

## Impact case study (REF3b)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Glasgow
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> C25: Education
<b>Title of case study:</b> <b>Highlighting youth transitions and processes: marginalisation and inclusion</b>
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>

Research carried out at the University of Glasgow directly resulted in an increased understanding of the complexity of modern youth transitions, helped to ensure that policy-makers understood the implications of their focus on the NEET group (Not in Education, Employment or Training), drew attention to the implications of precarious forms of work and highlighted the potential for acute social withdrawal among young people who experience difficult transitions in employment. This work has been widely covered by the media, has informed the development of a European agenda on vulnerable youth and was used as part of the response by the International Trade Union Congress to the G20 summit in Mexico.

<b>2. Underpinning research</b>
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The underpinning research was conducted at the University of Glasgow over the course of five key projects (undertaken between 1999 and 2007), led by Professor Andy Furlong (Professor of Social Inclusion and Education, 1995-present) and including contributions by Fred Cartmel (Lecturer, 1994-2006; Senior Lecturer 2007-present).

Furlong has a long-standing involvement in research into young people's transitions to employment with a specific focus on those from less advantaged families and those experiencing complex transitions involving periods of unemployment. The focus of his research was to understand the implications of the increasing length and complexity of young people's transitions from education to work and their early labour market experiences – particularly those young people from less advantaged backgrounds. His work has also focused on the growth of precarious forms of employment and he has highlighted the need to ensure that employment policy provides for people in insecure jobs who are often denied opportunities for training. The five projects are highlighted below:

- 'Integration through Training', a European Commission project led by Furlong (1999-2000) explored the extent to which the training programmes targeting young unemployed in eight European countries were effective in promoting labour market integration. The research focused on a wide range of training programmes in each country and developed a model to explain how schemes contributed to positive integration. It found that a wide variety of types of provision is necessary so that all young people can find forms of training to suit, and that compulsory programmes tend not to be effective. Most programmes in the subject countries were failing to supply employers with the types of skills they required and the most disadvantaged trainees tended to benefit least.
- Commissioned by the Scottish Executive (2000-02), 'Reconceptualising Youth Transitions' was led by Furlong and examined the extent to which transitions had become fragmented and the implications of unemployment and interventions on labour market outcomes. The project involved analysis of a longitudinal survey of 15- to 29-year-olds as well as a series of biographical interviews and highlighted the ways in which young people drew on various resources to bring about positive outcomes. It provided the framework for targeting support at the most vulnerable and highlighted the vulnerability of young people in jobs without training. The report emphasised the importance of personal agency as a resource though which other assets such as educational qualifications were mobilised and showed that negative outcomes were common where weak personal agency was combined with poor qualifications or weak family resources.
- Furlong led a study (2002-03) of young men who had experienced long-term unemployment soon after leaving school in order to better understand the consequences of youth unemployment for patterns of integration five years after being unemployed. The study

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showed that around a third were unemployed five years on while another third had been unable to move out of insecure forms of employment. The research also highlighted the vulnerability of those in jobs without training.

- Furlong's study of acute social withdrawal in Japan (2007) examined the link between the experience of complex transitions and social withdrawal and found that a phenomenon that had tended to be regarded as psychological could be understood as a sociological issue linked to labour market, family and educational structures. His argument was that social withdrawal cannot be seen as a single condition linked to psychological problems, but that there are a range of different triggers leading to different manifestations. Rapid change in the labour market and the breakdown of the links between school and work are particularly important – therefore framing the increase in withdrawal as a structural issue linked to change.
- A comparative study of the impact of changing labour market conditions on young people in the UK and Australia (2007-08), in collaboration from the University of Melbourne (Prof Johanna Wyn), found that the tendency to focus on unemployment or NEET is mistaken, as the rise in precarious forms of employment is something that will shape the post-recession economy in western societies. Under these new conditions young people are denied basic securities and increasingly lack control over their lives. This study laid the foundations for a new ESRC project 'The Making of the Precariat' (2013-2014; joint with University of Leicester).

