

Youth Policy and Participation (Yo-Yo)

Draft National Report for the United Kingdom

Amanda Hayes
&
Andy Biggart

School of Policy Studies
Faculty of Social Science
University of Ulster

Not to be quoted without prior permission of the authors

Introduction:

The report aims to outline the general situation in relation to youth transitions, policy and participation in the UK with a specific focus on Northern Ireland, where the fieldwork and case studies will be based. In terms of overall policy the different regions that constitute the UK share many similarities, although there are distinctive differences. Until

recently most aspects of policy were organised at the UK national level, however with the recent introduction of devolved government in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, many aspects of policy are now decided at the regional level. In a comparative EU context regional policy shares more similarities than differences, although with the devolved assemblies there is clearly greater scope for further divergence.

Youth Transitions

Like many other European countries the last couple of decades have represented a radical transformation of youth. In particular economic restructuring has impacted on participation and young people's transitions to the labour market. In a recent report to the OECD, Raffaele et al (1998) summarise the main economic trends that has affected the transition from school to work:

- higher unemployment in the 1970s and 1980s, increasing the barriers to labour-market entry;
- demographic factors in the early 1990s, reducing the number of young people entering the labour market;
- economic restructuring, and the increasing application of new technology, shifting the skills requirement from unskilled and semi-skilled to skilled;
- market globalisation, generating pressure to improve productivity;
- the expansion in participation in full-time post-compulsory and higher education, which has approximately doubled since the mid 1980s;
- the continuous process of policy change and development over the last two decades: an even more rapid rate of policy turnover than in most OECD countries.

Youth unemployment

Total unemployment in the UK stands at 5% (LFS, ILO definition, May 2001), however there are clear regional differences with the south east of England typically recording the lowest levels with higher rates in the north (North of England, Scotland and Northern Ireland). Unemployment in Northern Ireland currently stands at 6% and over the decade there has been a general trend towards narrowing the differentials with the rest of the UK (labour Market Bulletin). Northern Ireland however has a higher proportion of long-term unemployed (over 1 year) much higher than any other region of the UK. This also extends to young people, for example among males aged 20-24 years who were unemployed in 1995, more than a third had been unemployed for more than two years (DED, 1995).

ILO Unemployment Rates May 2001

	UK 16+	UK 18-24 Year Olds	UK 16,17 Year Olds	Northern Ireland 16+	Northern Ireland 18- 24 Years
Total	5	10	18.5	6	9.7
Males	5.5	11	21.3	7.3	-
Females	4.4	8.8	15.5	4.3	-

Source: UK Labour Force Survey

Several writers have questioned whether young people are affected by unemployment in the same ways as their elders. There are reasons for expecting that they will cope more easily. Many young unemployed people have never worked. Many have become acquainted with unemployment in their own families and communities. Few have the family responsibilities of their elders. Furthermore their identities have not become anchored in a lifetime's

involvement in a particular job. Roberts (1998) identified a multiplicity of youth reactions to unemployment. In areas of high unemployment, youth unemployment was normal and expected. Coping with it was as likely to bind friends together as set them apart. Some, though felt rejected, and in turn were inclined to reject society, turned to their own youth cultures as sources of values, support, identity and status. Most remained unpoliticized, but some rallied to the call of extreme right or left wing influences. Depression and disappointment appeared strongest amongst those from middle-class backgrounds, who left school qualified, had aspirations firmly attuned to progressive careers, and who would not normally have been at risk of unemployment in the 1960s and 1970s. They are still, the least at risk, but in consequence when unemployment strikes, it strikes all the harder. The balance of evidence suggests that many young people find ways of coping with unemployment. In many cases they are helped in doing so by being part of a broader local culture of youth unemployment, and by their lack of financial commitments compared with older people. Young people remain strongly committed to the employment ethic and unemployed young people are strongly committed to the norm of employment.

Educational Expansion:

Over the last two decades patterns of participation in education have changed quite radically as rates of participation have increased among 16 and 17 year-olds. Despite the continuous growth of the upper secondary school since the mid-1980s, levels of participation have tended to lag behind many other European countries. In 1990 in Germany, France, Belgium, Denmark and the Netherlands, for example, more than three-quarters of young people between the age of 16 and 18 were in full-time education, compared to only 40 per cent in the UK (DfEE 1993). While most advanced industrial nations had achieved high levels of participation by the mid-1980's, the UK rate remained below 50 per cent (Spours, 1995). Participation at this stage has continued to increase, however the UK's rate of participation in post compulsory education remains below the European average (Eurostat, 2001). However the increase in participation that has occurred represents less of an intrinsic motivation to learn, but rather reflects an instrumental orientation to education and training. Choices of whether to continue in education or training have tended to reflect the different instrumental pay-off to the available options (Brown, 1987, Raffe et al 1999).

In Northern Ireland, the proportion of 16 and 17 year olds who enter full-time post compulsory education either within a school or FE college increased from 57.9 per cent in 1990 to 71 per cent in 2000, a rate higher than England (64.4%). However participation rates in Northern Ireland decline steeply from the age of 18 and fall below the rest of the UK. As participation in the two post-compulsory school years continues to rise, this has led to a better-qualified school-leaving population and an associated rise in participation in higher education. Participation rates in higher education have more than doubled since the mid 1980's, and now around a third of young people go on to participate in higher education.

