understanding and knowledge of the conditions placed upon them, as well as the associated sanctioning system and appeals system (Griggs & Evans 2010; Oakley 2014). The type of behaviour changes that Dwyer has found evidence for so far are cases of respondents applying for inappropriate jobs out of fear and compliance; furthermore, once in work, conditionality was inhibiting paid work, as welfare recipients were sanctioned for missing appointments when at work. Such findings do not support the assertion that welfare conditionality and sanctions will initiate wider behavioural change amongst benefit recipients (Miscampbell 2014).

This has underpinned Dwyer's recommendation that support and not sanctions are needed to change people's lives positively. Yet the rate of JSA sanctions applied to vulnerable groups by the JC+, including young people, has escalated since 2011 (Watts 2014: 05). Those at the greatest disadvantage within highly conditional systems include those with low levels of qualifications or work experience and those with mental health conditions (Schram *et al* 2009, Meyers *et al* 2006).

### **A divergence in the concepts of young people's needs and the delivery of ALMP's**

I will now examine if there is a gap between what the young people's needs are and the services that the JC+ are providing based on the government's ALMP directives.

As the focus of policy has concentrated on ALMPs, there are questions concerning how such ALMPs will meet young people's needs regarding employment. I will assess literature that suggests ALMPs in England are focused more on DWP directives and employer needs, which may be at odds with the particular needs of the young people that have already been noted in this Chapter. Grant's (2013) research explores how welfare reform from 2002 onwards uses increased conditionality, targets and sanctions as part of service provision to all of the unemployed as one group. Grant's research was carried out in 2007-9 and notes that before this, in 2002, there were no targets for advisers to personally meet regarding sanctions (*ibid* 165). She found that advisers felt that their jobs were becoming "increasingly target driven without feeling able to offer a superior service to their clients" (Grant 2013:170). This shift in focus to meet DWP targets at the expense of giving clients a "superior service" (*ibid*) indicates a gap between the needs of clients and ALMP's structures that provide the services available to meet these needs.

Ingold & Stuart's (2014) regional study of employer engagement in the Work Programme finds that programmes that "prioritise 'work-first' approaches and increasingly tougher conditionality for benefit recipients" (*ibid*: 440) are a more attractive option in responding to the demands of employers. As such, employers are crucial to the success of ALMPs. For them, the welfare reform and introduction of the Work Programme represents a further ideological shift in how public and private sector relations with ALMPs are identified and understood.

The supply of certain types of labour that these ALMP's provided was not necessarily crucial for the employers, although they did benefit from other kinds- namely low quality, short-term labour, which is at a reduced cost. ALMP-focused characteristics such as wage subsidies and other top-ups did incentivise some

employers to take on 'high-risk' low skilled workers on a 'trial period' "but this was limited due to employers' lack of demand in times of economic recession" (*ibid*: 458).

These situations raise issues concerning how successful ALMPs can be at making young people truly and widely employable rather than meeting immediate short-term needs of specific employer demand, and indeed whether this is actually the aim for ALMPs. As such, the demand side of ALMPs from the employer perspective helps highlight in whose interests ALMPs best serve.

This ideological shift to a more aggressive neo-liberal focus on ALMP's has further implications for the role that structure and agency plays on young people's individual life choices and how they impact on each other.

### **Structure and agency explanations of youth unemployment**

The issue of youth unemployment and how governments respond to it with ALMP support and service is made more complex when a young person's agency and their structural constraints are taken into consideration. Whereas research uncovers structural explanations for the vulnerability of many young welfare recipients (Dean & Taylor-Gooby 1992, Shildrick & MacDonald 2013, Staneva 2015), Dunn (2010; 2014) argues that there is an element of "choosiness" in young people's employment choices. He argues that this is the case with all unemployed people as a group, and that this underpins the premise of policy to date. Although Dunn does not advocate the current range and extent of conditionality and sanctions, he agrees with the approach taken by the Coalition and now Conservative government that voluntary unemployment is a serious, widespread problem in the UK. As a result, measures to modify such behaviour are in his view needed.

Dunn reasons that social policy authors adopt a "quasi-Titmuss approach" (Dunn 2014: 2) that looks at the constraints of people's structures in order to understand their behaviour, and in doing so neglect the role that "choosiness in job search behaviour plays in deciding individuals' employment status" (Dunn 2010: 1). As a

result, Dunn argues that they repeatedly do not address the argument that many unemployed people could find a job in most labour market conditions, “if they were not so choosy” (Dunn 2014: 14). Dunn (2010) investigates choosiness in terms of “jobs a person is willing to do, as expressed in the flexibility and intensity of their job search” (Dunn 2010: 8). For Dunn, an individual’s values and behaviour can play a substantial part in the process of employment.

Dunn (2010) draws upon work from Murray’s (1984) ‘rational choice’ model of labour supply, whereby individuals prefer leisure to work, and Mead’s (2004) theory of a permissive welfare state that allows benefit recipients to decline fulfilling their duties to find work. Both authors ascertain that low-skilled jobs are generally available to the vast majority of people that want to work. Dunn (2010; 2015) uses these explanations to underpin his research regarding people’s choosiness and employability practice to give an alternative to what he regards as overly structural accounts for unemployment from social policy authors such as: Shildrick *et al* 2010, 2012, 2013; MacDonald *et al* 2001,2014, Macdonald & Marsh 2005; Walker 2000; Trickey *et al* 1998; Dean & Taylor-Gooby 1992. Dunn (2010) found that an individual’s values and behaviour “can play a substantial part in the process” (Dunn 2010: 8) of unemployment and getting a job. He conducted 50 semi-structured interviews with 50 participants at a time of “low unemployment (2001/2)” (Dunn 2010: 8). All had done some paid work and 44 had experienced unemployment. His research sought to “find out how different kinds of people would behave in similar circumstances” (Dunn 2010: 8). He argues that there was little variance in attitudes and behaviour according to geographical differences but “when interview respondents gained educational credentials, this sometimes raised their expectations and hence their choosiness” (Dunn 2010: 15). The more educated were more likely to prefer ‘dole’ to the drudgery of low paid, poor quality, insecure jobs, yet they usually found jobs due to their higher qualifications. There is a question here whether those with qualifications were actually being too choosy if they are getting jobs? On the other hand, those respondents with low educational attainment and fewer skills and experience struggled to find employment due to their low employability; elements that young people are at high risk of possessing.

Although Dunn includes factors that may affect a person's "choosiness", including education, money, morality and enjoyment (Dunn 2010, 2014), he treats all of the unemployed participants, with their varied backgrounds and experiences, in his research as one group of unemployed participants. He does not differentiate between ages, just as he does not regard geographical difference as a factor to explain variations in unemployment. This to me is problematic as it misses the same variations that policy does.

Conversely, from the context of employer engagement, Ingold & Stuart (2014) contend that a labour market so focused on supply-side ideology, is based on the assumptions that jobs are available if the jobless wanted them. They also find that location of labour demand is significant. They point to research that finds that ALMPs complement an economy on the up, but stress that these do not prove effective at times of economic depression or for those at the lower end of the labour market, particularly in post-industrial and economically depressed areas of the UK (Peck & Theodore 2000; Gore 2005; McCollum & Findlay 2012).

If it depends where employers are placed geographically, where they want workers to be placed and work, the structure of place becomes an issue, particularly for young people with few qualifications, skills and work experience. This involves not only the benefit recipient's agency but employers' choices also. In such cases, being motivated and 'work ready' can only go so far. This is an issue that Ingold & Stuart emphasise needs to be considered "in the context of local economies" (*ibid*: 459).

The proliferation in UK policy detailed in Chapter two has real implications for young people's experiences of UK-based ALMP's. There is still a strong thread running through the core of UK policies that is based on supply side economics. As these ALMP's are consistently concerned with how young people are placed in the labour market, they have become increasingly occupied with supply side policy and making young people work-ready for this.

Dunn's later (2014), and more in-depth, research incorporates these 50 interviews with interviews in 2011 with 30 employees and 40 unemployed JSA claimants. He

found that whilst all of the 40 JSA claimants in 2011 had been employed at some point and all were willing to do some form of work, his assessment of their attitudes towards taking less attractive jobs to claiming JSA found “widespread reluctance to undertake less attractive jobs” (Dunn 2014: 1). Dunn draws these findings against his interviews with 40 welfare-to-work organisation employees; all of which stated that many of their long-term JSA claimants (six-months plus) remained unemployed because they were “very choosy” (Dunn 2014:2) in the jobs they were willing to apply for. Dunn’s research finds that many unemployed people prefer living on benefits to taking jobs that would increase their income but that they regard as unattractive. His solution is that sanctioned claimants should have the opportunity to join a scheme that would more strictly enforce work requirements and improve their employability, through behaviour and attitude modification, whilst giving these claimants a higher benefit income for their participation. However this solution seems to contradict his assertions that many people choose to be unemployed because they are better off on benefits.

Shildrick *et al*’s (2013) research on poverty and insecurity, which focuses specifically on their participants’ attitudes to employment, finds different results. This study includes interviews with unemployed young people and their own perspective on their attitudes to employment. Shildrick *et al*’s research argues that the reality for many people who are unemployed and trying to get a job is one of moving in and out of low paid insecure jobs. Shildrick *et al* found that being on benefits was not necessarily preferable to being employed, as some respondents avoided benefits whilst in between jobs “or for as long as they possibly could (Shildrick *et al* 2013: 5). They found their respondents were experiencing “churning between low pay, no pay careers at the bottom of the labour market” (Shildrick *et al* 2013: 7) despite “strong resilient work motivation” (*ibid*). These findings informed Shildrick *et al*’s recommendations that there should be an increase in the quality of jobs available at the lower end of the labour market, including retention and National Minimum Wage levels; and for support to be given to the short-term unemployed who didn’t register and claim the benefits they were entitled to.

Dunn regards “pro employment values, attitudes and behaviours among unemployed people” (Dunn 2010:2) as a “paradox” (*ibid*). This is because Dunn regards employability as a result of behaviour, therefore those who were demonstrating these pro-employment values attitudes and behaviours would not be unemployed. This situation is not a paradox to other authors, such as Wiggan’s (2015) concern with how the labour market structure affects labour market autonomy, which recognises the importance of how structure affects agency. This can be seen through young people’s refusal to comply with procedures and also the type of choices open to people as a result of ALMPs, which then inform these pragmatic responses. For Shildrick *et al* (2013), what was acting as a barrier to employment was not the behaviour of the respondents, as they already possessed pro-employment behaviour and commitment.

Dunn (2015) criticises Shildrick *et al* (2013) for favouring one set of perspectives from the interview research, those of the unemployed respondents, over those of the JC+ employees. He considers this “remarkable” (Dunn 2015:2) when the JC+ employees will have vast experience of their clients’ jobsearch activity, whilst the respondents may not want to risk losing their benefit by saying they aren’t committed to looking for a job. Dunn claims that such findings receive virtually no critical scrutiny as they “please left wing people’s ears” (Dunn 2015: 2).

However he neglects to acknowledge three things here:

1. He himself has decided to take the perspectives of one type of respondent over another in his research, by choosing to regard the JC+ employees’ responses as more trustworthy than those of the unemployed respondents.
2. Social policy authors may report the impact of structural factors on unemployment because there is evidence that this is what is happening (Johnson 2000, Webster *et al* 2004, MacDonald 2011, Clayton & Brinkley 2011).
3. Dunn’s findings concur with the political status quo that focuses on the assumption that unemployment is voluntary rather than considering the impact

structural factors can have on a person's chances of stable employment. The government draws upon research that focuses on manipulation and illegitimate use of the benefits system by welfare recipients (Fletcher 2016), such as Mitton (2009) and Peters & Joyce 2006).

Another thing that is missed here is a proper acknowledgment that there is interplay between the structures that young people are located within and the choices they are able to make or choose to make as a result of their structure. A benefits system that works to the rhetoric that any job is better than no job, mandating people to take insecure unpleasant low paid jobs and pointless courses "can generate hostility to jobs in general" (Standing 2014: 144); as Giazitzola (2014) also found, people do not see the benefit of these types of jobs. An active refusal of work amongst this group could be seen as a "pragmatic response to their few skills and, at best, precarious employment" (Giazitzola 2014: 345). "The fact that there is an aversion to jobs on offer does not mean that masses of people do not want to work" (Standing 2014: 156); they just don't want insecure, poorly paid jobs. "An individual's ability to enter into employment and retain work, and progress, is affected by a complex interaction between a range of different factors" (Clayton & Brinkley 2011:37). However explanations that advocate the principle of conditionality based on behaviour change to fix an individual's irresponsibility and welfare dependency (Deacon 2004) assumes that these recipients are to some extent 'gaming the system' (Fletcher 2016). I will consider this concept in more detail next.

### **Gaming the system?**

Fletcher (2016) argues that the divergence in approach to the problem of unemployment is between individual conduct amounting to "cynical manipulation" (Fletcher 2016: 172) and structural causes for welfare reliance "vulnerability" (*ibid*). He investigates whether benefit recipients are "gamers or victims of the system" (Fletcher 2016: 171). Fletcher argues that the behavioural understanding of poverty and the poor is longstanding, with media discourses emphasising traits of the "undeserving poor" and "scroungaphobia" (Golding and Middleton 1982: 59), by



“Shirkers” (Fletcher 2016:173) and “dole wallers” (Wiggan 2015 196). He notes that whilst governmental discourse has stopped short of this terminology, the demonization of welfare recipients is still evident (Garthwaite 2011; Tyler 2008; MacDonald and Marsh 2005), including in political party portrayals of a “culture of dependency” (Cameron 2012 online). Baumberg *et al* (2012) argue that there is also a public perception of welfare claimants as less deserving than 20 years ago. For Shildrick and Macdonald (2013), these terminologies and portrayals produce “hegemonic assumptions” (Fletcher 2016: 173) of welfare recipients.

There are “caveats to the narratives of manipulation” (Fletcher 2016: 176), which include: (i) that the benefit system teaches benefit recipients to be rational; (ii) that recipients share “a normative position with the wider population and would act similarly” (*ibid*); and that (iii) the rationality and agency of welfare recipients is a response to the limited ability of the benefits system to provide support. Fletcher’s research found that many of the national agency stakeholders interviewed claimed that many welfare recipients had a lack of knowledge about the benefit system and showed “limited agency to act rationally within it and very constrained individual agency” (Fletcher 2016: 177). Furthermore, Fletcher surmises that this vulnerability may not be self-identified by the recipients and so further weakened the “agency of those subject to them” (Fletcher 2016: 183).

However, despite this, perspectives of benefit claimants as involved in cynical manipulation are not necessarily limited to the perspective of media and politicians and wider public. Welfare recipients in the research reported suspicions that some other claimants may be manipulating the system. In these cases, they supported the premise of sanctions to stop such behaviour, although they strongly denied enacting the same cynical manipulation. Key stakeholder participants did however claim that media and government exaggerated the extent of recipients gaming the system in their discourses (Fletcher 2016: 183).

Fletcher argues that these governmental systems that sanction and punish rather than give support use increased surveillance via conditionality, deterrence through sanctions and stigma through the use of discourse to achieve behaviour

modification. Moreover these systems infiltrate the “perspectives and actions of all actors within the UK welfare system” (Fletcher 2016: 183), which allows these systems to continue. They are exerting “new forms of control over populations increasingly marginalised by economic changes and welfare state retrenchment” (Fletcher 2016: 183).

Wright (2012) points out that what is crucial in understanding why and how welfare recipients act and react accordingly. Wright (2012) stresses the impact that specific structures have on benefit recipients’ agency and how these structures interact with each other to inform a changing dynamic that shapes their ability to make choices. This shapes recipients’ agency differently according to each recipient’s structural outlook. There is a cumulative effect between policies and the disadvantages the young people face that make young people’s situations insecure and inform their choices. However, young people’s precarity can also feed back into the young people’s disadvantages and employment/unemployment/non-employment status.

I will now review how this interaction between different factors and the pull of elements of structure and agency shape where young people are placed in their situation of unemployment and looking for a job. I will consider with whom the control for this situation lies.

### **Control: realist governmentality and the role of regulation and resistance**

Elements of control have been discussed throughout this review; however this section will look at how previous literature understands the connections between neo-liberalism and shifting welfare states, within shifting power relations.

Furthermore it will explore how recipients respond to these evolving relationships.

This section will first tie together the literature in this review to make sense of how the concepts of power, control and authority are attached to the factors of neo-liberal ideology, place and youth and the precariat. It will then review literature regarding the role of ‘Realist Governmentality’ to uphold the insights of post-Foucauldian approaches and attempts to address the limitations of governmentality

in order to further understand how ALMPs have prompted and justified the use of power, authority and surveillance to regulate welfare recipients. Research on workfare policy will then be assessed to understand how the play of power and authority work to control the unemployed and how the unemployed may deal with this.

It has been argued in Chapter two that ideology sets the conditions for who should be regulated and how. The structure of place can pre-dictate people's vulnerabilities to weak economies and to unemployment. Young people are more vulnerable to unemployment and are even more so if they live in weaker economies. These young people in weaker economies and on unemployment benefit are most likely to be in the precariat cohort, defined by what they lack- which overwhelmingly is security. However, so far these findings have not cascaded up into policy practice as ALMPs have become more concerned with regulation and surveillance of clients.

### **Realist Governmentality**

To give some further context to these reviews and to give a clearer view on what is meant in this research by governmentality, moreover, neo-liberal governmentality, how Foucault interprets this concept will be introduced in this section.

Governmentality gives a particular emphasis on how individuals are encouraged to govern their own behaviour. Its focus is less on the state exercising control and more on the "specific techniques and mechanisms of regulation and discipline in specific locations and institutions at the interface with the population" (Lister 2010: 119). In the case of youth unemployment, this focus is particularly on the power relations between the young people and the agencies involved in the 'street level bureaucracy' (Lipsky 1980) service delivery of DWP policy.

For Foucault (2003), this relationship also has great significance. According to Foucault's concept of governmentality, the relationship of power, regulation and choice can be understood by looking how power presupposes agency. How the state is engaged with this is important in understanding how it is used as a

mechanism of social control. He argues that we need to look at the day-to-day interactions with the state and look at individuals' "management of possibilities and their ability to structure the possible actions of others" (*ibid*: 138). In order for a relationship of power to exist, there has to be the potential for influence and resistance on both sides. It is not a simple top-down approach. This is not to say that governmentality rejects the idea of sovereignty, but it looks at a different relationship of power. Larner (2008) recognizes this as a triangulation of power: Sovereignty- Discipline- Government. The individual has discipline over oneself and actions; if not, they are regulated.

*"Whereas in the past this was a physical process of separation, in the modern social security system it is achieved through the multiplication of social security rules and procedures and a correlative division of the claimant population in accordance with the constitutive criteria of status and entitlement" (Dean 1988: 76).*

In a neo-liberal state, freedom comes to be understood in terms of "the management and organization of conditions in which one can be free" (*ibid*: 63-4). This re-iterates the points made by Fergusson (2004) that neo-liberalism promotes the ALMPs in England that are rooted in supplying labour and are blinkered in their focus on work incentives, increased conditionality and higher punitive measures to distinguish between those deserving and the new idle. Within this process, governmentality views risk as instrumental in strategies used by the government in formulating new classifications by which to organize and regulate people, including young people.

Although Foucault does look at society as a result of the change of the economic sphere (Foucault 2007), the theory of governmentality has been criticized for not looking at how we come to recognize this change and our knowledge of this, and then how we act (Larner 2008). Foucault views individuals as far from docile workers, and by the nature of the triangulation of power-relations according to this theory, there is potential for influence on both sides and so potential for resistance, and therefore potential for the realization of this criticism.

These power relations are both mental, as we consent to these policies (Gramsci 1980) as well as physical, in the control and organization of the interactions and whereabouts of people. Therefore power can produce change through people's realization of this power relationship, and then by going beyond realisation to what Friere (1996) recognises as conscientisation; people's critical consciousness of their situation followed by action with the "power to transform their reality" (Taylor 1993: 52). Here the practices that ALMPs impose, such as surveying benefit recipients via increased conditionality and sanctions and the street level delivery practices by the JC+, are such that the recipients may try to reject or resist these practices imposed on them. This redresses the power dynamic in the relationship between the recipient and provider; be it street level or above.

For Scott (1985) every-day resistance to power showed that people resisting the power had not accepted or consented to the control and power over them, although Scott expands on this to argue that this every-day resistance is still not a way of resisters liberating themselves. Under governmentality, resistance is not necessarily assumed to involve liberation and freedom, but concerns how individuals, who are managing their possibilities, deal with their situation and their ways of exercising some power themselves. By defining people by what they lack, as the precariat are defined (Standing 2011), resistance can empower them to act. Still, Mckee (2009) expresses criticism of this approach. Firstly if this form of resistance is to be taken on, where does that leave the possibility of emancipation? Secondly, these assumptions are based on the premise that power is distributed equally (Cooper 1994). It further fails to give proper attention to how modes of power are differentially accessible to different groups.

Larner (2008) and Mckee (2009) both suggest that a better and more relevant way to understand power and authority is through 'Realist Governmentality'. This is a version of governmentality with a grounded focus on the empirical world that aims to transcend other social policy settings (Mckee 2009). Its analysis goes beyond focusing just on discourse and emphasizes the role that politics, local culture and

habitus<sup>11</sup> play in restructuring governance. It looks at political and social relations as well as local variation and contexts, which are established as imperative in identifying and understanding young people's experiences of unemployment in particular places, such as (in relation to this study) the North-East.

With this concept of the interaction of power and regulation and the subjectivities of empirical life, this theory of Realist Governmentality offers a way to explore new issues of power and resistance to the Welfare State, more specifically unemployment benefits. Furthermore, this street level approach can be used to explore and make sense of not only different welfare states and locations but also differences between them.

It does this by identifying political and economic shifts within regions, and analysing local responses whilst recognizing how these responses are shaped by local political cultures (Larner 2008). According to McKee (2009), this street-level approach can therefore reveal how complex and messy people's structure and struggles are, and through this attempts can be made to fathom these by social research.

'Realist Governmentality' goes beyond the theoretical. It acknowledges the subjectivities in the empirical and can draw attention to the gap between what is attempted and what the government accomplishes; it does not assume that governmental aims are successful. Furthermore it acknowledges the potential for discrepancies between what the government proposes on paper and what happens in practice. Research using 'Realist Governmentality' illustrates the "potential for bottom up resistances to top down mentalities of rule" (McDonald & Marston 2005: 397). The subjectivities of place and people plus the micro-realities of individuals, and their day-to-day interactions with multiple bodies and institutions, can be explored. This can build upon the theoretical idea that individuals are not 'docile' workers.

Work will now be explored and reviewed by researchers who have adopted this

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<sup>11</sup> *Habitus* refers to the physical embodiment of cultural capital, to the deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that we possess due to our life experiences (Bourdieu 1989).

approach. This will uncover how Realist Governmentality has been used to form a more experiential view and appreciation of the people, place, and control, and the micro-relationships between and within these three factors, under ALMPs and neo-liberal ideology. This not only acknowledges that things have changed but *how* they have and the revolving impact this has.

### **The role of rights and responsibilities in control**

Dean (2007b) argues that as this change is happening, so too is the marginalization of human rights. In other related works he claims that in the developed world the characteristics of welfare provision are markedly conditional and “systematically subordinate to the specific legal and political context within which they are framed” (Dean 2007a:4). As a result, the rights of welfare recipients remain on the margins of public and political concern over human rights. In fact, “in the global context welfare rights have always been marginal” (*ibid*: 5). Despite mounting concern over poverty and social policy initiatives to correct the problems of social exclusion and poverty, it seems that ALMP’s are at odds with the concept of welfare rights, as those most susceptible to poverty and exclusion are also subject to ALMPs that could overlook welfare rights of the recipients as they do not take into account their needs, (see pp 44).

For Dean (2007a), the economic change in post-industrial capitalism has created an “ideological consensus” (*ibid*: 6) in what the problem regarding unemployment is and how things ought to be done. A subsequent rise in ‘third way’ politics has then prompted a mantra of “no rights without responsibilities” (Giddens 1998: 65). Dean contends that indeed with rights come responsibilities, but stresses that as the role of the Welfare State and social policy has moved from redistribution of resources and meeting needs to enabling people to individually manage risk, the assumption ascends therefore that individuals on welfare are not managing. Therefore what needs to be done is to correct those individuals to make sure they do.

This is evident in the introduction of claimant commitments as a prerequisite for receipt of unemployment benefit that all claimants must agree to and sign. The focus on the individual's responsibilities takes the focus away from their rights. At the same time, it identifies individuals who are not managing their own risks adequately, and then legitimates their regulation in order to make them manage.

In this way, then, recipients of welfare are controlled. As social policy becomes more concerned with more conditional provision, individual behaviour is the focus of access to services and benefits. In order to get benefits they must regulate their behaviour to act as the state sees fit. Ideological shifts towards ALMPs have reconfigured concerns towards active citizenship and the responsibility of a citizen to be active, as rights fall by the wayside in favour of monitoring who is being active, or making efforts to be active, further reaching regulation and surveillance of the individual supersede other concerns. There is an uncomfortable situation here in ensuring freedom of the market through ALMPs, yet increasing controls on the individual.

There is a paradox in an ideology that blames individuals for their poor choices, in education and employment, and bad management, of their time and taking up opportunities to increase their employability, and disregards the impact structures, such as increased conditionality to qualify for benefits, requirements to attend more meetings and JC+ appointments and punitive sanctions for non-compliance has on unemployment, whilst imposing stricter structures and limitations on individuals' agency in order to make these individuals more active.

### **The role of classification in control**

Caswell, Larsen & Marston (2010) continue this line of enquiry. They use the concept of governmentality as they explored the implications of using classification systems, in Denmark and Australia, to find a collaborative solution to the problem of unemployment.



They argued that the classification models used were divisive of the population, as they individualised blame and calculated individual risk rather than looking at the complex social problems behind unemployment. Like Dean (2007a), they argued that as a result people's welfare rights were diminished, as citizens became cases to be filled into pre-established categories. They found that frontline workers using the classification system became risk managers using statistical analysis of risk to deal with this social problem of unemployment (Caswell *et al* 2010: 399).

With classification systems, certain issues and forms of knowledge can be left out, ignored or not recognised in the system, which can cause frustration for the claimant, as Standing (2014) has argued, or cause the claimant to not pass on knowledge for fear of how it could be used against them in such a rigid system.

Caswell *et al* (2010) also found that, on a policy level, classification models in both Welfare States offered streamlined and supposedly 'objective' tools (*ibid*: 399). However in practice, once the complexities of individuals and their circumstances are taken into account, it was a lot messier. Policy in these welfare states also did not take into account the gap between the rigid classification model and the subjectivities of frontline workers in how they classified different people and how they used their own discretion. They argued that this leads to inaccuracies and disagreements over classifications and ultimately evidence of "resistance and refusal in policy practice" (*ibid*: 400).

Grant (2013) also found that the relationship between frontline workers delivering ALMP services and benefit recipients was not a simple case of the frontline worker exercising power over claimants, although they were used as a part of the processes to control these claimants. She found that JC+ staff had controls and structural restraints on them also through their targets and DWP directives and other ways of implementing ALMPs. The direction of the control that the JC+ staff had on clients still went downwards: as Grant acknowledged, "power relations are far from equal between benefit claimants and those who have power to provide benefits" (*ibid* 166), whereby claimants have little choice but to accept conditions imposed upon them.

Although the small scale of Grant's research prompts her to restrict the generalisability of her research to the wider population, it does offer a valuable insight into the perspectives and experiences of a group of "rarely studied workers" (Grant 2013:173). Giving such valid insights can contextualise the position in which the advisers and the recipients are placed, and their relationships with each other and with the wider institutions involved. Grant's research is "one piece of a large puzzle" (*ibid*: 174). This is not just in mapping workers' beliefs and behaviours, but charting how welfare is more intensely emphasising increased conditionality for benefits in practice.

### **The role of resistance against control**

Earlier collaborative research by Marston with McDonald (2005) has also explored the divergence between the theoretical and the empirical, and the interplay of power between 'frontline worker' and the 'client'.

MacDonald & Marston (2005) look at how governmentality allows a workfare state. They use 'Realist Governmentality' as an analytical tool to conduct 'street level' research. In their comparative research of the employment services and clients in the UK, US, and Australian welfare states, they looked at how the macro (welfare state) relations affect the micro (client case). Furthermore, they explore how individuals manage power and authority themselves. Through this method, they argued that engaging in policy research at a local level of analysis acted as a necessary balance to more macro comparisons. Aspects of "How workfare policies and programmes are aligning social relations and identities with new welfare ends and means" (*ibid*: 374) were therefore able to be uncovered.

*"Our analysis, although small scale, demonstrates how case managers are 'tutors in arts of self-management' (Rose & Miller 1992:14) and how case management is a key technology of government in a field of unemployment"* (McDonald & Marston 2005: 396).

Through 'Realist Governmentality', they found that the relationships between employment service staff, or frontline workers, and the clients were ones of power and authority, founded in the everyday politics of welfare reform:

*"Frontline workers (in the day-to-day interactions with recipients) were the eyes and ears of government. They regulated and enforced self-regulation of behaviour"* (McDonald & Marston 2005: 396).

As frontline workers were used in the surveillance of welfare recipients, governments are using more sophisticated methods of surveillance (Dean 2007). According to Rose (1999), this explains how liberal states can govern from a distance via seemingly disconnected agents. This is evident in recent welfare reform as services are increasingly contracted out whilst all surveillance and monitoring from these contracts are fed back to government bodies.

Using this analytical tool, they found that in the UK, US and Australia, citizens were obliged to become active in "managing their various social and economic risk through engagement with the paid labour market, while at the same time introducing harsher penalties for non-compliance with the new regime" (*ibid*: 375). The ALMPs in these countries were steeped in moral judgments about social citizenship that were becoming more narrowly defined in terms of active economic citizenship. Neo-liberal ideology and discourse provided a prime set up that prioritized self-management of the individual. "As the Welfare State became Workfare, so too did the constitutive relations and subsequent identities that characterized unemployment" (*ibid*: 375). The welfare recipients acted as a hazard to society as their 'failure to manage' meant they were in danger of not gaining employment. Those who could not manage were therefore classified as more risky (Dean 2007). An element of contention here for young people is how they can manage their risk of youth, especially in weaker economies, given that their age is not something within their control. This illustrates yet again the significance of exploring the structure of agency for young people.

ALMPs act on the premise that they would transform the undesirable behaviour of

unemployment. “In cases where this doesn’t happen, the mode of engagement resorts to authoritisation and coercion” (*ibid*: 396). The focus of policy on the labour market demand authorised the means taken to monitor and regulate welfare recipients, just as the premise that ‘any job is better than no job’ authorises mandating (or coercing) recipients to accept any job. It validated motives for the regulation of individuals and exercised power and authority through the everyday relations with them in order to ensure compliance with ALMPs, and more punitive sanctions for those who do not comply. The processes of ALMPs are informed by the policy discourses that blame young people and enforce conditions to rectify behaviour and limit their choices. ALMPs could actually be excluding the young people and thus instigate resistance to these ALMPs by the young people.

McDonald & Marston (2005) studied the relationship between case managers and their clients. They analysed the ‘technologies of agency’ (ways of exercising their agency) in this relationship, the compliance with and resistance to the case managers’ authority. This analysis revealed not only the compliance of clients induced by ‘individualisation of blame’ and or management of one’s actions, but also “how the clients refused this ideologically imposed ethic of self-reliance and responsabilisation” (*ibid*: 395-6).

