Young adults in transition:
the local picture in national context

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This is the second of two briefing papers on factors affecting young people's transition to adulthood. This briefing looks at how household location affects life chances and how this has developed over time. It starts with a fresh look at some well known data on who is imprisoned.

Figure one shows the prison population in England and Wales from 1900 to 2009. It highlights the sharp increase in the male prison population, especially since 2000. By 2009 the male prison population had risen to an all time high of 83,559.

FIGURE 1. BOYS AND MEN, GIRLS AND WOMEN, IN PRISON IN ENGLAND AND WALES 1900-2009
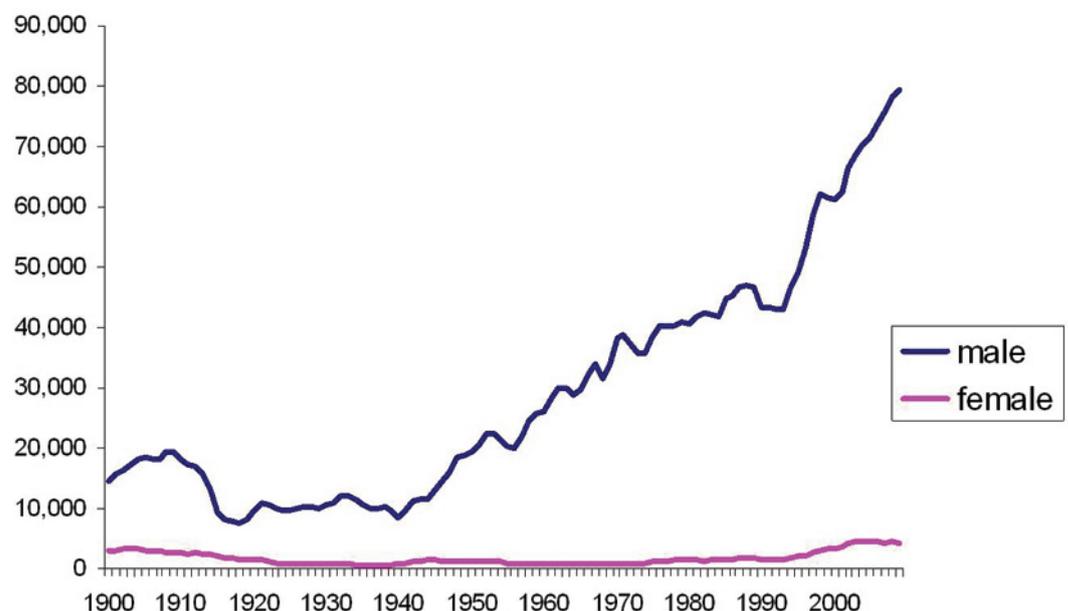
Source: Population in prison establishments under sentence the number in prison on the 30th June 2009, www.justice.gov.uk and Office for National Statistics mid-year estimates for England and Wales.

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The UK has one of the highest imprisonment rates in Western Europe, though within living memory our prison population was less than a quarter of what it is now. We do not reflect enough on what might be driving this currently high prison population. There is a strong correlation, for instance, between income inequality and rates of imprisonment.

Figure two is the same data on a log scale. This allows for a comparison of the rate of change over time between men and women. It shows two points where the rates of change diverged. The first was during the Second World War, the other was between 2008 and 2009. This raises the question, which cannot be answered here, of what happened during these periods that caused these divergences?

FIGURE 2. BOYS AND MEN, GIRLS AND WOMEN, IN PRISON IN ENGLAND AND WALES 1900-2009 (ANNUAL CHANGE)
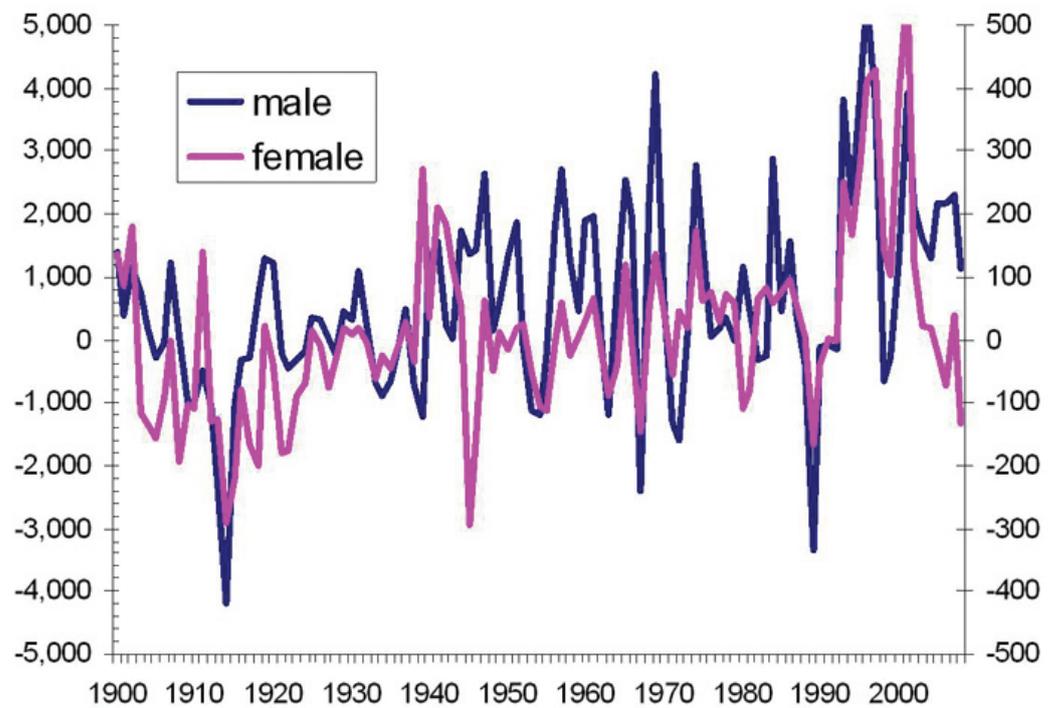

Source: Population in prison establishments under sentence the number in prison on the 30th June 2009, www.justice.gov.uk and Office for National Statistics mid-year estimates for England and Wales.