Structure of Transitions Systems

School system:

England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland each has its own education system. In Great Britain (England, Wales and Scotland) most schools are all-ability comprehensive schools. In contrast Northern Ireland retains a selective transfer test from primary to secondary level at the age of 11, although the new Northern Ireland Assembly is currently conducting a review of the transfer test and its survival in its current form looks unlikely although whether they adopt a comprehensive system like the rest of the UK or move to a different system of selection is yet unclear. Aside from the selective system of secondary education in Northern Ireland,

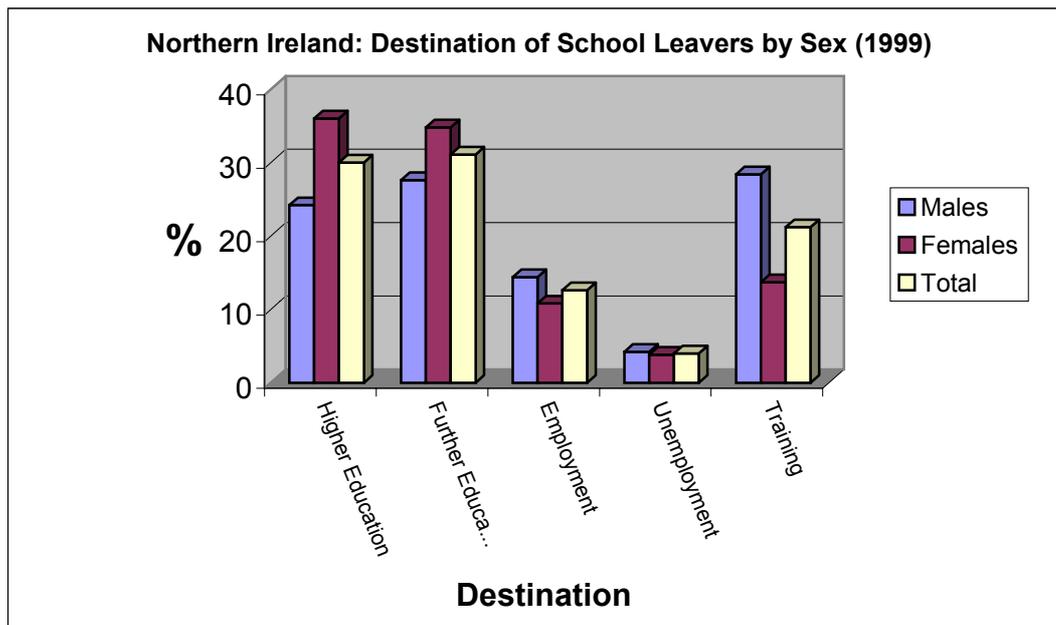
most education and training policy in Northern Ireland has followed the lead of England & Wales and unlike Scotland has adopted a broadly identical system of qualifications.

Compulsory schooling in the UK extends to 16 years after which time pupils follow a variety of routes, largely based on their examination performance:

- Academic route
- Vocational course based training
- Vocational Work based training: Job skills
- Occupational route:

Table 1 shows what young people did immediately after leaving school, regardless of the stage of leaving.

Table 1



Source: Department of Education 2000

Academic Route

The vast majority of qualified pupils (the majority of whom from middle class families) remain at school for two post-compulsory years and embark on courses leading to the award A level's in England, Wales and Northern Ireland or the Scottish Certificate of Education (Higher Grade). A level qualifications are the traditional qualification that lead to entry to University or other forms of Higher Education. In Northern Ireland these are predominantly

undertaken by pupils attending grammar schools and the majority of those who achieve two or more A levels go on to pursue some form of higher education.

Vocational Training:

In Northern Ireland vocational work based training is provided through the Job Skills Programme and was introduced in 1995 to replace the previous Youth Training Programme (YTP). Although primarily aimed at the 16-24 age group, it was open to adults up until the introduction of New Deal in 1998 (see below). The programme generally lasts for 2 years and is now offered at 3 different levels: Access with training up to NVQ Level 1; Traineeships (NVQ Level 2) and Modern Apprenticeships (NVQ Level 3).

The Access level was designed to provide a new route for those lacking in competencies to enter the scheme at the standard level (Traineeships). Modern Apprenticeships also represent a new option within Job Skills. Primarily aimed at 16 and 17 year old school leavers, it provides for a higher level of vocational training than the basic scheme. The scheme allows young people to train at craft, technician and trainee management level. Trainees study for an NVQ at level III that includes an additional component of core skills. The main aim of the scheme was to integrate work-based and college based training to provide work-based vocational training at a higher level. Young people are normally paid a wage by the employer and the responsibilities of the trainee and employer are set out in a nationally drawn up training agreement setting out the minimum standards for the industry. Attempt to raise the low skills base and make work based training more attractive to slightly better qualified who had become critical of the low status and poor quality training of the previous version of youth training.