*“We have focused on how the targets of employment services govern themselves and are constituted in everyday relations of power and authority. In some cases this has meant drawing attention to how these citizen-subjects refuse to act as a ‘recipient’, a ‘dependent’ or a ‘jobseeker’; a refusal to be what the relations of the state have made them in contemporary welfare politics” (McDonald and Marston 2005: 397).*

Young people responded to the policy-imposed power relations in this study in a number of ways. They documented resistance to authority, case management and individualized identities put on them; it was a form of defiance as well as resistance. Others exercised agency by using the “administrative and liberal principle of choice-identifying examples of using neo-liberal rationality of choice by the traditionally

powerless” (*ibid*: 394). This use of Realist Governmentality explored the micro-relations of power and authority and the interactions and relationships with “counter politics and resistance involved” (*ibid*: 397).

As MacDonald & Marston found these ‘bottom up’ forms of resistance, they also found that resistance and refusal was found amongst case managers too. They found examples where case managers used their discretion regarding individual cases to get round the regulations imposed, for example when or when not to apply the rules. However they also reasoned that this resistance by frontline workers may well have been to the extra administration processes, the forms and paper work and time spent required, rather than refusal to be instrumental in the control of claimants.

McDonald & Marston claim that looking at the street level ‘micro-relations’ of this relationship has given an insight into “how power works *through* subjectivities in ways that do not negate expressions of agency” (*ibid*: 397) but instead help to understand ‘technologies of agency’ in Workfare.

Although, like Foucault, this study does not look at the possibility for emancipation, by exploring more deeply these ‘risky populations’ it recognizes how authority and coercion may limit the abilities to have equal agency (Dean 2002). This is especially relevant now that the characteristics of Workfare are more magnified through the subsequent reforms of the Coalition and then Conservative governments.

They contend that a next stage of this research would be to go beyond semi-structured interviews as the primary methodology, just as Realist Governmentality gives the opportunity to adopt less structured or ethnographic methods so that the researcher can immerse themselves in the street level. They argue that this could help enhance the utility of governmentality by appreciating the operations of welfare in neo-liberal welfare states.

The form in which government are regulating through ALMPs has been found to be a more sophisticated and overtly detached method of governance, but their use of

'Realist Governmentality' seeks out the impact on the micro subjects of research. It therefore also shows how policy may not work in practice when applied to the empirical and the diversity inherent in and between differing contexts are included. From this research they argue that social policy needs to look at unemployment beyond terms of deficit and a classification of risk factors, otherwise these narrow indicators will miss the significant factors that impact on unemployed individuals and place the problem in its social context, and the interplay with power and authority.

### **Relevance to the research**

A review of all literature in this Chapter underlines the significance of numerous factors in unemployment and the complexity in the relationship of structure and agency, and the messiness in researching this. It further highlights the shortcomings of political theory when applied in the real world and questions what the actual aims of ideologically-based ALMPs are.

Behaviourist solutions to youth unemployment that bring about bad choices or agency do not seem to provide an adequate explanation overall. As a result, there can be participation by young people in education, training and employment, but exclusion of other forms may remain; there can be participation in work, but in-work poverty can remain. This is particularly the case with ALMPs that have based themselves on short-term cycles of getting people into any form of employment or subsidised employment, rather than necessarily considering issues of sustainable longer-term employment, or the levels of pay, opportunities for development, conditions, etc. that may be involved in these jobs.

Despite the recommendations of research for governments to seek alternative avenues to tackle unemployment and the reasons behind it, existing forms of ALMPs in England are still taking stronger hold as the government's preferred way to remedy unemployment. From the research considered, there is a real need for policy to take more account of differences within and between places, within the cohort of youth and taking into account experiences of multiple disadvantages.

Moreover, more in-depth research is also needed to grasp how and why these disadvantages are experienced, and the impact this has at an individual level for young people in different locations.

By using in-depth unstructured interview techniques and longitudinal engagement, through an approach explained in more detail in the following Chapter, it is an aim of this thesis to explore the day-to-day experiences of young people regarding unemployment, including in their interactions with ‘frontline workers’ or employment service providers. “For researchers, there is a job to be done in designing projects that break free from the conventions of thought on behavioural conditionality to capture the more nuanced aspects of agency” (Wright 2012: 324).

One significant issue that becomes apparent here is that regardless of the explanations adopted for youth unemployment, whether focused on structure and/or agency, the general consensus that unites different arguments is that, so far, the ALMPs put in place to tackle youth unemployment are not working. The young people affected are left with choices on how to respond within their contexts. This is where my research will contribute to redressing this gap, not just in the focus of the research but through the methodology and methods adopted and practiced, as my next Chapter considers.

## **Part 2**

### **Chapter 4**

#### **Method and Methodology**

Having considered the debates over youth unemployment detailed in Chapters 2 and 3, and in particular the continuing questions about the interactions between structural factors that shapes young people's experiences of unemployment and their agency to deal with this, this Chapter outlines and details the research questions, methodologies and methods I used to investigate these issues in the North East of England, along with associated rationales for these.

The structure of this Chapter is as follows: first, I will present and give a breakdown of my overall research aim and discuss the reasons behind my research focus. Secondly, I will detail the reasons for a comparative multiple case-study and explain my sampling strategy and give a brief description of the young people in my research, each of which I counted as cases in their own right. I will then introduce the particular geographical context of my research and justify my use of longitudinal research. There will be critical reflection on the impact of politics and ideology in relation to the methodology and how this consideration has shaped my use of research methods. The use of qualitative methods, specifically focus groups and interviews will be outlined and justified, including the use of individual contact with them via Facebook, phone and email. The implications of ethical considerations will then be discussed and the challenges met during carrying out the research will then be reviewed.



## **Overall Research Aim and Associated Rationale**

My research aim was to explore how young people, aged 18-25, in the North-East of England experience unemployment and ALMP interventions by engaging with young people's accounts over a period of six months.

The following bullet points give an introductory summary explanation of the rationales for each of the components in this overall research aim and how they were operationalised in practice in the research; these are then developed in further detail in the rest of the Chapter.

- I looked at each young person's individual circumstances and experiences of unemployment, and barriers to employment, as well as their accounts of interactions with ALMPs, particularly in terms of their interactions at the JC+ as the key point of interaction in their everyday lives. Each young person was considered a case in their own right. This approach drew on Stake (2010), who suggests that case study research can enable study of how things work, and to understand how things aren't working and why.
- Young people aged 18-25 were selected because this reflects the age bracket that is typically used in policy definitions of youth unemployment. In practice, I looked into the experiences of 28 young people within this age bracket who were unemployed.
- The North-East of England is important because, at the time that this research began in 2013, this region had the highest level of unemployment and JSA claimant rate amongst young people in England (ONS 2014). Within this context, there was also significant variation between wards, with some local areas particularly adversely affected. In response to this, the young people who I engaged with through my research lived in different locations within County Durham and Newcastle, in the North-East of England, with details of the particular areas and rationales for how these young people were selected further explained below.
- Young people's accounts were important because I wanted to include the young people as active subjects. I wanted to examine the reasons these

young people gave for their actions, focusing on the actors' meanings. There was also an emphasis on context and exploring how the young people's lives were viewed in terms of unfolding processes, as laid out by Becker & Bryman (2004: 92). I therefore used qualitative rather than quantitative approaches to achieve this detailed exploration of their accounts and how these interacted contextually. To conduct these case studies, I used multiple methods including focus groups, interviews and Facebook, phone and email interactions over the case study period, as detailed further below.

- It was important to research the young people's experiences longitudinally because some young people affected by ALMPs are in a cycle of benefits, work or employability schemes and unemployment. Studying these at more than one point in time allowed me to engage with young people and their experiences and their perspectives at different stages as they went through these cycles and other experiences. This type of research allows for the exploration of the "complex interplay of structure and individual agency" (Patrick 2014:708), a process that is fundamental to my research.

Therefore, a longitudinal case study approach was used, viewing each young person as a case study over a six-month period. This six-month period was selected for a number of reasons:

- Given the time scale of the research, this is a relevant period in which to collect meaningful data. The research extended beyond a single moment in time, which meant that developments could be detected, changes in progress that the young people made and any sequence of events could be established.
- Outcomes to gauge long-term success begin at six months (DWP 2014; McVey 2014). A six-month period in employment is currently considered by the government as long-term employment from the JC+ perspective, and this indicator also applied under previous programmes (YTS/NDYP/Youth Contract). It is also the time frame from which young people (aged 18-25) are classed as long-term unemployed. As six months is regarded as a long-term period to be in or out of employment

and by the JC+, it is a relevant and timely period to document young people's experiences and progress.

I will now discuss the nature of my case study methodology in more depth.

### **Comparative multi-case study**

The young people were considered as the primary cases in my research. These cases were not chosen to generalise the accounts and experiences of all young people across the whole of the population (in this case, all young people in the North-East) as "we do not study a case primarily to understand other cases; the first obligation is to understand this case" (Stake 1995: 4). The aim was to explore the different accounts and experiences of the young people from different locations and backgrounds. In the research, I wanted to understand the individual perceptions of the young people and the diversity of the research participants. I wanted to appreciate and gain insight into the complexities of the young people as single cases and the complexities in the North-East and within the cohort of the young people.

I decided that a multiple case study would be most suitable to do this as it allowed me to look at multiple cases in diverse settings and circumstances explore the multiple realities and views of the young people. Stake (2005) claims that this type of case study is best placed to examine situational complexity, as I was doing. I was able to "examine the common issues across the group of individual cases, over a variety of locations, with their unique features and the context of each case (*ibid*: 5). Although searching for better policy can arguably be in conflict with what happens to individual cases, Stake (2005) argued that understanding these individual cases can provide insights that can inform policy. In this respect 'multi-case' research can be very applicable to policy research.

As well as studying each case in its own right, this also involved comparison between the cases. Comparison is part of the way we think about ourselves and conduct our lives; we compare ourselves to others every day, gauging our success,

how happy we are, thin, fat, rich, poor. It allows a conceptualisation of the phenomena to be compared, whether to study the few or the many (Peters 1998:58-78), as well as “the identification of similarities and differences between two or more socio-economic or political phenomena” (Bryman 2004:126). Peters states that if interested in the detail and the context, practicalities and resources usually dictate a small study to focus on the nuances of each case at hand (*ibid* in Bryman 2004:129). Given that the study involved detailed qualitative contact over a six-month life course of the chosen case study individuals, therefore a sample size of 28 was deemed appropriate and practical throughout the study.

Bryman notes that there are problems with a comparative method; how can we ensure that there is comparability when selecting the cases to compare, ‘conceptualising the phenomena to be compared’ and when collecting and analysing the data (*ibid* 2004:128)? This was an issue with this research, not least of all as the research method changed frequently leading up to and during the field research, which will be discussed later in the Chapter.

I will now introduce my sampling method, detailing how I selected my cases.

### **Sampling**

Sample selection was significant to maximise the worth of the research to give full credit to the accounts given by the young people. I used four organisations in County Durham and Newcastle to gain access to the 28 young people studied as cases, and these young people came from seven different wards in County Durham and Newcastle, which were experiencing particularly high levels of youth unemployment, as data later in the Chapter will show.

The organisations were East Durham Partnership (EDP), New College Durham (NCD) Intensive Employability Programme, Albert Kennedy Trust (AKT) and Newcastle College<sup>12</sup>. The research had no anchorage to any specific organisation, and none of these were JC+ agencies. East Durham Partnership deliver employability courses

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<sup>12</sup> See Appendix 4 for more detailed profiles of these organisations

and subsequent work experience to unemployed benefit recipients who have been mandated onto the course by either the JC+ or a Work Programme Provider, including young people. New College Durham delivered one week intensive employability courses to people mandated by the JC+ who were in receipt of unemployment benefits, including young people. Newcastle College runs ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes. These classes are open to voluntary attendance and are also a requirement for some benefit recipients to attend as a condition of benefit receipt. Albert Kennedy Trust supports lesbian, gay, bisexual and Trans homeless young people in crisis.

These organisations were selected due to their willingness to co-operate with the research and allow me to access the young people with whom they worked, and because they enabled access to a spread of locations over the region, reaching young people from different locations and different backgrounds<sup>13</sup>. I then recruited those young people accessing these organisations' related programmes who were willing to participate in my research, selecting them on the basis of this willingness, providing they met the criteria of being aged 18-25 and being unemployed.

This approach enabled me to access a large enough sample that was diverse, through using different organisations that had different agendas and reached different young people relevant to the research. Using this sampling technique particularly meant that I gained a rich insight into many different young people's experiences across different parts of the region. I was able to follow the young people's progress and experiences of ALMP interventions in these different locations. The comparison was therefore between the different elements within each case (young person), and how they related to each other. This included their experiences of the different services and the different locations. This diversity guarded against the data being indicative of only one very specific group, for example young white English men from one village signed onto one employability initiative. As I couldn't research every young person in every area of the North-East, selecting young people from different areas and organisations guarded against the

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<sup>13</sup> As outlined further in the organisation profiles in Appendix 4

research becoming focused on just one organisation or area within the region. It also allowed for exploration into the structure of the young people's agency across different organisations and areas. I was able to gain more of an insight into the experiences the young people had of the services provided to them throughout different locations, including whether these services differed according to the different structures that young people were placed in and different needs of the young people. I was able to document the young people's accounts within different places, contexts, and external realities, whilst noting any intra-regional differences and multiple differences that young people said they faced.

Ongoing correspondence and meetings with staff at the chosen organisations secured access to multiple unemployed young people who were then given the opportunity to volunteer to participate in the study. The staff arranged times for me to attend group meetings with the young people; they allowed time for me to go on-site to introduce my research during their planned courses or lessons. They also contacted me if more young people had joined their courses so that I could meet them and see if these young people would be interested in participating. To a certain degree, some of the organisations acted as gatekeepers, as they already had a familiarity and rapport with the young people, which made it easier for me to approach the young people.

The organisations used were not concerned about providing candidates with particular experiences (good or bad) of their own services for the study, as their organisation was not the direct focus of the research and the focus of the research did not reflect on their performance. The research was not bound to any organisation's practice or limitations but it also meant that a lot of leg work from the researcher had to take place in order to maintain a relationship with the young people, and not always successfully. A key challenge was to get and keep the young people engaged in the research over the chosen six month period; this will be discussed later in the Chapter.

## Introduction to the 28 cases in the research

I followed the longitudinal stories of 24 out of the 28 young people. Here is a brief introduction to each case. I have organised the cases according to the organisation where I first met them, starting with East Durham Partnership (EDP), then New College Durham, Albert Kennedy Trust and Newcastle College. I should note here that the names of the young people are pseudonyms to protect their identities.

### Cases from East Durham Partnership (EDP)

Katie, Lindsey, Rob, Kai and Simon were all part of one initial focus group at EDP, which took place when they had been there for two weeks. When I first met them, they were all angry, as they had found out that this course was not a guarantee of six months' employment which they said they had been told to expect by the JC+; instead, they received a certain number of weeks' work experience depending on the qualifications they had. Katie, Lindsey, Rob and Kai all got allocated 10 weeks work experience, and Simon got four. I met them all again a month afterwards for another focus group at EDP and then continued individual contact after that.

**Katie** was 24 and from a former coal mining village, where she lived a couple of streets away from her brother, who was also unemployed. Katie had been out of work for over a year. She had been sent on an employability course by Acumen, her local Work Programme provider. At first, she didn't want to be part of the research, but when she found out it would be a focus group she was happy to be part of it and was one of the most vocal of the group. I kept in touch with Katie over Facebook every other week, and I met her again twice for informal interviews: once at EDP to be part of another focus group and once more after that by herself.

**Lindsey** was 24 and from a former coal mining village, where she had been in and out of work since she left her hairdressing college course halfway through. She had been mandated onto the same employability course as Katie at the EDP by the JC+, where she and Katie had become friends on the course. She wanted to complete her hairdressing course but she couldn't afford to leave JSA to finish it. Lindsey was

offered 10 weeks' work experience at EDP but didn't return after one week. I met Lindsey once again at EDP as part of a focus group and spoke to her three times on Facebook after that.

**Rob** was 23 and from the same village as Lindsey. He had a criminal record and had served a short time in prison. He had struggled to find work for over 3 years. He didn't have any qualifications beyond level one maths. I met him at EDP. As Rob put it, he had "been sent on every employability course going" and still couldn't find a job. I met him again as part of the same focus group as Katie, Lindsey Simon and Kai at EDP and I spoke to him over Facebook every other week after that. I later met him again for an informal interview by himself.

**Kai** was 19 from a small town in East Durham; he had left college before completing his A levels and had never had a job. He had been mandated onto the EDP course and was part of the same two focus groups as Katie, Lindsey and Rob. I kept in touch with Kai on Facebook every other week after the first focus group; he also took part in the second focus group. We communicated a few times over text, and I met him again for an informal interview once by himself.

**Simon** was 24 and from a small town in East Durham. He had been claiming JSA on and off for four years. He had been mandated onto the EDP course by the JC+. He had GCSE level qualifications and he had a criminal record over minor offences. He had tried to become a taxi driver but couldn't afford the licence. He really wanted to be an electrician but couldn't afford to stop benefits to go on the course. I met Simon at two focus groups with Katie, Rob, Lindsey and Kai and I kept in touch with Simon at least every other week via Facebook. I spoke to him once on the phone towards the end of the fieldwork.

**Dan** was 20 and from a small town in East Durham. He was a father to a six-month old child. He had some GCSEs and a motor vehicle qualification, although he had said he didn't have any qualifications so he would be sent on the employability course at EDP. He had been on JSA for nearly a year and had just been referred onto the Work Programme. Before signing on, he had worked at McDonalds for two



years and then got a zero hours contract at a food factory, where he had worked for four months until he stopped being offered shifts. He was really positive about the employability course and Acumen as he felt it would offer him the chance to get a job and to get away from JSA. Dan got 10 weeks' work experience at EDP. I met Dan once again for an informal interview at EDP six weeks later and we kept in touch via email, as Dan was not on Facebook. We had arranged to meet up several times after that, but last minute changes in work patterns on a zero hours contract stopped this and we communicated through email. At this point, his enthusiasm regarding the employability course and Acumen had drastically changed for the worse.

**Carly** was 24 and lived in another village in East Durham near her sister. She had a young child who was in the care system, and could visit her child only six times a year. She didn't have any qualifications and had a criminal record (including having served time in prison). She had been mostly unemployed for more than a year. She had been mandated onto an employability course at EDP when I met her. When we first met at EDP, even though she had agreed to be in the research, she was very angry and hostile. She was shouting, swearing and venting her frustrations about unemployment, immigrants, the government and terrorism. When I met her for the second time, four weeks later, her temperament was completely different. She was calmer, and was laughing and joking and friendly. I found out that a few hours before we were introduced, she had been told by her social worker that she would not be able to see her child when she thought she was going to. She told me that this was why she was so angry when we first met. Carly got offered 10 weeks' work experience at EDP. I kept in touch with Carly at least every other week on Facebook and met her again twice each time for informal interviews.

#### Cases from New College Durham

**Karl** was 19 and lived in a small town in East Durham. I met Karl at the NCD intensive employability course for a one-to-one interview. He had finished his A Levels and had been accepted into Sunderland University the following year. He had been on JSA for seven months when I met him. When I met him again, two

months later, he had been referred onto the Work Programme, three months before starting University. I kept in touch with Karl at least every other week via text message. We met three times for informal interviews over the course of six-months, before he went to university.

**Alison** was 20 and from a small town in East Durham. She suffered from bi-polar depression and had never had a job. She had never had paid employment but she had been volunteering at a local charity shop for nearly eight weeks to get some work experience. She had been on JSA for two weeks when I met her at the NCD employability course. When she had finished her art college course a year before I met her, she was too ill to work. Her dad was made redundant at the same time as she finished college. They had been living off his redundancy money for the year. She said that she didn't sign on for any benefits initially because she said she knew she wasn't ready to work so she didn't want to claim JSA falsely, and she didn't want to go onto ESA because she didn't want to be judged. Her dad didn't sign on for benefits because he wanted to find a job as quickly as possible and didn't want the stigma of being unemployed. I kept in touch with Alison over Facebook every 3-4 weeks; I interviewed her twice.

**Bethany** was 21 and lived in another small former mining village in East Durham with her boyfriend and his family. She graduated from university three months before I met her and had been on JSA for four weeks. She said she waited before signing on until she ran out of money and had no other option. Her degree was in Graphic Design and this is what she wanted a job in. She had experience of work before university as a carer and some bar work during university; she also sold her artwork online. I kept in touch with Bethany via Facebook at least every 3-4 weeks; I interviewed her twice.

**Rosie** was 19 and lived in a small town in East Durham with her parents. She had been on JSA for six weeks when I met her but had been unemployed for seven months; she said she put off applying for JSA as she didn't know what she was capable of and what she would do. She suffered from anxiety and depression and had to leave university seven months before I met her as a result, and she had

never had a job. I kept in touch with Rosie every other week via Facebook and text and we spoke on the phone; I interviewed her twice.

**Marcus** was 20 and lived in a small town in East Durham. He had been on and off JSA for nearly three years. He quit his A levels to start a job picking and packing in a warehouse in Birtley, where his dad was the foreman, on a temporary contract. When this ended, he was unemployed for nine months before working at McDonalds for a year. He was then, in his words, “let go” by McDonalds and signed back onto JSA for three months. He got agency work at Nissan as a production operative. He was “laid off” after a year and then asked to come back again a few weeks later; he was then dropped again after three weeks because orders at the factory had dropped. He had been back on JSA for three months when I met him. He deeply regretted quitting his A levels, but felt it was too late to re-start as he couldn’t afford to pay to study. I kept in touch with Marcus mainly through text a couple of times a month; we also spoke twice on Facebook and I interviewed him once more before the end of the research.

**Lee** was 21 and lived in the east of a small town in East Durham with his parents. He had been on JSA for two weeks when I met him. He got “basic” GCSE’s and left College after doing his AS Levels. He applied for some apprenticeships and completed his NVQ in retail at a car parts shop. He had lost his job six weeks before I met him, but put off signing onto JSA. He searched for a job and handed CVs out before he ran out of money; when he signed on to JSA, he saw this as a last resort. He had applied to do a health and safety course and some volunteer work before he had signed on. He said he spent his money on petrol driving around looking for a job as well as searching online. I spoke to Lee three times via text and four times on Facebook, and I interviewed him again over the phone.

**Charlie** was 24 and lived in a small village in East Durham. He had served time in prison, where he had gained his specialist cleaning qualification. Before prison, he had work experience in warehouses and as a painter. He had been put on ESA when he left prison due to his GP diagnosing him with depression and PTSD as a result of the incident that caused him to go to prison. He was referred onto JSA after a WCA

deemed him fit to work eight months before I met him. He had two young children and another baby due. I kept in touch with Charlie at least every other week by Facebook and text, and sometimes more frequently if he wanted to speak to me. We met twice again, for informal interviews, after the first interview and I interviewed him over the phone as well.

#### Cases from Albert Kennedy Trust (AKT)

**Aiden** was 20 when I met him through AKT Newcastle. He was originally from a small former mining village in the south of East Durham but had moved to emergency accommodation offered by AKT in Elswick four months before I met him. He said he moved because he and his father couldn't live together, because his father couldn't accept that Aiden was gay or that he wanted to be a drag queen. He left college before completing his course, and didn't have any qualifications beyond a few GCSE's. He had never been employed beyond some casual bar shifts and mandated employability courses. I kept in touch with Aiden on Facebook every other week. We spoke on the phone a few times and I met him again twice for informal interviews.

Lucy, Antonia, Cara, Alesha, Stevie and Eli were all part of one focus group at AKT. The plan was to meet them twice as a focus group but at the second follow-up focus group, only Eli, Cara, Alesha and Antonia turned up.

**Lucy** was 20 and lived in West Newcastle. She suffered from a rare syndrome<sup>14</sup> and as a result had never had a job. She had been on the Work Programme for two years and said she had been referred back to the JC+, moving back and forth between JSA and ESA. When I met her she said she had been referred onto JSA after a WCA had deemed her fit to work. Lucy was part of the initial focus group at AKT. I kept in touch with her every other week and I met her again with Antonia, her girlfriend at the time, and then another time with a friend; it was necessary for

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<sup>14</sup> One of her symptoms is that she can suffer up to hundreds of sporadic dislocations a day; this affects her ability to walk without crutches and get out of bed.

her to bring someone with her for mobility and safety reasons. At the end of the research, she was expecting her first child.

**Antonia** was 22 and lived in West Newcastle. She had her level one youth work qualification and had been on JSA for nearly 6 months when I met her, since the organisation she worked for couldn't afford to keep her on anymore. She was a transsexual female and very focused on helping LGBTQI+ young people and so very much wanted to return to youth work and gain her qualifications. I met Antonia again for another focus group and then two more interviews, once with Lucy and once again by herself. We only spoke twice on Facebook and not at all by phone or email.

**Stevie** was 21 and lived in West Newcastle, in accommodation provided by AKT. He suffered from depression and he had been on and off JSA since he was 18. He said that he didn't seem to have any problem getting himself a job, but it was keeping it that was the problem. When I met him he had been on JSA for nearly four months. Keeping in touch with Stevie was a problem as he would buy a phone when he had money and then sell it when he ran out of money; his number would frequently change and he would lose contacts as a result. I interviewed him again once at the AKT premises and I spoke to him twice on Facebook<sup>15</sup>.

**Elijah** was 21; he lived in West Newcastle in accommodation provided by AKT. He had family in London. He had been on JSA for seven months. He had A Level qualifications. I met with Eli twice via the focus groups and spoke regularly to him via Facebook every other week. After four months, he moved to London to try to find a job.

**Cara** was 21 and lived in West Newcastle, in accommodation provided by AKT with her girlfriend Alesha. She was very organised and saw her experience and interaction with the JC+ as a game: that certain things needed to be done in a certain way to get by on JSA. She had gone between zero hours contracts and JSA

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<sup>15</sup> Most of the young people I spoke to also used their phones for Facebook use as well so not having a phone would impact on this too.

for nearly 18 months. When I met her she was on JSA, but a week later she left JSA to take on two zero hours contracts. This was extremely insecure, as her contracts were based around events such as concerts and festivals. Three months after this, she started a course at Sunderland University. I kept in touch with Cara via Facebook and text on a weekly basis, although sometimes Cara contacted me more often. We met again for a follow up focus group and then I met her once more with Alesha for an informal interview and another time by herself for an informal interview. Towards the end of the research, we also spoke regularly on the phone, about once a week for the last month.

**Alesha** was 20 and lived with Cara. She didn't have any qualifications above GCSE. She had been on JSA for nine months when I met her at the AKT premises. She left JSA to go on two zero hours contracts with the same organisations as Cara. Three months later, she started a course at Newcastle College. I kept in touch with Alesha four times on Facebook over the six-month period, and we met again at a follow up focus group and then once more with Cara.

**Damon** was 18 and lived in West Newcastle with his parents. I met Damon at AKT. He suffered from diabetes, respiratory problems and other related health complications; his life expectancy with these complications was significantly reduced. Damon had never had a job and didn't have any qualifications. His dream job was to work on the trains as a driver, a guard or in the buffet. Damon was on JSA when I met him and he was getting help from AKT to appeal to be put on ESA. Damon didn't want to be part of the research when I first came to the AKT premises, but when I came for the follow-up focus group, he agreed to talk one-to-one. We kept in touch by text four or five times and I met him again for a one-to-one interview five months later.

**Craig** was 19 and lived in West Newcastle with his mum and his sister, Mia. Craig left school without qualifications and had never had a job. He had been on JSA for over six months when I met him. He suffered from depression and said he was appealing to be referred onto ESA based on his GP's advice. Craig didn't want to be part of the focus groups, so I had a one-to-one interview with him and I kept in

touch with him through Facebook every month, and sometimes more frequently if he got in touch with me. I interviewed Craig twice.

**Mia** was 18, and was Craig's sister and lived with him and their mum in West Newcastle. She had never had a job and didn't have any qualifications. I met Mia at the AKT premises; she had just signed on to JSA and said she didn't know what to make of it. I kept in touch with Mia on Facebook every month and interviewed her again at the AKT premises once more.

**Michael** was 19 and a Polish immigrant living in West Newcastle with his family. He and his family had moved over from Poland nearly nine months earlier so his parents could find work. He was attending a Newcastle College ESOL course as a requirement of his JSA. He was happy to be on the course and going to college. He was looking forward to using the course to help him get a job in England.

#### Cases from Newcastle College

Amir, Hamid and Ardash were all ESOL students at Newcastle College as a requirement of JSA, and they took part in a focus group at the college.

**Amir** was 24 and from Iran, where his family still lived. He said he had moved to England for a better life and ended up in Newcastle. He said that circumstances in his country were bad and that he hadn't wanted to leave, but he didn't say whether he was a refugee. He had been on JSA for eight months. He had been mandated onto employability courses throughout his time on JSA. He said he had experienced racism and unfair treatment when searching for employment. He also said he found the JC+ system very unfair and upsetting, and felt he should be paid to take English courses and get qualifications and then to go on JSA.

**Hamid** was 19, and was a refugee from Iraq. He lived in West Newcastle; his family were still in Iraq. He had been claiming JSA for over six months. He was on the Work Programme and was glad to be on the ESOL course to help with his English so he could get a better job.

**Ardash** was 18 and from Iran. She lived with her brothers in West Newcastle. She was very happy to be at college and for her English to improve. She had been on JSA for six months; she did not enjoy being on JSA or her experiences of JC+.

### **Contact with the young people**

The comparisons within and between the participants were documented via initial and follow up focus group or individual interviews, emergent individual interviews and on-going contact via Facebook and email and text as issues arose for the young people involved<sup>16</sup>. The young people could contact me via these media and I checked my mail accounts specifically for messages by them at least twice a day. However, there were many occasions where I was able to reply instantly as I was already using email or Facebook, or had my phone on me. This enabled the research to explore the interaction between the actions of the young people and their understandings. I would initiate contact with the young people to follow up any events or appointments mentioned by them, and to see how they were. If I hadn't heard from any of the young people for a month, I would send them an email/Facebook/text message to check in and see how they were. The research began with a preliminary focus group and individual interviews to establish the young people's differing situations, including backgrounds, needs, motivations and objectives. The research continued with individual interviews and online and phone contact to document young people's progress as it emerged. In addition, the research involved individual interviews with the participants when appropriate. These methods of contact were necessary as some young people worked better on Facebook, or by text. In most cases, the on-going internet and phone contact acted as a prompt to flag the need for face to face contact when issues did arise, and kept the research and myself familiar to them so the rapport and relationship continued throughout the 6 month period. On another practical level, it also kept the attention and engagement of the young people throughout this period.

I will now give a brief description of the different locations where I conducted my research.

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<sup>16</sup> See Appendix 5 for table breakdown of each case



### Setting the geographical context of my research

As the case descriptions above show, the selected young people lived in Durham and the surrounding villages and west Newcastle. The social backgrounds and contexts of these areas have accumulated to shape the structures and types of choices open to the young people living in them and the decisions they make. To fully understand their perspectives, it is necessary to locate these geographically and socially.

In 2015, the North-East region of England recorded the highest JSA claimant rate for 18-24 year olds in England, at 5%, compared to the UK average of 3.2% (ONS March 2015). This is also consistent with the historical evaluation that areas within the North-East region have fared worse than others historically in the UK (Robinson 1999; Hudson 2005; Bambra *et al* 2010). Within the North-East, there are parts of the North-East which are “part of the ‘mainstream’ and others which have been left behind” (Robinson 2002: 318), historically becoming marginalized and excluded. This in turn provides these populations with very different structures and contexts in which to act.

In the North-East, Durham City is a stark contrast to the villages in East Durham that both included cases which were studied in this research. As is the case with the more affluent suburbs of Newcastle, such as Jesmond and Gosforth as well as Newcastle city centre compared with areas of West-End Newcastle such as Elswick and Bensham, there “is a geography of difference in the North-East” (Robinson 2002: 324).

