

HISTORY FACULTY AND ST HILDA'S COLLEGE



# Employment, education and aspiration: youth participation, 1918-2011

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# Summary

- Parental aspirations are high, regardless of income
- Parental employment improves youth participation rates
- People have realistic expectations of youth participation
- Targeted funding, and communication, encourage participation

# Evidence base

- Census
- 38 official educational reports and educational surveys
- 100+ personal testimonies
- Interviews with 1340 working-class households, 1954-1970

# 1918-1939: low participation



- Average unemployment rate: 11%, highest among adults
- School leaving: 14 from 1921.
- Post-compulsory participation low: 8% 15-17 year olds in education
  - Reason: family poverty.
    - If I'd been able to stay at school maybe I'd have gone in for something better, but we were very poor' (Edith Edwards, domestic servant)

# 1918-1939: low upward mobility

- Training (apprenticeship) does not lead to sustainable employment
- Youth unemployment low but rises to over 10% at age 21
- Social capital important in job-seeking:
  - over 70% leavers find jobs through parents

## THE POVERTY LINE

### A Sheffield Survey

ONE IN FIVE BELOW IT

#### Aid of Social Services

Sheffield has a population of half a million, more than threequarters of which is made up of working-class households. A survey of the standard of living conducted by the Sheffield Social Survey Committee shows that in the winter of 1931-2 nearly a fifth of these working-class households were living below or on the margin of the poverty line. Two out of every five families were living in "comparatively poor circumstances," half on or below the poverty line, the other half above but within a close distance of it. Even if there had been no unemployment (the most important cause) one in seventeen of the families would have been in or on the margin of poverty. Had it not been for various forms of "social income" (insurance benefits and pensions), but leaving public assistance and charity out of account, nearly two-thirds of the working-class

# 1945-c.1965: overview



- Compulsory secondary education.
- School leaving age 15 (from 1948)
- Employment Advisory Service and youth work (from 1948)

# 1945-70: Parental employment

- Male unemployment low
- Married women's paid work increases
- Proportion of 15-18 year olds in education increases
  - 8% 1937
  - 20% 1961.
- Expansion of apprenticeship system



# 1945-70: Parental aspiration

- 'It's the mother that educates them', (Jackson and Marsden, *Education and the Working Class*)
- 'My mother was the driving force behind education, all the time' (Paul, b. 1948, grammar school pupil, father: milkman)
- 'She went out to work to buy us uniforms and books' (Billy, b.1947, comprehensive pupil, father: factory operative)
- 'That's why I went back to work, to see the children get on' (Mrs D, waitress, interviewed Liverpool, 1958)

# 1945-70: Security and sustainability

- 40% leavers find work through parents in 1960s
- 30% use Employment Advisory Service
- Greater availability of technical, skilled manual and clerical jobs
- Apprenticeship leads to sustainable employment
- Low social mobility, high security



# 1945-70: Low HE participation

- 4% leavers enter HE in 1962
  - Over 80% from non-manual families
- Grievance: limited post-compulsory provision:
  - 'Parental demand for post-15 education is greater than supply' (HMI Inspectors)
- Grievance: limited information on HE entry and funding:
  - 'I needed Latin for uni. They never told me' (Paul, b.1948, working-class grammar school pupil)
  - 'There was no money to pay for college'. (Carol, b. 1942, working-class secondary modern/comprehensive pupil)

# 1970-present: overview

- Post-16 provision expands
- Proportion of NEETs increases
  - Lack of sustainable training (Nuffield)
  - Parental uncertainty: 'I was an apprentice, then an engineer...if anyone had told us it would all collapse by the 1970s I'd just have laughed...My kids' world was different' (Alan Watkins, b.1942, father of two)



# 1970-present: HE participation

- HE participation increases from 6% to 46%
- Causes:
  - Expansion of post-16 provision
  - Funding for post-16 students
  - Expansion of HE
  - Employability
  - Early years provision
  - Information on funding



# 1970-2012: Low-income groups' attitudes to participation

- Families uncertain about purpose:
  - 'I worry sometimes about what its all for? All that debt' (Christine, cleaner, mother of two)
- Post-16 participation attractive if doesn't hamper employability
  - 'I'd like them to go to college - but I'd just like them to be happy' (Barbara, shop assistant, mother of two)
- Targeted funding, and communication about funding, important

# Conclusions

- Parental employment encourages youth participation
- Low-income groups see participation positively
- Broad access to post-16 provision, with funding for low-income groups, can raise post-compulsory participation
- Widely disseminating information on funding and opportunities to participate is key to effectiveness and popularity of policies