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# **Young men's education to work transitions in post-industrial Glasgow and Liverpool**

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Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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June 2023

## Abstract

Young men face a heightened risk of material hardship (McDowell, Bonner-Thompson and Harris, 2022), and struggle to find secure employment in contemporary service-dominated labour markets following shifts in the UK economy (Nixon, 2018; McDowell, 2020) despite their best efforts (Roberts, 2018). Although these conditions are documented, young men have not been a predominate and specific empirical focus of studies on the socio-economic implications of austerity and longer-term shifts in labour market opportunities (Raynor, 2017). Drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data, this mixed methods research investigates and compares young men's perceptions and experiences of local labour markets in light of recent skills policy changes that have aimed to improve young people's employability, foster economic growth and stimulate demand for skills (e.g. Scottish Government, 2018; HM Government, 2017). The sample was recruited from Glasgow and Liverpool, two similarly depressed labour markets with comparable histories and economic trajectories (Doucet, van Kempen and Weesep, 2011) and which have demonstrated the plight of young men resulting from deindustrialisation and periods of decline. Located within two member nations of the UK, namely Scotland and England, each regarded as subject to different national policy objectives, this research examines the impact of skills and training initiatives that have aimed at addressing cohesion between skills and sustainable jobs.

This thesis uses a theoretical framework that draws on the Risk Society thesis (Beck, 1992), the Age of Chance gambling theory (Reith, 2002), the Zones of (in)security conceptual lens (Furlong, et al, 2018) and the theory of Surplus Labour (Marx, 1976). The strengths of these theoretical lenses used in combination provide the explanatory power to inform new understandings of contemporary labour market conditions and the unique perspectives of young men who are navigating a multitude of complex structural circumstances. The findings from this research show the interconnections between those structural circumstances experienced by the young men and their agentic responses where they are required to engage as responsible economic subjects and autonomous agents (Rose, 1999; Roberts, 2018). The findings suggest that the individualisation of the young men combined with the unpredictability of

employment outcomes has resulted in them being pressurised into engaging in labour market behaviour that is akin to gambling. This research concludes that to address the 'gamble' in the move from education to work, more investment is required to increase the quantity of high-quality employment opportunities for young men on both sides of the border. To achieve smoother transitions into such sustainable jobs, more employer-led training provision and stronger links between education and training providers and employers is required alongside parity of esteem for non-university pathways and the encouragement of skills utilisation by employers.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	i
Table of Contents .....	iii
List of Tables.....	viii
List of Figures .....	ix
Acknowledgements.....	x
Chapter 1 Introduction .....	1
1.1 Overview.....	1
1.2 Key definitions .....	3
1.2.1 Precarity .....	3
1.2.2 Masculinity.....	4
1.2.3 Social Class .....	5
1.3 Historical Background.....	6
1.4 Purpose of the study .....	10
1.4.1 Positionality .....	12
1.5 Research Questions.....	15
1.6 Structure of the thesis.....	16
Chapter 2 Employment in the youth labour market.....	18
2.1 Introduction .....	18
2.2 Operation Austerity .....	19
2.3 A post-industrial economy.....	21
2.4 Individualised deficits and the supply of skills .....	24
2.5 Young men in contemporary labour markets .....	30
2.5.1 Changing industries.....	31
2.5.2 A problem of education?.....	33
2.6 The problem for young men .....	35
2.6.1 Welfare cuts.....	35
2.6.2 Labour market experiences in modern Britain .....	36
2.6.3 Masculinity: a deficit category? .....	38
2.7 Conclusion and main research question.....	42
Chapter 3 Skills and Labour Market Policies in the UK and Scotland .....	44
3.1 Introduction .....	44
3.2 The policies reviewed: Some key promises .....	45
3.2.1 More jobs and better pay.....	46
3.2.2 Expansion of vocational education opportunities.....	48
3.2.3 Support the growth of businesses .....	50
3.2.4 Policy implementation .....	51

3.3	Key aims of skills and education policies .....	53
3.3.1	Employability: Increasing the supply of skills .....	54
3.3.2	The needs of employers .....	56
3.3.3	Youth at risk.....	60
3.3.4	Unemployment policies.....	64
3.4	Policy narratives .....	67
3.4.1	Risky economic subjects.....	68
3.4.2	The individualisation of responsibility.....	69
3.4.3	Upskilling for employment .....	70
3.5	Conclusion and supplementary research questions.....	74
Chapter 4	Social Theories: the theoretical framework .....	78
4.1	Introduction .....	78
4.2	Critiques towards some social theories: Why are these theories less relevant for this research? .....	78
4.2.1	Social constructionism: Mannheim, Berger and Luckman.....	78
4.2.2	Habitus and Structuration: Bourdieu and Giddens.....	79
4.2.3	The precariat: Guy Standing .....	82
4.3	Theories of risk .....	82
4.3.1	Beck's Risk Society .....	83
4.3.2	The Age of Chance .....	85
4.3.3	A Risk Society for young men in the UK .....	86
4.3.4	Why Risk Society.....	88
4.4	The Zones of (in)security.....	89
4.4.1	Beyond labour market dualisms .....	89
4.4.2	Zones of (in)security in the UK context .....	90
4.5	Surplus Labour .....	91
4.6	Summary and conclusion .....	94
Chapter 5	Methodology .....	98
5.1	Introduction .....	98
5.2	Research Approach .....	99
5.3	Positionality .....	100
5.4	Data collection.....	103
5.4.1	Glasgow and Liverpool .....	104
5.4.2	Building Rapport .....	106
5.4.3	The study samples.....	108
5.5	Data analysis .....	111
5.5.1	Mixed Methods Research.....	111
5.5.2	Triangulation .....	113
5.5.3	Analysis of quantitative data .....	115

5.5.4	Qualitative analysis approaches .....	117
5.5.5	Thematic Qualitative Analysis .....	119
5.6	Validity of findings .....	122
5.7	Ethics .....	124
5.8	Summary and conclusion .....	126
Chapter 6	Education to employment transitions .....	128
6.1	Introduction .....	128
6.2	Informed post-school choices .....	129
6.2.1	Pushed on a university path.....	130
6.2.2	Increased choices: “what do you want to do?” .....	131
6.2.3	Informed choices .....	132
6.2.4	Non-university pathways “there was always a bit of a stigma” ....	136
6.3	The impact of qualifications in the labour market .....	139
6.3.1	“It’s a gamble any way you go” .....	142
6.3.2	“Literally hundreds of graduates” .....	144
6.3.3	Only some degrees “guaranteed” .....	145
6.3.4	Employer education links.....	147
6.3.5	Apprenticeships “a certain level of security” .....	151
6.4	Comparing the two cities.....	154
6.5	Summary .....	156
6.6	Conclusion .....	157
Chapter 7	Adjusting to an unjust labour market .....	159
7.1	Introduction .....	159
7.2	The Zones of (in)security in Glasgow and Liverpool.....	160
7.3	Accounts of the precarious labour market.....	165
7.3.1	The shortage: six jobs, one thousand people .....	165
7.3.2	“Too many insecure jobs”.....	166
7.3.3	Flexibility: it works both ways.....	168
7.3.4	“They don’t get back to you”.....	170
7.3.5	“You can’t get nothing without agency”.....	173
7.3.6	The probability approach.....	174
7.3.7	Where are the jobs located? .....	177
7.4	Detraditionalised pathways into employment.....	179
7.4.1	Employers want experience.....	179
7.4.2	Can’t get experience.....	181
7.4.3	Employers want qualifications.....	185
7.4.4	“It’s who you know” .....	186
7.4.5	Traditional pathways.....	189
7.5	Unemployed and on benefits .....	192

7.5.1	Job insecurity: it could happen to anyone.....	194
7.5.2	Individualised deficits: attitudes towards benefits and work.....	197
7.5.3	Dead-end training .....	201
7.5.4	Austerity: sanctions don't work .....	204
7.5.5	Back into work: more support needed .....	208
7.6	Comparing the two cities.....	211
7.7	Summary .....	212
7.8	Discussion and conclusion .....	214
Chapter 8	Discussion .....	217
8.1	Introduction .....	217
8.2	Education choices .....	219
8.2.1	“Informed choices”.....	220
8.2.2	Opportunities for better jobs .....	222
8.3	Postindustrial Labour Market Experiences .....	227
8.3.1	Games of chance .....	228
8.3.2	The most successful labour market in the world? .....	231
8.4	Marginalised young men in the modern economy.....	234
8.4.1	A “lifestyle choice” .....	235
8.4.2	Control and choice .....	239
8.5	Summary and contribution .....	241
Chapter 9	Conclusion .....	248
9.1	Reflections of the research findings .....	249
9.1.1	Complex structural circumstances .....	249
9.1.2	Detraditionalised pathways into employment.....	249
9.1.3	The state of liminality and marginalisation .....	250
9.1.4	A Risk Society in Glasgow and Liverpool .....	251
9.1.5	Gambling for future careers .....	252
9.2	Theoretical and Practical Contributions .....	253
9.2.1	Risk Society and Individualisation theses .....	253
9.2.2	Individualised Gambling Pathways .....	253
9.2.3	The zones of (in)security .....	254
9.2.4	Mixed methods: Extended branches .....	255
9.2.5	Impacts of skills policies.....	256
9.2.6	Bridging the gap .....	256
9.3	Policy recommendations.....	257
9.4	Limitations and future research suggestions .....	262
9.5	Final remarks.....	266
	References .....	269
	Appendix 1: Policies Reviewed.....	299



Appendix 2: Stage 1 Interview Questions .....301  
Appendix 3: Stage 2 Interview Questions .....302  
Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet .....307  
Appendix 5: Qualitative sample demographics .....309

## List of Tables

Table 2.1 Apprenticeship sectors in England (2015) .....	28
Table 2.2 Apprenticeship starts by level.....	29
Table 5.1 The Zones of (in)security criteria.....	116
Table 5.2 IMD/SIMD Ranking .....	116
Table 5.3 Phases of thematic analysis.....	121
Table 6.1 Highest qualification: Glasgow and Liverpool.....	129
Table 6.2 Job classification by education: Glasgow and Liverpool .....	140
Table 7.1 Employment status: Glasgow and Liverpool.....	161
Table 7.2 Income Quartiles: Glasgow and Liverpool .....	163
Table 7.3 Optimism about the future .....	172

## List of Figures

Figure 1.1 Glasgow’s Multiple Deprivation Map (2020) .....	8
Figure 1.2 Liverpool’s Multiple Deprivation Map (2022) .....	9
Figure 2.1 The Zones of (in)security (2010) .....	22
Figure 2.2 Jobs distribution of young people (2014) .....	27
Figure 6.1 Labour market position and education .....	139
Figure 6.2 Residential area by education .....	141
Figure 7.1 Zones of (in)security: Glasgow and Liverpool .....	162
Figure 7.2 Income Box Plots: Glasgow and Liverpool .....	164
Figure 7.3 Male unemployment rates.....	193
Figure 8.1 Individualised Gambling Pathways .....	242

## Acknowledgements

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the University of Glasgow for their funding during the first three years of this research and the additional support they provided during the writing up period especially as this research was conducted through the Covid19 pandemic.

Special thanks go to my supervisors, Dr Lesley Doyle, Prof Bridgette Wessels and Prof Melanie Simms whose encouragement, conscientious advice and guidance complimented the profound and dynamic exchanges that were made possible due to the interconnectedness of all our fields of study.

My gratitude also goes to my partner, friends and family particularly my late grandparents who sadly passed away during the period of this research. Their unconditional love and pioneering spirit will reverberate until the earth falls from the universe.

Finally, my wholehearted appreciation extends to the participants of this study. This research is about the experiences and perceptions of the young men; in parallel with my interpretation of their accounts was a personal education. With all humility I sincerely hope that this research adds knowledge to the field of youth studies and fulfils the wishes of my sample in arousing more awareness of their circumstances.

## **Author's declaration**

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Printed Name: JAMES KARTAL GÜLGEÇER

Signature:

# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Overview

The main focus of this research is to understand the perceptions and experiences of young men's education to employment transitions in light of recent labour market and skills policies in two ex-industrial cities, namely, Glasgow and Liverpool. Continuous globalisation of production based on profit maximisation had necessitated economic and employment restructuring in Britain from the post-war period (Nixon, 2018). The disappearance of 'traditional' masculine industries which were a major employer of men and industrial shifts to a knowledge and service economy, has been suggested to disadvantage young working-class men when applying for employment in the contemporary UK economy (McDowell, 2020). The types of skills required to enter the contemporary workforce has been impacted by the rise of the postindustrial, knowledge, service economy (Nixon, 2018). These changes resulted in widespread male job losses in the manufacturing and extractive industries, as well as a decline in the demand for skilled, semiskilled, and unskilled manual labour (Alcock, et al. 2003; Nixon, 2009). The effects of economic and financial crises, changing industries and demands, and lack of support networks have made young men vulnerable to material hardship and declining labour market prospects (McDowell, Bonner-Thompson and Harris, 2022).

The lives and experiences of young men in this context are seldom studied (McDowell, Bonner-Thompson, and Harris, 2022). While McDowell (2020) acknowledges that there has been a long-standing demonisation of 'undeserving' working-class men, much of the literature on young men has focussed on negative *attitudes* towards feminised service sectors, portraying a version of masculinity in deficit (e.g. McDowell, 2020; Nixon, 2018; Hardgrove, McDowell and Rootham, 2015; McDowell, Bonner-Thompson, and Harris, 2022). There is an absence of research focussing on the actual *experiences* of young men who were employed or aspired to be employed in the contemporary service economy (Nickson and Korczynski, 2009; Roberts, 2018).

In order to understand these features of the contemporary labour markets of Glasgow and Liverpool, this research employs a mixed methods approach.

Quantitative analysis of labour market data for Glasgow and Liverpool from the UK Household Longitudinal Survey (also known as Understanding Society) is analysed through Furlong, et al.'s (2018) *Zones of (in)security* conceptual lens to gain insights that are accurate in capturing standard and non-standard types of employment. These insights are complimented with qualitative analysis of 29 semi-structured interviews with young men occupying various economic positions in both cities. The qualitative interviews capture deeper insights into the experiences of young men's education to employment transitions and early career experiences. Together with the zones of (in)security, their experiences are analysed through a theoretical framework that also draws on Beck's (1992) *Risk Society* thesis, and Reith's (2002) *Age of Chance* and Marx's (1973) *Surplus Labour* conceptual theories.

One of the themes emerging from studies of young men to date have depicted young working-class men as immutable and unchanging which has removed "any blame by painting them as constrained by the tradition of embedded masculine heritage" that Roberts (2018) argues distils into a "largely negative set of traits" (p.33). Roberts (2018) points out that many of the rituals and attitudes ascribed to young working-class men also occur in the middle-class but is less researched. MacDonald (2011) also notes "one valid criticism of youth transitions research is that it has been over-occupied with the problems faced by 'those at the bottom' rather than with the wide range of youth transitions" (p.432). This research adds to the conversation surrounding the aforementioned narratives that characterise and pathologise young men as having a negative set of traits which have been used to explain their labour market exclusion. This research explores young men's perceptions and experiences of employment, employment opportunities, unemployment and their engagement with compulsory and post-compulsory education and training. While the abovementioned literature predominately focussed on working-class, marginalised men between the ages of 18-25, this research documents the experiences of both working- and middle-class together who were aged 16-30 at the time of data collection to provide a more holistic picture of the labour market, and skills and training landscape.

McDowell (2020) posits that research is crucial for policy debates as it reveals "long-term uneven geographic implications for children and young people living

isolated coastal or rural communities, in inner cities or on deprived estates in more affluent towns” (p.634). This research compares the differences and similarities of the experiences of young men from two different cities (Glasgow and Liverpool) of two nations (Scotland and England) who are living in diverse areas of deprivation. It explores the impact of regional and country-wide labour market and skills policies on the young male samples observed.

## **1.2 Key definitions**

### **1.2.1 Precarity**

Precarious forms of employment are a common experience in the contemporary youth labour market. However, there are two main concepts of precarity that require exploration before discussing precarious employment conditions. The first is the Autonomist Concept which originated from the operaismo movement prior to Italian autonomism (Wright, 2002). The second is the Sociological Concept which originated in France and was utilised by prominent social theorists such as Guy Standing and Pierre Bourdieu (Choonara, 2020)

The Autonomist Concept of precarity refers to positions and perspectives that merged from Italian autonomism. Prior to Italian autonomism, the operaismo (workerism) movement had split from the mainstream communist tradition that had focussed on factory workers struggles in the 1960s and 70s (Wright, 2002). The importance of the operaismo movement to the discussion of precarity is captured by the sentiment of a ‘beautiful precarity’ which expressed the notion of “an escape from the authority of capital and the state - an assertion of the right to subtract oneself from their control” (Choonara, 2020, p.430). Recent developments in the UK have seen the government respond to striking workers by proposing new legislations that intend to break strikes, jail protestors and replace striking staff with agency workers (UNISON, 2022b).

On this note, Furlong, et al. (2018) point out that Great Britain has a history of harsh working conditions for its workers. The 14th century Ordinance of Labour (1349) law restricted the freedom of workers to protest poor working conditions.



The Master and Servant Act (1823) penalised servants who left employment without their master's permission (Furlong, et al, 2018). Craig (2007) described labour relations in Britain: "For most of the past 500 years, employment relations in Britain was governed by the traditional master and servant relationship. Breaches of these contracts were punishable by imprisonment, whipping, fines, forfeiture or compelled labour" (Craig, 2007, p.2 in Furlong, et al, 2018, p.30).

It is therefore acknowledged that workers' right to withdraw from harsh working conditions is necessary, notwithstanding, precarity in this research is informed by the sociological concept as it refers to the persistence of insecure and uncertain employment conditions that give rise to substandard living conditions. The concept of precarity operationalised in this thesis is closest to that defined by Prosser (2016) who describes it as: "employment involving contractual insecurity; weakened employment security for permanent workers and non-standard contractual forms such as temporary agency, fixed-term, zero-hour and undeclared work" (p.950).

### **1.2.2 Masculinity**

It is crucial to understand how young men's post-industrial labour market circumstances may have been framed in research using a masculine/feminine binary and how young men's diverse decisions, actions, and inclinations have transcended these constrained and deterministic accounts of gender (Beasley, 2012). The idea of sex role theory, which holds that men learn how to be men rather than being exclusively impacted by nature, is where the rejection of this binary originated (Roberts, 2018). In advancing this idea, Raewyn Connell (1987) contended that sex role theory saw gendered role deviations as a failure of the socialisation process since it presupposed a normality of what males should be (Roberts, 2018). Connell (1987) provided a conceptualisation of masculinity as relational and multiple, moving away from a fixed definition of masculinity. However, criticisms of Connell's Hegemonic Masculinity Theory (HMT) are discussed in Chapter 2 (Section 2.6.3). It explores how Anderson's (2009) Inclusive Masculinity Theory (IMT) provides the apparatus to conceptualise multiple masculinities and how HMT informed research had framed masculinity as a deficit category which was used to explain men's labour market struggles.

The conceptualisation of masculinity in this research aligns with Anderson's IMT that contends various masculinities co-exist and do not seek to dominate, subordinate or marginalised other masculinities, and in which their behaviours are neither dissimilar from those of women nor hegemonic.

### 1.2.3 Social Class

Studies of young men's labour market circumstances have tended to focus on extremes, such as focussing on the long term unemployed and working-class. This research interviews both working- and middle-class young men. However, there are several conceptualisations of social class which makes it a contested concept (Crompton, 2008; Savage, et al, 2014). The *Registrar General's Class Schema*, which was used in Britain until the 1980s, was largely responsible for official measures of class. It was based on a six-tiered class structure with the top three professionals at the top, regarded as the middle class, and the bottom three, skilled and unskilled manual workers, who were regarded as working class (Szreter, 1984; Savage, et al, 2013). The *Nuffield class schema*, developed by John Goldthorpe and colleagues at Oxford University, was created in the 1970s and formalised in the UK's National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC). It divides people into one of seven primary classes based on their work and employment status (Savage, et al, 2013). However, criticisms exist of these models because it was argued that they do not highlight how class divisions are created by social and cultural processes (Savage, et al, 2013).

Pierre Bourdieu's conceptual apparatus has thus been employed in the social sciences to develop understandings of social class that extend beyond employment inequalities to include "the interplay between economic, social and cultural capital" (Savage, et al, 2013, p.220). Savage, et al. (2013) then developed a new model of social class based on analysis of the BBC's Great British Class Survey (GBCS) and a nationally representative survey. They combined economic, cultural and social capital to map contemporary class divisions in the UK and detail "the link between class and specific occupational, educational and geographical profiles which offer unparalleled insights into the organisation of class inequality" (Savage, et al, 2013, p.220-221). Using these variables, Savage and colleagues produced a map of seven classes from 'Elite'

(with very high economic, social and highbrow cultural capital) to Precariat (with the lowest scores for every capital criterion).

While criticisms exist on all the above models, it is beyond the scope of this research to address and advance models of class schema. For the purposes of this research, the working- and middle-class status of the participants was deduced by gathering information on job status, parent job status, parental involvement, geographical profiles, educational capital, and in some instances the participants expressed their perceived social class without prompting. The purpose was not to impose an official measure of class on the participants, but rather to appreciate the different advantages and challenges faced by the young men of various backgrounds who had varying levels of resources at their disposal.

### **1.3 Historical Background**

In order to understand the economic shifts that took place in Glasgow and Liverpool which negatively affected the primary employment prospects for young men, this section introduces the historical context of both cities. This research analyses objective labour market data between 2016-2020, and 29 semi-structured interviews to explore where there had been any changes in Glasgow and Liverpool following the implementation of a range of labour market and skills policies. The primary interest is young men's education to employment transitions and the analysis explores experiences of the contemporary youth labour market that has been characterised by unemployment and precarious forms of employment. However, these conditions are not understood in an isolated vacuum, they are the result of longer-term processes of change (Furlong, et al, 2018).

Goodwin (co-author of the Furlong, et al.'s 2018 book *Young People in the Labour Market*) and Hughes (2011) point to the sociological practice of Norbert Elias who emphasised to importance of understanding the long-term perspective to understand society. According to Elias (2006 cited in Furlong, et al, 2018), the understanding of long-term processes fosters an enhanced awareness of

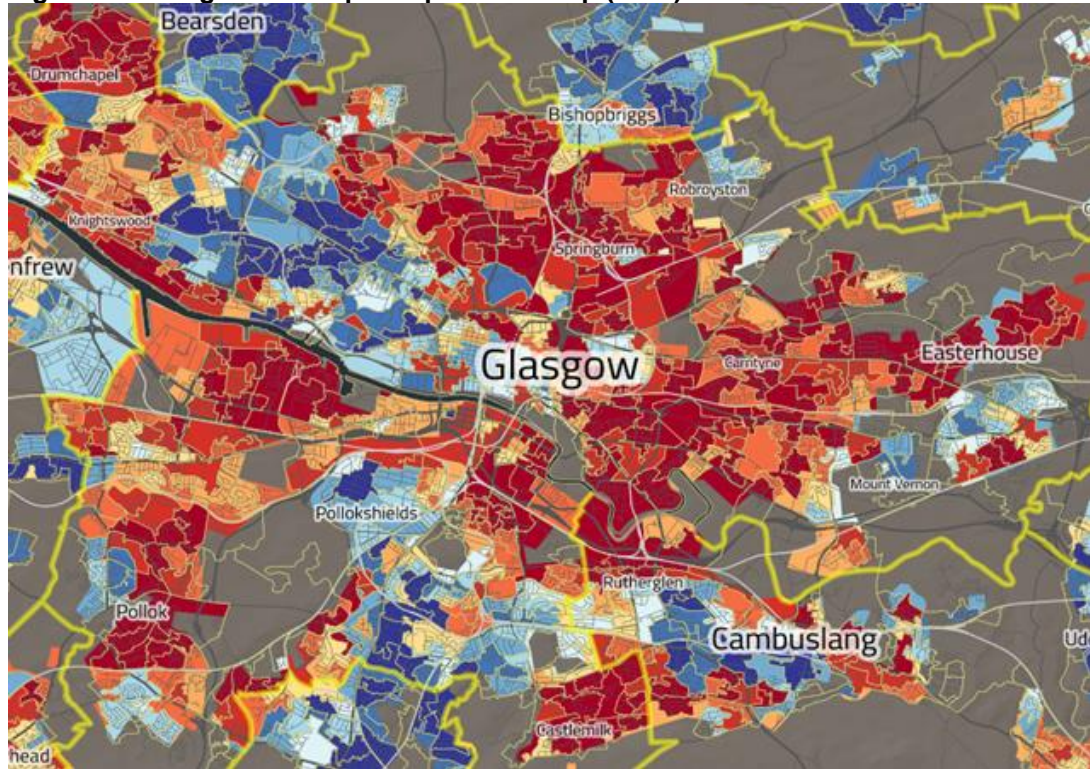
contemporary problems. This perspective is useful in understanding phenomena such as how precarious employment came to be, or how those conditions became the new normal for young men. The approach to understanding the historical processes that led to current conditions is termed by Elias as *sociogenesis* (Furlong, et al, 2018). Understanding of the historical context of places of study helps to prevent the separation of current conditions from the past (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). One of Furlong, et al.'s (2018) criticisms of Guy Standing's (2011) *Precariat* class, for example, was that it was a short-term explanation of precarious employment circumstances that implied a "here and now" of phenomena that was "wholly different from what went before or simply emerged out of nowhere" (p.11). The historical context of Glasgow and Liverpool's economic trajectories aids understanding of how current conditions experienced by young men came to be, or in Elias's words, of understanding the sociogenesis of contemporary conditions.

