

The Great Reversal

Young People, Education and Employment in a Declining Economy

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Second
Edition

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Introduction

Coalition education ministers David Willetts and Michael Gove are working hand-in-glove to return English education to the 1950s – this time with a ‘neoliberal flavour’. Imposed upon the public without any electoral mandate, their *Great Reversal* is a social as well as an educational project. It aims to revert to an age when everybody supposedly knew their place – and when education’s function was to keep them there! This was before attempts to make society more equal and less unfair through state education by introducing comprehensive secondary schools, progressive primaries and expanded further and higher education in the 1960s and ’70s.

The Coalition government’s neoliberal project for education as a whole, as for other formerly publicly owned and democratically accountable services, also reverses the previous tendency – or at least theoretical commitment – towards national state control over the private sector. In a global economy it seeks to free private enterprise to intrude further into state education and provide services for citizens who are thus reduced to consumers.

The most worrying evidence which this book gives is how far Gove and Willetts’ *Great Reversal* has already gone in England today and how little opposition it has encountered. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers warned in a 2011 pamphlet, *The future of state education: how everything you value is disappearing*: ‘Make no mistake: if these

changes are implemented by the end of this parliamentary term [in 2015], the state education system as we know it will have disappeared forever' (p.1). There has been only limited response from the teacher unions however, although Gove is now confronting them directly with his expressed intention to end the established pattern of pay progression up a national scale.

Similarly, although the trebling of English undergraduate fees in 2010 provoked large student demonstrations, joined in spring 2011 by sixth-form and FE college students protesting at loss of their Educational Maintenance Allowances, these quickly subsided, as did academic support for them, leaving only so far eloquent if ineffective campaigning bodies for the defence of the public universities (e.g. Holmwood 2011). The University and College Union declares its determination to fight on a case-by-case basis the inevitable course closures and redundancies that have already begun in higher education and which have been on-going in further education for the past 20 years. Again though, there is no coordinated response by parents, teachers and students across sectors to the changes being inflicted on state education at all levels.

In part, the lack of recognition by a wider public is because the scope and scale of what has already been introduced and the audacity and far-reaching nature of what is further intended has not been understood and yet education is changing out of recognition before our eyes. In part, it is because the Coalition builds on previous New Labour marketization of education and training. Like Blair, Willetts and Gove present their moves towards further privatization of England's schools, colleges and universities as 'modernization'. They claim it will liberate consumers so

that standards will automatically improve driven by individual choice and without ‘political’ interference by the state. As we show, these are dishonest claims because *The Great Reversal* can only disadvantage the majority at the expense of an already advantaged minority.

Already, education for many students – not to mention their parents – has become a competitive ‘positional good’ necessary for any hopes of transition to independent adult life. Tony Blair and Gordon Brown’s promises that the global economy would allow ‘more room at the top’ for those who were qualified proved hollow as the fortunes of the UK economy continued to decline. Now this ‘relative’ decline has been compounded by a double-dip – maybe soon to be a triple-dip – recession, which at the beginning of 2013 shows little sign of abating. A so-called *Lost Generation* of overqualified and underemployed school, college and university leavers has emerged – with many young people experiencing the education system as like trying to run up a downwards escalator, where you have to go faster and faster just to stand still. This leads us to the substance of this book.

Chapter 1 documents the true extent of young people’s labour market predicament today. We argue that not only is there no clear link between education and improved national economic performance but that we can’t ‘educate our way out of recession’, as many policy makers still seem to assume. It is true that the continued flat-lining of the economy has resulted in a further contraction in opportunities for young people; but the downturn has also intensified longer term changes in labour market conditions that we describe. For example, the continued fall in the importance of manufacturing industry, a sector that had previously provided ‘youth jobs’, has given way to a service economy

where low-paid, low-skill, part-time and ‘casual’ jobs are replacing secure and well-paid careers.

The latest applications of automation and information technology have also reached up the employment hierarchy to reduce large areas of professional work towards the conditions of waged labour – para-professions at best. So, instead of professionalising the proletariat, widening participation to higher education has disguised a proletarianisation of the professions, including notably the teaching profession in schools, colleges and universities. In place of opportunities for upward mobility, young people face a future of low-paid, part-time work in a ‘pear shaped’ occupational structure with rising inequalities in which *The real trend in social mobility* as Ken Roberts (2013) identifies is *from upwards to downwards*.

Chapter 2 assesses the curriculum and examination changes proposed for the upper years of secondary school and for higher education. Education Secretary Gove seeks to tighten the selection of a minority through cramming for more academic exams. Likewise, Higher Education Minister Willetts wants to reduce the numbers going on from school and FE to university. While simultaneously raising what they now call the ‘participation age’ to 17 this year and 18 in 2015, these two are reversing the widening participation to education which was rolled out to nearly half of 18+ year-olds under New Labour.

Such a speedy reversal in policy is unprecedented. Peddling illusions that reintroducing a grammar school curriculum will restart the limited upward social mobility that existed in a growing post-war economy and developing welfare state after the war, Michael Gove wrongly blames

comprehensive schools for bringing this period to an end. We show that the main consequence of Gove's GCSE reforms, despite his back-track on Ebacc, will be to reduce the number of students passing and consolidate a two tier system of state schooling heightened by Gove's expansion of academies and 'free' schools. Likewise, policies for restoring A-level as a 'gold standard' will widen divisions between particular subjects and different groups of students.

The chapter also discusses the implications of tripling undergraduate tuition fees. Designed to save money while promoting a market in institutions driven by 'student choice', the increased cost of HE is also intended to 'price out' many students. At the same time, the Coalition promotes apprenticeships as an alternative but, in contrast to the 'time-serving' schemes of before, no progression to employment is guaranteed. It is the absence of work, particularly the disappearance of specific 'youth jobs' that has been the reason for young people seeing little alternative but to stay in full-time education for longer. The chapter concludes by outlining the conditions for a new 'correspondence' between education and the economy. It puts this in the context of a recomposition of the class structure.

Chapter 3 argues that because education can no longer meet employment aspirations, then, rather than promoting any serious social mobility, its main purpose is increasing social control over youth. Whether Gove and Willetts recognize it or not, from primary to postgraduate schools, this is robbing education of its meaning for teachers and taught alike. This is a crisis for the whole of society but especially for its future generations. As a result, we suggest that – even though alternatives are needed in education – they must be combined

with more general social and economic policies to resolve the generational crisis in the interests of young people and the future of society. Indeed, the increasing inability of education to meet young people's aspirations implies that a different type of learning is necessary if education is to maintain any legitimacy in the lives of future generations.

In seeking to provide both an examination and an explanation of the workings of the Coalition's new learning policy and its relation to the economy and labour market, the book develops, expands and updates arguments about education made in our previous publication *Education make you fick, innit?* (Allen and Ainley 2007) but also about the worsening situation of young people in *Lost Generation? New strategies for youth and education* (Ainley and Allen 2010) and in our previous e-book: *Why young people can't get the jobs they want and the education they need* (Allen and Ainley 2012). Like these books, this short study integrates an interdisciplinary approach to education at all levels. This is essential to imagining an alternative to the current moribund economic system and for developing an education system that, instead of reinforcing the present, critically learns from the past in order to survive in the future.

Chapter 1

‘Overqualified and underemployed’ Young people and economic decline

Introduction

Even though many teachers and lecturers would argue that education should be about more than just improving employment opportunities, or increasing levels of social mobility, for most young people and their parents education has become primarily a ‘positional good’ – something to be pursued because it allows you to ‘get on’ in the future. This is what governments have continued to promise; but, despite being the most highly qualified generation ever, employment prospects for today’s young people are the worst ever.

Youth unemployment has remained at around the one million mark for a year and more –approaching one in five of all ‘economically active’ 16-24 year olds. In the UK, youth unemployment statistics also include students who are looking for work, but figures for those not in full-time education still produce dismal reading: well over 15% for 16-24 year olds, twice the figure for adult unemployment as a whole – with government figures showing a million NEETs (young people ‘Not in education, employment or training’).

Youth ‘underemployment’, where the job being done is not commensurate with the qualifications held, is much more difficult to measure, but is as significant as youth joblessness. Meanwhile, the number of young people remaining in full-time education because of

the absence of work cannot be accurately estimated either, since official falls in youth joblessness invariably coincide with increases in the number of full-time students.¹

So, despite years of schooling and hours of cramming to gain important exams, why are young people still all dressed up with nowhere to go? This chapter provides some explanations. It rejects the argument that young people's employment problems are merely the result of the inadequacies or the failures of the education system, arguing that, despite the assumptions of some politicians and employer representatives, we can't educate our way out of recession. Instead, it argues that the declining position of young people in the labour market is the result of long term structural changes in the economy. These are changes that the current economic downturn has significantly intensified.

Youth unemployment: national and international

Youth unemployment is now an international problem existing in countries with very different education systems. While *Eurostat* measures show that there are now 18.5 million people without jobs in the 17 countries sharing the Euro (*Guardian* 01/11/12), the figures also show that youth joblessness in Europe, has risen to 23.3%, up from 21% only a year ago and hitting a new level in Spain of 54.2%. Greece records a similar figure. According to an EU report (*The Guardian*

¹www.radicalized.wordpress.com/2012/11/16/youth-unemployment-falls-but-less-are-working/

22/10/12), European NEETs have also reached record levels, making up 15% of all EU youth and costing 3 billion Euros a week in state welfare and lost production. Ireland is estimated to have lost 2.8% of its output due to inactive young adults in 2011; Greece lost 3.28% and Poland 2.04%. The UK lost 1%. 73% of EU NEETs have had no experience of work at all. In addition, 42% of young Europeans are in temporary employment and 30% are only working part-time.

International Labour Organisation (ILO) statistics record a 4.6% increase in youth unemployment in developed countries between 2008 and 2010². The ILO also argues that there is now an increasing tendency for young people to ‘drop out’ of the labour market altogether to become ‘economically inactive’ rather than ‘unemployed’. Or they may join the burgeoning and unregulated economy that is off the books, wheeling and dealing, bartering and paying no tax – at best mutually supportive, at worst open to gangsterism and extreme exploitation. The ILO found 2.6 million fewer young people in the European labour market compared with what would have been expected. In Ireland, for instance, where youth unemployment is already over 30%, the ILO estimated the figure would be almost 20 percentage points higher if those young people ‘hiding out’ were included.

The ILO also reports that in nearly half of the countries examined, the risk of ‘social unrest’ amongst young people has been rising as a result of growing anger about the lack of jobs, while Paul Mason (2012) provides convincing evidence that ‘graduates with no future’ were catalysts in the revolutions in Egypt and other Arab countries. Research on the English 2011 riots commissioned by London School of

²www.ila.org/publns

Economics and *The Guardian* (12/08/12), though highlighting a general hostility towards the police as a key motive, also emphasised the importance of unemployment and increased inequality in leading to a rejection of ‘legitimate’ ways of earning a living.

Graduates and non-graduates

Mason is right to emphasise the changing characteristics of youth joblessness, as media reports now regularly focus on the increasing numbers of unemployed graduates. In 2011, The Association of Graduate Recruiters reported 79 applicants for every graduate vacancy and 80% of employers only prepared to recruit those with a 2.1 or a first³. A Warwick University study (Purcell & Elias 2008) tracking 17,000 university students in the first cohort to pay the previous £3,000 tuition fees, reported that some 30 months following graduation, 10% had experienced significant periods of unemployment. A report commissioned for the Association of Accounting Technicians (2011) showed 20% of 2010/11 graduates out of work⁴. Hopes of an improvement in graduate opportunities have been dashed by recent figures showing employers not meeting their employment targets with big falls in the banking and accountancy sectors (*Independent* 14/01/13).

It is always difficult to establish the true extent of graduate and post-graduate unemployment because of the large numbers who, unable to

³ www.agr.org.uk

⁴ www.aat.org.uk/about-aat/press-releases/after-swotting-its-back-washing

find ‘a graduate job’, are forced to take up non-graduate employment instead. 40% of the Warwick sample reported they remain in non-graduate positions, whilst the Higher Education Statistics Agency also recorded that the number of graduates in ‘elementary occupations’, such as cleaning and labouring, had doubled from 5,460 to 10,270 in the last five years⁵. Figures from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) also reveal a third of graduates going into low paid/lower skilled jobs up from one in four a decade ago⁶. The AAT report referred to earlier estimates that of those new graduates who were in employment, 40% are estimated to be in non-graduate jobs.

Contrary to popular perceptions, only about half of all science graduates find work that requires their scientific expertise. According to researchers at Birmingham University, six months after leaving university, only 46% of engineering graduates and 55% of those from physics and chemistry backgrounds were in work related to their degrees. According to Professor Emma Smith, one of the Birmingham researchers, ‘the shortage thesis is wrong – there are no jobs waiting’ (*Guardian* 08/09/2011). As this sort of ‘trading down’ becomes the norm, a consequence is that more and more jobs effectively become ‘graduatised’ without any significant change in their skills and knowledge requirements.

The increasing number of ‘Gringos’ (graduates in non-graduate occupations – Blenkinsop and Scurry 2007) means that other young people are in turn ‘bumped down the jobs queue’ into still less

⁵www.independent.co.uk 29/06/12

⁶www.timeshighereducation.co.uk 29/05/12

remunerated and still more insecure jobs. This helps to explain why 70% of the American workforce who do not have a degree have seen their entry level wage drop from \$13 to \$11 per hour between 1973 and 2005 (Brown, Lauder and Ashton 2011, 116), while those without qualifications in the UK are four times more likely to be unemployed than those with degrees.

Graduates and post-graduates increasingly depend on ‘internships’ for entry to permanent employment (Perlin 2011); the Chartered Institute of Personnel Managers claiming that out of 70,000 internships in 2011, between 10,000 and 15,000 were completely unpaid (*Guardian* 05/11/11). In 2011 the prominent high street chain Topshop was exposed for paying graduates on month-long ‘work experience secondments’ just £3.50 a day (*Observer* 09/10/11). According to graduate consultancy High Flyers⁷ up to a third of 2012 graduate vacancies will be filled by those who have completed an internship. This is despite a situation where thousands of interns could be entitled to at least the minimum wage of £6.19 per hour for those over 21, as legally they are deemed to have ‘added value’ for their employer. Despite promises to clamp down on employer exploitation, many graduates – at least those who can afford to sign up for them – have become resigned to internships as integral with labour market entry, a kind of ‘entry-level’ position. According to the National Union of Students, one in five 18-24 year olds now undertake an internship of some sort (*Observer* 02/12/12).

⁷www.highflyers.co.uk

Why doesn't more education lead to better employment?

Education is widely considered to have a significant influence on the general performance of the economy as well as on an individual's chances in the labour market, being seen as 'human capital'. The origins of human capital theory can be found in neo-classical economics where workers are rewarded according to their 'marginal productivity', that is the extra contribution they make to a firm's output. The more highly certificated earn more than the less qualified because, as 'factors of production', they add more value. Just as companies have invested in tools and machinery, individuals are encouraged to see education as an investment good, something that will provide a return in the future. Also, advanced capitalist economies are now considered to be 'knowledge economies' where human capital is at a premium. For the New Labour governments of Tony Blair and then Gordon Brown, the prioritisation of 'education, education, education' was justified in economic terms. According to Brown, the new global economy now allowed 'more room at the top' (speech at Greenwich University 01/11/07) for those who were qualified, but because of the disappearance of many low-skilled jobs, there would be less opportunities for those who were not.

Education in developed economies is also seen as an important 'public' or 'merit' good for which the state should take overall responsibility, even if this does not mean it has to be the sole provider. In the post-war years, although politicians were responsible for setting budgets and on deciding how education should be organised, what was taught in

schools was largely left to professional educators. However, since the boom years ended in the 1970s, governments have increasingly monitored ‘standards’ to intervene directly in learning and curriculum matters. The National Curriculum for the first time prescribed what was to be taught in English schools from 4/5-16 but increasingly detailed lesson plans also specify how it is to be taught. This tendency reaches to F&HE where full funding depends on ‘delivery’ of various ‘core’, ‘key’, ‘generic’, ‘transferable’, ‘employability’ and other so-called ‘skills’. Also, New Labour’s ineffectual national strategy for adult literacy (see Ade-Ojo 2010).

Because of its increased significance, education is constantly being held to account; but also its teachers are continually criticised, with league tables not only comparing the performance of schools but also countries. Employers and their representatives are also perennially critical of schools for not providing young people with the skills and aptitudes they require. As will be discussed in chapter 2, current changes to the upper secondary years and the introduction of new English Baccalaureate exams are being justified because they are based, so it is claimed, on practices that supposedly take place in more successful economies.

In contrast, the argument in this book is that education is now as much ‘ideological’ as it is ‘technical’ and its primary function has become one of social control (Allen and Ainley 2007). The more immediate concern of this chapter though is to examine the relationship between education and labour market entry in more detail. It argues that the declining fortunes of young people in the labour market are not because of the

‘failure’ of education, but more a consequence of long-term changes in the economy.

Education, young people and the jobs queue

In contrast to human capital theory, the American management theorist Lester Thurow proposed that each job has its own particular characteristics and that as a result, specific knowledge and skills are predominantly acquired by means of on-the-job training. Criticising human capital theory, he argued:

‘The key ingredient in this view of the world is the assumption that workers acquire laboring skills exogenously in formal education and/or training and then bring these skills into the labor market. Possessing skills, they bid for the jobs that use these skills. Unfortunately, the underlying assumption does not seem to be correct for the American economy. Workers do not bring fully developed job skills into the labor market. Most cognitive job skills, general or specific, are acquired either formally or informally through on-the-job training after a worker finds an entry job and the associated promotion ladder.’ (Thurow 1975, 77)

Another alternative to human capital explanations is to see the labour market as resembling a ‘jobs queue’ (Allen and Ainley 2012). This is not to suggest that educational qualifications are unimportant but that they have only an indirect relationship with the labour market. So instead of assuming that a more qualified workforce will lead to a more efficient and productive economy, a ‘jobs queue’ explanation concentrates primarily on employer demand – why they recruit particular workers in place of others. Rather than emphasising the economic value of particular types of education and skill, a ‘jobs queue’ approach emphasises that recruitment is also a social process.