**Table 3** gives a breakdown of the overall economic inactivity rates of these wards in Newcastle and County Durham. Drawing on this data and wider descriptions, the intra-regional difference between these locations will therefore now be discussed.

**Table 3: Labour market activity and qualification level of area population by Ward<sup>17</sup>**

	JSA claimant rate % 18-24**	% Economically Inactive	Student %	Retired %	Long Term Sick %	Carer %	% No Qualifications	Apprentice %	Qualification 4+ %
England & Wales	(GB) 22.5	23.2	6.6	4.9	4.6	4.9	15	8.6	29.7
North-east	-	25	23.8	16.4	27.3	22.9	10	*5.3	28.4
Newcastle	24.1	31.9	15.1	4.2	5.7	4.6	16.5	7.5	29.6
County Durham	28.7	27.3	7.1	6.4	7.2	4.2	18.1	7.2	23.5
Elswick	22.2	39.6	11.2	3.2	9.9	9.6	30.8	11.9	21.2
Horden	27.7	35.2	4.7	5.7	15.5	6.3	29.3	6.8	10.8
Easington	34.4	28.5	4.1	6.5	10.3	4.7	23.7	7	19.2
West Peterlee	40	27.3	5.5	5.1	9.6	4.6	23.1	6.9	14.1
East Peterlee	34	33.9	5.5	5.7	13.8	6	29.4	6.8	11.5
Neville's Cross	19	45.7	36.8	4.5	1.4	2.1	2.9	-	46
Elvet	7.7	73.5	66.6	0.9	1	0.4	3.3	3.9	21.3

(Data from NOMIS census 2011) (\* Includes other qualifications other than qualification range NVQ level 1-4+)

(\*\* from NOMIS March 2015)

### **Newcastle-upon-Tyne**

Newcastle city has the highest population of the cities in the North-East (Newcastle.gov.uk 2014). It has two universities, Newcastle University (a Russell Group university), and Northumbria University. It also has a division of Newcastle College Group, which is one of the largest education, training and employability

<sup>17</sup> For a breakdown of qualification levels and grades, see Appendix 6.

centres in the UK, called Newcastle College. These three centres generate revenue for Newcastle. Newcastle city's economy is also generated through its corporate, digital, retail, entertainment and cultural quarters.

The transport services in Newcastle city are numerous. There is a bus station that incorporates three main bus companies, a coach station, and a principal stop train station. There is also an airport six miles outside of the city centre and a central Metro train service that reaches Tynemouth, South Shields and Sunderland and Newcastle airport. However, the surrounding areas of Newcastle, such as Byker, Benwell, Fenham and Elswick have not necessarily enjoyed the prosperity in the city centre, or of the more affluent Newcastle suburbs of Gosforth and Jesmond.

### **Elswick**

Elswick is a ward of West Newcastle. It was formerly a heavy industrial community based around Elswick engineering works; in the 1980s, the demolition of this site changed the landscape. Elswick now houses business parks, high-rise flats (former workers' flats for the engineering works) and Newcastle College. Elswick is ranked third out of the 26 Wards in Newcastle for multiple deprivation (IMD 2010). It has been an area of high economic inactivity (39.6%) and unemployment (19.2%) compared to the other areas in Newcastle, the North-East, and UK. The JSA claimant rate for Elswick is 22.2%, and NEET rates for Elswick in 2012 were 12.7%, compared to 10.4% in Newcastle (Connexions 2012). This may give a more rounded picture of the situation concerning young people in Elswick. The extremely high population who possess no qualifications, at 30.8%, compared to West Gosforth (7.1%) and Newcastle (16.5%), gives another dimension to the inactivity in the area.

Elswick has the most diverse mix of ethnic background population of all areas covered in this research. The census (2011) records that 62.9% of people in this ward were born in England, with 47.3% of the Elswick population identifying themselves as 'White British' and 15.9% identified themselves as Bangladeshi. The next highest groups were: 8.2% identified themselves as 'Pakistani' and 5.6% identified as 'Other Asian'; 5% identified themselves as 'Other White'. This is

compared to Easington, where 98% identified themselves as 'White British', with the next largest group being 'Other White' at 0.8%.

### **County Durham**

County Durham is the largest local authority in the North-East. It has already undergone a massive period of industrial change and restructuring. Three decades ago, parts of the County were highly dependent on coal mining and steel production (CDEA 2011:3). However, as these industries, related businesses and related investments have left the area, "there are places apparently trapped in the past yet having to cope with the challenges of the present" (Robinson 2002:322).

Durham City's economy is strongly shaped by the World Heritage sites of the university, cathedral and castle. The CDEA (2011) reports that the main locations of employment in County Durham are in Durham city but also in industrial parks on the edges of towns, for example on the edge of West Peterlee and along the A19 corridor (CDEA 2011:4).

Transport links from and through Durham city have been improved via the East Coast mainland rail to London and other major cities, bus links to Newcastle and Sunderland and connections to the A1 & A19. It has improved commuting and connections with other cities, regions and economies, and so can share in and benefit from growth enjoyed in these other locations. However, benefiting from these improvements depend on three important provisos: that the people in the area have the capacity to commute, for example have a car to travel along the A1 or A19 corridor, that people living in the county can get to the city to profit from the improved transport links, and that the areas linked by these improved transport connections (for example Sunderland) are experiencing growth.

## **Easington**

Easington has one of the highest JSA claimant rates for 18-24 year olds out of the wards looked at in the North-East; at 34.4%, it is second only to the neighbouring ward of West Peterlee at 40%. Of its entire population, those that are economically inactive are 28.5% compared to 23.2% in England and Wales and 25% in the North-East. Wards such as Elvet, Neville's Cross and Elswick have much higher inactivity rates. However, these Wards have a significantly higher student population, at 66.6%, 36.8% and 11.2% respectively; this is compared to Easington's student population of 4.1%, the lowest of all of the wards considered, and lower than the England and Wales and North-East student population percentage. Its long-term sick population makes up 10.3% of the population, the third highest of all the Wards and neighbouring the other two higher Wards. It has the highest population of retired inhabitants of the wards covered, at 6.5%; and 23.7% of its population have no qualifications, compared to Neville's Cross at 2.9% and England and Wales at 15%.

Easington's economic inactivity is lower than Elvet and Neville's Cross, but the type of inactivity is important. Of those inactive, a much higher proportion are long-term sick or retired, whereas for Elvet and Neville's Cross the long term sick population is around the 1% mark and the student population is significantly higher than the North-East average.

This is reflected also in the percentages of population with no qualifications, with Neville's Cross at 2.9% and Elvet at 3.3%. The students may be inactive for the period of time that they are studying, but as Neville's Cross and Elvet house a large proportion of Durham University students, this economic inactivity is likely to be temporary. Their trajectories are likely to be upwardly mobile, and this cohort will therefore be constantly changing and progressing, and generating wealth and economic income to the area.

After the closure of its mines, Easington's migration has been mainly outward, as those who can leave the area for employment elsewhere have left, and very few

have moved in. Whilst England saw a rise in migration of 7% between 1994-2004, County Durham saw a loss of 2.9% and Easington 8.4% (regional trends ONS 2006). This may have a deeper significance in explaining the impact of location and social background on some of the young peoples' choices. This is a theme that will be made further apparent throughout this Chapter.

### **Horden & Cassop**

Horden is a village next to Easington, in east Durham; Horden was a mining village until the closure of the Horden Colliery in 1987. It has strong community links with Sunderland and surrounding villages of Durham, as these areas were built up around the same or similar industries. It has transport links via a bus route that runs from Durham through all of the villages and through to Sunderland. There are also bus links to and from Peterlee bus station, and so links to connecting routes such as Peterlee Business Park, and Durham.

Horden has the 4<sup>th</sup> highest economic inactivity percentage of the wards in **table 3**; this is after Elvet, Neville's Cross and Elswick, which have the highest student populations. Horden has the 2<sup>nd</sup> lowest student population to Easington and the joint highest retirement age with Easington; this means that the same issues with the inactive population in Easington could be assumed to be so in Horden also. Horden has the highest long-term sick population and second highest percentage of the population who are carers. Again, these will impact on the reasons that people are economically inactive and on their ability to become active.

Cassop is a former mining village in the ward of Coxhoe, situated 7 miles south east of Durham city. Cassop has a population of about 500. The main occupation of the people of Cassop was mining, but due to mine closures this is no longer the case. Public transport is limited to this village; it can take from 39 minutes up to 94 minutes' bus journey time to get to Durham city's bus station, and the journey can include getting two buses to get there. Durham City JC+ is the centre attended by the participants from Cassop. Travel to Newcastle by bus takes up to 180 minutes and involves getting two buses. Travel to Sunderland takes between 94-178

minutes and involve taking up to three different buses. Travel to Stockton takes a bus ride of between 67-97 minutes. These are all without factoring in travel from one's home to the bus and travel from the destination bus stop to the final destination, for example to a specific workplace.

### **Peterlee**

Peterlee is a small town that covers two wards, East and West Peterlee. It is situated approximately 10 miles east of Durham city and 10 miles south of Sunderland (Peterlee.gov.uk 2015).

East Peterlee adjoins Horden and Easington and includes the North East Industrial Estate. 33.9% of the population in East Peterlee is economically inactive. This is mainly made up of those who are: long-term sick (13.8%), retired (5.7%), carers (6%) and students (5.5%). It has the highest percentage of population with no qualifications (29.4%) in County Durham and second lowest for its population that has qualifications level 4+ (11.5%), second only to Horden.

West Peterlee is closer to the A19 corridor than East Peterlee. It also covers three industrial parks, South West Industrial Estate, North West Industrial Estate, and Whitehouse Business Park. These are centres for employment in the service sector and call centres. Even so, the JSA claimant rate for 18-24 year olds is the highest on **table 3** (pp103) at 40% and the economic inactivity rate is considerable at 27.3% of the population. Furthermore, amongst those who are in employment, both East and West Peterlee are more heavily concentrated in the lowest three occupation grades. It may be that these industrial parks have provided people in the area with jobs, including low level jobs. It may also be that the A19 corridor has allowed people to commute into industrial parks from other areas, stronger economies perhaps, and leave at the end of the day<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> It is worth noting here that there have been various attempts to stimulate economic regeneration in the North east through initiatives such as the North East Local Enterprise Partnership, which have been involved in the A19 corridor, and the Teesside Enterprise Zones

### **Why ideology and reflexivity matters**

In Chapter Three, I argued that ALMP reform in England has been based on neo-liberal value-driven ideological political agendas. Given that this terrain has been identified as deeply shaped by ideological agendas, it is important to consider how research methodologies may also be affected by ideological concerns. For May (1997), ideologically informed sets of values shape and inform how social problems are defined and dealt with in three ways. Values differ within and between different groups; something considered a problem by one group may not necessarily be considered as one by another (May 1997: 46). In societies, views of what is a problem also shift over time, as social attitudes and values change. Social power is not evenly distributed; defining that a social problem exists depends on the relationship of power. May states that as a result a “phenomenon becomes defined as a problem in terms of the power of social groups” (*ibid*: 47) and in this instance research can be used to scrutinise the social values themselves. Policy research is then also concerned with how “problems are defined, agendas are set, policy is formulated, decisions made and how policy is implemented, evaluated and changed” (Nutley & Webb 2000: 15). The individual circumstances, social structures and barriers still exist; however, how they are understood and tackled or not tackled is shaped according to ideologies.

I will now discuss the methodological approach of the research.



## **Methodology**

The methodological approach of this research was a critical realist approach. The research was based on the epistemological assumption that the social world needs to be concerned with how structures generate and impact on the social world. I was very aware that my own ideological perspectives shaped the reason for my topic selection and methodological approach. The conceptual framework a researcher has regarding the aspects of and interactions in the social world being studied very much shapes the nature of the research that will be carried out. This includes methods selection, which is informed by one's perspective on what is deemed as acceptable knowledge and how the social world should be studied.

This research was conducted from the stand point that in order to understand the young people's social world we need to understand the structures at play within it, which for Bhaskar (1989) can "only be identified through the practical and theoretical work of social science research" (1989: 2). This is not to say that there is not an objective real world but as Maxwell (2012) states, "our knowledge of the world is a construction" (Maxwell 2012: 20). Social phenomena we seek to understand are created by, what Bhasker (1989) identifies as mechanisms that are real but not necessarily directly accessible to observation. Social researchers seek out the effect of these and so in order to understand the social world then there needs to be integration between the real world and how one understands it and makes meaning from it. This is in relation to how the researcher comes to research and understand social phenomena interactions but also in understanding how the participants retell their experiences of their social world based on their knowledge and understandings of their contexts.

The aim of this research was to investigate young people's experiences to find out what was happening to them, from their point of view. I wanted to listen to the unemployed young people's perspectives in context and explore how understanding these might challenge wider perspectives, which have marginalised them in order to change the situations of the young people. The most effective way

to gain this understanding of human experiences viewed from the subjective perspective of the participant was through qualitative research methods.

As I recognised that knowledge of our interactions with the world is subjective, I also had to take into account that the young people's experiences and how they expressed them would perhaps be different from how I would understand it as the researcher, as they would reason in different ways. In this regard, my research was limited to not just the subjective accounts relayed by the young people but also my interpretation of these accounts; here there could be great potential for double-fold misinterpretation of what had happened, which could be seen as a significant limitation of the research. Nevertheless other methods are not necessarily superior; Foucault (1980) has argued that statistics and their interpretations are saturated with power relations rather than reflecting the world. Here the selection of methods I selected allowed for reflexivity throughout the whole process as it allowed for a deconstruction of the evidence collected.

Maxwell (2012) claims that all knowledge is theory laden but does not "contradict the existence of a real world to which this knowledge refers (Maxwell 2012: 2). The ideas and meanings of the individual are "equally real to objects and these aspects of reality interact in social life and mutually influence each other" (*ibid*). The differences in interpretations were not necessarily at odds with my research or undermine it. These implications are inevitable, it is the nature of the social world that there will be differences, as we understand subjective realities. For Olsen (2009), through understanding this and through methods that allow a deep understanding of the participants we can make sense of contradictions in the research including the messiness along with the patterns. Using this critical realist approach, the research is based on social scientists' way of knowing rather than claiming to be a direct reflection of the world (Bryman 2004).

I adopted an approach where by the main steps of the research were placed in a context of explorations from data collection to coding my data and analysing it to find emergent themes in order to then develop better underpinnings for descriptions of the world as a starting point (Danermark *et al* 2001). Throughout

the research, the way structures interacted with each other to impact on the agency of young people was a significant theme and emergent from that was the importance of power in this relationship and the significance of discourse. The discourses regarding the power relationships that were responsible for the occasioning of those discourses and then the way these discourses subsequently worked through existing structures were analysed in order to further understand the young people's agency. This was important in gaining insights into how the "social world is reproduced and transformed in daily life" (Bhaskar 1989:2), but not in a deterministic way whereby historical structures dictate the future as a pre-requisite. As Patomaki (2006) argues, the future need not be like the past, despite strong trends that could indicate otherwise; otherwise there would be little point in trying to change them. Drawing back on the admission of the messiness of the social world, especially taking into account for subjectivity, real life situations can be unpredictable or "unique" (Sayer 1992:3). In this research, each of the young people's situations was different as the cumulative structures they interacted with impacted on them. Here the accumulations of the structures were not necessarily observable, as Bhaskar (1989) recognises is inherent with structures. But the understanding of the young people's subjective experiences through the research uncovered these emergent themes and impacts.

### **Understanding the young person's perspectives**

My focus was on understanding the young people's subjective experiences that were subject to ALMP. From a practical point of view, valuing the knowledge and expertise deriving from the direct experience of the young people helped develop the relationship between them and myself. More fundamentally, I recognised that my research, just by its aims, design and selection, was value-based; my decision to look at the issues of youth unemployment from the young people's perspectives carries with it values. These values are not necessarily a bad thing; however there had to be an awareness of the place values had in the whole research process (May 1997).

### **(Re)presenting the young people's views**

It was important to consider carefully how I re-presented the respondents' perspectives through my recording, transcription and analysis and coding; as Denzin (1991) states: "the subject is more than can be contained in a text and a text is only a reproduction of what the subject has told us" (*ibid*: 68).

This was a complex process: how the young people were presenting themselves to me and how they communicated their perspectives to me was an important factor. Questions then arise over whether the young people are presenting themselves in an authentic way? Are they presenting their experiences honestly and is this reliable? And should their truth be assumed as more or less true? These questions will now be addressed.

### **Were the young people presenting themselves in an authentic way?**

Whether or not the young people were being genuine, and/or not changing their answers or perspectives due to my presence and being recorded, is a difficult call. I didn't know the young people before the study and did not know if their behaviour was consistent with how they normally behaved. What I did have was contact with them over a six-month period. I mapped their experiences and attitudes and accounts of stories over this six-month period to record outcomes of stories, their expressed attitudes to events, and consider themes that progressively emerged from ongoing conversations with them about their lives. There was diversity amongst different cases depending on different points of view and there were inconsistencies within cases depending on their moods at different points in time, with Carly's accounts being a particular case in point here<sup>19</sup>. However, perceived inconsistencies don't necessarily negate accounts; Sandelowski (2014) argues that in such situations we should not necessarily dismiss the storyteller as unreliable, but look at why there are perceived inconsistencies. Moreover, the nature of researching the social world can be that such inconsistencies are inherent (Silverman 1985, Miller & Glassner 2016).

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<sup>19</sup> See Carly's cameo on page 94.

### **Were the young people presenting their experiences honestly?**

This question feeds on from the last question and is in part addressed above; however; this is not just about whether the young person behaved differently to what they said but also about whether the young person was telling the truth as they saw it? There may have been situations when the young people embellished, held back or lied in their accounts or repeated stories or anecdotes they had heard as the truth. Silverman (2016) states there is the danger of using data and re-presenting it to underpin contentious claims. There seems to be a tendency to treat what people say with suspicion in research for reasons of reliability, validity and rigor; all of which are important to ensure research is credible. It is also essential that the researcher themselves scrutinises their own work in this way to guard against what Silverman calls “anecdotalism” (*ibid*: 279) in their research. For Mishler (1990), trustworthiness is a matter of judgement. The young people had no real incentive to lie to me, other than just wanting to, although some of what the young people described outside their own experiences was acknowledged by the young people as being second-hand rumours; however, my focus was on their accounts of their own experiences. They may have exaggerated claims to stress the points they were making and emphasise their points of view and how they felt; or they may have given honest accounts about their experiences. Nevertheless, at the very least, how they chose to present their point of view to me remains worthy of study in its own right.

### **Should their truth be assumed as more or less true?**

Here the issue is over whether to regard their accounts of their experiences and perspectives as true just because they considered themselves to be telling the truth as they saw it? In this respect, I do not mean to open a debate about realities and what can be regarded as objectively real or based purely on subjectivities. What I mean is that particular situations may well have happened but there may have been underlying factors to explain a certain situation or certain processes that the young people were otherwise unaware of.

Miller & Glassner (2016) contend that research can provide “access to the meaning people attribute to their experiences” (*ibid*: 56). In their research into gender inequalities in youth gangs, they argue that the real value of in-depth interviews is that they provide us with “access to social worlds as evidence of ‘what happens’ within them and how individuals make sense of their experiences and their place in the social world” (Miller & Glassner 2016:52).

Building on this, I will now discuss the different qualitative methods used to conduct my research.

### **Use of qualitative methods and data collection**

The young people in the research were directly affected by the policies that this research was investigating and so developing qualitative methods that they were comfortable with was important if effective methods were to be designed for use with this group. The problem I faced was that I was not young, I was not on the Work Programme, and nor was I unemployed or claiming benefits, so I didn't have free access to young unemployed people as peers or colleagues on JSA and didn't have current first-hand experience of the issues they faced. Therefore, in order to use the research to gain an insight into their experiences, it was important that the young people being researched had an opportunity to feed in to the developing design of the research process. Rather than just being subjects of research, there was some negotiation with them regarding the research methods that they felt most comfortable with being used, for example focus groups, group interviews or individual interviews. They also had some control over the method by offering the use of Facebook, text, phone and/or email to get in touch as issues arose for them. The method for engaging with the participants was not fixed, and varied in practice between the organisations and based on the participants' preferences.

### **Focus groups**

The initial plan was to have focus groups then individual interviews, for reasons discussed below. In practice, some young people refused to talk to me as a researcher one to one and would only talk in a group, and conversely other young people would only talk one to one.

My first point of contact with the participants varied between focus groups and semi-structured interviews, depending firstly on what the participants were most comfortable with and secondly on what was possible to carry out. Staff in the organisations they attended had previously approached participants before I met them, and had gained their consent to meeting me. In total, I conducted three initial focus groups and two follow-up focus groups. 11 of the 28 young people who took part in my research wanted to take part in a focus group rather than individual interviews. 13 opted for a one-to-one interview at the first point of contact.

**Table 4** shows the variation of methods used in each organisation over the six-month field research period.

**Table 4      Breakdown of the stages of research according to the organisations the young people attended**

EDP	AKT	NCD	Newcastle College
1 preliminary focus group	1 preliminary focus group		1 preliminary focus groups
2 preliminary individual semi-structured face to face interviews	3 preliminary individual semi-structured face to face interviews	7 preliminary individual semi-structured face to face interviews	1 preliminary individual semi-structured face to face interviews
1 follow up focus group	1 follow up focus group		
7 follow up unstructured face to face Interviews	13 follow up unstructured interviews	7 follow up unstructured face to face interviews	
On-going Facebook/e-mail/ phone contact 1 phone interview 1 email interview 1 Facebook interview	On-going Facebook/e-mail/ phone contact	On-going Facebook/e-mail/ phone contact 1 phone interview	

This slight variation between organisations did not necessarily hinder the research, as the purpose of offering the focus group and then the emergent individual interviews was to make the young people feel comfortable with the research, as well as to collect as much rich data as possible. Focus groups are often selected when they are deemed as the most appropriate to explore the interactions between different participants' experiences, opinions and concerns (Barbour &



Kitzinger 1999). Using focus groups allowed the participants to engage in discussions with each other, and this interaction encouraged discussion that may have been missed via other methods. Many of the young people were much more willing to take part in the research when told that they could take part in a focus group, rather than a one-to-one interview. I found that as a result of them being with their peers, they were more likely to be more forthcoming with their opinions and experiences, with which this research was primarily concerned. There is the possibility that being in a focus group can potentially prompt participants to play down or embellish their experiences or views. This could have occurred during my focus groups; however the young people's behaviour and accounts did not change when I spoke to them alone and at later dates. The longitudinal aspect of the research helped guard against this.

With some participants from one EDP, I used focus groups for follow up contact. This was the only time I did this, but these participants were on the same employability course together, they felt comfortable with each other and wanted to have another focus group rather than individual interviews. In the follow up focus group, I found that they prompted each other with things that had happened to them since the first focus group, which helped to include things that otherwise I may not have been told.

My research aimed to explore the importance of difference within structural and personal factors that culminate and interact to shape people's agency. Focus groups allow the researcher access to view the relationship between structure and agency with the ability to "translate into a meaningful account of the real world" (Callaghan 2005: 1.1). Using focus groups provided a point of interaction between cases to explore how their different perspectives might interact and relate together. The logic of my research was to give the young people a voice by following their individual trajectories and the problems created by systems for these. Small-scale qualitative studies have helped cast some light on the experience of hidden groups (Bilsborrow 1992; Aldridge & Becker 1993) and often ignored groups, such as young people. The individual trajectories of these young

people were very important so that the collection of them together could help understand the difference within this group, as well as their shared experiences, to gain some insight into what this group needed.

There was a danger with focus groups of losing some participants' contributions if other participants dominated the group. However, I was able to facilitate the focus group to make space for everyone's perspectives if I felt some participants were not able to express their opinions and wanted to. Furthermore, emergent follow up interviews were also put in place to provide alternative opportunities for these opinions to be expressed.

### **Interviews**

In total, I conducted 44 interviews. This included 13 initial semi-structured and 27 follow-up unstructured interviews, and two phone interviews, plus an interview via Facebook instant messenger and one by email, in this research. The semi-structured interviews were between 30-45 minutes, and the unstructured interviews lasted between 20-95 minutes depending on what the young people wanted to talk about; however most of the interviews were under 45 minutes, with the phone interviews typically lasting between 10-15 minutes.

These types of interviews allow the researcher freedom to make adjustments to the interview depending on how the interview is going or in which direction it is going (Arksey 1999). These methods allow the researcher to gain rich in-depth material and so gain a fuller understanding of a participant's perspective (*ibid*). I felt that, as with focus groups, it was the most appropriate way to capture views, expressions, opinions, experiences and attitudes of the participants that surveys or fully structured interviews could not. Conducting the interviews, gathering and transcribing and coding the data, is demanding. Arksey (1999) suggests that the use of semi-structured and unstructured interviews can be time consuming to arrange and conduct. This is because these methods allow the participant to answer more on their own terms than a structured interview would allow, and this flexibility therefore allows the researcher to probe beyond these answers and enter into a

dialogue with the participant (May 1997). These methods can also be expensive. I found this to be the case, particularly when the participants did not turn up for interviews. I would arrange to meet at places convenient for them. This meant travelling across the region; if they didn't turn up then it was a waste of time and money. However these costs were worth the data gained as the context and content of the interview was imperative.

Arksey (1999) states that the perfect interview scenario is not necessarily possible or realistic but I wanted to do what I could to make the participants as comfortable as possible so that they felt at ease with sharing their experiences and opinions with me. I was very aware given the nature of the research that they would potentially be sharing difficult experiences and I would be talking to them during times that were tough for them. I was researching in the field and so real life problems inevitably got in the way of research plans. I could not predict some of the situations that arose for them or led to them not meeting up. However it was worth persevering, as this process supported me in gaining valuable in-depth insights into their experiences. For me, this cost was part of the process.

The semi-structured interviews were used in initial one-to-one interviews where participants expressed a preference for this method or when a focus group was not possible.

### **Semi-structured interviews**

The semi-structured interviews were based on an aide-memoire<sup>20</sup>. As they were preliminary interviews, I felt that I needed to direct the conversation more at first than in the follow-up interviews, for example by asking about their background and where they were from. This was so that I could gauge what I needed to explore further and what their views and experiences were, as well as their barriers to employment. Most of the questions were very open-ended and I didn't necessarily stick to this aide memoire depending on how the interview played out. As this method allows the participant to elaborate beyond the questions asked, in many

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<sup>20</sup> See Appendix 7.

cases numerous questions that I had were answered in one answer, but this answer generated subsequent questions. The aide memoire was used more as a prompt for me to make sure I covered certain topics by the end of the interview. The nature of this method allowed me to make amendments to the interview questions as issues arose and new information materialised.

I was aware that the participants might understandably be cautious about first speaking to me, and may even be hostile to being asked about their experiences of unemployment and the JC+, including because of issues that occurred before their participation in the research. I have noted that using qualitative methods allow a rapport to develop between the researcher and the participants, but at this point no rapport had yet been built. I therefore didn't want to make the participants feel interrogated or that they had to explain themselves or their actions to me. Beyond the necessary questions about their name, age and where they were from, the initial engagement was guided by questions such as "tell me a bit about you". Once we developed more of a dialogue, I then started asking more pointed and specific questions in the conversation that we were having, rather than firing off a list of questions to be answered. It was important to allow the participants to speak freely without being prompted too much, as they needed to feel in control of the interview and the context of the interview. This was not just for their wellbeing but also on a practical note: if they were allowed to speak openly rather than just answer questions, they had the opportunity to share valid information that would not have emerged with other more structured methods. This helped me to use the interviews "as a resource for understanding how individuals make sense of their social worlds and act within it" (May 1997: 129).

There is a risk that the focus of the interview can become the result of the construction of the interview rather than the perspectives of the respondents (Silverman 1985), particularly in more structured methods. I therefore wanted to take measures to counteract a situation whereby the data reflected my choice of questions rather than the young people's experiences. Nevertheless I acknowledge that just through the selection or de-selection of questions or extent of structure in

my interviews, these were directed by my own judgements. I felt that although I wanted the participant to speak openly and freely, I needed to have some element of structure, and added structure in the preliminary interview to keep to some focus and ensure the data collected included relevant as well as in-depth information. This method allowed me to gain relevant information whilst guarding against my selection of questions skewing the participants' answers.

### **Unstructured interviews**

Unstructured interviews were used for follow up and emergent interviews with the participants. They are far more informal by design and are a big exercise in listening to the participant as they elaborate and enter into more in-depth dialogue with the researcher (Arksey 1999). They were used because they allowed free expression of the participants' opinions and experiences and more practically because the interviews were to follow up their progress, experiences and issues they faced. I could not, and did not want to, script these interviews as it was about them sharing with me what was going on in their lives with regards to unemployment and the JC+. Issues that were important to them and that they felt affected their lives were raised by the young people in this context. I wanted them to share as much as they felt comfortable with sharing, so I wanted them to feel as comfortable and in control of the process as possible. Any other method would have potentially missed rich and valuable data.

Measor (1997) notes a problem with such methods is that people may ramble, generating a high volume of information central to the people involved but not necessarily important to the research; because of this, interviews may not keep on track (Arksey 1999). As a result, it is "rare that unstructured interviews are used in social policy research" (Becker & Bryman 2004: 271). There are also concerns over the lack of standardisation of this method, and therefore potential issues with reliability (Robson 2002). Despite this, this method is deemed as one of the most appropriate ways to generate rich insightful data (Becker & Bryman 2013). I found that it was because they were allowed to 'ramble' that the participants shared, they went off on tangents and gave a lot of information that was not directly relevant to

the research but it gave information about who the participant was and what their circumstances were and how their opinions and attitudes were informed. The point of the research was to explore young people's experiences and views and this came out in their 'ramblings' and information that at first may not have appeared relevant. It was time consuming, both in data collection and analysis, but it was a holistic approach that generated insightful data as a result.

### **Facebook, email and phone**

The participants were potentially vulnerable, due to numerous and differing reasons such as illness, insecurity of income and lack of opportunities to earn, housing situations, and personal issues. They were also in a transitional period of their lives, whereby they were more sensitive to the impact of labour markets (see Chapter 3). Given these vulnerabilities, from a practical point of view I wanted to make contact as easy as possible for them and ensure it was as accessible and participant focused and friendly as possible.

Keeping in touch with these young people was a potential challenge in this research. The participants didn't always have credit on their phones; they didn't necessarily have constant and reliable access to the Internet. In some cases, their phone numbers changed and they did not let me know; one participant regularly sold his phone if he was short of money, and would buy a new phone when he was able to afford one. This meant his contact number changed frequently.

I used whichever form of communication was most convenient for them, sometimes all three and sometimes what they favoured changed. These forms of communication were used to make it easier for them to engage and to keep the research present in their minds, to arrange meeting up for follow up interviews and to talk about what was happening in their lives when they wanted to, and if it wasn't possible to meet up face-to-face.

Using the Internet offers "interesting opportunities to interact "with participants in innovative ways" (O' Connor 2013: 179). The use of the Internet now means that

researchers in policy arguably cannot afford to overlook the use of online environments (Fitzpatrick 2000). Facebook was essential to the success of this research, as all of the participants used Facebook. I made a private Facebook group page called HYPE (Hearing Young People's Experiences). This meant that only those invited to this group page by me could access it. Once I invited the participants to the page they could add posts on the page. They could also message me privately via this page. The participants did not use the page as a forum for group discussion as I had hoped, but this did give an additional way to keep in touch with the young people that they resonated with. The young people did not have access to any of the other participants' information as the contact was via private messaging and the account was a private account.