The sample was recruited from two similarly deprived labour markets which have demonstrated the plight of young men. This research is located in Glasgow and Liverpool, two similarly sized cities in Scotland and England with comparable histories and economic trajectories. They experienced economic expansion during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries founded on shipping and maritime activities (Doucet, van Kempen and Weesep, 2011). The two cities are now deindustrialised and have experienced periods of decline. For Rowthorn (2010), Glasgow is a classic example of a Northern British economy that lost vast numbers of industrial jobs during economic restructuring in the 1970s. Previously heralded as the "second city of the empire" due to its dominance in shipbuilding, engineering, chemical and extractive industries, its economy is now reliant on public sector employment, finance, hospitality and producer services (Gibb, Osland and Pryce, 2014).

Despite adapting to industrial changes, Glasgow "bears the legacy of economic restructuring in terms of relatively high levels of unemployment, economic inactivity and benefit dependence" and has "considerable inequality as measured by health, education and broader measures of multiple deprivation" (Gibb, Osland and Pryce, 2014, p.606). In its post-industrialist shift, Glasgow has noticeable levels of poverty and deprivation. Indeed, 35% of Scotland's most

deprived decile of neighbourhoods are located in Glasgow (Livingston, Kearns and Bannister, 2014) as illustrated by the dominant red zones representing the most deprived areas, with the minority blue areas representing least deprived in Figure 1.1 below (SIMD, 2020).

**Figure 1.1 Glasgow's Multiple Deprivation Map (2020)**



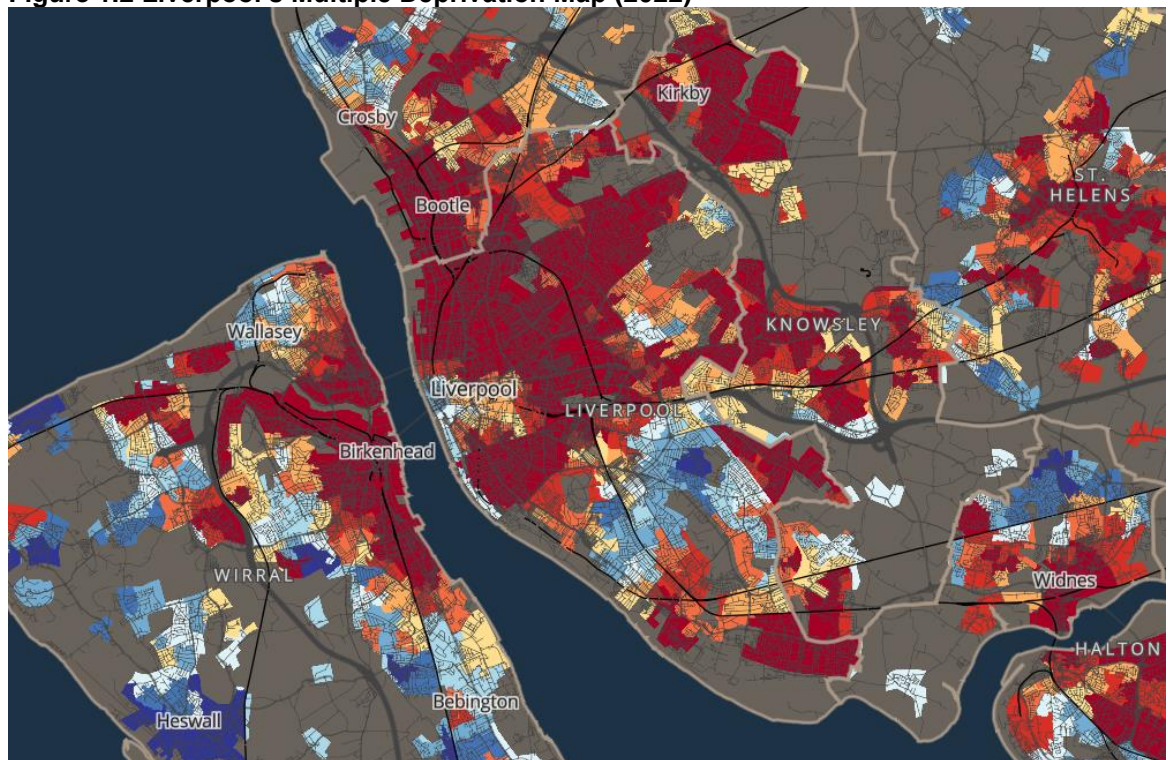
**Source: Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD, 2020)**

Liverpool has also seen extremes of poverty and prosperity over the past 200 years. During the 19th and 20th centuries, the city was a global port for trade in salt, slaves, raw material and manufacturing which led it to be called ‘a wonder of the world’ (Sykes, et al, 2013). Such was the scale of Liverpool’s prominence, its merchant fleet was greater than London’s, and it had more embassies and consulates. Its cargo was larger than New York’s and every port in Europe (Sykes, et al, 2013). The decline of port-related employment after World War 2 presented difficulties for young men in Liverpool as the primary employers of men either declined or disappeared (Mulhearn and Franco, 2018). Atlantic-oriented dock work was compromised due to EU membership (North, 2017) and Liverpool experienced shocks in the 1980s resulting from failed urban clearances and external economic trends (Sykes, et al, 2013).



The expansion of manufacturing plants in Liverpool during the 1960s proved to be only a short-term solution, and the end of the post-war boom coincided with economic and political upheaval (Parkinson, 1985). By the mid-2010s, the GDP of the Merseyside area had almost reached the EU average resulting from its designation as an EU Objective 1 area in the mid-1990s, however, economic progress from this funding did not reach every neighbourhood (Mulhearn and Franco, 2018, p.479). As with Glasgow, the intensity and persistence of concentrated deprivation in Liverpool is demonstrated by its high percentage of deprived areas. More than one-third of the population now live in the most deprived areas. More than one-third of the population now live in the most deprived decile according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) (Rae, 2012). Liverpool has been ranked lowest in “key economic, demographic and social indicators” and is “the most deprived borough in England” with large disparities of up to 30 years in life expectancy between the wealthiest and poorest (Sykes, et al, 2013, p.300). Like Glasgow, the scale of Liverpool’s most deprived areas can be seen in the majority red zones in Figure 1.2 below (IMD, 2022).

**Figure 1.2 Liverpool’s Multiple Deprivation Map (2022)**



**Source: Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD, 2022)**

Former industrial powerhouses, both Glasgow and Liverpool have experienced drastic declines and stagnation due to deindustrialisation and the outsourcing of production to countries with cheaper labour (Doucet, van Kempen and Weesep, 2011). While both cities have received investment in recent years aimed to stimulate economic growth (Doucet, van Kempen and Weesep, 2011) and address higher than average unemployment rates and economic inactivity (McCollum, 2012), post-war changes experienced by British cities such as Glasgow and Liverpool have severely impacted “the least affluent and most disadvantaged” and have taken “an uneven geographical form” (McDowell, 2020, p.623). These changes have negatively affected social networks, employment opportunities and the ability for communities to provide emotional and material support (McDowell, Bonner-Thompson and Harris, 2022).

## **1.4 Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this research is to provide insights beyond the one-sided concentration on working-class, marginalised young men (Roberts, 2018) (although they are included in the sample), and invited young males aged 16-30 from both working- and middle-class positions to provide a more holistic picture of men’s experiences in the local labour markets of Glasgow and Liverpool. The same age range is used to observe labour market experiences of young men in the Understanding Society quantitative dataset.

In the backdrop of the ramifications of austerity, changes to industry, waves of education and skills policies, and increasingly precarious and insecure employment conditions in the youth labour market (Bessant, Farthing and Watts, 2017), the inclusion of young men from varying backgrounds and statuses moves beyond the dualistic extremes in previous research that focussed on the employed/unemployed dichotomy (Furlong and Cartmel, 2004; Lindsay and McQuaid, 2004; McDowell, 2014; McDowell, 2020; Nixon, 2009; Nixon, 2018; Standing, 2011) and provides the potential to explore and compare experiences of the contemporary labour markets of Glasgow and Liverpool, and the education and training landscape (Roberts, 2018). The research participants for

the qualitative interviews are located within five economic categories, namely, employed, students, self-employed, apprentices and unemployed.

Despite attention on the increasing precariousness of young people's employment circumstances in youth studies, little research has been conducted into young men's experiences of education to employment transitions in the UK (McDowell, 2020; McDowell, Bonner-Thompson and Harris, 2022). Studies that have explored young men in the labour market have tended to focus on the *attitudes* of young, working-class men towards service sector employment and not the actual lived *experiences* of young men in the labour market (Roberts, 2018). At the policy level, the *supply* of skills and not the *demand* for skills has been the primary focus which had led to a skills mismatch in the labour market, and Higher Education expansion has disincentivised employers to lead training provision (Keep, 2020). Further, welfare policies have followed an increasingly linear path of stricter conditionalities and sanctions and young people and young men have been particularly vulnerable to unemployment (Crisp and Powell, 2017; Furlong and Cartmel, 2004; Roberts, 2018; Nixon, 2018; Statistica, 2022).

There is often an assumption by policy makers that young people are lazy and feckless, have the wrong attitudes towards employment and lack the necessary skills and motivations (Rodriguez, 2015). It has been long assumed in welfare policy that the unemployed are claiming out-of-work benefits because of a 'lifestyle choice' (Patrick, 2017) and because they lack employable skills, behaviours and attitudes (Mackie and Tett, 2013). The neoliberal turn since the 1970s has held vulnerable young people as accountable for their marginalised labour market positions (McPherson, 2021). However, existing research has highlighted that these assumptions in policy have been unsuccessful in their stated intentions in moving the unemployed into sustainable employment (Keep, 2019a). Without a simultaneous drive in demand for workers, Furlong and Cartmel (2004) argue that employers have had few incentives to provide work-related training as a route out of the cycle of unemployment and temporary jobs. Taken together, the policy assumptions and evidence from research point to a failure by policymakers to address long-standing in-demand skills shortages in which employers and young people, and the UK economy, are being negatively affected (TUC, 2022).



The resulting problems are manifold. Research shows that young people are more likely to experience labour market marginalisation despite being the most qualified generation in history (Crisp and Powell, 2017). Further, young men's ability to develop employable skills, build financial resources and protect themselves from poverty are undermined by their vulnerability to un(der)employment and declining social security protections (McDowell, 2020). Young men are continuing to experience these material hardships resulting from economic crises, austerity and long-term shifts in labour market opportunities (McDowell, 2020).

The aim of this research is to understand the experiences of young men's education to employment transitions in Glasgow and Liverpool in light of labour market and skills policies and a fractured socioeconomic environment. The findings from this study have significant implications for research into the experiences of young men making their transitions to adulthood in depressed labour markets. This research also highlights recommendations for policy which can address perceptual and practical barriers to existing support and opportunities for young men who may have been overlooked in policy. The scope of recommendations also provides recommendations for regional, devolved and UK governments which could help to inform future programmes for young people.

### **1.4.1 Positionality**

The terms 'positionality,' 'reflexivity' and 'standpoint' have been used in the social sciences to give attention to how the researcher's "self-identifications, experiences of marginalization, or professional privileges influence their research questions, data collection, and analysis" (Massoud, 2022, p.65). Awareness of positionality can help researchers to find their 'inner wisdom' and it can help to establish credibility as an insider particularly if they speak the local dialect (in my case I was able to converse in the local Scots dialect), and/or relate to under-represented or marginalised groups (as I will proceed to explain) (Massoud, 2022). The researcher's positionality accounts for other potential influences and perspectives such as one's epistemological position, life experiences such as previous or current jobs (see Chapter 5), theoretical influences, and the relationship to the phenomena of interest (Holmes, 2020).

The process of reflecting on one's positionality necessitates the researcher to understand their position in the social hierarchy and how their position informs their understanding of others (Reid, Greaves and Kirkby, 2017).

However, Brown (2023) posits that while good research is done reflexively, it is not necessary for the public to see every innermost thought and experience. In Brown's (2023) words:

There is a clear difference between the public positionality statement, and the reflexive being throughout research. Being reflexive is not some tick-box exercise. Being reflexive is, like being ethical, a state of being and a way of carrying out research. Reflexivity therefore needs to pervade each and every phase and stage of the research process. In no way does this mean we have to share all innermost thoughts, challenges and biases we are working through during the research. It does mean, though, that we do work through these thoughts, challenges and biases.

Although the researcher wants to ensure robustness and validity of findings, they have a duty to balance what should be made public and what should be kept private while being cognizant of their interests, background, motivations and influences. The discussion in Chapter 5 explores the ontological and epistemological assumptions for this research. Informed by the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm, I do not regard the research as being separate from the researcher. The research is thus influenced by my positionality as the researcher (Holmes, 2020). In line with ethical research, as the researcher is not detached from the research process, the researcher's wellbeing must also be considered when making a public disclosure (Brown, 2023). While the current trend in positionality statements is said to include gender, age, social class, sexuality, ethnicity and political beliefs (Holmes, 2020), Massoud (2022) cautions that there is little recognition of the costs that this methodological trend has imposed on researchers of certain backgrounds.

The costs of opening up one's self-identifications include emotional and physical exhaustion. The process of blurring the professional and the personal can open up the individual, and not the scholarly ideas, to criticism and harm (Massoud, 2022). While I am a British citizen and privileged to have been the awardee of the Andy Furlong Scholarship, I experienced a predicament between recounting the marginalisation I had experienced growing up whilst simultaneously trying to

prevent exoticising my Turkish ethnicity or ‘othering’ myself (Said, 2000). Nonetheless, being unable to “fall in line with the norms of the dominant group” (Mackie and Tett, 2013, p.387) whilst simultaneously contending with issues of recognition, the Anglo/Eurocentrism I encountered was a compounding source of my alienation. During my PhD journey, I found that the process of retelling physical and psychological trauma retraumatised me (Massoud, 2022) at times when I had to explain and justify to people and groups who could not appreciate how the cultural value privilege associated with Anglo/European ‘whiteness’ has prevented me from participating as a full member of society and the economic structure (Fraser, 2003, p.23).

However, these experiences of unequal terms helped me relate to the life chances of young men whose lack of resources prevented their participation on a par with others (Fraser, 2003), whose extended opportunities in education and the labour market has not been enough to overcome issues of maldistribution (Hine and Wood, 2009) and inequalities of assets and income (Fraser, 1996; Scott and Mooney, 2009; Mackie and Tett, 2013). I could identify with the experiences of young men whose marginalisation has been reframed as a responsibility of the individual, many of whom were hard to reach and without a voice (Rose, 1996; Patrick, 2017). I saw the responsabilisation of young men’s turbulent labour market circumstances as a reflection of a system of injustice and victim-blaming (France, 2008; Fraser, 1995).

While Massoud (2022) argues that ethnic minorities “unevenly carry the burdens of positionality” (p.66) this did not overwhelm me or detract from my motivation for this research. Rather, it had the opposite effect. My own experiences of marginalisation formed my interest in studying marginalised young men. Self-reflection cultivated an enhanced awareness of my motivations which in turn had influenced my research questions, methods and findings (Massoud, 2022). So, while I incurred some wellbeing costs from going through the process of reflecting on my positionality, the process helped me to identify how my research was influenced (Wilson, Janes and Williams, 2022).

From a professional standpoint, I am interested in this research topic for a number of reasons. Firstly, I have a career interest in education to employment transitions and the experiences of marginalised young men. I was an educator in

high schools in the international education sector and had worked with young men who were making their transition to post-compulsory education and employment. Secondly, the study is related to my personal interests and background, and I have been able to give my full attention to these current issues impacting young men. Lastly, during my time in academia I have been able to reflect on the experiences of my sample and also the conditions facing young people more broadly. Connected to my second reason, I have been able to see myself in the study and to some degree could be considered an insider (although I discuss the insider-outsider dichotomy in Chapter 5) by the close proximity of our ages in the sense I had also experienced challenging conditions in the contemporary UK labour market following crises such as the Great Financial Crisis and subsequent austerity operation.

## **1.5 Research Questions**

Considering the economic and labour market problems identified that young men are facing, the historical background of the labour markets that explored the sociogenesis of current conditions, the literature and the theoretical framework, the primary research question that guided this research is: What are young men's employment experiences of postindustrial labour markets in Glasgow and Liverpool?

The supplementary research questions are:

1. How have young men perceived and experienced their education and employment choices?
2. What are young men's experiences and perspectives of unemployment and welfare?
3. How can social theory help to understand the experiences of young men in postindustrial labour markets?

## 1.6 Structure of the thesis

Following this introduction into the depressed labour markets of Glasgow and Liverpool, Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature relating to the UK youth labour market. It provides insight into recent events such as the Great Financial Crisis and subsequent austerity measures that have impacted on the UK economy and employment conditions. Chapter 2 reviews the labour market conditions they are experiencing. It finds that labour market marginalisation has been framed in terms of individual deficits yet young men face several barriers to labour market integration. For this, the need to investigate skills and labour market policies in both the national and regional contexts emerged.

Thus, in Chapter 3, those policies critically analysed find that the individualised deficit narrative coincides with a shift from a skills utilisation approach to an employability approach which places responsibility on the individual for labour market outcomes. This discussion finds a policy overlap in the UK and Scottish policy contexts despite the popular notion that skills policy follows a divergent path in Scotland. In Chapter 4 I review the social theories that are utilised to examine the labour market experiences of the young men observed in this research. A theoretical framework drawing on Beck's Risk Society thesis, Reith's Age of Chance gambling theory, Furlong et al.'s Zones of (in)security conceptual lens and Marx's theory of Surplus Labour is constructed to understand the novel experiences of young men in the current environment.

Chapter 5 outlines the methodological basis for this research. A mixed methods study consisting of analysis of Understanding Society's labour market data and semi-structured interviews is underpinned by the interpretivist/constructionist paradigm. In Chapters 6 and 7 the findings of this research are presented. Using the Understanding Society longitudinal survey of British individuals and households, analysis of labour market data is conducted alongside the accounts of the twenty-nine young men interviewed in this study. Chapter 6 focusses on the education journeys of young men as they made their post-school decisions, engaged with tertiary education and attempted to enter the labour market. In this chapter we see the usefulness of Furlong, et al.'s Zones of (in)security model that explores labour market positions in relation to education level which form the basis for exploring points of convergence and divergence within the

data. The novel findings also provided the opportunity to apply new concepts to understand the unique findings of this research, and Reith's Age of Chance gambling theory utilised in chapter 8 provided explanatory power for understanding the unpredictability of outcomes explained by the young men.

Chapter 7 focusses on the labour market experiences of young men which are characterised by insecure and temporary forms of employment. The findings in this chapter are later analysed through the lens of Beck's Risk Society and Reith's Age of Chance to examine the job seeking strategies adopted by the young men presented in this chapter, and to explain the declined sense of agency that the young men conveyed. Analysis of this chapter also explores the Zones of (in)security for Glasgow and Liverpool between 2016-2020 and finds the majority of young men do not occupy the Traditional zone.

For those unable to gain access to permanent employment and who have become trapped in a cycle of unemployment and underemployment, their experiences are analysed through the lens of Marx's Surplus Labour. Thus, in Chapter 8 the findings of this research are discussed in greater detail using the aforementioned social theories. Based on the findings of this research, the notion of *Individualised Gambling Pathways* (Figure 8.1) is discussed to contribute to the understanding of young men's behaviour and agentic responses to the complex structural circumstances identified. This research concludes in Chapter 9 by assessing the findings, reviewing the theoretical and practical contributions and provides both policy and future research recommendations.

## Chapter 2 Employment in the youth labour market

### 2.1 Introduction

As the UK experienced changes in industry following deindustrialisation throughout the 1980s and 1990s, postindustrial cities such as Glasgow and Liverpool witnessed “the rise of the detached male workforce” (Alcock, et al, 2003), typified by huge male redundancy and unemployment and challenging transitions into employment among poorly educated, low-skilled younger men (Gangl, 2002). These economic transformations have disrupted working-class men’s labour market relationships (McDowell, 2014). At the same time, youth unemployment has risen since 2005, suggesting a structural cause that predated the 2008 Great Financial Crisis (GFC) (Furlong, et al, 2018). However, the response from successive UK governments in addressing underemployment and unemployment figures has been to frame the individual as responsible for their economic outcomes (Crisp and Powell, 2017). Supply-side skills policies reflect the individualisation of that increased responsibility, and the rhetoric and narratives that underpin these policies have portrayed young people and young men as having skills, attitudinal and behavioural deficits, all of which are argued could be rectified by engagement in more training and education (McDowell, 2020; Roberts, 2018).

The first section of this chapter discusses the fiscal policies enacted by UK governments as a response to the GFC (McDowell, 2020; Bessant, Farthing and Watts, 2017), their impact on real earnings (Marmot, 2020), and cuts to social services, welfare reforms and job losses (McDowell, Bonner-Thompson and Harris, 2022; Patrick, 2017). While precarious forms of employment have become increasingly prevalent (Stuth and Jahn, 2020) the Conservative government simultaneously heralded the UK’s flexible labour market (HM Government, 2017) and successive governments have continued to encourage participation in higher education as the pathway to secure careers (Keep, 2019a). The second half of this chapter critically analyses the effects of the supply side orthodoxy and how it has created an excess of highly qualified young people which the labour market has been unable to absorb into high-level employment (Furlong, et al, 2018). The rationale underpinning the supply of

skills has been that young people need to improve their employability, and young men have been characterised as having a deficit version of masculinity that makes them resistant to engaging in education and employment in the contemporary labour market (Nixon, 2009; 2018; McDowell, 2003; 2012; 2014; Ward, 2014). However, these narratives have been criticised in the literature as victim-blaming (France, 2008; Fraser, 2003) and overlooking the structural causes of underemployment (Furlong and Cartmel, 2004). It has been found that engagement with employment in service sectors is not at odds with masculinity, rather, young men have integrated with employment in these sectors despite awareness of the unlikelihood of upward social mobility (Roberts, 2018).

However, the negative portrayal of young men in mass media, academia and neglect by policymakers has compounded the challenges young men are facing in modern Britain (McDowell, Bonner-Thompson and Harris, 2022) who are the most likely group to be unemployed and claiming out-of-work benefits (Statistica, 2022). Coinciding with the responsabilisation of young men for their labour market positions is a rollback of the state's role and responsibility for jobs creation and increased welfare conditionalities and sanctions (Reeve, 2017). While young men have been blamed for their liminal and marginalised labour market positions, these assertions have been critiqued as smearing young men and overlooking circumstances in the youth labour market that have extended their adolescence as they struggle to navigate non-standard types of employment and dependence on welfare and family support (Hardgrove, McDowell and Rootham, 2015).

## **2.2 Operation Austerity**

Since the 2008 Great Financial Crisis (GFC) and the implementation of a variety of fiscal policies to decrease government expenditure deficits, the term austerity has been increasingly prevalent in the UK (McDowell, 2020). Average weekly earnings for those in work have not recovered to pre-2010 levels (Marmot, 2020). Families and individuals most at risk of poverty have been subjected to income cuts and reductions in a variety of social and welfare



support services, including those for young people (McDowell, Bonner-Thompson, and Harris, 2022).

The drop in real earnings between 2007 to 2014 in the UK was the largest since the 1860s (Stenning, 2020). Several parts of the UK have been disproportionately hit by government cuts (McDowell, 2020) and by the cumulative impact of welfare reforms and job losses, all of which reflect the uneven effects of austerity (Patrick, 2017). Such socioeconomic shifts are felt on a personal and societal level (Stenning, 2020). Unison (2022) reports that 1.3 million food parcels were given out between April and September 2022 which they argue reveals the extent of in-work poverty in the UK resulting from wage depression, economic stagnation and a cost of living crisis.

More occupations are becoming part-time, temporary and insecure reflecting new types of employment contracts (MacDonald, 2016). The past two decades have seen a significant rise in casual employment, zero-hour contracts, and diverse types of self-employment (McDowell, 2020). The distinction between these employment statuses bars many from the employment protections and benefits of stable employment (Taylor, Marsh and Nicol, 2017). As of September 2022, unemployment rates had fallen to 3%, its lowest rate since 1974 (Statistica, 2022). However, young people are more vulnerable to unemployment and underemployment than older groups and male unemployment rates have almost always been higher than that of women since the 1980s (Statistica, 2022).

While not the predominate focus of the socio-economic ramifications of austerity in academic literature or policy, young men are believed to face a heightened risk of material hardships in 21st century Britain (Raynor, 2017). Studies have shown that these conditions impact young men's feelings of self-worth and their capacity to maintain a reasonable quality of life and some level of independence (McDowell, Bonner-Thompson, and Harris, 2022). Further, situations that make it difficult for young men to find quality employment that pays enough to sustain themselves and their dependents are becoming widespread (McDowell, 2020).

In a decade of austerity, forms of fragile connection to the world of paid labour have grown more prevalent (Prassl, 2018). In the United Kingdom, the relative disadvantage of young males from working-class backgrounds has deepened and transformed (McDowell, 2020). Increasing social security constraints, reductions in benefit entitlements, the closing of youth services, and limited housing options have created a harsh new reality for young men seeking stable jobs and transitioning to adulthood (McDowell, 2020). Nixon (2018) and Ilan (2017) argued that with the growth of service sector jobs which require feminine traits, those embodying working-class masculinity could be said to be at risk of exclusion thereby exacerbating the relative disadvantage of young men with few in-demand skills, attributes or qualifications in comparison to both younger and older women (McDowell, 2020). While one of the causes of these conditions has been the UK government's responses to the GFC, scholars such as Furlong, et al. (2018) argue that the prevalence of precarious forms of employment existed in the UK prior to the 2008 financial meltdown. The next section reviews these conditions in the contemporary youth labour market.