Because it is difficult to map the exact skill requirements of occupations with what is accredited by particular qualifications, the qualifications young people bring to the labour market can only serve as a screening device for employers, or as ‘proxies’ (Raffe 1988). Though employers are typically critical of education for not providing the sorts of skills they say they need, this criticism has not been consistent, sometimes emphasising deficiencies in ‘basic skills’ like literacy and numeracy but on other occasions complaining about poor ‘soft skills’ or even that schools put too much emphasis on passing exams (*Financial Times* 19/11/12).

If employers don’t know what they really want (Rikowski 2006), they often also have extremely limited knowledge of what qualifications actually involve. Unable to calculate objectively the particular vocational contribution of individual courses of study, employers are likely to select candidates who hold qualifications considered to have high status by educationalists. They therefore choose applicants from those institutions considered to have greater prestige.

It is social factors, not simply economic variables, that help to explain why, for example, classics graduates from Oxbridge, and not business studies graduates from post-94 universities are over represented in top City firms. This helps to explain also, why many of the ‘vocational’ qualifications that have been created as equivalent alternatives to GCSEs – but which many in education consider to be intellectually inferior – provide very low labour market returns to those who have them (Wolf 2011). This is an issue addressed in more detail below.

The idea that labour market entry is based on a jobs queue and not a ‘skills test’ also fits well with the ‘credentialist’ theories of eminent

American sociologist Randall Collins. For Collins (1979) there was little or no connection between the intrinsic characteristics of qualifications and their usefulness in the labour market. Instead, the rate of increase in the level of credentials has far exceeded the increase in the technical requirements of the workplace. In contrast to human capital theory, where increases in wage levels reflect specific skills shortages, according to Collins, the contribution that education has made to economic performance is extremely limited and restricted to the development of mass literacy and other basic skills since the bulk of educational upgrading has occurred within job categories.

The reality is that rather than education failing the economy, the economy has failed education and this has resulted in a generation of young people now being ‘overqualified but underemployed’ (Ainley and Allen, 2010). While Collins referred to the growth of the ‘credential society’, Ainley (1999) described how what he called *Learning Policy* has, in the absence of work, been increasingly geared to producing a ‘certified’ society, where the young workers of the past are now full-time students – creating a situation of ‘education without jobs’. ‘Certification’ is a means of social control but also plays an economic function in relegating a growing minority to a reserve army of labour (see further below).

Brown, Lauder and Ashton (*ibid*) have provided a thorough critique of the globalisation thesis espoused by Blair and Brown above. Debunking the assumption that western economies serve as ‘magnets’ attracting and providing high skilled, well paid employment, they argue that a worldwide explosion of university level education has resulted in a change in the balance of power in favour of the emerging low-wage

economies like China and India and a ‘broken promise’ of education, jobs and incomes all round. Emphasising that China alone now has more graduates than the USA and ten times as many as the UK, so that there has been a ‘globalisation of high skills’ but not a globalisation of high wages, they argue that the spread of new technology and new techniques of production across the world, along with a huge expansion in the number of graduates, has resulted in a global ‘levelling down’ of wages.

The ‘vocational’ solution

Some of the clearest evidence against the argument that education directly constitutes human capital can be found by examining the role played by the full-time vocational programmes that developed in schools and colleges during the last two decades of the 20th century. The huge increase in youth unemployment during the 1970s – when the post-war boom ended and economies turned down – resulted in a national programme of youth training. In the UK this was under the auspices of the former Manpower Services Commission, an agency of the then Department of Employment (Ainley and Corney 1990). MSC schemes introduced a pedagogy based on *Competence-Based Assessment* (Wolf 1994) which was supposed to reflect the new conditions of the labour market. It was argued that changes in technology were making many specific occupational skills redundant. Employers therefore needed a ‘flexible’ and ‘adaptable’ workforce that could be trained but also retrained quickly to keep up with rapidly changing technology for which traditional, occupation-specific apprenticeships were anachronistic. Instead, young workers needed

‘generic’ or ‘core’ ‘skills’ that could be applied in a variety of situations, as well as developing new competences as shifting demand dictated.

MSC’s critics considered the schemes to be political and ideological responses to unemployment, aimed at reinforcing labour discipline and ‘attitudes’ as much as developing behavioural competences disguised as so-called ‘skills’. Nevertheless, the Youth Opportunities programme which was set up in 1978 by a Labour government with the support of the TUC, instead of being abolished by the Tories as they promised in the 1979 election, was expanded. By 1981, the YOP had half a million participants, mostly young people without formal academic qualifications. In 1983 it was further expanded into the Youth Training Scheme. Initially a one-year programme, a second year was soon added.

Few YTS schemes guaranteed permanent jobs. On the contrary, they constituted little more than what Finn (1987) described as *Training without Jobs*. Many of the schemes, on which trainees received an ‘allowance’ not a wage, were not run by employers but by training organisations or were college based. Unable to convince young people that they would improve their chances of employment, YTS became increasingly Draconian with non-completion being threatened by benefit withdrawal. Over the 1980s, young people increasingly voted with their feet and remained in full-time education. Here, vocational education courses replaced the MSC’s industrial training.

These new courses were based on the same philosophy, however. Prominent examples were the Certificate for Pre-Vocational Education (CPVE) intended for these new sixth formers. More recently, General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) linked to particular

vocational areas also included more generic ‘core skills’ and by 1998 had recorded over 40,000 awards at Advanced level. Yet, rather than providing a route into the workplace, for many students GNVQ became an alternative ‘second chance’ pathway into higher education, though these new opportunities were restricted to post-1994 ‘new’ universities as more selective institutions did not usually consider GNVQs as valid entry qualifications (Allen 2004).

In a further attempt to create greater parity with academic qualifications, New Labour’s *Curriculum 2000* initiative repackaged GNVQs as ‘vocational’ and then ‘applied’ A-levels –making them more text-book based and increasing the extent, but also the style of the external assessment, bringing in exams. In doing so, these qualifications became ‘the worst of both worlds’: not academic enough to attract traditional A-level students while alienating the very students they were once designed to appeal to and resulting in schools and colleges returning to the BTEC qualifications the GNVQ had been designed to replace (Allen and Ainley 2008).

With educational qualifications largely serving as labour market proxies, it isn’t surprising that vocational or applied qualifications have not achieved real currency with employers and it was of course highly debatable whether the vocational pedagogy really reflected developments in the modern and misnamed ‘post-Fordist’ workplace as the MSC intended. Vocational qualifications have been consistently associated with the ‘less able’ academically, those enrolling on GNVQ courses having lower GCSE grades than their peers enrolling for A-levels (Allen 2004).

It was also the case that the more student-centred and ‘egalitarian’ styles of learning associated with vocational qualifications were used to control potential behaviour problems, particularly amongst the many ‘reluctant learners’ remaining in fifth forms in the 1970s as a result of the raising of the leaving age (Moore 1984). This still applies to the new jobless sixth formers and college students of today as the ‘participation age’ is being raised again. This has only reduced the status of vocational qualifications further and damaged the reputation of the more advanced-level certificates.

Nevertheless, New Labour still went ahead and launched new 14-19 specialist diplomas in a 2005 White Paper on 14-19 education. The diploma would, it was claimed, finally ‘put employers in the driving seat’ (Allen and Ainley 2008) because of the role that Sector Skills Councils were to play in their design. Right from the outset though, the diplomas failed to attract their student target numbers and despite a few large individual employers giving their blessing, the qualifications failed to win the support of employers as a whole and nor, of course, the selective universities. The Coalition withdrew financial subsidies almost immediately and with take-up falling to a few hundred students, the diploma became another educational white-elephant – a very expensive one!

If more advanced vocational courses struggle to secure parity, the AAT research referred to earlier also provides data showing that those with lower level (GCSE equivalent) vocational qualifications are more likely to be unemployed. Alison Wolf in her 2011 review of vocational qualifications, referred to earlier, claims that non-advanced level vocational alternatives to GCSE are largely ‘worthless’ in terms of

labour market value and that workplace-based, not classroom taught, vocational learning produces much greater returns. Although as will be clear in chapter 2, this has not stopped the introduction of University Technology Colleges (UTCs) offering vocational specialisation from age 14.

‘Running up a down escalator’: why we can’t educate our way out of recession

During the nearly 30 years of post-war growth, white-collar, managerial and professional jobs expanded, allowing significant upward social mobility for young people from manually working-class homes. (This was ‘absolute’ and not relative social mobility because the traffic was one way as hardly anybody moved down from middle- to working-class jobs.) That comprehensive schools in the UK did not bring this limited upward social mobility to an end is clearly seen by comparing the USA during the same period, where all-through comprehensive High Schools had existed since the war but where similarly limited upward social mobility ended at the same time (Aronowitz 2008).

In comparison, the education systems of the moribund economies of today are subject to much greater pressure. By the time New Labour left office in 2010, approaching 70% of young people were achieving five GCSEs, nearly a 50% increase compared to when it took office in 1997. Today, young people find themselves running up a down escalator in pursuit of inflating qualifications (Ainley and Allen 2010). Many still sign up for expensive university courses for fear of being left behind, but they – or rather their parents – also shell out for private tuition for their GCSEs and A-levels, with the Sutton Trust reporting that 25% of

London secondary school students now have this extra support, despite its cost during recession (*Evening Standard* 28/09/12).

As well as scrambling for qualifications, young people egged on by their parents, scramble to get into schools with high performance scores in the league tables to avoid relegation to ‘failing schools’. For three decades, from the Conservatives’ Education Reform Act through New Labour’s ‘choice and diversity’ policies to Gove’s expansion of academies and addition of free schools, governments have been encouraging schools to compete against each other by allowing them to be more autonomous. Loosening the control of elected Local Education Authorities, or freeing them completely, schools have been encouraged to market themselves and create their own ‘ethos’, operating like small businesses to work more closely with and outsource services to private contractors. Whole ‘chains’ of these edu-businesses now operate under the same brand across the capital and elsewhere, sharing back-office support under joint management. ‘Faith schools’ also proffer their wares in this education market – the Church of England being one of their biggest sponsors, plus evangelicals and Muslims teaching ‘creation science’ alongside Darwinian biology.

At the time of writing, over 50% of secondary schools have converted to Academy status, becoming ‘independent’ state schools and there is little evidence to suggest this trend will be reversed. Indeed, as Diane Ravitch (2010) writes of similar developments in the USA, ‘we can safely predict that future studies will “prove” the success of charter schools and the failure of regular schools... locked into a downward trajectory’(145). Because, as she explains, ‘The regular state schools are hugely disadvantaged in competition with such schools, because they

are able to attract more motivated students, discharge laggards, enforce tough disciplinary codes, plus enjoying additional financial resources from their corporate sponsors.’(133) Like Gove’s academies and ‘free schools’, US ‘Charter schools represent, more than anything else, a concerted effort to deregulate public education, with few restrictions on pedagogy, curriculum, class size, discipline, or other details of their operation.’(*ibid*) As she concludes,

‘If we continue on the present course, with big foundations and the federal government investing heavily in opening more charter schools, the result is predictable. Charter schools in urban centers will enroll the motivated children of the poor, while the regular public schools will become schools of last resort for those who never applied or were rejected.’(220)

For ‘charter schools’ read academies and for ‘public’ read ‘council schools’.

Market competition is probably even more intense in higher education, an issue addressed in chapter 2. It is the pressure on schools, colleges and universities to deliver in response to increased labour market insecurity that has intensified this competition. Institutions have been completely marketised by a competitive regime designed to raise ‘standards’ in the academic tests and exams that are reflected in school league tables and university rankings. They have not yet been privatised by actual investment of private capital seeking profits for shareholders. Nor have they been monetised with the exception of university fees introduced and then raised by New Labour before being trebled again by the Coalition; even then a ‘free market’ in fees still does not exist since most HEIs have raised their fees to near the current £9,000 cap. This was insisted upon by the Lib Dems in 2010 as the price for their capitulation over their election promise not to raise fees. Pressure is

building from those universities that know they can charge more and find takers for their courses to do so. Meanwhile, £9,000 a year represents a considerable saving for those who have been paying fees of £27,000+ per child at Marlborough College, for instance. Current developments in higher education will be discussed further in chapter two.

As education changes from being a ‘public good’ to a ‘positional good’, one logical outcome is an increased attendance at private schools. A Mori poll for the Independent Schools Council showed 57% of parents would leave the state system if they could, the highest figure since these polls began in 1997⁸. Until the recession, the number of pupils at independent schools in England rose steadily to 511,677 pupils in 2007⁹ with participation rates being up to 16% in central London and Bristol 20% (Ainley and Allen 2010, 85). This despite independent school fees rising by 5.7% to an average termly fee for a day pupil now £3,751 and for a boarder £7,353. However, figures from the Independent Schools Council show pupil enrolments dropped by some 2,645 following the 2008 Crash and at least seven schools belonging to the ISC closed, while one surrendered its independent status to turn into a state-funded academy (telegraph.co.uk 29/04/10).

Youth unemployment: A structural problem

It goes without saying that the current economic down-turn has worsened labour market prospects for young people. At the beginning

⁸www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/7440022.stm

⁹www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/7374058.stm

of 2007, for example, unemployment as a whole stood at just under 1.7 million with 900,000 claimants. At the start of 2013, approximately 2.5 million were still out of work and youth unemployment had risen from 13% at the beginning of 2007 to just under 22% of a much larger total in March 2012 and as noted, continues to remain at around one million. Levels of unemployment may have been lower than in other downturns because many firms ‘held’ labour – almost a third reporting they maintained staff levels higher than necessary instead of recruiting.¹⁰ This cannot continue as recession is prolonged and the productive capacity of the economy reduces as companies scrap investment plans, liquidate plant and shed labour.

‘Keynesian’ demand-side responses to the downturn which have traditionally been used to reduce this ‘cyclical’ unemployment have been side-lined by the Coalition; especially by Chancellor George Osborne. On coming to power, Osborne produced a plan to restore growth to the UK economy which concentrated on ‘supply-side’ factors. Integral to this has been the need to reduce the size of the fiscal deficit through an austerity programme and ‘rebalance’ the economy. A reinvigorated private sector would, the Coalition argued, more than compensate for the loss of jobs as a result of budget cuts. The Coalition has until very recently continued to use ‘Quantitative Easing’. Basically, Mrs Thatcher’s ‘monetarism’ in reverse, rather than being lent to small businesses or individuals, the potential increase in cash has been kept by the banks to replenish their holdings, or been used to inflate commercial property prices and other financial assets. Though without the increase in confidence generated by a fiscal stimulus,

¹⁰www.cipd.co.uk/labourmarketoutlook

business will not be queuing to borrow anyway!

Predictably also, Osborne has failed to meet his growth targets and as a result his deficit reduction objectives, blaming Labour's past 'mismanagement', the Euro crisis and even the (climate change induced) unpredictable weather. Industrial output is at its lowest since May 1992 and manufacturing still 20% below its peak. In the third quarter of 2012, the economy – at least officially – moved out of a 'double dip' recession, recording a 1% growth, but few economists expected this to continue. The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), the government 'independent' forecaster, predicted negative growth for 2012 and only a 1.2% increase for 2013 and 2% for 2014, still below pre- recession rates. As a result, on current estimates unemployment will remain at 8.2% for 2013 and stay at over 7% till 2017.

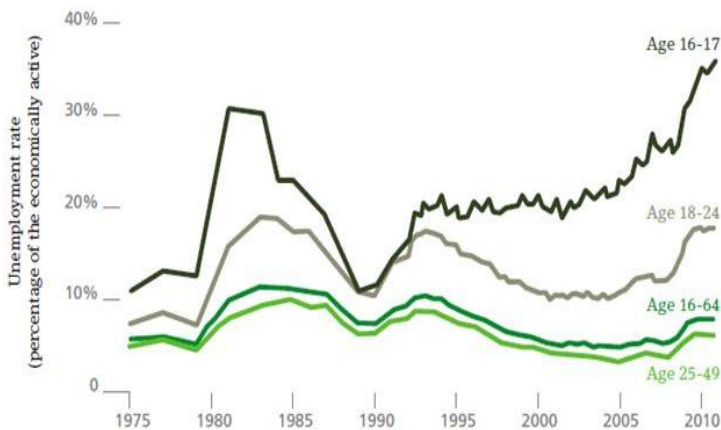
The Institute of Fiscal Studies has now predicted that 'austerity' could last for another eight years,¹¹ while the Institute for Public Policy Research reports the outlook especially bleak for young people and the long-term unemployed with hundreds of thousands at risk of permanent 'scarring': having their long-term outlook damaged by long periods of unemployment or by a difficult and patchy entry into employment. With ONS December 2012 figures recording over 100,000 young people out of work for more than two years, IPPR added 86,000 extra young people aged under-25 to those already unemployed, bringing the total to above one million again¹²

¹¹www.news.sky.com/story/1016241/austerity-era-could-last-up-to-eight-years

¹²www.ippr.org/press-releases/111/10039/youth-unemployment-could-top-1-million-again-next-year.

As the graph that follows indicates, unemployment rates for young people have been well above those for the population generally. In 1961 for example, out of a total unemployment figure of 330,000, only 10,000 were under the age of 19. It still may be true that when ‘growth’ kicks in youth unemployment will fall – but it is also the case that youth unemployment is increasingly becoming structurally embedded in the economy.

As shown, at the height of the New Labour consumer boom in 2002, over 10% of 18-24 year olds were out of work, compared with 5% of the population as a whole. As noted earlier, true rates of youth unemployment may be disguised by ‘warehousing’ – by raising the participation age and/or maintaining more youth in school, college and university.



Source: www.blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/2011/07/05/youth-unemployment. It should be remembered that unemployment figures are based on those ‘economically active’ – hence the disproportionately high rate for 16-17 olds.

The Great Reversal

While the economy continues to flat-line, many longer term changes taking place in the labour market are intensified, worsening the position of most young people in the jobs queue, regardless of the educational qualifications they have.

The ratio of unemployed young people compared with the population as a whole in selected countries, based on *Eurostat* data for 2012 Q1 shows the same pattern, though; in the UK it is particularly high.