Young people wishing to enter Jobkills are given a training credit, which they can exchange for training by any approved training organisation. This system of training credits was first introduced in the UK in 1995 and was designed to increase young people's motivation to train and to empower them in the training market. It also represented an attempt to force training providers to raise the quality of training to attract customers in a market driven system. The extent that young people have been empowered to make active decisions over training is contested (Coppers and Lybrand, 1994) found most young people do not shop around for training and as a means of empowerment young people lacked the confidence and experience to negotiate with training providers and lacked information about education, training and job opportunities.

Hodkinson et al (1996) have suggested that such policies aimed at empowering young people are based on a 'technical rationale' of decision-making, one that assumes young people reach decisions in a logical systematic way. Research has consistently shown that young people do not engage in systematic planning, but rather than decisions are subject to a wide variety of pressures and influences.

Further Education:

Further Education colleges provide a range of full-time courses aimed at the 16 to 18 age group. To a large extent FE colleges compete directly with the post-compulsory school system. Vocational courses based on GNVQ modules are normally designed to follow group awards within broad vocational areas. (e.g. Engineering, Travel and Tourism). GNVQ awards are available at three levels (Foundation, Intermediate, Advanced) the advanced level qualifications are now often referred to as vocational A levels, although it is often perceived as an inferior route to the traditional A level qualifications, they can meet the entrance requirements for specific courses in Higher Education.

Occupational Route:

Direct transitions from the end of compulsory schooling at the age of 16 to the labour market have been in sharp decline; most young people now follow some form of continuing education or training less than a fifth of young people now follow this route.

Status Zero

The concept of 'status zero' entered the discourse of youth studies in the mid-1990's in the United Kingdom. It is an age based concept and refers to 16 and 17 year-olds who are not in education, training or employment, following changes to social security legislation in 1988 that excluded this age group from claiming unemployment benefits in exchange for a guaranteed youth training place.

The vast majority of 16 and 17 year olds now pursue some form of education, training or employment on leaving school. However a number of youth research projects being conducted in the early 1990's identified a significant group of unemployed 16 and 17 year olds, in addition to those who were awaiting placement through the youth training guarantee, that were not reflected in the official statistics that no longer recognised unemployment as a legitimate status for this age group. (Istance et al, 1994; Wilkinson, 1995).

The concept is not precisely defined, but at times it has become synonymous with young early school leavers who are involved in or on the margins of criminal activity or the informal economy and teenage mothers. However the status zero group is far from homogenous and includes a variety of groups of young people including, those who initially experience difficulties finding employment or training on leaving school, those who subsequently drop-out from training or employment, teenage mothers or those taking some form of break or gap year from education or employment to name a few. Never the less research has shown that those who are most likely to be in status zero for an extended period of time are most likely to come from the most deprived social backgrounds and have low levels of educational attainment, other factors that have been associated with an increased risk includes teenage parenthood, homelessness, or having been looked after in care.

In Northern Ireland official estimates of the extent of 16 year-old young people in Status Zero at any one time, put the figure at between 4 and 6 per cent.

Linearity of transitions:

A great deal of attention has been given in the British literature to the way the transition process has been changing, although there is little empirical evidence to support the increasing complexity of transitions. However, a recent study examining the education and labour market routes young people took between the age of 16 and 23 years and found that about half of the sample followed linear trajectories, whilst the other half showed considerable complexity (Furlong, Cartmel & Biggart, forthcoming).

Programmes for Unemployed:

As we have already highlighted 16 & 17 year olds can no longer technically be unemployed in the UK, as the expectation is they participate in some form of education or training. Since 1998 existing schemes were replaced by the New Deal for Young People (18-24 years). Under the New Deal after receiving social assistance (Job Seekers Allowance) for 6-months

young people must enter the New Deal Programme. Initially they enter the New Deal Gateway, which involves an intensive period of counselling and advice that can last up to 4 months. An Action Plan is drawn up taking account of the individuals' needs and circumstances. Following Gateway young people are required to enter one of four possible New Deal options:

A six months subsidised placement with an employer; Six months work experience involving either voluntary or environmental work or up to twelve months access to full time education or training leading to a Level 2 NVQ (National Vocational Qualification). A 'follow through' support service operates continuously while participants undertake their Options in order to aid completion and job search. It is also provided if a participant returns to unemployment after completing the New Deal programme.

The New Deal for young people is compulsory and is enforced through a strict regime of successive benefit sanctions for non-compliance.

Careers advice

There was considerable debate in the UK during the 1970's and 1980's whether young people did in fact make meaningful decisions over career choices. Robert's (1977) argued that transitions were largely constrained through 'opportunity structures' and largely determined on the basis of social class gender and ethnicity. The extent that young people can make 'real' choices continues to be a matter of debate, although some have argued that in recent years the scope for choice has widened. Raffe et al () highlight 3 factors which may have extended the scope for choice: the process of 'individualisation' that has loosened traditional constraints of social context; a greater range and flexibility of opportunities and policies that have tried to promote young people's choice and ownership.

Formal careers advice in the UK is provided through two principle avenues, careers education in schools, which is now a compulsory part of the national curriculum during the last 3 years of compulsory education and the Careers Service. The Careers Service is the main statutory provider of careers guidance and local careers officers' offer individual counselling as well as working directly with schools. Research has shown that young people tend to use more informal sources of information most often parents.

