

Hard to reach? Young people's experiences and understandings of the post-16 transition

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the experiences and understandings of young people as they move from their final two years of compulsory education into a range of post-16 destinations including Further Education, work, apprenticeships and unemployment. The participants were all identified as being 'hard to reach' by school practitioners. The research responds to a need to deepen understanding of such young people ahead of the age of participation in education and training in England being raised to 18 in 2015.

The research was conducted in the South West of England. The empirical research was undertaken between January 2008 and April 2010 and comprised semi-structured interviews with 51 young people who were interviewed between one and three times during that period. The data presented in this thesis is focused on 11 of those young people who were each interviewed on three occasions.

The findings suggest similarities between the post-16 transition experiences of the young people participating here and those of young people in this age range, not identified as 'hard to reach'. Notwithstanding these parallels, the research revealed that young peoples' post-16 transitions and the aspirations they hold are often more nuanced than has been theorised in previous research. The findings raise questions about the implications of labelling young people, and 14-19 policy predicated upon assumptions regarding those who do not participate post-16.

In conclusion it is suggested that at a time of continued economic uncertainty and UK youth unemployment approaching one million¹, young people need more flexibility in the school and post-16 experiences that are available and actively encouraged, rather than increased levels of constraint.

¹ September 2011

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