## **2.3 A post-industrial economy**

There is a lack of clarity in the literature regarding the employment precariousness young people experience in their labour market transitions (Stuth and Jahn, 2020). According to Giddens (2013), and Beck (1992), precariousness may be a problem for most entry stage employment. Other research suggests that precarity is experienced by young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (MacDonald, 2009). How precarity is measured further complicates understanding - young people's early employment trajectories may be regarded as a success where there has been a transition to continuous employment (Bussi, 2016). While there is an abundance of literature that focusses on young people's entry-stage employment through the lens of 'standard' versus 'non-standard' employment (Furlong, et al. 2018; Bukodi, et al. 2008; Gebel, 2010, Standing, 2010, Kalleberg, 2009; Melin and Blom, 2015) the assumption of 'good' continuous standard employment and 'bad' discontinuous non-standard employment has been questioned (Frade, Darnen and Lappara, 2004; Choonara 2020, Cuervo, Crofts and Wyn, 2013; Stuth and Jahn, 2020).

The assumption that continuous standard employment is good has been questioned because it might also be precarious, and non-standard employment is not universally precarious (Stuth and Jahn, 2020). Furlong, et al. (2018) give the example of a pilot working on a temporary contract versus a fulltime employed waiter. An assumption that all continuous employment is a superior employment circumstance would ignore the nuances of privileged and disadvantageous labour market positions beyond contractual and occupational statuses.

**Figure 2.1 The Zones of (in)security (2010)**



**Source: Understanding Society 2010 (cited in Furlong, et al. 2018)**

The contemporary labour market is characterised by precarious forms of employment and young people enter the labour market today with fewer opportunities to access full-time, permanent employment (Furlong, et al, 2018). The decline of traditional industries and rise of new sectors have emerged alongside a change in the patterns of work for men and women. Furlong, et al.'s (2018) Zones of (in)security presented in Figure 2.1 illustrates the employment distribution of young people aged 18-25 in the UK in 2010, with those in permanent fulltime employment grouped in the traditional zone; part-time and

temporary workers in the liminal zone; and unemployed, students and those working under 10 hours per week in the marginalised zone. This conceptual lens will be used to analyse labour market experiences of young men in Glasgow and Liverpool for the period 2016-2020 in the findings chapters of this research (Chapters 6 and 7).

Figure 2.1 above shows that less than half of young people (49%) were employed in secure employment (Traditional zone) meaning that the majority of young people were in Liminal (15%) or Marginalised (36%) labour market positions. Furlong, et al. (2018) describe a current labour market that is “a stratified labour market in which the few enjoy a privileged security while the majority exist under conditions of insecurity” (p.7). Crucial to this discussion is the definition of precarious employment and whether workers in diverse types of employment fall under this category. Nevertheless, while there is debate surrounding the nature and existence of precarity and type of which workers fall under the category, the body of literature shows that precarity co-exists *alongside* stable employment (Choonara, 2020). Early employment marks a crucial stage in young people’s employment trajectories and impacts on future employment careers (Stuth and Jahn, 2020). The risk of later unemployment is increased by discontinuous transitions which can disrupt career pathways and have been referred to as having a ‘scarring-effect’ by others (Mousteri, Daly and Delaney, 2018).

Entry-stage employment is said to determine subsequent transitions and future careers (Luijkx and Wolbers, 2009). Literature covering education to employment transitions often overlooks the new complexities and risks young people experience (Stuth and Jahn, 2020). The gold standard of transitions was regarded as smooth entry from education to employment and the time taken to invest in qualifications or gain experience were accepted as normal (Brzinsky-Fay, 2007). However, as the remainder of this section will show, debate surrounds what is regarded as ‘good’ employment conditions. Transitions have often been regarded as a failure when the investment in education did not lead to continuous employment or led to several periods of unemployment (Stuth and Jahn, 2020).

Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) highlight that traditional pathways from education to employment had been broken, including for young people from affluent backgrounds. However, for MacDonald (2009), the growth of job insecurity for young people has been exaggerated, and instead certain social groups are more vulnerable to precarity than others. On the other hand, and similar to Standing's (2011) *Precariat* class, Avis and Atkins (2017) argue that the mass of employees are now an insecure working/middle class. They posit that the precariousness which is characteristic for working class young people with limited forms of capitals, including educational capital, is now experienced by middle-class youth. On the contrary, MacDonald and Shildrick (2018) argue that young people's transitions are marked by class inequalities and shaped by structural forces. This last point is important in relation to the predominate focus in research on young *working-class* young men that is discussed in the next section.

This section has highlighted the nuances surrounding what is considered good employment (e.g. Stuth and Jahn, 2020; Choonara, 2020). It has also drawn attention to research that shows that the majority of young people do not experience stable employment in the UK (e.g. Furlong, et al, 2018). The next section looks at the discussion surrounding the supply of skills and how the predominance of liminal and marginalised labour market positions occupied by young people have been framed in policy.

## **2.4 Individualised deficits and the supply of skills**

Labour demand for highly skilled workers has not matched the increasing supply of graduates in Britain, leading to increases in graduate unemployment and underemployment, and increased competition at the bottom end of the labour market (MacDonald, 2011). This has led to an increase in the education level expected of employed people by employers (Nixon, 2018). While unemployment rates are low and employment figures high, young people and particularly young men are most vulnerable to unemployment and underemployment (McDowell, Bonner-Thompson and Harris, 2022; Statistica, 2022).

During the 1980s, economists and sociologists discovered that investments in human capital by way of engaging in education yielded favourable returns for young people as they sought to avoid unemployment and increase their earnings (Furlong, et al, 2018). They found that academic qualifications brought superior results compared to government training schemes and vocational qualifications. However, the high-level, high-salary jobs from the new knowledge economy that were promised to replace jobs lost due to deindustrialisation failed to materialise (Furlong, et al, 2018). On the contrary, emerging market economies outperformed the UK in producing graduates during the 1990s and this coincided with the decline in the proportion of jobs at management and professional level (Furlong, et al, 2018). However, this did not prevent UK governments from encouraging young people to invest in their human capital by engaging at university (Keep, 2019a). However, the annual supply of fresh graduates without a simultaneous rise in graduate level jobs has created unfamiliar problems in the UK labour market for young people.

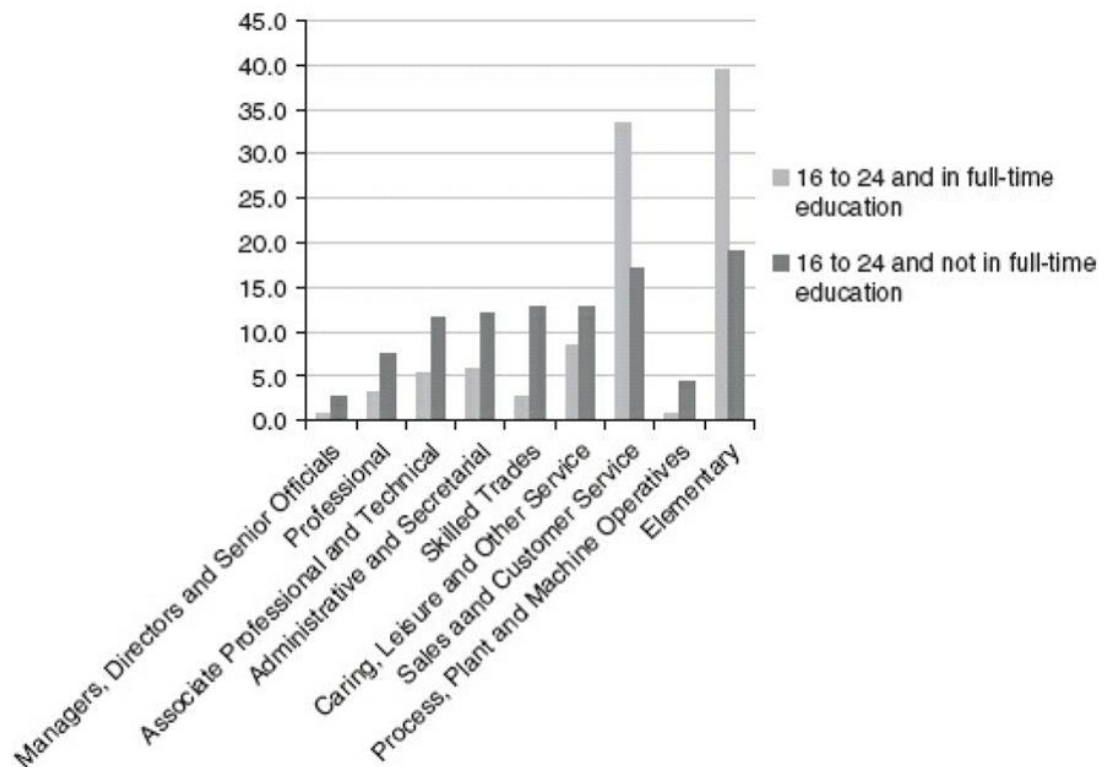
Furlong, et al. (2018) refer to the emergence of *graduation inflation* that has arisen in which the value of university degrees has declined. Combined with growth in low-skill sector jobs, the returns from university education are unlikely to compensate the time and money invested (Furlong, et al, 2018). With no commensurate growth in employment demand for academic graduates, less qualified young people are being squeezed out and are at greater risk of precarity than previous generations (Keep, 2020). Bessant, Farthing and Watts (2017, p.90) argue “There has always been a fatal flaw in the capacity of human capital theory to deliver on what it promised: its connection to the neoliberal political project.” This presents a paradoxical situation for young people according to Furlong, et al. (2018) who state: “Education beyond high school is a prerequisite for a secure lifestyle” (p.36). The Anglophone countries such as the UK, USA and Australia insisted that students should pay for higher education based on the assumption that it provided private benefits, but they formed part of austerity measures to cut government spending (Bessant, Farthing and Watts, 2017). The outcome for graduates in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain is huge student debt that acts as a ‘super-tax’ for those who manage to avoid the Marginalised and Liminal zones of employment and gain employment in jobs that previously only required GCE O levels (Furlong, et al, 2018).

While students have taken on increasing levels of debt, their reward has been increasing levels of unemployment and underemployment as the pool of graduate jobs has been diminished partly due to the outsourcing of jobs to countries with cheaper qualified labour (Brown, Lauder and Ashton, 2011). It was also assumed that a better qualified workforce would encourage private sector organisations to compete in higher value services (Lloyd, Warhurst and Dutton, 2013). However, the globalisation of high-skill production has been “combined with low cost innovation, challenging many of the beliefs about the social foundations of economic success.” (Brown, Lauder and Ashton, 2011, p. 48). Thus the “neoliberal opportunity bargain” that promised increased returns from investment in education by outsmarting workers internationally, has turned into a globalised high skill “competition based on price” (Brown, Lauder and Ashton, 2011, p. 48). Furlong, et al. (2018) demonstrated that young people are heavily concentrated in low-skill sectors of the UK economy despite having better qualifications than previous generations. Although the employability narrative has promoted upskilling as a solution to precarious employment conditions (reviewed in Chapter 3), education has not been the solution for many with one in four graduates still in low-skilled work three years after graduation, and only a quarter earned an income above the overall average (Mosca and Wright, 2011).

Irwin (2020) argues that traditional pathways into employment have been undermined by a decline in industries, evident in the employment distribution of young people displayed in Figure 2.2 below, and recent labour market policies and institutional structures which have made alternative pathways difficult. Aware of the low esteem placed on vocational qualifications, young people have still been opting for academic education despite global policy rhetoric of social justice and parity of esteem for Further Education (Avis and Atkins, 2017). Nixon (2018) and McDowell (2020) had argued that young men’s economic participation had been undermined following the decline in industries which had traditionally employed men. The loss of these jobs following deindustrialisation combined with the contemporary youth labour market which is characterised by precarious and insecure types of employment has presented new challenges for young men who can no longer rely on traditional pathways into employment and who struggle to find training.

Furlong and Cartmel (2004) for example, found that young men's occupation in precarious forms of employment had excluded them from work-related training necessary to enhance their future employment prospects. They discovered that both private and public sectors had shirked their responsibilities to provide training for lower skilled workers, impeding workforce development. Furlong and Cartmel found that many young male's labour market biographies were dominated by precarious employment, low-wages and exploitative conditions. The general trend towards casualisation of employment and use of employment agencies and temporary contracts made young men vulnerable to and in some cases trapped in poor working conditions as they exercised their resilience to evade unemployment (Furlong and Cartmel, 2004).

**Figure 2.2 Jobs distribution of young people (2014)**



Source: ONS (2014 in Furlong, et al. 2018, p.58)

Figure 2.2 above shows that by 2014, young people populated elementary and service sectors more than any other occupation (Furlong, et al, 2018). While high-quality work experiences can equip young people with necessary skills for employment, mobility from low-paid to high-paid industries are difficult for



young people without adequate training opportunities for progression (Atkins, 2017).

Young people have experienced increased responsibility to develop their human capital and have been burdened with debts to attain qualifications to gain work they will likely be overqualified to do (Bessant, Farthing and Watts, 2017; Keep, 2019a; Choonara, 2020). Furlong, et al. (2018) posit that those with the most limited social and cultural capital will be more likely to enter low-status vocational qualifications and traineeships. For those opting for employer-led training provision as a gateway to secure employment, the aforementioned changes in industry (e.g. Nixon, 2018; McDowell, 2020) have resulted in apprenticeships being offered in different sectors, as shown in Table 2.1 below.

**Table 2.1 Apprenticeship sectors in England (2015)**

Sectors	Number
Health and Social Care	85,000
Business Administration	49,000
Management	43,000
Hospitality and Catering	32,000
Customer Service	31,000
Children's Care, Learning and Development	22,000
Retail	18,000
Engineering	18,000
Construction Skills	17,000
Industrial Applications	14,000
Total	329,000

**Source: Fuller (2016, p.427 in Furlong, et al, 2018)**

The top 10 apprenticeship sectors above made up two-thirds of over 200 sectors in England during 2015. Traditional apprenticeship sectors such as engineering and construction have been replaced by those in the service sector (Fuller, 2016). As mentioned in the previous section, the decline of traditional industries have had significant implications for young men's transitions to adulthood, and this will be discussed in greater detail in the next section. However, early knowledge economy theorists like Bell (1973 cited in Nixon, 2018) anticipated that future productivity and competitiveness of industrialised countries would

rely less on employees' 'brawn' and more on their formal education which may explain why low-skilled males struggle with job development (Nixon, 2018).

Not only had there been changes in the sectors in which apprenticeships dominate, but the qualification level of current apprenticeships may also be inadequate for securing stable employment or career progression. Research indicates that the UK had a comparatively 'long tail' of substandard credentials and a much lower percentage of employees with Level 3 vocational qualifications. It was found that more than 10 million people aged 16-64 in Britain held less than NVQ Level 2 qualifications [GCSE level] (Nixon, 2018). Table 2.2 below captured apprenticeship starts by level for young people in England between 2014-2015. The situation is said to be different in Scotland, with there being higher completion rates in Level 3 qualifications (Greig, 2019).

**Table 2.2 Apprenticeship starts by level**

Level	Number	% of All Starts
Level 2	298,000	60
Level 3	182,000	36
Level 4+	20,000	4
All	500,000	100

**Source: Fuller (2016, p.426 in Furlong, et al, 2018)**

While modern apprenticeships were designed to address the skills gap and create a higher skilled labour-force (Keep, 2019a), the majority (60%) of apprenticeship starts outlined in Table 2.2 were in Level 2 positions meaning most apprentices registered in lower-level positions (Fuller, 2016). This has had implications for young people with the most limited forms of capitals as their potential to enter higher-status forms of education is low (Furlong, et al, 2018). For young men, the barriers to developing employable skills locked them out of secure employment was evident in research two decades ago, locking them in cycles of precarious employment and unemployment (Furlong and Cartmel, 2004).

One of the questions emerging from the above literature is whether young men had access to higher level apprenticeships or other employer-led training. Research has shown that those with the most limited forms of social and cultural capital were more likely to enter low status vocational qualifications and traineeships (Furlong, et al, 2018). Moreover, the discourses for providing opportunities for youth to manage their own learning conceptualise young people as human capital ready for a high-skill economy which assumes that all young people have access to the cultural and social capitals necessary for the journey to high-paid sectors (Billet, 2010). While high-quality work experiences can equip young people with necessary skills for employment, eligibility for traineeships may serve as a barrier for many (Atkins, 2017). As Table 2.2 above shows, many young people had entered low-level apprenticeships with low parity of esteem. Furlong, et al. (2018) argue that the inevitable outcome is an ongoing churn between education, substandard employment and welfare which is discussed in the next section. The next section thus looks at the challenges young men face in avoiding unemployment and unemployment in postindustrial labour markets and how their labour market circumstances have been portrayed by mainstream media and policymakers.

## **2.5 Young men in contemporary labour markets**

This section critically analyses the literature on young men's engagement with education and employment in the contemporary youth labour market. While literature focussing on young male's economic activity is scarce, much of the literature conducted has framed young men's economic inactivity as resulting from a masculinity that is incompatible with so-called feminised employment, which has been argued as reflecting aspirational, attitudinal and class-based deficits. However, as will be seen over the following two sections, men's engagement with education and employment is more nuanced than the picture that such individualised and deterministic narratives depict.

### 2.5.1 Changing industries

Due to changes in industry following deindustrialisation, many men found that their work orientations, previous work-related skills and experiences were obsolete (McDowell, 2014). According to Nixon (2009), the jobs which now dominate the labour market are low-level, flexible, 'servicing' occupations that are often female-dominated and require different skills, dispositions and attributes to the men's 'usual' or desired occupations.

McDowell (2020) argues that young men without jobs are constructed differently in discursive and rhetorical ways. While decent quality employment has become out of reach for many young men, moral judgments about class, youth, and self-worth have had stigmatising effects. For example, the issue of unemployment has been portrayed in individualising terms that blame young men for their marginalised situations (McDowell, 2020).

Those terms have included the idea that working class masculine norms run counter to behaviours and traits desirable in female dominated entry-level service work in postindustrial labour markets (McDowell, 2014). Young men have been suggested to be at a disadvantage when applying for employment because they lack attributes such as deference, self-presentation, servility (Furlong, 2006; France, 2016) and seduction (Bauman, 1998; McDowell, 2012). McDowell (2020) argues that the outcome for young men demonstrating old versions of masculinity were often confined to casual employment in retail and hospitality sectors or warehousing jobs.

However, in their nationally representative study of young unemployed men in Glasgow, although unemployed young men may lack strong credentials and skills, Furlong and Cartmel (2004) argue that young men's exclusion from the labour market was not a result of behavioural or attitudinal deficits, and they did not prefer to live on benefits. While Lindsay and McQuaid's (2004) study indicated that jobless males rejected low-level service jobs due to low wages and skills requirements, Furlong and Cartmel found that most young men wanted work and were willing to accept any work or training. Far from being unemployable, young men found themselves unemployed due to being let go after completing a

temporary contract or because of economic downturns (Furlong and Cartmel, 2004).

Nixon (2009) explored low-skilled unemployed working-class men's orientations and attitudes towards a range of jobs and found that they remained strongly oriented to male-dominated manual occupations and other niche services. When evaluating different service occupations, male participants discussed difficulty in conducting 'emotional labour,' especially when faced with difficult clients (Nixon, 2018). In similar studies of young men, McDowell argued that these sentiments indicated that service sector employment is seen as "women's work, and so beneath their dignity" (McDowell, 2016, p.54). Ward (2014) also argued that these attitudes were inconsistent with the realities of a de-industrialised economy, and argued that young men distanced themselves from anything regarded as feminine to maintain a strong sense of masculinity.

Contrary to the above arguments, Roberts (2018) argues that the notion of inherited men's dispositions towards masculine work is one of "simplistic and reproductive social reproduction" (p.126). He compares the experience of his young male sample, many of whom had only known service work, compared to older men who found the transition to the contemporary labour market difficult. According to the accounts from his sample, service work was "all there is" for the young men. Although there was evidence that some young men were unwilling to engage in service work, for Roberts, it is "not strictly a 'working-class' masculine habitus" (p.126).

Furlong and Cartmel (2004) suggested that traditional masculine job aspirations may have served as an obstacle for young men in Glasgow to enter the service economy as they may have seen them as unsuitable or incompatible compared to jobs in heavy industry, ship building, trades and construction. Meanwhile, several studies have argued that the predominance of low-level service occupations may be a barrier to employment for jobless or economically inactive working-class males (Furlong and Cartmel, 2004; Nixon, 2009; McDowell, 2014). However, Roberts (2018) found that young men were not restrained by a particular version of masculinity in his study of young men in the East and South East of England. The young men had embraced service work in which they integrated with contemporary employment despite being unable to experience

upward social mobility. Opposed to the idea that masculinity was the cause of young men's resistance to service sector employment, Roberts argues that of those who had left front-line service employment, low pay, and a perceived lack of prospects and career progression was perceived as hindering successful transitions to adulthood.

### **2.5.2 A problem of education?**

Nixon (2009) claimed that unemployed young men lacked the 'technical' and 'practical' abilities necessary in communication and service industries. While policies have been devised to address these skills and education deficits, Furlong and Cartmel (2004) found that there were few success stories from young men who had participated on low-level training schemes, especially those from lower-working class families who tended to be overlooked for high-demand stronger qualifications. Furlong and Cartmel found that long term unemployed young men often left school at the first opportunity without qualifications and entered unemployment and government training schemes. The majority of their sample experienced a cycle of precarious employment and unemployment. Those who obtained more stable work tended to come from families with more resources and had more than basic qualifications. Overall, the problem for the young men was not in finding employment (they found precarious employment) but in finding a secure job that allowed them to break the cycle of temporary or insecure employment and unemployment. Some young men avoided formal education due to negative past experiences (Furlong and Cartmel, 2004). McDowell (2020) also found that young men from lower socioeconomic backgrounds had the lowest rates of higher education but there was a growing recognition of the importance of post-school qualifications for the new economy.

There has been attention given to the underachievement of boy's educational performance in policy initiatives and popular news media, with headlines emphasising how boys are 'lagging behind' (McDowell, 2003). Contrary to the idea that young men's education effort was hindered by a deficit version of masculinity which made them reluctant to formal education engagement, Roberts (2018) argues that "theories of masculinity are not especially well suited to understanding the totality of boy's educational engagement" (Roberts, 2018,

p.84). Roberts (2018) argues that the narrative that all boys are failures is unfounded and underperformance in education is not exclusive to gender.

While boys do underperform relative to girls, the proportions are not as vast as suggested (Reay, 2009). Underperformance is not only a problem for boys, and this narrative also masks “complexities such as the intersection of gender with ethnicity and class” (Roberts, 2018, p.85). For example, while girls from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds outperform boys, they are still below national averages, suggesting class has a stronger influence than gender (Roberts, 2018). The problem with the gendered narrative that girls outperform boys is that it feeds into the idea of masculinity as a deficit, the idea is then used to explain the high achievement of boys running counter to gender norms, which also ignores underperforming girls who also need attention (Roberts, 2018).

While those with the most basic skills are more vulnerable to marginalised labour market positions, Furlong and Cartmel (2004) argue that it is wrong to frame these positions as resulting from personal deficiencies as the situation for many young men was that they were prevented from accessing training by employers that would protect them from marginalisation. The provision of low level qualifications such as National Qualifications (NQ) and National Vocations Qualifications (NVQ) have not protected young men from underemployment and unemployment. What was needed was advanced, in-demand qualifications and marketable skills. These were stronger determiners of transitions to employment for young men than their supposed masculine habitus in most cases. Furlong and Cartmel (2004) argued “No intervention can effectively move vulnerable people towards stable employment if the pool of stable jobs is rapidly declining” (p.35). In other words, labour demand is essential for young men to enter employment, and more secure employment opportunities are necessary for young men to remain employed. Without these two factors, education has limited effectiveness in preventing labour market marginalisation. These challenges are discussed in the next section.

## 2.6 The problem for young men

McDowell (2014) suggests that in ‘austerity Britain,’ media portrayals of young working-class men have shifted from a discourse of ‘masculine disadvantage’ that constructed them as victims of structural economic change to one that presents them as ‘feral,’ dangerous, or a threat to broader social values and cohesion. McDowell, Bonner-Thompson and Harris (2022) argue that young men in Britain have been smeared as unworthy, disreputable, out of control and needing surveillance. They argue that these negative portrayals have underpinned the narrative that marginalised young men are undeserving, skivers and scroungers. Far from the demonisation being deserved however, those forms of stigmatisation evident in official government policies attack “the relatively blameless majority of insecure and workless youth” (McDowell, Bonner-Thompson and Harris, 2022, p.626). This section highlights the conversations surrounding how these policies impact on young men’s lives and careers.

### 2.6.1 Welfare cuts

After the Global Financial Crisis and Great Recession, several European governments undertook varying austerity measures to decrease state expenditure amid a time of spiralling public debt (Nixon, 2018). In Great Britain, austerity was accompanied by historically unprecedented cuts in welfare spending and the development of the UK’s harshest regime of conditionality and benefit sanctions, increasing the level of conditionality placed on some benefit claimants and the severity of sanctions for failing to comply (Reeve, 2017).

Recent British welfare reform is based on the idea that jobless benefit recipients lack work commitment (Dunn, 2014). Policy-related speeches and papers have created themes such as welfare dependence, workless class, culture of poverty, and poverty of aspirations to explain ongoing poverty and unemployment, to justify punitive welfare policies, and shift responsibility from the state towards the individual for poverty (Shildrick, et al, 2012). Reeve (2017) argues that this shift by government is part of a broader neoliberal shift in social policy toward a rollback of the state’s role and responsibility in ensuring the welfare of its citizens by promoting discourses that individualise the causes of poverty and unemployment by suggesting they reflect individual deficiencies.