The participants may not have had full internet access via a computer to job search, they may not have had credit to call or text, but they did have a Facebook app and felt very comfortable 'chatting' on this forum; it was on their terms, in a place that they were comfortable. It was much less formal than email and less confrontational for some than talking on the phone. It was relaxed and contact and responses were instant. It was also very easy for them to use all the time and to get in touch with me when they felt they needed to without needing to give an instant reply to me, or becoming intrusive.

Email was also used to keep in touch, although this was less commonly used. Participants generally did not have constant access to email. They tended to email when they were conducting job searches on UJM or at mandated courses, whenever they did have access to a computer. However this was still vital in keeping in touch with two participants throughout the research. They were able to email me to update about their circumstances.

Phone interviews are not necessarily regarded as well suited to qualitative research (Rubin & Rubin 1995, Legard *et al* 2003, Gillham 2005). These interviews miss face-to-face rapport and the nuances of meaning. However, these interviews can also aid accessibility and inclusion of otherwise out-of-reach participants and allow interaction if the participant feels more comfortable using this medium (Bryman &

Becker 2013). The use of phones to keep in touch and to conduct interviews with the young people allowed for this interaction and greater accessibility to the young people if they preferred. Texts were used in the same way as Facebook, if the participants preferred to text.

Phone calls were used three times when participants were not able to meet up face-to-face and a follow up telephone interview was the most realistic way of getting in touch with them. For example, in one case, a follow-up phone interview took place with a participant who had just come out of a JSA appointment and wanted to talk there and then. Being able to call him when he wanted so he could vent was important; he wasn't just a subject but interacted to some extent. He was a participant in the research, but I was also on call in some respect for him to let off steam. The third call was to check on a participant's wellbeing. This was a challenge that I had to deal with that I discuss further later in this Chapter, in the challenges section. Allowing such immediacy of interaction with the participants was a commitment to them, as it meant being available across a range of times; in practice, though, they tended to initiate contact with me Monday to Friday during 'office hours'. This was because these times were when they had JC+ appointments, employability courses and interviews or other meetings or appointments. They would tend to contact me after an experience with one of these organisations. This meant that 'being on call' was not as intrusive as it could have been, despite what I had opened myself up to.

Nevertheless I felt that it was worth this instant access so that they could share experiences as soon as they happened, so that they felt they had someone listening to them and also so the experience was fresh in their mind and could be reflected on at a later meeting with them. Email and Facebook contact was easy to document as the interaction was recorded in text as it was happening. Phone calls were a bit trickier. I had to carry my Dictaphone around with me at all times and then when the participants did call I would check with them that it was ok to record them. I would then put them on speakerphone and record the conversation with them. There was one situation where an unexpected call to meet up with a participant



turned into a longer conversation. I didn't want to interrupt the call by asking them to wait while I recorded them so I took detailed notes as verbatim as possible the conversation as it was happening. I then followed this up with the participant when we met. This method was demanding, but I felt it was necessary to develop the rapport and trust with the participants and for both me and the participants to get the most out of the research that we could.

All three methods of communication worked best in conjunction with each other. Participants emailed me when they were able to and were able to give a longer message than by text message. I chatted with participants on Facebook and arranged times to chat on Facebook by text. I texted and received texts to arrange times to call participants and from the phone calls I gained more in-depth information than in a text. But most importantly, I was available on all three so the participants could contact me in whichever way they preferred. They felt more in control with how the contact with me panned out over the six-month period, and it made it more likely that participant kept engaged in and with the research.

### **Additional interviews**

An additional semi-structured interview was conducted with a Work Service Manager at Durham JC+. This was in order to get a JC+ perspective on their interactions with young people. For example, other research has suggested that young people were angry towards the JC+ staff, but the situations leading to this anger could have been to do with external constraints on the JC+ staff (Ingold & Stuart 2014), such as policies they were directed to follow. It also helped to obtain an alternative, more strategic perspective from a person managing a key agency with which the young people were interacting as they experienced their unemployment. It allowed me to further contextualise the young people's experiences in relation to JC+ and the logistics of JC+. The interview with the Work Service Manager gave me data from their positioned narrative, and how they saw their interactions with young people, and critically analyse this. It gave an insight from a JC+ perspective on the pressures on staff within the system. It should be noted here that the perspectives of one JC+ Work service Manager is not a

representative account of all JC+ staff. The perspectives of the Work Service Manager I interviewed were used in the context of wider policy documents and rules which they were required to follow.

### **Ethical considerations**

I wanted to give the young people in my research a platform to voice their experiences regarding the impact of policies that were affecting them.

My research complied with ethical standards by the British Sociological Association's (2012) Code of Ethics and went through the School of Applied Social Sciences ethics approval procedure. These standards were met by ensuring anonymity to all participants; informed consent was always obtained and participants were always treated in a tactful and sensitive way. Ethical clearance was given by all organisations involved and the participants consented to meeting with me before I met them; this guarded against participants feeling obligated or coerced into participating.

### **Informed consent**

All participants gave informed consent. The aims and the nature of the study were fully explained to them. What was asked of them and what they could expect from me and from the research was also detailed to them in writing and discussed with them.

In the consent form, they were assured that:

- Their participation was completely voluntary and not related to any organisation or as any condition of their benefits.
- They would remain anonymous if they wished and any sensitive information would be further anonymised to guard against experiences being traceable back to the young person
- They were able to stop participation at any time, but their data would still contribute to the research unless they stipulated otherwise.

Participants also signed a consent form for using Facebook that was in line with Facebook conditions and also assured them that their messages on Facebook were private and would only be used in the research. There are always issues with information on the Internet being hacked; however measures were taken to guard against this. The young people were made aware of the page and they had to be specifically invited by myself to gain access. Furthermore the group page was not used as a group forum but as a medium for private interaction between the participants and me. I did not grant access to any other organisations or bodies to get to this information. Once the fieldwork finished, the Facebook account was closed.

Confidence of the young people in the research, and in me, was imperative to me, for their wellbeing and the success of the research. I was therefore as informative and transparent as possible before they gave informed consent and encouraged them to ask any questions that they had about the research.

There were issues of full confidentiality in the focus groups if participants chose to share information given by other people in the focus group later on to people outside the group, which was out of my control. However it was made clear to all participants that in focus groups their contributions would be shared with the other members of the focus group and that information in these focus groups were not to be used outside the research. They were reassured that all information would remain anonymous.

With Facebook contributions, it was clearly and carefully explained that the use of Facebook was to keep in touch with the research, to share experiences and to act as a supportive forum for the young people. All participants gave informed consent to contact via Facebook and agreed to only use this forum in a positive and supportive and collaborative way.

I was very aware that they were potentially vulnerable and in vulnerable situations and circumstances, especially through emergent contact with them. I wanted to take any necessary measures to protect the participants; however as Alderson

(1995) acknowledges, there is a danger of protecting vulnerable people so much that their voices are excluded. The purpose of this research was that their voices were heard. I therefore didn't want to patronise or mute them or dumb down their experiences. I wanted them to feel at ease sharing their experiences so they could be heard. I wanted to make sure they were fully informed of the detail of the research and what it involved; they were young adults and I wanted to give them the credit that they knew what they were doing and talking about. In practice the participants had a lot of control over where and when we met and how we stayed in contact.

The participants were given a gift voucher for their participation. Although there are concerns over payment acting as a form of coercion to participate (Thompson 1996), I wanted to acknowledge their contributions and demonstrate the value of their participation. This is something that Ward (1997) cites as important when researching vulnerable participants.

A final consideration in this research was illness. Some of the participants had mental and/or physical health issues. There were two implications here: to ensure that informed consent was truly given and that I did not cause further distress to them. I explained and discussed with them the research and what it involved and what I was asking of them. If they did not understand, we discussed it more; if they were unsure about the research, I didn't ask them to participate unless they were happy to be involved. I also reassured them that if they changed their minds they could stop participation at any time. I was careful not to cause any distress to the participants as a result of the research. I therefore let them share whatever they felt comfortable with sharing with me. I was careful not to intrude in their private lives or press on with issues that they didn't want to discuss. In practice, no participant expressed distress as a result of the research; all of the participants involved were happy to share what they did contribute. I found that listening to them and letting them share what they wanted and then picking up on these issues as the conversations with them progressed or in follow up contact with them was the best way to gain information without being intrusive.

## **Analysis**

It was not the aim of this research to test a hypothesis. I wanted the analysis to document the experiences of the young people in a meaningful way so that it was not one abstract voice or one person ranting or rambling if read out of context.

The preliminary field research revealed the main issues and barriers faced by the participants, with follow up contact and research underpinning these with further experiences of the participants. This included emergent barriers and issues that culminated from other barriers or interacted with other barriers and experiences to form new issues for the young people. All methods of data collection used combined in order to capture these experiences and also the overlapping and inter-related nature of their experiences and barriers. This also meant that analysis was quite a messy process.

As a result, a large amount of data was generated through 50 transcripts; consisting of five focus group and 44 interview transcripts from the young people (including transcripts from one online Facebook messenger conversation and one email conversation), plus one interview transcript from the WSM. These were manually coded to themes that emerged throughout the field-study process. These themes were evolving as the field study progressed and comparative cases developed, and so how the data was coded also evolved. At first I used the qualitative data analysis software package 'NVivo'; however I found that, due to the messy nature of data, manual analysis and coding supported me better in analysing more meaningful and interesting patterns and threads of difference.

I read through all of the transcripts and noted any similarities and differences between the participant's experiences and perspectives and similarities and changes as the research progressed. I colour coded these similarities, differences and changes and grouped each of them according to location. I listed these similarities and differences and groups side-by-side and studied any further emergent links and themes. At this stage I was able to establish the barriers that the young people reported they faced and further barriers and issues that I picked

up on that the young people faced. I documented their insecure position and found an emerging tier of insecurity in their lives.

Once I established these themes, I studied the interview from the work service manager. I used the same colour code on this interview whilst flagging any other themes that emerged. I compared the codes and themes from this interview with the young people's data. I was able to compare the JC+ perspective with those of the young people's experiences and examine the discrepancies between their experiences and perspectives.

In my next stage of analysis, I used my colour codes to link up how the young people responded to the JC+ and mapped the elements of control by JC+ and interactions between the young people and JC+.

This method of manual coding allowed me to see links that I may have missed using NVivo, by reading and re-reading and analysing the transcripts I could make links of meaning between different cases rather than relying on the language analysis of another party. The analysis of the research was much more than the words written down. The intensity of the research process meant that I remembered the nuances present in the interviews and interaction with the young people that again using another method of analysis may have missed.

### **Transcription**

The transcription process was fairly straightforward. I transcribed the focus groups and interviews as soon as possible after they took place and compared and applied any notes that I made to the transcripts. With focus groups there is the inevitable challenge of identifying the participants correctly and taking into account the impact of group dynamics (Kitzinger 1995). I was mindful of this when transcribing and analysing the data and looked at the data in sequence with follow-up contact and interviews to see if accounts, attitudes and opinions were modified as a result; they were not.

## **Challenges**

### **Change to original research strategy**

The research was not unproblematic. The nature of the research design and the groups I wanted to research made access to the participants and conducting the field research trickier. May (1997) concedes that the research plan and the real world can be at odds; this was definitely the situation I was in with my research. My former original plan at the start of the research had involved all Work Programme providers listed by the DWP in the North-East being contacted with regards to taking part in this research. However, when I did this, A4e was the only provider that responded. After months of conversing with an A4e area manager in the North-East, I secured local approval to conduct my research at the A4e centres in the North-East via email and I had a meeting with him after securing this approval to discuss the research design. However a news scandal<sup>21</sup> surrounding A4e broke at around the same time that I got this approval. In the following months, it was increasingly difficult to finalise dates to begin the research and then even more difficult to get a response from the area manager. This delayed my field research by 12 months and I was unable to conduct the two-year field study originally planned. However the change in the research design meant that this two-year time frame was not as significant as it would have been if it were applied specifically to Work Programme contracts.

As a result of this change, my research was not affiliated with any Provider and instead worked with localised organisations that worked with young people from all different backgrounds. This meant that I spoke to many young people about their experiences of different Providers rather than being restricted to one Provider or JC+ centre. It also meant the focus of the research shifted from the Work Programme to a more holistic focus of young people's experiences of unemployment, barriers to employment, and the JC+.

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<sup>21</sup> In 2012 a news scandal hit the media that Work Programme provider, A4e, was being investigated for malpractice and systematic fraud since 2008/9 (BBC news online 23/3/2012). A4e was accused of management failure, putting people into jobs that didn't exist and making up paperwork. ([www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-17476415](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-17476415))

Another outcome of this change was that some of the time that should have been spent in the field study was spent trying to gain access to other groups of young people, without this institutional co-operation. It was a situation of literally knocking on doors and cold calling organisations for nine months. I was able to gain access to young people through the four organisations over the region; however the timeframe for the field research was now reduced to a six-month, rather than a two-year, period. This did mean that the research didn't follow young people from the start to the end of their engagement with the Work Programme. But as the research aims and design had now changed, this was not necessarily a significant issue. There were also advantages to this new research design and aims, as discussed earlier in this Chapter.

The reason for the change in the sample and research design generated a very interesting question; why the JC+ and so many Work Programme providers were unwilling or unable to allow me access to young people on their caseloads to take part in the research. It may have been that all of the organisations just didn't have time to allow me access, or that the DWP would not grant me access to the JC+. I also wondered if the young people's experiences would cast any unfavourable light regarding these organisation's services rather than just the JC+ practice or process.

### **Not getting too involved and keeping young people's confidence**

One further issue that arose was that one participant also began to view me as a confidant. They confided that they were going through a very difficult time with their partner; this was not a time to record an interview, so I sat and listened to them.

This situation became a further challenge, as the participant increasingly contacted me for advice and to confide in me regarding allegations of domestic violence against the participant. It became apparent that they were looking to me for support in this situation. This had inadvertently become part of an issue in the relationship.



My primary concern was for their safety. Once I established this, I explained that I wasn't qualified to deal with the issues regarding the domestic violence but I could, and I did, give her, a lot of information and contacts of people and organisations that could help her.

I was in a difficult situation, as I wanted to take these allegations seriously; however I was not experienced or qualified to deal with these issues. I was mindful that although I wanted to help, I didn't want to make the situation worse. I thought the best way I could support them was to get them to seek help from organisations and people with the relevant expertise in these matters. The field research with this participant had come to an end but I wanted to make sure they were in a position to do this before my contact with them ended.

After a few weeks of continued contact and strong encouragement, by me, for the participant to seek help, I realised that their immediate need at that time was for someone to vent to, over anything else. I, again, sent them a list of contacts, by phone, of people they could talk to or places they could go to get help should they need to. I also reminded them that the primary concern was their safety. I wasn't in a position to give this participant advice. I had no idea what the relationship dynamic was and I was in no position to be a confidant to the participant.

I didn't record any interviews during this time and I didn't include any of the contact during this period in the research. I didn't regard the information as relevant to the research and I didn't want to take advantage of them at a vulnerable time. From a practical point of view these issues arose at the end of the six-month research time period so I also felt that the risk to the research was low also.

## **Conclusion to the Methods Chapter**

The nature of my research did bring up issues, such as the demand on my time and resources. This challenge brought up issues that I did not envisage to this degree but on reflection the open and responsive nature of my research made such challenges more likely as a strong rapport between the young people and myself developed. I made myself available to them regarding their experiences of the JC+ and unemployment, however the relationship that developed between me, the researcher, and young people, the participants, evidently prompted some of the young people to trust and confide in me beyond the research remit.

This was a challenge but one that I felt worth the research design. The young people felt comfortable speaking to me and sharing their experiences. The openness of the methods used meant the young were more likely to be open with me, and more likely to share experiences and perspectives with me. This challenge was also one that was not entirely possible to overcome as the young people's relationships were out of my control. It may be that had I not developed a trusting relationship with this participant they would not have presented this challenge to my research. However I was very aware that once I left their lives at the end of the fieldwork, their experiences and situations carried on. With the particular respondent who ended up confiding in me about personal difficulties, I was able to forward information where she could get help, which she may not have otherwise received.

In research, "morally speaking the benefits of undertaking the research needs to be measured against the risks of being involved in the research" (Becker & Bryman 2013: 75). The use of methods in the research did present risks, although this particular challenge was not ideal for my research, the trust and openness that developed and the in-depth and insightful information shared by the young people was worth tackling such challenges.

## **Part 3 Findings**

### **Chapter 5**

#### **What the young people said: barriers and experiences**

##### **Overall introduction to Part 3**

The findings from my research are presented in three Chapters. This first Chapter (Chapter 5) focuses on introducing the narratives of the young people concerning their experiences of unemployment, and the barriers they said they faced in getting into work. It is data-led in starting from and grounding the analysis in the young people's perspectives. In the next Chapter (Chapter 6), I look at how the young people's perspectives sit within a wider critical context, including alternative perspectives (such as the JC+) and evidence and consider (in light of these wider perspectives and sources of evidence) the extent to which the young people in my research were "voluntarily unemployed", being "too choosy" in their actions and interactions with the JC+ and wider ALMPs and "selecting dole over drudgery". The third Chapter in Part 3 (Chapter 7) then looks at the interplay between these, particularly focusing on the agency of the young people and how they make choices in this context. I critically analyse the young people's responses to the churn and precarious situations they experienced in their interaction with the JC+ and ALMP service and through this I identify these responses as forms of cost benefit analysis (CBA) and resistance. Here I build upon understandings of power by Foucault (1980) that power is not just top down. It is "different from and more complicated, dense and pervasive than a set of laws or a state apparatus" (Foucault 1980:158). Rather, the mechanisms of power that function outside, below and alongside the State apparatuses, on a much more minute and everyday level, are not also changed (*ibid*: 160).

## **Introduction to this Chapter – key themes in the young people’s perspectives**

This Chapter introduces the perspectives of the young people within my research on their experiences of unemployment and trying to get a job. Within the data collected from the young people on their perspectives, six contextual themes were frequently identified as barriers to employment: public transport, lack of qualifications and experience, lack of jobs, immigrants, criminal records, and ill health.

**Table 5** shows these six contextual themes brought up by the young people and how many of the young people brought these up as barriers to them gaining employment within my research interactions with them.

**Table 5: Contextual themes**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Number of young people that brought this up</b>
1. Transport	28
2. Lack of qualifications and experience	26
3. Lack of jobs	28
4. Immigrants	10
5. Criminal record	4
6. Ill health	9

These barriers to employment from the perspective of the young people will now be discussed in turn. In the process, I will consider the accumulative and interactive cause and effect relationship that these barriers have had on each other, and on the young people, as a main thread throughout this Chapter. I will enable the young people’s voices to speak in each theme by using illustrative quotes.

## **1. Public transport**

A main factor for all of the young people when looking for a job was their reliance on and the expense of public transport whilst on benefits or starting a job. Whilst three of the participants had access to a car, the running costs of their car meant that they also had to use public transport.

Reliance, for most of the young people, on public transport therefore limited their scope for job searches, depending on where they lived, in a number of ways. Times available to work depended on when buses could take them to work and get them home; the distance to travel and time taken to get to places of work also depended on transport links and journey times. Affordability of public transport when searching for jobs or attend job interviews or mandatory courses and JC+ appointments were also factors in certain areas.

For example, Simon lived in Peterlee, and he explained how relying on public transport limited the type of job he could apply for. For him, the frequency and affordability of public transport was a factor in deciding where to apply.

- *For me [the problem] is public transport really, depending on what type of job y' get. How far it is, if you have to start at six in the morning, well there's no bus to get you there. It would cost you more in taxis just to get you there.*

### ***Is this just where you live? (Interviewer)***

*You have to travel up to 90 minutes for a job according to JC+<sup>22</sup> on public transport...From Peterlee to Durham it costs £7.50 supersaver return a day. That's the cheapest day ticket. But buses don't get you to work for 6 in the morning.*

Charlie explained how reliance on public transport was time consuming and limited the areas he could search for jobs.

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<sup>22</sup> The Jobseeker's Allowance Regulations 2013' require all people on JSA to search for and apply for jobs up to 90 minutes' commute from their home (DWP 2013: paragraph 14(2)).

- *The buses come once an hour and so you're talking about half a day gone just for them [JC] to give me some paper.....I rely on public transport, which is unreliable, and it is one bus an hour and I have to travel up to 90 minutes. To get to Sunderland it will take from 95-111 minutes so that's out. I can get to Durham in 56 minutes bus time.*

This wasn't limited to the young people living in more rural areas. Cara lived in Elswick, Central Newcastle. She explained that affording to look for jobs and attend job interviews was an issue for her.

- *I went to an interview and spent the last of my money getting there. I said 'Is there any chance of getting my bus fare back?' And they [JC+] said 'No'.*

This reliance on public transport was exacerbated by the geographical distribution of jobs that could be reached given these limitations in regard to the forms of public transport available to reach them. For example, Kai lived in Peterlee and had been unemployed for 8 months. He summed up the whole conundrum that all of the young people spoken to expressed that they faced:

- ***Kai-*** *How do I search for 72 new jobs every 2 weeks; there aren't 72 jobs in the North-East? I mean, I can understand going to Durham and Sunderland but not in Peterlee and surrounding areas. We're expected to apply there though like 10 miles or 90 minutes public transport. I'm fine with that but if you don't have the money, they won't give you the money, they'll only reimburse you, but what if you don't have the money to start with? So like that comes out of our own money but if you don't have it, how do you get it? It's a load of shit<sup>23</sup>.*

I found that the problem with travel was not necessarily a reluctance to commute. The connectedness to transport hubs and/or urban centres where there was a developed transport infrastructure was an issue for the young people.

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<sup>23</sup> In keeping with my intention to reflect the young people's voices, I haven't censored their language, even when they used swear words and other language or views that some may find offensive.

For example: If a young person, using public transport, lived in Newcastle city they potentially had access to jobs in Edinburgh. However a young person in Cassop would have to travel 54 minutes by bus to get into Durham. Even for young people who lived near transport hubs that enabled them to travel far within the 90 minutes allocated, the costs associated with travelling further remained an issue. For example, the young person who could get to Edinburgh in 90 minutes would also have to be able to afford the cost of the transport to get there and back.

Public transport could make the young people more mobile, but it was not necessarily convenient or cheap or easy for them to use. In summary, poor transport infrastructure limited the young people. Many young people could not afford public transport, jobs available further afield were low paid jobs and so paying extra to get there was not always possible for participants on benefits or in return for low wages.

I will now look at the second theme, lack of qualifications and experience.

## **2. Lack of qualifications or experience**

When I spoke to the young people, I found that the gap between the qualifications and experience possessed by these young jobseekers (who often had no or few qualifications) and what was required for the jobs available depleted the range of jobs open to these young people to only low skilled jobs. The competition for these jobs increased as they all applied for the same jobs available to them within the same location, taking public transport factors into consideration.

Alesha lived in Elswick. She explained how lack of qualifications and experience limited the jobs available to her.

- *The worst thing is they ask what work you're interested in, what skills and qualifications you have and what realistically you're aiming for and you tell them and then they say, 'right you haven't got this this and this [qualifications and experience], so we're looking for 3 different takeaways and that's it.*

Simon, from Peterlee, and Katie, from Horden, discussed this problem too.

- **Simon-** *Qualifications are a problem for me, the type of jobs you go for they want higher qualification than what you've got.*

**Katie-** *Even for some cleaning jobs, I mean cleaning, I know how to clean up.*

**Simon-** *I applied for Aldi and they said I didn't have enough qualifications, stacking shelves!*

In the areas I covered, the young people in this research who lacked qualifications (such as Alesha, Simon and Katie) were competing with more people for fewer jobs; this made the competition a lot tougher. But they were not alone in this; 26 out of the 28 young people in the research cited this as a barrier.

- **Alesha-** *Being under 20 yeah you're just going for, I don't have a degree so I'm going for fast food and cleaning and there is a limited number of those. That is down to age. I don't know if it will be different when I get a degree.*

For some of the young people, their perception of disadvantage due to their age was exacerbated by the lower benefit rates they received because of the way that the regulations treated people their age. Craig explained how being on the lower level benefits due to his age was not enough for him to live on.

- **Craig-** *Because I'm under 21 I get paid less than if I was over 25 when I claim on. I pay for rent and bills and then a metro week pass to get around and look for work every day like the JC say I have to. I can't afford food though. I have to steal food.*

Once young people were over the age of 18 and on JSA, they had little idea of where to go to get the qualifications they identified as needing, even though they said they wanted to get more qualifications.

- **Rosie-** *I just don't know what position I want, what I'm trained in or what employers want. As for what I want to do and what fits with me, I don't*



*know, and I don't want to get a job and then quit; I want to be really good at something but I just haven't figured out what that is yet.*

In order to receive funding for education post-18, to gain qualifications such as GCSE (level 2) and higher, young people need to have an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) based on the young person being diagnosed as 'high needs', such as Special Educational Needs (SEND) (DfE 2015). The young people in my research were not classified as high or special needs in this respect and so did not qualify for funding to pay for this type of education. They had already gone through the education system and those who had left school with few or no qualification would need to pay to attend college to have another chance at getting level two qualifications or higher. They didn't know where to go for help or how to go about getting help. They felt that it was too late for them to get these 'essential' qualifications that they had missed.

- **Marcus-** *I need more qualifications [to get work], A levels would help. I would like to finish my A levels but I don't think I could pick them up as different places use different exam boards. I'm too old to go back to Framwellgate [the school he started A levels]...but I don't want to start at the beginning and do 2 years.*

Furthermore if they attended a non-approved JC+ course they were in breach of the JSA claimant commitment (DWP 2013: Reg45). Training for the young people whilst on JSA was limited to short term 'employability courses'. The young people felt stuck, like Simon.

- **Simon-** *I want to go back to college, do an electrician course but the JC+ say I can't. I'm like "well it'll help me get a job". They just say, "Na, you need to be looking for a job". But I'm like, 'there are no jobs'!*

While qualifications were seen as a pre-requisite for standing a chance of getting a job, qualifications were not necessarily seen as the route to a guaranteed job. Dan was one of the 26 young people in my research who said that they faced the cycle

of needing a job to gain qualifications and experience but finding it very difficult to get a job because he didn't have qualifications or experience.

- ***Dan-** It's hard being young and looking for a job because there is a lot of competition from people with experience. There aren't that many jobs around and out there at the minute. The JC+ have told me that employers will take those with experience because they don't want to spend time and money training you up. But I said how can you get that if they won't take you on?*

Those that had some qualifications were faced with the lack of experience but those who had neither faced a double blow which made the jobs available to them potentially fewer. I will now look at the third theme identified by the young people: lack of jobs.

### **3. Lack of jobs**

Every young person in my research (regardless of their qualifications, location and background or job preference) told me that lack of jobs was a barrier to employment. Furthermore, there was consensus amongst the young people that there were not enough jobs even to fill their old jobsearch quotas<sup>24</sup> or new time frame quota<sup>25</sup> (DWP 2014) from the JC+. In addition, there were especially insufficient jobs that they were qualified for, and insufficient jobs in locations where they lived and surrounding areas.

Rob, Kai and Dan are three of the 28 participants who expressed their frustration at the discrepancy between the number of jobs they had to search for and the number of jobs (according to them) that were available in their area.

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<sup>24</sup> Jobsearch quotas are the number of jobs that benefit recipients were required to search and apply for as a condition of benefits.

<sup>25</sup> Time frame quota is the new requirement; this is the amount of time benefit recipients are required to search and apply for jobs as a condition of their benefits.

**Do you think there are a lot of jobs out there? (Interviewer)**

- **Rob-** yeah just not for us. Retail at the minute, there's none.

*Kai- I was told I had to look for 52 jobs a fortnight....THERE'S NOT EVEN 2 TO LOOK FOR!*

- **Dan-***I've been around everywhere at Seaham harbour, Durham, Sunderland, filled in application forms but heard nowt back, because there's loads of people applying, isn't there? There's nowt else you can do other than keep trying.*

Alison, from Durham, talked about her concerns over the difficulty of getting a job because of the sheer competition that she had heard existed for each job available where she lived.

**What do you think are your barriers to getting a job? (Interviewer)**

- **Alison** - *Erm...no jobs. Before JSA I applied for apprenticeships but I need to get a proper job now. My friend went for a bar job and she knew the guy who ran the pub and she said 100 people were going for that one position. I don't know. At the time when I heard that I thought, that is a huge amount of people but now I've been like yeah it doesn't seem like that much now I'm looking.*

This also relates to barriers of transport and lack of qualifications and experience. Competition for the jobs was so high because people were applying down<sup>26</sup> or all applying for the dwindling amount of jobs available to them.

- **Mia-** *I don't have any experience or qualifications and so people are applying for the same jobs I am with experience and with qualifications and so if there are hardly any jobs what are the chances of me getting a job when I have nothing to put on my CV?*

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<sup>26</sup> Applying for jobs requiring less than the young people's qualification and/or experience level.

For the young people, competition outstripped availability, as demand by the market for the labour supply in these areas was low.

Some had family ties to particular areas; for example:

- **Carly-** *My sister lives near me and she is all I have now, her and her kids, and so I'm staying put [in Easington].*

Some couldn't afford to leave, or weren't living in that place out of choice in the first place.

- **Rosie-** *I'm living with my mum and dad, which isn't great but I don't really have a choice as I've got nowhere else to live. I mean yeah I could save up and get my own place but what could I save from?*
- **Bethany-** *I'm living with my boyfriend and his mum, I hate it but it is great that she is letting us stay there otherwise we would have nowhere else to go.*

If a charity or the council had housed them, it wasn't seen as an option for them to leave a subsidised rental. For example: Aiden, Craig, Stevie, Antonia, Cara, Lucy and Alesha were living in temporary accommodation provided by a charity. They didn't have a choice of another place to go or move to as a preferred alternative.

This perceived lack of jobs was seen by the young people to be exacerbated by the lack of public transport and lack of qualifications/experience discussed earlier. The young people were limited to the jobs in the more immediate locations to where they lived because they didn't live in urban centres where there were more jobs or didn't live near good transport links to widen their search or didn't have the qualifications to have a wider pool of jobs to apply for, or all the above.

#### **4. Immigration/immigrants**

A perceived barrier to getting a job identified by 10 of the young people was immigration; 8 were from the 16 participants in County Durham, which has a predominantly white British population, and they saw immigration as a problem. Of the 12 people researched from the Elswick area, four were immigrants themselves; from the remaining eight, only two of the other young people cited immigration or immigrants as a barrier to employment.

The young people I spoke to from East Durham said they had not encountered 'immigrants' at work or where they lived, or as JC+ attendees or JSA recipients. However, they viewed immigrants as an external barrier to getting employment, like Katie, Lindsey, Rob and Simon:

- **Katie-** *To be honest with y' if all these foreigners didn't come here, it sounds horrible like but y'na...*

**Lindsey** *It's because they're paid less.*

**Simon-** *Aye, in [local food factory], 90-95% were Polish and Lithuanian...*

**Rob-** *It said in the news that we're coming out of a recession but...NA, there's not more jobs.*

**Katie-** *if you come from a foreign country there might be....but there's nothing because of too many Polish people here.*

Katie, Rob and Simon also explained a resistance and hostility towards immigrants:

- **Katie-** *There's nothing [no jobs] because of too many Polish people here. ... They've sent my brother to go to [local food factory]; I said 'you're not'. He said 'why?' and I said 'it's full of Polish people'.*

- **Rob-** *The JC were sending everyone to [logistics factory] at Wynyard. 50 started and on the day 34 walked out because the supervisors are Romanian.*

Despite East Durham having a low record of immigrant population in this study, participants here still discussed their concerns about immigration:

- **Simon-** *[There are] thousands of Romanians now*

**Rob-** *on the TV last night there are people living underground in Romania in sewers injecting and that, and they're on about making it part of the EU<sup>27</sup>! NA NA, I reckon they're coming over in the busload.*

When I first spoke to Carly, she was particularly angry with what she saw as the situation regarding immigration.