Figure three shows the number of boys and men in prison in England and Wales in 2009. The age group most incarcerated is the 30-39 year olds. Figure four shows the same data per thousand of this age population. It highlights that young adults are proportionately incarcerated more than older adults. There are more 21-24 year old men in prison per thousand than in any other age group. This is

FIGURE 3. BOYS AND MEN IN PRISON IN ENGLAND AND WALES IN 2009 (NUMBERS BY AGE)
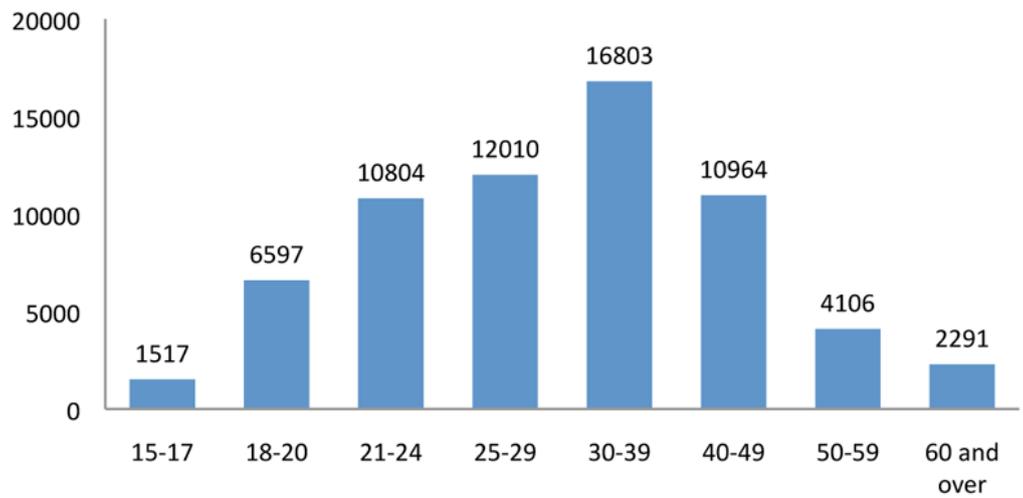
Source: Population in prison establishments under sentence the number in prison on the 30th June 2009, www.justice.gov.uk and Office for National Statistics mid-year estimates for England and Wales.

FIGURE 4. BOYS AND MEN IN PRISON IN ENGLAND AND WALES IN 2009 (PER THOUSAND BY AGE)
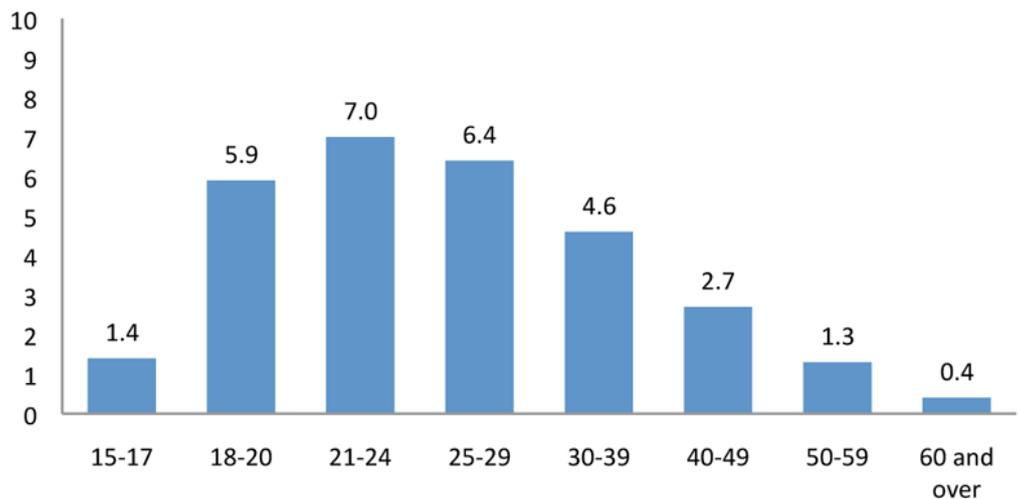
Source: Population in prison establishments under sentence the number in prison on the 30th June 2009, www.justice.gov.uk and Office for National Statistics mid-year estimates for England and Wales.

even after the recent reduction in imprisonment at these specific ages. But then there are more 30-39 year olds in the general population. Because there are fewer young adults in the population, relatively speaking, there is a proportionately higher percentage of young adults incarcerated than older adults.

There are far fewer females in prison than males. The scales of figures five and six have therefore been adjusted to make it easier to see the pattern. Figure five shows that the most imprisoned age group is also the 30-39 year olds. As a proportion of the age population, however, it is again young adults who are the most imprisoned, as figure six shows.

