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'I just want a job' – What do we really know about young people in jobs without training?

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Over recent years, a central concern of policy has been to drive up post-16 participation rates in full-time education and address the needs of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). As a result, young people who enter work which is classified as 'without training' at 16/17 have largely been ignored. However, the decision to Raise the Participation Age (RPA) for continuing in learning for all 17-year olds from 2013 and for all 18-year olds from 2015 in England, together with a growing unease about the impact of the current recession on youth unemployment rates, have revived interest in the 'jobs without training' (JWT) group. This paper draws on the findings from two studies: first, a qualitative study in two contrasting local labour markets, of young people in JWT, together with their employers and parents; and second, an evaluation of the Learning Agreement Pilots (LAP), which was the first policy initiative in England targeted at the JWT group. Both studies reveal a dearth of understanding about early labour market entrants and a lack of policy intervention and infrastructure to support the needs of the JWT group throughout the UK. From this, it is concluded that questionable assumptions have been made about the composition and the aspirations of young people in JWT, and their employers, on the basis of little or no evidence. As a consequence, a policy 'quick fix' to satisfy the RPA agenda will not easily be achieved. If the decision to raise the participation age is adopted also by the Welsh and Scottish parliaments, similar challenges may have to be faced.

From the policy perspective, the Jobs without Training (JWT) group in England comprises young people aged between 16-18 who are in full-time work and not in receipt of training which is accredited at NVQ level 2 (or above). In 2008, the proportion of 16-18 year olds in full-time post-16 education and training was 79.7 per cent. This was the highest ever recorded rate and represented a 1 percentage point increase from 2006. At the same time, 10 per cent of 16-18 year olds (approximately 20, 000 young people) were in employment without receiving recognised education or training (DCSF, 2009). This is a far cry from 1972, when the statutory school-

leaving age was raised from 15 to 16, and nearly two-thirds of all young people left school as soon as possible, with the vast majority moving directly into work (Roberts, 1995).

The position in the UK can also be contrasted to those in other countries. For example, Ryan (2001) pointed to there being significant differences between European countries, both in terms of their levels of youth unemployment and with regard to the quality of work in which young people are employed. Ryan attributes such cross-national differences to structural factors, such as variations between countries in their levels of economic performance, cyclical trends in unemployment rates and youth cohort sizes. Recent empirical evidence also suggests that national differences with regard to employment protection legislation, as well as the level of support for vocational education, significantly impact on young people's labour market entry patterns, depending on their levels of academic attainment (Wolbers, 2007). Wolbers' study found that deregulated labour markets, such as the UK, were more likely to increase the likelihood of unemployment or inactivity once young people had entered the labour market and to reduce the quality of their first employment. However, protective employment practices were also found to benefit young people with higher levels of education in highly deregulated labour markets such as the UK.

With an increasing emphasis within education and training policy on encouraging young people to remain in full-time learning beyond compulsory schooling throughout the UK, there has been limited research activity which explores the structure and functioning of the youth labour market and the attitudes and motivations of employers to recruit school leavers into jobs with or without training. This contrasts with the 1970s and the 1980s, when there was considerable academic debate about the composition of a distinct youth labour market (Ashton, Maguire and Garland, 1982; Ashton and Maguire, 1988; Bynner, 1990; Roberts and Parsell, 1992; Raffe, 1988; Furlong, 1992). Since the late 1970s, there has been a transformation of the labour market opportunities

available to young people, with attendant changes resulting in a less easily identifiable and distinctive youth labour market (Maguire and Maguire, 1997).

More recently, the quantitative evaluation of the piloting of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) did provide some information regarding the labour market positions of school leavers who enter jobs without training. The data show that young people who had entered the labour market at the age of 16, and who had gone into jobs without training, were more likely than their counterparts who were in jobs with training to:

- have no or few educational qualifications;

- have parents in socio-economic groups (SEGs) 4 and 5;

- be concentrated in sales process, plant and machine operatives and elementary or other occupations;

- be in seasonal, temporary or casual work; and

- have changed jobs.

(Middleton et al, 2003).

Other recent research showed that young people in the JWT group were difficult to identify and contact and were diverse in both background and character (Anderson et al, 2006). In addition, it has been asserted that young people in the JWT group are motivated towards early labour market entry by the attraction of earning money (Anderson et al, 2006) and that many of the JWT cohort are employed in the retail sector (Spielhofer and Sims, 2004).