- **Carly-** *[really fired up] There's no jobs in Britain for born and bred British people! I'm not racist but why the hell should other people from another country be able to come into our country and take our jobs. The government say that they're going to get everyone in Britain working, but how are they going to do that when they're letting all these people in? Every shop you see is Paki shops! Why not open a shop in your own country? Because then you're giving people like us a better chance. Just stay in your own country. So what you're getting shot at, shoot back at the cunts as far as I'm concerned.*

**Do you see many people from other countries around here? (Interviewer)**

*Nah, I've never seen them at all. I'm not racial at all. I've got coloured friends, but they were born in this country, their family were born and bred in this country. But when you've got people from Thailand coming over here, like people buying Thai brides and taking our jobs. It's bang out of order! They should put tracker bracelets on them...*

These young people blamed their self-perceived worse off situation on immigrants.

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<sup>27</sup> However Romania has been part of the EU since 2007.

When I met Carly again she had been on a work placement for four days at a chicken factory and said she had worked with three Polish workers. She explained her point of view further regarding immigrants.

- **Carly-** *There was this Polish guy Conner or Conga, I couldn't understand a word he was saying and I was working with him and he was really really helpful and nice but I couldn't understand a word he was saying but he was trying. And I was only doing 2 trays to his 4, so he was making me look slow! I'm thinking: you getting paid exactly the same as me you're making me look bad.*

The two young people in Elswick had the same concerns; like Damon:

- **Damon-** *Competition from immigrants has become a much bigger problem. They're on about border control but they're being hired because they're cheap. Our jobs are going to them. I'm not racist but British people should get the jobs first, but it doesn't work like that now.*

For these young people, the hostility toward immigrants seemed to be as a result of a view that they were competing with immigrants for an already limited pool of jobs.

This competition heightened resistance to immigrants. It was clear to me that the problem for these participants was about more than racism. My point here is that behind the argument about immigrants taking jobs were perhaps elements of racism, but behind this were elements of fear over 'their' jobs, benefits, and housing being re-directed to immigrants. These young people felt they were being left behind.

However the four young people who were immigrants that were involved in the research spoke of similar barriers to other young people, plus the added barrier of language. They lived in Elswick. I interviewed the four immigrants who were mandated onto an English speaking course as a condition of their benefits. They said they were paid less for being young and paid less for the same jobs as English

speaking people. Far from 'having it easy', they faced further barriers to employment.

Ardash and Hamid explained their experiences.

- **Ardash-** *We want a job but we need to come on this course first. JC+ say we do and look for a job while we do...but I look for a job and owners say 'no we can't take you, you don't speak good enough English.'*

**Hamid-** *The only jobs I can get are in takeaway shops, but they are late and I can't get buses home. I wouldn't get paid enough either; they [employers] say 'you don't speak good English' so you get paid less.*

These young people felt that they were actually at a disadvantage because they did not speak English as well as others and they were either denied jobs or paid less because of this.

The young immigrants spoken to wanted to work, like the other young people did. They spoke of the same barriers as other young people in the research. Yet they also felt they had less bargaining power because of the language barrier. Whilst not all immigrants may have difficulties with speaking English, the immigrants I spoke to were in this situation in terms of language/speaking English as a second language. In the interviews, I clearly understood what they were saying. However, they said they had been denied work for not speaking English well enough.

A lack of diversity in the range of jobs and the scale of the competition for the jobs that were available that these young people reported only served to compound the problem of lack of jobs for them.



## **5. Criminal record**

A significant problem for four participants in County Durham was having a criminal record. They felt no matter how hard they tried, as soon as employers found out that they had a criminal record, they had no chance of getting a job. For all four, they reported that many job opportunities had been lost when prospective employers found out. These young people couldn't necessarily do anything about this at this stage, and the JC+ couldn't change the fact that they had a criminal record.

Carly found that her criminal record limited the types of jobs she could apply for.

- **Carly-** *I wanted to be a childcare assistant... I couldn't do that, not with things going on with me son and me criminal record. If you've got a criminal record, then you get like pushed aside, to the bottom of the pile.*

Rob, in Horden, put his difficulty in getting any job that he found down to his criminal record:

- **Rob-** *If you work in retail, as soon as they find out they think the worst of you. My criminal record had nowt to do with thieving or burglary but they think, "that's what he is, he's been on drugs all his life"... if you fill a form in and it says criminal convictions they think it's really bad but it could be driving offence, not paying council tax, anything... There was a place at Arnison Centre three weeks ago wanting a scanner and I was like right I'll start no problem, and they say right, do you have a criminal record and I gans aye and then she says sorry the job's not available...it's every time man!*

Their criminal records and previous behaviour had a long-term impact on the opportunities open to them and so their life trajectories. This was especially so if participants had a prison record. For example, Charlie found this to be true after serving time in prison. He was able to attain qualifications in specialist cleaning to help make them more employable whilst serving his sentence. He said that despite

this, the experience of events leading to his prison sentence and then reluctance by employers to hire him made him “practically unemployable”.

- **Charlie-** *I've applied for loads of jobs but not had anything back, no emails or nowt so and then some need a CRB<sup>28</sup> check so then that's me out.... Four jobs found out I had a criminal record and didn't get back. My work coach said there are people who can help me, he hasn't told me who they are and it's been ages... I'm not looking forward to seeing him next like, why wouldn't he let me know and help me. You would think after I'd told him being to prison he would automatically refer me to them like would you?*

Two months later, his situation had not changed. He still didn't feel supported by the JC+ and he was still waiting for information about any specialised support for him.

- **Charlie-** *I applied for a cleaning job at the hospital, I mean I've got all my CRSC certificates for dealing with blood and needles and human waste all proper and that. I got as far as an interview but they asked for a CRB first and then they cancelled the interview.*

Carly, Rob and Simon didn't mention any extra support offered to them to overcome this barrier. The sticking point for the young people with criminal records was not about getting onto employability courses and initiatives; it was what happened once these came to an end. The young people didn't need employability courses and initiatives to overcome the barrier of having a criminal record; they needed an employer to employ them.

Although the participants' actions may have caused the criminal record or time in prison, a criminal record is something imposed externally onto an individual;

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<sup>28</sup> This refers to a Criminal Records Bureau check. This was a background check on an individual that employers use to look at the individual's criminal record data. This has since been replaced by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check.

furthermore the immediate ramifications transcended to an external barrier as a consequence, in the form of employers' reactions to these young people<sup>29</sup>.

## **6. Illness**

Nine of the 28 young people said they suffered from physical and/or mental illness. All nine said that that this illness acted as a barrier to employment or training, or progression to either. Furthermore, the young people said that toughening MWA or WCA's made their employment situation more difficult. This was because they needed a job but their illness prevented them from being able to do certain jobs or job-search every day.

- **Lucy-** *I have [a rare syndrome] and so the hypermobility is just one symptom. I have up-to 50-60 dislocations a day...my jaw is half out now... I couldn't even lift a handbag at my last Atos<sup>30</sup> assessment*
- **Damon-** *I have Type 1 diabetes and it affects my health massively, I've got a lot of complications with my health... Sometimes I'm too ill to come to the appointments...I don't know when my medication is going to take over or how it's going to take over. I have my good days and bad days. When I'm sick I'm sick and it is really hard for me to recover. The doctors say I'm likely to have a stroke down my whole left side in the next two years because my health is deteriorating.*

Some participants concealed the extent of their illness.

- **Alison-** *I suffer from Bipolar disorder. Some days I'm ok, but then I'm not. With an illness like this it sort of immediately affects how people see you especially in authority positions so I just keep it to myself unless it crops up.*

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<sup>29</sup> There are wider regulations at play regarding disclosure of criminal convictions and when they are considered as spent under the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 and including whether they need to be disclosed in DBS checks. The young people with criminal records still had cautions or convictions that were not yet eligible to be filtered from DBS certificates convictions in line with the amendments made to the Act (2012).

<sup>30</sup> Atos is a French data firm that was one of the businesses contracted by the government to carry out work capability assessments on claimants at the time of the research.

Others said they were not recognised as being ill by the JC+ and couldn't understand why.

- **Charlie-** *From 2011, when I left prison I went straight onto ESA, up till now I've been going to doctors for medical reasons, deep depression, and seeing counsellors... I was on ESA. Then I went for the JC+ to assess me about 6 month after and my doctor even said I wasn't [fit to work]. I had medical and sickness notes and certificates but when they say you're ready to work you have to go onto JSA. I thought 'Ok to work? I feel like killing myself!' It's ridiculous.*
- **Aiden-** *My depression is because of a lot of things but it is getting worse now and that's because of not getting work and how JC are... It's definitely made it worse.*
- **Damon-** *I've been in and out of hospital lots so unable to get a job. I'm not able to work full time because of my health but I couldn't afford not to work fulltime.*

Rosie explained how her condition was perpetuated by her experiences with the JC+. She suffered from anxiety, and she told the JC+ this. This affected what jobs she applied for.

- **Rosie-** *I apply for all the jobs and I can go out and hand in CVs... But with JC+ I worry if they will accept what I've done, it plays on my mind...I suffer from anxiety. I hate going to the JC. It makes it worse.*

These illnesses made searching for a job more difficult due to restrictions their illnesses placed on them and this narrowed the type of jobs they could apply for, as well as affecting their interactions with the various aspects of the ALMP systems that affected them.

## **Conclusion**

This Chapter has considered the six most frequent barriers mentioned by the young people as barriers to them getting into employment, including their relationship with the context and place in which the young people were located. As has been made clear throughout, these barriers interacted and accumulated to form multiple disadvantages, with all of the young people identifying more than one barrier. To give one final example to particularly highlight this interaction, Charlie had few qualifications or work experience. He lived in an area where he said there were few jobs and unemployment was high. He relied on public transport, which made it harder to search further and wider for jobs. He suffered from depression, which impacted on his ability to search for jobs. The qualifications that he did have in cleaning he had gained whilst in prison. His criminal record made it more difficult to find employment and his unemployment impacted on his depression.

Now that we have seen these six structural barriers from the young people's perspectives, I will address the young people's perspectives in a wider critical context and how they interacted with ALMPs; in the young people's case, this was particularly apparent in their interaction with the JC+ and JC+ services.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Young people's interactions with ALMPs**

#### **Introduction**

In this Chapter, I will focus on the young people's interaction with ALMPs, as focused in and through their interaction with the JC+ and going to the JC+ centre. The JC+ was an important issue to the young people as they saw the JC+ as acting as an additional barrier to employment for them. This view was universal amongst the young people I talked to: all 28 participants viewed the JC+ negatively, and all saw the JC+ as a source of frustration. In this Chapter, alongside the young people's perspectives, I will begin to introduce wider points of view through wider data which helps to address and contextualise the experiences young people were recalling. These will be in the shape of ONS statistics, DWP directives and the perspectives in the account given to me by one WSM who I interviewed as part of my research. I will compare this further wider data with the views of the young people over the five issues; three that the young people identified, which are: fake/irrelevant jobs; qualifications, training and employability services; conditionality and sanctions; and two that have been addressed in response to wider literature and comments from the WSM which are: voluntary unemployment; and selectivity. I will then look at the extent the young people preferred being on benefits over low quality jobs in relation to my findings. In doing so I will argue that the interplay of the cumulative effect of structures, detailed in Chapter 5 and this Chapter impacts on the young people's agency.

**Table 6: Issues addressed Chapter 6**

Issues identified in the data	Number of young people that identified this issue	WSM identified the issue
Fake/ irrelevant jobs	27	-
Qualifications, training and employability services	27	-
Conditionality and sanctions	28	-
Voluntary unemployment	0	1
Selectivity	0	1
Benefits over low paid jobs	0	1

**Fake/ irrelevant jobs**

Universal Jobmatch (UJM) is a British government website for finding jobs; as part of the site's functions, UJM 'jobmatches' users to job vacancies based on the users' profile (<https://jobsearch.direct.gov.uk/>). Claimants, including the young people in my research, are mandated to use UJM as a condition of receiving benefits (DWP 2014).

The WSM I spoke to stated that it was the site of choice for them.

- *WSM- [UJM] is more widely accepted now. There were issues with getting onto it, not being able to sign back in to it. Lots of issues in the beginning and people are now using it on a regular basis. There are lots of jobs in there so it is the site of choice for us.*

Despite this, the WSM did acknowledge that claimants were suspicious of how it was used.

- **WSM-** *The biggest advantage is their job search can be recorded on the site. As long as they give us access to it we can check on there. But a lot of people don't want us to have access. I think they think we are going to keep an eye on them that way, but all we are doing is looking at their searches as we would in their book.*

Many of the young people I spoke to did not like UJM. All 28 said they were mandated to use the UJM as a condition of their benefits, and 22 saw this as a significant issue preventing them from effectively finding work and getting a job. All participants spoke of fake jobs on the UJM website - either in a fraudulent or disorganised capacity; e.g. phantom jobs were posted or expired jobs were still on the site to apply for. Being made to apply for these jobs was a real source of irritation for them.

Lindsey, Rob and Simon discussed their annoyance about this and their suspicion of the JC+.

- **Lindsey-** *All the jobs are fake!*

**Rob -** *They reckon with UJM it was just one man sending out fake jobs.*

**Simon -***So jobs that were up weren't even jobs*

**Lindsey-** *Someone told us that it was to check that you were actually applying for jobs. But you get your hopes up and you get nothing back and it knocks you!*

Dan and Marcus found a vast number of the jobs on the site were for temp agencies.

- **Dan-** *UJM is crap, it's all fake, it's all agencies. If you look at them it's just so they can see your CV, you never hear back. Never. It's really frustrating.*

Applying for so many temp agencies was a situation that they did not want to risk, as they foresaw re-entering JSA and the upheaval with back claims and shortages



between wages and benefits was too risky. To them, this just perpetuated the short-term cycle of moving between work and benefits that they wanted to get out of.

- **Marcus-** *On UJM it's all these agencies that are all for temporary contracts and I'm already registered with them anyway.*

Participants also claimed that JC+ staff still told them to apply for jobs that staff knew they were not qualified for; therefore the jobs were irrelevant to the young people. They felt their time was being wasted by the JC+, and the JC+ knew it.

Antonia and Elijah discussed this:

- **Antonia-** *At the same time as I was on JSA I was doing a part-time college course in youth. [The JC+] were giving me jobs for youth managers which I was not qualified to do, didn't have the experience to do but they told me I still had to do it. I hated it... it was a waste of time because I could have been applying to other realistic jobs but I had to apply for these ones... I know a few people who have been told to apply for jobs that they're not qualified to do but JC+ say they have to otherwise they'll be sanctioned.*
- **Elijah-** *I got into trouble for not applying for a job that required lobotomy training, I explained that I couldn't do this and she replied, "Well, why not?" But there are other problems with the UJM system. I went into see my advisor. They said I had applied for a job recently. They said you've only applied for this job today, I said I applied a week ago, but it only showed up on their records that day. They asked if I had logged on today and I said actually you have permanent access to see when I am logged on; I haven't in the last 12 hours. If this job only came up now, how could I have applied for it? It's quite a bit of a muddle.*

Again it seemed to them that the JC+ and the related systems were not there to help them. It underpinned their suspicions that the JC+ had other motives than supporting them.

Jobseekers need to document usage in order to receive benefits and failure to do so could result in sanctions. The young people felt they were left in limbo as they didn't receive acknowledgement that companies had received CVs or about whether they had been successful. The young people didn't know how long to wait to hear back. Combined with not knowing if the jobs they were applying for were real, the UJM site became a real bone of contention for the young people and caused further resentment towards the JC+.

- **Rob-** *After 2 weeks of applying for jobs you just think 'what is the point!' You don't even get one email! Not even a phone call, we don't even know they've received it.*

The young people felt suspicious of the JC+; they felt that the JC+ was checking up on them.

- **Cara-** *They're doing everything they can to monitor you. They've got this UJM site and they monitor what you've been doing. They've had a lot of problems because people get locked out or things don't get saved. You get emails every morning at 2am, who's awake then? We're just like guinea pigs for them.*

There was also frustration about the difficulty in using the site and an inability to track progress made with job searches and applications. These issues with UJM further raised suspicion for the young people; they didn't trust the person who was meant to help them, which could have hindered their opportunities

### **Qualifications, training and JC+ employability services**

Another issue that the young people faced was that they wanted to gain qualifications so to widen the jobs available to them, but found themselves unable to gain the substantive qualifications they wanted to improve their longer term job prospects within the current system's rules and regulations. This contrasted with a JC+ focus on providing short training courses based on what the JC+ perceived as

being in current demand amongst local employers, in order to get them into any job in the short term.

Here the WSM I spoke to from Durham JC+ explained the JC+ position regarding qualification provision

- ***WSM*** -As long as there are vacancies out there for jobs then we will help them get the qualifications for them, like labouring CSCS<sup>31</sup> cards certificates, security qualifications, food hygiene. If there are vacancies for these in the area, then we will put people on these courses if they ask. We went through a period where everyone had a CSCS card and there were no vacancies for labourers and site work so we stopped putting the courses on.

Here, the ways in which the individual jobseeker's needs or employers' needs relates to supply, demand and wider society's needs becomes apparent.

A young person entering the labour market without qualifications or experience is not the fault of the JC+; however, the employability schemes in place to help them get a job (including any training/qualifications offered or supported through these) are within the remit of the wider ALMPs to consider.

The gap between the qualifications wanted by and courses on offer to the young people was a source of frustration with the JC+. Twenty-five of the young people did not see the relevance of the employability schemes they were mandated on to; as my research developed this number increased to 27.

For example, Rob was 24 and had a Level 1 qualification in English. He said he had been on a cycle of employability courses but he was still unemployed, which led to overwhelming irritation when I spoke to him.

- ***Rob***-To be honest with you none of the employability courses I've been on were helpful like.

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<sup>31</sup> Construction Skills Certification Scheme.

### **Why? (Interviewer)**

- **Rob-** *coz I'M STILL HERE AREN'T I!...I don't want this fucking [employability] qualification; I just want a fucking proper job.*

He had experience to support this point, as he had been in a cycle of unemployment and short-term employability courses for over two years and was still in the same situation with no foreseeable prospect of getting other qualifications beyond employability qualifications.

When I first spoke to Dan, he had just started his first employability course and he was happy to have been sent on it by his WP provider.

- **Dan** *It's great to be on this course, to finally get somewhere, I can get some qualifications and guaranteed employment.*

The next time I spoke to Dan he had a different opinion:

- **Dan** *After I last spoke to you I was in the computer classroom for another week and then I just stood in the warehouse for a few weeks sweeping floors. That was it then I had to sign back on to JSA...it was embarrassing, I was just being dicked around*

Charlie felt the same way:

- **Charlie** *-When I first went on the course I was dead happy, I thought get on the course get myself sorted get my CV done and get help to get sorted, what was the point when the course means nothing and no-one will employ me and I can't get any help?*

The young people were limited in their choices for wider education and training. Increased conditionality within the benefits system meant that participants couldn't attend college courses that prevented job searches seven days a week for most of every day.

Simon, Rob and Lindsey spoke about these difficulties in getting qualifications and how hopeless they felt the employability course was that they were on at the time I spoke to them.

- **Simon-** *I want to go to college but only if I'm doing less than 16 hours a week, including homework<sup>32</sup>. I want to do my electrician course but I would have to sign off and pay for it myself now I'm over 18... I can't afford that.*

**Rob-** *So we're stuck doing shitty courses like this, writing CVs over again and then signing back on after 6 weeks or whatever it is.*

**Simon-** *It's only 4 for me.*

- **Lindsey-** *I wanted to do a course, I said I want to better myself and they said you've got to pay for it all yourself. I can't afford that. I need help with living costs, because if I went to college to get qualifications, so I could get a better job, then my payments would stop and so I'd have no money...I said, I wanted to go to college, finish my hairdressing, to better myself and I asked what help I would get and they said no!*

The young people said that the lack of information given by the JC+ regarding the employability courses they were mandated on to meant that they did not know what they were signing up for, or had been misinformed what the courses or terms of the placements were.

- **Marcus-** *I was on a week course about employability and then after the week you could do your forklift truck licence. So I did it and then nothing, no test or licence and nothing. I asked and they said it had been cancelled. People had gone there to do care work too and the same happened to them they were left with nothing to show for it. So they wanted people to do the course so said there was something at the end, but then really there was nothing.*

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<sup>32</sup> This is in accordance with regulations laid out in the claimant commitment (DWP 2014).

I first met Katie, Simon, Kai and Rob on the same employability course as each other, from three different JC+ centres. They all claimed they were told it would result in 6-12 months' employment. They found that this was not the case.

- **Katie-** *aye and we got told it was gonna be 6-12 month and it's only 4 weeks!*

**Simon-** *I need proper hours [meaning permanent hours are preferred], signing off the dole and being only told "right the job can only last 6 weeks", there's no point really cause by the time you've had to reapply for your dole*

**Katie-** *then y' have to wait a month for it t' come through!*

**Kai-** *Thing is when people finish here and sign on; they have to wait 6 weeks... When we finish here, what if that's us?*

**Rob-** *the JC just a vicious circle really isn't it... no money for 6 weeks with rent to pay...the reality is we don't know what we're gonna get, the reality is we're not getting 6-12 month, that's the reality.*

The young people did not see these courses as an opportunity to upskill, but a waste of time and source of embarrassment.

- **Marcus-** *I got sent on some Mickey Mouse courses [low level courses that are not what employers want], but I'm not putting them on my CV, it's embarrassing, it wouldn't help me get a job. I reckon employers would be put off by them... Now I'm on a CV writing course! I mean I'm not putting this course on my CV, it's a joke.*
- **Dan-** *These courses, they're a waste of time, takes time out of looking for a job. I got sent on level one computer course, you can do that in primary school. I knew everything so I spent the rest of my time helping other people.*

These experiences led to a feeling of disconnection for the young people with the JC+, as a service provider, and led to feeling that they weren't cared about, like

Lindsey in Horden and Cara and Alesha in Elswick. The whole experience of the JC+ was regarded as a highly negative experience for all of the young people I spoke to.

- **Lindsey-** *I'd like to better myself, for them [JC+] to be more supportive towards you instead of not bothering.*
- **Alesha-** *They make the process of getting into work seem easy. Its fine, just have a good CV, get an interview and you've got your job, but it's nothing like that.*

**Cara-** *They should offer support at JC, most of the time the supervisors are doing nothing, pretending to be busy on their computer. I know for a fact my supervisor hates her job, she tells me all the time. I'm keeping her in work.*

**Alesha-** *JC+ never helped me.*

**Cara-** *nor me*

Dan described how he felt the JC+ directly prevented him from getting a job after they mandated him onto a guaranteed jobs trial which disrupted his longer term training.

- **Dan-** *I went to this place Monday to Friday 8.30-4pm but I couldn't complete my training because I was keep on having to go and sign on and have meetings and that [at the JC+]. So they didn't want me...I was telling them [the JC+] "it's your fault I'm unemployed!"... First time with WP she said, "What's stopped you getting a job" And I said- "JC+!", and she said, "Yeah true I've had that a lot."*

It is significant that the negative feelings and experiences, to differing degrees, were present for all the young people in the research and in all locations. It suggested to me that these experiences weren't down to one staff member's behaviour or a rogue JC+ Centre but was perhaps more to do with the increased

conditionality under the 2013 DWP directives that the JC+ and JC+ staff had to apply (as already detailed in Chapter 2 pages 45-48).

Here the WSM explained these:

- **WSM-** *When people sign on to benefits, whatever it is, they are claiming a 7-day [a week] benefit. If they are not looking for work, capable for work or available for work for those 7 days or if they chose not to do something, for example if they agree to take up a mandatory opportunity but they don't start or leave half way through, there is a good chance that they will be sanctioned.*

In a previous study, Grant (2013) found that from the perspective of the JC+ staff, they were trying to help their clients but were constrained by tighter regulations. As laid out in Chapter 3(p 78), JC+ reform since Grant's research has seen the JC+ much more closely structured and controlled by DWP directives with tougher conditions for benefits and more punitive measures in the shape of sanctions. Having to adhere to new measures set out by the DWP are not necessarily indicative that the staff wanted to penalise the young people.

A huge area of contention for all of the young people, and between the JC+ and the young people, was surrounding sanctions. This is a theme that I will focus on next.

### **Conditionality and Sanctions**

Ten of the young people in my research said they had been sanctioned, but all of them said they had been threatened with sanctions by the JC+.

The WSM argued that sanctions were working:

- **WSM-** *The sanctions are the consequence of not fulfilling something that is deemed mandatory and appropriate for that customer... Sanctions are to persuade what is needed to get them into work more quickly, definitely. So I think that is one of the reasons to get them to do what is necessary to move*



*them forward more quickly than they would left to their own devices... I think it is working... There are always a percentage of people who don't want to do them [fulfil benefit conditions] and aren't bothered by the sanction penalty. For most of them who are bothered and it does matter to them and who want to find work as soon as possible they will do what you ask them to do.*

In this regard, those who were bothered would do as they were told anyway so that they could get a job, regardless of sanctions. Those who were sanctioned had sanctions against them because they were not bothered and seen by this WSM as being those who wouldn't change their behaviour regardless of sanctions. There didn't seem to be a position in the middle whereby some young people would need support to navigate through the system or that the system had potential for faults in its processing of sanctions

The responsibility for sanctions was externalised, by the WSM, as an external body takes the final say over sanctions.

- **WSM-** *[the decision to sanction] is done by decision makers outside the office. The staff don't make that decision. Staff refer a potential doubt to the decision maker and they make the decision.*

For the young people in my research, sanctions were a source of anger, frustration and fear of the JC+. They were seen by all of the participants as a tool of control and one that was used harshly and unfairly.

- **Carly-** *I was sanctioned 6 weeks [with] no money because I missed an appointment... What is that achieving apart from missing the next appointment because you've got no money to get to it! And the hardship takes 6 weeks to get back so what do you do in the meantime?*

Welfare reform that introduced higher conditionality and tougher sanctions made staying on benefits increasingly insecure. The young people that had been

sanctioned said that sanctions were not one-offs; instead, they were numerous and seemingly unpredictable.

For example, Rob said he had been sanctioned numerous times. The first time I spoke to Rob he had been sanctioned whilst on his employability course.

**Do you understand why you were sanctioned? (Interviewer)**

- **Rob-** *Missed appointment to do one of these courses, but thing is I'm on the course. I missed the appointment to go on this course because I forgot about it so they rebooked me to go on the course so I'm on the course but they sanction me. It's crazy!*

The next time we spoke he said his sanction had rolled over into two sanctions:

- **Rob-** *I went to claim hardship and it wasn't there and I rang them and they said I'd been sanctioned on top of my sanction. They said every time you get sanctioned you have to fill out a new form. And I said 'well that's stupid I only handed in this sanction form last week'.*

Sanctions were described by the young people as having been applied in situations that they saw as profoundly unfair; for example, when I first spoke to Dan, he described the following situation:

- **Dan-** *One of the worst things is my girlfriend went into labour on the Sunday night and I was meant to start it[a course] on the Monday; [I] phoned the course, they said 'Don't come in', she was in hospital because she got cut open and I had to look after the bairn. When I went down the JC, they said 'Well why didn't you go down?' When I told them they said, 'Well you should have got someone else to look after the bairn' so they sanctioned me for that.*

### **How long was the sanction? (Interviewer)**

- *3 weeks, so I had no money for milk, nappies, nothing...so I got into debt from borrowing from my mam and dad.*

The next time Dan was sanctioned he said he was at the JC+:

- **Dan-** *They said I was late for an appointment by 5 minutes and got sanctioned... the best thing was, was that the security guard wasn't there and I was waiting for 5 minutes for him!*

As a result, Dan didn't trust the JC+ or see it as a place for support.

### **Do Sanctions work? (Interviewer)**

- **Dan-** *they do for the JC+ because you've got no way of standing up for yourself, they're just doing it to break you, and well they have.*

All of the young people in this research believed there were targets for sanctions.

- **Lucy-** *They've got sanction targets to meet so they just go overboard with it, crazy. They're getting worse now with government cuts so they will need to sanction more.*

**Antonia-** *I know someone who works at the JC+ and they told me and it's crazy.*

This contributed to the young people becoming very angry and further suspicious of the JC+:

- **Aiden-** *The staff have no people skills. In any of the JC+ they don't care. They're getting a fucking £250 bonus for every fucker they sanction... They don't give a shit about us because they're getting money in their back pocket for stopping our money...they're breaking the law and they're stopping people's human rights. Everyone needs a certain amount of money to live on*

*and with sanctions it goes against our human rights. They take that away, they're breaking the law, and they get away with it.*

It should be noted here that I found absolutely no evidence to support the claims by the young people that the JC+ staff had targets for sanctions. Furthermore, the idea that there were targets for sanctions was categorically denied by the WSM that I spoke to:

- **WSM-** *the staff definitely do not have targets for sanctions, I can't emphasise that enough.*

The young people still identified the JC+ as responsible for the sanctions.

- **Kai-** *There is a decision maker. They let the decision maker know if you haven't met your target. But they could easily not tell them. It's up to them if they tell the decision maker.*

From the young people's perspective staff still had targets that were at odds with helping the young people.

- **Cara-** *Did you know that they're actually using the call waiting music so you get so agitated that you hang up, so they don't have to speak to people. I understand why they do it. They've got so many people to deal with. Their main thing is JSA and they'll be like right we've got so many people coming in on JSA, how many have we got coming off and that's the way they work trying to even it off.*

**Are they being strategic? (Interviewer)**

**Cara-** *Well I would be, if I was running the company that's what I'd do to whittle it down. If you've got 200 people calling but only 50 to answer the calls and each call lasts 30/60mins, those surplus will get fed up and hang up and call back when they're less busy. They're also waiting to get screamed at*

*and they're also going to get a higher turnover because they need to put up with that.*

DWP protocols for the process of applying sanctions are that it is JC+ staff that decide if the clients have fulfilled an action, set out in a mandatory Claimant Commitment, set out by the JC+ staff (DWP 2013: P3,Reg17). If the JC+ felt that the clients had not fulfilled this, then they would refer to the decision makers. As a result, decision makers usually sustained sanction referrals.

The young people said they didn't know where they stood with the JC+ and with sanctions and so didn't always know what to do to avoid them.

- **Kai-** *My cousin now has been told that he has to look for 76 jobs a fortnight. He got sanctioned because he did 75. [young person] downstairs got sanctioned because he did all the jobs but in one day, but they didn't say he had to span it out over all 14 days of the 2 weeks just so many jobs in 2 weeks. My advisor had a go at me. He said if you want a job more than 30 hours a week you need to do more than 30 hours a week job searching. How does he know how long I spend? You can only put down what you applied for but I might have spent ages searching through loads of jobs to find the ones to apply for. But I can't put that because I would get wrong for not applying for them.*
- **Rosie-** *The JC+ seemed really badly organised. One woman told me one thing and then the next time I went I was told different things. And then last week I went and the woman was awful... but there is no consistency and you don't see the same person.*

This perhaps is not surprising if some of the JC+ staff couldn't define what the purpose of sanctions was; the WSM had difficulty, at first, identifying the purpose of the sanctions.

***Do you think that sanctions are used as a punishment? (Interviewer)***

- ***WSM-I didn't decide the reason to introduce sanctions. We are here to apply the rule for benefit. Why they were introduced and what the purpose of them are when they were introduced, that's not my decision... Is it a penalty? I suppose in some form it is. But whether or not it was introduced to be a punishment I'm not able to answer.***

***In your opinion? (Interviewer)***

***WSM- It is definitely a penalty.***

The WSM justified sanctions as being there to make young people accountable for their actions, and as being necessary as a penalty to correct the young people's poor behaviour.