FIGURE 5. GIRLS AND WOMEN IN PRISON IN ENGLAND AND WALES IN 2009 (NUMBERS BY AGE)
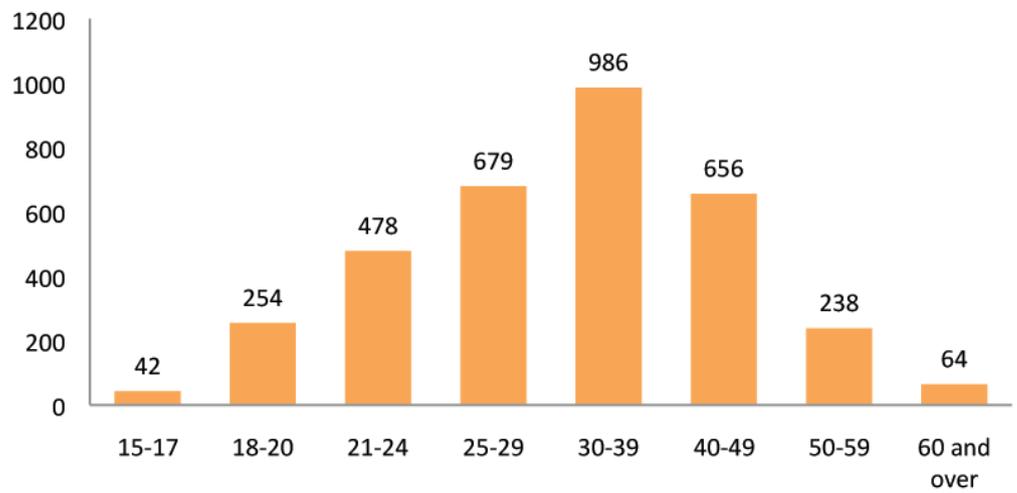
Source: Population in prison establishments under sentence the number in prison on the 30th June 2009, www.justice.gov.uk and Office for National Statistics mid-year estimates for England and Wales.

FIGURE 6. GIRLS AND WOMEN IN PRISON IN ENGLAND AND WALES IN 2009 (PER THOUSAND BY AGE)
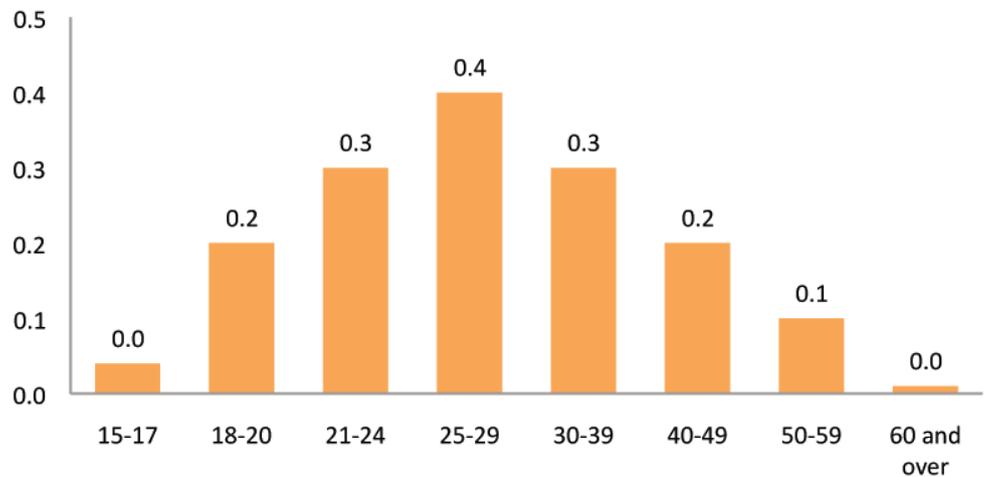
Source: Population in prison establishments under sentence the number in prison on the 30th June 2009, www.justice.gov.uk and Office for National Statistics mid-year estimates for England and Wales.

The data examined so far offers a 'national' perspective on imprisonment in England and Wales. It highlights some aspects of imprisonment in relation to males, females and young adults as a whole. It does this by averaging out a whole host of detail and local differences in order to offer a simple 'national' picture.

Another way of understanding the national picture in relation to young adult experiences is to explore it at a local level. This provides a richness of detail and understanding that the data explored so far cannot do.

We cannot look at something as rare still as incarceration (or wider criminal justice capture) and make pronouncements over why one young person within a very small area rather than another in very similar circumstances ends up losing their liberty. We can look at what happens to most youngsters in small geographical areas and how their circumstances differ according to what in general is most likely to befall them.

We will be using maps which are population-based cartograms. In these maps each area is sized roughly according to its population. Each hexagon represents a parliamentary constituency; each neighbourhood is represented by a half hexagon. Compared with traditional maps – which often make it difficult to distinguish what is going on in high population areas like city centres, these maps make it much easier to assess visually patterns across the country. It makes it possible, for instance, to see in as much detail the patterns in a physically small constituency like Tottenham as in a physically large constituency like Hexham. A detailed key to these maps can be found at www.sasi.group.shef.ac.uk/publications/identity/online_appendix.pdf

The data in these maps offers estimates of the status of young adults (those aged 18 to 24) at the mid-point of the last decade (c. 2005), based on a variety of data sources, including the 2001 census. It will be possible to update this analysis with the 2011 census data once that becomes available. For now, however, this is the most up-to-date data of this type currently available. Many aspects of the geography of places changes very slowly. This means that data that is half a decade old still offers a solid foundation for reflection on current policy challenges.

Figure seven is a map of England showing the most likely outcome for 21 year olds based on which political constituency they lived in at the age of 15. In the 1970s the main outcome for young adults was to enter straight into employment after leaving compulsory education. Only a few would go on to university. In an average comprehensive school, out of a cohort of 300, only six would go on to university. Now there is a much wider variety of outcomes.

Figure seven shows the 12 most likely outcomes for young adults today. It is not elitist to talk about going to university any more. A third or more of young people, and 51 percent of young women, now go to university. But what type of university they go to is related to where they lived at the age of 15. The red areas are where young adults are most likely to go to a Russell Group University. The purple areas indicate the most likely outcome is an elite university. In contrast, the most likely outcome for

