

Young adults in transition: local matters, national implications

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This briefing is produced as part of the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies' contribution to the T2A Alliance, a broad coalition of organisations and individuals that identifies and promotes the need for a distinct and radically different approach to young adults in the criminal justice system. Convened by the Barrow Cadbury Trust, its membership encompasses a number of leading criminal justice, health and youth organisations.

Full details of its work can be found at www.t2a.org.uk.

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This is the first of two briefing papers on factors affecting young people's transition to adulthood. In the second briefing paper – Young adults in transition: the local picture in national context – we explore how household location affects life chances and how this has developed over time across the country.

In this first briefing we look in detail at some factors affecting young adults in the areas covered by the three Transition to Adulthood (T2A) pilots: Birmingham, Worcestershire and the two London boroughs of Croydon and Southwark. It has implications for understanding the specific challenges facing these areas. It also highlights the divergent life chances and outcomes for young adults who are born and grow up in different parts of the country. This point is taken up in the second briefing of the two briefings.

By looking in detail at the experiences of young adults that are a particular focus for the T2A Alliance, we shed light on some of the challenges affecting policy and practice relating to young adults. 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, but 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.

In this briefing we move down through three layers of increasing complexity. We start at the simplest layer: the England-wide averages for all young adults. We then move on to compare the same data *across* the three T2A pilot areas. Finally we reach the most complex layer where we compare the data *within* the three T2A pilot areas. Through our analysis we move from the simple to the more complex; from a layer of generality through to several layers of greater specificity.



Layer one: the England-wide average

Figure one is a distribution curve for all young adults across all parliamentary constituencies in England. It shows us that the average number of young adults in the middle of the last decade in all constituencies was around 4,500. Two-thirds of the constituencies had a population fairly close to this average of 4,500. The range for them was between 2,800 and 5,200. The other third had either much higher or much lower numbers of young adults among their general population. Among the constituencies we will be looking at this includes Birmingham Ladywood, with a young adult population of over 8,000. As we will see, the young adult experience in Ladywood is unusual in a number of ways.

It is outside the scope of this briefing to explore them in full however what we can point out is that constituency populations vary slightly in size.

To make it easier to compare differences between constituencies we will use percentage figures, rather than raw numbers, in the rest of this briefing. Using percentages does not remove all the difficulties of comparing constituencies with different populations. Nevertheless, it does reduce them. It also allows us to compare the proportions of young adults involved in different activities in constituencies across England, which is our main interest here.

Figure two gives a breakdown for the estimated average (mean) involvement of all young adults in the 12 activity areas in the middle of the last decade across all English constituencies.

Figure two shows us that full-time employment (35 per cent) was the most common activity for young adults across England. The next two largest categories were higher education in a former polytechnic or red brick university. In total, 30 per cent of young adults were involved in some form of higher education, whether in a further education college (three per cent), former polytechnic (12 per cent), red brick (12 per cent) or elite university (three per cent).

11 per cent of young adults were involved in educational activities at GCSE (six per cent) or AS/A Level (five per cent) standard, with a further two percent involved in basic or vocational educational activities. The other categories were part-time employment (six per cent); unemployment (seven percent); not in education, employment or training

(five per cent) and being engaged in caring responsibilities (four per cent).

We need to remember that these figures are the average figure for the entire population of young adults (aged 18 to 24) in England. Averages hide all variation. The average of seven per cent unemployment, for example, masks big variations in different parts of the country. It was also a figure taken from the best of the boom years. Youth unemployment was high then. It is much worse today. Some 20 per cent of young adults were unemployed in the middle of the last decade in some parts of the country. In other parts it was less than 2 per cent. Today, just a few years later, by various definitions youth unemployment is 20 per cent overall (Wearden, 2011).

Place matters greatly, but so does time. Being born 18 years before 2011 was a bad time to be born if you are looking for a job at 18 rather than to study further. Place and time combined matter most. These are the two key life determining factors which are almost entirely out of the hands of children and young people as they enter into adulthood.

Three other factors that have a great influence on our future life chances are gender, class and ethnicity. Class overlaps most closely with areas. Many factors which affect one social class more than another can be seen through this data. The possible additional effects, on each class, of the areas different social classes live in can also be seen. Conversely the proportions of males and females, at least in childhood, are much more similar in each area and geography has little influence on later differentials in outcomes. Ethnicity lies between these extremes in the extent to which what may appear an influence of a particular area is actually the reflection of a discrimination being applied to a particular ethnic group, or in how some ethnic groups benefit or are harmed by the areas they are more likely to find their members living in, due to decisions made years ago (contrast a northern mill town with inner south London).