However, wider research casts doubt on whether such approaches to behavioural management work in the long term (Kluve 2014, Card *et al* 2010)

It seems that the heightened conditionality and the sanctions were based on the ideological assumption that youth unemployment was a fault of the young unemployed, which needed to be corrected by sanctions for their poor choices. Dunn's (2015) research claims that policies introduced by New Labour and then the Coalition Conservative government with "increased conditions attached to benefits and the severity of financial penalties for those who do not comply" (Dunn 2015:1) are in response to widespread voluntary unemployment. Despite this, as discussed in the literature review, he claims that claimants who are 'too choosy' continue to prefer a life of "dole over drudgery" (*ibid*). The next section of this Chapter will look at these three assertions (voluntary unemployment, selectivity of young people and preferring benefits over low paid jobs in relation to the young people in my research.

## **Voluntary unemployment**

This increased conditionality and the introduction of sanctions shifted the focus of the JC+ towards a behaviourist approach to correct the young people's behaviour. The WSM explained what the role was of the JC+ staff.

- **WSM-** *We are here to get everyone that is on benefits into work as quickly as possible. A majority are keen to look for work and take on the advice on offer and will take that. We also have a percentage that doesn't want to engage. They come here for their benefit and from the conversations that staff have with them they aren't really bothered about training available. There are a percentage that either don't want to work, or do something very specific. That's not what we are here for.*

Assertions similar to those stated by the WSM have been found in research before the reforms introduced by the Welfare Reform Act 2012, when sanctions and conditions had been introduced (Dean 2007; Carpenter & Freda 2007; Caswell *et al* 2010), and especially since the reform (Fletcher 2015, 2016; Patrick 2014; Staneva 2015; Berry 2014a). I found that all of the young people in my research said they wanted a job and most of the young people involved were incentivised and self-motivated to work and find work.

Lee, for example, had just signed on to JSA at the Durham JC+ two weeks prior to speaking to me, although he had been unemployed for two and a half months. He didn't sign on to JSA until he considered himself to have no other choice.

- **Lee-** *I didn't sign on straight away, I did my own bit of doing my CV up looking for work around but then two and a half weeks ago I had to sign on because I didn't have any money left.*

When I met him he was on a weeklong employability course. He was very motivated to get a job and had ideas to get work and wanted information and guidance from the JC+.

- **Lee-** *I had an idea about being self-employed, getting a van and doing mobile car valeting and I asked the woman there and she mumbled about it and then changed the subject. I thought 'Your role is to help me', but I thought 'No don't say anything', because I didn't want to be sanctioned.*

Alison didn't think it was right to sign onto JSA if she didn't have the experience to get a job, so she waited till she felt ready to work and then did her own searches and did voluntary work experience first to put on her CV. She didn't sign on until she considered herself to have no other option.

- **Alison-** *My dad was made redundant last year around the same time I left college. So we lived off his redundancy package for less than a year and he's been on JSA for a few months. I didn't go on straight away because I'm 20, I've had no work experience at all, so I thought I should try to look for a job and get some voluntary work experience first so that when I did claim JSA I had a chance of getting a job.*

Dan spoke of his efforts to get a job but explained that all that was on offer were insecure employability courses and work placements.

- **Dan-** *The government and JC+ are jobbing everyone off into so-called voluntary work, that's the only reason people have jobs or temporary contracts like this! I mean another 12 weeks, when this course is over unemployment will be back up, but then it will go down again because they'll just have more people coming on for 12 weeks, just like at [factory] man...That's all they do: temporary contracts, work programmes or voluntary work that's how unemployment is going down. I've worked about 16/17 weeks for free, 8 hour shifts working 8 weekends in a row. At the bar opening up staying from 12pm-4am. Obviously it wasn't very nice but I had to do it and I wanted to because I wanted a job.*

Going onto these JC+ mandated courses, employability courses or placements meant that the participants could be signed off JSA if it lasted over 28 days. Once it



ended, they had to sign back on but there could be a gap between the course ending and getting benefit payments, which made these courses a risk to the young people as it made their income insecure. None of the employability courses or placements resulted in secure or stable employment, which would offer secure or stable income, for any of my participants.

For example, this was the case for Simon and Rob. Because they lived week-to-week or day to day on limited benefit income, they didn't have savings and so were vulnerable to falling in debt.

- **Rob-** *This here is just the dole sending y' here for six weeks just to get you out of their hair*

**Simon-** *Just to get us off the dole really, that's why they're sending us here.*

**Rob-** *Aye and then back on it after 6 weeks work, because we only get 16 hours a week after this. (Turns to Simon) do y' na y' only get paid monthly. So we're stuck doing shitty courses like this, writing CVs over again and then signing back on after 6 weeks or whatever it is.*

**Simon-** *It's only 4 for me.*

For Simon and Rob, the change from fortnightly income on benefits to a monthly income for six weeks was disruptive. They did not have any savings to see them through the two-week gap between payments.

The hours given on employability placements were also variable. It became the case that they couldn't afford to be on temporary placements.

- **Rob-** *When I was at Aldi [!] was a temporary placement...but the hours weren't good enough and then I was only getting 17 quid on me rent.*

**Katie-** *The time you pay your rent and council tax and all everything else, you've got nowt, y' nee better off.*

**Rob-** *If you get 20 hours it's not worth it and it just goes and you have to go back onto JSA and wait to get your money.*

These young people were going into placements that they knew were temporary as a condition of their benefits.

Kai told me that once his employability placement ended he went back onto the JSA figures as a new case.

- **Kai-** *When I sign back on [after the EDP employability course] I think the way the appointment goes is that you have to have another induction appointment. You go and you have to talk about what you want to do and what your roles and responsibilities are [on JC+] then they give you your new books and forms and send you on your way and you wait it out till your payments finally start. It's crazy at the end of the placement I'm given an introduction to the JC+ and JSA, it's like you know I've done this before, I was here a few weeks ago.*

Like Kai, Rob, Katie and Simon, all of my participants discussed juggling poor pay with benefit deductions when they signed off JSA, and problems with making ends meet when they were sanctioned or waiting for hardship grants and rapid reclaim payments.

A justification offered by the WSM for the increased conditionality was that the young people weren't being asked to do anything that people at work wouldn't be asked to do. Finding a job after all was now their job, seven days a week.

- **WSM-** *We're not asking them to do things for the sake of it... we're not asking them to do anything that they wouldn't have to do at work... If I didn't come to work to work today there would be some sort of consequence to that because you can't not come to work. It is like anything in life.*

However, having a day off or some time off in a week is deemed as a minimum requirement per week under the Working Time Regulations 1998 (as amended by

The Working Time Regulations 2003). Governments and European regulatory bodies have introduced these protections and required employers to comply with them. Most people who work do not have to work most of the day, seven days a week, for £57.90 a week. This breaks down to £8.27 a day for an average working day, just over £1 an hour. To put this in perspective, the proposed national living wage in 2020 will be £9 per hour; furthermore, benefits have been frozen and have not risen with inflation since 2015. The added implication with this is that those on benefits don't deserve the same as those who work. They need to prove they deserve benefits by going above and beyond what most people who work would do, and for much less. Arguably, cutting and freezing benefits aren't necessarily primarily about cutting costs but instead are argued by some (e.g. Fletcher 2015; Wiggan 2015; Standing; King 2015) to be more about establishing the neo-liberal ideological frameworks that inform them and, primarily, making the unemployed pay.

However, wider evidence indicates that there was much more to the young people's situations and choices than voluntary individual choices that could be 'corrected' by sanctions. As the literature review in Chapter 3 highlighted for young people in general, participants in this research faced a differing mix of barriers due to their geography but their geographical place interacted with other factors to affect their likelihood of being unemployed and opportunities for seeking work. Place mattered but it was also wider socio-spatial impacts and barriers that compounded and transcended these place-related factors. For example, in relation to the areas in which I was researching, Table 3 in Chapter 4 pp 103) details NOMIS statistics which show that at the time of my research:

- (i) All of the areas I covered recorded higher percentages of the population with no qualifications and lower percentages with higher than a level 4 qualification; and
- (ii) The JSA claimant rate for 18-25 year olds were also higher, compared to the England and Wales and North East region percentages.

Table 7 shows the job density<sup>33</sup> levels by local authority in the region of the North-East. These figures show that there are fewer jobs per resident aged 16-64 in County Durham than there are in the North-East and England overall. Newcastle has the highest job density rate on the table, which suggests there are more jobs per resident aged 16-64 in this local authority than other areas on the table but does not specify the level of these jobs and could be explained by the fact that Newcastle local authority includes a busy city centre, as laid out in Chapter 4.

**Table 7: Job density figures by Local Authority, March 2015**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Job Density</b>
England	0.8
North-East	0.68
County Durham	0.57
Newcastle	0.96
North Tyneside	0.6
South Tyneside	0.54
Sunderland	0.69

(Nomis 2017)

If there are fewer jobs in an area per resident of working age and there is higher unemployment in these areas then competition is going to be higher in these areas for the available jobs. If people do not have qualifications, this limits their options; if a higher proportion of people have fewer qualifications, then more will be applying for the jobs that require fewer qualifications. As we have previously seen, this dependence on the jobs available in any particular area is further exacerbated by limited public transport and ability to travel to jobs within the 90 minutes travel time specified by JC+ regulations (see Chapter 3 pp 45-48, and Appendix 3 p 250).

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<sup>33</sup> Job density is defined as the number of jobs in an area divided by the resident population aged 16-64 in that area (Nomis 2015).

A contended barrier to gaining employment that I will consider in relation to the young people in my research is the extent to which the young people were selective in their job search activity.

### **Selectivity of young people**

According to present and previous government rhetoric (see Chapter 2) and the WSM I spoke to, young people being overly selective was an issue.

- **WSM-** *I think a lot of people are being too selective. But if it is in 90 minutes of travel that is what they are expected to do. We've all done that; a lot of people have to travel...They have to be available for any job that they're capable of. If they have the experience or qualifications that the employer is looking for then we would expect them to apply for the job.*

According to Dunn (2012, 2015), a majority of those who are unemployed are “too choosy” (Dunn 2015:1) regarding the types of jobs they will apply for and work they will do.

I found evidence that two of the young people in my research were very limited in the jobs they would apply for and what conditions they would meet for their benefits. Preferring not to go online, not liking libraries, not liking being told what to do and not wanting to walk to the JC+ were all reasons given by these two young people for not fulfilling JC+ conditions.

Carly was particularly selective in what she would do to meet conditions and the jobs she would apply for. She had few qualifications and very little work experience. She also had a criminal record and had certain commitments to her child, who was in foster care. All of these factors meant that there were limitations to her work availability and what she would apply for.

- **Carly-** *I got a message from my work coach but I'm not chasing them [JC+] round! It's not my job, if they want me; they've got me phone number, email, address. I'm not the JC+. I've got things to do myself. I'm not wasting my credit on my phone to ring them.... They expect everyone to go to the*

library or afford the Internet and afford a computer, how? And with the libraries, with this one here [Easington Colliery library] it's not open all the time<sup>34</sup>. Fair enough I'm a member, I can go in when I want but I'm not going to walk up there only to find that it's closed and have to walk back and I'm not going to walk all the way to Horden<sup>35</sup> to use a computer for an hour.

When I next spoke to Carly, her attitude to job searches was the same.

- **Carly-** *The JC+ said they had some call centre work and they'd try and get me an interview for that but I don't think I want to do that, I don't see myself sitting in a call centre all day, that's not me... I think I'll ring Claire and say, "here I'm not going to go for it, it's not for me. I don't want to be sat in an office, I like to be busy."*

#### **Would you do nights? (Interviewer)**

- **Carly-** *PPPHHHHHHHHHH!! You wouldn't catch me doing nights.*

The third time I spoke to Carly, she had recently walked out of a WP placement on her second shift at a chicken factory; at this point, she was even more adamant about her work preferences.

#### **So did they tell you not to come back? (Interviewer)**

- **Carly-** *I mean all I can do is try it. If I don't like something, I'm not going to stick at something I don't like. Standing in a stinking horrible factory for £6:10 an hour when I could do retail... but there's no retail jobs so I'll wait till more come up. It's like my fella says 'they [JC+] will have to give you a job sooner or later'.*

Carly acknowledged she was receiving some support to find a job. However a point to be made here is that the choices of jobs that she said she did have available to

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<sup>34</sup> The opening times for Easington Library at the time of the research were Monday 9:30am- 5:00pm, Thursday 9:30 am- 7:00 pm and Saturday 9:30 am- 12:30 pm (durham.gov.uk/article/2037).

<sup>35</sup> Horden library is six miles from Easington library and is a 40 minute walk, it is a 19 minute bus ride(Google search 19/2/18)

her through the JC+ and WP were unpleasant and poorly paid jobs. She wasn't refusing a wide selection of well-paid work; she was refusing to work in an insecure job in unpleasant conditions for very little money, which was awkward for her to get to by public transport. Nevertheless, her situation was that these were the types of job available to her, which was a challenge that she and most participants had to deal with.

Aiden was also specific in the types of jobs he would do and the conditions he would meet. This was not just with the JC+; it was also when he was at college.

- **Aiden-** *I was put onto Income Support in February 2013, with me being on the course at Peterlee and the college paid my fare over there but I thought 'fuck that, I can't do this, it's an hour there on a bus, 6 hours at college, an hour back. That's 8 hours!' I thought 'they can fuck right off'. I thought 'I can't do this' because when I got in, I wasn't even having my tea; I was just going straight to bed! And they couldn't understand why I was going into college classes and falling asleep!...*

*On JSA I have to look at 32 jobs a fortnight I have to look for and I'm like Y'WAH!!! You are having a laugh. So I did it on my little booklet and then they said 'No, you have to do it online'. I said 'How the fuck do I do it online, I've got no internet access'. They said 'Well you've got a library next to you' and I said 'What!!! I don't have a library card and I will not be getting one!!!'*

### **Why won't you? (Interviewer)**

*I don't like libraries, I love to read but I do not like library books because you're on a time period for them.*

Aiden was also resentful towards the JC+ for being sent on work placements and he recalled being hostile to JC+ staff as a result.

- **Aiden-** *I want to do bar, retail, care. They are the three jobs I'm looking for and they sent me into a fucking computer recycling plant...They said, "Oh because it's community based". I said "I don't give a shit if my granny works there, why have I been sent on this?" She said, "Well we can't answer that". Fucking dozy bitch.*

He was also resistant to the way that control was being exercised:

- **Aiden-** *I don't agree with it [JSA conditions] being forced on you like a punishment. Because I will tell you now, if people force me to do anything I will not do it. Like my mam would force me to clean my room up and I was like 'NO'! My adviser in Newcastle knew this but he kept doing it so one day I just went in and signed and just walked out.*

A huge further barrier was that his employment preferences were blinkered to one profession.

- **Aiden-** *I want to be a drag queen.... But if you tell the JC+ that, they say it isn't a practical job...I'm like, excuse me, it is practical for me! It's like working nights in a care home - apart from I'm going out and providing an entertainment service... I'm a voluntary drag queen at the minute, then as you get more known you get paid.*

Because the JC+ made him search for different jobs, he resented being unable to focus his time on becoming a Drag Queen. In this case, it is very difficult to see what the JC+ staff could have done to help him become a Drag Queen or get another job. Over the 9 months of contact with Aiden, he had limited his job search to a very niche profession, but for him it was the fault of the JC+ that he did not have a job. The JC+ had not helped make him a Drag Queen, and he told me that he did not see why he should be anything else. Over my time in contact with Aiden, his attitude to finding work, towards the JC+ and accounts given of his interactions with his work coaches were consistent. His behaviour towards his work coach that he told me about was aggressive and hostile, and his attitude towards the JC+ was also hostile.



It seemed to me that this was how he really felt about getting a job and the institutions involved with him finding a job and getting benefits.

These two cases however were unusual in my research.

All of the young people who were participants in my research said they just wanted to work, although there were some conditions for most participants concerning the types of jobs that they would apply for. Unrealistic shift patterns for their circumstances, locations of the job and being either over or under qualified for the jobs were the most common reasons given by the participants for not applying for certain jobs.

The reasons behind job de-selection<sup>36</sup> were rational for them; they relied on public transport and so night shifts where the transport was not available to reach the employer at the right time of day weren't compatible. Location and length of shifts became a more pressing concern, as the time taken to travel and money spent would be too expensive for the number of hours worked that day. This may not have been choosy behaviour, but a situation where they were forced to de-select due to the other barriers faced.

Rob explained the difficulty of these situations, particularly when the jobs, like his placement in Aldi, were insecure.

- **Rob-** *When I worked at Aldi it took me over an hour to get there and if I had to do an early or late shift I had to get different buses, it cost £7.50 return a day. If I worked a 4 hour shift that day then I paid more than I got in one hour to get there and back. And it took me at least 2 hours there and back. I couldn't get a week pass for the bus because I didn't know when I was working or how many hours. After 3 weeks I went from 29 to 20 hours but still going in every day to them saying 'oh we don't need you today, go home'.*

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<sup>36</sup> By this I mean young people deciding not to apply for a job because they no longer deemed the job a viable option due to their circumstances.

They wanted a job that covered their living costs and one that was not temporary, like Mia, Bethany and Rosie.

- **Mia-** *I just want a job, but if I can't get there then how can I apply for it? So there's no point applying for it if I can't afford it.*
- **Bethany-** *I've worked really hard for my degree and now I can't afford to get to jobs and I have to apply for jobs I don't want to do and that you don't need a degree for and that wouldn't last anyway, it just doesn't make sense to me.*
- **Rosie-** *I got a job at [toyshop] and I was really chuffed but it only lasted one shift and then I didn't go back. I was gutted as well because I'd spent all my money getting a week bus pass and it took two buses to get there but it was only a one-day thing but I was told it was a placement that would be permanent and I can't get a refund for it can I.*

They wanted secure jobs but just as importantly jobs that they wanted to do, like Craig and Marcus.

- **Craig-** *He said I have to apply for as many jobs as possible, which is fair enough, and then he said "and that means anything" but I don't want to do just anything.*
- **Marcus-** *Last time I went [JC+], I told them I was looking for line production and warehouse work and they gave me an application form for [a jewellers in Durham]. I felt completely ridiculous ... Imagine me there! They don't listen to you. They aren't trying to help me with a career.*

Another consideration is that the welfare reform of increased expectations and higher conditionality reformed how the young people's behaviour was identified to now be selective. The young people's behaviour had not changed but requirements had which meant that previously satisfactory behaviour was now not enough.

But it wasn't a simple case of the JC+ exerting control over the young people.

The jobs the young people didn't want to do were vacancies which employers were otherwise finding hard to fill. The employability courses they did not want to do were the ones they said they had already been on or ones that they didn't deem relevant, but they still had to go on them. They didn't want to do temporary jobs because they couldn't afford the gaps between payments when signing on and off benefits. The structural factors impacted on the decisions the young people made.

I will now explore what my analysis of the data from this research reveals in terms of critically analysing the views/assumptions of those such as Dunn who state that the majority of unemployed prefer being on benefits over taking low level jobs or low paid or uninteresting jobs.

### **Benefits over low-level jobs**

This assumption ties in with the first four issues compared in this Chapter that the young people would be regarded as favouring JSA to the jobs they were told to apply for. Again, I found no evidence that this attitude was widespread amongst my participants.

Karl had been accepted into university and was claiming JSA until he found a job to tide him over until he went to university. Even though he has A' level qualifications, he struggled to find employment and even though he knew being on JSA was temporary, it still impacted on him negatively.

- **Karl-** *[The JC+] is really bad, one the worst experiences a young person can go through... I get a sudden feeling of dread when I walk in. Everyone is looking at you and judging you when you walk in.*

All of the young people said that they hated being on benefits and going to the JC+. Hamid, Damien, and Alison attended different JC+ centres but they all felt the same way, which was representative of the rest of the young people in my research.

- **Hamid-** *The JC+ is awful, it makes me cry*

- **Damien-** *JC+ is horrible. The worst thing you can ever do is sign on... You feel judged; low down all the time...the staff the way they talk, look, treat you. You feel dead victimised when you go in...it's just horrible. You can't really explain till you go in and sign on.*

Four of the young people said that it made them feel suicidal.

- **Dan-** *Like that lad in the newspaper who saw his adviser and then went home and killed himself...I've thought loads about doing that before, it's the way they treat you making you feel like shite...you've got no money, you feel like shit and then they're how they are.... I mean I'm already paranoid and that's because of the job centre. Whenever I go out, I feel like I'm in trouble...I can't explain it, you think you've done something wrong but you know that you haven't... Like... When there's a bully after you...yeah.*
- **Craig-** *I'll tell you how, it's made me want to kill myself sometimes.*

These accounts are in stark contrast to other literature such as findings in Dunn (2015), which argues that many benefit recipients would prefer claiming benefits over taking “unattractive jobs” (Dunn 2015:1). None of the participants enjoyed being on JSA or ESA or going to the JC+. Alison and Lee delayed signing on (see pp171). Kai put off signing back on to JSA after his six week employability placement because he couldn't face going to and dealing with the JC+.

- **Kai-** *After I finished the last employability courses I took the month off from JC because I needed a little break because I hate it, but now I've got none of me wage left I need to go back.*

Cara and Alesha left JSA voluntarily because the conditions, in their eyes, were so bad and because they didn't see how it would help them get a job. They didn't prefer being on benefits to having a low level job. They chose to go on to zero hours contracts, which were extremely insecure and left them in a position where they were unable to plan further than a week in advance. At the time of the research, they each had two zero hour contracts.

- **Cara-** *It's ok if you get shifts but you struggle if you don't. This month we'll struggle because we don't have many shifts because there's not that much on.*

It became a juggling act to keep both jobs as both contracts offered shifts at short notice.

- **Cara-** *So basically [employer] rang me today to see if I was available to work this weekend but I said I have to get back to you because I don't know if I'm working [one of festival] gig. I mean I assume I am but I don't know yet.*

**Alesha-** *Next week we don't have anything so I'll ring and say I'm available and he'll say next Saturday 10-3am but I need to keep on the ball about working between the two [zero hours contracts].*

Zero hours contracts enabled these two participants to make some extra money if companies had work available. But the relationship was one way and top down. It meant that every week they had to wait to see if they got a call to work or make a phone call to see if there was work available. If work was available they had to take it to be considered for work the next time. If work was not available, they had to ring another agency or do without that week. They constantly had to renegotiate their position in the labour market, trying to stay away from signing on.

**How far in advance can you work? (Interviewer)**

- **Cara-** *I don't know, I'm normally like (make phone gesture with hand) "am I working next week?" they'll say no and then I'm like right I'll need to find something else.*

Like most of the young people in my research, Cara and Antonia were not voluntarily unemployed, they were not being "choosy" and they did not select dole over drudgery but they were in an extremely precarious position. This is a recent but growing element to benefits as young people are churned between benefits

and sanctions and employability placements as off-flows. For Cara, her predicament in zero hours contracts was a more secure option for her than being on benefits.

- **Cara-** *being on benefits is insecure. Not knowing how long you will be on it and then go back to work. I'm at the JC+ tomorrow and they could easily say, 'right you've not done enough we're going to sanction your benefits' and it's happened to so many people before.*

Katie, Simon, Kai, Lindsey and Rob discussed their experiences of this type of churn between benefits and employability courses and placements and the difficulties with payments.

**Are you all signed on at the JC+? (Interviewer)**

- **ALL-** *NO signed off*

**And at the end of this employability course? (Interviewer)**

- **ALL** *sign back on*

Once they got work, they were very aware how short-term it was from the outset.

- **Rob-** *We'll get work [from this employability course] for a few month hopefully.*

**Lindsey-** *well it doesn't look good for us when all of them out there are bored and they've gone home at lunch time. We sitting here waiting to join them, if they've gone home coz there's no work, where we gonna go?*

**Katie-** *When we start they'll be finished anyway, to keep it going isn't it?*

**Kai-** *Then we start another course, like this one aye,*

**Katie-** *they'll not have y' sign on for long*

## **Analysis**

In my research, the changes to the JC+, JSA and ESA did not 'correct' these young people's behaviour. It did not make them look harder for a job, as they felt they were already looking hard for a job anyway. The young people didn't feel the employability and workfare approach supported them or helped them become 'work ready'. Instead, the new structure and conditions within the benefits system and JC+ approach demotivated them.

What the reforms did do was increase off-flows off benefits of these young people: whilst some young people did get jobs, off-flows were also achieved in a number of other ways. The first was through employability courses and mandated work experience programmes that signed the young people off benefit caseloads for a short period of time before the young person signed on again as a new claimant. Off-flows were also achieved through sanctions that cut or suspended eligibility for benefits. This also made some of the participants feel like the only or better option would be to leave JSA without any immediate opportunity for work, education or training, also an off-flow. It should be noted here that it is not the aim of this research to explore if the sanctions were justified or if JC+ staff had targets for sanctions, but sanctions didn't seem to encourage my participants into work, it just made living on benefits harder and more unpleasant.

The young people did make choices and decisions within this context. For example, it was their choice to leave JSA, or delay returning to JSA or decide not to apply for a job. However it wasn't as simple as a free choice. There were wider factors influencing the choices they ended up making. The judgements of when these choices became 'too' selective or choosy depend on who is making the judgement, and particularly in my case whether it is the government/JC+ or young person in my research making this judgement. It is an interaction between the agency of the young person, the ALMP, and the structural factors; this is what I will explore further in Chapter 7.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Control: interaction, surveillance & resistance**

#### **Introduction**

In my research, I identified that a significant element in all of the young people's lives was the feeling of a lack of control they had over their interaction with the labour market and the JC+ and the churn between being on and off benefits and unemployment that underpinned these feelings.

In this Chapter I will introduce the interaction between the young people's agency and the attempted strategies of control implemented through the government's particular ALMP approach as mediated particularly through the JC+. This will be in order to appreciate the significance of how attempts at control are recognised and experienced by the young people and the measures taken by them to cope with, respond to and negotiate this control. I will look at the role of normalisation and self-regulation and the role of surveillance and control in the interface between the young people and ALMPs in which the JC+ is a key element for UK ALMP engagement with the young people. Using Foucault's (2003) analysis of power, in order for the type of power dynamic in the relationship between the JC+ and the young people to occur, there needs to be a potential for both influence and resistance. I will then look at the young people's responses to feelings of a loss of control over their positions in these interfaces, which I identify as cost benefit analysis and resistance.

#### **Interaction between the young people's agency and attempted strategies of control**

The young people identified their position as being one where they lacked control over their situation in the labour market and in particular the regulations imposed by the JC+ and how they were being treated by the JC+. They also felt that the JC+



controlled their relationship to and with the labour market, including the types of work they could do and apply for and the courses they went on.

I found that the young people were controlled through discourses, surveillance, social control and reformed regulation. These methods classified the young person's behaviour as pathological; as Squires (1990:51) states, one that needed correcting, "to distinguish the 'idle' from the 'genuinely needy'".

Individualisation of blame within policy put the responsibility of being unemployed and on benefits at the door of the claimant, in this case the young people involved in the research. Such reform also differentiated their behaviour as being apart from what was judged to be the norm of society, by JC+ staff as well as the wider public. The young people were viewed in terms of what Dean (2007b) regards as the risk they posed to applying these norms of society. Staff effectively became risk managers of this risk; as the WSM at Durham said:

- ***WSM-** We have to weigh up what is the most likely to happen... We are here to get them a job as quickly as possible.*

Staff had to implement policy and the DWP directives aimed to correct the young people's behaviour through self-control and regulation in order to meet these norms and the new JC+ mandated 'claimant commitment', which committed them in this case to moving off benefits and into any work possible.

### **Normalisation and self-regulation**

The higher conditionality and more punitive measures of the Welfare Reform Act (2012) normalised the disciplinary techniques carried out by the JC+. Self-regulation and social control, via pressure from peers and general public, prompted the young people to feel they were not fulfilling the norms of wider society and pressured them to behave accordingly.

Katie, Rob, Kai and Simon spoke about how they felt judged for being on benefits.

**Do you think people look at people on the dole negatively? (Interviewer)**

- **Katie-Aye**

**Rob-** The majority of people aye.

**Katie-** It's all you hear on FB [Facebook]

**Simon-** they call you worse than shit don't they.

**Rob-** yeah as if all you do is watch Jeremy Kyle<sup>37</sup>.

- **Kai-** With the whole thing on the news and what you read. It's as if when you look at people going to the dole you can just tell that the type of person that they are... as if the majority go on because they can't be arsed to work.

Rosie didn't tell people she was on JSA because of what she thought people would think of her.

- **Rosie-** I think with the JC+ there is that whole stigma attached to it as well like, oh you're claiming benefits ok. So I feel if I say I'm on JSA, people will think I'm doing nothing.
- **Marcus-** The JC+ is not very nice. I hate going there. It's degrading, the people who work there put everyone in the same boat, thinking that they all going to be and want to be permanently unemployed but that's not the case.

Like many of the young people, Cara said that she felt the staff at JC+ stigmatised her.

- **Cara-** At the JC+ 'you're a proper dole woller you!' and you sit down and they're like 'Right what have YOU done?' And it's like 'I have done my job search, I have been applying for jobs and made the effort.' It is the case where they're quite prejudice[d] with that. If [you] look like a charver, they'll

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<sup>37</sup> Jeremy Kyle is the presenter of a tabloid television chat show aired on weekday mornings. It deals with DNA tests, lie detector tests and scandal. It is often referred to negatively due to the content of the show. Viewers are also referred to negatively as they are often associated with lazy, unemployed people. The over-riding cultural reference to the content of the show and the viewers is one of moral decline.

*just dismiss you. I handed in a CV and a lot of the time they're surprised and like... they're just not consistent, they need to give everybody a chance.*

The young people also started to judge other benefit claimants for being voluntarily unemployed.

- **Karl-** *[The JC+] When you walk up to there and there are a lot of people there because they can't be arsed to get a job and think 'oh I'll live off the dole'. I see a lot of that in Durham. I saw one guy with a can of Fosters [lager] at 12pm. He hid it behind the bin, went in, and came back out ripped up his paperwork and got his can and walked off. And you see a lot of that. And then there is someone like me, working hard as they can, getting qualifications to get somewhere, and is finding it a lot harder than people like that to get jobs.*
- **Stevie-** *I do think that the JC is split, the people who genuinely want to work and the people who take the piss.*
- **Lucy-** *When you go to the jobcentre people judge you like you can't be bothered to work.*

**Antonia-** *Yeah. There are people who genuinely do want to work but there are others who don't want to and want to stay on benefits.*

**Lucy-** *You see a hell of a lot of it.*

They didn't recognise themselves in these judgements but they applied the judgements onto others, which they had said weren't accurate to them and weren't fair.

This view of the young people, including perspectives such as Dunn's (2012, 2015) when adopted in wider society and by the young people against each other, arguably makes increased conditionality and surveillance of them more acceptable and the norm.

## Surveillance and control

The conditions and surveillance carried out by the JC+ became invasive for the young people in the research. As a street level branch of the government's ALMPs, the JC+ is "the eyes and ears of government" (Macdonald & Marsten 2005:396), which the young people in my research felt. Charlie struggled to cope with the increased surveillance by the JC+ and it controlled his day-to-day life and interactions with other people.

- **Craig-** *Now I have to go in every week to see an advisor for 90 minutes and use the JC computers for most of the day every day. A daily ticket is £8 a day, that's £40 a week! I claim for my partner and we get £225; once I pay £10 maintenance, shopping bills, baby stuff, there isn't that left, there's nowt. How am I going to come here every day? I mean the jobs I looked at today, I applied for 2 weeks ago! But I've got other responsibilities, I've got my daughter to pick up on a Wednesday and they still give me appointments for Wednesday. They want me to change my contact with my daughter to see them.*

Changing what little contact he had with his daughter was not something he was willing to do. He was assigned weekly Wednesday sign-ons. He was late for one of these appointments and was sanctioned.