FIGURE 7. THE MOST LIKELY OUTCOME FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN ENGLAND AT 21 YEARS OLD

Legend:
- Foundation
- College
- HE in college
- New University
- Old University
- Elite University
- Apprenticeship
- Full-time work
- Part-time work
- Unemployed
- Other
- Home & Family
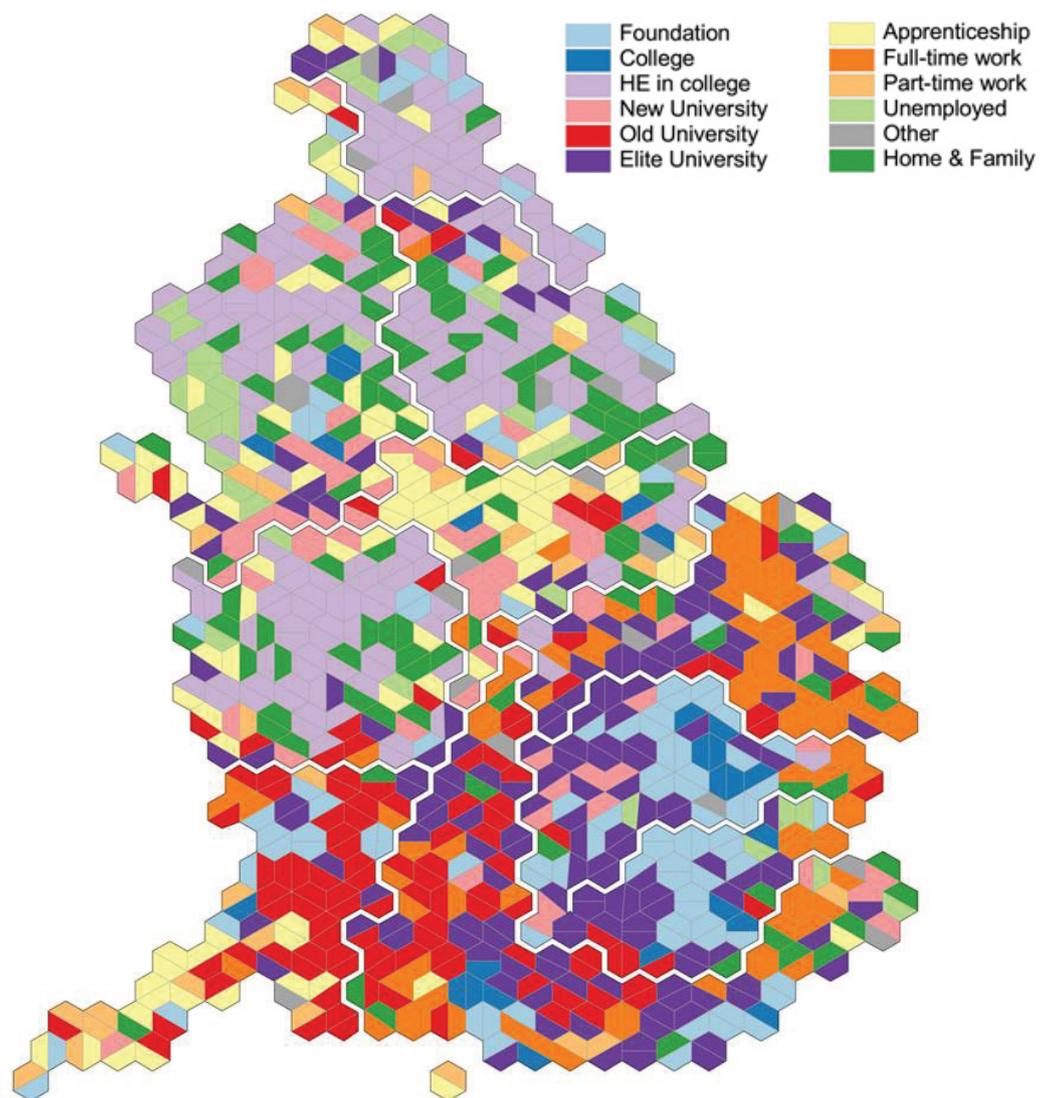
Source: Work in progress, Universities of Sheffield and Brighton (with Judith Watson)

those living in the grey area is 'other', or those not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Figure eight looks at the age of the women who gave birth across 641 neighbourhoods in England, Wales and Scotland. The age at which women have children is now moving towards becoming bimodal; people now have children in their twenties up to their early forties. The most common age group across England and Wales was 25-29, as indicated by the two blue hues (1,076 neighbourhoods). The pink areas show that women having children in their early thirties is the norm (190 neighbourhoods) and the green areas are where the norm is to have children in their early twenties (16 neighbourhoods). This figure highlights the differences in ages of mothers. There

FIGURE 8. AGE AT WHICH WOMEN GIVE BIRTH
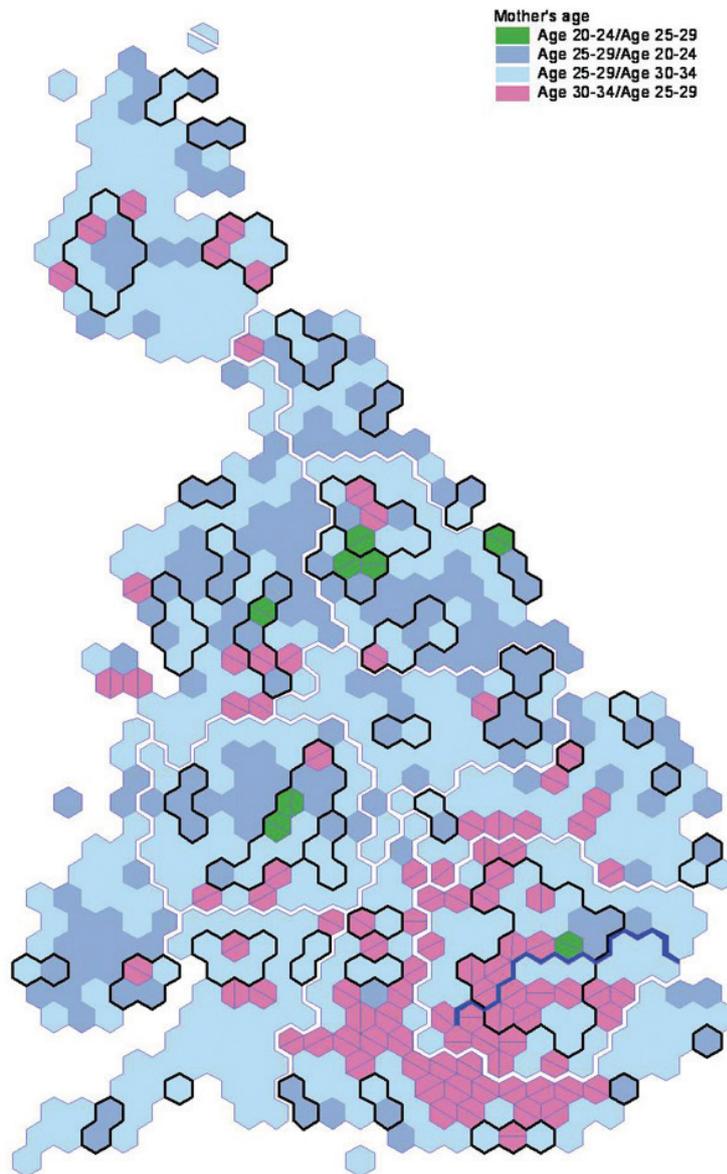
Source: Thomas, B. and Dorling D. (2007), *Identity in Britain: A cradle-to-grave atlas*, Bristol: Policy Press.