In contrast to some of these complexities, the contrasting life chances of those young people living in high unemployment areas, compared with those living in low unemployment areas, will be evident.

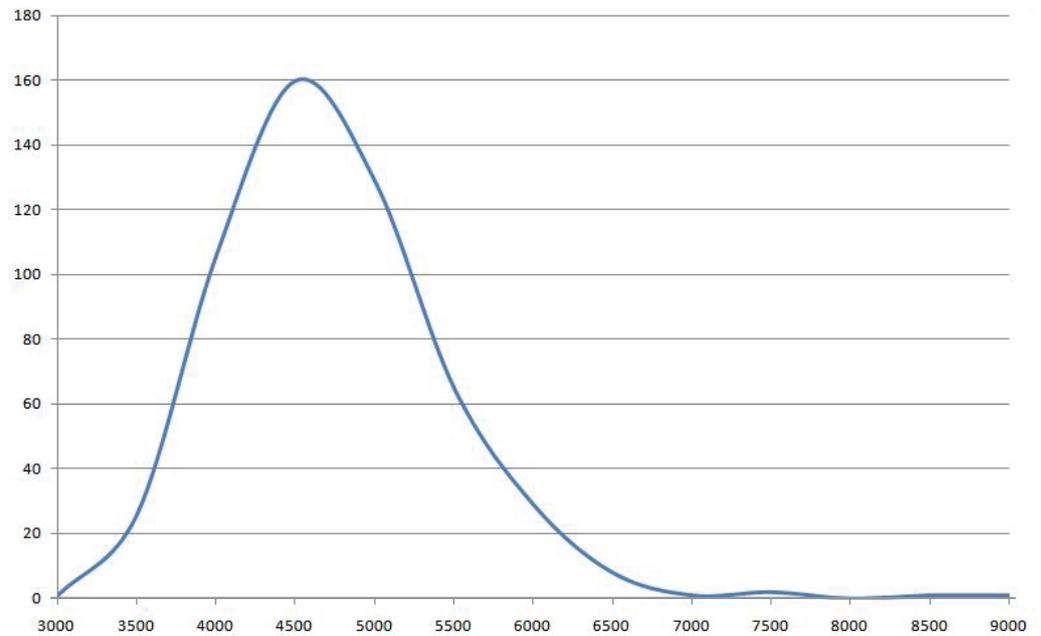
Layer two: comparison between the T2A pilot areas

We now move on to look at data relating to the three T2A pilot areas. Figure three compares the England averages with the averages for the three T2A pilot areas.

Proportionately more young adults were studying for basic literacy or equivalent qualifications in the T2A

pilot areas compared with the England-wide average. A larger proportion of those young adults were also unemployed. A smaller proportion of young adults in the T2A pilots were in full-time employment. But these differences along with the other differences are relatively minor in character and within the range of variations we would expect to see.

FIGURE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF NUMBERS OF YOUNG ADULTS ACROSS ALL ENGLISH PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES



By their nature averages tend to iron out variations. We gain a sense of the overall picture, but at the risk of missing some important detail. As we progress through the layers of analysis, this important detail will become clearer.

Figure four breaks down the three pilot averages into its constituent parts. It shows the averages for three pilots alongside each other. These are based on the UK parliamentary constituency data referred to above. The Birmingham T2A average, for example, is the average of the nine Birmingham constituencies that together make up the catchment area of the Birmingham T2A pilot.

The three T2A pilot areas share a number of features in common with each other and with the England-wide picture. In statistical terms the correlation between the three areas, and between them and the England-wide data, is high.¹