McDowell (2020) argues that young men face increasing challenges to avoid low-quality employment and a low pay/no pay cycle. Russel (2016) adds that welfare conditionalities have served as a mechanism to pressurise young men to accept those low-quality jobs. Crisp and Powell (2016) found that young men are the most likely of any group to experience welfare sanctions. Increasing benefit conditions and harsher penalties for noncompliance have hurt the most vulnerable unemployed males. Reeve (2017) for example, found that unemployed young men were four times more likely to be sanctioned, and argued they had been “set up to fail” by the benefits system. Welfare reform based on behavioural theories of poverty and unemployment have damaged working-class men’s labour market participation following the Great Recession (Nixon, 2018). Semi- and unskilled manual employees report the most underemployment in post-crisis labour markets, whereas skilled manual workers report the most financial instability. Young, low-skilled males bear the burden of unemployment and long-term unemployment (Nixon, 2018).

As the next section will show, in-depth studies on young men reveals their labour market situation may be characterised by increasing ‘marginalisation’ or ‘precariousness’ rather than complete exclusion (Simmons, et al, 2014). Because of the low-pay/no-pay cycle referred to above, young men have been found to churn between precarious employment, unemployment, and government-mandated training initiatives (McDowell, 2020; Shildrick, et al, 2012). Research indicates that insecure employment has not helped them to escape poverty or become financially independent (Nixon, 2018). In their study of young unemployed men in the south of England, Hardgrove, McDowell and Rootham (2015) found that short-term, flexible-hours contracts have created an ‘extended adolescence’ for young working-class men, who are dependent on family support to contend with unstable working hours and low pay.

## **2.6.2 Labour market experiences in modern Britain**

Declining demand for male manual workers following deindustrialisation have created difficulties for some young men in the labour market (Nixon, 2018). Austerity policies and welfare reform have compounded the marginalisation of young men, particularly those with low education levels (Nixon, 2018). Literature on the contemporary youth labour market shows young men face

challenges in their transitions to secure employment, particularly those with limited forms of educational and social capital (e.g. Furlong, et al, 2018; Furlong and Cartmel, 2004). This is due to the decline in traditional industries such as heavy industries and urban manufacturing that employed men (Roberts, 2018). These challenges emerged in the 1980s and 1990s but persist in modern labour markets (McDowell, 2014). The growing prevalence of 'poor-work' at the bottom of the labour market and recent welfare reform have exacerbated the economic and social marginalisation of young men in Britain, especially the most disadvantaged, such as those with low-level skills and educational qualifications or no family support networks (Nixon, 2018; McDowell, Bonner-Thompson and Harris, 2022).

The 1970s saw a fast increase in a low-paid, low-level female service sector employment which McDowell (2014) refers to as the 'feminisation' of employment. Shildrick, et al. (2012) argues that a lack of demand for male manual labour explains male economic inactivity and unemployment. Overall male employment declined from 92% in 1971 to 76% in 2011, while female employment climbed from 53% to 67% (Nixon, 2018). In the 1980s and 1990s, male economic inactivity doubled in Britain, from 8.6% to 15.5% (Nixon, 2018). The increase of economically inactive men also occurred alongside hidden unemployment (Nixon, 2018). Grint and Nixon (2015) found that women outnumbered males in critical low-level occupations such as caring, leisure, and other services and sales and customer service.

Nixon (2018) argued that service sector job growth has not reduced high unemployment and economic inactivity among low-skilled and poorly educated younger men (Nixon, 2018). Prior to the 2008 GFC, Furlong and Cartmel (2004) found that their young male sample were neither workshy nor unemployable but "many were effectively locked out of the segments of the labour market that offer opportunities for secure employment, career development and a decent quality of life" (p.2). They found many young men faced barriers to integration which necessitated resilience in the labour market, as they became trapped in precarious positions.

Roberts (2018) argues that much of the literature of young men demonstrate "how locality, heritage and identity intersect and interact" (p.30). He adds that

deindustrialisation and de-traditionalisation of local economies has not changed the ways in which masculinity is “performed and socially reproduced” (p.30). However, Roberts notes that studies on young men had failed to investigate their views of ‘feminised’ service work despite claiming the low-level service economy was incompatible with their masculinity. Furlong and Cartmel (2004) found that women could access jobs easier than men in local labour markets such as Glasgow. They found that there was a higher demand for female workers in low-skill service occupations. This was a contributing factor for the long-term unemployment of young men, particularly those with only basic qualifications (p.19). Another problem facing young men was the type of work they searched for while unemployed “were often seeking full-time unskilled manufacturing or labouring jobs: jobs that had been in decline for some time” (p.21). McDowell (2003), on the other hand, found that young men accepted service roles due to a lack of alternative choices.

Declining industries are particularly evident in Glasgow and Liverpool where many young men have become trapped in cycles of unemployment and precarious forms of employment (Gibb, Osland and Pryce, 2013; Mulhearn and Franco, 2018). Insecure and informal work adopted by employers explains why some young men struggle to leave unemployment behind them, especially those with basic qualifications who are more vulnerable to these employment practices (e.g. Furlong and Cartmel, 2004; Hardgrove, McDowell and Rootham, 2015). Many young men were in weak positions because of a mismatch between patterns of labour demand in the service economy and the sort of jobs desired by young men. However, as this review has discovered, the attitudinal deficit narrative does not fully explain the reasons why young men experience labour market marginalisation (Roberts, 2018). The deficit narrative apparent in studies of young men and masculinities is critically examined in the following section.

### **2.6.3 Masculinity: a deficit category?**

The rejection of the masculine/feminine binary, which held that men’s actions were determined by their gender, originates from the idea of sex role theory that men learn how to be men rather than being solely influenced by biology (Beasley, 2012; Roberts, 2018). Raewyn Connell (1987) extended the discussion by arguing that sex role theory conceived of deviations from gendered roles as a

failure of the socialisation process which assumed a normality of what men ought to be (Roberts, 2018). Connell (1987) proceeded to offer a conceptualisation of masculinity as relational and plural, which moved on from a fixed idea of masculinity towards “different ways of enacting manhood, different ways of being a man” (Connell, 2000, p.10).

Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity explained how inequalities are “produced, maintained and, contested” within a social hierarchy and how power disparities within these pluralised masculinities exist (Roberts, 2018, p.45). It identifies how the stoic, dominant and controlling male archetype “serves to subordinate and marginalise other masculinities, and ultimately legitimates unequal gender relations between men and women” (Roberts, 2018, p.46). Messerschmidt (2016) argues that the source of power inequalities between men arises when subordinate men are unable to employ traditional masculine characteristics. This is a sentiment echoed by Edley (2017) who posits that most men are unable to perform hegemonic masculinity. Thus, the hegemonic process legitimates men’s subordinate and marginalised status who are nonetheless complicit in the process (Connell, 1995). However, criticisms exist of Connell’s Hegemonic Masculinity Theory (HMT). On the surface, it has been argued that terms such as hegemony and complicity are vague (McCormack, 2012) and vary according to time, place and context (Aboim, 2010). Moreover, HMT risks the development of homogenised typologies of dominant and subordinate men without discussing the hegemony of the supposed group of dominant men (Beasley, 2012).

Demetriou (2001) moves the discussion away from violence, control, domination and oppression of hegemonic masculinity towards the manifestation of non-hegemonic masculinities. Demetriou argues that the masculine typology of the hegemon assumed by Connell is not fixed but rather “in a state of constant hybridisation” (Roberts, 2018, p.49). As such, this hegemonic bloc, as Demetriou puts it, may be a positive form of masculinity in the instances where it attempts to incorporate rather than marginalise. What Demetriou argues is that HMT fails to conceptualise the potential for positive social change and changes in masculinities (Demetriou, 2001). However, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) contended that hybrid masculinities are merely transformations of hegemonic

masculinity and social change in this sense is a “top-down reconfiguration and fortification of existing power relations” (Roberts, 2018, p.49).

On the other hand, Whitehead (2002) warns that HMT becomes a symbol for male dominance, with a gender hierarchy that is consumed by “the systematic pursuit of power by heterosexual men” (p.95). The trouble with HMT, then, is that it assumes power relations in reductionist ways that overlooks or obscures the individual’s place in history (Whitehead, 2002). In this sense, Roberts (2018) argues that Connell offers little room for the potential of resistance at individual or collective levels as it proposes a hegemon that cannot be overcome, which he suggests is at odds with the concept of hegemony formulated by Gramsci. Howson (2006), in drawing on the tools provided by Gramsci, provides a tripartite model of hegemony, consisting of detached, dominate and aspirational hegemonies. Howson identifies Connell’s HMT as *dominate hegemony* as it assumes that the hegemon reproduces existing power relations.

The studies of young men discussed in this chapter (e.g. McDowell, Nixon, Ward) provide insights into a “falsely homogeneous and universalised masculinity” (Segal, 2007, p.xxxi) that had argued young men were resistant to learning and reluctant to engagement with employment in a service sector dominated labour market. These studies had attributed young men’s economic marginalisation as resulting from the performances of an archetypical masculinity that was inclined to industrial jobs where men could exhibit toughness, stoicism, and the need to re-work male superiority in a pursuit of power (Roberts, 2018). Although Connell claims that HMT does not predict men’s actions, Moller (2007) argues that it reduces masculinity to a logic of domination which encourages researchers to be selective in identifying abuses of power. Roberts (2018) is concerned that it is this approach that has dominated research on working class men and has presented them as “adherents of the model of masculinity ... where dominance and toughness, homophobia and heterosexism are all essential to men’s gender identity” (p.52). Roberts (2018) argues that the danger emanating from researchers who are informed by HMT is that they may be reluctant to “acknowledge change as anything other than a buttress of male dominance. Such selective accounts are in danger of framing masculinity as a deficit category” (p.53). Duncanson (2015) captures this problem by arguing that HMT overlooks

signs of progressive change, she continues “the risk is that we come to our analysis of gender relations with a framework within which progressive change cannot be conceptualized” (p.240).

Eric Anderson’s Inclusive Masculinity Theory (IMT) contends that out-with the masculinities of the main power-holding elites there have been “changing patterns of gender behaviour, particularly among ordinary boys and young men in the West” (Roberts, 2018, p.54). Roberts (2018) draws attention to changes in social behaviours, consumption and employment attitudes. Anderson (2009) argues that the masculine characteristics in HMT, such as misogyny, overt heterosexuality and emotional restraint are less prominent with more recent young male cohorts. Anderson (2011) argues that the culture of condemning homosexuality or men’s femininity, *homohysteria* as Anderson describes it, has declined in Western culture.

Thus, the need for men to be seen as aligning their behaviours with heterosexual masculinity and refraining from what might be regarded as feminine has slowly eroded (McCormack and Anderson, 2014). As such, Anderson (2009) argues that HMT is inadequate in theorising contemporary masculinities, and it is IMT that provides the explanatory power to sufficiently conceptualise men’s “attitudes and gendered behaviour that undermine the values of orthodox masculinity” (Roberts, 2018, p.56). McCormack (2012) suggests that the erosion of *homohysteria* has altered the construction of masculinities. For Anderson (2011), multiple masculinities co-exist within IMT in which they are neither behaviours differentiated from women nor hegemonic as they do not seek to “dominate, marginalise or subordinate any of the other masculinities within a given culture” (Roberts, 2018, p.56). So, while Connell argues that the feminisation of subordinate groups of men is embedded within hegemonic masculinity, of which men must exhibit performances that disparage archetypical feminine attributes, Anderson’s IMT allows for multiple masculinities to co-exist that do not consist of the characteristics formulated within hegemonic masculinity.

## 2.7 Conclusion and main research question

The disappearance of ‘traditional’ masculine industries which were a major employer of men and industrial shifts to a knowledge and service economy, have been suggested to disadvantage young working-class men when trying to access employment in ex-industrial cities such as Glasgow and Liverpool (Alcock, et al, 2003; McDowell, 2020). Young men in the contemporary youth labour market face barriers to integration and many struggle to escape the trap of un(der)employment despite engaging with higher education, vocational education and government training schemes (Hardgrove, McDowell and Rootham, 2015).

However, the literature has shown that young men have not been the predominate empirical focus of studies covering longer-term shifts in labour market opportunities (Raynor, 2017). Roberts (2018) highlighted that the research which does exist has focussed on young men’s *attitudes* towards service employment, not their actual lived *experiences*. There is thus an absence of research focussing on the experiences of young men who were employed or aspired to be employed in the contemporary ‘service’ economy (Nickson and Korczynski, 2009; Roberts, 2018). One of the themes emerging from studies of young men to date have depicted young working-class men as immutable and unchanging which has them as “constrained by the tradition of embedded masculine heritage” that Roberts (2018) argues distils into a “largely negative set of traits” (p.33). While McDowell (2020) acknowledges that there has been a long-standing demonisation of ‘undeserving’ working-class men, much of the literature on young men has focussed on negative attitudes towards feminised service sectors, portraying a version of masculinity in deficit (e.g. McDowell, 2020; Bonner-Thompson and Nayak, 2021; Nixon, 2018; Hardgrove, McDowell and Rootham, 2015).

The body of literature has shifted from masculine disadvantage to a story of negative masculine traits to explain exclusion from secure employment (McDowell, 2020; McDowell, Bonner-Thompson and Harris, 2022). In this sense structural inequalities may have been masked by rhetorical constructions in which research has documented young men may blame themselves for unsuccessful education and labour market outcomes (McDowell, Bonner-

Thompson, and Harris, 2022). Other research indicates it is not young men's behaviours or attitudes that are preventing them from escaping cycles of precarious employment and unemployment but rather the lack of access to public and private sector training and development (Furlong and Cartmel, 2004; Hardgrove, McDowell and Rootham, 2015).

Overall, mainstream accounts of young men have often smeared men as dangerous, unworthy and undeserving (Dunn, 2014; McDowell, 2020). However, the majority are relatively blameless for experiencing a labour market characterised by insecure employment (McDowell, Bonner-Thompson and Harris, 2022). Their negative portrayal reflects a neoliberal pattern of pinning the blame on the individual for poverty and unemployment while the state rolls back responsibility (Reeve, 2017). Young men in modern Britain experience profound challenges to avoid poor work and unemployment (McDowell, 2020) and deadweight government mandated training schemes (Shildrick, et al, 2012; Keep, 2019a), particularly those with low-level skills and qualifications (Nixon, 2018) and increasingly those in the middle class too (Avis and Atkins, 2017). Roberts (2018) also pointed out many of the rituals and attitudes ascribed to young working-class men in the literature also occur in the middle-class but is less researched.

Considering the above circumstances young men are facing that were identified in this review of the literature, the following research question emerged as necessary to understanding the experiences of young men in the current context. As such the primary research question that guides this research is:

What are young men's employment experiences of postindustrial labour markets in Glasgow and Liverpool?

As referred to at various points throughout this chapter, the next chapter reviews the skills and labour market policies in the UK, Scotland, Liverpool and Glasgow.



## Chapter 3 Skills and Labour Market Policies in the UK and Scotland

### 3.1 Introduction

The United Kingdom (UK) experienced economic restructuring in the post-war period which was facilitated by the globalisation of production (Nixon, 2018). From the 1980s onwards, former British industrial powerhouses such as Glasgow and Liverpool saw widespread jobs losses in traditional industries due to this process of deindustrialisation (McDowell, 2020). While those industries were replaced by the knowledge/service economy, the contemporary youth labour market has been characterised by temporary, precarious forms of employment and high unemployment rates (Bessant, Farthing and Watts, 2017). Although the 2008 Great Financial Crisis (GFC) has been used to explain the cause of recent labour market precarity, which has allegedly created a *Precariat* class-in-the-making (e.g. Standing, 2011), it has been suggested by other scholars that the causes of these current conditions have followed a similar pattern since deindustrialisation and are thus a manifestation of longer term social processes of which the financial meltdown was merely a symptom (Furlong, et al, 2018; Goodwin and Hughes, 2011).

The period following UK prime minister Margaret Thatcher and US president Ronald Reagan's neoliberal shift in the 1980s intensified the attack on traditional industries and the outsourcing of production (Furlong, et al, 2018), and it also began the change in how social security and welfare were conceived (Crisp and Powell, 2017). While welfare was originally a safety net for those involuntarily out of work, the embrace of neoliberal ideology by the UK government has reframed the unemployed as making a deliberate 'lifestyle choice' (Patrick, 2017). This sentiment has not been limited to welfare, as this chapter will show, and it has informed government approaches to education, skills and training policies in both Scotland and England, although some differences exist.

As this research is about the experiences of young men's education and employment experiences in Glasgow and Liverpool, the focus of this chapter is to review recent skills and labour market policies from Scotland and England. It

should be noted that while Scotland and England are two different nations, they are both member countries of the United Kingdom sovereign state. However, for the purposes of this review, policies relating to Glasgow and Scotland are reviewed under the Scottish policy context as they relate to the powers of the devolved Scottish government, and policies relating to Liverpool are discussed under the UK policy context. It should also be acknowledged that while the Scottish government has devolved powers, the UK government is responsible for what are regarded as reserved powers which extend to both Glasgow and Liverpool. While Liverpool only has one national government (the UK government), Glasgow has two governments, namely the Scottish and UK governments (DfS, 2023). At the regional level, both Liverpool and Glasgow city regions have local council authorities who are responsible for managing the city region deals which are also analysed in this chapter.

Education and labour market policies in Scotland are regarded as being ideologically divergent from the UK government (e.g. Hodgson and Spours, 2016; Keep, 2019b; Arnott and Ozga, 2016). However, a growing body of literature argues that there is a significant overlap between both governments' policies (e.g. McPherson, 2021; Tijmstra, 2009; Mooney and Scott, 2012; Mackie and Tett, 2013; Valiente, Lowden and Capsada-Munsech, 2020). These arguments are discussed in this chapter. There are three main sections in the body of this chapter. Sections 3.2 and 3.3 describe the policies being reviewed including the promises, themes, narratives and rhetoric underpinning skills and labour market policies. Section 3.4 critically analyses the policies in Scotland and England. It discusses where there are differences in policy approaches, and where both may be following a broadly similar, neoliberal path.

## **3.2 The policies reviewed: Some key promises**

In order to identify how the UK and Scottish governments have recognised youth unemployment and underemployment, and the policy approaches to facilitating sustainable education to employment transitions, this section introduces the policies that are selected for analysis. The policies included for review were selected prior to when the qualitative interviews were conducted in 2020 for this

research. However, although the period of analysis in the quantitative data is 2016-2020, with the awareness of the need for understanding of the impact of longer-term social processes on the present (Elias, 2006; Goodwin and Hughes, 2011), national policies dating back to 2006 were included alongside discussion of historical policy pathways (e.g. deindustrialisation).

At the UK level, the 2017 *Industrial Strategy* (HM Government, 2017) was introduced to address longstanding productivity stagnation and drive economic growth through measures aimed at increasing productivity levels (Green, et al, 2018). In formulating the Industrial Strategy, the government consulted over 2000 companies in the industry and business sectors. The proposed measures included raising investment in research and development; increasing investment in skills, physical and digital infrastructures; and aimed to develop sector deals and promote local industrial strategies in devolved administrations and combined authorities (Green, et al, 2018).

Places, as one out of the five foundations of the Industrial Strategy, aimed to provide the opportunity for local level regions to adjust the policy aims based on their local context and needs (HM Government, 2017). The place-based foundation of the Industrial Strategy was based on the premise that local authorities are better able to make decisions that best drive local economic growth (McEwan, 2017). As such, city regions such as Glasgow and Liverpool were provided greater powers to deliver the Industrial Strategy at the local level (Fai, 2018). The next section of this chapter explores the promises of the Industrial Strategy and how the Glasgow and Liverpool City Region Deal(s) pledged to achieve those aims (GCR, 2017a; 2017b; 2017c; 2019; LCR, 2018a; 2018b; 2018c; 2019). From the above policies, at the UK, national and regional levels, the analysis identifies three key promises relevant to this research as they relate to education and employment. Those three promises are first, the creation of more jobs; second, the increase of technical and vocational education opportunities; and third, and the growth of businesses.

### **3.2.1 More jobs and better pay**

The first promise identified was the creation of more jobs and better pay. All policies assure their support for young people in their transition from education

to the labour market by developing greater job opportunities with improved conditions. This was evident in the Industrial Strategy and also appeared in the local deals for the Glasgow City Region (GCR) and Liverpool City Region (LCR). The success of the 2017 Industrial Strategy invited testing in relation to the high-quality employment and increased income it promised to create across the UK:

The real test of a successful strategy is the consequences it has for the lives of our fellow citizens. That must mean more good jobs and better pay. We are committed to high quality jobs for all UK citizens ... This strategy is our long-term plan to ensure that people in all parts of the UK are able to lead fulfilling and prosperous lives (HM Government, 2017, p.29)

The inclusive promises in the strategy was to be extended to all, with everyone pledged to be part of a potential wage increase resulting from growth in all parts of the UK:

The ambition of our Industrial Strategy is to build a Britain fit for the future, a country confident and outward-looking, as we work together to increase productivity and earning power for everyone (HM Government, 2017, p.243)

The Scottish Government promised to create more jobs and attract inward investment in the Glasgow economy:

Regional partners estimate that over its lifetime, the deal will deliver around 29,000 jobs and attract around £3.3 billion of private sector investment (Scottish Government, 2017)

The Glasgow City Region website outlined its promise to create more jobs and new businesses:

Working together, the group is targeting 100,000 extra jobs; 6,500 new businesses, and big improvements in qualifications, training and skills (GCR, 2017a)

A later update of the GCR Deal outlined its key pledges to:

Support an additional overall increase of around 29,000 jobs ... Work with 19,000 unemployed residents and support over 5,500 back into sustained employment ... Create 15,000 construction jobs ... Spread the benefits of economic growth across the Region (GCR, 2019, p.5)

The Industrial Strategy and the Glasgow and Liverpool City Region Deal(s) not only promised to create more jobs, but the types of jobs created were to be sustainable and would also help those out of work into employment. Alongside investment in the creation of more jobs was specific work-related training.

### **3.2.2 Expansion of vocational education opportunities**

The second major promise identified centres on the expansion of technical education. The national and regional policies pledged to ensure that technical education was held in the same esteem as academic education, and to address areas where there were skills shortages. Investments included a promised £500million per year in the Industrial Strategy for the new T-Level qualification which is the technical education equivalent of A-Level (HM Government, 2017). The Industrial Strategy proposed to investment in skills development, including technical education such as Apprenticeships and T Level qualifications:

We will ensure that everyone can improve their skills throughout their lives, increasing their earning power and opportunities for better jobs ... We are committed to delivering three million apprenticeship starts by 2020 ... We will put technical education on the same footing as our academic system, with apprenticeships and qualifications such as T levels (HM Government, 2017, p.94)

In the second foundation of the Industrial Strategy, namely People, around 50,000 people have entered higher-level apprenticeships as the government aims to improve the skills of the workforce (Exemplas, 2018). Alongside the promise of jobs creation, the *Liverpool City Region Deal* promised to achieve specific apprenticeship targets:

By 2020, we will have created 9000 jobs and 5500 apprenticeships for local people (LCR, 2018b)

Our aspiration is to deliver 20,000 apprenticeships per annum by 2020 (LCR, 2018c, p.4)

The LCR Deal referred to the skills mismatch and set out aims to stimulate employer demand for apprenticeships, support more young people to enter apprenticeships and provide support for their delivery:

Too many employers still do not understand or engage with apprenticeships ... 16-18 apprenticeship numbers are falling ... There is a current misalignment between employer demand and provider supply. A technical skills gap still exists between LCR compared to national qualification averages ... Local skills system is complex & fragmented (LCR, 2018c, p.26)

The Glasgow City Region Deal made similar commitments to increasing apprenticeship opportunities:

“To tackle youth unemployment and contribute towards the Scottish Government’s Delivering Young Workforce Strategy, we will work towards a guarantee that provides every young person 16-24 years old a job, training or an apprenticeship” (GCR, 2017c, p.8)

The proposed new jobs promised in the GCR Deal would reach every area alongside skills development:

we are absolutely united in our determination to aim higher on jobs, skills and growth that benefits every community ... Only by working together will we build a more resilient and dynamic city region that delivers homes and jobs for a skilled workforce and prosperity for all its people (GCR, 2017a)

Investment in people is a key section in the Industrial Strategy after issues were identified that the UK did not have enough people skilled in STEM subjects. The idea was to create training opportunities for people to improve their skills so that they were equipped with the necessary skills for next generation technology jobs. Under these policy plans, technical education was to be put on the same footing as academic qualifications through the creation of new T-levels and apprenticeships. STEM subject training would receive additional investment alongside plans to address regional disparities in education and skills levels and barriers that prevent under-represented groups entering training for certain sectors. According to the White Paper, this required closer collaboration between training providers and businesses to target specific local skills needs and would be enhanced by the introduction of digital skills training, including digital T Levels and digital apprenticeships to meet the demand for jobs requiring digital skills (HM Government, 2017).

### 3.2.3 Support the growth of businesses

The third key promise was to support the growth of businesses. Within the fourth foundation of the Industrial Strategy, namely Business Environment, the UK government promised to provide a £20 billion action plan to support high-growth potential businesses which would help in raising total UK exports from 30% to 35% of GDP by 2027 (HM Government, 2017). The local industrial strategies found in the aforementioned fifth foundation 'Places,' would support local growth (Exemplas, 2018).

