Introduction to the second edition

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Generally 'youth' tends to be seen as a problem: young people are beset by pre-dominantly negative images, are seen as either a source *of* trouble or *in* trouble. In bringing together this collection one of our main goals has been to challenge this 'problematising' perspective on youth. We also want to promote critical reflection on the position of young people in the UK today and in so doing we have sought to capture and analyse the changing images and experiences of young people as well as the complexity of the transitions they go through. We perceive a need to rethink youth in terms of acknowledging and respecting the many positive contributions young people can and do make to their communities and how adults can provide young people with both effective support and positive criticism. We believe that adults and young people alike can learn and benefit from such a refashioned public dialogue. Thus this reader, along with its companion anthology *Changing Experiences of Youth* (Garratt, Roche and Tucker, 1997), is presented as a positive contribution towards promoting the rights, and acknowledging the responsibilities, of young people in contemporary society. Yet a great deal has changed since this reader was first published in terms of young people's everyday lives: the policies directed towards them and the practice issues affecting those that work with them. In this new introduction we will provide an overview of some of the main changes that have taken place, and comment on the new material included in this second edition.

The changing face of youth

Many of the trends that shaped the transitions of young people in the late 1990s have become more pronounced over recent years. It is increasingly the case that young people remain in education and in the family home beyond the age of 16. The dramatic expansion of higher education, the removal of independent benefits to young people and the introduction of student loans mean that young people continue to be economically dependent on their families for much longer. Such 'extended dependency' is consistent with a wider European picture. However the effective privatisation of higher education in the UK means that a disproportionate number of students in the UK are engaged in high levels of part and full time work as well as generating significant debts.

The expansion of higher education and the promotion of lifelong learning has been associated with a powerful 'can do' ethos amongst the young. This is the

idea that 'anyone can make it as long as they try hard enough', with young people tending to blame failure on their individual faults rather than on wider economic conditions or social policies (Evans et al., 2001). Yet evidence from panel studies (that follow the same people over an extended period of time) suggest that opportunities for young people are in fact *less* than they were 20 years ago, and that the expansion in higher education has benefited the 'not so bright middle classes' rather than industrious working class youth (Schoon et al., 2001). In many ways the UK is a more diverse, polarised and less meritocratic society than it was a generation ago. The majority of white, non-disabled and middle class young people face a relatively smooth and predictable (if highly demanding) pathway through initial and higher education into professional employment. However, less privileged young people may struggle to find a clear and linear path from dependence to independence – going through a range of short term vocational courses and training schemes, and periods of unemployment. Moreover, the goal of independence as a model of adulthood has to be questioned with a growing recognition of the interdependence of members of families and households. So for example, the costs of young people's further education may be offset by the wages of mothers, and the care provided by older siblings may in turn facilitate the employment and training of other family members (Irwin, 1995).

Commentators have described this picture in terms of *uneven* and *fragmented transitions*. Uneven, because different groups of young people have very different experiences of the transition to adulthood. Fragmented, because the different markers of adulthood are increasingly uncoupled from each other. So for example, although young people may have to wait longer before they are economically independent, evidence suggests that other markers of adulthood such as sexual activity and consumption are practised at increasingly young ages. In the past for example, a young person may have begun work, left home and established an intimate relationship at roughly the same time. Today we may find that a young person becomes sexually active at the age of 15, continues to live at home until 25 and spends the money from their part-time employment on paying their way and supporting a social life.

The material world has also changed since 1997. One of the most dramatic changes has been the rapid expansion of information and communication technologies, and in particular the near saturation of the mobile phone youth market in the UK. While access to computer skills and the internet continue to be constrained by material factors, the overwhelming majority of young people from a range of backgrounds now have mobile telephones. In a longitudinal study of young people's lives begun in 1996 Henderson et al. (2003) found ownership of mobile telephones by young people exploding. New practices of sociability emerged, through which young people increasingly became the mobile centre of their social worlds, freed from the surveillance of parents and other gatekeepers. So although young people may be staying at home longer, they are able to carve out a new more autonomous way of living within the

home. They thus find themselves at greater freedom to pursue work and leisure opportunities by virtue of being contactable whilst mobile. Young people are also targeted as independent consumers. The 'pesterpower' of young children is understood by advertisers to be a powerful influence on family expenditure. The high level of school and college students in part-time work provides an important market for a range of products and services that are marketed aggressively at both boys and girls. And of course, you no longer have to be young to enjoy youth culture, as the music, styles, games and gossip of the teenager are made available to all those with the money and inclination to acquire them.