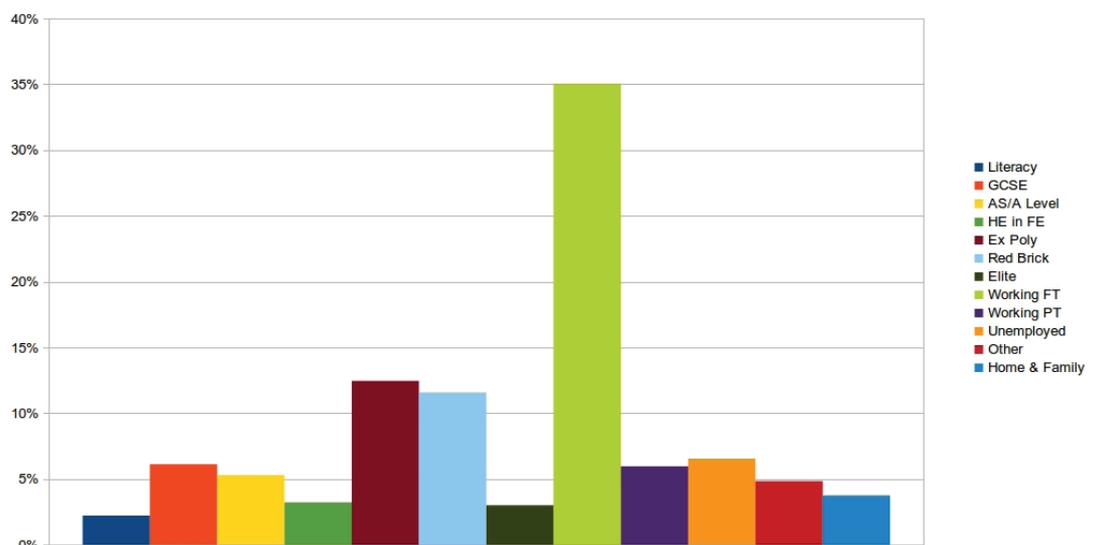
Full-time working was the most common activity in all three areas, as it was for England as a whole. Participation in Higher Education – 31, 27 and 34 per cent for London, Birmingham and Worcestershire respectively – was also comparable to the England-wide participation levels. Consistent with the England-wide figures, part-time working, unemployment and caring responsibilities were also, in general, less common.

But we need to be careful of making too many ‘in general’ observations. For we can also spot a number of important divergences, particularly between Birmingham and the other two T2A pilot areas. A far larger proportion of young adults in Birmingham, for instance, were engaged in basic and vocational educational qualifications, as well in studying for GCSEs and AS/A Levels, than was the case in London and Worcestershire. A smaller proportion of Birmingham young adults were engaged in full- or part-time work than were those in London and Worcestershire.

Both Birmingham and London diverge in some important respects from Worcestershire and the all-England average for young adults. In particular, a larger and similar proportion of young adults in London and Birmingham had caring responsibilities at the time they were counted for this study, or were unemployed or not in education, employment or training than was the case in Worcestershire.

The experiences of young adults in Worcestershire, by contrast, were much closer to the all-England average. Over recent years election pollsters have coined the term ‘Worcester Woman’ to describe a typical voter whose views and aspirations place them in the centre ground of British politics. The data we have been examining suggests that ‘Worcestershire Young

FIGURE 2. INVOLVEMENT OF YOUNG ADULTS IN 12 ACTIVITY AREAS: ALL ENGLAND AVERAGE



¹The correlation coefficients for the three T2A pilot areas across all 12 areas of activity were: London: Birmingham, 0.86; London: Worcestershire 0.99; Birmingham: Worcestershire, 0.87.

Adult' might serve as a short-form description of the 'average' young adult in England.

the Worcestershire pilot compare with each other. Just how 'average' is Worcestershire?