Transitions in relation to Gender, Class and Ethnicity

Gender

Since the late 1980's in the UK girls have been outperforming boys in examinations at age 16 and since then at all levels of educational performance up to higher education. This has led to a renewed policy focus on male 'under-achievement'. However many of the policy debates that have surrounded male underachievement appear to ignore the fact that male achievement has also been rising, albeit at a slower rate and the picture is more complex than is often acknowledged. Rates of participation in post compulsory education are also significantly higher among females, although reflecting gender segmented opportunities participation in work-based vocational training is lower.

In the UK economic restructuring has led to a radical transformation of the labour market, where we have witnessed a decline in traditional male dominated sectors of the labour market principally in manufacturing and relative growth of traditional female sectors in particular the service sector. This has led to what some have called the 'feminisation' of the labour market, and some commentators have suggested that as many as 80-90 per cent of new jobs created in the UK will be taken by women (Wilkinson, 1994).

Research into the gender differences in the labour market on the other hand have generally tended to focus on adult employment, either among those of working age or specific older age groups through cohort studies (Paci and Joshi, 1996, MacEwen Scott, 1994). These studies have highlighted the growing number of women in professional and managerial occupations (Crompton and Saunderson 1990; Crompton 1997), although have also stressed overall continuities in terms of women's labour market disadvantage (Harrop and Moss 1995; Joshi and Hinde 1993). Egerton and Savage's (2000) recent study is a notable exception in that it examines the impact of social and economic change both in terms of gender and age. Their analysis was restricted to those in employment but highlighted the significant gains made by young women in the last couple of decades. Young women entering the labour market in the 1980's could expect to have better jobs than their mothers however the reverse was found to be true for the males. Biggart (forthcoming) has however questioned whether these apparent advantages apply to all segments across an age and gender segmented labour market. He found amongst significant disadvantage among female low qualified minimum aged school leavers, compared to similar males.

Social Class

Although post-compulsory education is rapidly becoming a typical feature of youth transitions in the UK, levels of participation and particularly educational outcomes, are powerfully conditioned by social class and educational attainment (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). Educational attainment at 16 is strongly associated and other indicators of family background. Although there has been a general trend towards increasing participation in education from all social classes the pattern has not been uniform. Educational attainment at 16 is strongly associated and other indicators of family background.

Ethnicity

Ethnic minority groups represent less than 1 per cent of the population in Northern Ireland. However, evidence from the Youth Cohort Survey in England and Wales suggests that overall ethnic minorities have higher post-compulsory educational participation rates (Jesson et al, 1991). This also held true at the Higher Education level for most ethnic groups (Coffield & Vignoles, 1997). However educational advantage among ethnic minority groups is not translated into labour market advantage. In 1999 among the male 16-24 age group unemployment in Great Britain was 14% among the white population compared to 22% among males from minority ethnic groups. Although white females of the same age had a lower of unemployment compared to white males at 10%, ethnic minority females were more likely to be unemployed than comparable males (25%) and the rate was more than double that of white females (Labour Market Quarterly, 2000).

In Northern Ireland the travelling community represents one of the largest ethnic minority groups. There are high rates of illiteracy and a lack of formal qualifications among the Traveller community. The majority of traveller children leave school after primary level, although this is partially a reflection of the low priority Traveller culture gives to education beyond the basics of reading and writing, a recent study highlighted a number of perceived barriers to continuing education including low expectations of teachers and fear of bullying within secondary schools by both teachers and pupils (Connolly & Keenan, 2000). There are particularly high rates of unemployment among the traveller community, which has been exacerbated through collapse of the traveller economy from the 1950's. Among those attempting to access the mainstream labour market efforts are hampered by illiteracy and a lack of formal qualifications.

Official Definition of Problem Groups

Within the UK there is particular concern with young people leaving education at an early stage with minimal qualifications who are perceived most at risk from social exclusion, increasingly Level 2 qualifications are seen as the minimum level for employability (Raffe,), however a significant proportion of young people leave school without attaining this level. As a majority of those who achieve limited educational credentials are male, this has been strongly reflected in

'...the failure of boys and in particular white working-class boys is one of the most disturbing problems we face within the whole educational system.' (Chris Woodhead, Chief Inspector of schools in England, quoted in TES March 15th, 1996)

The specific concern with low attainment among young males has also been partially fuelled by media stereotypes of disaffected young men and associated problems of criminality. The issue has also been closely tied up with renewed concerns about social exclusion or inclusion, skill levels, economic competitiveness, lifelong learning and the restructuring of the economy. Although Northern Ireland achieves better examinations results at the top end of achievement scale compared to England and Wales it has a longer tail of lower achievers.

Other groups of concern include teenage mothers, young homeless, care leavers and these have been reflected in the work of New Labours Social Exclusion Unit. In Northern Ireland youth policy has largely been the preserve of the Department Education (see below). However in the past the Department has mainly concerned itself with mainstream education issues and beyond the basic concerns of traditional youth work has shown little interest in broader youth issues. Since devolution a more critical response to youth policy appears to be emerging, although once again so far this has been focused on educational issues and it too early to see whether broader youth issues emerge on the policy agenda.