Thinking through transitions

One way of thinking about the changing conditions of young people's lives is to recognise that in becoming adult, young people are pursuing the experience and recognition of *competence*. This is the feeling that you are good at doing or being something. There are rewards gained from the ways in which others react to this such as greater freedom, responsibility, privacy and respect. In the past competence came as a package, and was founded on economic independence. Increasingly, the process of becoming competent is a piece-meal affair. Different forms of competence may be available in different areas of young people's lives. So for example, a young person may develop a sense of competence by being a valued worker, a parent, a successful student, musician, sportsperson, sexual partner, popular or even feared member of a social scene. Failure to be recognised as competent in one area may encourage young people to invest and seek recognition in other areas. So for example, young people who struggle as students may seek competence and recognition from work, consumption and parenthood.

This perspective makes visible two themes that underlie the contemporary policy agenda on youth. First, a concern with *social exclusion*. We are familiar with the notion that young people's experiences are shaped by economic inequality. However, there is also a cultural dimension to inequality. This is where an initial disadvantage creates the conditions through which it makes sense to young people at the time to make choices and pursue lifestyles that in turn can reduce their life chances and those of their children. This is particularly clear in the area of teenage pregnancy where associations are made between deprivation and educational failure and peer, class or family cultures in which early parenthood 'makes sense' and is valued within local terms.

The second theme that this perspective makes visible is a more nuanced understanding of the role of *timing* in the processes of social inclusion and exclusion, highlighting the potential for *targeting* resources and interventions. Not all young people from disadvantaged backgrounds fall into the stigmatised policy categories of 'teenage parents', 'problematic drug users' or 'young

offenders'. The increasingly fluid and diverse character of modern UK society means that outcomes are determined by a particular combination of circumstances and conditions in conjunction with an individual's resources. So for example, the experience of parental illness or family disruption near to the time of examinations may be decisive in terms of the qualifications that a young person is able to gain. This in turn may be decisive in terms of the ways they subsequently invest their energies. Increasingly, policy makers are seeking to understand the ways in which *risk* and *resilience* operate in young people's lives, enabling the targeting of resources on those most in need, at the times they are most needed. This brings with it a new commitment to prevention which takes two forms. First, there is an investment to reduce child poverty, most clearly expressed in the Sure Start initiative, but also a range of health, education and neighbourhood renewal schemes targeted at disadvantaged communities. Second we find a move to identify 'vulnerable' children and young people' deemed to be 'at risk' (of offending, taking drugs, dropping out of education, becoming teenage parents, etc). The emergent policy agenda signalled by the 'Children and Risk' green paper is an approach which 'identifies, refers and tracks', drawing on individualised support in the form of mentors/ personal advisers as well as more material support such as grants and special allowances. It is also an approach where services work together, sharing information in order to ensure that young people do not fall between the cracks which mark professional boundaries.

A new youth policy?

There are a number of chapters that have been fully revised for this second edition, and which reflect those areas of youth policy that have been subject to most dramatic change in recent years:

In Chapter 10 'Welfare Services for Young People' Bob Coles leads us through an array of new initiatives, spearheaded by a series of reports from the Social Exclusion Unit and culminating in what he describes as the closest thing that we have had to 'a coherent youth policy' – including, in England, a Minister for Youth, a Children and Young People's Unit and, most recently, a Minister for Children and a Directorate which draws together children's services under one departmental brief. In many ways youth policy can be seen as heralding a new way of working in which disciplinary, sectoral and professional boundaries are crossed in the pursuit of 'joined up' working and service delivery. Thus we find local interdisciplinary teams delivering drugs policy, teenage pregnancy prevention and criminal justice referrals. We also find the development of new hybrid professionals such as Connexions Personal Advisors and Learning Mentors, drawn from a range of backgrounds and providing one-to-one support to young people. The drive to keep a greater number of less privileged young people in full-time education and training has been central to government

strategy with key policy developments including the launching of Connexions (a universal careers service for 13–19 year olds) and New Deal (a welfare to work initiative for 18–24 year olds). In Chapter 11 Stanley Tucker and Steve Walker provide a history of the split between academic and vocational training that characterises the British education system, including proposals for a new 14–19 curriculum. In Chapter 13 Harriet Bradley and Paul Hickman updates the reader on changes to the youth labour market and associated policy initiatives.