	Youth % unemployment	All groups % unemployment
Euro area	22.2	11.2
UK	22.0	7.9
Spain	50.7	24.4
Greece	52.3	23.1
Ireland	30.4	14.8
Germany	8.1	5.5

What ever happened to ‘youth jobs’?

In the post-war years, large numbers of young people were employed in manufacturing and the sector generated ‘youth jobs’, many for young men especially linked to apprenticeships, a process originating from the medieval guild system. In the UK, this process of assimilation into the labour force was as much a period of ‘time serving’, often lasting several years, as it was the learning of skills – although participation in some form of day-release training at Further Education College was invariably a mandatory part. By 1950, 33% of boy and 8% of girl school leavers entered apprenticeships (Finn 1987, 55). By the mid-1960s, when apprenticeships were at their peak, up to a quarter of a million apprenticeships were on offer each year although by then only 6% of women were apprenticed (Mizen 2004, 51).

Apprenticeships were supported by trade unions which often considering themselves ‘partners’ with employers, playing an important role in both the management and the regulation of schemes. Apprenticeships were a way by which the pay and conditions of skilled workers were separated from those of unskilled workers to secure privileges in relation to pay and conditions, progression and employment security. It was only possible to be employed in a craft or trade job, by gaining the occupational badge that the apprenticeship for it bestowed.

Regardless of whether it was through an apprenticeship or by a more direct entry to the ‘shop floor’, during the post-war period thousands of young people made relatively straight forward and linear transitions to the labour market, without any of the ‘vocational preparation’ they are now said to lack. Paul Willis in his 1970s study of a group of secondary

modern school boys described how by the time they were due to leave school, many had already effectively socialised themselves into the norms and values of shop-floor culture as a result of family and neighbourhood contacts (Willis 1977). Even in the mid-1970s, up to 40% of young people still left school without any qualifications. Educationists were particularly concerned with girls' underachievement at a time when the 1971 census recorded the average age of first marriage for women as 20.

Now that most women do not have their first child until they are in their 30s shows what an immense change has taken place in a relatively short period and it is now boys' underachievement that is the focus of educational concern. This underlines a huge shift in gender relations that is a large part of the changes we are describing but which has gone unremarked even by feminist scholarship (but see Leathwood and Reid 2009). It is related to the decline of heavy industry that has undermined traditional male roles and at the same time the growth in services and administration that has offered new career opportunities open to women as much as to men. From the 1960s on, middle-class young women pioneered the new extended transition from school to work and home to living away, joining their brothers in widening access to HE for the qualifications they now required. This momentum has continued with many more women now in HE than men – see below.

For the traditional manual working class, transition from school to work was often enhanced by the existence of relatively localised industries allowing collective transitions. 'Classic' sociological examples of this process were young men following their fathers into industries like mining (Dennis *et al* 1957) but there were many other cases of

particular towns and cities being dominated by one or two large employers where ‘informal’ recruitment patterns continued to be as important as those based on qualifications. In these situations, the transition from school to work was often also a ‘collective transition’ – school friends going on to become workmates, even if minority youth, young women and disabled youngsters often lost out. Transition from dependence in their parental home and family to independence in their own home and family was also usually short, both in terms of time and distance (Jones 2009).

Deindustrialisation

Britain became a ‘de-industrialised’ society even more rapidly from the 1980s, although manufacturing had been in long-term decline since ‘the workshop of the world’ was overtaken by Germany and the USA by 1900. During Mrs Thatcher’s first term of office, almost one in four manufacturing jobs disappeared. After ‘Big Bang’ in 1986 when she deregulated the City until the Big Crunch in 2008 – a period when the banks boomed and the housing market ‘bubbled’ – two million more manufacturing jobs were lost with a further one million disappearing in the 2008-9 recession. Figures from the Institute for Employment Studies show that the UK now has only 11.4% of its total employment in manufacturing compared with an EU average of 17.3% (quoted in Wolf 2011, 149). 75% of the workforce is employed in services and 6% in construction.

Of course, technological advances have meant that manufacturing productivity has increased dramatically as labour has been replaced by

machinery. This is a global phenomenon as automation has advanced and all Western economies have experienced declines in manufacturing employment. Manufacturing output as a proportion of GDP has also fallen, even if the total manufacturing output in the UK may have increased by around 70% since 1980. In a sense, despite importing almost £100bn. more goods from other countries in 2010 than it was able to sell to them, the UK is still a significant contributor to manufacturing – but these days this requires much less labour. This has had massive implications for employment, resulting in ‘jobless growth’.

There are other more specific factors that explain the rapid decline in the UK’s manufacturing base and why the decline in manufacturing employment has been more pronounced than elsewhere. In the 1970s for example, critics linked the decline in competitiveness of the UK economy to the growing influence of finance capital over the exchange rate which ‘allows the City to flourish... while industry loses markets and has its profits squeezed’ (CSE 1980, 29). In other words, speculation became more profitable than productive investment, returns on which continued to fall. More recent commentaries however have focussed on the way in which the more general ‘globalisation’ of production has increased the level of outsourcing to new centres such as China and India – where workers are ‘cheaper, more abundant and receive fewer labour rights’ (Turner 2008, 10). This has resulted in what economists refer to as a loss of ‘comparative advantage’.

Manufacturing jobs have continued to head overseas with more than 1.5 million jobs in this sector being lost since 1997 when New Labour came to power. More recently, as well as outsourcing to the low wage

economies of the far East, UK firms have continued to face – at least until recently – a resurgent German economy growing at around 4% per annum at the beginning of 2011 and fanned by Chinese demand for heavy capital equipment. In early July, for example, the UK's last remaining train maker, the Derby based company Bombardier, announced 14,000 redundancies – including many holding skilled 'core' jobs – as a result of losing out to German company Siemens over the contract to supply the new Thames link trains.

While the UK was losing competitive advantage in mass production, proponents of globalisation argued that Britain would be able to remain at the cutting edge of new industries and higher value jobs in research and development. Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, invariably spurred on by their high priest of business, Peter Mandelson, fantasised about a 'knowledge economy', *Living on Thin Air* (Leadbeater 2000). Yet, the US drug manufacturer Pfizer's decision to close its plant in Sandwich, Kent in 2011 with the loss of 2,400 jobs is a clear example of the dangers of making such assumptions. It is also quite wrong to believe that these new industries can provide anywhere near the employment opportunities of the mass production era.

The internet industry for example, now contributes 7.2% of the UK's GDP, making it the fifth largest industry, just behind the financial sector and more significant than transport and construction together (*The Guardian* 28/10/10). Yet internet companies only employ 250,000 people, just above the number employed in agriculture but far below the 2.3 million currently employed in manufacturing. Less, in fact, than the number of people employed by Tesco – Britain's largest individual private sector employer. In other words, these new types of industry

require much lower levels of labour and in particular, the mass semi- and unskilled labour, a feature of traditional manufacturing.

Of course, politicians continue to celebrate any signs of manufacturing recovery; Business Secretary Vince Cable fooling the Liberal Democrat Conference in 2012 by claiming that the 2,000 jobs created by Jaguar Land Rover in the West Midlands was the sort of development that would save the British economy and that recovery would depend on ‘cars not casinos’ (*Birmingham Post* 19/09/11). Cable’s comments are farcical: in Birmingham alone manufacturing employment declined from nearly 99,000 to only 49,000 between 1998 and 2008 – especially as a result of the decline of the car industry with the closure of MG Rover at Longbridge (Hatcher 2011). With sluggish growth in the service sector, local unemployment rates remain much higher than average at 11.5% and the city is a classic instance of ‘deindustrialisation’.

To an extent the Coalition recognises this and emphasise the importance of ‘rebalancing’ the economy but, even in a more favourable economic climate, it is unlikely that this could ever take place without fundamental structural reform including international reordering. Even if demand for an endless supply of consumer durables is sustainable in an ecological as well as socio-economic sense, this demand for manufacturing goods compared to services also has limits. This is one reason why manufacturing output continues to decline as a proportion of national output. With North Sea oil now largely having run out – even if it may be premature to argue, as Elliott and Atkinson (2012) do, that *Britain will have Third World economy* within a year or two – the UK is certainly becoming a ‘post-industrial’ capitalist economy. The

replacement of manufacturing jobs by service sector employment, has, it will be argued below, had significant effects on the occupational class structure and especially on young people's future employment prospects.

This was brought home by the coincidence that, on the day when the Prime Minister announced that, as a result of 1% growth for Quarter 3 of 2012, the economy was out of recession (Parliament 26/10/12), Ford's announced the closure of its Southampton Transit Van plant and its panel-stamping operation based at Dagenham – with the loss of up to 1,400 jobs reducing the number of its UK car workers to 11,500. 40,000 once worked at Dagenham alone. After a loss of £1billion in Europe this year and despite having received £400 million in government subsidy since 2010 (*Times*, 01/11/12), Ford told *The Guardian* (26/10/12) that the economic reality for mass-market car production is a 'retrenchment' that will cost thousands of manufacturing jobs as a result of over-capacity and 12% falling sales. Mr Cable said the news was 'very disappointing'. In contrast, the department store Debenhams, despite a 'very difficult market' reaffirmed the importance to the UK economy of retailing by committing itself to opening new sites and to hiring 1,700 more people, after a 4% increase in its yearly pre-tax profit – but it also announced a planned increase in overseas stores targeting the Middle East and Asia.

New ‘knowledge workers’ or a service sector proletariat?

It was often assumed that, as manufacturing became ‘leaner and meaner’, the reduction in its labour needs would be more than compensated by the growth of new sectors like retailing, finance and the growing demand for personal services. As noted, the new ‘globalised’ economy would also, according to Prime Minister Gordon Brown, provide ‘more room at the top’ for those with qualifications. A corollary of this up-skilling was that there would be limited opportunities for those without such ‘skills’. Of course, employment in the service sector has expanded – from 60% to over 75% of the working population between the end of the 1970s and today. Almost three million jobs were created in the financial and business sectors of the economy between 1981 and 2001. There are now over a million employed in this sector which generates a £35 billion surplus for the UK’s balance of payments.

Employment in education, health and public administration also grew by almost 1.4 million during this period. With 12.2% of the working population now employed in health and social care alone, employment in education is approaching 10%, compared with 4.4% in finance and insurance and 4.1% in information and communication (Wolf 2011, 149). Unlike manufacturing, many service occupations rely on ‘hands on’ personal contact and therefore work cannot be automated in the way it can be in a factory. Nevertheless, it affords a promising area for expanded private investment seeking profits that have fallen in manufacturing and been lost by bank speculation.

According to Peter Drucker (1993), management guru of the late 20th century, the ‘winners’ in the globalisation race would be the growing class of ‘knowledge workers’. Employed in the new ‘thinking’ occupations of the 21st century, their jobs would involve ‘high level problem solving’. Able to work across national boundaries, they would enjoy high levels of rewards through the application of their skills. The Work Foundation (2010, 10) has argued that by 2020, 60% of the labour force will be ‘knowledge workers – using “tacit knowledge” rather than relying on “codified/procedural knowledge”’ – an increase from only 10% in 1970. According to the Foundation (2009), 30% of jobs already have high knowledge content and another 30% have some knowledge content.

But the manually skilled workers from the manufacturing era have not become the new technocrats of a British Silicon Valley! Instead, Owen Jones describes the dismal experiences of call centre workers where computers dictate the time and duration of breaks, when workers have to put their hands up to go to the toilet and where ‘higher-grade’ operators can earn as little as £16,000 (Jones 2011). According to Roberts (2011, 50) using terminology developed by Goos and Manning (2003), new ‘lovely jobs’ have been created in services – for example, management consultants and business analysts; but there has also been an increase in ‘lousy jobs’ – hospital porters, bar staff and shelf-fillers. (See Cederstom and Fleming 2012 for really lousy jobs!)

Even though the financial sector is considered to be ‘high skills’ and ‘high earner’, with over a quarter of those employed in the City or in its Canary Wharf overspill, less than 40% of the sector’s workforce could be considered to be senior managers or ‘professionals’ – over a third

work in ‘secretarial, administrative and sales’. While ‘average’ salaries in the City – where two thirds of the workforce are male and 50% under 35 – are about £85,000 and the pay of top individuals is well known, London as a whole can be contrasted with those employed in financial services in the North-East, where average pay is in the region of £27,000 and where half of the workforce is over 35 and also over two thirds female.¹³

There are also repeated counter-examples of ‘professional skills’ being broken down and bite-sized as companies downsize and contract out to armies of ‘para-professionals’ and ‘associates’. If you sell or buy a house, for instance, more likely than not, you will only meet a solicitor when it is time to sign the contract. If you are in hospital, your visits from a doctor may be reduced to a few minutes. If you have a child in school, you may also find they spend time with a ‘teaching assistant’ as much as with a supposedly professional teacher.

UKCES data (quoted by Wolf 2011) shows that the fastest growing occupations in absolute terms are educational assistants (91% increase, up from 252,358 to 483,979 between 2001 and 2009) and care assistants (28% increase, up from 563,112 to 719,453 in the same period). These are para-professional roles at best. In the last decade, the number of teachers in England has risen by around 10%, but the number of teaching assistants by 200%. The trade union Unison says that assistants

¹³ www.radicaled.wordpress.com/2011/12/15/casino-economy-no-use-to-the-jobless/

are being used as ‘cut price teachers’ – being asked to do more than they are qualified for.¹⁴

Even if more advanced in the UK, the growth of service sector economies is a global trend and many new jobs exhibit the characteristics of globalised employment practices – for example, casualisation and flexibility with low levels of union organisation. These are examples of what Standing (2011) considers a new type of ‘precarious’ employment that is not only transcending national boundaries but is also increasing across social classes (Ross 2009).

Part-time Britain

There are currently around eight million part-time workers, compared with 21 million people who still work full-time in the UK. This has reduced the average time worked to just under 32 hours per week, although the average for men is still 36.3 – reflecting the fact that women still constitute the majority of the part-time work force. Part-time working as a proportion of the total of those employed increased from 21% to 25% between 1984 and 1999, a rise of 1.5 million jobs in total. Amongst the employers invited to Cameron’s ‘jobs summit’ at the start of 2011 for example (*Telegraph* 08/01/11), were two of the UK’s leading part-time employers, Sainsbury and McDonalds.

Of course, many young people continue to work part time while they study. According to ONS data¹⁵ of the one in four young people who

¹⁴ [www.news.bbc.co.uk 19/06/12](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/19/06/12)

¹⁵ www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lmac/underemployed-workers-in-the-

now work part-time, almost half do so because they are studying. Indeed, ONS labour statistics show almost one in three sixth-forms, college and university students working despite a small fall. The ILO report referred to earlier however, argues that the huge increase in part-time working by young people – an increase of 17% points in Ireland, 9% in Spain and 5% in the UK – is a clear indication that part-time work is being taken up by many young people because it is the only employment available. It goes without saying that part-time working is not what most young people want and it is also the case that a part-time economy weakens the position of young people in the jobs queue.

The opening of retail outlets like supermarkets during evenings and throughout weekends has resulted in new types of working practices and contracts, notably ‘twilight’ and weekend. Rather than having to recruit and rely on young people, employers can also draw on particular groups now arriving in the labour queue who they consider to be more ‘mature’ or ‘dependable’, for example women with family commitments or older workers with more ‘experience’. As ONS figures show (*Guardian* 23/11/12), part-time women workers make up 20% of the entire workforce, part-time men only 6.3%. Women with family commitments are also more dependent on this type of work – and (although this cannot always be assumed) may consider it supplementary to a male partner’s, employers may also see them as more ‘amenable’.

If more people are working part-time because it is convenient for them, many others may not be doing the work they want for the hours they

need. The ONS figures show a net increase of only 250,000 full-time jobs, while the number of people working part-time because they can't find a full-time position has increased by over 300,000 in the last two years – bringing the total to 1.24 million, 18% of all part-time workers. 40% of 1.6 million on temporary contracts (60,000 more than two years ago) are also in this category. According to ONS statistics,¹⁶ more than three million workers are also 'underemployed' in the sense that they want to do more hours – an increase of a million since 2008 and the onset of the recession. The data shows that almost two-thirds of these are part-time and that young people are more likely to be in this category.

Finally, the increase in part-time working has mirrored the growth of 'self-employment' – at over four million; 80% of the increase in the self-employed are also 'part-time'. As well as picking up 'odd jobs', *The Guardian's* John Harris also noted (23/01/12) that increasing numbers of new positions are now advertised 'on a self-employed basis', to contract – often on demand, allowing employers to avoid having to pay national insurance, provide holidays or sick pay. Using a wider definition of unemployment and including people working part-time and temporarily because they are not able to find anything else, the TUC has claimed unemployment is over six million¹⁷.

¹⁶ www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lmac/underemployed-workers-in-the-uk/2012/index.html 28/11/12

¹⁷ www.touchstoneblog.org.uk/2012/02/what-is-the-true-extent-of-labour-market-slack/.

Low-pay Britain

Intensified by developments in service sector employment, if not at ‘Third World’ levels, the UK workforce is increasingly low-paid. In other words, the exact opposite to what the globalisation thesis argued and governments have repeatedly promised. The proportion of national income going to labour has been decreasing during the last 40 years – down from just under 60% to just over 50% (*Guardian* 03/11/12) with the share of national income of the bottom 60% falling from 40% to 33% (Lansley 2012). According to the Commission on Living Standards established by the Resolution Foundation, after 1955 incomes rose by an average of 2.7% per annum until 2001. Since then the figure has fallen to 0.6%.¹⁸

The fact that incomes have risen by lower than inflation means that many workers have effectively received a pay-cut. This, along with the increase in part-time working, is also another reason why unemployment has not risen any higher and also why, despite non-existent growth, there are apparently, more people working so that it is predicted there will be 30 million people in employment by 2015. Even now standing at 29.56 million, the number of people in work is almost as high as the pre-downturn figure in 2008 – yet the economy is heading towards a ‘triple-dip’ recession! Osborne’s claim that over a million new private sector jobs have been created for example, hides the disappearance of up to 600,000 mostly permanent jobs in the public sector, but even if this still gives an overall gain it ignores the nature, not to mention the pay levels, of many of these the new jobs.

