



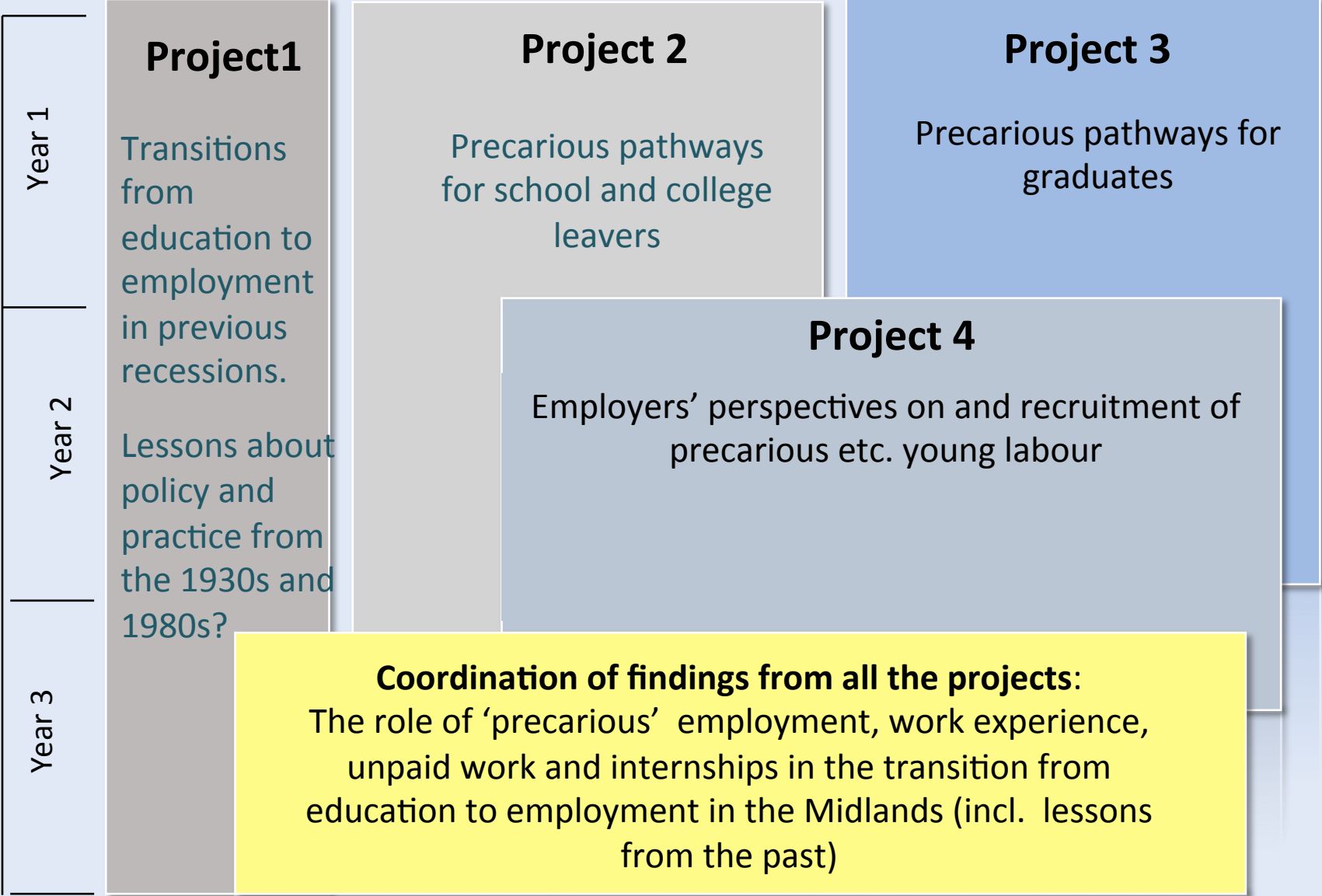
Precarious Pathways? The Initial Labour Market Experiences of Young People in the Midlands of England Who Do Not (intend to) Enter Higher Education

Phil Mizen (Aston University), Gaby Atfield and
Arlene Robertson (IER, Warwick)

'Precarious' Pathways to Work (in the Midlands)?