The Industrial Strategy stated that its role was to move away from the traditional model of intervening in the economy through "nationalising, subsidising and directing large parts of the economy" (p.165) and claims the role of the government is not to subsidise or protect favourites but instead to create a competitive environment in which the best businesses can thrive where "anyone with a good idea and the entrepreneurial ambition" can do business in the UK (HM Government, 2017, p.165). For those who were not employees, self-employment was actively encouraged in the Industrial Strategy as Britain would become "the best place to start and grow a business" (HM Government, 2017, p.10) including in areas regarded as left behind:

It will increase the ability for start-up businesses outside London ...  
Enhancing the business environment locally is a key objective in our  
push for further devolution (HM Government, 2017, p.168)

The GCR Deal emphasised the creation of more jobs and an increase in business start-ups:

This is an ambitious long term strategy that will help to drive  
economic growth and create thousands of jobs in the City Region ...  
The Action Plan sets out a clear ambition across the region to create  
thousands of jobs, increase the business base, and provide support to  
entrepreneurs and start-ups to help them develop and succeed (GCR,  
2017a)

The Glasgow City Region Economic Strategy emphasised its commitment to business start-ups and entrepreneurship:

To build on the Glasgow Economic Leadership Board, with new  
structure reflecting the themes of the City and provide a focus on

business growth and sustainability, promoting entrepreneurship, and link with the sustainability and smart cities agendas (GCR, 2017b, p. 36)

The Industrial Strategy aimed to close the productivity gap between the UK and its competitor countries. A theme of the Industrial Strategy was to make the economy ‘work for everyone’ and improve the earnings of employees (HM Government, 2017; ONS, 2017). Although the Industrial Strategy aimed to improve productivity levels to spur economic growth, it was unclear whether increasing the value of production would tackle issues related to in-work poverty and household poverty for employees in low-paid sectors (Tinson, et al. 2017; Sissons, et al. 2017; Blundell, et al. 2014). The 2020 Marmot Report concluded that in-work poverty had increased in the UK, and income levels have not recovered to pre-2010 levels (Marmot, 2020). Forth, Innes and Rincon-Aznar (2018) found that productivity growth and income levels in the lowest paying sectors were not addressed in the Industrial Strategy. Only one of the twelve sector deals was for a low-wage sector (tourism) and the two largest low-wage sectors, namely retail and administrative and support services, did not receive sector deals. Riley, Rincon-Aznar and Semak (2018) argue this reflected the prioritisation on high-value sectors in the strategy.

### **3.2.4 Policy implementation**

A number of issues were raised in the literature regarding both the policy and implementation processes of the apprenticeship model and levy. The key stakeholders involved had expressed concern over the complexity and uncertainty surrounding the new model (Hodgson, Spours and Smith, 2017). This is combined with uncertainty from numerous factors including: the difference between theory and practice; potentiality of conflicts between standards; conflicts of interests between small, medium and large employers; a lack of labour market data informing decisions, including areas of skills gaps and mismatches (Hodgson, Spours and Smith, 2017).

There were also concerns that the apprenticeship model would benefit certain types of organisations over others. For example, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) had voiced concerns that the development of skills and standards within the model were underpinned by corporate values and focussed



on higher skills as they were designed by large employers despite SMEs being the majority providers of apprenticeship places (Hodgson, Spours and Smith, 2017). This casted doubts over the returns for SMEs from their investments, which represented a potential cause for the skills mismatch to be perpetuated. It was predicted in the literature that these problems would have impacted participation levels as around 99% of firms in the UK are classified as small (Hodgson, Spours and Smith, 2017; Bernick, Davies and Valero, 2017). As of 2023, it is reported that employers in England had collectively lost more than £3.3bn in unspent apprenticeship levy funds (Moules, 2023). These funds were surrendered by employers who were unable to use the money to invest in workplace training, suggesting a weakness in the system in which employers and apprentices have struggled to navigate. Rather than encouraging increased training provision, there has been a 72% drop in entry-level apprenticeships and 59% drop in all apprenticeships in England, representing declining apprenticeship numbers since the levy was introduced (Moules, 2023). Young people were promised increased opportunities to access “high-paid, high-skilled jobs of the future” that were promised to be created from conditions that foster successful businesses to emerge (HM Government, 2017, p.1). The now defunct Industrial Strategy had promised to develop skills in young people and help businesses to invest in innovation and training. It identified key industries of strategic importance and strengthening ties between government and industry and claimed it would “propel Britain to global leadership of the industries of the future” (HM Government, 2017, p.1).

However, while employment rates have risen since 2010, this includes those employed in zero-hour contracts, part-time and temporary jobs (Marmot, 2020). For Furlong, et al. (2018), this broad definition of employment works to mask labour market marginalisation particularly for young people who are most likely to be employed in these non-standard jobs. The Industrial Strategy itself had boasted that the UK’s flexible labour force had helped the UK to reduce unemployment levels since the GFC (HM Government, 2017). It can be seen the UK and Scottish governments and local authorities in Liverpool and Glasgow had similar aims to create more jobs and businesses, provide opportunities to develop employable skills and foster economic growth. Although analysis of the policies in this section has found that while employment rates may have risen,

this has been facilitated by the flexible nature of the UK labour market. Further, while the apprenticeship system has expanded in Scotland, and apprenticeship outcomes are generally strong, the OECD (2020) review *Strengthening skills in Scotland* suggests that there are improvements to be made in terms of its flexibility, responsiveness and quality of provision. This is reflected in the *Young Person's Guarantee*, in response to the Covid19 pandemic, which included aims to increase apprenticeship starts and encourage employers to lead training provision (Scottish Government, 2021). However, the apprenticeship levy has been widely regarded as a failure in England, which has seen declining apprenticeship uptakes since its inception and the funds extracted from employers have gone largely unused due to the complexity of the system (Moules, 2023).

The next section looks at the arguments in the literature discussing the discourses within the skills policies in Scotland and England. Furthering these arguments, the proceeding critical review analyses additional excerpts from the policy documents as they relate to the focus of this research on young men and young people's experience of skills, education and labour market policies.

### **3.3 Key aims of skills and education policies**

In reviewing policies that relate to Glasgow, this section reviews Scotland's *More Choices, More Chances* (Scottish Executive, 2006) and *Developing the Young Workforce* (Scottish Government, 2014a) both key policies as they highlight the shift from the skills utilisation approach to the employability approach following the 2008 financial meltdown and subsequent austerity policies in the UK.

Looking at policies that relate to Liverpool, the UK's *Positive for Youth* (HM Government, 2011b); *Post-16 Skills Plan* (DBIS, 2016a); and the *Technical Education Reform* (DBIS, 2016b) applied to all English cities including Liverpool. These policies are analysed alongside the Scottish policies to compare and contrast the broad aims as they relate to education, training and employment, how those aims were to be achieved. A range of policy documents were analysed alongside these policies to explore the narratives and rhetoric identified; they are listed in [Appendix 1: Policies Reviewed](#).

Following a review of the existing literature on skills and education policies four themes were identified, namely the supply of skills; the demand for skills; youth at risk; and unemployment (welfare policies).

### 3.3.1 Employability: Increasing the supply of skills

The Scottish Government indicated prior to the 2008 GFC that the supply of skills was not enough on its own to improve employment and that the demand for skills was also important, described by Valiente, Lowden and Capsada-Munsech (2020) as a *skills utilisation approach*:

Simply adding more skills to the workforce will not secure the full benefit for our economy unless employers and individuals maximise the benefits that they can derive from these skills ... We need to move beyond a focus on meeting the current demand for skills and tackle the issues which underlie and drive demand. We need the skills to facilitate sustainable economic growth but we also need our firms to be ambitious and demanding users of skills (Scottish Government, 2007, p.13)

Valiente, Lowden and Capsada-Munsech (2020) argue however that the effects of the 2008 financial meltdown resulted in a watering down of this approach which it used to justify funding cuts. As the skills utilisation approach required long-term commitments and investment, an *employability approach* offered quicker solutions to youth unemployment.

Valiente, Lowden and Capsada-Munsech (2020) argue that this updated policy approach was simply to get young people into employment rather than improving the quality of employment and demand. These changes are reflected in cuts made by the Scottish National Party (SNP) government to adult education and scaling back of adult education (McMurray, 2017), and a refocussing on employability in education:

Clearly there are other purposes to education, but we must recognize the difficult economic circumstances we face, with unemployment, and youth unemployment in particular, significantly higher than pre-recession levels. Moreover, we face unprecedented reductions in public expenditure (Scottish Government, 2011b, p.6)

The Scottish Government's *Developing the Young Workforce* policy proposed that vocational education needed to be improved to protect young people from unemployment (Scottish Government, 2014a; Valiente, Lowden and Capsada-

Munsech, 2020). The Glasgow City Region Economic Action Plan also aimed to reduce unemployment and guaranteed every young person a job, training or apprenticeship

To tackle youth unemployment and contribute towards the Scottish Government's Delivering Young Workforce Strategy, we will work towards a guarantee that provides every young person 16-24 years old a job, training or an apprenticeship (GCR, 2017c, p.8)

The LCR Deal suggested that apprenticeships provided alternative educational pathways to secure careers and young people should be made more aware of opportunities that existed:

we need to ensure consistency in the way the apprenticeship route is promoted to young people as for many students this would provide a more effective and less costly way to achieve their career aspirations (LCR, 2018c, p. 18)

McPherson (2021) and Mok and Neubauer (2016) argue the supply-skills orthodoxy was propagated by narratives of skills shortages in the UK and Scotland, as seen in the UK's *Post-16 Skills Plan*:

We face a major challenge: the pressing need for more highly skilled people, trained effectively, to grow the economy and raise productivity...We need young people and adults to have the skills and knowledge that better equip them for employment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in order to meet the demands of the future (DBIS, 2016a, p.10)

Young people's labour market liminality and marginalisation is framed by the SNP government as a problem of the individual's employability, resonating with the rhetoric emanating from Westminster

The Review has highlighted the need for additional focus on employability ... This is central to our approach to education as we continue efforts to develop the workforce the economy requires (Scottish Government 2018, p.14)

Valiente, Lowden and Capsada-Munsech (2020) argue that the Scottish Government has blamed youth unemployment on a skills crisis, framing it as an individual deficiency (McPherson, 2021). The Scottish Government proposed that education should be more industry facing and should enhance young people's employability, also evident in the UK government's *Post-16 Skills Plan*:

A shift is clearly underway from purely the provision of learning to more focus on employability and skills required to meet market

demand... This trend must continue... There should be a continuum from primary school right through into employment (Scottish Government, 2014b, p.4)

Employers, large and small, will sit at the heart of a dynamic skills system to ensure the day-to-day training and education that individuals receive genuinely meet the needs of industry (DBIS, 2016b, p.12)

The above policies frame young people's labour market marginalisation as a problem of employability. Furthermore, the shift from the skills utilisation to the employability approach that occurred in response to austerity following the GFC appeared in both Glasgow and Liverpool City Region Deal(s) (GCR, 2017c; LCR, 2018c). This can be traced to the UK and Scottish policies (e.g. DBIS, 2016a; Scottish Government, 2014b; 2018) that pushed the supply of skills which was underpinned by a skills shortage narrative (McPherson, 2021). Thus, both UK and Scottish governments emphasised the importance of developing the employability of young people to meet market demand. The next section looks at the rise in importance of demand side factors in policy.

### **3.3.2 The needs of employers**

The *Life Chances of Young People in Scotland* report indicated that the skills system in Scotland was not doing enough to foster engagement between employers, learners and skills providers:

The Institute for Public Policy Research Scotland has argued that the skills system in Scotland is not well matched to current or future labour market demand, suggesting this is due to inadequate engagement between employers, learners and skills providers. To respond to this challenge, schools are developing and strengthening links with employers to make transitions into work as smooth as possible but also, crucially, to make sure skills gaps are recognised early and can be plugged by schools (Eisenstadt, 2017, p.11)

Skills shortages were also of concern in the *Post-16 Skills Plan* that said they had been problematic for several years

Employers have also reported concerns about their current and future ability to recruit high-skilled employees, and many fear the impact of

a continued shortage, particularly in engineering and manufacturing (DBIS, 2016b, p.14)

Specialist skills such as complex problem-solving and complex numerical/statistical skills were reported by employers to be in shortage. These skills were clearly described as being a priority labour market need

These skills underpin innovation and adaptation, both of which are of great importance to success in a flexible, globally-competitive economy and are major contributors to productivity (DBIS, 2016b, p.15)

While the paper recognised the importance of employer engagement and investment in training “Employer investment and engagement in technical education is important to improving the skills of the workforce and consequently raising productivity” the paper also noted that there was a lack of employer led training provision “it is clear that employers are currently not involved enough in the education and training of young people” (DBIS, 2016b, p.15). Indicating a shift towards demand side factors over supply side orthodoxy the paper stated:

Increasing the level of employer engagement with training and development is a central plank of the reform process. By getting employers more involved in both the design and delivery of training, the reforms will reinforce the value of training to employers, while also ensuring that the education system delivers the skills employers need (DBIS, 2016b, p.17)

It was up to the education system to ensure employers requirements are satisfied and that they have access to suitably qualified and flexible workers

The education and training system will need to develop workers with suitable skills to meet the demand from new and changing jobs. A more skilled workforce is less expendable, more adaptable to change, and better able to transfer between economic sectors. The proposed reforms will help create a dynamic and flexible workforce, well placed to adapt rapidly to the structural and technological changes in the economy (DBIS, 2016b, p.21)

The plan for colleges in Scotland's youth employment strategy, *Developing the Young Workforce* included improving links between colleges and employers "to deliver learning that is directly relevant to getting a job." It also referred to satisfying employer needs by contributing "to a significant reduction in youth unemployment by ensuring that what is on offer is relevant to labour market needs" (Scottish Government, 2014a, p.15).

The flexibilisation of the individual appeared in several policy documents in Scotland and UK texts. For example

placing a renewed focus and flexibility around the skills required to accelerate economic recovery and to sustain a growing, successful country with opportunities for all (Scottish Government 2010, p.9)

A flexible skills system is required to respond to these challenges and ensure there is the right mix of skills in the workforce to respond to labour market demands and support economic growth (Scottish Government 2010, p.14)

In *The Government Economic Strategy* (Scottish Government, 2011a) importance of employment flexibility and development of skills for its economic subjects was emphasised:

Learning, living and working in today's economy requires young people to be flexible, adaptable and to have the on-going capacity to develop knowledge and skills. This investment in our young people is essential for the future growth of our economy (Scottish Government, 2011a, p.61)

Valiente, Lowden and Capsada-Munsech (2020) argue that these narratives imply young people's responsibility to engage in continual education according to the needs of employers. The UK's *Industrial Strategy* boasted of its flexible labour market which it claimed to have facilitated "near record employment rates" (HM Government, 2017, p.20). The strategy also claimed low productivity rates were the cause of wage stagnation and low living standards. It follows the narrative promoted in various government policies that upskilling would lead to economic growth and economic prosperity, which had been negatively affected by individual deficits.

The *Technical education reform: the case for change* paper linked the UK's skills deficit to poor productivity levels to justify its focus on the supply of skills to the labour market. Referring to OECD estimates, it equated an increase in skills with economic growth

If all young people in the UK acquired basic skills by 2030, then by 2095 the UK economy would be 13% larger than would be expected with the current labour force. In monetary terms, this equates to 3.65 trillion US dollars (143% of current UK Gross Domestic Product (GDP)) (DBIS, 2016b, p.12)

The paper argued that the UK was suffering from a skills deficit: “our current skills system is failing to fully meet the country’s needs across a range of skills” (p.13). It attributed the UK’s poor productivity squarely on the individual’s basic skills “Without these abilities, it is unlikely that an employee is working productively” (DBIS, 2016b, p.13). The necessity of lifelong learning apparent in the plan:

Young people need to be prepared to retrain throughout their working lives as they change careers and demand for skills changes. Changes in employment patterns are placing greater responsibility for training onto individuals rather than employers (DBIS, 2016b, p.21)

The needs of employers at least are covered in the *Life Chances of Young People in Scotland* report (Eisenstadt, 2017), *Developing the Young Workforce* (Scottish Government, 2014a), *The Government Economic Strategy* (Scottish Government, 2011a), the UK’s *Post-16 Skills Plan* (DBIS, 2016b), and the *Industrial Strategy* (HM Government, 2017). Their needs include the facilitation of engagement between employers, learners and skills providers; addressing skills shortages and recruitment of high-skill workers; the prioritisation of specialist skills; increasing employer engagement with training provision and the flexibilisation of labour. The position of young people in these policies, therefore, views them as increasingly responsible for lifelong learning to ensure they adapt to changing economic patterns. From an early age, young people not heading for employment, education or training were profiled as ‘at risk.’



### 3.3.3 Youth at risk

The Lib-Con Coalition's *Building Engagement, Building Futures* policy (HM Government, 2011a) spoke of youth at risk "Partly as a result of lower levels of attainment, disadvantaged groups of young people are at significantly greater risk of becoming NEET" (p.13). It emphasised the importance of supplying skills to reduce unemployment:

We must ensure that young people are able to make a successful transition into work. That is why we are focused on ensuring that all young people reach the age of 18 with the skills they need (HM Government, 2011a, p.14)

The responsabilisation of labour market outcomes on the individual also appears in UK *Positive for Youth* policy:

It is clear that we need to do more to help many young people who are at risk of dropping out of society to develop a much stronger, clearer sense of responsibility and respect for others, real aspirations and pride for themselves (HM Government, 2011b)

McPherson (2021) in her study of NEET (not in education, employment or training) policy in the UK and Scotland observed there were a lack of substantial updates to the UK's youth unemployment strategy since 2011 opting to focus more on technical education (e.g. DBIS, 2016a; 2016b). In Scotland, the government had taken a more proactive approach, for example the youth employment strategy from 2014 onwards (e.g. Scottish Government, 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; 2015a, 2015b; 2018).

McPherson (2021) notes that the NEET term was rejected in Scotland. Referring to the 2007 Cabinet Secretary for Education, Fiona Hyslop, who argued that the NEET term labelled young people and what they needed was 'more choices, more chances' ultimately becoming the name of Scotland's NEET policy that also framed young people at risk:

Out of school hours activities can be effectively targeted to help re-engage and motivate young people at risk of becoming NEET (Scottish Executive, 2006, p.21)

The *More Choices, More Chances* policy (Scottish Executive 2006) assumed that young people, particularly those who were NEET, needed more education to protect them from unemployment and included the social profiling of 'youth at risk' (Valiente, Lowden and Capsada-Munsech, 2020):

The young people experiencing NEET today are more likely to become the economically inactive of tomorrow ... Given that low attainment is a characteristic of this group, it recognises that participating in education and training - rather than employment in jobs without training - is the most effective way of enabling these young people to access and sustain employment opportunities throughout their adult lives (Scottish Executive 2006, p.iii)

The significant findings of *Children Education and Skills* report found that there was a 'scarring effect' on the economic activity of young people who were NEET who were 2.5 times more likely to be unemployed or working in a low status occupation 10 years later. The report cited education as an important risk factor for both males and females and area deprivation was linked with higher NEET rates consistently between 1991, 2001 and 2011 (Scottish Government 2015b).

Valiente, Lowden and Capsada-Munsech (2020) argue successful employment transitions still remained the key indicator of social inclusion and shaped young people to meet the demands of the economy instead of meeting young people's needs and aspirations. They continue

Youth unemployment has been prioritized as the main social problem to be addressed, and most of the limited public resources for LLL have been targeted at youth at risk of unemployment at the expense of broader adult education. SNP governments have taken advantage of the political opportunity offered by the GFC to strengthen the labour market orientation of education provision and impose stringent austerity measures on colleges with little political resistance (p.228)

The individual is charged with individual deficits which are proposed to be rectified by the provision of more opportunity to develop skills and awareness of help and guidance:

This strategy aims to promote equal access to and participation in skills, career information, advice and guidance and learning activities

for everyone. It is intended to promote equality of opportunity to those who face persistent disadvantage and to improve the numbers of people economically active across all groups within society (Scottish Government, 2010, p.6)

The *Life Chances of Young People in Scotland* report to the first minister also referred to youth at risk and emphasised the importance of supplying skills to meet employer demand

those who leave school at the earliest opportunity are at particular risk.... concerns have been raised about whether the skills system in Scotland is sufficiently well matched to current and future labour market demand, raising questions about the prospects for social mobility going forward (Eisenstadt, 2017, p.6)

*Life Chances of Young People in Scotland* report suggested that if young people made better decisions their transitions to employment would be more successful

high quality transitions advice - about work, study, or apprenticeships - at key stages in secondary school and beyond is vital ... Young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds, who are less prepared or supported to make 'good decisions' about post-16 options, are more likely to do poorly in their transitions (Eisenstadt, 2017, p.7)

In Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy (Scottish Government, 2014a), *Developing the Young Workforce* (DYW) schools were tasked with providing guidance on "finding, applying and getting a job" (p.12), deliver mentor support (p.13), enhance the provision of apprenticeships and vocational qualification (p.13-14). The DYW sought to involve several stakeholders in providing access to existing education and employment opportunities:

Key partners such as schools, colleges, local authorities and Skills Development Scotland all have a responsibility to engage with young people, and those who influence them, to ensure they have the right information to make informed choices (Scottish Government, 2014a, p.16)

The importance of vocation education was linked to the 'right' information to make 'informed choices'

To ensure that young people can access the opportunities that are right for them, it is essential that they have a clear and accurate understanding of the value of a vocational education at college and the opportunities this can deliver (Scottish Government, 2014a, p.16)

One of the key aims of the DYW policy was to ensure that

Young people able to access more vocational options during the senior phase of secondary school, which deliver routes into good jobs and careers, developed through effective partnership between schools, colleges, local authorities and other partners (Scottish Government, 2014a, p.17)

Key performance indicators (KPI) of the DYW policy included the reduction of youth unemployment to make Scotland in the top 5 European countries for youth unemployment rates (KPI 1 and 2), increase the percentage of school leavers attaining SCQF level 5 vocational qualifications by 2021 (KPI 3), increase the percentage of young people recruited by employers directly from education by 35% by 2018 (KPI 6) (Scottish Government, 2014a, p.14).

In the UK's Building Engagement, *Building Futures* policy (HM Government, 2011a), *Positive for Youth* (HM Government, 2011b), and Scotland's *More Choices, More Chances* policy (Scottish Executive 2006), *Life Chances of Young People in Scotland* (Eisenstadt, 2017), and *Developing the Young Workforce* (Scottish Government, 2014a), young people with NEET status were individualised as risky economic subjects, and have been framed as responsible for the growth of the economy (McPherson, 2021). Coinciding with the shift to the employability approach, the rhetoric in both UK and Scottish policy is that employment outcomes are determined by the individual. Thus, the above policies prioritise the expansion of education choices for young people to ensure that they can engage in lifelong simultaneously implies that they provided with equality of opportunity to improve their economic circumstances (Valiente, Lowden and Capsada-Munsech, 2020). However, for young people who are unable to gain access to secure employment, they are often exposed to the UK's welfare system in order to survive. Welfare policy and initiative aimed at reducing unemployment are reviewed in the next section.

### 3.3.4 Unemployment policies

For young people who experience insecure employment and fragmented transitions, their exposure to welfare is inevitable (Furlong, et al, 2018). The payment of benefits to provide financial assistance is regarded in policy terms as a 'passive' policy, whereas 'active' policies are created to activate the unemployed into employment through a range of programmes (Robinson, et al, 1997). Due to the overlapping features of passive and active labour market policies, welfare policy will be covered in the following discussion and referred to as active labour market policies (ALMP) in the remainder of this chapter.

Prior to the Lib-Con Coalition gaining power in 2010, New Labour introduced the Flexible New Deal (FND) in 2009 targeted mainly at under 25s. It was a policy extension of the New Deal (ND) which extended obligations of the unemployed to gain employment through embarking on mandatory training, voluntary work, and subsidised employment and carried the threat of sanctions for non-compliance (Vegeris, et al, 2011). Labour introduced the Young Person's Guarantee (YPG) in early 2010 which guaranteed all jobseekers aged 18-24 an offer of a job, training or work experience who had been unemployed for six months (Crisp and Powell, 2017). The claimants had to accept the offer by the tenth month of their claim or would face sanctions. Another programme aimed at 18-24-year-olds was the Future Jobs Fund (FJF). Introduced in 2009, its aim was to support the creation of subsidised jobs for the unemployed (Grimshaw and Rubery, 2012). Further, initially launched on a voluntary basis in January 2010, the Community Task Force (CTF) had become mandatory by April 2010 for those who had not agreed to the YPG within the 10-month timeframe. The CTF provided work experience through placements and job search assistance (Rodriguez, 2015).

Most of the ALMP programmes launched by New Labour to deal with the 2008 GFC were scaled back or cancelled by the Coalition (Crisp and Powell, 2017). ALMP, while following a steady pattern since the 1980s, were markedly different following the Coalition forming a government (Rodriguez, 2015). The Coalition introduced the Single Work Programme in June 2011 and was designed to replace all the ALMP of the previous New Labour government and ran alongside the rollout of the Universal Credit (UC) welfare programme. Just as UC saw the

merging of several types of benefits into one to increase efficiency, the Work Programme (WP) incorporated the welfare to work programmes into one system (Rodriguez, 2015).

However, at the UK level, for young people out of work and claiming benefits, Rodriguez (2015) notes conditionalities increased immediately for young unemployed people. Those aged 18-24 were mandated onto the WP and had to provide evidence they were actively seeking work. The programme provider had 104 weeks to assist the unemployed person into sustained work. A new system of payments to providers was devised under the WP, which incentivised providers to achieve the aims of the programme. Cavaglia, McNally and Overman (2020) explain the Coalition introduced a youth-targeted private sector incentive programme in the form of the Youth Contract (YC) in April 2012. It applied to young people aged 18-24 who had been on the WP. The Youth Contract provided wage incentives for permanent job vacancies and Apprenticeship Grants for Employers (AGE 16-24). Another private sector incentive programme was the New Enterprise Allowance (NEA) launched in April 2011. The NEA was designed to encourage unemployed young people to start their own business through the provision of financial support and business mentoring (Cameron, 2015).