¹⁸www.resolutionfoundation.org/us/current-work/commission/

The final report of the Commission on Living Standards shows one in five workers paid below two-thirds of the median wage – in other words, being paid less than £7.49 per hour or the equivalent of £13,600 *per annum* full-time. The report predicted that, if current trends persist, a ‘low income’ household will be 15% worse off in 2020 compared to 2008.¹⁹ Resolution data also shows 21% of workers (5 million in total) earning less than what is described as a ‘living wage’ now calculated at £8.55 in London and £7.45 elsewhere – approximately 20% higher than the National Minimum Wage of £6.19 per hour. 71% of those aged 16-21 earned below the living wage, compared with just 14% of 36-45 year olds.²⁰ Meanwhile, the Hills Report on inequality commissioned by the previous Labour government found 10% of full-time wage earners being paid less than £12,402, 15% earning £13,884 and 20% on £15,236 or less (*Guardian*, 27/01/10). The extent to which the growth of part-time working has affected average earnings is also evident, with the report showing a median part-time weekly wage of only £141 and 30% of part-time workers earning under £100 a week.

The class structure goes pear shaped

The rise of the service sector and the occupational changes outlined above has led to a recomposition of the class structure. The post-war ‘pyramid’ model has disappeared and its traditional division between non-manual middle and manual working classes has been eroded by the

¹⁹www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/final-report-commission-living-standards/

²⁰www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications May 2012

growth of services, the decline of heavy industry and the applications of new technology. There is little evidence to suggest it has been replaced by the ‘diamond’ shaped structure in which unskilled jobs disappeared and a general up skilling of occupations provided substance for assertions that ‘we are all middle class now’. On the contrary, it is now sometimes argued ²¹ that the occupational structure has turned into an ‘hour-glass’ shape, where the expansion of managerial and professional jobs at the top has been accompanied by the growth of the new types of low-paid and low-skilled jobs at the bottom (Wolf 2011). There has, it is suggested, (for example by Lansley 2012), been a ‘hollowing out’ of the middle with sharp falls in the number of jobs paying ‘middle wages’.

In fact, the term ‘squeezed middle’ is now used by just about everybody from Boris Johnson to Ed Miliband.²² The number of new managerial and professional jobs being created at the top should not be over-estimated however. According to UKCES,²³ the number of ‘managers, directors and senior officials’ is predicted to increase from three million (9.9%) to 3.56 million (11.1%) between 2010 and 2020, with the number of professionals from 5.84 (19.2%) to 6.7 million (21.0%). Below these, an ‘associate professional and technical’ group are estimated to constitute 14% of all occupations by 2010. The UKCES figures also confirm the increase in unskilled work in sectors like retailing, catering and the care industries referred to earlier, with the ‘care, leisure and other services’ group as a whole – a category that

²¹ e.g. www.glasshouseforum.org/pdf/GF_glans-laurin_hourglass.pdf

²² www.express.co.uk/posts/view/350874/Boris-Johnson-vows-to-fight-for-the-squeezed-middle-class Ed Miliband (www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-11848303)

²³ 2011 Table B4 www.ukces.org.uk/publications

includes teaching assistants, up from 2.71 million (8.9%) to 3.03 million (9.5%) by 2020. ‘Elementary’ occupations also remain significant, the UKCES report identifying 3.2 million (over 10%) in this category. The fall in skilled trade occupations – from over 11% to 10% would also support the argument about the squeezed middle, as does the decline in administrative and secretarial workers.

According to Labour Force Survey data for 2007 (quoted by Wolf 2011), only 8 million employees can be considered to have ‘knowledge intensive’ jobs, compared with nearly 20 million who have not. Meanwhile, a more sombre Work Foundation survey of ‘leaders and innovators’ found only a third (10% of all workers) performing ‘high intensity’, knowledge jobs that combined high level cognitive activity with high level management tasks (Work Foundation 2009, 4). Interestingly, the survey also reported ‘knowledge workers’ were more likely to work longer hours and, in general, did not have the flexibility and autonomy these jobs are widely assumed to enjoy – with many just as likely to be working a standard 9-5 day (*ibid*, 56). The Foundation added that, with the increased numbers of graduates, ‘skills underutilisation’ is more significant than any skills shortage (7).

The Hills Report²⁴ showed median (middle-earner rather than average-earner) hourly incomes of £9.90, but also the top 40% of full-time earners down to an income of £26,676 with 20% earning above £36,800 and only 10% earning £46,500+. Include the next 30% and income level falls to £20,000 – with the bottom 30% earning below £17,680. This concurs with our earlier arguments about the proletarianisation of

²⁴www.guardian.co.uk/uk/interactive/2010/jan/26/hills-report-uk-inequality-social-trends

professional work and its replacement by ‘para-professionals’. Using figures for wages and salaries, as opposed to job titles, we would argue that rather than becoming hour-glass, the class structure is turning ‘pear shaped’ (Ainley and Allen 2010) with no floor beneath ‘the squeezed middle’ and the so-called ‘underclass’ below.

Young people – a new reserve army of labour?

According to Bell and Blanchflower²⁵ 16-24 year olds are disproportionately represented in jobs with lower earnings. They describe how young people entering lower paid service work are also likely, with the disappearance of more ‘skilled’ work, to find progress up the occupational structure more difficult than before. Claims that it is an increase in high skilled jobs that have exerted an ‘economic pull’, encouraging young people to stay on in full-time education, are also refuted by Alison Wolf in her 2011 review of vocational education for the Coalition government. She confirms that it is likely most young people have been ‘pushed’ into staying on in school or college because of the lack of well-paid jobs. Blanchflower went further, calling for 100,000 more university places instead of less in order to get young people ‘off the streets’ (*Times Higher* 9/11/11).

Ainley (2010) has suggested that young people now constitute a large part of what Marx referred to as a ‘reserve army of labour’ (RAL). The size of capital’s reserve army is generally assumed to be related to the pattern of the business cycle, diminishing when accumulation

²⁵ www.dartmouth.edu/~blnchflr/papers/Youth%209-1.pdf

accelerates but ratcheting up to new levels when crisis returns. If it has been accentuated by the economic downturn, then, as has been argued, youth unemployment –not to mention extensive ‘underemployment’ – is increasingly structural and in more and more cases, youth have been distanced from the labour market.

The reconstitution of the RAL involved in the state’s resolution of the latest capitalist crisis goes further than in the 1980s and implicates education rather than training to an extent it has not done before. What we have called ‘Education without jobs’ replaced the *Training without Jobs* described by Finn in 1987. With the ratcheting up of permanent and structural unemployment, education and training – alongside housing, social security, policing and regional policies – helped reconstitute through the provision of ‘worthless’ vocational certifications a ‘rough’, ‘semi-’ or ‘unskilled’ section of the formerly manually working industrial proletariat into an irregularly employed peripheral so-called ‘underclass’ of NEETs.

In 1982 Andre Gorz predicted a permanent ‘non-class’ within post-industrial capitalist economies:

‘This non-class encompasses all those who have been expelled from production... or whose capacities are under-employed as a result of the automation and computerisation of intellectual work. It includes all supernumeraries of present day social production, who are potentially or actually unemployed, whether permanently or temporarily, partially or completely.’ (Gorz 1982, 68).

At the start of the 21st century the similarities between a ‘lost generation’ and a ‘new class’ deserve to be revisited.

Guy Standing (2011) reiterates Gorz, describing young people as a major part of a new ‘precariat’ – a growing class of people who, while not being in anyway homogeneous, share a common sense of ‘economic insecurity’, lacking any permanent workplace identity and ‘not feeling part of a solidaristic labour movement community’ (Standing, 12).

Young people, an ‘underclass’ and the new poor

The term ‘underclass’ has become a politically loaded concept. First used by right-wing commentators in the 1980s, the term reappeared in some accounts of the 2011 August riots. This controversial usage should not prevent recognition of a growing new poor, below the increasingly proletarianised ‘working-middle’ described above. It is a product of the fact that, as previously indicated, average wages have remained largely static since 2003 and that the share of the national income going to the bottom 50% has declined.

While younger workers can still expect their earnings to rise over time, the Resolution data (see previous) also showed that at least one in seven workers who are theoretically at the age of their peak earnings still earn less than the living wage. On the basis of the trends outlined above, this figure will surely grow. In the LSE/*Guardian* research into the 2011 summer riots mentioned earlier, hatred of the police, poverty and unemployment were identified as key reasons for the violence. While stopping short of describing urban dispossessed youth as an ‘underclass’, the researchers found clear evidence of resentment towards those who had ‘too much’ from those who lacked access to the

material culture to which they were continually exposed by a well-advertised ‘carnival of conspicuous consumption’.

As Winlow and Hall summarise in their analysis of the English urban riots of 2011:

‘the disturbances were a brief eruption of social unrest that lacked the clear, unifying political symbolism necessary to turn objectless dissatisfaction into articulate political demands. Rather, the consumer-oriented subjects who inhabit the socioeconomic margins of late capitalism were unable to make this political move and ultimately found themselves with nowhere to take their dissatisfaction but to the shops.’²⁶

This is not to say the riots will not recur – perhaps as the annual summer events predicted by Bea Campbell as long ago 1991 and see John Pitts’ long list of *Riotous Assemblies* (2011); also Blanchflower above. The leaders of Northern English city councils have also recently warned of ‘civil unrest’ in response to central government funding cuts (letter to *The Observer* 30/12/12) – though not so far to education and health which are supposedly ‘ring-fenced’. In fact, Gove’s policy of failing more school leavers by issuing those who do not pass the Ebacc with a certificate of (non-)achievement, together with Willetts’ restriction of any alternative to academic HE, leaves only ‘apprenticeships’ often indistinguishable from workfare. This could be described as a recipe for more riots.

The recomposition of the class structure and the increased precariousness of labour can only further disengage particular groups –

²⁶www.culturalpolitics.dukejournals.org/content/8/3/465.short

such as the white working class inner-city youth described by Gillian Evans 2006. African-Caribbean boys, stigmatised as an education ‘underclass’ but having achieved at least partial integration into schools (Graham 2012), now face a 50% chance of unemployment, compared to 24% for white males and 34% for Asians.²⁷ Already unfairly targeted for their influence on the 2011 riots²⁸ with right-wing historian and broadcaster David Starkey causing outrage for his comments on BBC TV when he blamed ‘black culture’ for turning white youngsters into looters. (See Professor Gus John’s widely circulated if so far unanswered 13/8/11 *Open Letter to Prime Minister Cameron*.)

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the inability of young people to find the employment that they want is the result of long term changes in the economy and the labour market, more than it is a failure of schools, colleges and universities, even though these have contributed to creating a so-called ‘lost generation’ of young people who are both overqualified and underemployed. The next chapter returns to the current Coalition education policy, arguing that it at least recognises this situation, even while seeking a misguided solution to it. For Willetts and Gove’s *Great Reversal* from widening participation to HE and their reversion to the selective schooling and minority HE of the 1950s aims to restart limited upward social mobility through market competition for academies and ‘free’ schools. Since the only social

²⁷ www.tuc.org.uk/tucfiles/408/BME%20youth%20unemployment.pdf

²⁸ www.voice-online.co.uk/article/%E2%80%98black-men-unfairly-targeted-riot-coverage%E2%80%99

mobility now is absolutely downward (Roberts 2013), this is impossible and perhaps Gove and Willetts know this, as they seem also to accept education's role in social control by seeking to impose a new 'correspondence' between education, economy and a changing occupational class structure.

This is unjust and unjustifiable (save through some pseudo-scientific geneticist ideology, like that which supported the old 11+ IQ tests – see Simon 1996) but it is at least possible. It therefore needs to be vigorously opposed but most opponents still seek instead an impossible alternative policy of trying to educate our way out of recession to a so-called 'knowledge economy'. In practice, what these proposals usually amount to are modest interventions in education and training, such as qualifications reform, that virtually all policy-makers and many sociologists who ought to know better suggest will bring about significant redistribution of life-chances.

As Ken Roberts, the 'Grand Old Man' of British Sociology, concludes in his masterly 2001 *Class in Modern Britain*, 'the best way to change mobility flows is to change the structure of opportunities itself' (p.283). Gove and Willetts' education policies have the opposite intention, to reinforce the current limited opportunity structure and restrict it still further. As we shall see in the next chapter, theirs is a continuation of another reversal – that of Thatcher's switching of Old Labour's comprehensive school slogan of 'equal opportunities' into her very different slogan of 'opportunities to be unequal'.

Chapter 2

Not meeting the standard?

Education in a declining economy

‘Our school system performs well below its potential... other countries are improving their schools faster.’ 2010 White Paper *The Importance of Teaching* (4).

Since the Coalition has been in office, Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove has devoted considerable attention to reforming the qualifications structure for the upper secondary years. The White Paper *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE 2010) set out a clear context for reforming learning. It argued that international comparisons showed the UK falling behind the education levels of other countries, particularly the economically successful economies of East Asia.

Gove has justified his reforms as responses to the ‘dumbing down’ of learning and to the ‘grade inflation’ which, he argues, took place under New Labour. Certainly, as modules and retakes made learning ‘bite-sized’, schools shopped around the market for examinations their students could pass, with competing awarding bodies anxious to increase profits by making sure these were available. It is now also alleged that teachers were inflating coursework marks to ensure schools performed well in key subject league tables (*Independent* 02/11/12).

Gove moved quickly, demonstrating his determination to reform the public examination system by, for example:

- Laying out a much greater role for Ofqual, the examinations watchdog, in the monitoring of performance levels. As a result, several

examination papers, most notably in science, have been criticised for not being challenging enough. More recently, Gove instructed Ofqual to force exam boards to use a ‘comparative outcomes’ formula, reminiscent of the ‘normative referencing’ used in the old GCE O-levels – effectively capping increases in pass rates from one year to another. By ruling that all GCSE examinations must be taken at the end of the course and that A-level papers can no longer be taken in January, he has also effectively ended the ‘modular’ approach to learning and its assessment.

- Promising to reform exam board practices. During December 2011, *The Telegraph* ran a series of articles about practices at examination board seminars. They disclosed how some teachers were paying up to £230 a day to attend sessions with chief examiners during which they were advised about future questions and about techniques, even wording, that pupils should use to obtain higher marks (*Telegraph* 07/12/11). This resulted in the suspension of two senior examiners.
- Altering the format of school league tables. Preventing the inclusion of ‘GCSE equivalent’ vocational qualifications on the grounds that these are much less demanding academically and require less curriculum time.
- Introducing performance tables in a new ‘English Baccalaureate’ restricted to English, maths, science, either history or geography and a modern foreign language, thus narrowing the range of ‘subjects that will count’, cutting out arts as well as crafts and sports.

It was Gove’s proposals for new English Baccalaureate Certificates (EBCs) that were to be most controversial with a consultation

document *Reforming Key Stage Four* (DfE 2012) published in response to the GCSE exam grades debacle in August 2012, when it became evident that the June-July English exam papers had had higher grade boundaries than those in January. In the interests of ‘rigour’, it pulled no punches, concluding:

‘There is clear evidence that the standards of our examinations have fallen over time, and that the expectations they set for our students are now below those of our international competitors. Between 2006 and 2009, the proportion of students achieving a C grade or higher in English and mathematics GCSE increased by 8%. But comparison with international tests – where there is no incentive for achievement to be inflated – taken in those years show that this significantly overstates the actual improvement in attainment which has taken place’. (3.3)

Announcing EBCs would replace GCSEs, the consultation document claimed there was an urgent need to restore public confidence in an examinations system where ‘60% of those surveyed in a recent YouGov poll believe that GCSEs have got easier, while only 6% think that they have got harder’ (3.4). More specifically,

‘employers, universities and colleges are dissatisfied with school leavers’ literacy and numeracy, with 42% of employers needing to organise additional training for at least some young people joining them from school or college’. (3.3)

The issue of standards is complex however. For example, in response to Gove’s concerns Ofqual compared question papers in biology and chemistry GCSEs, and biology, chemistry and geography A-levels between 2003 and 2008, and 2001 and 2010. It considered them less demanding because they had multi-choice and less essay questions; but multi-choice questions and written essays test different abilities under different conditions and therefore it is questionable whether a

comparative analysis of this type can ever really be conclusive. Gove's conception of standards is also only one conception.

In his *Enquiry into A-level standards* 2002, Professor Tomlinson concluded,

'I believe it to be vital that there is greater public understanding of the examination process and that as a consequence there is an end to the annual argument about results. The standard has not been lowered if an increased proportion of students meet it as a consequence of improved teaching and hard work.'²⁹

Tomlinson's comments illustrate the inherently insolvable tensions behind the debate about exam standards. Are standards really falling or is the problem that there are too many people meeting them? These tensions are also reflected in two different approaches to examination assessment. As noted earlier, GCE O-levels and A-levels until 1993, were based on 'normative referencing' – essentially a quota system with candidates in competition with each other. In contrast, GCSEs have been based on 'criterion referencing' when students get marks for what they show they know or what they demonstrate they can do.

Tomlinson's reference to 'improved teaching' might be seen as an endorsement of the 'teaching to the test' culture which now dominates schools so that teachers must meet 'performance targets' or risk sanctions, even dismissal. On the other hand, we should not underestimate the importance young people now attribute to passing exams and as a result, the 'hard work' that they now put in in order to do so. Whether they and their teachers are working smarter or merely harder to less purpose is another question.

²⁹www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/TMN2

In post-war years qualifications were predominantly seen as requirements for white-collar employment and, as noted in chapter 1, many working-class school leavers, especially boys without any or with few qualifications, could make a relatively easy transition – at least compared with today – to industrial manual work, including apprenticeships. Now, with the absence of real employment opportunities and a changing occupational structure, most will consider gaining the good exam grades essential as labour market labour currency to improve their place in an ever lengthening ‘jobs queue’ (Allen and Ainley 2012).

In a slack labour market employers also know they can recruit well qualified (now ‘overqualified’) young people for jobs for which qualifications were not previously required and so more jobs become ‘graduatised’, so that degrees – especially particular types of degrees – lose their original value. In this context ‘grade inflation’ is the inevitable consequence of ‘diploma devaluation’.