The 2008 Education and Skills Act confirmed a policy commitment to ensuring that all young people remain in some form of accredited education or training to the age of 17 by 2013 and to the age of 18 by 2015. This brings with it the responsibility to tackle barriers to participation and

restriction on choice, which currently inhibit some young people's participation and retention in post-16 learning/training. In particular, it requires strategies which ensure that education and training options are available, accessible and attractive to two groups of young people who do not currently participate in any formally recognised form of post-16 education and training: those who are NEET and those in JWT. There is also a need to reduce drop-out rates in post-16 learning and training.

Tackling specific barriers to participation in post-compulsory learning has been a common objective of a range of government policies in England in recent years. Financial barriers to learning have been addressed through the piloting and subsequent national roll-out of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), which offers a means-tested financial incentive to 16-18-year olds from lower income families to help secure their participation in post-16 education. Evidence from the EMA pilots also demonstrated that flexibility in financial incentives, the availability of provision and other types of support was needed in order to overcome the multiple and varied barriers to learning that were experienced by specific groups of vulnerable young people. For example, among young people with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD), a greater degree of inter-agency working was needed to raise awareness about EMA, as well as to dispel inaccuracies in understanding about the negative impact that receipt of EMA would have on continued eligibility for other state benefit entitlements. The key barriers among teenage parents were: childcare (funding childcare, shortage of provision for young children, and social and cultural attitudes to childcare); transport; finance; time; personal skills and lack of confidence; negative school experiences; and other factors, such as the views of partners (Allen et al 2003). Transport inequalities were highlighted as a key issue in the Social Exclusion Unit's report Bridging the Gap, which also included a commitment to introduce an EMA directed at students who live in areas with poor transport provision (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). However,

the subsequent evaluation of the EMA transport initiative showed no significant impact of the intervention on the education decisions of eligible young people (Perren et al, 2003).

In order to respond to this challenge and bring about the successful delivery of the Raising of the Participation Age (RPA) agenda, the barriers to participation in learning have to be identified and eradicated. Mechanisms which would contribute to achieving these aims would include: offering financial incentives and support; providing flexible, diverse and accessible learning options; assistance with transport and equipment costs; and making available adequate levels of mentoring and guidance to specific groups of learners. The piloting of the Activity and Learning Agreements between 2006 and 2009 targeted the NEET and JWT groups and tested the offer of financial incentives, together with intensive support and tailored learning packages, to induce young people's participation in post-16 education and training.

While the end of 2007 witnessed the first small decline in the proportion of 16-18 year olds not in education, employment or training (NEET), at the end of 2008 the proportion had increased to 10.3 per cent, from 9.7 per cent in 2007 (DCSF, 2009). The fact that there was also a reported decrease of 8.3 per cent in the proportion of 16-18-year olds starting an apprenticeship framework in 2008/9 compared with the same period in 2007/8 (Data Service, 2009) does not bode well. An underlying concern must be that young people in the JWT group are more vulnerable to job loss, given their position within the labour market, and that this may, in turn, lead to an increase in the NEET population. Concerns about rising levels of youth unemployment are growing. In 2008, as well as increased media coverage about Britain's growing NEET population, employers' organisations the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) both published reports highlighting the damaging effects of youth unemployment on individuals, society and the economy (BCC, 2008; CBI, 2008).

It remains to be seen how the JWT population will be affected in the long term by the recession, and whether job and training opportunities for young people will increase once the economy recovers. During the 1980s, academic research was divided about the extent to which recession permanently or temporarily eroded job opportunities for young people. Ashton, Maguire and Spilsbury (1990) attributed the decline in demand for youth labour throughout the 1980s to changes such as the decline of labour intensive industries, the impact of new technology, increased business competition and a process of increasing competition. They argued that the changes were irreversible and, regardless of economic conditions, many of the jobs which were traditionally occupied by young people had been lost. In contrast, Raffe (1986) argued that young workers are particularly vulnerable to any changes in the levels of employment or unemployment because of their place in the 'labour queue'. Effectively, those groups, such as young people with few or no qualifications, which have the least to offer, in terms of the attributes required by those recruiting, are severely affected. Proponents of this hypothesis maintained that these changes were not permanent and could be reversed by policies aimed at stimulating economic activity. These contrasting arguments raise two important questions with regard to the JWT group: what are the characteristics of the JWT group which determine their place in the labour market and, crucially, what types of employment are they engaged in? The following sections explore these issues.