Despite the increased conditionalities, mandatory training and work placements, and promises to increase jobs and reduce employment in UK, Scottish and regional policies discussed in this section, the failure of the skills and education drive was inevitable according to Keep (2019a) who argued that the assumptions in policy had overlooked the realities of the labour market. Those assumptions included the demand for skills was increasing across the economy; recruitment and selection were founded on a qualification-based meritocracy; extensive opportunities for progression existed; pay systems reflected qualifications and skill in a direct manner; enhancing skills supply would stimulate increased demand for skill (Keep, 2019a, p.30-31).

However, at the regional level, there were promises that things could be done differently. The Glasgow City Region Economic Action Plan aimed to reduce unemployment and guaranteed every young person a job, training or apprenticeship:

To tackle youth unemployment and contribute towards the Scottish Government's Delivering Young Workforce Strategy, we will work towards a guarantee that provides every young person 16-24 years old a job, training or an apprenticeship (p.8) (GCR, 2017c)

Devolution was heralded as being a key opportunity for Liverpool to encourage improved employment conditions and increased incomes:

Devolution gives us the opportunity to do things differently - and one of the ways we will do that is by making clear to those who apply for funding, that they will have a better chance of success if their bids demonstrate positive social impact on our communities. These are the projects that promise to use local labour, refuse to use zero-hour contracts, create apprenticeships and pay the real living wage (LCR, 2018b)

The UK unemployment rate increased by 0.1 percentage points to 3.7% in Q4 2022 according to ONS figures. Meanwhile, the employment rate increased by 0.2% to 75.6% in the same quarter (Singh, 2023). While both unemployment and employment rates simultaneously increased, it is explained by an increase in the expansion of the labour force (economic activity) as people respond to the cost of living crisis (Singh, 2023). However, economic inactivity rates are still higher than pre-pandemic levels which have been argued by Singh as posing a threat to economic growth as the pool of workers and skills available to businesses contracts. In the international context, the UK has the highest inactivity gap in the G7 (Singh, 2023). Despite the simultaneous rise in employment and unemployment rates, the UK's 1.1 million unfilled vacancies could be explained by declining rates of total and regular pay, high inflation and falling living standards. While recent headlines suggest that British wages have increased by 6.7%, they have failed to keep up with inflation which stood at 10.5% on February 2023, representing a real terms wage decline of between 2.5% to 3.1% (Godfrey, 2023; Singh, 2023).

So, while the economy remains tight due to a discrepancy between the number of suitably qualified workers and the requirements of existing job vacancies (CIPD, 2023), the latest ONS figures indicate a departure from the record breaking headlines of 2022 and "hiring intentions are expected to weaken further amid a difficult business environment, marred by higher input costs, tighter monetary conditions, and falling consumer demand" (Singh, 2023).

Nevertheless, according to the latest report by CIPD, hard-to-fill vacancies are set to persist as job applicants are reported to lack the technical skills and experience required, which may pressurise employers to focus on upskilling existing staff and raising prices to cover the costs (CIPD, 2023).

This section has discussed the aims of recent skills and labour market policies in the UK and Scotland, and Glasgow and Liverpool. Following the shift from the skills utilisation to the employability approach, a response to the GFC and subsequent austerity agenda, young people in both UK and Scottish policy texts are framed as responsible for their individual outcomes and also for the growth of the economy collectively. While there have been indications of a drive towards improving engagement between employers, learners and skills providers, the skills shortage narrative has underpinned the idea that it is the individual's employability that explains labour market prosperity or marginality. The rhetoric found in Scottish skills policies, and those at the level of Glasgow and Liverpool, have tended to resonate with that of Westminster. That is, young people have a duty to engage in lifelong learning to meet the needs of employers - those not in employment, education or training are profiled early on as risky economic subjects.

Analysis of the overlapping themes within the policies analysed above also revealed that the rhetoric and narratives underpinning the policy aims are convergent both sides of the border. The next section explores this convergence in greater detail.

### **3.4 Policy narratives**

Historically, skills policies have been conceptualised and implemented by each region in the UK in different ways, underpinned by divergent ideological backdrops that influence the aims of policy (Arnott and Ozga, 2016; Hodgson and Spours 2016; Keep, 2017). Hodgson and Spours (2019) posited that the ways in which skills policy issues are addressed differ between Scotland and England. Keep (2019b) agrees and argues that this is because they are “located inside divergent wider national policy discourses and goals” (p. 293). According to



Keep, those differences include “national, ideological and policy model choices” (p.293).

However, while Scotland has different policy architecture in terms of its centralism to ensure delivery of policy objectives (Valiente, Lowden and Capsada-Munsech, 2020), this review has thus far shown that there are similarities in the policy objectives within the UK and Scotland, and the narratives and rhetoric in Scottish, Glasgow and Liverpool’s policies resonate with those of the UK government. This section draws on critical analysis conducted in the literature (e.g. Mackie and Tett, 2013; Valiente, Lowden and Capsada-Munsech, 2020; McPherson, 2021) and additional policies as they relate to this research.

### **3.4.1 Risky economic subjects**

In both the UK and Scottish policy contexts, young people have been regarded as ‘economic subjects’ and they have been held accountable for economic prosperity or decline (McPherson, 2021). As such, young people are also categorised in a ‘on track’ or ‘at risk’ dichotomy. In both policy contexts, this dichotomy attributes labour market marginalisation “on the basis of individual characteristics rather than on structural barriers and inequalities” (McPherson, 2021, p.141). Mackie and Tett (2013) also argue that the designation of risky status onto individuals obscures structural barriers. In other words, the marginalised labour market positions experienced by the individual are depicted as a failing and character deficit of the individual.

France (2008) argues that the discourses of risk prevalent in youth policies “feeds into the blaming and ... problematising culture that exists around how the state should tackle the youth question” (p.9). Young people framed ‘at risk’ classifies the individual through a negative lens overlooking the causal structural issues of marginalisation (Foster and Spencer, 2011). One of the criticisms of youth transitions prevalent in UK and Scottish policy texts is that they conflate “adulthood with obtaining employment” (McPherson, 2021, p.139) reducing young people to economic subjects in both UK and Scottish government policies.

Cuervo and Wyn (2014) describe youth transitions in government policy as generating a dichotomy of ‘on track’ and ‘at risk’ youth based on the assumption of linear education to work transitions. However, the individualisation of responsibility could be described as informed by “neoliberal notions of individual responsibility to encourage young people to ‘be the authors of their own story’” McPherson (2021, p.140). While the Scottish Government document *Achieving our potential*: stated it aimed to improve the “capacity of individuals ... to lift themselves out of poverty by developing their resilience” (Scottish Government, 2008, p.4), by overlooking the structural causes of poverty, it could be argued such assertions “stigmatize the disadvantaged, adding the insult of misrecognition to the injury of deprivation” (Fraser, 1995, p.86).

### 3.4.2 The individualisation of responsibility

Mackie and Tett (2013) identify employment as the key remedy proposed by the Scottish Government to overcome inequality yet the policy texts are unclear how maldistribution of wealth and income would be addressed. Nevertheless, the policy documents such as *More Choices, More Chances* also contain the discourse of opportunity, reflecting a meritocratic vision of society (Mackie and Tett, 2013). However, Hine and Wood (2009) posit issues of maldistribution are influenced by social and cultural capital, and economic circumstances.

Not all people are able to benefit from increased opportunities as it overlooks factors which marginalise young people, such as poverty and race which prevent them from taking up opportunities (Mackie and Tett, 2013). Fraser (2003), for example, argues:

it is not the case that everyone enters these struggles on equal terms. On the contrary, some contestants lack the resources to participate on a par with others, thanks to unjust economic arrangements (p.57)

Individual responsibility for having necessary skills features heavily in policy documents such as the UK’s *Industrial Strategy* and Scotland’s *Developing the Young Workforce* where the foundation of economic growth is based on the development of skills which are assumed to boost productivity (Mackie and Tett, 2013). For example:

(Individual Learning Accounts) ... make a significant contribution to delivering ambitions on individual development - placing the individual at the centre of learning and skills development and supporting individuals to increase control and choice over their skills and learning development (Scottish Government 2010, 29)

Resulting from the notion of individual deficiency is the idea of employability which itself emanates from the supply-side orthodoxy. An individual 'lacking' employability, as it goes, would explain their unemployment. This notion is then justified with claims of character deficits and skill shortages (Mok and Neubauer, 2016). Mackie and Tett (2013) argue that the individualisation of responsibility for developing skills combined with the narrative of opportunity works to frame young people as being accountable for unsuccessful education to employment transitions. They argue that this ignores the constraints marginalised young people have to overcome their "poverty, social exclusion, geographical location and family disadvantage" (p.394). Thus, the churning working-class young people experience is misrecognised as they are held responsible for their liminal and marginalised labour market positions (Roberts, 2011).

### **3.4.3 Upskilling for employment**

Mosen-Lowe, Vidovich, and Chapman (2009) note that the discourses found in UK and Scottish skills policies are "focused on the individual fitting into the culture of educational systems, rather than developing different environments to meet individual needs" (cited in Mackie and Tett, 2013, p.395). Mackie and Tett (2013) argue that these flexible requirements are not spread evenly across social structure and are more likely to apply to working-class occupations. They continue that the Scottish Government have created a myth of the need for flexible young people and are instituting a rules-based societal norm on the dominated for the needs of the economy. However, Valiente, Lowden and Capsada-Munsech (2020) suggest demand-side policy interventions are:

essentially designed to prepare individuals to satisfy the requirements of the economy and the labour market, ignoring the fact that many of these vulnerable populations will continue to be excluded by the

market and may have unsatisfied aspirations beyond employment (p.227)

Wiggan (2015) argues it is irrelevant whether enough jobs exist for the unemployed, what is more important is the quality of work available. The unemployed in this perspective are not rejecting paid work in its entirety but instead labour power is “questioning of the demand they make themselves available for all existing job vacancies” (Wiggan, 2015, p. 377). However, Cleaver (2018) argues that the UK’s economy is dependent on the imposition of low-paid, unskilled jobs thus welfare conditionalities and skills policies are necessary to compel workers to work in low-quality jobs and create conditions where labour power is competing for undesirable jobs (Standing, 2014).

In both the UK and Scottish skills policy contexts, the policies have explained NEET to be a problem of employability rather than opportunities (McPherson, 2021). Crisp and Powell (2017) argue that the supposed ‘skills crisis’ implies young people are to blame for their marginalised positions despite being the most qualified generation in history. In both policy contexts, getting any job was argued as the best solution to labour market marginalisation (McPherson, 2021) however, the assumption of whether precarious work leads to stable employment has been questioned in the literature (Drishti and Carmichael, 2022). Further, low-quality employment and underemployment may be masking the unemployment rates with the number of young people working in zero-hour contracts reaching 1.05 million in 2020 (Drishti and Carmichael, 2022).

Inherent in the UK’s execution of supply-side labour market interventions is the use of benefit conditionalities and punitive sanctions for non-obedience, designed to pressurise the unemployed into substandard employment (Berry, 2014). Berry (2013) argues that problems specific to the UK labour market could not all be solved by the supply-side approaches of ALMP. Those problems include under-employment, the rise of precarious employment, regional inequalities, skills -underutilisation’ involving the lack of employment available that matches educational attainment (Wright and Sissons, 2012) and wage stagnation (Plunkett, 2011).

According to Wiggan (2015), the conditionalities in welfare policy are “tools developed by the British State to discipline labour power” as part of an agenda to deepen “low-wage labour market flexibilisation” (p.372). Barnes and Tomaszewski (2010) argue that successive welfare policies have implied any low-paid or precarious employment was better than being unemployed in receipt of benefits or non-employed, and this manifested in the conditionalities to receive benefits.

Both the Conservative and Labour governments have curtailed benefits eligibility and increased conditionalities, markedly since 2008, and this has served as a blockade to sustenance outside of employment (Clasen, 2011). Integration into poor-quality, low-paid jobs is regarded as essential to the authority of the state argues Byrne (2005), and preserves the utility of the reserve army of labour ensuring competition for low-wage jobs (Wiggan, 2015). The foundation of success, according to the *Industrial Strategy*, is competition

We believe in the power of the competitive market - competition, open financial markets, and the profit motive are the foundations of the success of the UK. Indeed the best way to improve productivity is to increase exposure to competition (HM Government, 2017, p.21)

Mackie and Tett (2013) identifies economic competitiveness as one of the key categories in Scottish policy texts to achieve social justice “Both innovation and commercialisation are key drivers of productivity and competitiveness, particularly in an increasingly interconnected global economy” (Scottish Government 2011, p.47). Fairclough (2003) suggests that economic competitiveness rhetoric is part of “the neoliberal discourse of economic change ... which demands “adjustments” and “reforms” to enhance “efficiency and adaptability” in order to compete” (p.100).

Wiggan (2015) posits that welfare conditionalities and skills policies have been effective tools by the British state to manage labour market transitions of the floating segment of the reserve army. Thus, he argues ‘work for your benefit’ policies are a “product of evolving antagonistic class relations between capital and labour power” and “part of a broad strategic intervention by the state to erode power autonomy in response to ‘refusals’ of poor-quality jobs” (Wiggan, 2015, p.372). The rise of precarious forms of employment was discussed in

Chapter 2, however, in relation to policy, Lallement (2011) argues that ALMP are implemented to facilitate the growth of low-paid and non-standard types of employment, particularly since the GFC.

Keep (2017) draws attention to the Economic Strategy and Labour Market Strategy, the Fair Work Convention and the Strategic Labour Market Group as examples of policies implemented by the Scottish government to address income inequalities, working conditions, enhance employee voices at work, and create more in-work education opportunities. Scotland also created Skills Development Scotland (SDS) to help achieve policy objectives as they relate to Further Education (FE), apprenticeships and careers guidance and the Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) and Scottish Funding Council (SFC) oversees matters relating to the Higher Education (HE) sectors, including the distribution of funding that de facto ensures students in Scotland see their tuition fees waived. However, the overarching objectives of these policy measures appear to be a response to the problems highlighted by the supply-side orthodoxy as they aim to increase demand for skills in the labour market, ensure skills are utilised by employers, and working with employers to ensure compatibility with the supply of skills. According to Keep (2019b), no such strategic vision for skills development exists in England. Without the mechanisms to enact radical change, skills policy in England has continued to focus on the supply of skills as opposed to addressing the issues of demand for and use of skills (Keep, 2019b).

However, despite these differences, analysis of the policies in this section has found that there is significant policy overlap in UK and Scottish skills policies. In both Scottish and UK policy texts, young people are regarded as economic subjects who are responsible for both individual economic prosperities, and the prosperity of the economy. Accordingly they have been profiled as 'at risk' or 'on track,' yet as Mackie and Tett (2013) argue, this dichotomy works to shift responsibility away from government and onto the individual which obscures structural causes of labour market marginalisation. For McPherson (2021), in both Scottish and UK policy, the risky economic subject narrative was symbolic of neoliberal notions of individual responsibility for determining their economic circumstances.

The underlying assumption inherent in these skills and labour market policies was that of a meritocracy in which equality of opportunity existed. However, the individualisation of responsibility appears to have overlooked how unjust economic arrangements may prevent young people from engaging in education and training opportunities (Mackie and Tett, 2013; Fraser, 2003). The individual deficiency narrative appears to be a convenient justification to explain underemployment and unemployment rates among young people (Mok and Neubauer, 2016) which contributes to the misrecognition of young people's challenging circumstances (Fraser, 1995; Roberts, 2011).

Both Glasgow and Liverpool experienced deindustrialisation following historical economic decisions undertaken by the UK government. Their local authorities have been granted responsibility and autonomy to achieve the objectives set by the UK government. While the Industrial Strategy provided funding for local city deals to deliver local needs, as the purpose of the regional deals was to achieve the objectives of the overarching UK strategy, and certain powers were outside of their control (e.g. immigration, welfare, central banking), it is perhaps unsurprising that there is noticeable policy overlap in skills and labour market policies despite the diverse means to achieve those ends.

### **3.5 Conclusion and supplementary research questions**

The disappearance of traditional masculine industries and economic shifts to a knowledge and service economy have had major implications for young men's education to employment transitions in ex-industrial cities such as Glasgow and Liverpool (Alcock, et al, 2003; McDowell, 2020). It has been argued in the literature that young men have struggled to find secure employment in postindustrial economies despite engaging with various forms of education and many struggle to escape cycles of unemployment and precarious employment (Nixon, 2018; Roberts, 2018; Hardgrove, et al, 2015).

However, despite these experiences of young men, they have been demonised in mass media as 'undeserving' which have portrayed a version of masculinity in deficit alongside other deficits to explain their labour market marginalisation

(Bonner-Thompson and Nayak, 2021). There are parallels with the way in which narratives in skills policies reviewed in this chapter have stigmatised and blamed the individual for their circumstances that have served to mask the structural causes of deprivation (Fraser, 1995). While young men seldom feature in studies of longer-term labour market shifts (Raynor, 2017), however, it should be noted that despite the profound challenges young men in postindustrial labour markets face in avoiding poor work and unemployment identified in the literature (McDowell, 2020), the words *man*, *men*, *male* or *males* rarely appeared in any of the policies reviewed in this chapter.

This chapter has reviewed the various skills and labour market policies aimed at young people in the UK and Scotland. While popular notions in academic literature suggest that policies in Scotland are divergent from the UK, critical analysis in the literature focussing on youth skills policies have identified several unifying and overlapping narratives and rhetoric (e.g. McPherson, 2021; Mackie and Tett 2013; Valiente, Lowden and Capsada-Munsech, 2020).

Across the English, Scottish and local policy documents reviewed in this chapter, authorities have pledged to create more jobs, increase incomes and boost economic growth (e.g. HM Government, 2017; Scottish Government, 2017; GCR, 2019; LCR, 2018b). The mechanisms for achieving these aims follow a broadly similar neoliberal path. The responsibility for economic growth has been placed on the individual and on the individual developing the skills necessary to ensure economic productivity is boosted (DBIS, 2016b; Scottish Government, 2018). The skills deficit narrative was used to explain the need to supply skills and enhance young people's employability in policies such as the UK's *Post-16 Skills Plan* (DBIS, 2016a) and Scotland's *Developing the Young Workforce* (Scottish Government, 2014a).

In both UK and Scottish texts, labour market marginality has long been explained by young people 'lacking' employability, and this has manifested in the social profiling of 'youth at risk' of unemployment and underemployment (McPherson, 2021). It has been argued in the literature on youth studies that the framing of young people as 'on track' or 'at risk' (Cuervo and Wyn, 2014) has stigmatised the disadvantaged (Fraser, 1995), and feeds into the 'blaming' of youth (France,



2008) that obscures structural causes of marginalisation (Foster and Spencer, 2011).

Also emanating from the skills crisis narrative is the claim that increasing the supply of skills would reduce unemployment. Again, the individual is classified through a negative lens, overlooking the structural barriers experienced by many of the disadvantaged. This is evident in various policies such as the UK's *Building Engagement, Building Futures* (HM Government, 2011a) and Scotland's *More Choices, More Chances* (Scottish Executive, 2006).

As the individual was regarded as accountable for their labour market outcomes throughout the policy documents, it follows that young people's decision-making would be framed as a causal factor of unemployment. Thus, policies such as *Developing the Young Workforce* tasked schools and colleges with ensuring young people made 'informed choices.'

However, as this review has found, supply-side and demand-side labour market interventions have devoted resources of the state on the employability of the individual (Wiggan, 2015). Backed by welfare conditionalities and mandatory participation in training and low-wage employment (Crisp and Powell, 2017), it has been argued in the literature that these policies were not designed to fix problems characteristic of the UK labour market, rather they are designed to "support a particular growth model by facilitating a low-paid and flexible workforce" (Berry, 2014, p.5).

Based on the skills and labour market policies reviewed in this chapter, the following supplementary research questions were drawn:

1. How do young men perceive their education and employment choices?  
What have been their experiences in Glasgow and Liverpool?
2. What are young men's experiences and perspectives of unemployment and welfare?

Further, it is important to note that young people and particularly young men are more likely to be unemployed (Statistica, 2022), and increased education

participation may still be masking unemployment rates (Furlong and Kelly, 2005) who may be warehoused in college or university (Furlong, et al, 2018). Furlong and Cartmel (2004), in their nationally representative study of young men in Glasgow, had found that the young men in their sample did not struggle to enter employment, rather the major problem they faced was finding stable employment to break the cycle of employment and unemployment. So, it is questionable whether the current low unemployment rates cited indicate improved working conditions for young men. In order to analyse young men's experiences of their education to employment transitions the next chapter proceeds to explain the theoretical framework that will be used to understand the findings from the data generated.

## **Chapter 4 Social Theories: the theoretical framework**

### **4.1 Introduction**

With the aim of understanding young men's perceptions and experiences of education to employment transitions in Glasgow and Liverpool, a theoretical framework was constructed drawing on four theoretical perspectives including the Risk Society thesis (Beck, 1992), the Age of Chance gambling theory (Reith, 2002), the Zones of (in)security conceptual lens (Furlong, et al, 2018), and the theory of Surplus Labour (Marx, 1973).

This chapter explains the theoretical perspectives selected to analyse the findings from this research, how the perspectives relate to the UK youth labour market and how they may be usefully combined. When reviewing potential social theories for this research, other theories emerged as being relevant, and which had regularly featured in youth studies. Section 4.2 discusses the theories that were considered and justifies why they were not selected for this research. The main body of this chapter then explains each of the theoretical perspectives that were selected and their relevance to the Scottish, English and UK, and Glasgow and Liverpool contexts (Sections 4.3-4.5). Section 4.6 discusses the interplay between the four theoretical perspectives and how their strengths are combined to provide lenses through which to understand the research findings. Following the summary of the theoretical framework this chapter concludes with the last supplementary research question (Section 4.7).

### **4.2 Critiques towards some social theories: Why are these theories less relevant for this research?**

#### **4.2.1 Social constructionism: Mannheim, Berger and Luckman**

There were several theories relevant to my research that have been employed in youth studies. Karl Mannheim's *sociology of knowledge* held that intellectuals were able to derive an objective knowledge of social relations due to a 'free-

floating' detachment from society (Outhwaite, 2005). Inspired by Karl Mannheim, Berger and Luckman's (1991) version of the social construction paradigm appears to explain the processes of individuals within society. They claimed: "individual consciousness is socially constructed" and "society exists only as individuals are conscious of it" (Berger and Luckman, 1991, p.96). However, their version of social construction implies a reality-construction by the individual independent of history in which social class and power are irrelevant (Outhwaite, 2005). The social theory opted for in my research acknowledges the impact of the historical or taken-for-granted 'natural processes' the dichotomy of which is captured by Elias' *civilising processes* as opposed to *civilising offensives* that informed the *Zones of (in)security* conceptual lens discussed in Section 4.4.

#### **4.2.2 Habitus and Structuration: Bourdieu and Giddens**

Bourdieu (1964; 1980) argued that the education system makes the excluded believe they are not excluded and forces acceptance of this judgement. He also argued that the content taught by schools is alien to the working class. However, while it may be true that the content is more relevant for those from more affluent backgrounds (where the content has more meaning outside of educational settings), Rancière (2007) argues that Bourdieu's critique asserts that the marginalised are so because they have been tricked and lack the knowledge to realise the reasons for their inequality of outcome. What is not attacked is Bourdieu's methodological validity, but rather its performative effect. Rancière (2007) asks what image of the subject being studied is depicted by any methodological approach? He argues that Bourdieu's model of society divides those who can see the truth and those who cannot; "a society in which people cannot 'be' in any other way than is 'proper' to their place" (Pelletier, 2009, p.6). For Bourdieu, the poor do not succeed because they cannot engage in educational discourse due to their habitus. Rancière argues that the cause of their failure is because they are unheard. According to Rancière (2000), emancipation should not come from reflexive knowledge but rather changing the "distribution of the sensible." The notion of an equality in the *future* legitimises the idea of a *present* inequality. This idea of social progress makes present inequality appear as 'sensible' (Pelletier, 2009).

Pelletier (2009) argues that Pierre Bourdieu places the poor and the sociologist in different places in society in a way that separates the observer from the subjects being observed. Ross (1991) contends that Bourdieu's conception of emancipation, which emerges from knowledge gained by exclusive scientific methods, gives scholars the task "of speaking for those whose presumed ignorance grants [him his] domain" (p.xviii). Rancière (1974) suggests that 'the dominated' are suggested by Bourdieu as being "unable of themselves to emerge from their own modes of thinking and being which the system of domination has assigned to them." (Pelletier, 2009, p.3). Rancière (1984) formulated the logic of Bourdieu's circular argument: the dominated do not understand the system that oppresses them, the dominating deny the system oppresses the dominated, both reproduce the system.