Economy or culture?

In arguing his case for more ‘rigour’ in public exams and in the context of the UK’s declining international performance, Gove portrays himself as a ‘moderniser’, looking to the education practices of high performing countries for inspiration. His White Paper argues that ‘High-performing jurisdictions such as Finland, Singapore, Hong Kong and New Zealand ensure that principles of knowledge, teaching and learning underpin their aims and strategic commitments’ (2.3).

Consequently, the Experts’ Panel Report on the National Curriculum

commissioned by Gove (DfE 2011) proposed a more ‘knowledge based’ curriculum. Moving away from what is described as the ‘transferable knowledge and skills approach’, it aimed at a ‘curriculum representing the accumulated experience of the past and the representation of this for the future’ – where knowledge is something to be ‘mastered’ rather than explored, transmitted rather than ‘constructed’...’ (2.10). For example:

‘...the emphasis on effort is particularly marked in the Confucian-heritage countries such as China, Hong Kong SAR, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan. The assumption here is that deep engagement with subject matter, including through memorisation where appropriate, leads to deeper understanding.’ (8.6) and ‘Hong Kong... as with South Korea and Singapore also operates with a curriculum model focusing on “fewer things in greater depth”.’ (8.10)

This type of comparative analysis is highly selective at best (see Morris 2012). It compares very different traditions of education, including those requiring pictographic characters as opposed to phonic literacy. Even Sir Michael Barber, architect of many ‘school improvement’ reforms during the last two decades, warned about the dangers of copying policy on the hoof (*Guardian* 22/8/12). Barber also pointed out that as policy makers in the Asian Tiger economies recognise that their economic systems need to become ‘more innovative’ and their schools ‘more creative’, some of the countries cited by Gove were looking to European education systems for inspiration.

While most teachers in England would welcome the relaxed, but successful education system of league table free Finland, which incidentally has relatively low levels of the ‘school autonomy’ also seen

by free marketeers like Gove as essential for high performance, do we really want the type of rote learning and fact regurgitation, not to mention the stress and parental obsession that is associated with school systems in Asian Pacific countries? (For an insight, see *China's Ant People*, a BBC documentary first broadcast in December 2012 but now available on the *Why Poverty* series website in conjunction with the Open University.) There are many other reasons for the high growth rates of these economies that have little to do with their education programmes.

In any case, Peter Wilby (*Guardian* 08/12/2012) pointed out that the specific OECD international tests on which Gove based his evidence had since been declared invalid with officials reprimanded. Also, less than three months after Gove had published his proposals for exam reform, new 'global league tables' published by the multi-national education supplier Pearson and compiled by *The Economist* Intelligence Unit ranked the UK sixth best in the world – although Finland and South Korea remained first and second.³⁰

There is an argument that all young people should have access to what Michael Young refers to as 'powerful knowledge' (2008) and that the balance between knowledge and 'skills' needs to be restored. Gove told the RSA (30/06/09) that every citizen 'had the right to draw on our stock of intellectual capital' and that a 'culture of relativism starves the curious'; but, sitting alongside Gove's arguments that it is through 'deepening knowledge – through subject disciplines that real understanding and thinking skills are embedded' (RSA speech 30/06/09), is also an overt enthusiasm for a particular and extremely

³⁰www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-20498356

narrow notion of ‘culture’ and ‘tradition’. As a result, it has been widely perceived that Gove is taking secondary education *back to the grammar school* (Allen 2012), restricting examination success to a smaller number of candidates but also re-establishing the importance of education in the transmission of particular cultural values. Rather than a ‘moderniser’, promoting social mobility and dynamic change to stimulate economic growth (somehow!), on the contrary, Gove is returning to the ‘restorationist’ tradition of the New Right in the 1980s (Jones 1989).

For example, Gove considers the school history curriculum should reflect a particular heritage: ‘I believe very strongly that education is about the transfer of knowledge from one generation to the next... The facts, dates and narrative of our history in fact join us all together.’ (Westminster Academy speech quoted by Allen 2012) In his RSA speech, Gove similarly lamented the results of a survey in which many history students entering Russell universities named Nelson, rather than Wellington in charge at Waterloo. Thus, former-Coalition schools Minister Nick Gibb was to promise that in future history syllabuses would prioritise the values of ‘knowledge and scholarship’ rather than ‘enquiry’ and ‘interpretation’. Like Gove, he said that instead of an emphasis on ‘how to learn about history’, there needs to be an emphasis on ‘what history to learn’ (Telegraph.co.uk 22/10/12).

Gove’s attack on ‘relativism’ also entails rejecting a curriculum that includes a variety of viewpoints with consideration by students of their validity and how that is to be established, not to mention different cultural traditions. Instead, there is no debate and content is clearly defined by those who know best so that it is fixed and final. It is also

hierarchical with EBC subjects considered more important than others excluded from the wrap-around qualification. This is a long way from the baccalaureate once associated with progressive reformers, or even the academic International Baccalaureate which at least includes subjects such as philosophy in its essay questions.

...Or are there just too many students passing?

Much of the criticism of the EBC proposals was to come from prominent individuals in the creative arts³¹ and from leaders of sports governing bodies³², both concerned about the narrowness of the Ebacc. Their concern was justified, like that of the Goldsmiths' College lecturers who wrote a joint letter to *The Independent* (27/11/12), even if it may also be self-interested. Entries for GCSEs in creative arts subjects and for sports studies have been steadily declining anyway and the EBCs would have certainly created new subject hierarchies, further enhancing some and marginalising others. In the run up to the changes, schools concentrating resources on coaching pupils in what would have been a 'six subject' curriculum.

The EBC proposals were designed to create a two-tier secondary education. Hostility from the Liberal Democrats may have prevented Gove from officially bringing back the O-level and CSE divide, which was rumoured to be his original intention. However EBC was to be a Trojan horse for scrapping the GCSE and restoring pre-GCSE styles of

³¹ e.g. www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/sep/23/michael-gove-ebacc-destroy-creative-education

³² www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/dec/17/ebacc-olympic-legacy-sports-chiefs

assessment – with clearer notions of ‘pass’ and ‘fail’. Even if – as with the O-level – the EBCs would be ‘available to everybody’, students who did not pass, or those not entered, would be provided with a ‘Statement of Achievement’, setting out their ‘strengths and weaknesses’ in each subject.

The consultation document avoided being drawn on how exactly EBC grades would be determined, or if GCSE-style grading would be continued. *The Mail on Sunday* (16/09/12) originally claimed that only ‘one in ten’ would get ‘grade 1’ and Gove certainly intended to give Ofqual a leading in role in EBC ‘regulation’. At the moment only about one in five schools achieve 40% A* to C in current Ebacc GCSEs, though this will undoubtedly rise as schools give them more attention. The ‘higher standards’ of EBCs would, the consultation document promised, be more difficult and it would be harder to achieve a pass than it is to reach a grade C in GCSE.

Like traditional O-levels, EBCs would have end of course ‘three hour’ written exams, internal assessment will be ‘minimised’ and there will be an emphasis on spelling and punctuation. Arguably, this was much of the reason for the exclusion of performing arts and sports subjects as they are unsuited to this type of assessment.

Some two months after the EBC announcements Gove told the Independent Academies Association (*Guardian* 14/11/12) that he considered students also learnt better through the use of ‘memory and routine’ arguing that learning musical scales, times-tables and verse provided ‘mental equipment to perform more advanced functions and display greater creativity’. More competitive and more difficult exams

would he claimed, promote motivation, solidify knowledge and guarantee standards.

If the function of assessment is now to act exclusively as a sorting mechanism, then the EBC would perform the role very well. As Yandell (2012) put it, ‘if the aim is to arrive at a certain quota of sheep... then why waste time on anything more nuanced?’ In a letter to Ministers however, Ofqual’s Glenys Stacey was not so sure. She claimed that the EBC reliance on essays may mean that marking becomes more subjective and thus ‘less suitable for accountability measurement’ (*Financial Times*, 6/12/12). A plethora of appeals and requests for remarks could have been expected!

Back-track on the Ebacc: but not on its main ideas

In the wake of a damning Parliamentary Committee report, but also the 30,000 strong petition produced by an alliance stretching from the National Union of Teachers to leaders of business and industry, Gove made what many saw as a humiliating climb-down on the EBC, conceding he had gone ‘too fast too soon’. At the same time as announcing GCSE would now stay however, he also decreed that for the Ebacc subjects at least, it would be re-launched and be harder to pass.

Like the EBC, the new GCSEs would now be based on end of course external assessment whenever possible, there would be no more ‘tiered’ papers as in the current GCSE and a new emphasis on spelling and punctuation. New syllabuses in history and English in particular would be given the new cultural emphasis described earlier. In other words,

opponents of the Ebacc/EBC have not had a conclusive victory and it will be argued below that, as with the proposed EBC, the changes to GCSEs reflect the changing context in which education now operates.

Restoring the A-level ‘gold standard’

Helped by the Curriculum 2000 reforms, which modularised all exams, A-level entries and A-level passes have risen to unprecedented levels and the continued increase in top grades – with one in four candidates achieving an A – has led to a backlash from elite private schools amid allegations of dumbing down and to a situation where ‘Oxford, Cambridge and Imperial College regularly turn away candidates with three A-grade passes as a result’.³³ According to Ofqual (*BBC News* 19/6/12), modular A-levels should be abolished and resits restricted to one. Gove has now scrapped January examinations, regularly used for resits or ‘premature’ entries by schools and reverted to a two-year course disconnected from the AS level, previously a compulsory requirement and usually taken at the end of year one.

One consequence of A-levels popularity has been increased reliance upon alternative ‘elite’ qualifications like the Cambridge Pre-U, while Cambridge and the LSE have also published ‘B’ list subjects considered ‘undesirable’ for their admissions criteria. Gove has unashamedly identified himself with this lobby and has backed the Pre-U. He has also, as noted above, set out clear ideas about how A-level should be restored to its former glory, reclaiming it as the ‘gold standard’– instructing awarding bodies to involve Russell universities in syllabus

³³www.Independent.co.uk 13/09/12

design so as to link it more directly with entry to HE. The Russell group has already issued a new list of ‘facilitating’ A-levels –effectively the original Ebacc subjects from which prospective applicants should study two. All this fits with Willetts’ plan to reduce numbers attending universities and to heighten competition amongst institutions for top-grade students. It restores A-level to its original purpose for which it was introduced in 1951 as a university entrance qualifying exam for a small minority of applicants specialising in either the arts or the sciences (Snow 1959).

Though not receiving anything like the same attention that was devoted to GCSE, 2012 saw a 0.4% fall in the number of A/A* A-level grades. As with GCSE, this was surely the result of applying a comparative outcomes formula, even if the total percentage grades A*-E continued to increase – by 0.2 per cent, even though the exam boards claimed they had done ‘nothing different’ this year and the official explanation from the Government and Ofsted was that this year’s cohort was ‘weaker’ (*Independent (i)*17/08/12). The fall in top grades caught out some of the universities, both Russell and ‘middling’, that sought to take advantage of a government decision to allow them to expand through the ‘unlimited’ recruitment of students with minimum grades of AAB (ABB next year). It also meant that some institutions found that total recruitment was down – Southampton reported a fall of 600 after withdrawing from clearing when the supply of AAB students ‘dried up’ (*Guardian* 07/09/12). All but the Famous Five or Fab Four (depending if LSE is counted with Oxford, Cambridge, Imperial and UCL) elite within the elite Russell Group lost students or went into clearing to make up their numbers.

Data from the Joint Council for Qualifications³⁴ also shows a further growth in percentage entries for more ‘traditional’ subjects, with Further Maths and Classical Studies experiencing the highest increase of 7.5% and a fall in the percentage of candidates taking newer (disparagingly labelled ‘softer’ A-levels). Law was one of the biggest losers with an 8.5% fall in entries. In addition, there was a further decline in the Applied A-level qualification with a 10.7% drop in the number of grades for the Double Award – less than 1,700 entries for ‘double’ business and 7,601 for the ‘single’ compared with almost 30,000 for the ‘academic’ version. But business studies as a whole (typical of anything with ‘Studies’ affixed to it rather than a proper ‘-ology’!) is considered ‘soft’ with numbers sliding and entries for ‘hard’ economics creeping up. *The Times* (17/10/12) also reported that Gove, in response to further pressure by Russell universities, is now planning an ‘A-Bacc’ made up of four traditional academic A-levels and a 5,000 word dissertation.

A brief word on primary and teacher training

Gove’s preoccupation with reforming the upper years of secondary education should not prevent us from recognising how traditionalist pedagogy is also penetrating primary education. Gove condemned New Labour’s *Rose Review* of the primary curriculum for ‘presaging a further abandonment of subject disciplines and a retreat into fuzzy abstract learning’ (RSA speech 30/06/09). Instead, the new draft National Curriculum for primary schools published in June this year

³⁴www.jcq.org.uk/national_results/alevels/

restores an emphasis on whole class ‘rote learning, the requirement for children to chant their times tables, the requirement to learn poetry by heart’ (Tomlinson 2012). Echoing the Ebacc, the new primary curriculum will consist of three main programmes of study – English, Maths and Science. For English there will be a phonics test for six year olds and a grammar test at 11; while for Year 3 Maths children will concentrate on adding or subtracting fractions ($5/7 + 1/7 = 6/7$ according to Tomlinson, being the example given by the DfE).

‘Funny phonics’, a simple prescription for the complex business of learning to read a language as phonetically irregular as English, has been picked up from New Labour’s advocacy of it as ‘the One Best Way’ to acquire literacy. Again, Gove’s simplistic logic is apparent – first learn to ‘sound out’ the letters (‘the basics’) and then put them together to make words, even if they don’t mean anything as in test questions on reading nonsense words. This is supposed to replace ‘trendy teacher’ emphasis on reading for meaning, whereas competent teachers have always combined the two approaches and known how their children were progressing from close acquaintance with their reading and writing without perpetually testing and retesting them.

To an extent, whole class approaches with teacher at the front and pupils paying attention will replace previous emphasis on ‘personalised’ approaches encouraging ‘differentiation’ and grouping pupils according to their various ‘learning styles’. Under New Labour these reached down even into infant schools with batteries of tests starting at earlier ages as teachers were encouraged to differentiate between HAPs, MAPs and LAPs (higher, middle and lower achieving pupils). These were ‘the

gifted and talented, the just plain average and the struggling’ as a 2005 White Paper unsubtly distinguished them (p. 20).

Despite teachers’ deviations from such directions, teacher training in university Schools of Education cannot be altogether absolved from some responsibility for the willingness of inexperienced new entrants to the profession to unthinkingly follow such instruction, as well as to go in for snake-oil solutions such as ‘brain gym’ supposed to stimulate the ‘left and right sides of the brain’ etc. However, to be fair to them, many teacher trainers tried to work around the precise prescription of competences in which they were supposed to train – not educate – teachers dictated to them by the central government’s Teaching Training Agency. Gove intends to abolish teacher training in any case since he does not believe in it – on the private school model, you either can or can’t teach and no amount of training or even education will alter this presumably genetic disposition – see Simon 1985.

Closely assessing and inspecting the new ‘phonics acquisition’ is going to have the predictable effect that teachers will concentrate on targeting their middling pupils, relegating failures to statements of special needs (not that there will be much additional provision for them any longer) and ignoring the already competent. Concentration on ‘sounding out’ at the expense of reading for meaning and the enjoyment of narrative could even inhibit pupils’ progress in reading. Together with the debilitating effects of television and the internet upon literacy (see Maryanne Wolf 2008), this could possibly add to the more or less constant 20% of the (male) adult population who have been recorded as only ‘functionally’ literate and numerate since they were first tested by the army for national service after the war. (The Department of

Education claims 14% of adults are functionally illiterate and 28% functionally innumerate, Ade-Ojo *o.c.*).

Gove and vocational learning

After a decade during which New Labour attempted – but again failed – to establish ‘parity of esteem’ between academic and vocational learning by rebranding the latter ‘applied’ education based more on text-book learning, Gove has sought to marginalise vocational education by restoring the boundaries with academic study whilst also insisting vocational education is more practical and work based. On coming to office, Gove commissioned Professor Alison Wolf to ‘review’ vocational learning. Reviewing 25 years of ‘vocational pathways’ in schools, Wolf (2011) concluded that current vocational education was both inadequate in content – calling for a greater emphasis on maths and English skills – but also ‘worthless’ for labour market entry. She proposed vocational learning should be restricted to 20% of the timetable pre-16 and called for the expansion of apprenticeships.

Not all Tories agree. Lord (Kenneth) Baker, the creator of the 1988 academic National Curriculum, now claims the importance of practical learning and ‘soft skills’, like team building, will be undermined. Baker told the BBC *Today* programme (03/03/11) that Wolf ‘didn’t go far enough’ and that Britain needed ‘better institutions for practical, technical, hands-on training below 16’. Gove’s proposals for making the EBC the basis for high status learning would have certainly impinged on Baker’s University Technical Colleges (UTCs), a new

technical stream offering vocational specialisation from age 14 with three due to open from September 2012 onwards and more in the pipeline.

Against Gove's emphasis on academic learning, Ed Miliband, in a move that would certainly please Lord Baker, used his 2012 leader's speech at Labour Party Conference to announce new proposals for Technical Baccalaureates for 'the forgotten 50%' – those who do not progress to university. No details or blue prints for this new qualification have since emerged, so it is difficult to see whether they may be a sufficient departure from the ill-fated 14-19 specialist diplomas described in chapter 1. Only one of the new UTCs (Aston in Birmingham) has a specific link with local industry and shares new premises with the University of Aston to which it will predictably afford guaranteed entry to successful students.

The scrapping of the Ebacc/EBC proposals may make the Baker project slightly easier however, as new Key Stage 4 league tables now allow performance in three non Ebacc subjects to be counted, including approved 'high quality' vocational options. It is still not clear how the creation of a new 'technical stream' – as represented by Baker and Miliband's initiatives – coincide with the labour market developments also discussed in chapter 1 however.