Research evidence on JWT

Evidence from a qualitative study of the JWT that was commissioned by the ESRC and findings from the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) sponsored evaluation of the Learning Agreement Pilots (LAP) provide an insight into the difficulties that exist in both defining the JWT population and in understanding the characteristics of the group. The qualitative research comprised a study of young people, employers and parents in the two

contrasting local labour markets of Tees Valley and Warwickshire (Maguire et al, 2008a)[2]. In the early stages of the project, telephone interviews were conducted with national and local policy makers, as well as local Connexions staff. Representatives from the DCSF and national and local LSCs provided contextual information on national, regional and local policy in relation to young workers, and, in particular, to the drive to encourage and raise participation in education and training among young people who enter JWT. In each of the fieldwork areas, samples of young people in JWT were drawn from the Connexions Customer Information System (CCIS), which collates information about all young people aged 13-19. An opt out mailing was administered by local Connexions offices, on behalf of the research team, to all young people who had left compulsory education in 2006 and had entered JWT.

A total of 36 in-depth interviews were carried out with young people. The majority of interviews were conducted face-to-face during Summer 2007. While in Warwickshire, there was an even split between the proportions of male and female participants in the sample, two thirds of the Middlesbrough sample were female. The overall sample was overwhelmingly composed of ethnically white young people who still lived at home with their parents. The socio-economic status of the sample could be broadly defined as 'working class', since the majority of their parents were in socio-economic groups (SEGs) 4 and 5. As the respondents were young people who were willing to participate in the study and fulfilled the criteria of 'being in the JWT group', they could not be regarded as being statistically representative of young people as a whole. Parents' engagement in the research was secured through contact established with the young person. Eight face-to-face interviews were conducted separately with parents in their own homes.

Representatives of seventeen employers (from seven companies in Warwickshire and ten companies in Tees Valley) were interviewed by telephone in the Autumn of 2007. The sample was drawn from contacts provided by local Connexions offices, which work on a regular basis with local employers (eleven interviews), as well as from young people who were willing to pass on their employer's details (six interviews).

The other source of data is the evaluation of the Learning Agreement Pilot (LAP), which was administered jointly by Connexions and the local Learning and Skills Council in eight pilot areas in England. The pilot ran from April 2006 to July 2009. The initiative was targeted at young people aged 16-17 who were working but not engaged in any accredited training. A Learning Agreement outlined the accredited training that the young person was undertaking and was drawn up between a Connexions Personal Adviser, the young person and their employer. All training costs were met within LAP and, in some areas, wage compensation and bonus payments were also paid.

The large-scale longitudinal evaluation had three main strands. Firstly, a quantitative study used surveys of young people to measure the impact of the pilots in comparison to a number of control areas; secondly, a programme theory element focused on testing some key aspects of the policy to identify what worked, what did not and the reasons for this; and finally, a process evaluation examined the ways in which the pilots have been set up and delivered and the main issues associated with their implementation. This article will focus primarily on findings from the process evaluation. In total, three visits were made to each pilot area and 230 interviews were conducted with Connexions managers and operational staff, employers and training providers (Maguire et al, 2009).

Young people in JWT

Both studies highlighted a significant problem in terms of defining and tracking the JWT group. The LAP was perceived to be offering Connexions services the incentive to become more involved with young people who had entered jobs without training (JWT) and who, in recent years, had not been a strategic priority. However, substantial gaps in knowledge about the accuracy and efficiency of the data stored on the JWT group were exposed. The main tool used to identify the target population of young people was the CCIS database, for which, Connexions services followed up all 16-year olds by telephone during the first three months following the completion of their compulsory schooling. For the first cohort of young people eligible for LAP, destinations data was collected at least six months prior to the beginning of the pilot and the data stored on the JWT group was reported to be inaccurate since large numbers of young people had moved into alternative destinations or could not be traced. Furthermore, attention focused on contacting young people who had been defined as in JWT at the time the destination survey was conducted, thereby taking no account of young people who had entered other destinations, such as full-time education or work with training, unless they had been informed by young people themselves or other PAs, that they had subsequently entered the JWT group. Connexions personnel reported that the exercise in tracking young people in the JWT group had alerted them to the need for ongoing, rather than one-off follow-up, for all groups of young people, not only those who were defined as NEET (Maguire et al, 2008b).

Evidence from the qualitative study in Tees Valley and Warwickshire also demonstrated the complexities involved in identifying and tracking young people in the JWT group. In total, 325 telephone calls were made to young people in Warwickshire, to secure a sample of 14 interviews. In Middlesbrough, the research team made a total of 625 telephone calls to young people to achieve 22 interviews (see Table 1). Difficulties in securing a sample of young people in JWT included: problems in establishing contact with young people, which comprised 27 per cent of the sample; a lack of willingness among some young people to take part in the research (25 per cent

of sample); and inaccurate data within CCIS, specifically in relation to incorrect contact details for young people (14 per cent of sample).