Such sentiments have been discussed in the chapters 1-3 in which skills and character deficits make inequality of outcome appear as obvious (e.g. Nixon, 2018, Roberts, 2018; McDowell, 2020), which justified the promotion of the supply of skills which would bring future equality (e.g. Scottish Executive, 2006; Scottish Government, 2010). By placing education as the platform for levelling out for 'youth at risk' (e.g. HM Government, 2011a; 2011b; Scottish Executive, 2006, p.21), improving the distribution of knowledge on the basis of addressing inequality legitimises the inequality of those who do not engage in education. It then becomes easy to blame the individual for lacking the *right* attitudes or behaviours for failing to obtain education, or not making *informed choices* or *better decisions* (Scottish Government, 2014a, p.16; Eisenstadt, 2017, p.7). Pelletier (2009) captures how individual deficits are used to justify marginalisation:

For the argument that it is education which is 'failing' to equip students with the necessary tools for democratic participation is the same argument which sustains the view that education is a means of ordering capacity. In this way, inequality is made innocent: it is simply an ordering of capacity. The state or economic power which follows from academic achievements is consequently framed as properly assigned, a justified difference, a justified inequality. Claims about the redistributive power of education serve therefore to justify hierarchy - to explain inequality. The presumption of inequality which underpins the setting of equality as the goal of the education system is the very means by which the actualization of equality is infinitely deferred (2009, p.13)

Biesta (2007) adds that a ‘colonial’ understanding of inclusion is concerned with bringing people into the existing order: “the political order itself, the democracy in which others are being included, is taken for granted; it is the starting point that itself cannot be questioned” (p.9). Rancière (2007) suggests that for the ‘underachievers’ and ‘ignorant,’ education is not the vehicle to address their powerlessness. Rather, as Pelletier (2009) argues, they must contest

the hierarchy which prevents their speech from being heard, the problematic in education can be re-formulated in terms of the means by which equality is denied and inequality justified; the means by which discourse and subjects are split into intelligible and unintelligible, essential and inessential, theoretical and practical, academic and vocational (p.13-14)

The structure-agency paradigm could also be considered relevant to understanding youth transitions, and both social theorists Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu appear to offer a resolution to Berger and Luckman’s idealistic, ahistorical, and ‘free-floating’ voluntarist conception of behaviour for one of the key concepts of structure-agency thinking recognises individual choice is constrained and moulded by structural realities (King, 2005). Both Giddens and Bourdieu explain that the reproduction of social structures with individuals exercising agency within the confines of cultural rules and resources. The dilemma facing writers on structure-agency is that of determinism on the one hand, and individualism and randomness of choice on the other. Bourdieu argues that the habitus determines the way individuals adopt social practices, for Giddens individuals’ social practices are related to structure and reproduce the social systems which influence action (Giddens, 1984).

Both habitus and structuration are claimed to direct individual action. However, if individuals still have agency under structure (or within habitus), then neither guarantee action in appropriate ways for the system nor prevent actors from behaving randomly. Thus, if the individual only chooses to follow structure or habitus, they could also choose not to follow, which leaves the only explanation of action as one of individual *choice*, which resonates with the narratives in Scottish and UK skills policies (such as *More Choices, More Chances*) (Schatzki, 1987; Taylor, 1993; King, 2000a; King, 2000b).

While this research does not employ Bourdieu's *Habitus*, I do not argue that the various forms of capitals have no impact on young people's advantage and disadvantage in navigating education to employment transitions. However, Furlong and Cartmel (1997) referred to in the Section 4.4 highlight the ways in which class and background can determining outcomes are understood.

### 4.2.3 The precariat: Guy Standing

Guy Standing's *Precariat* class (Standing, 2011) regarded precarious circumstances facing his theorised class as a contemporary phenomenon, that is, based on contemporary experiences, at least since the financial crisis of 2008. As Mills (2002) and Furlong, et al. (2018) argue, a focus on issues of the present may overlook how they were informed by the past: "The idea that the past is somehow 'hermetically sealed' from the present and that our current experiences of work and employment are not informed by change and transformation over the long term is both epistemologically fallacious and ontologically problematic" (Furlong, et al. 2018, p.23; Furlong and Cartmel 1997). According to Furlong, a long-term perspective is required to better understand precarity. One of the criticisms of Standing's "class in the making," as will be discussed in more detail within debates of the selected social theories, was that the precarious nature of the labour market may not be exclusive to the contemporary era. Standing focussed his analysis primarily on the period immediately before and after the 2008 financial crisis (Furlong, et al, 2018). Further, the Precariat class could be argued as oversimplifying a more complex set of labour market positions and this last point is unravelled in Section 4.4 of this chapter which outlines the *Zones of (in)security* model that will be used in this research.

## 4.3 Theories of risk

Several authors in the social sciences constructed a theory of risk to understand modern society (Reith, 2002). Ulrich Beck (1992) argues that the risk society is characterised by risk where industrial society has been replaced by 'reflexive modernisation'. For Giddens (1991), a "secular risk culture" exists in modern society: "To live in the universe of high modernity is to live in an environment of chance and risk" (p.109). Both Beck and Giddens recognise that risks have

always been present in history, however, for Giddens, what is unique about late modernity is that “risk and risk-assessment is a more or less ever-present exercise” (1991, p.124). Gerda Reith (2002) in her study of gambling’s relationship with the modern world *Age of Chance*, posits that unavoidable uncertainty and risks inherent in daily life have made individual actions to minimise risk a gamble, yet the outcomes of these actions are individualised. This section explores both Beck’s Risk Society thesis and Reith’s Age of Chance gambling theory.

### 4.3.1 Beck’s Risk Society

Ulrich Beck (1992) defines three main stages societies have undergone: premodernity, simple modernity and reflexive modernity (or *late modernity*). In reflexive modernity, the science and technology upon which society came to believe and depend has created new problems which have to be managed. Rather than seeing the transformations that contemporary societies are undergoing as postmodern, Beck sees them as having changed into what he describes as a *Risk Society* (1992).

In *Risk Society*, Beck (1992) categorises three trends which are connected to *Individualisation*. First, there is increased competition and mobility of flexible labour (Mackie and Tett, 2013; HM Government, 2017). Second, the individual experiences an increased need for education to compete for jobs which are in decline (Furlong, et al, 2018; Choonara, 2020). Third, there is a decline in collective structures of which the individual was previously interdependent (McDowell, Bonner-Thompson and Harris, 2022).

Beck (1992) posits that changes to the global economy in the 1970s demanded more mobile and flexible labour. Mythen (2005, p.131) describes the “globalization of production, labour market deregulation and a reformulated financial order” as the forces that demanded the changes to the demands of the workforce. Beck (1998) argues that contractual insecurity had arisen from automation and declining employment:

Here we have the new law of productivity that global capitalism in the information age has discovered: fewer and fewer well-trained and globally interchangeable people can generate more and more output



and services. Thus, economic growth no longer reduces unemployment but actually requires a reduction in the number of jobs. (Beck, 1998, p.58)

The reduction of jobs observed by Beck may explain why the majority of young people occupying the liminal and marginalised zones in the UK youth labour market in Chapter 2 (Furlong, et al, 2018) despite being the most qualified generation in history (Avis and Atkins, 2017). For Beck (2000), in the Risk Society “Paid employment is becoming precarious” and “‘Labour market flexibility’ has become a political mantra (p.3). This flexibilisation of the workforce benefits employers more than employees who “are able to fire employees with less difficulty” (Beck, 2000, p.3). Referring to the individualisation of risk “Flexibility also means a redistribution of risks away from the state and the economy towards the individual” (Beck, 2000, p.3). In the Risk Society

The jobs on offer become short-term and easily terminable (i.e. ‘renewable’) ... For the majority of people, even in apparently prosperous middle layers, their basic existence and life world will be marked by endemic insecurity (Beck, 2000, p.3)

According to Beck (1992), economic insecurity is a problem for all classes, risks are no longer the domain of any particular class grouping. As he argues risk is not experienced as a class problem, and people are exposed to risk as individuals and not as members of any particular class, the potential for social inequality has been individualised. While Beck acknowledges the existence of inequalities between the rich and poor, and the “fundamental conditions of wage labour have remained the same” he argues that class and status have lost their significance in late modernity: “ties to a social class recede mysteriously into the background for the actions of people. Status-based social milieus and lifestyles typical of a class culture lose their lustre” (Beck, 1992, p.88). Bauman (1990; 1997) defined ‘postmodern discontents’ as an appreciation of ‘contingency as destiny’. That is, an “awareness of uncertainty as more than a temporary condition” (Smart, 2005, p.256) with the modern way of life characterised by indeterminacy and ambiguity.

For Beck (2000), the risks arising from changes to employment must be faced by the individual. The individual can no longer rely on personal relationships or family for guidance which places more pressure on personal decision-making

which has been individualised. However, while the individual is responsible for decisions, these choices are being made within a larger structure in which employment outcomes are characterised by uncertainty and insecurity (Beck, 2000).

The next section extends the discussion of the risks experienced by young men in the labour market by bringing in Gerda Reith's insights from the notion of 'chance' in western culture. It introduces a new framing of the view of gambling- and chance-based practices which have been argued as part of the risk and uncertainty present in today's age (Reith, 2002).

### 4.3.2 The Age of Chance

Gerda Reith notes the social sciences have constructed a theory of risk "as a paradigm for modern society" (2002, p.41). According to Reith (2002), for risk authors such as Beck and Giddens "the creation of risk is inherent in the capitalist system of production" (p.42). With the entrepreneurial risking of money in the banking system, Reith argues "we are forced to point out that surely by now it is apparent that this kind of speculative risk is part of the very nature of capitalism itself" (p.90). On this note, Beck had argued that no-one is exempt from risk in late modernity and that "the social production of wealth is systematically accompanied by the social production of risks" (Beck, 1992, p.19).

Reith's discussion of risk differs from Beck's as her central focus explores gambling's complex relation to the modern world. In her book *The Age of Chance*, Reith (2002) asserts that due to persisting uncertainty and chance in the modern world, everyone are gamblers. She continues "chance has become an irreducible aspect of daily life: risk, speculation, indeterminism and flux are our constant companions in social, economic and personal affairs: we have entered the Age of Chance" (p.1). This definition includes mankind's struggle with uncertainty which Reith argues is unavoidable.

As opposed to the economic man "acting rationally from perfect knowledge of certain conditions," the individual in the Age of Chance makes decisions "based on only *partial* knowledge" in modern economic systems (p.40). Reith posits that

risk cannot be eliminated thus the individual chooses options “with the highest probability of success” which is “simply risk minimisation” (Reith, 2002, p.40). This forms the “basis of rational risk-minimising action in uncertainty” (2002, p.40).

Reith (2013) suggests that an expansion of “games of chance” has dispersed into “non gambling-specific locations” in contemporary Western societies which are saturated by ‘hyper-consumption’ (Ritzer and Miles, 2019). Reith (2002) posits the term ‘gambler’ describes “both economic entrepreneurs and recreational players.” In this context, economic life has been described as “casino capitalism” in “post-industrial, ‘post-modern’ society” (Reith, 2002, p.90). In this global casino, risk has been invoked to “explain the social and personal insecurity” experienced by the individual in this environment (Reith, 2002, p.90).

#### **4.3.3 A Risk Society for young men in the UK**

Reith (2002) posits that in the risk society “the pursuit of knowledge takes the form of the calculation of risks” (p.41). In the skills policies reviewed in the previous chapter, the development of skills through engagement with post-compulsory education is linked to the entrance into high-paid, high-quality employment (e.g. HM Government, 2017). This link has informed various policies in the UK, for example, Scottish policy charged schools with ensuring young people make *better decisions* about their post-16 destinations (Eisenstadt, 2017) and *informed choices* (Scottish Government, 2014a). However, as the literature has shown, the link between skills and employment, and the profiling of youth at risk, obscured the broader structural causes of marginalisation (Foster and Spencer, 2011) that blamed the individual for their circumstances (France, 2008).

The action of gambling is framed by Western governments as a personal choice and decision, and the “risks of excessive consumption similarly regarded as a matter of individual liability” (Reith, 2013, p.322). Reith (2013) posits that “discourses of pathology and irresponsibility” are ‘reductive models’ which “individualise the problems” of excessive consumption (p.322). Ireland, et al. (2022) argue that the emphasis placed on individual responsibility helps to

overlook the pressures created to engage in gambling, positioning itself as normal individual consumption. Rose (1996) describes this as ‘responsibilisation’, where structural features of social life are obscured by individualising terms.

This responsibilisation has been reviewed in the previous chapters that framed unemployment and precarious employment on individual deficits, and also profiling young people ‘at risk’ (McPherson, 2021; Valiente, Lowden and Capsada-Munsech, 2020). The framing of young people as economic subjects in both UK and Scottish policy contexts, has worked to hold young people accountable for their economic insecurity which has been attributed to individual characteristics (McPherson, 2021). Further, the designating of ‘risky’ status onto young people has obscured the structural causes of marginal labour market positions (Mackie and Tett, 2013).

Various scholars have found that the majority of young people occupy liminal and marginalised labour market positions despite being the most qualified generation in history (Furlong, et al, 2018; Cuervo, Crofts and Wyn, 2013). Smooth labour market transitions are uncertain, and young people find themselves exposed to an austerity driven welfare sanctions regime that has pathologised the individual’s exclusion from the world of work in a youth labour market characterised by flexible, temporary and insecure employment (Crisp and Powell, 2017). Beck’s Risk Society identifies the changes to the global economy resulting from technology and development of global capitalism (1992; 2000). Beck argues that individualisation reflects changes to education, work, and traditional sources of guidance such as the family and peers (1992; 1998).

Studies of young men have found that traditional sources of support and guidance had declined in postindustrial labour markets such as Glasgow and Liverpool, placing more pressure on the individual to navigate uncertain transitions (Hardgrove, Rootham, and McDowell, 2015). There is a growing body of research that argues that there are overlapping narratives in UK and Scottish skills policies (e.g. HM Government, 2017; Scottish Government, 2010) that reflect a neoliberal pattern of blaming the individual for unemployment and deprivation while the state withdraws responsibility (Reeve, 2017; Fraser, 1995).

#### 4.3.4 Why Risk Society

As discussed above, the Risk Society thesis provides a lens through which to view changes in the UK economy that have demanded more mobile and flexible labour, and in which employment has become increasingly precarious (Beck, 1992; 1998; 2000). Beck's thesis provides a theoretical perspective on the redistribution of risk and responsibility from the state towards the individual. It also provides descriptive and rhetorical power to illuminate declining labour market conditions experienced by young people in the developed world. However, the assumption that employment outcomes are solely determined by an increase in choices and personal agency, and that these challenges and risks can be mitigated by the individual, has been argued by Furlong and Cartmel (1997) as the epistemological fallacy of late modernity.

Bauman (2001) posits that there is little in the conditions described by risk society that are particularly new and working lives have also been "full of uncertainty since time immemorial" (p.24). However, Bauman argues that contemporary labour market conditions have a powerful individualising force because the uncertainties are dividing rather than uniting and are made to be suffered alone (p.24). As such, the uncertainty and unpredictability pervasive in contemporary labour markets have a structural element, in that varying degrees of choice determine the ways in which the individual interacts with these conditions. Thus, social class, geography, gender and ethnicity still provide a range of comparative advantages and disadvantages (Bauman, 2001).

Here, Gerda Reith's Age of Chance offers a new dimension to understanding the risks in the modern world. Reith (2002) argues that as uncertainties are unavoidable and chance has infiltrated modern life, individual choices are based on risk minimisation. Ferguson (Reith, 2002) suggests that sociological understanding of gambling has "much in common with ... 'the risk society'; which is best viewed as the recovery and extension of the theory of probability theory to situations of everyday life" (p.xiv).

The narrative of 'opportunity' in skills policies discussed in Chapter 3 has framed young people as accountable for unsuccessful education to employment transitions (Mackie and Tett, 2013). The logic of the existence of equality of

opportunity to engage in education argues that an individual lacking in employability explains their labour market position - unemployment and underemployment are framed as resulting from character and behavioural deficits for not taking the chances provided through increased choices argued to be available (Mok and Neubauer, 2016). However, as chance has infiltrated modern life and gambling has become widespread “social life has become increasingly and openly randomised” (Reith, 2002, p.xvi-xvii). Reith (2002) continues “there is a notion of ‘luck’, the idea ... that the outcome of games is decided by providential forces such as ‘fate’ or ‘destiny’.”

To understand the ‘shades of grey’ in which young people are employed in modern life, the next section explores the *Zones of (in)security* conceptual lens developed by Furlong, et al. (2018).

## 4.4 The Zones of (in)security

### 4.4.1 Beyond labour market dualisms

In order to better understand the features of the contemporary youth labour market, Furlong, et al. (2018) devised the *Zones of (in)security* conceptual lens. Furlong and colleagues argue that their model is more accurate than Guy Standing’s dichotomy of a precarious class versus secure workers as it goes beyond the extreme dualisms inherent in the *precariat* theory. The *Zones of (in)security* comprises three zones of labour market positions. Those three zones are the *zone of Traditional* employment, the *zone of Liminality* and the *zone of Marginality*. The Traditional zone includes traditional employees who are in permanent, secure, full-time jobs. The Liminal zone comprises those in temporary or insecure employment, self-employed or part-time workers. The Marginalised zone contains those in the most disadvantaged positions such as the various forms of unemployment, on government schemes and ‘fill-in’ jobs. How these zones are constituted is outlined in the methodology chapter (Chapter 5).

Furlong, et al. (2018) argue that the conditions of insecurity are structured states that “human, social and cultural capital ultimately provide some

protection for privileged groups” (p. 79). Given the reduction in fulltime employment opportunities which have been replaced with alternative forms of employment characterised as part-time, temporary, and precarious, the three zones provide a more accurate understanding of the difficulties young people face in transitioning to adulthood rather than grouping young people into a homogenous group such as Standing’s Precariat class.

Furlong and colleagues had warned however that the privileging of focusing on complex transitions versus successful traditional transitions may present a skewed version of the labour market which could “miss the details of the lives of those experiencing the more ‘ordinary’ and unexceptional transitions to adulthood” (discussed in Chapter 2) (Furlong, et al, 2018, p.47). This limitation also highlights one of the limitations of quantitative analysis. This weakness is rectified through the mixed methods approach of this research which qualitatively analyses semi-structured interviews to capture those life details that are missed through quantitative data analysis. Nonetheless, the strength of utilising the Liminal and Marginalised zones to analyse objective labour market data is the ability it provides to differentiate between those working full-time and part-time hours, and permanent and temporary employment contracts.

#### **4.4.2 Zones of (in)security in the UK context**

Furlong, et al. (2018) describe the contemporary UK youth labour market as “a stratified labour market in which the few enjoy a privileged security while the majority exist under conditions of insecurity” (p.7). Those insecurities include having to hold down several part-time jobs which are often impermanent. The Marginalised zone captures those who may be experiencing unemployment and are dependent on welfare benefits. Young people are particularly vulnerable to welfare conditionalities and sanctions. Crisp and Powell (2017) argue that the unemployed in the UK have been targeted as a problem to be addressed rather than as victims of structural conditions. The notion of employability for example, where the attributes and skills of a person are believed to explain employment outcomes, has individualised the problem of precarious employment as being the fault of the individual.

In their study of labour market conditions in the UK, Furlong, et al. (2018) found that an increasing casualisation of labour from the ‘golden age’ to present-day circumstances are now characterised by precarity. The Zones of (in)security lens highlighted growing numbers of young people in the Liminal and Marginalised zones. This indicated an increasing trend in insecure employment for young people. The zone of liminality had been informed by the works of Sociologist Norbert Elias who defined the position of liminality as one where the worker was engaged in temporary work, not in a position where they belong, no occupational identity and their future is uncertain and risky (Furlong, et al, 2018).

One of the limitations of the zones of (in)security however is that it assumes a good continuous/bad discontinuous employment dichotomy. That is, all fulltime, secure, permanent employment is good, and all insecure, impermanent employment is bad. That limitation is acknowledged by Furlong and colleagues who gave the example of a pilot working on a temporary basis for an employment agency who could be argued as occupying a more advantaged and privileged labour market position than a restaurant waiter employed fulltime on a permanent contract (Furlong, et al, 2018). However, as the zones of (in)security helps to identify the existence of liminal and marginalised labour market positions it will be used in this research to assess and compare young men’s labour market positions between 2016-2020 in Glasgow and Liverpool. In the next section, Karl Marx’s theory of *Surplus Labour* discusses the cause, purpose and utility of these labour market positions.

## 4.5 Surplus Labour

According to Marx (1976), capitalist economies are inherently unstable and go through periods of expansion and contraction. Because of this, the fluctuations of the economy require a *reserve army of labour* during economic booms, who stand by in ‘reserve’ during slumps. Marx argues workers are hired during economic expansion and then lose their jobs during contraction. The reserve army can be regarded as substitute workers only called upon when needed. In *Capital*, Marx observes “the industrial reserve army, during periods of stagnation



or average prosperity, weighs down the active army of workers; during the periods of overproduction and feverish activity, it puts a curb on their pretensions” (Marx, 1976, p.792). The existence of a reserve army of labour explains the relationship between employers and the reserve army controls wage costs and ensures the flexibility of labour whose bargaining power is diminished (1976). This power dynamic is maintained by the existence of a continual surplus of labour who are set against one another in competition for scarce employment opportunities, thus increasing worker dispensability.

In contrast to the neoliberal idea that unemployment is infrequent and the macroeconomy will self-regulate to a ‘natural’ rate of unemployment, Marx argues “The reserve army of labour is frequently mobilised or disbanded at the whim of capitalists and accommodated by the state in response to cyclical forces or crises that dominate the operations of a capitalist market” (Marx, 1976, p.792). Berry (2014) argues that the use of benefit sanctions and mandatory participation in training and work were effective tools designed by the British state to pressurise the unemployment into substandard employment. Berry continues that active labour market policies (ALMP), which include welfare conditionalities, form part of an associated statecraft that serves to “facilitate, and even legitimate, a particular type of labour market, upon which a wider model for economic growth rests” (Berry, 2014, p.26-27). ALMP thus exemplify supply-side employment strategy, that is, devoting the resources of the state on the employability of the individual.

According to Berry (2014) “the UK’s growth model requires an abundance of low-paid jobs in the labour-intense and volatile services sector” (p.2). However, as low-paid jobs are typically undesirable, the role of ALMP is to sustain a steady supply of labour for these positions, which instil behaviours, attitudes and ethic at the individual level. He continues they ensure the individual is available for work, is ‘work-ready’ through cyclical participation, training and voluntary work, backed through mandatory conditionalities and the threat of punitive sanctions for non-compliance and disobedience. While supply-side economics can run alongside demand-side interventions, ALMP in the UK were “associated with the disavowal of demand-side labour market interventions evident from the late 1970s onwards” (Berry, 2014, p.3). ALMP are not designed to fix problems, and

the growth model operated by Labour was accepted by the Coalition, which has informed the continuation of UK ALMP by the Conservative government (Berry, 2014).

Beck (1998) argues that the new law of productivity in global capitalism requires fewer well-trained people to generate more output, and economic growth requires a reduction in jobs thus progress would not reduce unemployment. However, the weakness of having fewer well-trained labour has been highlighted in the recent tightening of the UK labour market. As of 2023, the mass exit of economic migrants following the UK's withdrawal from the EU, there are a reported 1.1 million unfilled job vacancies which employers are unable to fill because of a lack of suitably qualified and skilled labour applying for those roles (CIPD, 2023; Godfrey, 2023; Singh, 2023). While employers might in theory be pressurised to train existing staff and improve pay and working conditions, circumnavigating this pressure there are indications that the UK government is considering special temporary visas to import in-demand skilled labour to satisfy the short-term demands of employers (IAS, 2023).

A surplus labouring population was outlined by Marx in *Grundrisse*:

It is a law of capital, as we saw, to create surplus value, disposable time: it can do this only by setting necessary labour in motion - i.e. entering into exchange with the worker. It is its tendency, therefore, to create as much labour as possible; just as it is equally its tendency to reduce necessary labour to a minimum. It is therefore equally a tendency of capital to increase the labouring population - population which is useless until such time as capital can utilise it (Marx, 1973, p.399).

According to Marx (1976), capital increases the labouring population and reduces necessary labour simultaneously. It is this interplay that creates the reserve army, that is, a labour population that is on standby, in reserve, until their labour becomes necessary, and are subject to unemployment due to the cyclical nature of the necessity of labour. The above-mentioned special temporary visas (IAS, 2023) would facilitate the importation of an international reserve army of labour to temporarily satisfy the short-term needs of the UK labour market. Marx describes three different forms of surplus population. The first group are described as a *floating surplus*. They are workers who are cyclically

unemployed. The second group are the *latent surplus*. They are a part of the population not fully integrated into capitalist production but exist as a pool of potential workers. The third group is the *stagnant surplus*. They are part of the active labour market; however, the nature of their employment is limited and irregular. The reserve army acts as a reservoir of disposable workers (Marx, 1976; Burrows and O'Brien, 2016).

## 4.6 Summary and conclusion

The four theoretical perspectives reviewed in this chapter have their strengths and limitations. The connection between their strengths and weaknesses are summarised below. The reasons for their selection and how they will be utilised to answer the research questions in this study are also justified.

As discussed in the preceding sections, Beck's *Risk Society* thesis provides a lens through which to view changes in the UK economy that have impacted on young men's transitions from education to the world of work (Main research question). While the Beck's thesis moves the analysis of labour market conditions away from social class and offers a lens to understand the individualisation of risks in Western labour markets, it does not account for the ways in which transitions from childhood to adulthood are influenced by background and social class, which may overlook the causes of social mobility inequalities (Brooks, 2016; Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). This is where Gerda Reith's *Age of Chance* offers a unique lens through which to understand the risks involved in young men's education and career decision making where actions are undertaken to minimise those risks which have become unavoidable. The sociological theory of risk provides descriptive and rhetorical power to examine young men's experiences of postindustrial labour markets (Main research question) in the context of declining and insecure labour market conditions currently experienced by young men.

The *Zones of (in)security* (Furlong, et al, 2018) recognises that conditions of employment insecurity are influenced by class and background. As opposed to Beck's assertion that labour market insecurity is experienced by individuals of all

classes in which labour market risks have been individualised, Furlong and Cartmel (1997) argue that the individual's background and class are significant predictors of employment outcomes. The Zones of (in)security is able to gain insights into variations of local labour markets beyond the national picture and as such it can differentiate the various conditions within local labour market conditions. This contemporary conceptual lens is "sensitive to the complexity of modern labour market experiences" (Furlong, et al, 2018, p.45) which considers the 'shades of grey' labour market positions, such as precarious employment which have been increasingly occupied by young people. The three zones go beyond dualisms and are more accurate in capturing non-traditional and non-standard forms of employment and provide a more accurate understanding of change. For example, it will be possible to distinguish young men working in precarious forms of employment who may otherwise be regarded as employed irrespective of contractual status and number of hours worked. The findings will be used to compare each city throughout each time period between 2016-2020. The ambiguous nature of young people's complex transitions to adulthood are then explored in the qualitative interviews in richer detail.