Higher education at a higher cost – paying more for less

Alongside new divisions in schools, Gove's counterpart Willetts plans increased divisions within higher education. Here also the same tired free market formula of competition driving up 'standards' will be

applied at a cost. New Labour had accepted the bi-partisan 1997 Dearing Report and introduced a £1,000 tuition fee – waving goodbye to an era of free higher education in favour of one where attending university was regarded as an ‘investment’. Labour then went on to break its own 2005 election promise by raising the level to which fees could be charged to £3,000. Yet this proved to be small beer compared to the Coalition’s decision to introduce a £9,000 ceiling in response to the 2010 Browne Review, effectively introducing an HE free-market and preparing the way for the abolition of capping altogether which was only retained *pro tem* at the insistence of the Lib Dems.

Under the new proposals higher education is essentially being redefined as what economists refer to as a ‘private good’ to be run through a ‘voucher’ system (Brown 2012). The cost of teaching all subjects, save the STEM subjects of Science, Technology, Engineering and Medicine, will be met entirely from student fees. Institutions thus compete for student customers and charge them ‘what the market will bear’. Universities wanting to charge more than £6,000 a year from September 2012 when the scheme became operational had to undertake measures, such as offering bursaries, summer schools and outreach programmes, to encourage students from poorer backgrounds to apply – mimicking practices in the US Ivy League. Since most institutions raised their fees to near the cap, there is still no market in which different institutions and courses within them can be compared on price. Nevertheless, following the dogma, to ensure that market forces work efficiently and effectively, the government will ensure that universities publish as much information to consumers as possible. Not only about course provision but also about student outcomes and graduate destinations, i.e. labour market outcomes.

Again, to strengthen the free market, the government also sought to widen the choice of supplier, increasing franchising to further education colleges (HE in FE) but also changing the regulations about ‘eligibility’ to award degrees. Any college with 1,000 minimum full-time degree level students can convert to university status, rather than having to call itself a ‘university college’. The new financial arrangements will also increase the number of private suppliers, including small colleges operating their own franchise arrangements with universities that could be anywhere in the UK, if not in the world, aiming to attract students by slashing undergraduate fees, like the specialist law and accountancy ‘universities’ that have been encouraged to enter the competition for loan-bearing students. In addition to arguments about efficiency, the increases in student fees were given the further economic justification of providing additional revenue for the Fab Four/ Famous Five to maintain their ‘world class’ status in an increasingly globalised market. And indeed, they have followed their wont by not increasing the numbers of applicants they admit in order to increase demand and invest even more in research as a further indication of their ‘quality’ instead of in teaching.

What price a degree?

The government has accused those opposed to fee rises, especially NUS, of spreading misinformation about fees that do not have to be paid until graduation. Each month employed graduates will pay back 9% of their income above a £21,000 threshold but the subsidised interest rate at which the repayments are made – currently 1.5% – could be raised, as blogger Andrew McGettigan has repeatedly warned. Under

a ‘progressive tapering’ system, the interest rate will rise from just inflation (RPI) for incomes of £21,000, to 3% on top of inflation for incomes above £41,000. Interest of inflation plus 3% will also be charged whilst the student is studying. Any debt that is not cleared 30 years after graduation will be cancelled. Critics have alleged that Willetts got his sums wrong and that the loans would only add to the national debt that the Coalition were supposed to reduce. Alternatively, as McGettigan suggests, Willetts calculates on not lending so much because the total number of undergraduates will be reduced and is already being reduced.

Clearly this is the main political objective of the fee increases. Less students will both reduce costs but also, as with Gove’s attempts to reinstate a more selective and elitist education at the upper end of the secondary school, restore the university as a minority, rather than a ‘mass’, institution. Thus, as discussed in more detail below, the intention is also to expand apprenticeship as a cheaper but also more appropriate alternative for many young people. Nearly all universities have raised their entry thresholds as well as their fees and withdrawn commitments to ‘widen participation’ – if not to ‘fair access’ but this is not the same thing – as they revert to traditional type and drop modular forms of assessment. At the same time they are desperately seeking links with employers, furiously franchising and piloting two-year, four-term degrees with learning-on-demand and on-line.

Despite – or partly as a consequence of these moves, already only about one in three 18+ women are now applying for degrees compared with a quarter of 18+ men. This is way down on New Labour’s target of half of 18-30 year-olds to be in some sort of HE by 2010 that was nearly

achieved for women at least, despite raising fees. It appears that many young men now have other options, as perhaps have some of the more highly qualified sixth-formers who are prepared to go abroad, wait things out or enter employment without the necessity of going to HE in hopes of a ‘graduate premium’ that for many graduates promises only about 15% of their prospective lifetime earnings over non-graduates as Million+ estimate it (Hadfield *et al* 2012).

Even though there are still about seven million full- and part-time students in further and higher adult education, half a million of them postgraduates, already overall undergraduate home applications to English universities were down by about 10% for 2012, though UCAS data³⁵ still shows applications from school leavers, even those from less well-off back grounds, holding up well. One explanation could be that without having alternative options well-qualified young people have little else on offer, particularly given it is the case that with average incomes falling (as we noted in chapter 1) more may realize they may never fully pay the loans back anyway. If so, this is going to throw Willetts’ calculations into disarray.

UCAS figures show older students are now less likely to apply to any university and so account for a large part of the overall drop in applications. By contrast, rather than applying to local universities to save money by living at home, many ‘oven-ready’/ A-level qualified sixth-formers still go for the ‘full-student package’ at campus and other unis between the Fab Four and the Million+ group of former-polys, although some of these institutions report ‘wild swings’ in numbers of

³⁵http://www.ucas.com/about_us/media_enquiries/media_releases/2012/20120130

applicants (Guardian.co.uk. 19/01/13).

Perhaps this explains why many Million+ institutions are most badly down – especially in the hardest hit everywhere humanities, social sciences and modern languages as well as business studies – but also because many institutions raised their entry tariff and thus excluded students who might otherwise have come to them. (The one exception to this trend is this year’s stipulation that all nurses should complete fee-free degree courses.) Not many applicants have so far been attracted by alternative offerings from the FE colleges where the number of HE in FE students has also fallen by 50% in some colleges (Guardian.co.uk 19/01/13).

The latest new universities that have been encouraged to enter the market for degrees and sub-degrees have also been no more successful and nor have private providers, save in some specialist subjects like accountancy and law.

At the time of writing, it is difficult to establish whether the above trends will continue – UCAS reported a further 8% fall in applications up to mid-November 2012, but both UCAS and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills argue the figures come too early in the cycle to draw any real conclusions (*Independent (i)* 29/11/12).

Are apprenticeships really the alternative?

The flip-side to reducing the number of university students has been an aim to increase the number of apprentices, though in their enthusiasm

for them both Willetts and Gove seem to have forgotten that half of 18+ year olds are young women and that, despite the largest surviving old-style apprenticeship being in hairdressing, most of these girls who have achieved more highly than boys in terms of qualifications, will not be immediately attracted by the metal-bashing technical trades of yesteryear which seem to be the image of apprenticeship uppermost in the Ministers' minds!

BIS research also shows clear links between apprenticeships and lower socio-economic background – only 8% of apprentices coming from managerial and professional backgrounds with the largest group from the old occupational categories of C1 and C2 (routine white collar or skilled manual) and 28% from semi-skilled/ unskilled backgrounds, categories that have recently produced some of the largest increases in university applicants³⁶.

In fact, the new schemes have little in common with the post-war, time-served and legally binding apprenticeships referred to in chapter 1 – only 14% were in either manufacturing or engineering (BIS working paper 76, May 2012). John Major introduced 'Modern Apprenticeships' in 1994. These combined 'Modern' with reassuringly conservative sounding 'Apprenticeships' – like his 'warm beer and old maids cycling to church'! In fact, they were more 'Postmodern' with flexible time-serving and no guarantee of employment on completion. Nevertheless, new Labour administrations further sustained them by providing subsidies to employers who ran them.

³⁶www.ucas.com/about_us/stat_services/stats_online/data_tables/socioeconomics).

Now apprenticeships are divided into different levels 1 – Intermediate Level linked to a level 2 Competence Qualification (GCSE equivalent), Advanced linked to level 3 (A-level equivalent), with ‘Higher’ linked to level 4 (degree – or at least foundation degree – equivalent). Approaching 300,000 began apprenticeships during 2009/10 and in its 2011 budget the Coalition announced 50,000 more apprenticeships, 250,000 more by 2015. According to Professor Wolf, because they provide practical experience in the workplace, apprenticeships give a much higher return for young people compared with school and college-based, full-time vocational education courses. Despite the success of oversubscribed apprentice schemes, ‘offering good salaries and quick promotion’ (BT’s higher level apprenticeship had more than 100 applicants for each of its training places while Network Rail had 8,000 applicants chasing 200 places), the problem as Wolf identifies, is that, only one in ten firms offer apprenticeships at all.

As Wolf also recognises, in 2007/8 less than half of apprenticeship starts were by 16-18 year olds – a 7% fall from previous years (Wolf, 165). In evidence to Wolf, UKCES reported that the demand for apprenticeships exceeded supply by more than 15:1. So in future, we can still expect a large proportion of apprenticeships to be provided by FE colleges or by private training organisations. Like the Youth Training Schemes of the 1980s, described by Finn as *Training Without Jobs* in 1987, they will be little more than ‘Apprenticeships without Jobs’, the school-leavers’ equivalent of an unpaid graduate internship.

The government may argue that 163,000 new apprenticeships have already been created – more than double their original proposal of 50,000 and that George Osborne has pledged an extra £150,000 million

to bring the total apprenticeship budget to £1.4bn by 2012. It is now clear however that only a minority of these new placements have been for young people (*Guardian* 28/10/11). Only 11,000 new places have gone to 16-18 year olds (just 7% of 16-18 year olds currently do apprenticeships, *Guardian* 27/11/12) and only 16% to those under 25. According to the IPPR, around 40% go to people over the age of 25 and apprenticeship starts for those aged over 25 increased by 234% between the middle of 2010 and the end of the first quarter of 2011³⁷

According to the Department for Business's own survey of over 11,000 apprentices,³⁸ while two thirds received on the job training for an average of just over 12 hours and half off the job/ college training for just over six hours, 5% of apprentices reported they got neither, 1 in 20 adding that they got no pay at all. It is also evident that employers have repackaged or are 'converting' or 'rebranding' existing jobs as apprenticeships so as to meet targets and qualify for state subsidies.

Neither is it clear how many apprenticeships will be short-term – maybe for a few months at best. The bulk of Morrison's trainees (around 85%) are members of the existing adult workforce and aged over 25. The average duration of these 'apprenticeships' is just 28 weeks (IPPR). Again, according to DBIS's own research³⁹ 7% of apprenticeships last for less than six months, just under half last less than a year and only 22% longer than two years.

³⁷ www.ippr.org/publications/55/8028/rethinking-apprenticeships

³⁸ www.bis.gov.uk/publications

³⁹ www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/further-education-skills/docs/e/12-812-evaluation-of-apprenticeships-learners

Thus, according to the Richard Review of Apprenticeships commissioned by the DBIS,⁴⁰ ‘There has been a drift towards calling many things apprenticeships which in fact are not.’ An apprenticeship in an old job is ‘on the job training. There must be a job and the job must be a new one’ (p5). Under the Coalition, ‘apprenticeships’ often exist in name only and are certainly not the legally binding indentures of yesteryear that guaranteed employment on completion, because again, employers, benefiting from plenty of applicants, including plenty of graduates, do not require such ‘time serving’; nor is it required to acquire the ‘skills’ of most jobs, 40% of which it is estimated can be performed effectively in a few days (Felstead *et al* 2002). The reality is that most employers do not require apprentices for work which is increasingly automated and unskilled if it has not been outsourced abroad.

Education and the economy: a new correspondence?

If the effects of Gove’s proposed curriculum and examination changes on national economic performance are highly questionable and hardly justifiable, the concluding pages of this chapter return to the issue of education and the economy, but from a quite different perspective. We have argued that, rather than responding to the needs of a ‘knowledge economy’ in which high skilled jobs predominate, ‘education, education, education’ has not been able to fulfil the expectations it raised, producing instead an ‘overqualified and underemployed’ generation. The education system is therefore increasingly

⁴⁰www.bis.gov.uk/news/topstories/2012/Nov/richard-review-of-apprenticeships

dysfunctional and concerned only with maintaining social control in the absence of work.

However, according to Hirtt (2011), there is now an increasing recognition by European governments that it is not necessary for all students to have higher level qualifications, only ‘key competences’ or ‘basic skills’. In other words, a new ‘correspondence’ between education and the economy does not require everyone to be highly educated.

‘The problem posed for the European decision-makers is as follows: through the evolution from the fifties to the eighties we inherited education systems where students follow eight to ten years of common education. From a historical perspective, this coincided with the belief in a prosperous capitalism, with a strong and continuous growth, requiring a continuous rise in the level of education. But today, we live in an era of crisis, massive unemployment and polarisation of qualifications. So today what should be the common basis for education for, on the one hand, future engineers and, on the other hand, future low-qualified workers, who will be working in one insecure job after another?’ (Hirtt, 12).

From what has been argued in chapter 1, Hirtt’s search for a ‘skills’ explanation should also be seen to be problematic, being another attempt at constructing a direct education-economy ‘correspondence’ albeit a rather different one. Hirtt’s model has some commonalities with the neo-Marxist theories of Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976) where, rather than increasing the productivity of human capital, schools essentially restrict personal development through the development of conformity and through the reproduction of the ‘capitalist social relations of production’ needed to discipline the future workforce.

‘To capture the economic import of education, we must relate its social structure to the forms of consciousness, interpersonal behaviour, and personality it fosters and reinforces in students.’ (9)

Education and ‘knowing your place’

However, Hirtt’s more general observation about the changing nature of education in declining economies is a useful one. It helps to explain

‘the increased importance of education in the “social control” of a generation of young people who, compared with their counterparts of fifty years ago, now experience a very different relationship to the labour market. In contrast to official wisdom about the positive challenge of globalisation for education and employment, we would argue that many of the developments in schools, colleges and universities, are, on the contrary, the result of the negative consequences of economic restructuring on the lives of young people. With the breakdown of the traditional avenues of transition from school to work and the replacement of the manual/ non-manual divide by an increasingly credentialised occupational structure, educational institutions are required to restore “order” to the lives of young people.’ (Allen and Ainley 2007, 34)

We would add that education has always and everywhere played a key role in social control (see *PS* to Ainley 2003) but this does not mean that reformers have not played an important part in shaping the direction of state education policy and, during the second half of the twentieth century in particular, campaigned successfully to make schools more comprehensive and further and higher adult education more accessible. The abolition of the 1944 tri-partite system was an historic advance in social progress but it is still very much the case that

the reasons for the expansion of state education from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards resulted from concerns about threats to political and social stability. Also the dangers from working class ‘self-education’. In a way, the comprehensive reforms and subsequent widening participation to HE can be seen as an attempt to educate the working class out of existence by professionalising the proletariat.

Notwithstanding the efforts of philanthropists concerned about the inequities of child labour and also recognising that many employers opposed the extensions to compulsory state schooling, education was necessary to ‘shackle minds’ and ‘civilise the class as a whole’ (Johnson 1976). As Robert Lowe from the Council for Education in a speech about Disraeli’s 1867 Reform Bill observed:

‘You have placed the government in the hands of the masses; you must therefore give them education.’ (NUT undated)

For a long time after the 1870 Education Act increased mandatory provision, schooling remained marginal to many working-class children and truancy remained and remains high (Finn 1987, 9).

Despite a century of further reforms, state education has continued to play a contradictory role and there is no evidence that in itself it has ever promoted real social mobility and challenged real inequality. As noted in chapter 1, during the post-war period many working-class children ‘moved up’ into professional and managerial jobs, but, as we have made clear, this was ‘absolute’ upward mobility because there was an increase in the number of these jobs, rather than ‘relative mobility’ when as many people would have moved down. Nevertheless, the potential of education to reform society has continued to inform

political rhetoric. In the New Labour years, as argued in chapter 1, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown urged that changes in the global economy now meant that there was ‘more room at the top’ for those who were well qualified and a reduction in opportunities for those who were not. The reality was the creation of a generation of ‘overqualified and underemployed’ young people – education running the risk of becoming increasingly ‘dysfunctional’ with a lack of fit between what was supposed to happen and what really does!

Helped by an inherent distain for the egalitarian principles that characterise comprehensive education, Conservative Party politicians like Michael Gove and David Willetts recognize more clearly than their critics that because education cannot meet employment aspirations its main purpose has become social control over youth. As we have seen, they seek to tighten the selection of a minority through cramming for more academic exams and by ‘pricing out’ those who cannot afford it from higher education. An indiscreet interview with an education mandarin illustrates how their policies are continuous with Tory ideas of the 1980s:

‘There has to be selection because we are beginning to create aspirations which society cannot match. When young people drop off the education production line and cannot find work at all, or work which meets their abilities and expectations, then we are creating frustrations with perhaps disturbing consequences.

We have to ration the educational opportunities so that society can cope with the output of education...We are in a period of considerable social change. There may be social unrest... [and] if we have a highly educated and idle population, we may possibly anticipate more serious social conflict. People must be educated once more to know their place’. (Ranson 1984)

Education and social control: implications for politics and policy

Developing an alternative programme for education and young people requires a new intellectual clarity. This chapter has sought to illuminate the changing role of education in response to new economic conditions – the reversal of the ‘reforming’ functions of education and the return to the emphasis on its original intentions of social control. While accepting that education continues to be an unequal and unfair process, many reformers and campaigners still assume this situation can be ameliorated by changes in policy direction with better funding, less selection and reformed assessment. Though more radical approaches put the emphasis on creating an alternative pedagogy and a new approach to the curriculum (e.g. Wrigley 2006), while there is awareness of inequalities within education, there is little interest in exploring education’s compliant role in supporting economic restructuring and class recomposition.