Layer three: comparison within the T2A pilot areas

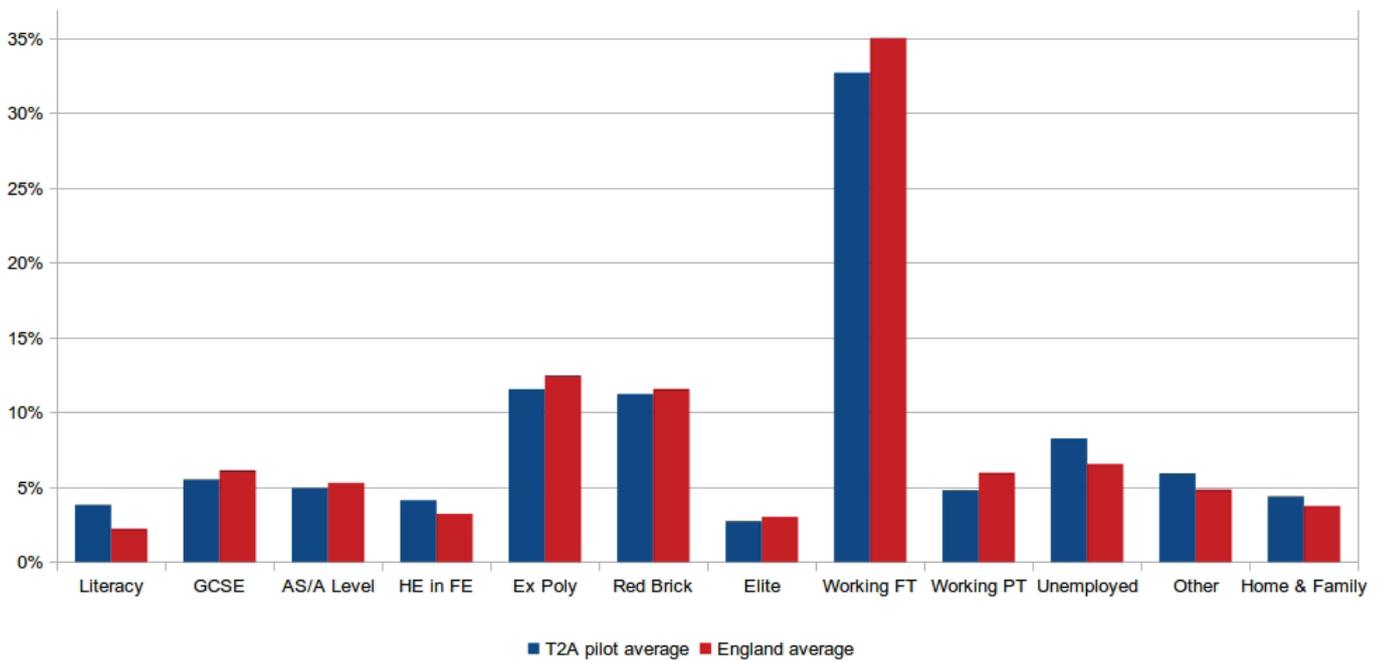
In the previous section we were primarily interested in similarities and differences between the T2A pilot areas. In this section we are interested in the similarities and differences within the T2A pilot areas.

We will start with the Worcestershire T2A pilot area. In the previous section we observed how closely young adult experience matched the England-wide average. But how do the various constituencies that make up

Figure five gives a breakdown of our data for the five constituencies that make up the catchment area of the T2A pilot. With an above average percentage of young adults unemployed and in full-time employment and a below average participation rate in higher education, Redditch stands out from the other four constituencies, But it only does so relatively. The five constituencies were remarkably similar as far as our data is concerned.

Figure six shows the same data for the six London constituencies that fall within the T2A pilot. Here

FIGURE 3: INVOLVEMENT OF YOUNG ADULTS IN 12 ACTIVITY AREAS: ALL ENGLAND AVERAGE AND T2A PILOT AVERAGE



the differences are more marked. Participation rates in higher education in Croydon South, for instance, were double those of Bermondsey and Old Southwark and of Camberwell and Peckham. Unemployment rates in those two constituencies were between three and five times as high as Croydon South. In their overall characteristics the constituencies of Croydon North and Croydon South have more in common with some of the Worcestershire constituencies than with the other London constituencies in the T2A catchment area.

Finally, figure seven shows the data for the ten Birmingham constituencies.

With its high participation rates in higher education and low unemployment rates, Sutton Coldfield is a relative outlier in comparison with the other Birmingham constituencies. At the other end of the range sits the constituency of Ladywood. With close to 15 per cent of young adults unemployed and an employment rate half that of a number of other Birmingham constituencies, life as a young adult in the middle of the last decade must have been very different than that in neighbourhoods only a few miles down the road.

Reflections on the data

We started this briefing by exploring data of a relatively simple and abstract nature: the England-wide average for all young adults. Policy reflection

and debate on young adults – as on many other areas of public policy – tends to start and finish at this layer of analysis. By moving beyond this to layers of greater and greater specificity and complexity we have highlighted just how much is hidden by a focus on the ‘national’ average.