is no neighbourhood where mothers aged below 20 are in the majority.

Figure nine is an estimate of the potential wealth of children in 2003. It is a sum of all of the wealth of an area, including housing wealth and positive equity ranging from £4,000 (dark) to £146,000 (light). If, hypothetically, all the adults in the area were to die, figure nine shows what their children would

be left with. The wealth is dramatically polarised. This means a small but significant group of children and a growing group of young adults in Britain can expect to inherit a vast sum of money. On the other hand, for children who live in the constituencies where there is much less money and whose parents do not own any property or other assets, their inheritance will be tiny. The cuts being implemented by the current government will reduce the amount

FIGURE 9. THE AVERAGE VALUE OF HOUSING EQUITY IF SHARED OVER ALL CHILDREN IN 2003
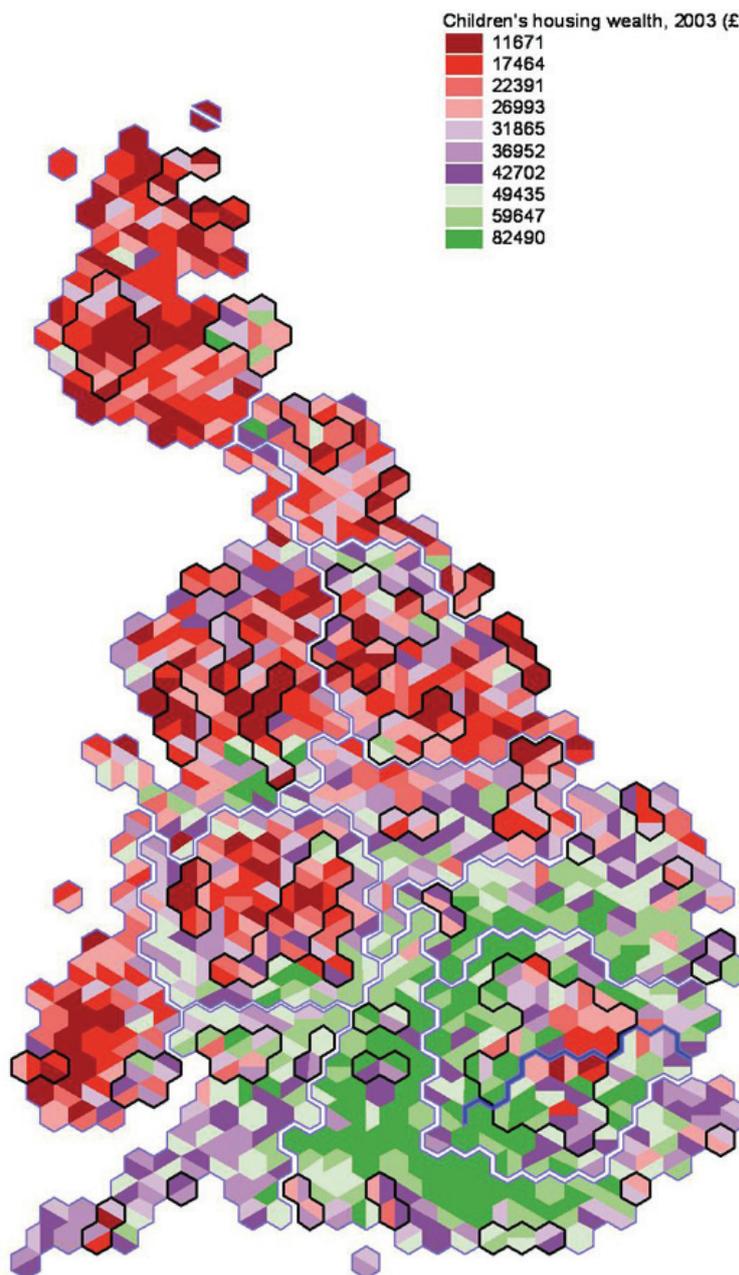
Source: Thomas, B. and Dorling D. (2007), *Identity in Britain: A cradle-to-grave atlas*, Bristol: Policy Press.

available by a further £2,000. These young adults will find themselves in even more challenging financial situations.

Figure ten shows the qualifications of 18-24 year olds. There are areas where less than two per cent of young adults have no qualifications when they leave school. In other areas it is over a third.