Once influential and topical, Dale *et al*’s 1976 studies of the relationship between education, economy, class and power, are now largely absent from books and journals reflecting the role of education in the ‘reproduction’ of class relationships and social inequalities. These are now widely seen by academics as refracted through culture, as in the influential work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu who advised on the education policies of Mitterrand’s socialist government in France in the 1980s. Cultural solutions require less radical interventions than structural ones and the increased influence of ‘post-structuralist’/postmodern theory within academia meant that the concept of ‘power’ itself became problematic and, following Foucault, dissipated in

‘discourse’. One-time radicals have also been influenced by ‘school improvement’ – essentially a set of management theories applied by the London University Institute of Education to raise performance levels, particularly in inner city and ‘deprived’ schools and colleges. As a result, bigger questions about the nature of ‘standards’ themselves were put on the back burner.

These developments represent a retreat in understanding the crisis facing society and young people. This requires the type of interdisciplinary approach espoused in this book. As well as broadening its emphasis, a new politics of education also needs to construct new alliances that go well beyond various professional and practitioner interests. Though these – particularly teacher unions – will continue to be central to a programme of reform, a new politics also needs to develop a new approach to learning itself. These issues and others will be addressed in the concluding chapter.

One final, but important point: given the role of education in both the social control and in the ‘reproduction’ of inequalities, it is doubtful if any government – even one that endorses the neo-liberal project to the extent that Gove and Willetts do – would seek to privatise the public provision of education completely, particularly the school sector – though there are, as we have seen, fewer constraints on the privatisation of colleges and universities. School services can be outsourced and academies and free schools allowed to operate like private companies, and maybe a few, particularly more selective schools, run on a ‘for profit’ basis, while continuing to be funded by public money. Indeed, Gove has declared that he has ‘no objection to private firms running state schools for profit’ (*Independent* 10/1/13) and is angling for the

inclusion of this proposal in the Conservative manifesto for the 2015 election. He is supported by the Bright Blue pressure group within the Party of which Willetts is a leading luminary.

It is questionable whether the state could withdraw from education completely however, as it would lose too much direct authority and control over the schooling of the mass of the population – a control which has been extended and intensified in the absence of waged work. One of the key aims of Conservative policy makers therefore has been to target the local authorities as the main providers of education, moving from a national system of education that was locally administered to a national system that is now nationally controlled.

Thus, while all schools have been made more ‘autonomous’, at the same time centralised direction over them by the state has increased. This follows the usual formula in the new market-state of power contracting to the centre whilst responsibility for delivery of centrally set targets is contracted out. It does not preclude the introduction of some kind of voucher system but it does raise questions about whether schools to which parents are legally obliged to send their children would ever be allowed to open and close according to the vagaries of the market. The same does not apply to post-compulsory colleges and universities, where loans for fees constitute *de facto* paperless vouchers. Mergers and closures of whole universities – not just the closure of courses and departments within them that are already occurring – can be anticipated, following the reduction in numbers of FE colleges that has occurred since their incorporation in 1993 (Ainley and Bailey 1997).

Neither of the authors are soothsayers and nor can we anticipate how the rapid developments to which this book draws attention will develop

(including any resistance to them). It may be for instance that Baker can resolve his differences with Gove over the Ebacc, allowing a reversion to a post-war tripartite hierarchy of state secondary schools to emerge with UTCs as its middle tier. (We have questioned whether there is the ‘economic base’ for this correspondence and most UTCs seem sponsored by universities seeking to boost their entrants to technical subjects; so, like GNVQs and ‘applied A-levels’, they may merely offer a back-door to non-elite HE. The record of the original post-war secondary techs is not good either – being limited to only 4% of all English state secondary schools, they gave way to expanded further education leaving a binary division in the schools between the selective grammars plus privates as against the secondary modern vast majority.)

Or the wilder fantasies of Gove’s voucherite supporters may see a voucher introduced for basic primary and secondary provision with monetary contributions required from parents for additional services at academies and free schools. This would paradoxically bring the private schools into the state system as parents could also discount their vouchers against fees there. This would mean the state subsidising the private sector at a cost that even Sir Keith Joseph, Mrs. Thatcher’s *eminence grise*, Education Minister and convinced voucherite, realised would be prohibitive (see Denham and Garnett 2002, 432).

Nevertheless, it would be the most substantial reversal of all – if England, which had been the last of developed countries to have completed state elementary schooling only by 1902, would be the first country to go beyond its habitual *kowtowing* to the private schools and abandon state for private education altogether. Although it would fit with the general pattern of provision in the new market state for a semi-

privatised state sector to be increasingly indistinguishable from a state-subsidised private sector in the new mixed economy of post-welfare provision, it would be a hazardous and untried experiment for education.

Chapter 3

Moving on: Alternative policies for youth and education

Despite the urgency of the generational crisis confronting society, there is a lack of discussion about alternative policies. Opposition remains confused and divided, partly because, as we have argued in this short book, *The Great Reversal* that is being imposed on education at all levels is so extensive and far reaching that we are fighting on several fronts. Typically, education reformers and campaigners confine themselves to arguing for a school system based on ‘comprehensive’ principles, getting rid of academies and free schools and restoring local authorities to reduce inequalities and improve social mobility and for free further and higher education, ending tuition fees. These will always be fundamental demands, likewise ‘defending what we have got’ by keeping education as a public service against further privatisation and outsourcing (e.g. Holmwood 2011).

When the essential function of education for the state becomes one of maintaining social control, then a broader response is necessary. From a research perspective, it requires radical academics to get out more and stop speaking only to the converted, linking their own situation to that of the rest of education and addressing a wider audience more simply and directly than they do their often uncomprehending students. From a wider policy perspective, it requires the construction of different political programmes and new types of alliances between the growing opposition to the *Great Reversal* as the vast majority of parents, students and teachers realise that this mandateless project is of a part with the Coalition demolition of what remains of the rest of the welfare state. However, the argument in this book (and elsewhere – see Ainley

and Allen 2010) is that the particular conditions have long since gone that allowed education to be seen as a ‘great leveller’, or at least be seen as attempting to play a major reforming role in society and to ‘change lives’ in a period of economic growth and an expanding labour market with at least some opportunities for individual advancement.

Like most comment and debate on English education and schooling, this short book has concerned itself only with the state schools which are funded by taxpayers and nominally at least still democratically accountable to the national and – to a much lesser extent now – local state. However, as Diane Reay argues (2012), the long-standing dominance of private schooling over state education to all levels is an issue that can no longer be ‘sidelined’ as it was by ‘RAB’ Butler, author of the 1944 Education Act. Ironically, Michael Gove’s policies for involving the private sector in state schooling may afford the opportunity to do this. Certainly, the contradictions in his policies that we have exposed and which, we contend, indicate their inevitable failure will give another chance for progressive change. Similarly, the influence of what are still ‘The Great Public Schools’ over an ever more blatantly selective, expensive and snobbishly elitist hierarchy of universities is increasingly open to challenge.

The economics of youth unemployment

Following from what has been suggested, an alternative programme for young people must begin with the economy – where there has to be a focus on both a general ‘Keynesian’ demand stimulus, but also specific policies to deal with the issues faced by young people in the labour market. As argued, without some kind of fiscal stimulus, any scheme to

reduce unemployment is likely to fail. It is over-optimistic to believe that keeping public spending at existing levels, cancelling out the Coalition's VAT rise and keeping interest rates at rock-bottom, is going to be enough. And it is certainly not enough to argue, as Labour does, that the deficit should be reduced 'more slowly'. Labour's timidity is reflected in the fact that, despite having a healthy lead in opinion polls and despite the disastrous performance of the economy in recent months, Osborne and the Coalition are still ahead on the electorate's trust in economic competence, even if this lead is diminishing.⁴¹

Key to restoring the health of the economy is the expansion of the public sector through what old-fashioned socialists used to describe as 'a programme of public works' (Ainley and Allen 2010, 135). Extending but also using public ownership of major parts of the financial sector will ensure that credit flows are unlocked and that the self-employed, small-and medium-sized enterprises are able to borrow the money they need. Disappointingly, state intervention in the banking sector made necessary by the Credit Crunch was not continued and the limited state control of banks is being reversed, again, despite the fact that public confidence in financial institutions remains at an all-time low.

Without reverting to the large bureaucratic national corporations of the post-war years, the local state can be used far more strategically. In place of its rapid privatisation and attempted depoliticisation, it can be given the democratic authority to play a leading part in the national reconstruction that is becoming increasingly necessary. (See Latham 2011.) Providing local authorities are given the power and the financial

⁴¹www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2012/oct/23/tories-poll-voters-trust-economy

resources to do so, they can work alongside local voluntary sector agencies to provide and support secure employment opportunities and high quality services. In addition to restoring housing, education and improving local infrastructure, local authorities could play a key role in the creation of a million new ‘green’ jobs (Campaign Against Climate Change, 2009).

More specifically and in relation to youth unemployment, Paul Gregg and Richard Layard⁴² point out that the economic returns from creating employment for young people are greater than the cost of keeping them on the dole; not to mention the devastating and permanent social and psychological effects of a prolonged period of idleness on a young person, known as ‘scarring’. Gregg and Layard repeat the arguments of Keynes in his General Theory that increasing the level of spending increases levels of earning, thus generating additional tax revenue to cover the original spending and so on.

So, rather than simply concentrating on ‘improving’ the supply side of the labour market, the main problem that needs to be addressed to prevent further economic decline is the overall lack of demand. The previous Labour government’s Future Jobs Fund (FJF) represented a step in the right direction, adopting the premise that if jobs were not available they would need to be created. Under the £1 billion scheme, local authorities and voluntary and private sector employers could be subsidised by up to £6,500 to take on a jobless young person. The 150,000 new jobs were to be ‘socially useful’ and 10,000 had to be ‘green’. FJF was not without its weaknesses. Jobs were only guaranteed for six months and were relatively low skilled and at the minimum

⁴²www.cep.lse.ac.uk

wage. Nevertheless, FJF was described by the TUC Touch Stone website as ‘the most progressive employment programme for a generation.’⁴³ It did at least stabilise youth unemployment and was radical enough to be one of the first things abolished by the Coalition from May 2010.

Denouncing FJF as expensive and ‘bureaucratic’, the Coalition’s alternative ‘work programme’ was launched in July 2011. Essentially, 18 different contractors (15 of them private companies) were charged with finding employment opportunities for individuals, including young people, on a ‘payment by results’ basis; for example, contractors will receive £4,050 for finding a job for an 18-24 old who has been on Job Seekers’ Allowance. The reality is that most payments are much lower and that groups of people more difficult to help and with more complex needs may just be ‘parked’. In the absence of a lack of demand for employees, the Work Programme, if not an unmitigated disaster, can only have a very limited affect. As the Work Foundation argues:

‘The programme’s success is really dependent on the speed of economic recovery and the availability of suitable job vacancies for participants. This could be difficult as the programme’s minimum success criteria are in most cases above that which have been achieved by other employment programmes during times of relatively strong economic growth.’⁴⁴

Thus, an investigation by *The Guardian* revealed that in the 14 months until July 2012, none of the 18 contractors managed to meet the 5% target of placing people referred to the scheme in a job for half a year,

⁴³www.touchstoneblog.org.uk

⁴⁴www.theworkfoundation.com/pressmedia/news/newsarticle.aspx?oItemId=487

despite the government having spent £435m on the scheme thus far⁴⁵. One of the contracted companies, A4e was also embroiled in major fraud allegations in relation to another part of its operations. The second biggest contractor to the programme, with £438m of deals, A4e found only 490 jobs for 17,650 unemployed people in the south of England – a success rate of just 2.8%. The analysis also identified an unsurprising trend: that the work programme performed best in richer areas where there were lower levels of unemployment. The work programme in Middlesbrough, for example, where 15% are unemployed, found just 100 jobs for 4,500 people referred.

During the Jubilee Celebrations in June 2012, there were reports that unpaid security staff had been bussed in from as far away as Bristol as part of ‘training’ for a level 2 NVQ in stewarding organised through the Work Programme with trainees having to sleep under a Thames bridge starting work next day.⁴⁶ The training provider subsequently apologised but still insisted that the exercise provided a valuable opportunity for those seeking to find work in the security and stewarding sector.

The Coalition’s ‘Youth Contract’: too little, too late

In response to accusations that youth unemployment was getting out of control, in November 2011 Nick Clegg announced a new £1bn ‘youth contract’. At first sight, this appeared to represent a return to the ideas of the Future Jobs Fund, as it reintroduced the policy of subsidising

⁴⁵ www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2012/nov/27/work-programme-long-term-jobs

⁴⁶ www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-18329526

employers to take on unemployed young workers. Employers will indeed receive £2,275 = half the minimum wage – though less than under FJF – to encourage them to take on 160,000 unemployed youngsters but, as Clegg made clear on BBC Radio 4's *Today* Programme, the scheme is aimed not at public sector employers but at the private sector.

According to Clegg and the then-Work and Pensions Minister, Chris Grayling, employers taking part in a CBI discussion told Ministers the Youth Contract was a fantastic opportunity for them because so many were already passionate about tackling youth unemployment and already doing what they could to help young people, without any government incentive or intervention.⁴⁷ Just six months later a survey by the EEF, the manufacturers' organisation, showed that it was rather a different story.⁴⁸ Of the firms surveyed, not a single one was actually taking part in the scheme. 32% said they had not yet heard of it; 44% had but were not planning to take up the offer or even considering it – only 21% went this far. Unsurprisingly, the House of Commons Work and Pensions Select Committee warned that the initiative was having only a marginal impact and 'will not be enough' to encourage employers to create desperately needed new jobs (*Telegraph* 19/09/12).

⁴⁷ www.dwp.gov.uk/youth-contract/business/

⁴⁸ www.itv.com/news/2012-09-04/the-governments-youth-contract-comes-under-scrutiny

‘Workfare’ comes to the UK

As well as ‘more funding for apprenticeships’, including the subsequently announced so-called ‘professional apprenticeships’ (whatever they are – apart from another way to cut back on applications to higher education), the Coalition also announced that 250,000 young people would be provided with unpaid work experience placements lasting up to eight weeks, adding that they would lose their benefits if they ‘volunteered’ and then did not complete it. It is also the case that anyone on a ‘work-placement’ scheme is no longer officially counted as ‘unemployed’ even if they continue to receive benefits (*Guardian* 16/01/12).

This led to allegations about ‘slave labour’ and to one ‘trainee’, Cait Reilly, a University of Birmingham geology graduate, seeking (though failing) to get a judicial review against the scheme after she was required to stack shelves without pay in the budget store Poundland.⁴⁹ She appealed on the grounds that it had nothing to do with her aim of finding work in the museum sector and that by doing the work of paid employees the scheme was potentially increasing unemployment. The 22-year-old said she had been told by Job Centre officials that the placement was mandatory and that she had to give up an existing unpaid museum placement to complete it.

While Poundland defended the placements as providing valuable work experience, the fallout from what opponents labelled a British version of US ‘Workfare’ was that many well-known high street companies

⁴⁹www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-16037332

distanced themselves from the scheme. Aware of the adverse publicity, Tesco, for example, backtracked still further, promising to pay participants and offering a job if a placement was successful (*Guardian* 22/02/12). Department of Work and Pensions officials also gave assurances that the scheme would be used in a supportive rather than a coercive manner and would be ‘voluntary’. Labour has continued to be committed to principles of job creation and to promise sixth months of paid employment to the long term unemployed, but now, wanting to be seen as being as ‘tough’ on welfare as the Coalition, announced that those who refuse the offer would also be subject to benefit reduction (*Guardian* 05/01/13).

A basic income for all young people

Within an alternative framework of job creation, Local Authorities and local public/ voluntary sector alliances could be crucial in generating real opportunities for young people. For example, apprenticeships linked to real job opportunities, something Brighton’s Green council initiated before it was plunged into its own internal arguments about cuts. LAs can also play an increased role in developing other initiatives, for example, by introducing quotas for employment as conditions of Council contracts, purchasing agreements, planning permission and grants. LAs can also act as a network of local employment boards where employer vacancies can be matched to young people’s needs and where, to borrow language from the financial sector, local councils can act as a ‘provider of last resort’ for those young people still without employment.

Fundamentally however, the conception of ‘the problem’ needs to be changed. Rather than being seen as one where young people have to become much better prepared for ‘employability’, either by schools, colleges and universities providing ‘pre-vocational’ education or through government-backed pseudo-work placements, bogus apprenticeships and endless internships, the starting point should become an issue of entitlement. As the arguments in chapter 1 have emphasised, the traditional process of transition from education to employment has broken down and is unlikely to be restored in the foreseeable future. As a result, large numbers of young people, including many of those who are well qualified, will inevitably be unable to find the jobs that they want.

An important step for many young people would be a significant increase in their level of income through the minimum wage and in levels of state benefits, including an increase in the minimum paid to apprentices, which is still only £2.65 an hour. We would go further and argue that all young people should also be eligible for a basic income, although of course, there needs to be extensive discussion about the exact form that this should take and under what sort of conditions and the level at which it should be paid.

Clearly, it would be different to anything that has come before and should not be confused with Ian Duncan-Smith’s proposals for the reorganisation of welfare payments into a ‘universal credit’! Here, it is the Green movement, rather than the ‘socialist left’ which has set the agenda. The left continues to operate with a post-war collectivised model of the labour market where the issue is ‘the right to work’, rather than to question the conditions under which this might take place. This

leads to the contradiction referred to in chapter 1 when more and more people enter the workforce but everybody is being paid less! It is an approach that is completely inadequate to deal with a situation where young people (and many others) have to accept unregulated employment, without any of the traditional protection trade unions have been able to guarantee.

Growth and/or redistribution?

Of course, any alternative policies will require funding. In previous times welfare policies were financed by growth. While a plan for sustainable growth is essential, the assumption that the increases in taxation revenue necessary to allow welfare payments to be funded can be generated through economic expansion alone is no longer tenable in the way it used to be in the post-war years of the last century. There must be a move towards more direct redistribution.

Redistribution is much more of a political challenge, however, because it requires the transfer of resources – and as a result, the transfer of economic power – from one group to another. Redistribution should not be seen as redistribution from one generation to another (as by Willetts 2010) but should be a process of economic distribution financed by increases in the rate of income and corporation tax, increased land and estate duties. As this study has argued, the changing position of young people in society is the result of changes in the organisation of global capital rather than, as Willetts argues, the extravagancies of a ‘baby boomer’ generation, who have ‘taken too much’ and now have to ‘give it back’!