Table 1 to be inserted here

In addition, a number of young people who were categorised as 'in JWT', were found to be ineligible to take part in the research because they had changed their status since the CCIS data had been prepared (13 per cent of sample). In total, interviews were conducted with 17 per cent of the sample of young people that was provided by the Connexions Services. Interviews were arranged with a further four per cent of the sample, who either cancelled or failed to attend for interview[3].

Identifying eligible young people to participate in the research and securing their participation was more problematic than had been anticipated. It significantly prolonged the recruitment phase of the project and the search to secure the sample was demanding in terms of staff resources. However, it did result in the achievement of a random sample of young people who were classified as being in JWT, which was the objective of the study. While an extensive search was undertaken for a relatively small sample of young people, the target number of forty interviews was nearly secured.

The absence of any system of regular tracking of young people in the JWT group by Connexions staff emanates from a lack of prioritisation about this group of young people within targets set for Connexions at national level. With an emphasis on raising participation rates in post-16 full-time learning and tackling the needs of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), young people who entered jobs without training (JWT), have not been a strategic priority in recent years (Maguire et al 2008a). Consequently, it is very difficult to assess and to

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[3] In total, 204 names and contact details of young people in JWT were provided.

meet the needs of a group of young people, if so little is known about their characteristics and requirements.

The characteristics of young people in JWT

The sample of young people interviewed in Tees Valley and Warwickshire provides an insight into the lives of some young people in the JWT population. Most of the respondents were in their first year beyond statutory schooling and therefore their experiences of school, teachers and learning were very recent. Interviews with the key informant group and an examination of existing literature suggested that young people in JWT would be very similar, in terms of their characteristics, to young people in the NEET (not in education, employment or training) group - i.e. low academic achievers with poor school records in terms of attendance and school completion at the end of Year 11, together with negative attitudes towards learning (Middleton et al, 2003, Anderson et al, 2006 and Spielhofer et al, 2007). This was not borne out by the evidence from the interviews. However, due to the difficulties in securing a sample, which were outlined earlier, it may have precluded some young people who fell into this category.

The majority of young people in the sample had completed Year 11 and had taken and passed GCSEs. The range of attainment at GSCE varied enormously from a broad range of subjects at A-C grades at GCSE, to one GCSE pass at Grade E. Perceptions about school ranged from 'good' to 'alright' to 'hating it', while almost all felt that they could have done better in terms of their examination results. Parents reported generally positive views about their son/daughter's education and were satisfied with their level of attainment. Despite the higher than expected levels of academic attainment within the sample, young people themselves felt that they were not high achievers. Some respondents described themselves as being 'practical' rather than 'academic', which may have been to mask a lack of confidence about their academic attainment

or because they believed they could achieve their potential more successfully through work and/or training. .

> *Yes, sort of now I know that I don't need to go to college to get on in life. I know that there is a way to work and do training…. I was no good at school, no good at writing, couldn't really spell….now I know I'm learning.'*
>
> (Engineering operative/apprentice with GCSE grades B/C/D earned £4.25 per hour)

Respondents were asked to talk about the sources of information and guidance they had drawn on while still at school. Connexions is a familiar brand among young people (Coles et al, 2004)) and parents and had been a source of guidance and support for the majority of young people in the sample. Most were positive about Connexions, having had contact with Connexions advisers both during and after completing Year 11. In contrast, parents had felt marginalised from any involvement with Connexions and some would have welcomed more engagement with the agency. While some parents had been hesitant about their son or daughter leaving school at the end of Year 11, or at the early stages of their post-16 education, because of uncertainty about the range of employment and training opportunities available, they had supported their decisions to leave full-time education. Parents offered a great deal of practical and emotional support in confirming and supporting young people's choices, and this was widely acknowledged and appreciated. In contrast, teachers were reported to have had little impact on young people's choices.

Young people had looked for employment in their local area, which, for the majority, was defined by their ability to travel to and from work from their parents' home. They had no immediate plans to leave home or the area. Social networks and, especially, other family members, had been important for young people in terms of both indentifying and securing employment opportunities. This confirms the findings of Green and White (2007), who found that social networks and place

attachment shaped how young people saw the world. Social networks gave some young people strong advantages in the labour market, with family and friends providing valuable sources of support and attachment to place often determining decisions about life choices, including where young people would seek work (Green and White, 2007). Skegg argues that spatial and social mobility increasingly defines an individual's social class. The modern middle class 'self' is defined as a highly mobile individual, while the working class 'self' is defined through attachment to a local area of community, that is, geographical and special fixity (Skeggs, 2004:112).

Why do young people go into work at 16?