### 3. References to the research

- Furlong, A. (2006) 'Not a Very NEET Solution: Representing Problematic Labour Market Transitions Among Early School-Leavers', *Work, Employment and Society*, Vol. 20 (3) pp.553-569 (an official journal of the British Sociological Association with an impact factor of 1.255) (doi:[10.1177/0950017006067001](https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017006067001))
- Furlong, A. (2008) 'The Japanese hikikomori phenomenon: acute social withdrawal among young people', *The Sociological Review*, 56 (2) (A leading peer-reviewed UK sociology journal with an impact factor of 1.220) (doi:[10.1111/j.1467-954X.2008.00790.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2008.00790.x))
- Furlong, A., Woodman, D. and Wyn, J. (2011) 'Changing times, changing perspectives: reconciling 'transition' and 'cultural' perspectives on youth and young adulthood' *Journal of Sociology*, 47, pp.355-370 (winner of the best paper in the Journal of Sociology for 2011/12) (doi:[10.1177/1440783311420787](https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783311420787))
- Furlong, A. and Cartmel, F. (2004) *Vulnerable young men in fragile labour markets: Employment, unemployment and the search for long-term security*, York Publishing, York. ISBN 9781859351796 [available from HEI]
- Furlong, A., Cartmel, F., Biggart, A., Sweeting, H., and West, P. (2003) *Youth Transitions: Patterns of Vulnerability and Processes of Social Inclusion*, Central Research Unit, Scottish Executive, Edinburgh, p.99 ([Link](#))
- Furlong, A. and Cartmel, F. (2003) 'Unemployment, integration and marginalisation: a comparative perspective on 18-24 year-olds in Finland, Sweden, Scotland and Spain', in Hammer, T. (ed) *Youth Unemployment and Social Exclusion in Europe*, Policy Press, Bristol. ISBN 186134368 [available from HEI]

#### Relevant grants:

- 'Integration through training', European Commission grant, 12/99-12/00 (€156,000)
- 'Reconceptualising youth transitions', Scottish Executive grant, 01/00-06/02 (£120,000)
- 'Breaking the cycle: Overcoming the impact of long-term youth unemployment', Joseph Rowntree Foundation grant, 06/02-06/03 (£42,928)
- 'Economic and social change and the hikikomori phenomenon in Japan', GB Sasakawa Foundation 02/07-12/07 (£1,500)
- 'New perspectives on life and work in the UK and Australia', British Academy, 2007-08 (£4,000).

#### 4. Details of the impact

In the UK, there are currently 7.2 million young people aged 18-25, representing 12% of the population. Among the 16-24 age group, 1.09 million are currently not in education, employment or training (NEET). Around half experience complex, non-linear transitions in their pathway to employment. The economic and social impact of young people in these situations is becoming increasingly visible in the UK and worldwide.

At one time labour market dynamics were understood simply in terms of a dichotomy between employment and unemployment and framed in policy terms by an emphasis on activation measures that aimed to move people quickly into jobs. Over the past decade, University of Glasgow research has contributed to increasing awareness among policy-makers of the limitations of such activation programmes and the complexity of young people's pathways into and within the labour market. Furlong has helped to highlight (in international fora) the limitations of policies that focus on the NEET group, has drawn attention to those people churned between a series of poor-quality and insecure jobs and shown how non-linear pathways from education to work increase long-term vulnerability among all groups of young people (from early leavers to graduates). His research has also led to the recognition that acute social withdrawal among young people can be a consequence of negative labour market experiences.

Furlong's work has contributed to policy debate and influenced policy change and service provision by agencies supporting young people in a number of countries. Specifically, the Glasgow research has:

- Contributed to recognition of the limitations of a focus on the NEET group and highlighted the extent to which such an approach risks neglecting the needs of other vulnerable groups.** Furlong was invited to act as an expert adviser to a 2011-12 EUROFOUND (a tripartite EU Agency, providing knowledge for social and work-related policies) project on NEETs in Europe. At the request of the project leader, he helped the team understand the implications of his own work for European policy, specifically promoting a broad focus which included those who were not NEET but who nevertheless occupied vulnerable positions in the labour market while also advising on the problems of NEET as a category. He was asked to attend four meetings, and to produce and present at each a briefing paper on an aspect of the work as well as providing general advice and criticism. The Research Manager, Employment and Change, for EUROFOUND stated:

*Given all the work Professor Furlong [has] carried out in the field of youth and his expertise on NEET, it was a great pleasure for me when he accepted to be part of our network of experts and his contribution was essential for the success of the project... The direct impact of the participation of Prof. Furlong in our project ranged from reviewing and providing feedback and guidance to our research to contributing directly to our report and illustrating new dimensions and problematic[s] of using the concept of NEETs for policymaking.*

*Moreover, his previous publications in the field have been the starting point of our desk research and literature review...As [a] main outcome of the project, the report "NEETs – Young people Not in Employment, Characteristics, Costs and policy responses" was published in October 2012. ...[T]his report is the most successful publication of Eurofound since its foundation in 1975. The report had a huge media and policy impact. The day of publication 330 newspapers in the world reported the main messages of the research. Most importantly, the report shaped the European policy debate...the report contributed to explain[ing] the concept of NEETs to millions of European citizens and, especially, to European policymakers. The contribution of Andy Furlong in achieving this result was essential.*

There is also strong policy interest in the NEET group and in young people in precarious forms of employment in Japan (where the classification of NEET extends from 16-34 years of age).

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Professor Furlong has had several pieces of work published in Japanese to meet this interest (e.g. a translation of *Young People and Social Change* published by Otsuki Shoten, Tokyo in 2009), has been invited to present to the Japanese Ministry of Labour's Institute for Labour Policy and Training (which advises on policy planning and implementation) and the Institute for Labour Policy and Training published his report to the Ministry of Labour. From 2008-12 Furlong served as advisor to the Japanese Youth Cohort survey, which is funded by the Japanese Department of Education and Skills. The survey team adopted key aspects of the approach Furlong had developed for the Scottish government report on transitions. He received a 'Furusato Award' from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science in 2010 (the country's main research council) for 'excellent achievements towards Japan-UK academic collaboration'.

- **Highlighted the growth of precarious work forms among young people in influential world forums.** Comparative work between the UK and Australia and the UK and Japan was used as the basis for a briefing paper commissioned by the International Trade Union Confederation to inform the response of the international labour movement to the G20 summit in Mexico in 2012. The briefing was entitled 'Unemployment and precarious work among young people' and aimed to draw attention to young people in precarious forms of work who can be overlooked by policymakers' focus on unemployment/NEET.
- **Raised public awareness of the psycho-social consequences of new forms of working among young people** in Japan where precarious employment is much more common than in Europe. Acute social withdrawal (the hikikomori phenomenon) has traditionally been treated as a psychological problem. Glasgow research found that acute social withdrawal was actually a sociological issue linked to labour market, family and education structures in Japan. Furlong suggested that changes taking place in Europe could trigger similar outcomes there. These claims stimulated significant public debate, primarily through widespread media coverage. On 14 May 2008, he discussed the issue on Laurie Taylor's BBC show, [Thinking Allowed](#), triggering email exchanges from concerned parents and journalists. More recently the findings were covered in a [BBC Magazine feature](#) (5 July 2013) which received more hits than any other on the day of publication, triggering numerous email exchanges from parents and journalists in countries as far away as Columbia – plus an exchange from a senior member of the UK Cabinet Office.

<b>5. Sources to corroborate the impact</b>
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- Research Manager, Employment and Change, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (EUROFOUND) (supporting statement embedded in text; available from HEI, evidencing contribution to European policy work on NEETs)
- Director, Workplace Research Centre, University of Sydney, Australia [contact details provided] (can evidence Furlong influence on policy debate around the education-work nexus and contribution to G20 summit statement)
- Survey Team Leader, Japanese Youth Cohort Survey [contact details provided] (can corroborate Furlong's role in work on youth unemployment and youth transitions in Japan)

Media Coverage (evidencing contribution to public awareness):

- Hikikomori: Why are so many Japanese men refusing to leave their rooms? (*BBC News Magazine*, 5 July 2013) ([Link](#))
- Exposed: the myth of a 'culture of worklessness', (*The Guardian*, 14 December 2012) ([Link](#))
- Thinking Allowed - Hikikomori - Women's Anti-Suffrage, (*BBC Radio 4*, 14 May 2008) ([Link](#))