Youth Policy

Until the recently the main difficulty with the Governments approach to young people was that there was a lack of machinery for bringing policies and services together. For example, it was no-one's job to ensure coherent design and delivery on young people. No single department was in the lead, and the work that departments undertook individually sometimes overlapped confusingly and left gaps. Added to this there was no permanent youth policy cross-Whitehall Ministerial committee or official network. All this meant there was no single point of contact where people inside and outside Government could go to get or give information. Frequently, inside departments too, responsibility was also fragmented.

Youth Policy and Services

Politicians and policy makers in Britain and Northern Ireland currently tend to talk about young people in three-linked ways- as thugs, users and victims.

As **thugs** they steal cars, vandalise estates, attack older (and sometimes, younger) people and disrupt classrooms. As **users** they take drugs, drink and smoke to excess, get pregnant in order to jump the housing queue, hedonistically, care only for themselves. As **victims** they can't find work, receive poor schooling and are brought up in dysfunctional families. (Jeffs & Smith, 1999)

Criticisms of the young are not new and as illustrated above those criticisms come in different guises. The sources of criticism are also varied: the media, parents and religious organisations. One of the key features of academic and non-academic representations of youth, is the widespread construction of youth in general, and specific groups of young people in particular, as 'problems'. Consequently, youth policy tends to be profoundly shaped by such discourses.

The government's main current youth policy development for England (the Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Parliament have chosen to take different routes) is the new Connexions service and strategy (DFEE, 2000). The strategy recognises the complex and long-term nature of youth transitions and aims to create a 'step-change in participation and attainment through the teenage years' by providing 'a ladder out of social exclusion' by "breaking the cycle of non-participation and underachievement" (DfEE, 2000:14). There is also some concern around developing citizenship and building 'stronger, vibrant communities' via initiatives such as the Millennium Volunteers, the Neighbourhood Support Fund and citizenship education (Informal Education, 2000). Finally, it is argued that 'by raising participation and attainment we raise individual earnings and boost economic performance' (DfEE 2000:15). The origins of the Connexions strategy lie in the White Paper *Learning to succeed* (DfEE, 1999) and in the Social Exclusion Unit's (SEU) report *Bridging the Gap*. The SEU's report, in particular, recognises that current provision for young people is fragmented and uncoordinated. The Connexions strategy therefore takes an holistic approach to policy implementation and practise with respect to service provision, and focuses on the 13 to 19 age range. The National strategy for Neighbourhood renewal (2000:10) reports similar objectives and states that 'the key challenge is to achieve greater coherence at a national and local level of existing initiatives'. The new Ministerial Committee on Children and Young People has a remit of overseeing the coherence of policy across this age range by getting Departments to work together.

At the heart of the Connexions strategy is the Connexions service which is delivered through a network of personal advisors drawn from a range of professions who currently work with young people. The ultimate aim of the Connexions service is to ensure a smooth transition from adolescence to adulthood and working life so that every young person has the best start in life. It aims to do this by providing teenagers with the help and support they need to participate in formal and informal learning so as to achieve their maximum potential.

Four key themes have been identified by the government in the strategy:

- *Flexible curriculum that engages different young people and leads to the relevant, sought-after qualifications.* This includes opting out of elements of Keys Stage 4 to spend more time on work-related training, broadening options, and reviewing the national curriculum (including an increased emphasis on citizenship). A 'Graduation Certificate' is proposed for all by age 19 that recognises qualifications, key interpersonal skills and voluntary work.
- *Ensuring high-quality provision in school sixth forms, further education colleges and work based learning.* This entails altering the funding and coordination of provision (through the new Learning and Skills Council and learning partnerships); extending inspection to all 16-19 provision, and recognizing 'Beacon Colleges of Excellence in Further Education'.
- *Targetting financial support for those in learning.* Policies here include the development of a 'Youth Card' that gives some discounts in leisure and rewards participation in

learning; extending access funds in further education and introducing them for 16-19 year olds in schools; and piloting Educational Maintenance Allowances.

- *Outreach, information, advice, support and guidance.* Included here, are various anti-exclusion and anti-truancy measures; Millenium Volunteers, the Neighbourhood Support Fund, and the new Connexions Service. (DfEE 2000:18-19).

The underlying theme in the Connections strategy is that if people become disconnected/disaffected from schooling and further education, and thus the labour market, they are more likely to pose significant problems for welfare systems and society in general. Therefore, as argued by Tony Blair in 1999 'The best defence against social exclusion is having a job, and the best way to get a job is to have a good education, with the right training and experience'. However, Jeffs and Smith (p.4.) would argue that the Connexions strategy is simply another aspect of the growing centralisation and control that has characterised education and welfare policy in recent years. They would also argue that '*Transforming Youth Work*' (2001) the consultative document on English Youth Work which proposes a transformation of youth work and integration of services which includes tying work closely to the narrow objectives of the Connexions strategy is increasing central surveillance and control; further containment of young people; and is of an individual rather than an associational orientation.