FIGURE 10. 18 TO 24 YEAR OLDS WITH NO QUALIFICATIONS
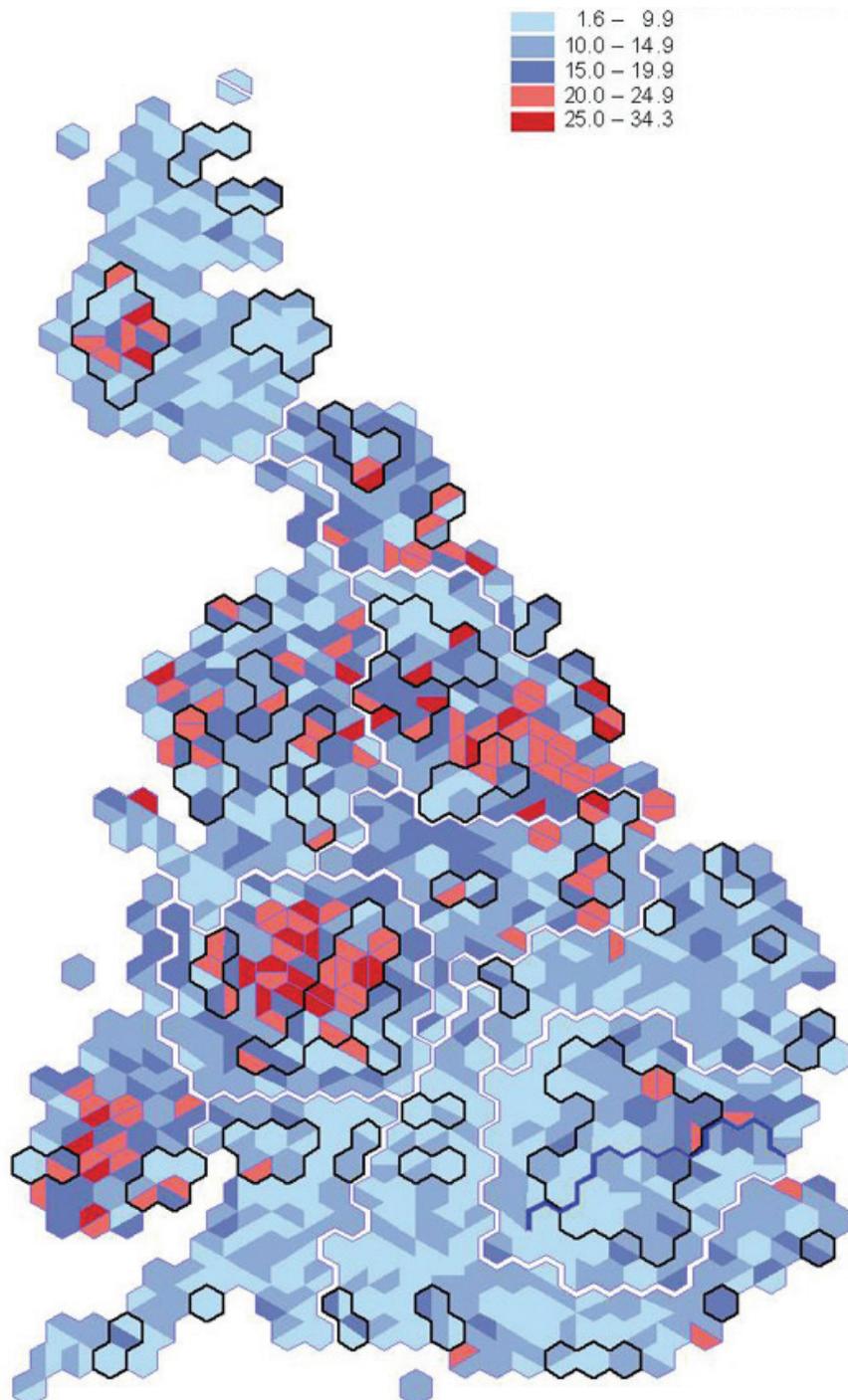
Source: Thomas, B. and Dorling D. (2007), *Identity in Britain: A cradle-to-grave atlas*, Bristol: Policy Press.

Figure eleven shows the most common jobs of those aged 16-24. The great variation highlights the different employment aspirations and outcomes of young adults. They range from highly paid professional jobs in some areas to badly paid elementary jobs in others. These aspirations are often realistic in terms of what they can achieve in their geographical area.

FIGURE 11. MOST COMMON JOBS AGED 16 TO 24

- 2. Professional/9. Elementary
- 3. Assoc Professional & Tech/2. Professional
- 3. Assoc Professional & Tech/4. Admin & Secretarial
- 3. Assoc Professional & Tech/5. Skilled Trades
- 3. Assoc Professional & Tech/7. Sales & Customer Service
- 3. Assoc Professional & Tech/9. Elementary
- 4. Admin & Secretarial/3. Assoc Professional & Tech
- 4. Admin & Secretarial/7. Sales & Customer Service
- 4. Admin & Secretarial/9. Elementary
- 5. Skilled Trades/3. Assoc Professional & Tech
- 5. Skilled Trades/7. Sales & Customer Service
- 5. Skilled Trades/9. Elementary
- 7. Sales & Customer Service/3. Assoc Professional & Tech
- 7. Sales & Customer Service/4. Admin & Secretarial
- 7. Sales & Customer Service/5. Skilled Trades
- 7. Sales & Customer Service/8. Operatives
- 7. Sales & Customer Service/9. Elementary
- 9. Elementary/2. Professional
- 9. Elementary/3. Assoc Professional & Tech
- 9. Elementary/4. Admin & Secretarial
- 9. Elementary/5. Skilled Trades
- 9. Elementary/7. Sales & Customer Service
- 9. Elementary/8. Operatives

Source: Thomas, B. and Dorling D. (2007), *Identity in Britain: A cradle-to-grave atlas*, Bristol: Policy Press.

Figure twelve shows the social class of children according to their parents' occupations. When compared to the most common jobs of young adults in figure eleven, it shows that the experience of the older generation is far from a guide to what might happen to their children. This is because of the greater variation in life chances across the country.