Important questions remain as to how services for children and young people will be integrated when they have been developed separately and when some of the most crucial ones have been left out of the new vision of joined up government – namely youth justice which will stay within the Home Office. This leads us to the second area in which New Labour youth policy has distinguished itself. While the welfare agenda has been focused on understanding and meeting the needs of socially excluded young people, the youth justice agenda has pursued a more controversial and punitive approach. Ironically, the same young people are treated very differently within these two policy areas, with young offenders barraged with a range of initiatives that not only infringe their human rights but also fail to recognise them as simultaneously children 'in need' (Goldson, 2002). In Chapter 14 John Muncie describes the many changes that have been enacted in the field of youth justice in recent years. He argues that a 'discourse of responsibility' lies at the heart of New Labour's reforming programme, in which criminal justice policy is being turned to for the resolution of social problems. Communities are held responsible for crime prevention, individuals for their own behaviour and parents for their children. Despite a rhetoric of restorative justice, Muncie argues that a growing trend towards the incarceration of young offenders undermines principles of crime prevention, rehabilitation and human rights.

The third area in which youth policy has developed concerns the treatment of young people in local authority care. Coles (Chapter 10) describes the background to the policy initiative known as 'Quality Protects' which, amongst other things, sets local authorities targets to improve the educational attainment of young people in care and to provide personal advisors to support them when leaving the care system after the age of 16. Evidence of repressive and/or abusive regimes in several highly-publicised court cases in the early 1990s led to a number of official reports cataloguing the evidence of bad practice and prescribing ways in which better practice could be planned and delivered. The impact of these developments on working with young people in residential settings is discussed by Adrian Ward in Chapter 26. In Chapter 23 Brian Corby discusses current policy requirements and understandings of good practice in what he defines as the mistreatment of young people. He draws examples of mistreatment from families, state institutions, schools and the streets, and in doing so draws attention to the *unevenness* of the provision of rights and protection for young people across these different locations.

These new contributions reframe those chapters which stand as originally

published. In most cases these contributions provide insights that have stood the test of time. For example, chapters by Rex Stainton-Rogers (Chapter 1) and Christine Griffin (Chapter 2) encourage us to understand youth as a historically specific constructed category – an important point to understand as we witness the economic foundations of youth refiguring. Chapters which explore youth cultures of the past (Daren Garratt, Chapter 15) and present (Maria Pini Chapter 17, Les Back Chapter 4) as important sites of creativity and expression are all the more important as youth culture becomes a big business in its own right. The mutually constructing/constraining relationship between social policy categories and the identities that they make available is the subject of a number of chapters. Tim Edwards (chapter 18) explores tensions between policy attempts to proscribe teenage sexuality and the social and economic conditions that make sexuality one of the most accessible forms of 'feeling adult' available to young people. Similarly Gargi Battacharyya and John Gabriel (Chapter 7) document how social policy has constructed racialised identities, and Lena Robinson (Chapter 16) explores the ways in which young people may struggle to inhabit identities that do not feel like they belong to them.

There are four overlapping themes which structure the reader. First, there is the issue of how young people are seen, or socially constructed, and how they see themselves. This is a critical agenda in the sense that it seeks both to displace the dominant images of young people, which see them as problems, and to take seriously the varied ways in which young people tell us in symbolic and practical social activity who they are and what their interests are. Second, there are the emerging demands for rights for young people and their claims to citizenship. Central here is the emphasis on their participation not just in disputes which concern them but also in the life of the communities in which they live. Allied to this are the mechanisms by which their interests are represented by others and how these representatives are held accountable. Third, there is the issue of social difference. Young people are not a homogeneous group in this society. While they are unified by the fact of their age they are differently located socially on the basis of class, gender, ethnicity, impairment and sexuality. Any serious study of the lives of young people must deal with the politics of their social place and identity. Finally, the services that society provides for young people and the practical issues raised by different service delivery strategies in different settings are explored.

There is still a long way to go in developing policies and practices that address the real needs of young people and which build the capacity of workers and professionals to this end. We hope that this collection will stimulate those who work with young people, in a variety of different settings, to examine their day-to-day practices and service delivery strategies. At the same time the collection has an agenda that extends beyond the directly practical. It is not a 'rough guide' to good practice, though we hope that improved practice will be an outcome. Rather we are concerned to challenge the solidity of the category of youth in order to open up new possibilities of thinking about young people and their

relations with adult society. Youth is historically varied and significant, it is also a social process and not a fixed life stage. The contributions to this collection reflect a paradox: the lives led by young people are as varied and as divided as those of adults, and at the same time what unites youth is the reactions of adult society. If young people are to become effective social actors then social practices and attitudes will have to undergo change.

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