Northern Ireland

The current policy for the Youth Service in Northern Ireland, was introduced by Department for Education in Northern Ireland (DENI) in 1987. It identifies the target range as 5 –25, with an emphasis on the 10 –20 age band and sets out clear aims for the Youth Service including a core Youth Curriculum. DENI has overall responsibility for the Youth Service and it ensures as far is possible that policy is carried out with uniformity.

The Youth Service comprises both the statutory and voluntary sectors. The statutory sector is administered by 5 Education & Library Boards and consists of some 166 youth clubs and 21 residential centres and a range of project based work. The Education and Library Boards are the main providers for the Youth Service and have a statutory obligation to 'secure provision for their areas of adequate facilities for recreational, social, physical, cultural and youth service activities'. The voluntary sector is more amorphous, encompassing a range of provision in a variety of settings, from very localised community initiatives to regional bodies. Around 2, 200 voluntary groups are registered with Education and Library Boards for the receipt of grant aid and other support. A further 30 regional groups are registered with the Youth Council which has an advisory, encouraging and grant making role.

The resources for the Youth Service are derived from a number of sources but the main sum is allocated by DENI. This is distributed to the Youth Council, to headquarter organisations and to the 5 Education and Library Boards. In addition, there is money sourced from the EU for cross-community work allocated to Peace and Reconciliation Fund, Trusts and increasingly through inter-agency and inter-sectoral work. While funding from DENI may be seen as fairly stable, the EU sources are time limited.

The youth service in Northern Ireland has historically been the main provider of opportunities for personal development and social development for young people. It is a testament to its effectiveness and appeal that it has engaged with one in three young people in Northern Ireland. In 1997, a major review into the Youth Service in Northern Ireland was launched by Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI). The official record of this review, '*Youth Service for*

Millennium (Oct. 2000) was launched by the Department in January 2001. The delay was linked with the hesitant steps towards devolved government in Northern Ireland.

One significant recommendation was that the “Youth Service” should cover an age range from 4 to 25 year olds. This has major implications for a ‘Service’ which has tended to focus on the middle group (i.e., 10-14 year olds: *ref. Research into Youth Provision* Loudon, McCreedy, Campbell, NEELB 1994). The Policy Review Group identified gaps in the work with young people in the older age group. These groups include 16 + young people, young women, gay and lesbian young people. The breadth and scope of services involved in providing for an age range of 4 – 25 (youth service range in England and Wales is 11-25) has obvious implications for resources and training of workers.

Participation and Citizenship

The concept of citizenship is by no means new, however the understanding of citizenship has extended beyond the narrow ‘passive’ framework of civil, political, social rights as conceptualised by T.H. Marshall over 50 years ago. Recent years have seen a redefined concept of citizenship emerge and gain salience in political debates and policy agendas which emphasises citizens responsibilities and the active participation of citizens in their local communities, rather than their rights. Central to this has been the notion of the ‘active citizen’. The more narrow definition however has the advantage of clarity as there is no timeless definition or agreement of what this reconceptualisation of the nature of citizenship actually means as it lacks specific empirical definition and is prey to different formulations across the political spectrum. Hence contemporary highly fractured and mobile notions of citizenship have become increasingly contested and prone too much rhetorical and ideological assertion

Citizenship and the Welfare State: Social Citizenship

During the 1980’s the British Conservative governments’ attack on welfare dependency resulted in state based social provision being either cut back or removed from groups of young people. For example, since 1988 lower rates of income support **was** paid to those aged under 25 years. Many under 18 received no support at all as income support was withdrawn from 16 and 17 year olds on the assumption they would be provided places on training schemes. And it was at that time, for a significant number of young people, the problems of dislocation, insecurity and deprivation began to surface as a result of the inadequacies in the income support system. As a consequence of these changes we can state that many of the benefits of social citizenship have been reversed rather than increased, and have in effect rendered groups of young people as ‘second class’ citizens. Access to welfare entitlement is restricted through access to the labour market. Many benefits are paid through insurances and the insurances are paid by deductions from employment (Helve Wallace, 2001). This is particularly problematic for young people because they are less and less likely to be working, or, if they are working many of the jobs they do enter may be short-term ones or those in the formal economy which do not necessarily give them access to full benefits. In addition, the increasing tendency for young people to continue in full-time education or training for longer and longer periods leaves them economically dependent upon parents for longer periods in the face of declining public funding. Full economic dependence in youth is achieved through the structures of the labour market and the welfare state both, which prove to be problematic for young people. It is argued that until young people achieve full economic independence, full citizenship rights will continue to be withheld from them.

Political Participation

One form of citizenship - political participation, is the right to vote and express a political viewpoint. However, it has become a commonplace that a significant number of young people have no party identification, are poorly informed about and lack interest in political issues, are ignorant about political process or institutions, uninterested in the outcomes of elections and uninvolved in politics. 'Testament of Youth', a MORI poll carried out for the Trade Union Congress in the UK, found young workers "disenchanted with traditional politics". It called on politicians, employers and trade unions "to listen to their concerns and delivery a new package of rights against exploitation." Commenting on the results, the TUC general secretary, John Monks, said: Young workers are often treated like school kids. Policy makers and employers who ignore young people's plea for fair treatment are storing up trouble for the future (Democratic Dialogue, 1997). The result of this not being listened to is that young people are turning their backs on politics and politicians. Data drawn from a BYC report (1998) states that 49 per cent of those young people questioned who were eligible to vote didn't vote in the 1997 General Election, increasing to 60 for local elections. Only 22 per cent said they would definitely vote in the 1999 European elections. A recent ESRC (1999) report not only confirms this apparent apathy in young people but also states that there were also important differences between groups, with more in the unemployed groups stating that they would not vote. The authors go on to suggest that the young people seem to be making a conscious decision *not* to do something. Gallagher (1997) in a similar study conducted in Northern Ireland found a link between gender and political involvement. His research revealed that young women were less likely to be involved in political parties and more likely to be involved in campaigning groups than young men.