- Relatively high levels of youth unemployment and under-employment (especially for some group);
- Increasing insecurity of employment, with growing differentiation between 'career jobs' and temporary, part-time, zero/core hours, contract employment;
- Intensification of focus on vocational skills and qualifications - but few apprenticeship opportunities to U25s;
- Expansion in higher education participation (but shift of costs to learners and increase in debt);
- Drive towards work experience and 'employability skills' prior to labour market entry
- Key project question: how do young people (U25s) experience and engage with factors like these as look to leave education for paid employment?

Precarious pathways from education to employment for young people?



Project 2 - Key Research Questions

- Project 2 examines 'precarious' transitions from perspective of young people (16 to 24 year olds) not seeking higher education
- It asks:
 - What are the perceived employment opportunities for (non-HE) education leavers in the Midlands?
 - What types of work experience, unpaid, temporary or part-time work have been undertaken or are anticipated?
 - How and why do young people access non-standard forms of work (i.e. are these 'career/work choices' or perceived necessities)?
 - What do young people make of these types of work and what are their perceived (dis)advantages?

Focus Group and Interview Research

A sample of young people from three Midlands cities facing the prospect, or having experience, of 'precarious' work. The fieldwork:

Focus Groups – to gather diagnostic and local/city data

- 10 focus groups with young people in Birmingham (3), Coventry (4) and Leicester (3)
- 84 focus group participants in total

Semi-structured Interviews – to allow in-depth follow-up/investigation and consider process (i.e. how young people 'make their way')

- 80 semi-structured interviews: 59 'first' interviews and 21 'follow-up' interviews



Focus Group Participants

Demographic	Birmingham n=23	Coventry n=33	Leicester n=28	All n=84
Gender				
Male	16	20	13	49
Female	7	13	15	35
Age				
16-18	13	23	18	54
19-21	9	7	8	24
22-26	1	3	2	6
Race/ethnicity				
Asian	8	10	6	24
Black	0	3	2	5
Black Afro Caribbean	10	2	0	12
White	5	17	19	41
White/Asian	0	0	1	1
Unknown	0	1	0	1
Main Activity				
Employed	5	5	6	16
Unemployed	3	7	0	10
Education/Training	10	18	16	44
Apprenticeship	0	2	2	4
Unknown	5	1	4	10

Interview Participants

Demographic	Birmingham n= 21	Coventry n= 22	Leicester n= 16	All n= 59
Gender				
Male	11	10	7	28
Female	10	12	9	31
Age				
16-18	7	7	8	22
19-21	7	9	6	22
22-26	7	6	2	15
Race/ethnicity				
Asian	4	0	8	12
Black	3	3	1	7
Black Afro Caribbean	3	1	0	4
British South Asian	3	0	0	3
White	8	18	5	31
White/Asian	0	0	1	1
Unknown	0	0	1	1
Main Activity				
Employed	7	3	4	14
Unemployed	6	10	2	18
Education/Training	5	3	8	16
Apprenticeship	3	6	2	11

Key Emerging Theme – Temporary Work Agencies

- A key theme is the importance of temporary work agencies as (potential) sources of employment
- Unsurprising, perhaps. Literature on TWAs suggests huge growth as measured by workers contracted/placed; revenues; and national and international reach – although many regional/local agencies as well
- Arguments about TWAs, stress their significance as:
 - Enablers through activation, flexible working, ready employment, experience, employability – govt., employers/industry, agencies; Gray (2002)
 - Symptom of dysfunctional labour market – ILO (2010)
 - An active dynamic in greater labour insecurity – Forde (2001), Forde and Slater (2016), Gray (2002), Purcell *et al.* (2004)
- What do young workers make of TWAs and how do they use them?