Young people cited a range of motivations for finding work at the end of Year 11. In addition, it was widely asserted by many local and national policy makers, in the key informant group, that young people in JWT were 'churners', in that they had turbulent employment records and shifted regularly between employment and unemployment. This definition only applied to a small number of our sample, although the young people in the study cannot be assumed to be representative of the JWT population per se. A typology was developed to help explain the motivations of young people entering JWT, with respondents falling into three broad categories: 'Taking a year out'; 'Making a career'; and 'Doing odd jobs'. Spielhofer et al identified three sub-groups within the JWT population, which mirrors this typology. These were: 'transitional in JWT', which included young people looking to re-engage in education and training; 'sustained in JWT', defined young people in work who were settled in employment: and 'at risk in JWT' which described young people in precarious employment, who were at the greatest risk of becoming NEET. The study comprised a much larger sample of 120 qualitative interviews with young people currently or previously NEET or in the JWT group and an analysis of Youth Cohort

Study (YCS) data, which included 1,878 young people who were in JWT (using YCS definitions[4]) (Speilhofer et al, 2009).

- **Taking a year out**

Despite the level of guidance and advice that they had accessed and about which they had generally been positive, some young people had intended to move into full-time post-16 education and, for a number of reasons, had failed to make the transition. Being unable to find a course they wanted, applying too late, courses being fully subscribed, or course tutors being unwilling to accept their applications because GCSE results were lower than expected, were cited as reasons for leaving full-time learning. A common feature among young people who had 'failed to make the grade' for their chosen course was that they were offered alternative provision, which, in some instances, did not resemble the course for which they had initially applied. In Warwickshire, the prospect of travelling to a college across the county, thereby involving a considerable journey time, had also deterred take-up among some young people.

> *'I needed four Cs altogether for the course I wanted to do and I didn't get them, so they dropped me to another course but I didn't want to do that course. It was only a year long, then I decided the travelling was a lot.'*

> (Worked part-time in retail with GCSEs earned £4.48 per hour)

For some, finding a job and being in employment was 'marking time until next September', when they would be able to access the provision they wanted. In general, their employers were not aware that they regarded their job as a temporary measure until they returned to full-time learning. Young people in the 'year out' group did not necessarily hold the highest Year 11 attainment levels among the sample.

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[4] YCS defines being in JWT as being in full-time or part-time employment and not having received any training in the past four weeks.

Those taking a year out also included young people who sought employment until they joined the armed services or fire service at 17 or 18.

- **Making a career**

For a substantial proportion of young people, finishing school, and finding a job which offered training and financial independence, had been a positive move. While the majority could not see themselves staying in their current job 'for ever', they valued the training they received and the experience gained from working for a living. Included within this group were some young people who had started college courses and dropped out. They were clustered within the retail, engineering and business administration sectors. These respondents did not perceive themselves as being 'disadvantaged' or 'insecure' in comparison with their counterparts who had remained in full-time learning. They spoke positively about the benefits of working, in particular the changes in self-image they derived from being away from the classroom and in an environment where their skills and abilities were being utilised, valued and extended. In turn, their employers and parents did not regard them as 'marginal workers' or 'failures', but as young recruits who had the potential to build upon their skills and abilities within an applied training environment. These findings resonate with the studies of the youth labour and training markets which were conducted in the 1970s and 1980s, and identified labour market segments, in which some young people accessed good quality training and development (Ashton et al, 1982, Roberts et al, 1986, Lee et al, 1987, and Raffe, 1990). A key difference was that young people now operate in an 'open' labour market - one in which they compete for jobs and training with all age groups.

- **Doing odd jobs**

Young people in this group fulfilled the stereotypical image of those who are classified as 'in JWT', having low levels of Year 11 attainment and turbulent trajectories before and since

leaving school, including time spent at school or college, on training programmes, doing different jobs and being unemployed (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005; Bradley, 2005). While the value they attached to education and training was high, their personal experiences had clouded their views about their own abilities to progress through this route. Therefore, having a job was more about 'earning money', which fulfilled their immediate needs. Work involved cleaning, re-cycling, sales work and catering (fast food), training was minimal and wage rates were generally lower than for the other two groups. Going back into education or training involved 'taking risks', not only in terms of the drop in income that would result from leaving work, but also in terms of the apprehension and insecurity felt about what this might involve. This 'fear of failure' is a significant finding, in that it should alert policy makers to the need for support for young people, as well as for financial incentives and attractive provision, in order to encourage and sustain their participation in formal learning or training activity.