FIGURE 12. CHARLES BOOTH TYPE CLASS MAPS FOR YOUNG ADULTS
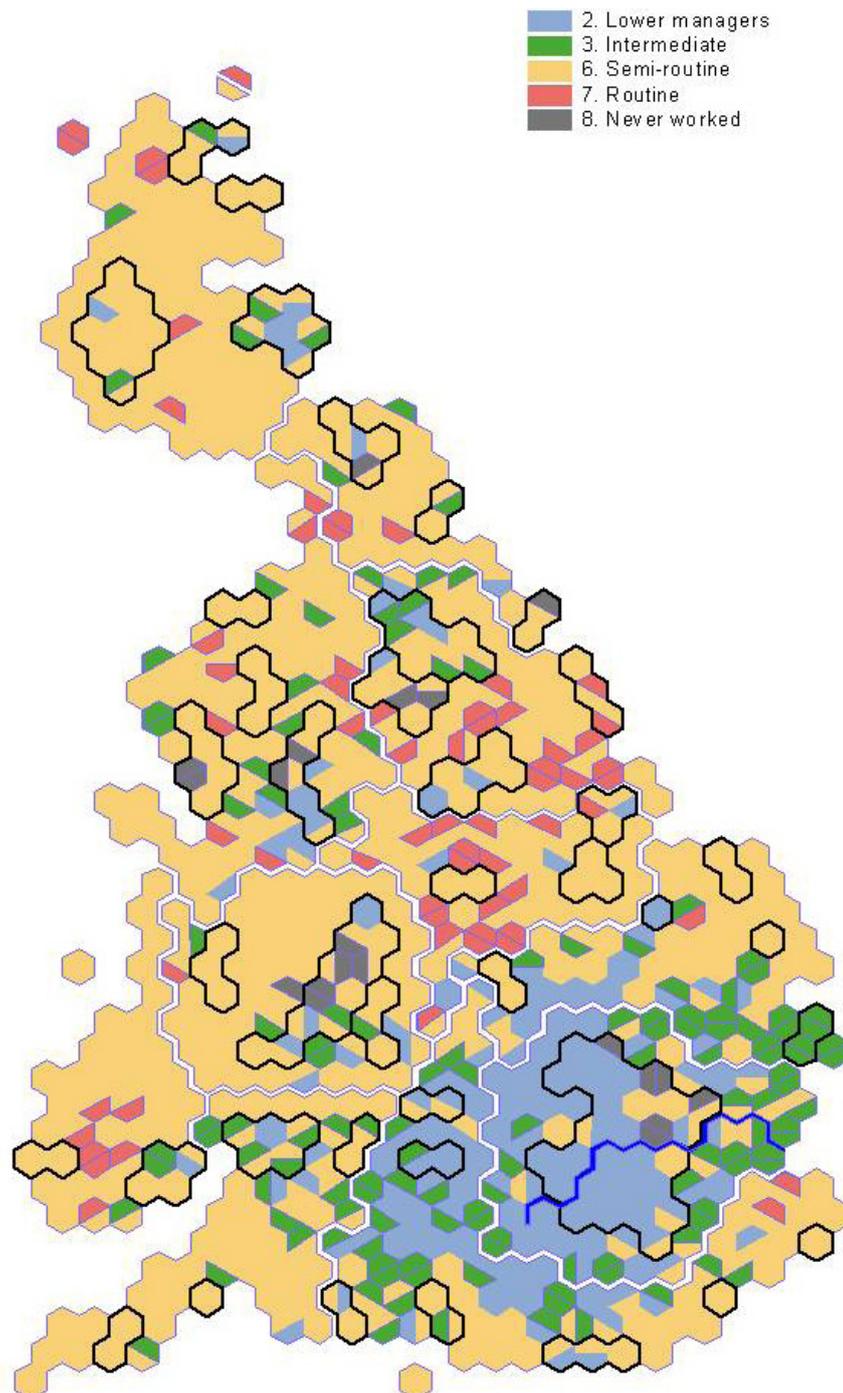
2. Lower managers
3. Intermediate
6. Semi-routine
7. Routine
8. Never worked

Source: Thomas, B. and Dorling D. (2007), *Identity in Britain: A cradle-to-grave atlas*, Bristol: Policy Press.

Figure thirteen shows illness and poor health rates in people aged 16-24. The blue areas are young adults who are unlikely to be suffering from a limiting long term illness and poor health. The red areas are where young adults are more likely to say they are suffering from a limiting long term illness. There is a clear geographical distinction with the central south of the UK below average, and coastal pockets above average. The major reason is poor mental health, and for good reason. Part of the measure of poor mental health is that you do not look forward to the future. For many young adults there are good reasons for feeling pessimistic.