In this section we apply our analysis to some practical policy challenges relating to young adults. We divide our observations into three main areas:

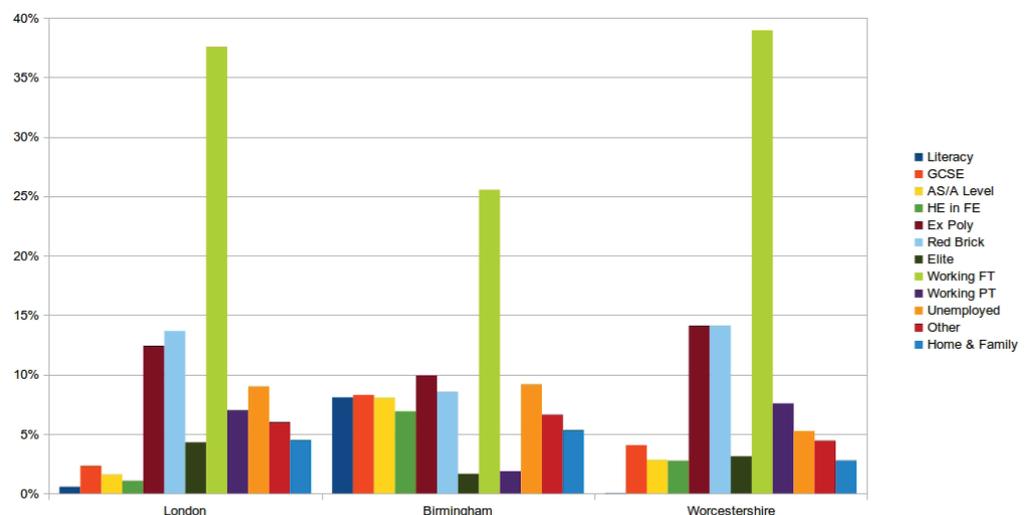
1. The nature of the policy challenge.
2. The assessment of programme impact.
3. The commissioning and delivery of effective services.

The nature of the policy challenge

When we delve down below the level of the ‘national’ average we find that young adult experiences in the mid-point of the last decade were very different depending on where they lived. It is worth reiterating that in many ways these were very good years for young adults. Employment was good in comparison to today and there had very recently been a great increase in places available for education and training. We will not know for some years where has been worse hit in terms of young adults’ life chances but any areas and types of areas we identify here are some of the most likely contenders.

In some cases these differences were stark and significant. As a proportion of the overall young

FIGURE 4. INVOLVEMENT OF YOUNG ADULTS IN 12 ACTIVITY AREAS: T2A PILOTS



adult population, nearly five times as many young adults in Camberwell and Peckham were unemployed as in Bromsgrove. Twenty seven times as many young adults in Dulwich and West Norwood went to elite universities compared with the young adults of Erdington. Nearly 10 per cent of young adults in Ladywood were engaged in caring responsibilities, compared with five per cent in Croydon North and just two per cent in West Worcestershire.

More commonly, the differences were important but, for the majority of young adults in most areas, relatively small. Earlier, for instance, we noted that higher education participation across the London, Birmingham and Worcestershire pilots was 31, 27 and 34 per cent respectively. We might therefore say that, 'on average', some 31 per cent of young adults across the three T2A pilots were in higher education. The range around this average was relatively large, from a low of 14 per cent in Hodge Hill to a high of 50 per cent in Sutton Coldfield. But