Surveillance also had an online dimension:

- **Charlie-** *I have to give JC+ my UJM account, I mean it feels like, I don't know but just like they don't trust you and so they are watching you all the time and you have to present evidence of what you've done and they still want it on booklet and computer.*

The second time I met and spoke to Charlie, when he was on an employability course, the conditionality and surveillance he spoke of the first time had not reduced.

- **Charlie-** *When I'm on this course I still have to do my full job search and attend all the appointments, even though it's a full time course and I still have to sign on and that...I have to go into shops and weekly searches. I've got to spend at least 8 hours a day on job searches and if I can't get to a laptop, I have to spend it looking round shops for jobs and that. I still have to do this after the course, so I don't know how they expect me to do that when I've got this course and my kids and all the other stuff I have to do.*

This was something other participants had also discussed, such as Cara (Chapter 6 pp 160)

The digital aspect of surveillance effectively bled into every aspect of the young people's lives. This marked a step up in the power intensity and scope of surveillance found in previous research (Graham & Wood 2003; Grant 2013). Measures to correct individuals' behaviour invaded all spheres of their lives including their private lives and commitments.

Dan ended up blocking the JC+ from his email account.

- **Dan-** *I had to change my email address coz I was getting loads of hassle from the JC+ all the time.*

To the young people, the JC+ wasn't there to help them, it was 'intimidating', 'threatening' and forced them to do things they didn't want to. Rosie explained how she felt this was a form of attempted control:

- **Rosie-** *They gave me a form about sanctions. It just said you will be sanctioned if you don't do as we say; and I was like ok, I'll jump through your hoops.*

The increased conditionality, further-reaching surveillance and tighter controls exercised by the JC+ had real implications regarding the young people's agency once they had become involved with the institution of the JC+ in seeking to control the young people's actions. Furthermore, power was not distributed equally in the relationship between the JC+ staff and the young people and between the young

people. There were many factors shaping their agency other than this concept of control. The impact of the structure of agency on the young people proved to be significant and apparent.

**Karl** described how he felt about being mandated onto a CV writing course, when the instructor changed nothing about his CV or cover letter.

- **Karl**- *I felt annoyed, angry....at the JC+. They never gave me a reason, not one; they just referred me. My supervisor told me face to face. I said my CV didn't need anything doing to it and he said, 'Well you have to go on the course'. He never said why.... It's an abuse of power... When I was on the course the instructor had a look at my CV and said there was nothing he would change, no changes to cover letter. The course is about using the Internet; I've been using it since I was in year 5. It's been a total waste of a week for me. And if I go back and raise my voice a bit about it they'll sanction me.*

Once he finished the employability course Karl, in his words, felt “fucked around” and that the JC+ “held benefits over his head”.

This data underpins my data in Chapter 6 that contradicts the premise, of the government and in literature such as Dunn (2015), of sanctions being used to correct behaviour if the young people felt that sanctions were imposed regardless of their behaviour. It is therefore questionable to what extent sanctions worked to motivate people into work.

This inevitably impacted on the young people's feelings of the control they had over other aspects of their lives. Their situation with the JC+ consumed a huge part of their lives, from the time spent fulfilling their claimant commitments to the restrictions put on them by the JC+ and feelings of a loss of control over their lives

## Loss of control

I found that the young people's day-to-day interactions with the JC+, and the related mandated and other tasks and conditions, led to feelings of anger, depression, low mood, and anxiety about their precarious situation. Dan spoke to me about how this loss of control triggered and deepened these feelings.

- **Dan**-*JC+ is ridiculous, go pretend and make a claim and see how it is and you'll want to kill yourself. It needs to be proper rather than sending me on stupid courses that don't matter...It makes me feel depressed because you have no control over your life, you say the course is no good for you and they send you anyway...JC+ they have control over your life and they let you know it, they just sanction you.*

The increased conditionality, the wider reaching surveillance, and the normalisation of this surveillance, which seeped into their everyday lives, triggered the young people's views of having no control. This feeling of lack of control then didn't apply just to their trips to the JC+ but increasingly to the rest of their day-to-day lives and futures.

- **Craig**-*I feel intimidated... my supervisor said I had to come on this CV course or he was going to stop my money, which made me feel anxious about coming in the first place.*
- **Rosie**-*I feel like a little kid at school getting wrong, that's definitely how I feel. Like I have no independence and nothing is good enough.*

However, this was part of the process of dealing with the control rather than a resignation to it as a final outcome. The young people went through feelings of helplessness, but also adopted other coping mechanisms to deal with the control dynamic. This feeling of helplessness also came at different times for different participants. For most, these feelings were woven into and occurring alongside other coping mechanisms that were instigated by initial feelings of helplessness, or caused the feelings of helplessness if resistance or Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) were not successful.

**Dan**, for example, spoke more about the unpredictability arising from having no control over his life and limitations on how he could respond.

- ***Dan**- It depended on what mood she [JC+ supervisor] was in. There were two sides to her and when you get treated horrible there's nothing you can do about it. If you say something then you are sanctioned; like if you retaliate.*

This added to their feelings of helplessness. The result of his feeling of a loss of control in the relationship with the JC+ was to adopt a CBA regarding what he did and didn't do to meet his claimant commitment. This was the second way that I found the young people dealt with control. For example, one young person described his coping strategy as follows:

- *When I started, I was applying for god knows how many proper jobs. Then I realised how the system works. So then I faked the jobs, writing lies down...I could show you my book, you can tell it's all lies, they just count them, or look at the first or last date.*

For this young person, the UJM was fixed; there was no point in applying for jobs because "it was all fake". Therefore he didn't see why he should waste his time applying for jobs that, in his mind, weren't real. Here, CBA informed this young person's actions.

### **Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA)**

As earlier Chapters established, the young people claimed that certain barriers, such as lack of jobs in the area, transport, and indeed the JC+ itself, stopped them from getting work. They also claimed that the JC+ conditions were unrealistic for them to meet, especially if they did not know what these were. I found that the young people assessed their situation with the JC+ and analysed it on a cost, or risk, to benefit ratio. To them, the JC+ was a risk to employment or any progression. Their feelings of helplessness at their situation, gauging the system as fixed or regarding the JC+ as incompetent meant that many of the young people did not see a valid return compared to what the claimant commitment was costing them, in terms of time, money and morale.



Just like the young person last quoted above, many of the young people found ways to get around these commitments; based on their subjective CBA, it wasn't worth their while to fully comply, and based on their subjective assessments, alternative measures were worth the risk.

Cara and Antonia signed off JSA to go onto zero hours contracts because it was better than what Cara called being under a "dictatorship".

One of the young people wanted to get college qualifications. He had found a course at his local college, but the JC+ said he would have to sign off to do this course. This was because, including homework, the JC+ said it would be more than 16 hours a week. Simon couldn't afford to go on the course without JSA, but saw the value in the course to bettering their situation. Therefore, he lied about the course:

- *I've got on to my college course but the dole is saying I have to quit it because I can't look for full time work even though the course is under 16 hours but they include working at home time to go on top of them hours I do at college as well.*

**What are you going to do? (Interviewer)**

*I just said I'm doing under the 16 hours so they [have] got to let me do the course.*

**Is it actually under 16 hours or did you just say that? (Interviewer)**

*I just told them it was under the 16 hours.*

Two young people claimed sickness as a means to deal with the situation they faced with the JC+ on JSA.

One participant saw the situation on JSA as hopeless and so decided to 'go on the sick' to get more help in getting a job.

- *I've gotten more help on the sick than when I've been able to work. People who want to work and can work get no help. How does that work, that's why I went on the sick. I got more help on the sick than on the dole and that's literally why I went on the sick. It doesn't make sense; they should give help when you're physically fit so you don't have to go on the sick.*

This participant was not speaking for anyone else but her own situation and analysis of risk; for her it was about lessening the risk of unemployment.

Another participant saw going 'on the sick' as an opportunity to be prioritised for work.

- *What I'm going to do is go on the sick and then Shaw Trust, who deal with people on the sick put you on a placement and then you get a job at the end of it...my mate done it. People with mental health, physical problems get help. That's what him and me are going to do. They might put us in Tesco, Sainsburys, and a car show room! So fabulous! I've got a job but then I'll still get sick pay till I get a job.*

It wasn't necessarily that this participant thought that people with mental or physical illnesses and on ESA had an easier experience. This participant saw an opportunity and was going to take it; it was worth the risk to his current benefit and it lessened the risk of unemployment. To these participants, with their circumstances, these decisions were seen as completely reasonable and sensible. Using CBA, they were the best way for these participants to get the gain for the smallest cost. It was the only way they could see that they could get a job; to them it was a rational choice.

### **Resistance to Control**

Another coping mechanism to these policy-imposed power relations was resistance. The young people put off signing on, they confronted the JC+ staff and walked out of meetings and they lied to the JC+ staff. They faked jobs in their job searches and didn't apply for jobs; this was also noted in the research as a means of

CBA as well, but in some instances it was a way of defying and, as one young person put it, “giving a middle finger to the JC+”.

The first form of resistance by the young people that I identified was trying to avoid the JC+ altogether, by trying anything to get away from it or to avoid having to go to it in the first place. In the previous Chapter, such actions by the young people were observed and discussed. Lee (pp176) put off signing on to avoid being subject to the conditions of the JC+. Alison (pp176) delayed going on JSA because, for her, the JC+ fell under the ‘control’ side of welfare provision rather than the ‘care’ margin. She viewed the JC+ as a place that would not ‘care’ for her needs regarding her illness; to her the JC+ “didn’t have a good reputation” with things like that. Other participants wanted to escape the negative and controlling relationship they experienced with the JC+.

Kai’s hatred of the JC+ was so apparent that he would adopt numerous ways, as did many of the young people, to cope with the experience of being on JSA and to resist the perceived control from the JC+.

- ***Kai**-You do it [the job searches] but you don’t want to find a job almost just to spite them. It’s like you’re making me do all this so I’m not going to do it so you have to keep on giving me your money. They just make you not want to look for a job out of hatred for them. It’s like no; I’m not going to do what you tell me.*

One young person stopped doing genuine job searches for the JC+, and at sometimes any job searches at all. The different ways that he resisted this control, however, did not necessarily work cohesively to better his circumstances.

- *It’s like with my job search; some of it is a lie. I will actually look for jobs but some of it is a lie. It’s my way of giving them the middle finger, because they don’t check or follow up. They just sign it and send you on your way. Like out of 14 jobs I only applied for five, the others I made up or just got older books and applied again.*

Resistance via avoidance was in relation to getting away from or not going back to the JC+. Once on JSA this form of resistance was a protest at the conditions mandated to him and the way he felt he was treated. Defiance seemed to be out of the frustration of feeling helpless and lacking control. They were coping mechanisms for while he was on JSA, until he managed to 'get out' again. I found this situation was representative of how many of the young people felt whilst on JSA. They hated being on benefits and they hated how they were treated at JC+ and so defied the conditions imposed on them.

- **Rosie-** *I don't like being told what to do like 'this much or else!'*
- **Aiden-** *If you ask me to do it then fine, fair enough, but you don't tell me or force me. And my adviser [JC+] in Newcastle knew this but he kept doing it.*

Issues around CBA, discussed earlier, heightened their frustration and resentment, and so prompted this form of resistance and defiance.

Rob tried to speak to a member of JC+ staff about his sanctions, but he didn't feel he got anywhere.

- **Rob-** *I wanted them to listen and she was like don't talk to me like that use appropriate language and I'm like well just listen to me, just listen,*
- **Kai-** *it was so funny because all we heard was 'listen, listen, just listen awwwww fuck off' ... on a power trip like.*

The young people didn't feel they would get anywhere by communicating with the JC+, so they walked out.

- **Craig-** *I thought argh here, see you later, I'm going' ...it's ridiculous isn't it!*
- **Aiden-** *so one day I just went in and signed and just walked out.*
- **Rob-** *I just ended up putting the phone down on her like*

There was such frustration by Karl that he confronted the JC+ staff.

- **Karl**- *Well there was a bit of a situation last time I went in, a bit of an argument. I just went in to confront him and the JC+ because they weren't helping or supporting me and that's when they said 'it's time to refer you to the work programme anyway'. So I went in to say you're not doing your job and that's what he said. They're just trying to move you on. They have no luck with you they think 'Right, let's just move you on to someone else.'*

Karl was trying to exercise his agency and stand up for himself. As a result of his actions Karl says he was sanctioned.

Karl ended up using his job searches as a form of light relief to see if the JC+ staff noticed; they didn't.

- **Karl** - *The JC+ didn't care what you applied for as long as you had the right number of jobs. I even applied for a lecturer role at [a] University and wrote it on my form and they didn't say a thing. I only did it to see if they would notice and they didn't say anything. I applied for that and a position for a brain surgeon in London and they didn't do anything.*

**Table 8: The outcome of the young people at the end of the research**

Outcome of the young people	Number of young people
On JSA	17
On ESA	4
In permanent work	2
On a zero hour contract	2
In fulltime education	2

I contacted my participants three months after my field study ended with them.

Out of the 28 young people participating in the research, Elijah had moved to London after our second meeting and was hopeful of finding work four months into

the research. Four were on ESA, Craig had been moved from ESA to JSA, Lucy had moved from ESA to JSA and then back to ESA again within six months. Lucy's health condition was permanent but the assessment outcomes kept changing because the assessments did not take into account the changing yet severe nature of Lucy's condition; her position on benefits was inevitably highly precarious. Here reclassification of eligibility, or whether or not the young people deserved ESA or not, was changing without the young people changing.

18 were on JSA, including the participant who was also at college. Within the JSA group, many of the young people had taken part in employability courses and initiatives, but had still gone back onto JSA once they completed. They were still on JSA but many would have been classified as off-flows and then new claimant cases; some had also experienced sanctions that cut or suspended their benefits.

Two more were in education: Antonia had gone back to finish her youth work course and Karl was at university, having confirmed his place before this research. Two left JSA and took up multiple zero hour contracts at the beginning of the research and were still on zero hours contracts. Out of 28, only two had permanent jobs; this included any young people securing a permanent contract job and then losing it for whatever reason. Lee found work within six weeks of signing on to JSA. Bethany, the only one in the research with a degree, got a work experience placement that progressed to a permanent job relevant to her degree after three months on JSA.

I recognise that these outcomes may be different now. Some may have a permanent job, some may have moved off ESA because their health conditions improved, or because they are no longer classified as eligible. Some may have left JSA because they are now classified as eligible for ESA; more might be on zero hours contracts. All of these outcomes, and more, are possible.

At the end of the research, six had entered into the next age cohort; they left youth unemployment because they go older, not because they got a permanent job. Their transitional phase had been extended as it straddled over to adult unemployment.

## **Analysis**

In Chapter six, I discussed how ALMPs were not fit for their purpose of correcting the young people's behaviour. In this Chapter, I have shown the ways in which the young people negotiated their agency within the ALMP and wider structural constraints that the young people interacted with. What became apparent to me was that these ways the young people dealt with surveillance and control did not work independently or abstractly. Through this research, I found the significance of the role that structure and agency have in these young people's lives, moreover the significance of structure of their agency. These forms of control shaped the young people's behaviour in the ways outlined in this Chapter. Literature in Chapters two and three have documented the disadvantaged position that young people are placed in the labour market (Berry 2014a, Fletcher 2015, OECD 2016). I found that the young people in my research were also disadvantaged in their interactions with ALMPs.

The government rhetoric and discourses that blamed (Fergusson 2004) and marginalised (Dean 2007) and stigmatised (Patrick 2014) also alienated and excluded the young people. "Surveillance makes it possible to qualify, to classify, and to punish, it establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them" (Foucault 1977:184). I found that the increased conditionality and sanctions normalised the need for surveillance to correct the reason why these young people were on benefits. This induced behaviour that was counter-productive as a result of their feelings of helplessness. Loss of control and helplessness was not a static state; it was fluid and transient as the young people adopted other ways of dealing with their circumstances, but the feelings of helplessness did come back and motivated other actions again.

The cost benefit analysis undertaken by the young people brought with it issues as well. Literature widely covers the risk analysis by institutions and imposed on the welfare recipients as individuals (Caswel *et al* 2010, Dean 2007a, Macdonald & Marsten 2005). These policies individualised the young people and made the young people manage their own risk, the young people negotiated the risk of the imposed

policies and conditions. If the young people were not aware of the purposes of the employability courses they were mandated onto it was only rational choice based on the knowledge they had. Their CBA was potentially more risky if they were not aware of other costs and benefits available. This also relates to the young people's agency and their capacity to exercise it fully if they lacked the knowledge regarding the conditions of the JSA claimant commitment (as detailed in Chapter 6)

Just as Dean (2007 a) argues how policy is used to classify young people in terms of risk, my young people also saw their interactions with the JC+ as a risk. To the young people in my research, the JC+ actions were not rational; they felt they couldn't second-guess what the JC+ would do or what would happen to them. The young people felt they were kept in the dark and they felt that their situation was 'a fix' and that they were being lied to. If the young people's analysis found that they wouldn't get anything out of applying through the JC+ then it was rational to suggest that the jobs would not be applied for in this format.

By examining the micro impact of ALMPs, how the participants managed the power and authority relationship, as Macdonald & Marsten (2005) did, I found this was the case. As the JC+ managed my participant's possibilities, through surveillance, classification and discourse, my participants found ways to resist and defy the JC+.

These differing ways young people dealt with the control, and the mechanisms of that control on a day-to-day basis, were important to them as a way of renegotiating their agency in the structure that they were in and resisting their lack of agency. However, as Leonard (1997) argues, although necessary, such resistance to this social control was not sufficient to change their structure or give them the agency to leave such structures- geographical and institutional.

These forms of resistance were what can be identified as "bottom up resistance" (Macdonald & Marsten 2005) and exercised in the two-way relationship between the young person and the JC+ staff. These young people were now individuals managing their own possibilities to deal with their situation. They were ways for the young people to exercise some power at certain times. However it was not



necessarily a means to liberation; it was as a result of feeling helpless and not listened to. Defiance was short-term gratification to deal with their immediate situation. In some ways it empowered them (Standing 2011) without necessarily liberating them.

The adversarial relationship, shown in my research, between the young people and JC+ where the current ALMP doesn't engage in the positive side of ALMPs as other countries do to support young people, such as Germany and Austria. Investment in directing young people into any work by any means possible created the short-term churn. The young people didn't 'correct' their behaviour to make themselves more employable because: a) in their minds they were already doing all they could to find work, b) the ALMPs interventions such as employability courses weren't making the young people employable as they were repeatedly mandated onto these courses; these employability courses were part of the churn process.

The focus on the problem of choosiness (Dunn 2015) and welfare dependency (Cameron 2012) of young people in ALMPs has prompted interventions such as sanctions, conditionality, compulsion and 'work ready' courses. This solution hasn't worked for the young people in my research because these ALMPs do not take into account the impact structural barriers have on the young people's agency. The problem is being framed wrong and so the solution is wrong.

If we understand the control, surveillance and resistance experienced and enacted by the young people and the context of this then maybe we can understand how to better help the young people.

The next Chapter will discuss the conclusions I have made from my findings and analyses of my research.

## **Part 4**

### **Chapter 8**

#### **Conclusion**

##### **Introduction and revisiting the aim of the research**

This Chapter will conclude the thesis by considering how my findings in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 (obtained through the methodology and methods outlined in Chapter 4) interact in ways which add to the literature discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, to address the research question outlined in Chapter 1. The insights from the resulting analysis will then be considered in terms of how these young people interact with ALMPs and vice versa. This Chapter also considers what this analysis suggests for improving understandings of young people's experiences with the labour market (or ALMPs) over and above what existing literature has already found in Chapters 2 and 3, and makes recommendations for continuing research and alternative approaches to ALMP interventions that might be developed to more effectively address youth unemployment over the longer term.

##### **Summary of the findings**

Chapter 5 explains the narratives of the young people regarding their experiences of unemployment and the six barriers they highlighted the most as preventing them from getting into work, namely public transport, lack of qualifications or experience, lack of jobs, immigration, criminal record and illness. The data in this Chapter not only shows how these barriers have had a significant impact on the young people's positions in the labour market, but also the compounding effect of the barriers as they interact. .

For example, structural barriers, such as place or lack of public transport, could simply be considered in isolation as a principal factor impacting young people's experiences with the labour market; however, Chapter 5's six identified barriers provide empirical evidence that the cumulative effects of these barriers and their

interactions are very relevant. An intrinsic element to understanding Crowley and Cominetti's (2014) spatial barriers, outlined in Chapter 2, is the multiplicity at play when it comes to the cumulative effect of barriers on each other that shapes the experience of the young people. For young people especially, where you live matters not just because of where you are placed vis-a-vis available to work but work opportunities and other knock-on effects of their environment. These indicate other barriers that may be otherwise missed if we do not account for the multiple disadvantages the structure of place incorporates.

Data from the young people's perspectives found that the places they lived had few jobs available to them; these places also had poor transport infrastructures that made them less mobile in their job searches, thereby reducing the scope of travel time and geography within which they could travel for a job and seek work. If they lacked qualifications, the pool of jobs available to them shrank further. For some, factors such as ill health or a criminal record limited job availability further still and increased competition for whatever jobs still remained available to them. These young people said they needed help to navigate through these barriers.

An important feature born out of the findings was the impact of structures on agency. Current critiques laid out in Chapter 3 have argued about structural explanations versus explanations of individualism. However, historically and at the time of this research, UK ALMP systems have not taken into account these six structural barriers when addressing the issue of youth unemployment (Crowley & Comminetti 2014; Fergusson 2004; Staneva 2015; Vanreenen & Petrongolo 2010).

The experiences of these young people did not bring about behaviour that resulted in employment but, as Chapter 7 shows, instead brought about feelings of a loss of control that initiated CBA and resistance whilst they remained in the benefits system.

## **The impact of structures and how individuals respond and act to systems**

There has been a lot of conflicting research between structural and individualistic explanations of young people's unemployment. The data in this thesis has found that the position of youth unemployment seems to be somewhere in the middle of structural and individualistic explanations. The comparisons of data that looked at the young people's experiences of the JC+ in line with wider data including evidence from a local JC+ WSM, official statistics and policy documents in Chapter 6 found that there was a structure and agency interplay regarding youth unemployment within my research findings.

Here I also found that the young people made selections based on the structures or cumulative structures that impacted on them, for example where they lived, access to transport and level of qualifications (as detailed in Chapter 5 and 6). As data in Chapter 6 showed, there were different scales of selectivity, from young people who would de-select jobs because the job required a criminal records check when they had a criminal record or because they did not possess the qualifications required for the job, to young people who expressed how they were more limited in the types of jobs they were *willing* to search for. Here it is very important to stress that what is deemed as being '*overly selective*' or, as Dunn (2015) states '*too choosy*' depends on whose viewpoint is being applied. In the case of meeting conditions for benefit receipt, the determining judgement was the government's, concluding that any job was better than no job, based on a neo-liberal attitude towards welfare.

Where Dunn's (2015) argument is that unemployed people would be able to find a job in most labour market conditions if they were not "so choosy" (Dunn 2015:14), the evidence in my research indicated that this is not the case. Most of the young people in my study did *not* prefer benefits over low paid jobs, and they were *not* voluntarily unemployed. Very few made an active choice not to meet conditions imposed by the ALMP system; in fact, my data showed that for the young people in my research, they overwhelmingly felt that they were taking measures to avoid

being sanctioned. They did have some agency in this regard albeit limited, especially if their actions resulted in sanctions.

My data points towards something that transcends the dualism around structure and agency. The rival structure and agency explanations of youth unemployment (discussed in Chapters 3 and 6) suggest that both are important features. Giddens' social analysis of the recursive connection of human action with structural explanations (Giddens 1979) is a valuable foundation to begin to understand the experiences of the young people in this research. This explanation of the balance of the role of structure and agency in the social world proposes that people do not have "entire preference of their actions. Their knowledge is restricted, they are the elements that recreate the social structure and produce social change" (ibid). Structuration theory stresses that structures depend on reproductions through action (Giddens & Pierson 1998) in that: "Human actors are the elements that enable creation of our society's structure by means of invented values, norms or are reinforced through social acceptance" (Lamsal 2012:113).

My research does not share the same explanation as Giddens' structuration theory, although there are common elements, including the need to look at how both structure and agency impact on each other. The data in this research found that young people did have some agency in some form, as Giddens (1998) stated, but not to necessarily transform their lives or social structures to bring about social change. Giddens' focus on the inseparable nature of structure and agency and the balance of importance of structure and agency does not fully recognise the role of structural causation as structures change, and furthermore that those in power have more agency. Structure and agency cannot be of equal importance in social relationships if individuals have different levels of agency. The findings in this research go further than proposing the relationship between structure and agency exists, whilst acknowledging there is the will and agency of the individual to take into account and essentially the structure(s) in which the individual is placed that shapes this will and agency. The impact of the interaction of the specific structures the young people identified informed a changing dynamic that shaped their ability

to make choices. For Wright (2012), in such situations, the cumulative effect between policies and the disadvantages young people face made their situations more insecure, as was the case with participants in my research, within the processes of the system's short-term churn between benefits, sanctions and employability placements (the accounts of Simon, Lindsey, Katie, Rob and Kai in Chapter 6).

There are systems that are created both singularly and collectively; ALMPs for example are created singularly and collectively and the evolution of such policies, evidenced in Chapter 2, show that these have been reproduced by governments based on historical practices. Furthermore, these ALMPs differ internationally according to the structure of ideology that has informed them, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. The young people in my research interacted with these ideological ALMP interventions. This involves the interaction of structure and agency, which can reform structures, as well as the interplay between structure and agency. This is not where it ends though; otherwise behaviour modification interventions such as those in UK ALMPs would have been more effective in getting the young people into work. I argue in this thesis that the interactions between ALMP structures and the young people have not brought about the intended social change for the young people who participated in this research because structure and agency are not necessarily of equal weighting in the young people's relationship with ALMPs. Where and with whom the power lies in the structure and agency interaction informs if and in what way interactions reform structures.

Drawing upon Bourdieu's theory of power and habitus, we can understand the relationship between the young people with their structures better. We can also apply habitus to understand the interplay I suggest occurs between structure and agency, whereby objective structures are understood by the subjective experiences of individual agents. Structures do also exist outside the individual and, as Bourdieu (1989) states, the capital, and indeed cultural capital, one has shapes the power an individual has as an agent within structures.

Habitus or “the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them” (Wacquant 2005: 316) is central in understanding the legitimacy of power in society. Because social relationships create habitus, the process is bound up with the relationship of power (Harris 2004). Power is culturally and symbolically created and gains legitimacy via agency and structure interplays through habitus. The way people experience power, and how successful their action is, is a product of the interaction of a field and their habitus. As such, habitus is not fixed it can change between contexts and over time and where one is placed in a field can inform the power and agency that a person has. Depending on where the young people were placed in the field, in which they construct their interactions with ALMP, or their relationship with ALMP, their experience of power and amount of agency they had to interact with ALMP were shaped accordingly. Neo-liberal assumptions of youth unemployment became more widely accepted in society and informed ALMPs. Increased conditionality as a condition of benefit receipt and punitive measures for non-compliance were introduced as a solution. Through habitus, these assumptions and ALMP interventions were deposited on the young people based on their experiences in society and interactions with ALMPs. Their day-to-day interactions with ALMPs, in this case particularly with the JC+, reinforced the legitimacy of the power dynamic between the young people and ALMPs, as the young people had to meet higher and further conditions in order to get their benefits.

For the young people in this research, structures also accumulated externally to them, which also shaped how the young people acted; like the predicaments with Charlie and Kai regarding where they lived and transport infrastructure, in Chapter 5. The young people acted in response to structures and structure accumulations, which would also have impacted on the reproduction of social processes.

Where there is this power dynamic and interplay between structure and agency, there is also potential for resistance within this relationship. For Bourdieu, habitus can be transformed via changes of circumstances as a different set of dispositions

are learned and legitimised. There is no guarantee however that changes to habitus will necessarily bring about transformative change; this would depend on a certain type of change of circumstances whereby a different learned set of dispositions and interactions with these brings about this transformation. Here the relationship with power is important; the transformation has to be legitimate and accepted as such. To exemplify this, the resistance the young people discussed in Chapter 7 did not transform their circumstances. Power to transform habitus is significant. In this context, if ALMPs were informed by a different set of assumptions about youth unemployment and created a different ALMP framework, this could transform the interplay between structure and agency.

This thesis argues that this interplay is the structure *of* agency. And this interaction is happening at a micro level between the young people and JC+. If, as indicated above, policies are based on a different set of dispositions and ways of understanding social problems, then the structure of agency could possibly form the basis to transform the current habitus and change the circumstances of the young people.

Much other research has found the significance of structural factors regarding youth unemployment; it is therefore worthwhile carrying out more research in this area to listen to young people, focusing not just on whether structure does impact on agency but *how* structures impact on their agency from the young people's perspectives, including the traps that can prevent young people getting out of short-term cycles of insecure, low paid work and benefits.

The next section of the conclusion will address further why and how the structure impact on agency.



## **The ALMP and JC+ System**

Data from Chapters 6 and 7 show the JC+ system has not been working for the young people in my research because, as evidenced in Chapter 3 (including through the research of Watts, 2015, and Dwyer, 2017), UK ALMPs have not focused adequately on the needs of young people when addressing youth unemployment.

The problem of youth unemployment has instead been regarded, by governments, as a problem that belongs to the young unemployed (Fergusson 2004, Crisp & Powell 2016, Fletcher 2016). I found that the young people in my research had experienced this, as they said they felt that they were made to feel that they were the problem by the government and wider society. This matched previous research, which also found that policy discourses that individualise blame, and do not take into account the differences between young people within structures, have been present in previous UK government ALMPs, specifically by Fergusson (2004). Fergusson's research identified overlapping discourses, which further weakened young people's labour market position. This disregard for the distinct yet overlapping nature of structural barriers that weakened the labour market positions of the young people by these policy discourses weakened the positions of these young people further still. It wasn't just the way that ALMP policies seemed to ignore these barriers that was a problem for these young people. The individualisation of blame that fuelled this disregard and the UK ALMP direction that I found was especially problematic for these young people's situation in the labour market.

For Foucault (1991), power transcends structure and agency, but power is also found in the interactions of everyday life, such as in these micro-level interactions between the JC+ and the young people. Power is found in ideas and knowledge and those in power control related discourses through making their own values seem common sense in everyday discourse (Gramsci 1980). This form of hegemonic control has occurred in the benefits system. Policy discourses that assume these common sense values fabricated narratives of young people "gaming the system" (Grayling 2012; Fletcher 2016) to have an easy ride and being "dole wallers"

(Wiggan 2015). These were then used to justify punitive conditional measures and sanctions, to correct claimant behaviour and make them 'more employable'.

In the instances of the young people in this research, the UK ALMP was not designed to support the young people into employment. The priority was to get the young people off benefits and into any work possible in that order, as stated by the WSM in Chapter 6, but most of these young people weren't being supported and weren't getting work beyond the churn between benefits, short-term work placements and sign on and offs stated earlier. Even by the government's own standards then, the services carried out by JC+ system were not 'correcting' the young people's job search behaviour. I would therefore argue that this must then be applied to remodelling the UK ALMP systems in order to support the young people into longer-term employment.

Despite the current format of UK ALMPs, there is evidence for a better outcome through better-designed and implemented ALMPs; at the same time, in creating and running these policies and systems, we need to take into account the everyday interactions and impact on their everyday interactions.