After the financial meltdown there has been greater general social awareness of inequalities, including hostility towards ‘the rich’. So much so that even David Cameron lays into CEO and banker bonus payments and all three major political parties compete to promote a ‘fairer’ or ‘more responsible’ capitalism. If the case for redistribution has been gaining strength, so has support for action against tax avoidance and closing the UK’s huge ‘tax gap’ with billions unpaid.⁵⁰

Redistribution of income but also redistribution of work

The concept of ‘redistribution’ can also be applied to work itself. Technological advances mean that an economy in which there are not enough secure, well paid and intrinsically satisfying jobs to go round and where a significant minority willingly and continually ‘overwork’ to the detriment of themselves and their families (Bunting 2004), while others are either ‘underemployed’, temporarily employed or not able to find work at all, can be replaced by one where ‘necessary’ work can be more easily distributed.

The redistribution of work was one of the central components of eco-socialist Andre Gorz’s thesis during the last crisis in the 1980s. As noted in chapter 1, Gorz argued that huge increases in industrial and manufacturing productivity – the result of advances in technology and changes in the production process – were leading to the classic Marxist ‘industrial proletariat’ being superseded by a ‘non-class’, no longer feeling involved in ‘its’ work or identifying with ‘its’ job. ‘Work no

⁵⁰ www.compassonline.org.uk/publications/item.asp?d=6284

longer signifies an activity or even a major occupation; it is merely a blank interval on the margins of life, to be endured in order to earn a little money' (Gorz 1982, 70).

Seen as Utopian at the time of its publication, Gorz argued it was already possible in France to reduce work to 1,000 hours a year without serious loss of income and in an age when there are simply not enough well paid and interesting jobs to go round – these arguments can only become more resonant. Indeed, the case for a 21 hour working week has been taken up by the New Economics Foundation⁵¹. While NEF argue that reducing the working week will reduce inequalities and promote social justice, it also cites ecological and sustainability issues. More economists are now recognising we can and must have 'prosperity without growth' (see Jackson 2011 for one example).

As noted earlier, according to Guy Standing young people make up the 'core' of a growing international 'Precariat'. This is an emerging class facing the increased economic insecurity resulting from globalisation and like Gorz's 'non-class', without the occupational identity of the old working class. Despite being part of a new dispossessed, Standing also detects emerging new social attitudes and argues more young people now reject 'the labourism of full-time jobs stretching out into the distance... are unimpressed by stories of employment drudgery and stress of older generations... In international polls nearly two-thirds of young people say they would rather be self-employed' (Standing 2011, 66). Young people, 'have seen their parents lose status, income, pride and stability, they have no role models to emulate' (*ibid*, 67).

⁵¹www.neweconomics.org

If today's youth find it difficult to form collective associations in the production process partly because they are part of the flexible labour force, working "remotely" then young people have become 'the world's urban nomads hurrying from one public place to another, from internet café to whatever doubles as workplace and play-space' (Standing, 78). As well as the 'groaners' unable to enter the conventional labour market through apprenticeships and competing with other groups of workers for the low paid service jobs described in chapter 1, there are the 'grinners' – students and back-backers happy to take precariat jobs who live more fully in the moment and are unconcerned about the future (Standing, 59).

Madeline Bunting (2004) writing about the 'all hours' working culture of many professional and managerial jobs was equally optimistic, declaring the 'the eighteen to twenty-four age group view the working culture of their parents with horror', while Ainley and Bailey found many FE students in the 1990s rejecting 'the dogma of work... that derived identity from occupation' (1997, 55-6). Whilst we should be careful about accrediting too much significance to any reportedly changing attitudes to work amongst young people, at the same time we should recognise the prevalence of new patterns of work as against the official obsession with 'career' in any new youth politics.

We need a different type of education

Even if we cannot 'educate our way out of recession', in a climate of austerity, privatisation and outsourcing, the starting point for campaigns around education must still be to defend 'what we have got' and to argue that education at school, college and university should be an

unconditional right for young people, free not just at the point of entry and subject to local democratic control, even if this means rethinking the LEA (Allen and Ainley 2007, 118). Yet with education in danger of experiencing a major crisis of ‘legitimacy’, we need an alternative to the post-war ‘reformist’ perspective which we have argued has effectively run its course. It is being replaced, as argued, by one of ‘education for social control’ which is what underpins the Gove-Willetts agenda. In the words of Camilla Valejo, the Chilean student leader, ‘we need to improve the educational system but not this one’. But if, to revisit Gramsci, we need to ‘struggle against the old school’ then ‘struggle’ in itself, is not really enough. Developing an alternative worth struggling for requires a different set of values and concepts to address the perennial question of ‘what should education be for?’

For higher education, Cambridge University lecturer Stefan Collini answered his own 2012 question *What Are Universities For?* with the claim that ‘education is for its own sake’. This struck a chord with many academics because it chimed with a widely held notion of academic freedom. This supposedly allows HE teachers – unlike school and FE teachers – to set and examine their own courses linked to their personal research interests. Very few academics actually exercise this degree of freedom and Collini’s special pleading for them is unlikely to win widespread public support. More detrimentally, Collini divides ‘higher’ from the rest of education by reinforcing the alleged superiority of research (knowledge production) over teaching (knowledge reproduction).

This misconceives the nature of teaching by supposing that it merely reproduces what is already known but all teachers know that in

representing an old subject – even without the scholarship necessary to keep up to date with it – they have to reinterpret what they know both for themselves in new circumstances and for new generations of students for whom that knowledge is necessarily new. Knowledge and skills embedded in culture are thus not handed uncritically down the generations but are developed in teaching at all levels, as well as in scholarship and research.

Nor is research ‘for its own sake’, despite repeated government demands for its restriction to national economic ‘impact’. As UNESCO’s 1997 *Resolution on Higher Education* states: ‘higher education is directed to human development and to the progress of society’. This is a much wider purpose than ‘blue skies’/ ‘curiosity driven’, ‘research for its own sake’ which supposedly drives the scientific model of research. Both research and teaching for their own sakes ignore the role of education at all levels in critically learning from the past so that society can change its behaviour in future.

Just because education as a whole is currently renegeing on this responsibility does not invalidate the claim that it has this wider potential and that this potential needs to be realised across the whole of education reconceived as creating a community of learning uniting schools, colleges and universities. Learning here is widely conceived as including all forms of cultural creation and recreation (see further below). It must also be closely connected with democracy and the opportunity that raising the school/ ‘participation’ age to 18 in 2015 provides for the equivalent of a French *bacc* – as opposed to Ebacc! – or US High School type of leaving diploma to mark the assumption of independent, adult citizenship.

A general diploma for everybody

Needless to say such wider purposes are far from Michael Gove's arid and narrowly academic curriculum. Nevertheless Gove has reopened the debate not only about what should be learned but also how and why. Lord Baker (whose UTC project was referred to in chapter 2) publically criticised the Ebacc, calling Gove's exams shake-up a 'huge mistake' and forecasting 'a lot of disgruntled youngsters at 13 or 14 who are no longer able to follow more practical and vocational courses' (*Independent* 27/12/12).

Baker has published proposals for a Technical Baccalaureate which would combine technical qualifications, an extended project, reflection and 'employability skills' with English, maths and ICT. To strengthen his hand, Baker has involved Professor (now Sir Michael) Tomlinson, author of the 2004 Tomlinson proposals for qualification reform – but he has also stolen a march on Labour leader Ed Miliband who we have also seen proposing a 'tech bacc' for the forgotten 50% who do not attend university.

Despite Baker making it clear to the *Times Education Supplement* (17/12/12) that his new qualification would allow students to overlap with English Baccalaureate subjects or to do both and also announcing that the level 3 award could include science A-levels as well as existing BTEC qualifications, in other respects Baker's proposals reflect traditional Conservative thinking about education, as much as being opposed to Gove's. Gove echoes Old Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson's misleading description of comprehensive schools as 'grammar school education for all'.

We have argued this will fail, not only because it is a contradiction in terms (grammar schools by definition cannot be for all since they are selective).

Baker perhaps sees this and wants to revert instead to different types of schools for different types of students. His main gripe is that the 1944 Tripartite system was not implemented properly because the technical schools were largely downplayed as a result of English academic snobbery.

‘We had them in 1945 – grammar schools, technical schools and secondary moderns – but technical schools were the first to go... It was seen as dirty jobs and greasy rags stuff. A second-class education and everybody wanted to be in the school on the hill.’⁵²
(Actually, they were too expensive and vocational education migrated to FE.)

Now Baker proposes four types of state secondary school at 14+: liberal arts colleges offering traditional grammar schooling, UTCs, performing arts schools offering training for the entertainment industry and ‘specialist career colleges preparing young people for a range of professions’, though he has not elaborated on the latter (www.telegraph.co.uk 27/12/12).

Such calls for a new type of practical or ‘vocational’ learning are only going to have resonance with young people themselves – rather than with politicians appealing to aspirational parents who would like ‘other people’s children’ to follow them – if such courses are seen to lead to sustainable employment. In view of the arguments outlined earlier

⁵²www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6026973 06/11/09

about the changing nature of employment, the post-industrial economy and the collapse of traditional occupational skills, there are major questions about the sustainability of a Tech-Bacc/ UTC ‘middle stream’. The only alternative is to argue (as Allen and Ainley 2008) for a general diploma for everybody which makes a range of different types of learning experiences available to all.

If the diploma will initially have to be an ‘overarching’ certificate using existing qualifications/ parts of qualifications as its constituent parts, then it would have to have a robust organisational framework to ensure that all units or ‘routes’ within the diploma have equal status. It may still need a strong subject core – many arguing that there should be a mandatory Modern Foreign Language and Humanities, though not in way that Mr Gove wanted. A new diploma would also continue to promote cross-circular themes and generic knowledge. Mandatory for all, not allowed to be side-stepped by ‘independent’ providers. It would also have to serve as the basis for entrance to a new, localised and ‘Ruskinised’ free higher education system recruiting from local communities (Allen and Ainley 2007, 120), what Spours and Hodgson (2012) call *A unified and ecosystem vision*. The exact make-up of this new alternative, however, can only be the product of national debate amongst all school and further and higher education stakeholders, particularly student representatives (Burns 2012).

A new approach to learning

Reforming qualifications requires much more than imposing equality between various types of learning. It also requiring us to address how learning should take place, what should be the relationship between

‘teachers’ and ‘taught’, as well as how technological developments can be used to provide alternative learning environments. In this respect, we have previously emphasised the importance of confronting the way in which the post-war ‘professional distance’ between teachers, students and parents has been reconstructed as one of producers and consumers (Ainley and Allen 2010, 160) and how ‘really personalised learning’ could be developed that goes well beyond current conceptions of an alternative pedagogy (*ibid* 151). Here, rather than ‘de-school’ (Illich 1971) what is effectively an ‘overschooled but undereducated’ generation, we need to ‘deinstitutionalise’ education (Aronowitz 2008), understanding that schools, colleges and universities are not the only places where young and older people ‘learn’ – far from it – and make them places where students can combine more formal acquisition of knowledge with that from ‘outside’ in cultural creation and recreation, including what are now thought of as ‘leisure’ activities, including sports and hobbies. Changing teacher-learner relationships in this way would represent a major change of direction in view of our earlier arguments about the increased importance of education as a form of social control. The crisis in legitimacy for education at all levels to which this is leading can be redeemed by a new emphasis upon education for democracy – to control and not be controlled by society.

We would also again want to emphasise how continuing to support young people’s current individual aspirations, even if they become increasingly more difficult to realise, does not conflict with the longer term objective of restoring education as a collective agent, instead of being a means to positional advantage. Rather than ‘credential mills’ (Aronowitz *ibid*) churning out qualifications for an inflated examination

industry that become increasingly ‘worthless’ in a declining economy, bringing people together across the generations is essential if we are going to continue to expect young people to be in full-time education for longer and if schools, colleges and universities are to remain more than holding camps or warehouses. Without such a new approach, education will face a deepening crisis of legitimacy.

Can the ‘lost generation’ find its way?

We have referred to the recomposition of the occupational structure and to young peoples’ ‘precarity’ and, as a result, their distance from both traditional labour movement organisations representing ‘core’ workers, and yet, according to Standing, their common feeling of economic insecurity that would still allow unified action. The concerns about the consequences of youth joblessness referred to at the start of this study and of a ‘lost generation’ were given a new emphasis in winter 2010-11, with protests against £9,000 university tuition fees and loss of Educational Maintenance Allowances. Months later young people again took to the streets, this time in the inner-cities. Though some in the media referred to a general ‘mindless’ or ‘classless’ violence, on the contrary these two groups, rather than representing a new ‘precariat’ emerging as a ‘class for itself’ in the way Standing suggests, we argue represent very different constituencies.

On the one hand, the student protestors can be defined as middle class or ‘aspirational’ working class. Part of what we described as a ‘working-middle’/‘middle-working’ class, they have played by the rules and worked hard at school but quickly became politicised in response to the way higher education is being put beyond their reach and that of

their younger brothers and sisters. They no longer believe government and opposition promises, like those of the Lib-Dems in 2010 not to raise student fees (!) and even if many will eventually find employment, in many cases it will not be anywhere near commensurate with their expectations and qualifications, being part-time or ‘para-professional’ at best.

Few academics any longer rely upon students to sustain an escalating *Resistance*, as Bailey and Freedman did in 2011 and students themselves are equally confused with NUS looking to Scotland for an example of integrated F&HE (Burns 2012) but simultaneously visiting the dark side by drawing upon consumer power to influence the National Student Survey in league with *Which University!* Many students have decreasing interest in what they study beyond the prospects it offers for employment. Such is *The Consumer Experience of Higher Education* (McArdle-Clinton 2008), they remove themselves from any meaningful involvement in learning: ‘Let’s make like I give a shit!’ as a student T-shirt proclaims. At worst staff join the charade of quality they supposedly maintain.

On the other hand, the urban rioters – *The Guardian* (12/08/12) estimating that almost 80% of those up in court were under-25 – the ‘criminals who shame the nation’ as *The Telegraph* called them (10/8/11), have become marginal to society. Failed by a selective and academic education system, without work and without hope, they no longer play by any rules. No longer having any commitment to ‘fairness’ or any faith in ‘justice’, they have become youth’s new ‘underclass’ – regardless of the connotations associated with this term

outlined earlier. They are not ‘political’ compared to the students; yet according to some Manchester youngsters interviewed by BBC News (11/08/11), the summer riots were ‘the best protest ever’ against a system that denied them access to the consumer goods they see flaunted around them. It was like ‘Christmas had come early’ but the normal rules of shopping had been suspended for the day. Research on the riots, commissioned by the London School of Economics and *The Guardian*, while highlighting a general hostility towards the police as a key motive, also emphasised the importance of unemployment and increased inequality in leading to a rejection of ‘legitimate’ ways of earning a living. ‘Why be decent people?’ asked one young rioter. ‘It’s not getting us anywhere.’ (*Guardian* 06/12/11). (And see Winlow and Hall above.)

There have been opportunities for these two groups to come together. Many working-class FE students joined the student protests against fees to demand also the restoration of EMAs and, according to the LSE/*Guardian* research, 44% of rioters were still in education – but it is difficult to imagine them ever being united for long. Even though they often live next door in the same neighbourhoods, paying the same rack-rents and ducking and diving at the same part-time McJobs – if they are lucky. Also, the number of young people who have taken to the streets still remains comparatively small. Most did not!

Against Coatman and Shrubsole (2012), we would conclude therefore that the power of young people to act as a distinct force in themselves and separate from other campaigning organisations is extremely limited. At the same time though, the new generation of young radicals operating through ‘socially networked, horizontal movements’ (Mason

2012, 63), in this country at least, have little time and see little need for traditional Labour movement activities undertaken by some of their parents – like street leafleting, not to mention public meetings in Town Halls! Whatever the strengths of new communications technology in creating a ‘network revolution’ of student protestors, urban rioters and other ‘spontaneous’ protests around movements like ‘UK Uncut’ for example, ‘a potential and serious weakness is the absence of strategy, the absence of a line of communication through which to speak to union organised workers.’ (Mason *ibid*) This recognises that a new youth politics still needs old alliances.

In the post-war years many young people came into contact with trade unions as a result of making the ‘collective transitions’ described in chapter 1. Becoming part of a clearly defined occupational group often meant inheriting a collective and oppositional ‘shop-floor’ culture. Today, Standing is right to say that many youth see unions as protecting benefits enjoyed by some older workers that they can never anticipate having themselves. Nevertheless, it still falls to the labour movement organisations that have represented many of their parents so well – not least because of their considerable resources and their continued ability to dislocate production, to adopt and develop policies that stretch well beyond simply protecting the immediate interests of their members and to change their more general political and cultural orientation.

In this respect, teacher and lecturer organisations face enormous challenges. The ending of a period in which education was seen as a vehicle for challenging social inequalities by increasing individual mobility, means that the traditional teacher union politics, no matter how militant, that simply equate the professional interests of their

members with extending education provision, will no longer do. In alliance with student organisations and those representing others directly involved in working with young people – those in what remains of the youth service for example, these activities now need to become part of a more general programme for advancing the interests of young people and the future of society that they represent.

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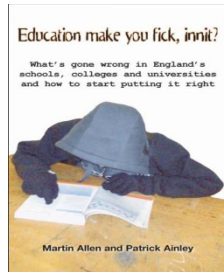
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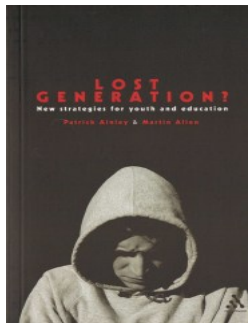
The Great Reversal

Also by Martin Allen and Patrick Ainley

Education make you fick, innit?
Tufnell Press 2007



Lost Generation? New strategies for youth and education
Continuum 2010



The Great Reversal

Developing the arguments put forward in their previous books *Education make you fick, innit?* and *Lost Generation? New strategies for youth and education*, Allen and Ainley provide a chilling analysis of the employment difficulties faced by young people. A stinging attack on the Coalition's education policy, *The Great Reversal* argues that we can't simply educate our way out of recession. Real alternatives are needed.

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