> *'Like the bloke from Connexions said, I have a brain but I don't know how to use it… I wanted to learn me joinery but now I've just lost it…It's dropping down from over £200 odd a week to £30, It's a big drop but perhaps I'm willing to take it.'*
>
> (Worked in re-cycling, attained GCSEs and earned £200+ per week)

Routes into employment

Young people find work through a variety of routes (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005). A key finding from the qualitative study was the importance of family and friends in helping to secure employment. Some were working in family businesses (in particular in South Warwickshire), at the same firm as their parent(s) or being recommended for employment by a family member or friend. In contrast, placement into employment by Connexions, Job Centres or employment agencies was not commonplace. Young people were enterprising in their efforts to find work, including walking around shopping centres and offices, dropping off their CVs, responding to

numerous job adverts in newspapers and magazines, and looking for and responding to job adverts in shop windows, as well as 'door knocking'. For some, part-time jobs held in Year 11 had led to full-time work, particularly in the retail and catering sectors.

School-leavers in this group were functioning within a labour market which is essentially open to all age groups, since employers can no longer openly recruit young people into specific types of work. The only 'advantage' they appeared to have derived was from informal networks, which, in some cases, had helped them to access work and associated training. Employers did not demand educational qualifications as a pre-requisite to entry, regardless of the level of training that was subsequently on offer. Selection procedures were described as being fairly relaxed, usually entailing an interview with a manager and, less typically, selection testing, such as verbal reasoning or numeracy assessments.

Employment usually entailed working full-time. Within the retail sector, a number of young people were employed on a part-time basis, with their weekly hours, and hence their earnings varying, depending on the number of hours they were required to work. While some were hoping to secure full-time employment with their employers, others welcomed the flexibility that their part-time working offered.

Training activity

Another significant finding from this study was the extent and range of training that was provided for young people who were classified as 'in JWT', and the importance and value that was attached to training activity by both young people and their employers. Training activity fell into three distinct categories: induction and Health and Safety; in-house training; and externally accredited training.

Induction and Health and Safety training offered basic training and constituted a minimum of two hours of 'being shown the ropes' by another member of staff, to a maximum of two days' entitlement, which entailed some on-the-job, as well as off-the-training, as in watching videos and attending oral presentations. In addition, young people in the 'taking a year out' and 'making a career' groups were much more likely to have received, or were in the process of receiving, further in-house training and were positive about it. Within the retail sector, the use of training manuals, which enabled young people to progress their training activity alongside their practical on-the-job work experience was in evidence across all retailers within the sample. The completion of training manuals brought with it bonus and/or pay increases (which were usually quite small), as well as the possibility of promotion. Respondents also recognised that they would use their training record to gain employment with other retail companies, thus illustrating that the training they received was transferable. There was no evidence to suggest that young people or their employers felt that their training was 'second rate' to that which was offered within government supported training provision or within full-time vocational learning.

> '..with your books it's a good opportunity for everyone to really show that they can do things. Also, there's a bonus at the end of every book and you get a pay rise…it's an incentive to try to do better.'
> (Worked in retail, attained GCSEs and earned £6.04p per hour)

Working for money?

Our findings do not support those of other studies, which have asserted that young people in JWT are working for solely financial returns (Anderson et al, 2006; Spielhofer et al, 2007). Money was rarely the prime motivator for moving into employment, although earning money was recognised to have brought with it increased independence, which many were now reluctant to give up. Being less dependent on their parents and having the ability to 'pay their way' were important to young people. Money enabled many of them, particularly those in the rural

Warwickshire sample, to further their independence in terms of supporting the costs of driving lessons and buying a car.

> *'Not at first really, because when you are at school, you're not used to having money and things and then you get money. I have always wanted to do my driving lessons, as soon as I was 17, that's what I wanted to go straight in for. ......I have a good quality of life, because I can go out every weekend and stuff, but money is important now, I couldn't go back to the way it was before.'*

> (Clerical Officer with GCSEs Cs and Ds and earned £12,177 per annum)

Awareness about the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), which offers financial support for young people in full-time post-16 learning, was high. Most young people believed they were ineligible to receive EMA because of their parents' income, although most had never applied. There was no evidence to suggest that they were under pressure from their parents to earn money and to contribute to household income. Most did, in fact, 'pay board', although they perceived this to be a further measure of their independence from their parents, as opposed to something they were obliged to do. Furthermore, there was some uncertainty about the economic returns from participation in full-time post-16 learning among young people, their parents and employers, which was enough to persuade some young people that it may be too great a risk to leave work and return to full-time learning.

A solution to some young people's unwillingness to return to full-time learning could be to introduce formalised learning and training activity alongside their working lives and it was on the basis of this assumption that the Learning Agreement Pilot (LAP) was launched. The LAP was initially aligned to the principle that it was to be 'young person' focused. It was designed to offer, wherever possible, flexible, personalised and responsive provision to meet the needs of the young person and, where applicable, their employer, as well as progression routes for the young person to achieve, if appropriate, higher-level qualifications (LSC, 2005).