### **What the UK can learn from other countries' ALMPs**

International evidence discussed in Chapter 2 shows mixed results depending on the typology the country and the time period covered in the analysis (Card et al 2010, Kluve 2006, Staneva 2015). This is also mixed regarding short-term and long-term effectiveness. Overall evaluation of ALMPs found that education and training initiatives had general positive medium to long-term impacts in moving young people into employment in the long-term (Nekby 2008, Kluve 2006, 2014, Card et al 2010). If there are not immediate results from ALMPs, the long-term effectiveness is still important; ALMPs may not affect employment outcomes directly but through the impact on education participation (Caliendo 2011). Initial results could also be misleading as training programmes may show limited effectiveness for moving young people into employment, if the young people were still in education and training.

ALMPs that included training and retraining initiatives for the unemployed, like Denmark and Germany, were heavily dependent on the business involvement and business cycle of the economy in order to yield effective long-term employment prospects (Dar & Tzannatos 1999). This link to business is consistent with Staneva's (2015) later evaluation that Germany's dual vocational education and training can only be effective if employers engage with this type of structure and it is kept up to date.

A 2014 Labour Markets Report on Sustainable Governance Indicators (SLI 2014) scored OECD and EU countries out of ten according to the effectiveness of their LMPs in addressing unemployment<sup>38</sup>. Germany was the highest scoring country with nine out of ten; the UK scored seven. Staneva (2015) states that this highlights the attempts of the UK to increase labour market flexibility; it also shows that the UK could learn from the successes of countries such as Germany. Likewise the UK can learn from ALMPs that have not been as effective. France, for example, scored a five on the Labour Markets Report (2014). The report highlighted that despite high overall spending on ALMPs and a large number of reform measures, France had shown poor results in the labour market. Youth unemployment was cited by the report as a particular problem as it was linked to the French job-training scheme that relied heavily on schools for delivery, when the diplomas that the young people received from such training have not been accepted in industry at large (SLI 2014). Important insights may be able to be garnered from models that have not fared so well and more successful models such as the German model. Throughout the range of ALMP typology assessments, the German model has been defined as containing positive activation (Taylor-Gooby 2004) with an investment in human capital (Berry 2014, Kluge 2014). Importantly through the recession and recovery, Germany's peak in youth unemployment has been lower than the UK and youth

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<sup>38</sup> The SGI report asks the question: How effectively does labor market policy address unemployment? 41 OECD and EU countries are sorted according to their performance on a scale from 10 (best) to 1 (lowest). There are four tiers: 10-9 = Successful strategies ensure unemployment is not a serious threat. 8-6 = Labor market policies have been more or less successful. 5-3 = Strategies against unemployment have shown little or no significant success. 2-1 = Labor market policies have been unsuccessful and rather effected a rise in unemployment.

unemployment recovery was quicker. Moreover “labour market developments in Germany have attracted much attention over Europe” (Staneva 2015) for their effectiveness.

### **What the UK could learn from the German model**

Countries need to apply ALMPs that will target the issues specific to their labour markets and labour market issues. Therefore the German model may not be a perfect match, but there are elements of the German model that the UK model could benefit from perhaps tailoring and applying elements to its own ALMP.

The German model consists of high participation in education and training schemes, highly regulated vocational training and “relatively low levels of apprentice remuneration” (Staneva 2015:69) compared to the UK. Germany has a dual system delivery, between school- and firm-based training, centred on occupation-specific regulations and federal government. The scheme includes nationally-regulated skills certification. Young people receive institutionally defined and recognised skills that are highly portable within the industry occupation, which facilitates labour matching. Germany isn’t the biggest spender on ALMP as a percentage of its GDP, as shown in Chapter 2, but the mix of interventions and the consistency of delivery means that its ALMP is effective at moving unemployed young people into employment. The trend of OECD countries’ ALMPs, including Germany, may be a move closer to the flexibility present in the UK model (Berry 2014). It may well be that these countries have adapted their models because they see the value of flexibility in the UK ALMP. Likewise this could imply that interventions used in the German model could be adapted to the UK model.

The German model is not without implications; it depends on a joined up approach with business and employers so that services and support are provided consistently to the young person. It also depends on whether the ALMP objectives are for short-term or long-term outcomes. In my research, some of the young people had longer-term goals for employment, such as the young person who wanted to be an electrician, but the short-term JC+ system was not giving the young people the

means to reach their longer term goals for jobs, even if there was a demand for these in the wider employment market.

This next section of the Chapter will suggest how the UK could improve aspects of its ALMP and what the implications for this could be, including taking into account the experiences of the young people and the barriers they faced in this research.

### **How the UK could improve aspects of its ALMP**

The economic, labour and industrial context of Germany differs to that of the UK. I am not suggesting that the template of the German, or any ALMP is directly applied onto the UK; “for policy to be effective it needs to be targeted, depending on the nature of the problem, the country and context and taking into account the particular issues faced with entering the labour market” (Staneva 2015:71).

Elements that the UK could adapt from the German model include human capital investment rather than making young people liable for their own unemployment. The German model has done this through improved education and training routes for those who are unemployed, job creation through close partnerships with business in related schemes, with essentially the joined up approach between these initiatives; “multiple separate initiatives provided by different government bodies and agencies leads to confusion about the help and support available to young people” (*ibid*).

In doing this, UK ALMPs should combine job creation with education and training, which recognise the structure of agency by looking towards improved solutions for the long-term.

### **Job creation, education and training**

It should be noted here that not all young people will want or need this education and training. Many young people go to university, join apprenticeship schemes or head straight into work. Some young people want short-term job search support and assistance whilst, for example, between jobs, like the case of Bethany. Most of the young people in this research did need additional long-term solutions to

prevent them being trapped over a substantial period of time in the current ALMP. A mix of short-term job search assistance and long-term education and training should therefore ideally be in place alongside job creation methods.

Job creation is also key here, not just at a national level but also at an inter-regional level. To make the education and training worthwhile, the young people would have to have jobs to transition into. There would be no point in educating and training young people if there were not related jobs for the young people to go into. The young people need jobs near to where they live or they need the means to travel to other economies to work.

There are two issues that should be addressed when designing these aspects of an ALMP concerning job creation and education and training in the context of local employment needs. The first issue is the risk that job creation initiatives in areas, such as those researched, may create only low-skilled temporary insecure jobs, if they only matched the typical types of employment available in the local labour market. If this was the case, then this would disadvantage these young people further whilst young people in areas where there were higher-skilled longer-term jobs will get higher-skill training.

The G20 OECD (2014b) report on effective labour market strategy states that in order to boost quality job creation, employment and participation and stable macroeconomic framework with structural policies that encourage innovation, skills and business development is needed. If new jobs are created that require skilled workers, Further Education (FE) colleges should be able to work more closely with businesses and be able to rely on stable government investment. The OECD (2014) recommends that in order for economies to become more stable policy needs to support innovation via available technology and capital, affordable premises and start up financing and promote networking between businesses.

A proactive response to skills gap and obstacles to business growth (such as lack of skilled workers and transport links) must be tackled at a policy level. Furthermore, governments need to allow time for a longer-term approach to ALMPs. Young

people in education and training may not complete their qualifications for two or more years and so results of these initiatives will not be seen until at least a year thereafter. The government can't afford to be short sighted with this. Young people need support to break into the labour markets and make steady progress.

The second is that education and training has to be recognised nationally by industry so that the young people are not geographically bound to the success of one local labour market and their skills bound to one very specific job in only one place. LMPs can ensure businesses can access workers, and build employability and mobility of workers in ways that can increase productivity and better job matches. A one-size-fits-all approach can undermine local labour issues. Policy needs to be strategic and joined up; "policies actively working with businesses to actively engage in stimulating productivity and increasing utilisation of skills in local small and medium enterprises through joint research and development and innovation projects" (OECD 2014:10).

Education and training options, which would improve this situation would be nationally accredited and recognised within the industry the young people were training in. The education, training, skills and qualifications would therefore be transferable across the country. The young people would meet the demands of the local labour economy, and the education and training would also provide the young people with a broad set of wider generic skills that were adaptable to changing labour markets. If the young people wanted to look further afield for a job, then they would have the qualifications and skills needed that would transfer to a similar job in another location. The government must therefore invest in social infrastructure and business and industry to strengthen networks in and between economies, "including economies performing more highly" (OECD 2014:12) than others. These suggestions regarding the aspects of job creation and education and training directly addresses some of the barriers the young people experienced: lack of jobs, where they lived and lack of recognised qualifications and skills. They could also take into account other barriers that affected the young people's agency that

were emergent through the research such as transport, illness and criminal record, which will be looked at further next.

### **Acknowledging the structure of agency**

The structures that have affected the young people have been well documented in this thesis. The OECD (2014b) recognises that central government “manages a range of policies that impact on each other” (*ibid*: 3) such as education and transport policy. In order to reach their long-term goals, other immediate interventions should be put in place, for example free public transport, childcare vouchers, and flexible learning around wider commitments aimed at removing childcare and transport barriers. There is already some support available for young people with criminal records to a limited degree, but it would help young people further if knowledge of this support was available, including if its service was more widely available and targeted at those who needed it.

These suggestions do not ignore the importance of agency in this framework; the young people are not passive. As with any model that does not treat recipients as passive, there would be expectations of action from the young people. The young people still have a responsibility for their actions.

If UK ALMP interventions usefully addressed the dilemmas young people were facing through measures that supported young people in the long-term as well as the short-term in their everyday interactions, then the relationship between the ALMP system and the young people would have a much better chance of reaching a long-term goal of supporting these young people into permanent employment. Using the cases in this research, an ALMP whose street level interface of the JC+ made young people like Rosie feel “bad about their lives”, was regarded as “evil” by young people like Lucy, and was ineffective in enabling the young people to become employed. A fundamental aspect that would change UK ALMP for the better would be one based on improving opportunities for young people and one that provided a positive street-level interface, which would through this address another barrier experienced by the young people in this research. Getting a job



should not be or feel like a punitive measure. Furthermore, neo-liberal narratives and discourses do not need to dominate discussions around young people and youth unemployment.

The next section of this Chapter will consider the implications of the analysis regarding surveillance and policy discourse in the JC+ system.

### **Surveillance and policy discourses in the JC+ system**

Surveillance and policy discourses in the system played an important role in power over the agency of the young people in my research; the acceptance of this power through hegemony allowed control to occur. Gramsci's theory on power and Foucault's theoretical notion of control and power and the relational aspect of this is helpful in understanding the relationship of the young people with the JC+, as these theories recognize that power does not just originate and operate as a top-down force. Those in power create the societal norms and 'common sense' values which are accepted via hegemony, and this sets the back-drop for ALMPs that use surveillance and discourses to control the young people through everyday relationships and interactions with the JC+ as a street level bureaucracy, as shown in Chapters 6 and 7.

The far-reaching nature of surveillance in the shape of the increased conditionality impacted on the young people's actions physically, as they had to turn up for extra appointments, log on at certain times and attend certain courses. What also impacted on their agency was the classification of the young people through discourses. They felt like they were being judged as watching daytime television programmes such as Jeremy Kyle instead of working, and they had personal experiences of judgement from others on Facebook that stigmatised the young people. Some young people, such as Rosie, didn't tell others they were claiming JSA; some, like Kai, Lee and Alison, put off claiming JSA due to this stigma. The normalisation of increased surveillance, conditions and sanctions also impacted these young people's agency, as this became the standard practice in the system and standard experiences for the young people.

The significance of street-level bureaucracy is important here. The discourse and surveillance designed to encourage young people to modify their behaviour via the street-level JC+ added an extra aspect of regulation for the young people. Here the neo-liberal ideology that has informed the UK ALMP has become everyday language and everyday actions, not just *on* the young people but also *by* the young people. For example, Karl, Stevie, Antonia and Lucy in Chapter 6 judged some other young people about their reasons for being unemployed in the same way they said they hated being judged. The individualistic policy discourses of governments in power trickled down into the media and everyday use of the young people. They didn't recognise themselves through these discourses, but they took on this discourse to judge each other. These uses of discourse every day in the media, by politicians and then by the young people themselves against each other shows how power presupposes agency (Foucault 2003).

Incarceration has a stigmatising effect (Foucault 2003), and being in the ALMP system had a similar stigmatising effect on the young people, particularly if they became 'incarcerated' in the benefit system and continual cycles of short-term churn. The young people in my research were managing their situations, as they understood them, within the options that they saw as being available to them.

As noted in my literature review, Kluge (2014) discusses the use of 'carrots and sticks' methods in ALMPs. To adopt this metaphor: the effect of the conditions and sanctions used by the UK government on the young people in this research was to create a bigger 'stick' so the young people churned continually through the revolving door in and out of the ALMP-related structures faster. This faster churn created multiple transaction costs as the young people frequently signed on and off benefits (like Kai, Karl, Cara and Rob) or were repeatedly sent on the same employability courses (like Craig, Rob, Dan and Mark), resulting in growing dissent toward the system (as shown in Chapters 6 and 7). The wider literature indicates that this type of system doesn't seem to have been saving the government money (Standing 2010, King 2015, Patrick 2014, Fletcher 2015); in 2010 the UK's

expenditure on labour market policies was unchanged from 2009 figures at 0.3% of GDP (OECD 2015).

The interactions with the JC+ system demotivated the young people and actually had a negative impact on their actions. Karl for example spoke of dread regarding going to the JC+. The conditions and sanctions made them anxious about their interactions with the JC+ system, such as Dan who felt like a bully was after him. It affected their confidence; Rosie for example, said it made her feel bad about herself. Many of the young people said that being on JSA was 'the worst thing anyone could do' and some, such as Charlie, Craig and Dan, said it evoked desperate feelings of suicide. For some of the young people with mental health problems, their experiences with the JC+ exacerbated their condition as they felt more anxious, lower in mood and less motivated to find work, such as Aiden's account.

These feelings that the young people had as a result of their day-to-day interactions with the JC+ actually produced counterproductive behaviour as the young people felt they had no control over their situation in the relationship with the JC+ and so adopted methods to cope with their situations. For example, they weighed up if their actions were going to result in them gaining anything and if not they found ways to avoid the JSA conditions. The young people said that UJM was full of fake jobs, and some young people found out that the staff weren't checking their jobsearch booklets, so they copied jobs from previous booklets rather than doing genuine jobsearches. Some of the young people didn't feel they were being supported by the JC+, so they tried to qualify for ESA so they would get extra help in finding work. The young people resisted the power and control the JC+ exercised in their relationship by lying about the jobs they were applying for, applying for jobs they knew they weren't qualified for, walking out of JC+ meetings or leaving benefits altogether.

In these respects, it might be argued that the young people were in some ways "gaming the system" (Fletcher 2016), in the sense that they were collecting benefits whilst not technically fulfilling all of their imposed claimant commitments.

However, the young people were not gaming the system in the way that Grayling (2012) identified in his speech, as the young people weren't 'winning' in this system: They weren't being liberated from the JC+. As Taylor (1993) has argued from a realist governmentality perspective, resistance does not need to result in liberation.

Just as the power and control that the JC+ had was engrained through day-to-day interactions, the young people enacted everyday forms of resistance. These forms of resistance were strategies to resist the abuse of the powerful (Scott 1985), which in this context took the form of the JC+. These actions were as a result of the young people feeling like the JC+ wasn't helping them; they didn't see the point in fulfilling the conditions and they didn't see these conditions as helping them get work and so it wasn't worth their while. Their actions were a response to a set of structures that weren't working for them. Here the structure *of* agency is significant in understanding the young people's situations. The accumulative impact of the structures identified in Chapter 5 meant that the young people instead needed extra support to find work as these structures impacted on their agency. Then the structure of the ALMP further impeded them as, from the young people's perspectives, the JC+ wasn't helping them (and in some cases stopping them) from finding the work that they needed support to get in the first place. Returning to Bourdieu's concept of habitus above, the young people had agency but where they were placed in the field of the ALMP determined the level of agency they had and so power to act.

The JC+ system focused on these short-term churn methods whilst not doing anything about structural and labour market issues to create jobs for the young people in my research; this just evoked rebellious responses from the young people, in the shape of resistance, cost benefit analysis over their actions and giving up, as they didn't see a way out of this precarious churn. The young people were stigmatised for being on benefits and were trapped in the benefits system churn, which stigmatised them further as many remained incarcerated on benefits within this system as the structures in the ALMP (particularly in the form of the JC+)

stopped the young people moving on. As the outcomes of the young people in my research in Chapter 7 showed, a majority of these young people were still claiming benefits at the end of my research.

### **Recommendations looking forward**

Having pulled all of my findings together and looking up from my thesis, the data points towards the need for a different type of ALMP in the UK. Evidence in Chapter 2 concedes that ALMPs report mixed results at short-term and long-term rates (Card *et al* 2010, Kluge 2014). Research that finds the right mix of passive and active interventions is needed (Staneva 2015), including through “wage subsidies combined with training which increases the employability of young people through skill development” (Staneva 2015:71) to best promote longer term employment prospects. This also needs to take into account how employer involvement and individual skills are combined; the success of the wage subsidy programmes depends crucially on how they are combined with individual skills and employer involvement and with other follow-up measures.

Nevertheless, job creation or demand-side initiatives have not been the focus of UK ALMPs. I would therefore argue on the basis of my research that the focus of the UK ALMP needs to shift towards interventions that combine long-term job creation with education and training that provides workers with the skills to fill the jobs created. Education and ALMPs need to work together to support young people in their transitional journey into work and those without the skills need a route to get recognised skills and qualifications so they can get and keep long term jobs, such as the young person in my research who wanted to train to be an electrician. Furthermore, those young people without any skills and qualifications need to be allowed a longer transition, if needed, to gain these further skills.

My data found that understanding how structure and agency interact is essential in understanding the problems behind youth unemployment and also in finding alternative solutions to it. Taking young people’s perspectives seriously involves designing systems which recognise, value and support young people in exploring

their employment options, and in exercising choices about their short and longer term options as they transition through their early stages of involvement in the labour market. Structural opportunities need to be created for young people, rather than focusing on cost-burdening exercises of re-assessing them for benefit eligibility and claimant commitments that create short-term churn.

If UK ALMPs addressed demand-side as well as supply-side policies through passive and active measures, there could be a more positive labour market outcome for the young people. UK ALMPs could create more secure labour market opportunities and education and training for young people to enable them to fill these opportunities making for a more effective ALMP in moving young people into employment. ALMPs can perform better than what is happening in the UK, with data in Chapter 2 having shown that other countries have had lower youth unemployment before, during and after the recession and have seen a quicker recovery. There is, as Berry (2014a) warns, a caveat in picking up one welfare state's ALMP template and expecting the same result. Context is extremely important, as this research has found, but a mixture of initiatives to fit the needs of the young people that the ALMP serves is possible. Based on my data, in designing such combinations of initiatives, listening to the experiences of unemployed young people in the contexts concerned would be a good place to start.

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## **Appendices**

<b>Appendix 1</b> NDYP phased approach	<b>248</b>
<b>Appendix 2</b> Work Programme support and referral by customer group and 3 main principles	<b>249</b>
<b>Appendix 3</b> JC+ work related requirements	<b>252</b>
<b>Appendix 4</b> Profile of the organisations used	<b>254</b>
<b>Appendix 5</b> Breakdown of research contact with each case	<b>258</b>
<b>Appendix 6</b> Comparative table of qualifications	<b>259</b>
<b>Appendix 7</b> Semi-structured interview aides memoire	<b>261</b>

## **Appendix 1**

### **NDYP phased approach**

It was a phased approach that had three stages:

1-Gateway- a period of 16 weeks whereby intensive support is given to clients to find a job.

This stage is compulsory for all young people on JSA for over 26 weeks; however, the client's provider can move them onto this stage earlier if the client opts to.

2- Flexible Options- this stage lasts from 13 weeks up to 52 weeks, if in full time education or training. Support is given to the client to gain skills, qualification and work with employers and enter subsidised employment or apprenticeships.

3- Follow-Through- A 13-week period to give continued support to clients who return to JSA after the NDYP.

At the end of this period unsuccessful clients go back onto the Gateway stage. And so the cycle continues.

(Source DWP evaluation paper 2007)

## **Appendix 2**

### **Work Programme support and referral by customer group and 3 main principles**

Customer groups who will receive support under the Work Programme are as follows:

<b>Customer Group</b>	<b>Time of Referral</b>	<b>Basis for referral</b>
Jobseekers Allowance customers aged 25+	From 12 months	Mandatory
Jobseekers Allowance customers aged 18-24	From 9 months	Mandatory
Jobseekers Allowance customers who have recently moved from Incapacity Benefit	From 3 months	Mandatory
Jobseeker Allowance customers facing significant disadvantage (e.g. young people with significant barriers, NEETs, ex offenders)	From 3 months	Mandatory or voluntary depending on circumstance
All Employment and Support Allowance customers	At any time after their Work Capability Assessment	Voluntary
Employment and Support Allowance (income related) customers who are placed in the Work Related Activity Group	When customers are expected to be fit for work in 3 months	Mandatory

## **Appendix 2 continued**

### **The Work Programme's three main principles.**

#### **1, Freedom for service providers**

The government claims that local providers are best placed to identify the most effective way of helping people into sustained work. They are free to deliver the Work Programme according to the codes of conducts and minimum standards set out.

Organisations compete for the contracts and win them based on quality and price of the delivery of services. Programme providers need to be accredited by the Merlin standards<sup>39</sup>, within 12 months within receipt of WP contract and maintain during its contract, to promote "supply chain excellence" (DWP 2013 online).

#### **2, Long-term commitment**

Prime Providers deliver the Work Programme on a 5-year contract, instead of a two-year basis under the NDYP. This is a pre-requisite of payment is to attain Merlin accredited standards throughout the contract

#### **3, Clear incentives to deliver results**

Success of providers is based on outcome rewards, depending on sustained job outcomes, which have been increased to 100% outcome based funding for providers (Social Market Foundation 2011).

#### **Payments to providers come in three lots:**

***An attachment fee** – when a customer starts on the programme.*

***A job outcome fee** – designed to reward providers for getting as many customers as possible into work.*

***Sustainment fees** – which will be paid to the provider whilst they keep a customer in work. A significant amount of the total amount will be in sustainment payments and these will be fixed over the life of the contract.*

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<sup>39</sup> "The Merlin Standard is a standard of behaviour which DWP prime providers are expected to adhere to in their relationship with the subcontractors" ( DWP 20 Nov 2013)

## **Appendix 3**

### **JC+ work related requirements**

#### **Work related requirements.**

**Work focused interview requirements-** “with purposes relating to work or work preparation...The Secretary of State may specify how, when and where a work-focused interview is to take place” (*ibid: S15: P 2-4*).

This was a long list of requirements set out by the Secretary of state for the young people to fulfill; these requirements are set out by the JC+. They have control over what the young people have to do to meet them, as a requirement for getting their benefit.

**Work preparation requirements:** - Again setting out these requirements and deciding if they have been met are in the control of the JC+ and staff, according to requirements set out by the Secretary of State whenever the Secretary of State sees fit.

**Work search requirements:** -Work search requirements are actions deemed reasonable by JC+. The reform has taken away specific quotas for the clients to meet. Instead, quotas are based on the subjective judgment of the staff and according to more stringent requirements set out by the Secretary of State.

**Work availability requirement:** -The benefit is a seven-day a week benefit. The clients have to be available and ready to work whenever they are told to. They have to go on employability courses and take up mandatory volunteer positions and work experience when the JC+ staff mandates them to. In this regard the JC+ has control over the young people’s everyday actions.

#### **Benefit cap**

**Capping working age benefit:** - Under the 2012 reform, working age benefit is capped so that those on benefits could not earn more than those in work. This amount was worked out according to what the Secretary of State saw fit.

### **Claimant's responsibility for their sanctions**

The regulations are the same for 'other sanctions' laid out as reasons according to the JC+ staff. If JC+ staff think that the client has not met their requirements and conditions for benefits 'without good reason' JC+ staff could refer the client. It is at the JC+ staff's discretion that young people are referred for sanctions.

## **Appendix 4**

### **Profile of the organisations used**

#### **East Durham Partnership**

East Durham Partnership is a charity that offers a range of employability skills programmes at different levels, which address individual learner needs. East Durham Partnership learning scheme mostly receives young people mandated from JC+ centres predominantly in East Durham. Courses can last from 3 days to 3 weeks depending upon the status and previous learning of the clients. Learners are referred by the JobCentre Plus, Work Programme providers, Careers Service, and Probation Service; individuals can also self refer. Following successful completion of their employability programmes, learners may be offered employment with EDP where they can undertake NVQs in a range of topics. The length of employment can last from 3 – 24 weeks. ‘Clients’ are informed of the length of employment they will be given once they have completed the training. The fewer qualifications, they have the longer the length of employment they receive. Once they start working at EDP, they are classed as employed and sign off JSA.

#### **New College Durham**

New College Durham runs a course that is co-financed by the Skills Funding Agency, through a Skills Support for the Unemployed (SSU) contract. This contract provides support for individual’s aged 19 or over or who have been unemployed for over six months and claiming either Job Seeker’s Allowance (including partners on joint claims) or Employment Support Allowance benefits and living in the North-East. The New College Durham Intensive Employability Programme receives young people mostly from Durham JC+. The support is focused on securing sustainable employment by offering targeted vocational training courses, Sector Based Work Academies, Work Trials and Employment Opportunities. This programme is completely separate from the Work Programme. Due to funding and contract reasons, young people on the Work Programme are not referred to this

programme. The course is a full time 5 day 30 hour course that runs from a Monday to Friday. Most of the people on this course are mandated to do so by the JC+.

### Albert Kennedy Trust

The Albert Kennedy Trust supports lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans homeless young people in crisis. It helps house young people and runs a fortnightly drop in support group in Newcastle city centre. This is where I gained access to the young people who participated in the research and where the initial focus group took place. The gatekeeper to this group was a youth support worker that ran the drop in-group. The drop in support group is a safe and familiar setting for all of the members of the group; the group trusted the youth support worker and they had respect and a rapport with her. She had helped them with benefits applications, problems with Work Programme providers and the JC+, advice for interviews, and finding them a home. She had a relationship with the group whereby they trusted her and respected her without her taking on an authority figure. This made it possible for me to talk to them, as they were open to talking to me based on her introducing me to the group. The Albert Kennedy Trust has offices in Manchester, London and Newcastle. This research used the office at Newcastle. This organisation has no link to JC+ and does not have any contract to deliver employability schemes.

### Newcastle College

Newcastle College is one of the largest educational, training and employability organisations in the UK. Its main Campus is at Rye Hill, close to the City centre. It runs an ESOL course, teaching English to speakers of other languages. This course is taught to over-18's at the Riverdene campus in the residential area of Cruddas Park, Elswick. The students on this course are predominantly immigrants. This course receives immigrants once they received immigration status and were mandated onto this course as a requirement. Four of the participants in my research were on this ESOL course. They were immigrants from Iran, Syria, and Poland. This added extra diversity to the sample and access to individuals who potentially had different issues to other participants; there was also diversity between these four



participants as one participant was a refugee. This meant that they potentially had different barriers that may affect their job seeking if they had issues arising from their reasons for seeking refuge in the UK. This meant that they might have had different issues and needs compared to the Polish participant.

These participants had been mandated onto the course by the JC+ as a condition of JSA. They were happy that they were on the course so they could learn and improve their English, and employability prospects. Contact with these participants was limited to either a focus group or individual interview as access to these participants came towards the end of the research. However their experiences and views about what it is like for them to be unemployed, looking for work and not speaking English was a valuable contribution in understanding their experiences of unemployment, barriers to employment and relationship with the JC+.



## Appendix 5

### Breakdown of research contact with each case.

Name	Focus Group (amount)	Interview (amount)	Phone interview (amount)	Phone call/Text	Email contact (frequency)	Facebook (frequency)
Katie	2	1				Every other week
Lindsay	2	1				Three times
Rob	2	1				Every other week
Kai	2	1				Every other week
Simon	2		1			Every other week including one interview via Facebook
Dan		2			Every 3-4 weeks including one interview via	
Carly		3				Every other week
Karl		3		Every other week		
Alison		2				Every 3-4 weeks
Bethany		2				Every 3-4 weeks
Rosie		2		Every other week		Every other week
Marcus		2		Twice a month		
Lee		2		3 times		4 time
Charlie		3	1	Every other week		Every other week
Aiden		3		Twice		Every other week
Lucy	1	2				Every other week
Antonia	2	2				Twice
Cara	2	2		Weekly		Weekly
Alesha	2	1				4 times
Stevie	1	1				Twice
Elijah	2					Every other week
Damon		2		5 times		
Craig		2				Every month
Mia		2				Every Month
Michel		1				
Amir	1					
Hamid	1					
Ardash	1					



## Appendix 6

### Comparative table of qualifications

<u>Level</u>	<u>Regulated Qualifications Framework</u> <u>examples</u>	<u>Framework for Higher Education</u> <u>Qualification examples</u>
<b><u>Entry level</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Entry level certificate</li> <li>- Entry level Skills for Life</li> <li>- Entry level award, certificate and diploma</li> <li>- Entry level Functional Skills</li> <li>- Entry level Foundation Learning</li> </ul>	
<b><u>1</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- GCSE (grades D-G)</li> <li>- Key Skills level 1</li> <li>- NVQ level 1</li> <li>- Skills for Life level 1</li> <li>- Foundation diploma</li> <li>- BTEC award, certificate and diploma level 1</li> <li>- Foundation Learning level 1</li> <li>- Functional Skills level 1</li> <li>- Cambridge National level 1</li> </ul>	
<b><u>2</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- GCSE (grades A*-C)</li> <li>- Key Skills level 2</li> <li>- NVQ level 2</li> <li>- Skills for Life level 2</li> <li>- Higher diploma</li> <li>- BTEC award, certificate and diploma level 2</li> <li>- Functional Skills level 2</li> <li>- Cambridge National level 2</li> <li>- Cambridge Technical level 2</li> </ul>	
<b><u>3</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- AS and A level</li> <li>- Advanced Extension Award</li> <li>- Cambridge International award</li> <li>- International Baccalaureate</li> <li>- Key Skills level 3</li> <li>- NVQ level 3</li> <li>- Advanced diploma</li> <li>- Progression diploma</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- BTEC award, certificate and diploma level 3</li> <li>- BTEC National</li> <li>- Cambridge Technical level 3</li> </ul>	
<b><u>4</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- HNC</li> <li>- Certificate of higher education</li> <li>- Key Skills level 4</li> <li>- NVQ level 4</li> <li>- BTEC Professional award, certificate and diploma level 4</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Certificate of higher education</li> <li>- HNC</li> </ul>
<b><u>5</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- HND</li> <li>- NVQ level 4</li> <li>- Higher diploma</li> <li>- BTEC Professional award, certificate and diploma level 5</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Diploma of higher education</li> <li>- Diploma of further education</li> <li>- Foundation degree</li> <li>- HND</li> </ul>
<b><u>6</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- NVQ level 4</li> <li>- BTEC Advanced Professional award, certificate and diploma level 6</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bachelor's degree</li> <li>- Graduate certificate</li> <li>- Graduate diploma</li> </ul>
<b><u>7</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- BTEC Advanced Professional award, certificate and diploma level 7</li> <li>- Fellowship and fellowship diploma</li> <li>- Postgraduate certificate</li> <li>- Postgraduate diploma</li> <li>- NVQ level 5</li> <li>- BTEC Advanced Professional award, certificate and diploma level 7</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Master's degree</li> <li>- Postgraduate certificate</li> <li>- Postgraduate diploma</li> </ul>

## **Appendix 7**

### **Semi-structured interview aide memoire**

So tell me a bit about you and your background.

Where are you from/ where do you live/ what school did you go to? (*If needed*)

What qualifications do you have?

What JC+ do you go to?

Are you on any employment programmes?

What is your experience of the JC+/ relevant employment programme?

(*If relevant*) Why are you on this programme/ what do you think of it?

What do you think of the JC+?

What barriers do you think you face in getting a job?

How do you think you can be helped to overcome these barriers?

Do you have any questions for me?