FIGURE 5. INVOLVEMENT OF YOUNG ADULTS IN 12 ACTIVITY AREAS: WORCESTERSHIRE T2A PILOT

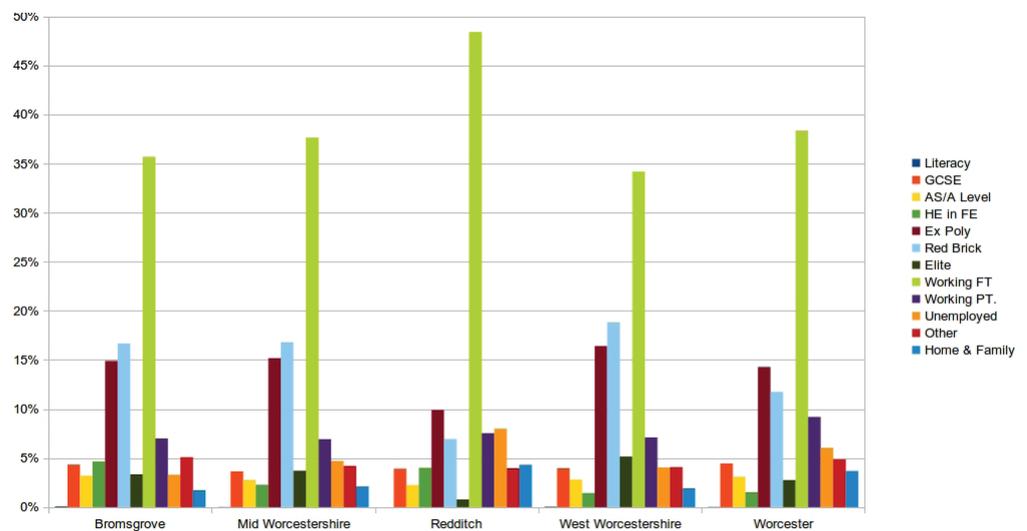
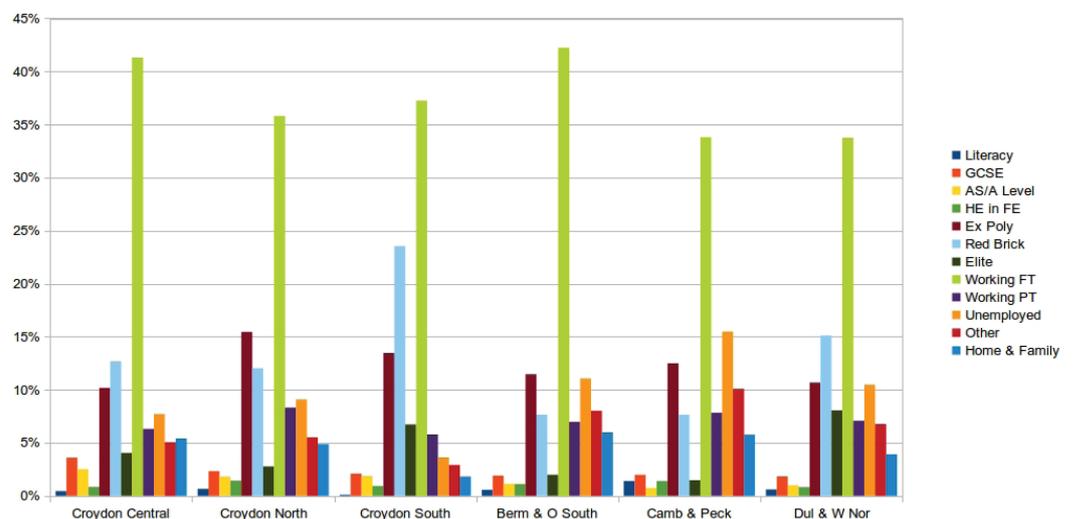


FIGURE 6. INVOLVEMENT OF YOUNG ADULTS IN 12 ACTIVITY AREAS: LONDON T2A PILOT



the range for the majority of young adults – some two thirds of them – was rather less: between 20 and 40 per cent.

In the case of participation in full-time work, the average across the three pilot areas was 34 per cent, ranging from a low of 16 per cent (Ladywood) to a high of 48 per cent (Redditch). But again, the range for the majority (two thirds) of young adults was much smaller: between 29 and 39 per cent. The percentage unemployed ranged from Bromsgrove’s three per cent to Camberwell and Peckham’s 15 per cent. But in most cases the range was rather smaller: two to three per cent either side of an average of eight per cent.

The experiences of most young adults across the pilot areas were marked by relatively small variations that made for potentially big differences in outcomes. The differences of a few percentage points in employment or unemployment, higher education participation or caring responsibilities had a significant impact on the life outcomes of all the young adults whose lives made up this data. This was especially the case if the differences were cumulative. Taken together a few percentage points difference on educational attainment, working life, economic inactivity and caring responsibilities made for a big difference.

The policy implications that flow from this include:

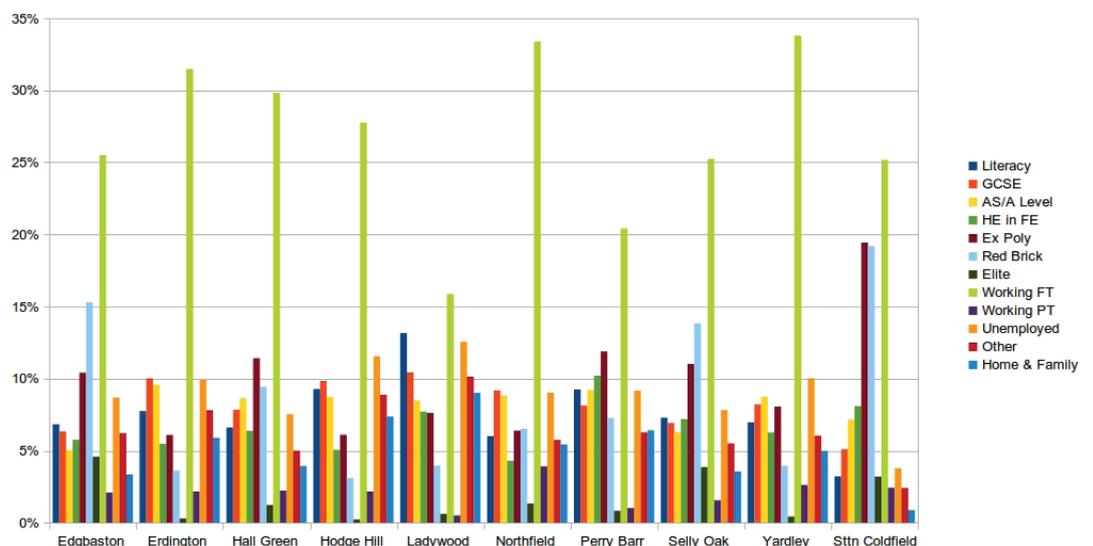
1. In principle, addressing the challenges faced by *most* young adults involve relatively small changes, addressing the whole population, across a number of areas policy (e.g. education, training, labour market, social security, family support).
2. The experience of *some* young adults in *some* areas are markedly different in ways which are more significant and will require more concerted action, addressing the whole population, across a number of policy areas.
3. The high degree of particular social inequalities in life chances during the height of the boom years suggest that any policies aimed simply at returning to that apparent level of prosperity will imply also returning to the kind of major inequalities in life chances we have explored.

The assessment of programme impact

A detailed analysis of the three T2A pilot areas revealed a mixed picture. Comparisons between the three areas revealed some important differences, particularly between Birmingham and the other two areas. But taken as a whole the three areas were relatively similar.

Comparisons *within* the three pilot areas threw up a very different picture. Young adult experience across

FIGURE 7. INVOLVEMENT OF YOUNG ADULTS IN 12 ACTIVITY AREAS: BIRMINGHAM T2A PILOT



the Worcestershire pilot area was remarkably similar. Across the London pilot area it was somewhat varied. Across the Birmingham pilot area it was incredibly varied. This poses distinct and different challenges to the delivery of services on the ground.

Across the three pilot areas the same level of intervention, applied in the same way, for the same duration, by equally skilled and committed staff would likely have different outcomes. This is partly because the three areas differ one from the other. The internal differentiation within the pilot areas will have a significant impact.

To put the point at its simplest, the same type of intervention in the Birmingham area is likely to be less successful in comparison with London and Worcestershire. Interventions within London and Birmingham are likely to be less successful than Worcestershire. This is not to say that Worcestershire is any utopia. But there have traditionally been more favourable life-trajectories there for young adults. The place has far more favourable paths to get back onto.

This has important implications for evaluation and assessment of programme impact. Apparent programme success or failure will have as much, if not more, to do with context of its operations as with the quality and effectiveness of the programme or staff. Stated differently we might say that the effectiveness of programmes will partly depend on the degree to which they can adjust and respond to on the ground circumstances.

The commissioning and delivery of effective services

By exploring the experience of young adults at a detailed and local level it has been possible to uncover a diversity of experience overlooked when analysis is restricted to the national or regional level. We can therefore say that *the analysis of data at the appropriate level of detail is key to the commissioning and delivery of effective services.*

The data we have explored relates to the middle years of the last decade. Much has changed in the intervening years. In the current recession, which has had a disproportionate impact on young adults,² the position for some young adults today will have deteriorated further compared with the position only a few years ago. We will need new data to ascertain how bad it has been. But if this recession has been like earlier ones, youth unemployment will

have risen most where it was highest to begin with and will have risen the least where it was lowest to start with.

We can therefore say that *the analysis of the most up-to-date data is key to the commissioning and delivery of effective services.* The data we have been exploring is the best currently available. This updating will be possible over the next couple of years with the availability of data from the 2011 census. It is always worth looking at long term change in trajectories between censuses. Where are the areas where young adults' parents cannot understand their children's outcomes in life because the parents' were so very different?

Finally, by exploring the range of young adult experience across 12 different categories of participation, it has been possible to explore the range and cumulative impact of different challenges faced by this age group. Other challenges – health for example – are explored in more detail in the second briefing. This points to a third, and final observation regarding the commissioning and delivery of effective services. This is that *services to young adults at risk of criminal justice capture must be properly configured, involving a broad range of services that reach beyond the narrow confines of the criminal justice process.*

² See, for instance, an international comparison of young adult and adult unemployment levels, www.economist.com/blogs/dailychart/2010/12/youth_unemployment

The T2A pilot areas

During the period December 2008 to July 2009 three T2A pilots were established in London, Birmingham and Worcestershire with the support of the Barrow Cadbury Trust. The purpose of the pilots is to test models for the delivery of improved services and strategies for young adults at risk of criminal justice capture (Burnett and Santos, 2010).