In Britain the most marked manifestation of disenchantment has been in the membership of political parties. Not only have the figures dropped since the 50's, but also the parties themselves have been ageing. The average age of the Conservative Party member is 61, and the median 65; only 5 per cent are under 35. In the Labour party, although the average age is 48, three times as many members are over 66 than are under 25. These patterns of disenchantment aren't only peculiar to Britain as similar observations can be found in most industrialised countries. A recent JRF (2000) report however, has challenged the traditional view that low political participation of young people is mainly due to their own 'apathy' but notes that many young people viewed politicians in a negative light seeing them as remote, untrustworthy, self-interested and unrepresentative of young people. It would appear then that the responsibility of increasing the numbers of young voters lies with the politicians who should seek to promote a better image of politics. This is not to say that young people are not political. The report goes on to state that many of the young people had been involved in some sort of political activity such as a demonstrations, signing of petitions, or taking part in some form of voluntary activity, irrespective of cynical views concerning politics.

Furthermore the young people stated they would participate more if they thought that their views and opinions were taken seriously. However this reported research and previous studies notes that young people's political interest once activated does increase with age.

It has been recognised in Britain that youth work can have a role to play in political education. For example, in 1978 the Department of Education and Science gave substantial grants to short-term political education projects sponsored by the National Association of Youth Clubs and the British Youth Council. The DES statement on political education on youth work states:

What is required is experience of such a kind that the young people learn to claim their rights to influence the society in which they live, and to have a say in how it is run. It is active participation in some form of political activity which really counts.

The British Youth Council Report (1996) *Never Had It So Good* focused on 16 – 25 year olds in a compilation of opinion polls and interviews. The report clearly shows young people under pressure from society and alienated by a political system that is stacked against them. The report concluded: “Young people are not looking for sympathy or special treatment just equal treatment. We must ensure that they are given an equal chance to participate in the society they will one day lead”.

A recent report (JRF, 2000) argues that the challenge to those who are keen to kindle political interest is to ensure that young people are aware of the relevance of politics within their lives. However, in order to engage their attention, politics needs to be delivered in an accessible and enjoyable that enables them to consider and appreciate issues being discussed.

Citizenship Education

It is interesting to note at this point that the UK National Commission on Education (1994), confirms the importance of citizenship and highlights two important developments in modern life which are worth repeating in full:

1. The ever-increasing weight of legislation, and the use of law to regulate many aspects of daily life, has not been matched by corresponding efforts to acquaint citizens with the information they need to exercise their rights and duties with understanding and confidence.
2. Growing cynicism about politics, combined with a decline in voting amongst the **youngest electors**, suggests commitment to the democratic processes may be eroding. Accountability of government to the people requires and educated and informed citizenry capable of making reasoned moral judgements concerning issues in the public domain. (Cited in DD)

From September 2002, citizenship will be a compulsory part of the curriculum in both primary schools and secondary schools. In Northern Ireland a pilot citizenship education programme is currently being run in 25 schools. (Northern Ireland of course presents the challenge of education for citizenship in a deeply divided society). The basis of this innovation is the 1998 Crick Report *Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools*, published by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. However, the proposals of the Report and the implementation of these have not been met with universal acclaim and consequently ‘Education for Citizenship’ has been the subject of many critical debates. The idea of educating for citizenship, has proved contentious, in so far as what is envisaged goes beyond teaching young people about citizenship to the fostering of a range of attitudes, dispositions and values. The Crick Report however, which aims explicitly at an ‘active’ citizenship, is quite lucid on this matter as education for citizenship is defined as combining social and moral responsibility, community involvement and political literacy. There are the complaints however that there is no room on an already overcrowded timetable and questions asked raised, such as ‘are there objective measures of the moral and social qualities which are at the core of ‘the good citizen’? The latter difficulty, of clearly formulated and measurable outcomes, of course, can also be attached to other ‘citizenship’ learning contexts, such as the youth service.

In a recent survey (BYC, 1998) it was stated that the education system is not preparing young people as to-morrow’s citizens. Less than quarter of the young people who took part in the survey received any form of citizenship education. However the young people were aware of this shortfall and were supportive towards the idea of citizenship education, with 68 per cent wanting it to be introduced as part of the school curriculum. The Commission on Citizenship (1990) recommended that citizenship education should find a place not only in schools but

also with youth services and community work curricula. High profile youth initiatives such as the Princess Trust Young Volunteer scheme and the Community Service Volunteers Action Programme, are clearly examples which espouse citizenship themes of obligation, caring and competency (Hall et al, 1999). Also within the Youth Service in Northern Ireland there is a growing recognition of the role that young adults can play in the development and delivery of services to children and other young people that is closely aligned to concepts of citizenship and participation. Support for young people in the transition to full active participation in community life is particularly relevant in Northern Ireland given the long absence of local democracy and the prevailing sectarianism.