The policy 'fix' – The Learning Agreement Pilot (LAP)

In the absence of any substantive knowledge about, or accurate assessment of, the JWT population, the LAP was launched in April 2006. The LAP offered Connexions Services the incentive to become more involved with young people who had entered JWT and who, in recent years, had not been a strategic priority. Joint delivery responsibility for the LAP also demanded that Connexions and local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) staff work together to manage the implementation of the initiative. In some cases, this was a new venture. It was widely believed that considerable movement or 'churning' took place among young people in the NEET and JWT groups. This was largely attributed to the assumed nature and content of the employment available to young people in JWT and to the low level of aspirations that were felt to exist among those in the NEET group. Population sizes had been over-estimated and delivery targets had to be more closely aligned to local estimates of the number of young people in JWT, which, in all cases, was significantly lower than national calculations. Throughout the two-year pilot phase, staffing figures had been re-profiled downwards in response to reduced population sizes and to lower than anticipated take-up of LAP (Maguire et al, 2008b).

LAP managers realised during the first year of the pilot that the role of 'LAP Adviser' was very different to that of the generic Personal Adviser (PA) operating within mainstream Connexions Services. PAs focused on working with young people and had received generic training to recognise and empathise with their personal needs. However, the delivery of LAP required a different set of skills, which included 'selling' the concept of LAP to both young people and employers, and many areas had initially struggled to recruit staff who could effectively work with both client groups. As a consequence, in some areas where LAP staff were employed or redeployed from existing Connexions personnel, problems were reported in relation to their ability and confidence in working with employers and, to a lesser extent, in having the diagnostic

skills to identify the learning and training needs of young people in the labour market (Maguire et al, 2008b).

At its inception, the principles underpinning LAP were that the pilot would focus on encouraging young people who were working but not engaged in any accredited training, to do so. The training needs of their employers were also expected to be considered. Many respondents from Connexions, local LSCs and providers felt that these objectives, representing a 'learner led' agenda, had largely been displaced by an increasing focus on driving qualification attainment within LAP, including learning that either directly equated to, or contributed towards a full Level 2 entitlement, ie an Apprenticeship outcome. LAP was described as being less creative and more prescriptive than was originally envisaged.

The delivery of LAP showed that one-to-one engagement with a young person and to a lesser extent their employer, was the key to their participation. Many young people emphasised the central role of their adviser in encouraging them to re-engage with learning. In addition, the key to retaining them on LAP was the continued support they received from LAP advisers, training providers and their employers. The findings point to the significant role that LAP advisers had in both initiating and sustaining the participation of young people in training. Furthermore, the dialogue between the young person, the provider, the employer and the adviser was the key to keeping them on track and confident about their programmes of learning (Hillage et al, 2009).

Attempting to meet the needs of both young people and, as far as possible, their employers, within the parameters of Learning and Skills Council's (LSCs) learning aims database (Section 96) was a complex arrangement to deliver. While the database consists of a large volume of qualifications, the lack of accessibility and availability of many of these qualifications in most pilot areas, in effect, seriously restricted choice. Moreover, some training providers were unwilling to provide 'one off' courses to young people on a demand-led basis, as it was deemed uneconomic to do so. The vexing issue of how to reconcile these competing demands from

young people, employers and providers within LAP policy proved challenging for its implementation. The pilots also had to contend with the delivery of a complex policy arrangement targeted at a segment of the youth labour market where there was the lack of information about the characteristics of young people in JWT and their employers (Maguire et al, 2008b).

Despite these issues, significant progress had been made during the second year of the pilot. While flexibility over provision remained an issue, training providers who could adapt their training delivery to support specific needs had been identified. In addition, Connexions staff had developed greater confidence in working directly with training providers in order to broker provision. The key to retaining young people on LAP was the continued support they received from LAP advisers, training providers and their employers. Young people who had support from their employer, as well as from their PA, were reported to have higher retention and completion rates. However, take-up rates remained lower than anticipated and the quantitative evaluation of LAP showed that the programme had demonstrated only a modest effect on learning activity among the JWT population (Hillage et al, 2009). Consequently the LAP ceased to be operational from July 2009.