FIGURE 13. ILLNESS AND POOR HEALTH AT AGES 16 TO 24
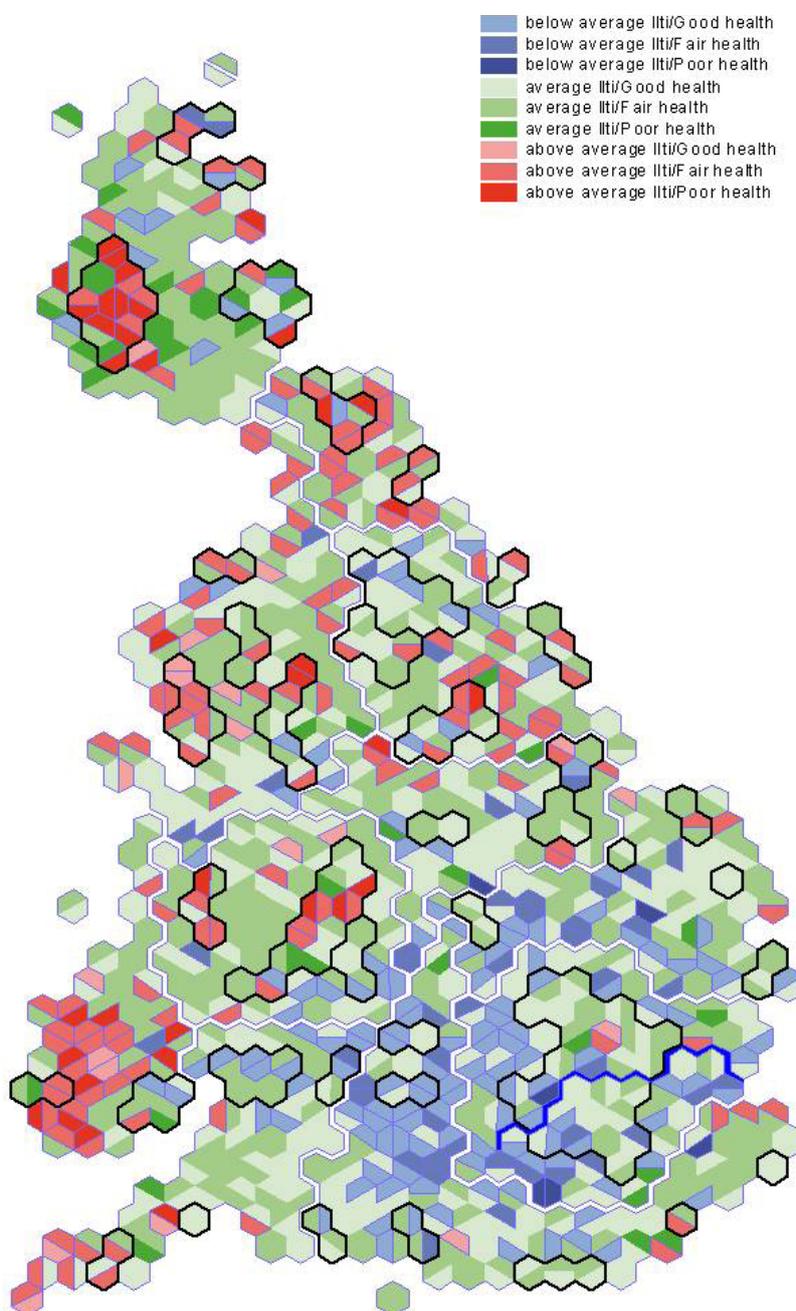
below average Illti/Good health
below average Illti/Fair health
below average Illti/Poor health
average Illti/Good health
average Illti/Fair health
average Illti/Poor health
above average Illti/Good health
above average Illti/Fair health
above average Illti/Poor health

Source: Thomas, B. and Dorling D. (2007), *Identity in Britain: A cradle-to-grave atlas*, Bristol: Policy Press.

Finally, it is important to look also at young people who do not reach adulthood. Figure fourteen shows all the causes of death in 17-19 year olds between 2006 and 2007. It indicates just how big a proportion of deaths in this age group are the result of road traffic accidents. It is partly because we have become so good at curing other diseases, that cars are now such a big factor. Yet suicide is the second biggest cause of death, a disturbing fact that points to the challenges faced by young people as they seek to make their transition to adulthood.

As the maps show, there are many different factors affecting young people's transition to adulthood, which are not shown when simply looking at national statistics. They also highlight the great variance across different areas of the country, which is not just a north/south divide but also coastal/ inland and urban/ rural. The picture is constantly changing. It is not easily possible to map the life outcomes of one generation to the next, and the next generation may face different barriers to overcome in reaching adulthood.

FIGURE 14. NO TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD. ALL CAUSES OF DEATH OF 17 TO 19 YEAR OLDS, BRITAIN (2006–2007 DEATHS)
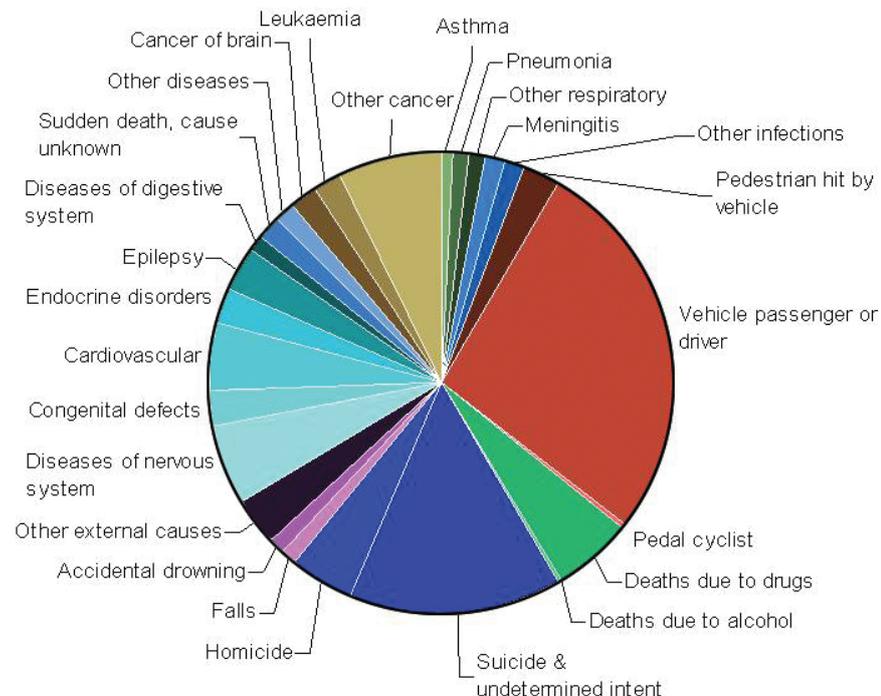
Source: Shaw, M., Thomas, B. , Davey Smith, G., and Dorling, D. (2008), *The Grim Reaper's road map: An atlas of mortality in Britain* , Bristol: Policy Press.

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Other publications by the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies for the T2A alliance include:

Criminal Justice Matters (2010), *Transitions to adulthood*, June, No. 80.

Garside, R. (2009), *Risky people or risky societies? Rethinking interventions for young adults in transition*, London: Centre for Crime and Justice Studies.

Garside, R. (2010), *From criminal justice to social justice: rethinking approaches to young adults subject to criminal justice control,* London: Centre for Crime and Justice Studies.

McGuire, J. (2010), *Comparing coercive and non-coercive interventions,* London: Centre for Crime and Justice Studies.