However Crick argues that preparation for citizenship cannot end at age sixteen, at the very time when young people begin to have more access to opportunities, rights and responsibilities of adult citizenship and the world of work. Government policy emphasises the need for civil society combined with citizenship, and the question of citizenship education in Further and Higher Education and training post 16 is currently being addressed with projects due to start in autumn 2001 as part of a staged implementation of active citizenship. This needs to understand the that interest in politics increases with age and to understand more fully the ways in which biographical events occur that make civic and political engagement more immediately relevant. Evans, 2001 takes this point further by stating the need for an exploration of the ideas and practices of citizenship is evident whether young people are in training or in work-based training and indeed should extend into and throughout adult life. She goes on to argue however that by viewing the concept of citizenship as a status acquired at a fixed point serves only to impede on this process.

Participatory Democracy via Youth Councils

The most favoured response by statutory and voluntary agencies for encouraging Youth participation at a local level within the UK has been the setting of Youth Councils. Prior to the current revival of interest in Youth Councils there had been two previous attempts at their establishment, during the late 1940's and 1950's and again during the 1980's. However, both these attempts failed as the driving force behind young people's participation was not grounded upon convictions of desirability and basic rights, but on political expediency (Matthews, 2001).

At present there are currently over 400 youth councils within the UK representing a new wave of interest in this form of political participation/participative democracy. The growth of Youth Councils within England and Wales has in the main been haphazard as their form and character is dependent, in part, on factors such as the demography, political make-up and traditions of a locality and in part on existing institutional and organisational structures. As a consequence of this they have a limited funding capacity to support development. In Scotland development has been more successful due to effective partnership working between the Scottish Community Education Council, Youth Link Scotland and the Principal Community Education Officers' Group. Following extensive research and consultation by this partnership the 'Connect Youth' Programme was set up to promote effective involvement of young people in the decision-making process that effect their lives.

By far the strongest tradition of youth councils in the UK, is within Northern Ireland. In 1979, the Department of Education established the Northern Ireland Youth Forum (NIYF), with a brief to encourage the development of a network of Local Youth Councils (LYC). Members of the LYC were recruited from local youth clubs, including statutory and voluntary agencies, both uniformed and non-uniformed. The purpose of the LYCs was to get young people involved in tackling local issues and to ensure that Local District Councils respected their voices.

The UK Youth Parliament, which had its first sitting in February of this year, currently has around 250 openly elected MYPs drawn from England. It can have up to 417 MYPs from across the UK. Separate arrangements have been made to elect young people from the rest of the UK via the devolved assemblies for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The UKYP aims to give young people aged 11 – 18 across the UK a means through which they can identify issues of concern; and offer a channel through which they can raise these concerns with Government and organisations that influence young people's lives. Since its inception, the UKYP has published a Youth Manifesto calling for wide ranging improvements to young people's lives. It has also been commissioned to obtain feedback from young people on aspects of the development of the Connexions Service. The UKYP has received short-term funding from a variety of sources including Government Departments such as the DfES, private sector sponsors and charitable trusts. However, future funding of the UKYP is a major concern.

Much local and national legislation has very great implications for young people between the ages of 16-and 18 yet at present they have no means to express a political preference on who is to make these decisions. BYC is working with the Children's Rights Alliance and other youth-led organisations to campaign for a common age of majority for political and social rights at sixteen. The Liberal Democrats in their manifesto have also called for this.

References

BYC '*State of the Young Nation*' a report by the British Youth Council, 1998.

BYC '*Never Had it so Good*' a report by the British Youth Council, 1996

Department of Education (2000) Qualifications and Destinations of Northern Ireland School Leavers 1998/99. Statistical Press Release, 28th June 2000. Bangor: Department of Education.

DED (1995) Unemployment Press Notice August 1995. Belfast: Department of Economic Development.

DfEE (2001) *Transforming Youth Work*, London: Department for Education and Employment.

Eurostat (2001) Eurostat Yearbook 2001: The statistical guide to Europe, Data 1989/90. EC: Eurostat.

Gallagher, T. (1997) '*So what do you think*' cited in Democratic Dialogue, Belfast.

Jeffs, T. and Smith, M.M. (2001) *Informal Education*. Connexions

Joseph Rowntree Foundation, (2000) *Political Participation of Young People*. York

Labour Market Quarterly (2000) Patterns of Labour Market Participation in Minority Ethnic Groups. November. Sheffield: DfEE.

Loudon, McCready, Campbell, (1994) 'Research into Youth Provision' NEELB.

Mathews, H. (2001) Citizenship, Youth Councils and Young People's Participation. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 4. 3. pp 299-318.

Social Exclusion Unit (1999) *Bridging the Gap: New opportunities for 16-18 year olds not in education, employment or training* Cm4405 London.

'Testament of Youth', (1997) MORI poll for the TUC, cited in Democratic Dialogue, Belfast.