For this briefing local data relating to the three T2A pilots was collected and analysed, based on the UK parliamentary constituencies that fell within the pilots' catchment areas. The constituencies, identified in discussion with representatives from the three pilot areas, are as follows:

London	Birmingham	Worcestershire
Croydon Central	Birmingham Edgbaston	Bromsgrove
Croydon North	Birmingham Erdington	Mid Worcestershire
Croydon South	Birmingham Hall Green	Redditch
Bermondsey and Old Southwark	Birmingham Hodge Hill	West Worcestershire
Camberwell and Peckham	Birmingham Ladywood	Worcester
Dulwich and West Norwood	Birmingham Northfield	
	Birmingham Perry Barr	
	Birmingham Selly Oak	
	Birmingham Yardley	
	Birmingham Sutton Coldfield	

The data

The data we will be looking at estimates the status of young adults (those aged 18 to 24) at the mid-point of the last decade (c. 2005) in relation to 12 education, training, employment and personal matters. These are:

Literacy	The young adult is studying for a basic literacy or vocational qualification of an equivalent status.
GCSE	The young adult is studying for GCSE or similar level qualification.
AS/A level	The young adult is studying for AS and/or A level or similar.
HE in FE	The young adult is engaged in higher education at a Further Education college.
Ex Poly	The young adult is studying at a university that was formerly a polytechnic (or similar institution).
Red Brick	The young adult is studying at a red brick university.
Elite	The young adult is studying at one of the more selective of the Russell Group universities.
Working FT	The young adult is working full-time.
Working PT	The young adult is working part-time.
Unemployed	The young adult is unemployed, available for work and claiming dole.
Other	The young adult is otherwise not in education, employment or training.
Home and Family	The young adult is significantly engaged in caring responsibilities, including dependent children and/or adults (and maybe not in education, employment or training).

The years of young adulthood are a time of transition, when people begin to make decisions for themselves rather than following the choices and constraints of their parents. The years of young adulthood offer a myriad of opportunities: going onto post compulsory education, entering employment, becoming a parent, doing nothing. By looking at these 12 factors in relation to where young adults live, we gain important insights into the variable life chances and life outcomes of this age group.

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.

A separate appendix, at the end of this briefing, explains how the data was compiled.

Technical appendix: how the data was compiled

The dataset on young peoples' most likely futures arose from research being undertaken jointly between staff at Sheffield and Brighton Universities which has looked at young people aged 18–21, and measured the number of them in each of 12 groups, from education and work to staying at home with children, in each of a thousand areas of England; a subset of these areas are studied in this report. The domains of education and work are further subdivided; we measure the numbers going to 3 different categories of university, and taking different levels of courses at FE colleges, and working full-time or part-time. This was first documented in section 2 of Thomas et al., (2009).

To calculate these figures the numbers of young adult students enrolled in FE colleges and the equivalent on courses were calculated from the National individual records and assigned to the home postcode of each student. This is what resulted in our estimates of those enrolled in adult education below Higher Education level. Higher Education records have similarly been accessed earlier by type of institution and again the home post-code (this time at age 17) was used to assign students to which type of university they were attending by where they were located before they went. The map of which kind of

university you are most likely to end up in if you go to university was first published in Thomas and Dorling (2007), where further documentation can be found. It was later that we added the Further Education Learner Record and then the census.

Finally we used the 2001 census, which was a little more dated than the other records, to assign the large remainder of young adults living in each area to the remaining categories having subtracted those who were studying by vacation time (rather than term time) address. Until the 2011 census is released in 2013 there is no more up-to-date data on what young people who are not in education, training or unemployed are involved in each area. Unemployment statistics outside of census years are very unreliable. However, it should be noted that the picture we paint here is of the situation prior to the financial crash of 2008. Today more young adults will be unemployed than we can estimate here for each place, but to get an accurate estimate every young adult needs to be asked what they are doing in the census. Nationally only around half a million adults under age 25 are officially unemployed although surveys tell us that a million say they are unemployed. Those surveys only produce national figures thus they cannot allow us to make local estimates.

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