Conclusions

There is little known about young people in JWT, due to the delivery of Apprenticeships being the main priority of policy priority within the youth labour market in recent years. In the context of the Raise the Participation Age agenda, this appears to be an alarming oversight, which is exacerbated by: a) the absence of a robust destination system to provide accurate evidence about the types of work that young people in JWT enter; and b) the lack of an infrastructure to support their transition into the labour market or to recognise their learning or training needs once in employment. Without such knowledge, the introduction of the RPA will struggle to address the needs of this significant group of young people.

The qualitative study of young people demonstrated that the JWT group is not homogeneous, but comprises a number of different segments whose members are characterised by differing labour market experiences and personal ambitions. This confirms the findings of many studies which have now been completed on young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) (SEU,1999; Rennison et al., 2005; Coles et al., 2002., Sachdev et al., 2006) and the limited emerging evidence on the JWT group (Spielhofer et al, 2009). Common features amongst the sample for the qualitative study were their lack of confidence in their academic achievements and, all too often, their negative school experiences. Importantly, young people in 'JWT' do not recognise the label or the associations which have been assigned to it. Moreover, the findings suggest that young people do not enter the labour market simply for money, although they soon become accustomed to the benefits of a regular income. Therefore, if a policy of preventing early labour market entry is to be pursued, this should be facilitated by a far more sophisticated and informed understanding of the implications for those currently termed JWT.

Clearly, the use and application of the term "JWT" requires urgent re-evaluation. From the limited amount of data that is available, it is apparent that there is a significant amount of work-based training activity which falls outside the accredited training framework. In addition, many young people who are categorised as in JWT do not appear to consider early labour market entry as a second rate destination, nor do they align themselves closely with the NEET group, in terms of failing to make 'successful' post-16 transitions. In essence, too many assumptions are being made about young people in JWT on the basis of scant evidence.

Despite its good intentions, LAP failed to deliver the volume of learners expected, due to the absence of a rigorous appraisal of the needs of the JWT group and their employers prior to the introduction of any policy intervention. Furthermore, delivery of the policy was hampered by a lack of clarity about what the policy was expected to achieve, most notably whether the needs of both employers and young people could realistically be met within the same initiative. While one-

to-one engagement with a young person and, to a lesser extent, their employer, was the key to their participation in LAP, a much wider range of support should be established for young people who choose early labour market entry, including advice and guidance on local labour market opportunities, job placement support and in-work advice on their future learning and training needs.

It is also evident that considerable improvement in the status and career prospects of those currently designated as JWT could be achieved by the introduction of some form of accreditation in sectors or organisations where significant amounts of in-house training are already being delivered. This would certainly be preferable to a policy of persuading young people and employers to take part in other forms of training and development, which may be less relevant and meaningful.

A more draconian alternative to tinkering with the status quo, as far as JWT is concerned, would be to legislate to prevent early labour market entry outside of an Apprenticeship framework. However, this would bring with it the danger of young people entering an unregulated, informal economy, where the demand for their labour becomes even more precarious to calculate.

It might be the case that the current recession provides the answer to the JWT 'problem' by removing altogether the current demand for young workers. Unfortunately, not only are we unable to predict, with any certainty how the British economy will develop in the coming years, but also we currently know so little about the structure and functioning of the labour market in which young people operate outside of the Apprenticeship frameworks, that it would be disingenuous to believe that we could forecast the impact of broader economic trends. It might be that the availability of jobs for school leavers returns to its current position, once the economy moves out of recession. What we do know is that any attempt at crystal ball gazing is made even more perilous by the absence of data and understanding relating to the present JWT population of young people.

The rationale for the introduction of the RPA was summed up in the following quotation:

> *'We have a duty to prepare all young people for a labour market which will be radically different to the one their parents faced. Raising the age until which a young person must participate in some form of education and training would go a long way towards meeting this challenge.'*
>
> (Alan Johnson, former Secretary of State, Department for Education and Skills, (2007) 'Raising Expectations: staying in education and training post-16' p3.)

In preparation for a post-RPA era, policy makers should formally recognise the existence of early labour market entry outside of Apprenticeship delivery, rather than to try to eradicate it altogether. This would have the effect of improving engagement with young people who wish to join the labour market or are already in JWT. Crucially, it would need to be underpinned by other measures in order to make a real impact on the aspirations of young people and the opportunities available to them.

Firstly, resources should be put into the recruitment of guidance and support workers who are both confident in dealing with employers and competent in their understanding of the needs of young people in the labour market.

Secondly, there needs to be a greater degree of flexibility within the qualification framework in order to produce a more attractive learning offer to all young workers, as well as to ensure that providers, most notably colleges, are required to adapt their delivery arrangements to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse cohort of learners.

Finally, support to meet the learning and training needs of young people in the labour market needs to be located within guidance services, which are well-resourced and which have a clear identity within local authority structures.

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