What P2W participants feel TWAs have going for them

- ‘Normality’ – TWAS are extensively and readily used when looking for paid work
 - *“I could say I’ve used, like all of them. I’ve got an account with them all”* (Ella, 18, Leicester)
 - Providing to paid employment
 - Full-time, part-time, temporary, fixed term, zero/core hours
 - In catering, hotel, restaurants, fastfood, bars, clubs and bars, cleaning (commercial and domestic), shop work, warehouse and distribution, labouring/construction, industrial/factory, selling, door-to-door, security, NHS (cleaning, catering), social care (children and the elderly)

- Way to access for those with few qualifications and little experience (and who can draw on family support)
 - *“If you need money quickly, and like say they’ve got a shift there for you, that’s fifty quid there for you, but if it’s not worth your while there’s not much point in doing it really. Say someone who lives at home with their parents, it’s good for them because then they’re making money and they pay their parents a bit of rent, but they won’t be having to go out and pay £150 rent or something like that, especially if they’ve only made £50” (Kyle, 20, Coventry)*

- A 'stepping-stone':
 - Providing (paid) work experience:
 - *"I've updated my CV, so I've got experience on there now, because of my waitressing and agency [work], so hopefully I'll find something because I have experience."* (Bless, 18, Birmingham)
 - Access to internal labour markets (NHS, local authorities, large private sector organisations) or 'temp-to-perm' possibilities:
 - *"They asked me to send my details to them, scan my passport, everything I send to them, then they started giving me work, but when I started doing care work the manager wanted me to become permanent, but that wasn't the thing for me, I didn't want to do care work".* (Evelyn, 19, Coventry)

- Offering flexibility and control:
 - Fitting hours around study and other commitments:
 - *“I have Wednesdays always free, I have the whole weekend, Friday I’m free so it’s basically, Friday I finish [classes] at 10 in the morning, so if I get a job from Friday in the afternoon then plus the weekends or Wednesday”* (Maarif, 18, Birmingham)
- Giving choice and ability to decline undesirable jobs (e.g. Evelyn above)
- Providing temporary jobs rather than getting ‘stuck’ in jobs felt low level or inadequate to needs/aspirations
 - *“There is a difference between being a shop worker and a receptionist”* (Evelyn, 19, Coventry)

- Easy and fast sources of work:
 - Gap between signing-up and starting work can be short:
 - *“I went in to fill in some paperwork and gave them my number and occasionally, every week, they would call me, not occasionally, every week I think, they would call me on a Friday, and ask me if I’d want to work on the Saturday or Sunday at weekend, so yeah, I’d say yeah. I’d tell them yeah, I want to work”*. (Aqeel, 18, Leicester)
 - Immediate and easy access through online presence:
 - *“I’ve just got an iPad, so I get my iPad, type in Google ‘Jobs in Coventry’. Lots of pages come up like Gumtree, you’ve got Indeed, you’ve got Reed comes up and loads of job sites. My favourite one is Indeed cause it’s so easy to use”*. (Sophie, 18, Coventry)
 - Online agencies can allow application for multiple jobs with a single registration/
CV

These positive coexist with significant reservations, cynicism and criticism/hostility

- Unable to satisfy aspirations for work, because of age:
 - “Agencies do not help you if you are under 18 ... they say, ‘well, we’ve got no work that you’re able to sort of do’” (Rose, 23, Leicester)
- Insufficient experience:
 - “[I] got an email back once [telling her] that you’re not experienced enough so you can’t [be placed in work].” (Melissa, 17, Leicester)
- Limits to flexibility and control:
 - *So, I was applying online too and then my mum got me to join her agency, but obviously they weren’t going to give me anything because I wasn’t as available as their other people because obviously I was at college.”* (Aafa, 18, Birmingham)

- Limited response/replies:
 - *“I don’t even get them!”* [i.e. emails with job suggested job opportunities] (Chloe, 17, Leicester)
- Wasted time and effort:
 - *“... you’re getting all these other ones [i.e. suggested opportunities] flooding in and you don’t wanna waste your time on them, because they’re either, ah, can you do delivery driving? ... and it’s like, I haven’t got a [driving] licence or anything for that ... well, that was a fucking waste of time’.* (Damon, 19, Coventry)

- Offering jobs outside of perceived skills, experience:

- *Melisa*

- ... you get emails like this job's available near you, blah, blah ... This job suits your description, and you are probably doing something for health and social care, and it turns out to be photocopying or something [Laughter]*

- *Ella*

- They send me chef ones and I was like, I can't even cook scrambled eggs [Laughter]. (both 17, Leicester)*

- Offering jobs that are inaccessible:

- *Chloe*

- I get loads of email but none of them plan [sic] out.*

- *Ella*

- Yeah, well I get loads of emails as well about them, it's like I get them all the time, like, oh yeah, this, erm, job matches your areas. Coventry! Yeah, yeah, [of] course I live in Coventry. And yet you know, I live in the middle of Leicester! (both 17, Leicester)*

- Deception by artificially inflating the number of vacancies:
 - *“Most of them have the same jobs on there, that’s what I’ve noticed. Like the same job will come five or six [times]. I get like five emails about the same job”*. (Melissa, 17, Leicester)
 - *“[employers] advertise their jobs on so many different [TWA web] sites ... half of the time you’re applying for the same job, 10 times over. So, you might think like, ah, yeah, I’ve applied for 10 jobs [but] you’ve probably applied for one, maybe two jobs, because they’re the same ... so you have to be careful in what you’re applying for, you think you are applying for so many and you’re getting your hopes up ... and towards the end it just kinda gets to you and it’s like, well nothing’s out there, no one’s getting back to me, I’m not hearing anything, so what is the actual point? It’s so difficult”*. (Danielle, 21, Coventry)

- Jobs that fail to materialise:
 - *“So, we go sign up with them, take all our ID in and they’re like, ‘well, if anything comes up we’ll let you know’, and I kind of think, well, you’ve called me because I’m applying for a job, now that job’s suddenly disappeared”.* (Danielle, 21, Coventry)
- Or breaking perceived promises:
 - *“... when he got there [i.e. her partner] to do the work, it was nothing like they’d explained [a temp-to-perm opportunity]. So, he was doing a job that he really wasn’t qualified to do. The agency bloke ... [told her partner] I can’t help you, you’re gonna have to apply for that job again”.* (Katherine, 18, Coventry)

- Just want to make money from you:
 - *“Do you know an agency is just a business? They don’t, it’s not, it’s nothing to do with us, they just, they get, for them it’s just to make money, nothing to do with sorting people out or helping them, they just get massive contracts and they send you out.”* (Iqbal, 21, Leicester)
 - *“So, that’s why I think they promise all this stuff and it’s actually nothing they’ve explained to you, ‘cause once you’ve been promised all this, you’re thinking, yes!, this is gonna be a great job. You go for it and obviously they’ve already had the commission, so you’re stuck in a job you don't really want.”* (Katherine, 18, Coventry)

- Treating you as a commodity:

- *“And the agency ... they used to, and then they [a large logistics business] used to pay the agency, what did they pay them like? The wage there to work an hour for the, the person who’s employed me, [name of logistics company], I think it was £10.69 for a hour, and then because we were agency workers, we used to [get] £6.31. £6.31! ... And then the agency would eat that couple of pound, you know what I’m trying to say to you? And if there’s 25 people turning up to work, 15 get work, and we’re banging out 8, 9 hours ... These agencies are basically set up purely for business.’ (Duhat, 19, Birmingham)*

Some Preliminary Thoughts

- Extensive and routine use of TWAs by young people looking for work
 - Quick and easy sources of paid work
 - As a means of selecting between different types of work opportunities
 - For instrumental purposes – experience, access to employers or internal labour markets
 - To accommodate other commitments – study, leisure, family
 - To sift out unwanted/undesirable employment
-
- Reproduce existing barriers – e.g. age, lack of work experience, skills/qualifications
 - Limits to flexibility/accommodating other commitments
 - Opportunities are limited – numerically and range of jobs/occupations
 - And those offered are often highly unsuitable
 - Deceptive and underhand practices
 - Not concerned with needs of young workers

Contacts:



Paths2Work@warwick.ac.uk



www.warwick.ac.uk/paths2work



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