Marx's theory of *Surplus Labour* provides a structural context with which to interpret both the quantitative and qualitative findings in this study. It is a strong tool for analysis of postindustrial labour markets such as Glasgow and Liverpool where young men experience high unemployment rates (Furlong and Cartmel, 2004; McCollum, 2012; Mulhearn and Franco, 2018), a high rate of employment turnover and moreover, fluctuations in labour market patterns and strong competition for scarce proportion of permanent, fulltime, secure jobs (Nixon, 2018; Roberts, 2018; McDowell, 2020; McDowell, Bonner-Thompson and Harris, 2022). Marx's *Surplus Labour* provides the conceptual apparatus to understand the mechanics of the system that creates insecure conditions for the working-class and explains the utility of the reserve army of labour identified as occupying marginalised labour market positions in the Zones of (in)security (Supplementary Research Questions 1 and 2).

Looking at the instability of capitalist economies in which marginalised labour market positions exist; Marx observes the reserve army is in place to be utilised during economic expansion but must be readily disposable during contraction.

Workers are thus serving the role of substitute workers and only utilised when required. The reserve army provides insight into the nature of the flexibilisation of the contemporary labour market. Beck's (2000) Risk Society thesis argues that employees are subject to the flexible demands of employers and must work fewer or more hours as required. This benefits employers who have reduced labour costs and maximised production through the transferring of risks to the individual. These risks have spread to daily life in the modern 'postindustrial' world which Reith (2002) described as the *Age of Chance*. In this age, the individual cannot avoid risks because risk is in the very nature of capitalism itself. Reith's Age of Chance helps to understand the expansion of games of chance in which the individual's actions are likened to gambling where the calculation of risk provides a probabilistic "theoretical base for decision-making" (Douglas, 1992, p.23) in the 21st century (Reith, 2002) (Supplementary Research Question 1).

Reith (2013) notes that the "promotion of free enterprise and consumer choice" coincided with the reduction of the role of the state and "emphasis on individuals' responsibility for their own welfare" resonating with the neoliberal shift from the 1970s (p.317; Bauman, 1997; Giddens, 1991). This shift will be discussed in relation to young men's experiences of unemployment and welfare (Supplementary research question 2). The retreat of government responsibility created a vacuum of revenue streams for the state which was filled by commercial gambling according to Reith which transformed the notion of 'chance' from "a source of disruption into a source of profit" in Western culture (2013, p.317). For Reith, in this process "we can see the commodification of chance as the ultimate twenty-first-century product, sold by business and purchased by the consumer - the gambler" (2013, p.317). From this perspective, we can explore how young men conceive their education and employment choices (Supplementary research question 1). It has been argued that skills policies in Scotland and England promote the 'chance' of equality of opportunity for young people (e.g. Scottish Government, 2010; HM Government, 2017). The individual is responsible for making *better decisions* and *informed choices* to ensure successful transitions (e.g. Eisenstadt, 2017). Those choices have involved increased participation in Higher Education (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007) and the re-engagement and motivation of young people with low educational

attainment in policy who were argued 'at risk' of unemployment through various training schemes (McPherson, 2021; Valiente, Lowden and Capsada-Munsech, 2020) and welfare conditionalities (Rodriguez, 2015).

Reith (2002) posits that *games of skill* are governed by a rational framework of prediction and control. *Games of chance* in the Age of Chance on the other hand "encourage a distinctive cognitive framework" (p.156). Despite knowledge of the odds generated by probability theory, 'gamblers' continue "to play when the odds are against them, behaving as though they could influence games of pure chance and stubbornly expecting to win in the midst of catastrophic defeat" (p.156). While Gerda Reith refers to risks inherent in the capitalist system of production (2002), no studies have used the Age of Chance gambling theory to interpret labour market circumstances. Of interest to this research is whether the local labour markets of Glasgow and Liverpool have created such uncertain circumstances that gaining access to secure employment is now down to *chance* or perceived as such by young men.

Considering the labour market conditions and four theoretical perspectives that have been drawn on to construct the theoretical framework, the final supplementary question that will be used to analyse the research findings is

3. How can social theory help to understand the experiences of young men in postindustrial labour markets?

This chapter has presented the theoretical framework that will be used to analyse the findings. The next chapter focuses on the methodology that was used in gathering and analysing the data.

## Chapter 5 Methodology

### 5.1 Introduction

The reviews of literature and policy in Chapters 2 and 3 found that there is a gap in studies on the experiences of young men of both working- and middle-class backgrounds who were aged 16-30 in relation to educational engagement and labour market integration in ex-industrial British labour markets (Raynor, 2017). In particular, the application of theories of risk to explore and understand young men's experiences and perceptions as they transition to adulthood. Studies to date have tended to depict young men as constrained by a deficit version of working-class masculinity and have explored resistant *attitudes* towards working in the service sector (Roberts, 2018). Little is known about the *experiences* of young men as they engage with a multitude of educational pathways and employment in postindustrial labour markets. As the literature has shown, young men face barriers to integration despite engaging with post-compulsory education and government training schemes and there is also a gap in knowledge around the impact of various skills and labour market policies experienced by young men. This led to four research questions that my research aims to address.

#### **Main Research Question:**

What are young men's employment experiences of postindustrial labour markets in Glasgow and Liverpool?

The supplementary research questions are:

1. How have young men perceived and experienced their education and employment choices?
2. What are young men's experiences and perspectives of unemployment and welfare?
3. How can social theory help to understand the experiences of young men in postindustrial labour markets?

## 5.2 Research Approach

This research is a mixed methods study and utilises two approaches to collecting data, firstly through primary analysis of secondary quantitative data, and secondly through 29 semi-structured interviews. Mixed methods research departs from the either/or assumptions of qualitative and quantitative approaches and enables the utilisation of either approach to address the research questions (Wheeldon, 2010). While my study's primary focus is to analyse the experiences of young men as they transition from education to the labour market, as the research draws on both objective labour market data and qualitative interviews, the position of this research is rooted in the pragmatic paradigm but is weighted more on the qualitative data. Mixed methods underpinned by pragmatism in this study aims to provide new knowledge based on the research questions (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Although this mixed methods approach contains quantitative data analysis, it does not follow the positivist assumption that that knowledge can be acquired objectively, that an objective reality exists, or that it is possible to attain absolute knowledge of reality through research (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006).

While positivists seek the objective truth, the interpretivist/constructionist paradigm suggests truth is variable (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). Truth varies depending on who is interviewed, and the answers given are subject to change because people change their views as a result of new interactions with people, different perceptions of circumstances, reflection, and the development of new knowledge (Arthur, et al, 2013). The interpretivist/constructionist paradigm aims to understand the world of human experience (Cohen and Manion, 1994) and is usually operationalised through qualitative data collection methods or mixed methods (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). The interpretivist methodology adopted in the interview stage understands reality is constructed by the conscious individual and multiple realities exist (Arthur, et al, 2013).

As Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) argue, meaningful mixed methods research must offer more than the sum of each part of quantitative and qualitative results. Mason (2006) explains it is possible to pursue the research questions in a collective manner. By adopting a multidimensional approach, it becomes possible to "ask contrasting and distinctive questions about the social world, and



to conceptualise what they (the researcher) are researching, and what would ‘count’ as knowledge or evidence about it, in different ways” (Mason, 2006, p.9). A multidimensional approach does not require one dominant methodological approach. Instead of integrating methods to produce data, or running different approaches in parallel, the multidimensional logic enables more than one ontological and epistemological approach to be utilised to ask new questions, and to create new methods to gain new answers and understandings (Mason, 2006). This research analyses quantitative data to measure labour market conditions using the Zones of (in)security conceptual tool in the first stage. It then interviews young men to understand the multiple realities experienced by individuals and interpret underlying meanings of those experiences (Rodriguez, Smith and Barrett, 2020).

### **5.3 Positionality**

From the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm it is inevitable that I as the researcher am involved in the production of data (Busetto, Wick and Gumbinger, 2020). I selected the topic, created the research questions, and collected, analysed and presented the data. As the researcher is the primary ‘instrument’ of data collection and analysis, reflexivity is important to become aware of our interpretations (Watt, 2007). Russell and Kelly (2002) point out that reflexivity allows researchers to become aware of what they see, and one’s own assumptions and behaviours that may influence the inquiry. I found that by keeping a lab book and journal, I was able to track my progress as I overcame obstacles in my data collection and analysis.

Wolcott (1995) argues topics should be worthwhile to the researcher because the fieldwork requires wholehearted commitment. As I explained in Chapter 1, my interest in this topic derives from my personal interests, motivations and background. Prior to returning to academia, I had worked in a prestigious all-boys private school in the international education sector for several years. Despite the relative wealth and privilege of my pupils, I was aware of my duties and responsibilities to be “a good teacher,” and the impact my role had on those young men’s futures. I had to balance providing a learning environment in which

my students could 'learn' but I was also aware of the ramifications of exam scores that could determine their trajectories in post-compulsory education and career pathways in a highly competitive globalised world economy.

I was sensitive to these issues facing young men, I had also been one of many male graduates in the post-GFC aftermath unable to find secure employment. I was not the only one who emigrated from the declining West to the emerging East through a perceived necessity, and I found fortune within my unfortunate circumstances. Looking back home from afar, conditions appeared to be deteriorating every year for young men in the UK labour market, and my friends and family kept me updated on their struggles. Hence my choice on focussing on young men as well as choosing the theories from the risk framework. Ulrich Beck's (2000) *Brazilianisation* thesis resonated with my experiences for I had been working in emerging economies for close to a decade but living standards in the UK did not appear to be comparatively superior. While poverty studies are well established in the UK, mainstream sentiments such as 'rich country, poor people' have begun to arise in relation to growing awareness of the discrepancy between the wealth generated in this modern advanced economy and pervasive forms of multiple deprivation. It seems that the working class is rising to resist poverty and in-work poverty, captured succinctly by the recent RMT protest slogan "enough is enough."

To temper my personal bias and aid my development as a researcher, I kept a research journal. This was not only for myself; I shared my reflections with my supervisors and my extended network, and through discussions and collegial presentations with my colleagues at the University of Glasgow. I experienced immediate benefits in using a reflexive journal as it helped me to become aware of my thoughts, experiences, decisions and assumptions throughout the research process. Ellis and Bochner (2000) describe journaling as the personal tale of what went on in the backstage of doing research. I found that by writing down what seemed like unsurmountable obstacles, patience and time usually brought an answer. This was true for each phase of my research and was an effective management tool in my independent study.

Highlighting the benefits of journaling, Watt (2007) shares:

audiences should have the opportunity to see how the researcher goes about the process of knowledge construction during a particular study. By engaging in ongoing dialogue with themselves through journal writing, researchers may be able to better determine what they know and how they think they came to know it. An introspective record of a researcher's work potentially helps them to take stock of biases, feelings, and thoughts, so they can understand how these may be influencing the research. Making such information available to readers provides them with a means to better evaluate the findings (p.84)

Keeping a journal helped me to reflect on my interview techniques. There was a noticeable difference in the quality of my first interviews compared to the last. Entries from my first and second interviews for example related to interrupting my interviewees at the wrong time and focussing too long on irrelevant topics. The awareness of this poor technique motivated me to educate myself in effective interviewing through reading articles and also viewing formal and informal interviews. I also learned to record from two devices rather than one after I discovered one of the interview recordings was blank. As the interview was with a hard-to-reach unemployed young man in Glasgow, I remember that it was very insightful and yet all I had to show were the rapid notes I had taken in-meeting. That was the price of the lesson and from that point onwards I used two separate recording devices for every future interview.

How I recruited my sample was shaped by reflection and I entered into my notepad my progress. At the early stages it became clear I was spending too much time in one community and as I regularly discussed my progress with my supervisor, I was advised it was developing into an ethnographic study which was not the correct approach. With this awareness, I was able to pull back and then send targeted promotions promoting my research in social media which produced quicker results. It had not been a completely wasteful activity however - a contact from a local community centre had helped me to refine a poster to promote my research which proved to be useful for recruiting my research participants. Watt (2007) explains writing short notes to oneself allows ideas to be captured when they occur and is the beginning of analysis, and reflection allows researchers to discover things that were in their head unbeknownst to them beforehand. From each interaction I took notes, I recorded every lead and

idea. Many of those came to nothing but it was part of the necessary process of exhausting every avenue I could discover.

I was recruiting and interviewing at the same time. I recruited from various sources, for example, using the snowballing technique I asked those I had already recruited if they would introduce me to their networks. As I aimed to interview an equal number of young men from five economic categories (outlined in section 5.4.3), I kept a chart on my chalkboard at home. This motivated me to ensure I did not interview too many people in one category (over-saturating), and it also helped to highlight which categories were underrepresented. For example, while I had interviewed four employees and four students in Glasgow, I had only interviewed one unemployed and no apprentices or self-employed. Thus, the chart showed me I had to spend more effort in recruiting self-employed, apprentices and unemployed. This combined with my journal, influenced my conversations and my actions, and ultimately engineered a solution to problems that were brought to my attention through these types of reflections.

## 5.4 Data collection

As mentioned in the previous sections, young men's labour market experiences are seldom studied (McDowell, Bonner-Thompson and Harris, 2022). Studies which have been conducted predominately focussed on low-skilled, poorly qualified young working class males aged 18-25 (e.g. Furlong and Cartmel, 2004; McDowell, 2014). MacDonald (2011) also notes that studies of youth transitions had focussed almost exclusively on 'those at the bottom' which was also argued by Roberts (2018) who posits young middle-class men are less researched than young working class men. They tended to frame young men's marginalisation as a consequence of a deficit version of masculinity that made them resistant to learning, and they explored negative attitudes towards service sector employment (e.g. Nixon, 2018; McDowell, 2020). This is where Beck's (1992, 2000) *Risk Society* thesis provided a lens to interpret the findings as it recognises the risk of displacement for all young people in the labour market, and

increasing responsabilisation for unemployment and underemployment (Rose, 1996).

The main aim of my research was to assess labour market experiences of young men of both working- and middle-class statuses in Glasgow and Liverpool. This was expected to provide a more holistic picture of men's experiences in contemporary post-industrial labour markets. Mixed methods were selected to identify labour market circumstances through quantitative data and then explore the issues identified in more depth through the qualitative interviews. As mentioned in the introduction section of this chapter, the first stage involved quantitative analysis of a nationally representative longitudinal survey (Understanding Society) to assess the local labour market contexts of each city. The second stage comprised of semi-structured interviews with young men aged 16-30 of varying education levels and labour market statuses. This section introduces the research process, explaining the justification for the context and selection of the cities, how I built rapport with my sample, and how the quantitative and qualitative data were accessed and collected. Section 5.5 explains how the data was analysed.

#### **5.4.1 Glasgow and Liverpool**

As the review of skills policies in chapter 3 uncovered, while the policies in Scotland are widely regarded as following a divergent path from the UK government (Hodgson, et al, 2019; Keep, 2019b), there are disagreements in the literature that argue there is significant overlap in the aims of policy, the ideology underpinning them, and how young people are framed in policy narratives (Mackie and Tett, 2013; Valiente, Lowden and Capsada-Munsech, 2020; McPherson, 2021). This study set out to understand the differences in young men's perceptions and experiences of the local labour markets in both nations in light of these national and regional policy contexts. For this reason, both Glasgow and Liverpool were selected for this research because they are two similar cities in regard to their size, history and post-industrial shifts, but they have different governments implementing policies (albeit similar policies) to address similar problems.

The problems that successive national and local governments have tried to solve include the massive loss of industrial jobs which were a major employer of men due to economic restructuring (Doucet, van Kempen and Weesep, 2011; Mulhearn and Franco, 2018), unemployment rates consistently above national averages (Gibb, Osland and Pryce, 2013; Belcham, 2006), and disproportionate levels of poverty and deprivation (Livingston, et al, 2014; Rae, 2012). Both Glasgow and Liverpool have experienced regeneration in the 21st century, which has been top-down led, aiming to develop the city centres outwards following periods of decline (Speake and Pentaraki, 2017).

For young men in Liverpool and Glasgow, leaving compulsory education and finding employment is challenging, particularly if they lack educational and social capital (McDowell, 2020). The decline of traditional sources of support and guidance have placed more pressure on the individual for personal decision-making (Beck, 1992). In the 21st century, life in the North West of England and West of Scotland is difficult for young men in depressed labour markets including those from more affluent families as they experience a neoliberal state which has made labour market transitions uncertain (Hardgrove, Rootham, and McDowell, 2015; Furlong, et al, 2018). Furlong and Cartmel (2007) point out that the individualisation of responsibility on the individual to navigate education to employment transitions among their increased choices may lead to self-blame for unsuccessful outcomes which mask the structural forces that continue to operate.

Glasgow was selected for practical reasons. I had previously worked and studied in the city, and I thus had a network of friends, family and professional colleagues with whom I could contact for advice and guidance. This social capital was advantageous in providing initial access to research participants. As I knew the city, I knew particular sites I could access that provided opportunities to recruit more interviewees. For example, I was able to recruit three students who were volunteering at a local community centre, and a fulltime employee at a local gymnasium. My familiarity with Glasgow made the recruitment of my sample relatively simple. Liverpool was selected because it represented a similar city in England with which to compare and contrast labour market experiences and skills and labour market policies. My colleagues in academia provided access

to their professional networks which allowed me to explore various avenues such as colleges and universities to recruit potential participants. After the first few interviews had been conducted in both cities, I was able to use the snowball sampling method by asking my interviewees to refer their networks if they met my sampling criteria (outlined in section 5.4.3). As mentioned previously, I also employed online recruitment strategies such as promotion of my research on social media websites to invite young men to participate in interviews.

### **5.4.2 Building Rapport**

I recruited my sample from various sources. Fortunately, I had visited various sites in person to build a network of contacts and had completed my first interview in person just before the first wave of Covid19 lockdowns were enforced in 2020. I had contacted and visited community centres in Glasgow and built rapport with the managers and volunteers, explaining the aims of my research, all of which allowed me to build momentum in the recruitment process. Such was the positive response from those I spoke to, they went the extra mile to help me recruit my sample including introducing me to potential interviewees, speaking to the families of young men, providing back and forth feedback on my research poster and keeping in touch via email and telephone. Gupta and Kelly (2014) posit that researchers often feel compelled to reciprocate the generosity of those they encounter in the recruitment process, but they do not know how to return the gesture. I felt so thankful for their help that I wanted to give them something in return, but they gestured that the attention I was giving to the topics of my research were enough returns, and they welcomed me with their encouragement. I think they could sense that I was someone who had entered the Glasgow labour market in previous years as a young man, and I had experienced similar issues to those that I was researching. This may have conveyed an air of sincerity and authenticity about my research endeavour. I felt this encouragement when I contacted other departments such as Skills Development Scotland who went above and beyond in introducing me to an abundance of young male apprentices I could interview in Glasgow. Again, I wanted to express my gratitude but did not know how.

Breen (2007) and Dwyer and Buckle (2009) refer to an ‘insider-outsider’ dichotomy in conducting research and highlight the benefits and challenges of

both positions in relation to trust and rapport. However, in my experience, I found there were shades of grey in this dichotomy. While I built rapport with the young men in the community centre, or those who I was introduced to via networks or previous interviewees, I found the openness and closedness of those who I interviewed were not solely dependent on my insider-outsider status. For example, one of the college students I interviewed from the community centre was somewhat closed. Then, for many of the young men I recruited via social media, we had never met before yet they were incredibly open. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) suggest what is more important than insider-outsider status is whether the researcher is honest, open and interested in the experiences of the research participants. So, although the dichotomy in theory categorises insiders as losing objectivity and outsiders take more time to break down barriers with interviewees (Breen, 2007), the interviewees were mostly open irrespective of whether I was perceived as an insider or not.

I found that my listening skills which I had developed as an educator and counsellor in the education sector facilitated positive interview experiences for the participants. A beneficial aspect of my insider status was my experiential and contextual understanding of education to labour market conditions as a British male, and my past experience engaging with young men including those who were marginalised. Further, upon a humorous reflection, my ability to understand the Scots/Glaswegian dialect enabled me to interact with several of the young men in Glasgow naturally, perhaps in a way someone without my linguistic abilities would not have been able to do so. I also found a common understanding with the young men in Liverpool. My reflections on my visits to Liverpool and subsequent interviews suggested that there was a sense of intrigue, curiosity and also comradeship from the people in Liverpool with Glasgow believed to be a similar city and me as the researcher interviewing from there. I got the impression that the young men I interviewed believed I knew where they were coming from and that I could relate to their circumstances - that I "knew the score." Gillingham (2000) points out that a genuine interest in the experiences of research participants leads to the collection of rich data. My research participants enjoyed the interviews and having an adult to converse with and listen to their experiences. Several reported that the interview



experience was beneficial in the sense that they were able to reflect on their journeys and emerge with an enhanced self-awareness.

While there was an element of familiarity with my sample, I had to ensure that familiarity did not breed contempt for the research process. After an initial email or telephone communication, I explained the purpose of the research prior to beginning the recording of each interview and explained the process of consent, this was when I entered 'researcher mode.' While Adler and Adler (1987) suggest that the distance between the researcher and participant is stronger in theory than in practice, I still presented myself in a professional manner when appropriate, helping to ensure that the participants were secure in the knowledge that the details gathered would be used anonymously. This for me was the shade of grey in the insider-outside dichotomy, I was "on their side" in the sense of sharing relatable backgrounds and having worked with young men, on the other side I had a professional duty of care in my role as researcher. In practice, I found that by being genuinely interested in the lived experiences of my participants, showing interest and respect, I was able to gather rich data from a passionate and enthusiastic sample.

### **5.4.3 The study samples**

As I sought to interview young men of specific characteristics, the sampling strategy used to recruit the qualitative sample in this research was snowball and purposive sampling (Faugier and Sargeant, 1997; Hendricks and Blanken, 1992). Those characteristics are described in this section.

The population for this research was young men aged 16-30, residing in Glasgow or Liverpool and engaged in at least one of five labour market activities namely:

1. Employees,
2. Unemployed,
3. Self-employed,
4. Fulltime students,

## 5. Apprentices.

The age group was selected for a number of reasons. Firstly, the predominate focus on young men in the literature had been on 18-25 year-olds. Secondly, while the age range constituting 'young people' is debatable, however, according to Arnett's (2007) *Emerging Adulthood* which has appeared in youth studies (e.g. Wyn, 2014), the age group of around 16-30 captures the socio-economic situation of young people that reflects the frequent job changes and changing patterns in education in contemporary societies, in which young people spend several years from their late teens to their late twenties before establishing long-term adult roles.

The aim was to interview four men in each of the abovementioned five categories. I thus aimed to interview 20 young men in each city, equalling 40 in total. However, the depth of each five labour market categories was more important than breadth of total sample size. In the end, I interviewed 19 young men in Glasgow and 10 in Liverpool. I encountered difficulties in recruiting self-employed and apprentices in Liverpool and self-employed in Glasgow. As I received a high response rate from those who were employed, it would have been easy to have interviewed over 40 young men if I were not aiming to interview four men in each of the five categories. I had to make the decision to start declining young men from categories that were already saturated such as those who were employed and fulltime students to ensure parity of the five labour market categories in focus. During the interviews I asked 10 basic questions at the beginning of each interview to gather a basic overview of each participant (detailed in [Appendix 2: Stage 1 Interview Questions](#)). As I had produced quantitative results from the Understanding Society survey, I adopted questions from the survey to inform the semi-structured interviews which are outlined in [Appendix 3: Stage 2 Interview Questions](#).

To provide a more holistic view of young men's experiences in local labour markets, I did not limit my sample to working class, a predominate focus I discovered in the literature review of young men. Despite the variation of class status in my sample, I found several overlapping themes relating to young men's perceptions and experiences of education and employment. I also discovered experiences of exclusion and marginalisation that are often ascribed to those

from working-class backgrounds. I was able to gather a broad range of experiences in which similarities and contrasts could be analysed.

All of the 29 participants were interviewed once except one former apprenticeship liaison officer in Liverpool where we spoke twice. The interviews lasted between 40 minutes and 2 hours. Although there was a concern that hidden communities of hard to reach young men would be challenging to find (Brackertz, 2007), and may slip through the net (Doherty, et al, 2004), I was able to interview young unemployed males, and those from low levels of resources (Freimuth and Mettger, 1990), such as men on low incomes, those who live in high rise apartments, and the 'time poor' (Brackertz, et al, 2005). For men of both working- and middle-class positions, I ensured their voices were regarded as relevant by giving them my interest and attention (Wilson, 2001). As the research was interested in the experiences of young men's extended adulthood, I decided that I could not interview men over the age of 30. For example, I terminated an interview with a self-employed male in Glasgow when I learned he was 31. In sum, to qualify for the interview, the participants had to reside in either Glasgow or Liverpool, be aged 16-30, be male, and fall into at least one of the five labour market categories.

In the quantitative data analysis phase, analysis of the Understanding Society (US) Special Licence (SL) dataset was conducted. The US dataset is the largest of its kind in the UK and provided access to information on individuals' economic activity, age and education data. The criteria for the qualitative sample mentioned above was the same as the quantitative sample. The observed population had to be male, reside in either Glasgow or Liverpool, and be aged 16-30. As the qualitative interviews were conducted in 2020, I decided to analyse years 2016-2020 in the Understanding Society dataset to explore local labour market conditions leading up to the point of the interviews. This showed the four years leading up to 2020, and also coincided with the year prior to the implementation of the UK's highly anticipated *Industrial Strategy* in 2017 which had promised to address long standing issues of low pay, unemployment and underemployment for young people (HM Government, 2017). With this inclusion criteria, I was then able to explore the labour market activity of young men in both cities. The next section explains how the data was analysed.

## 5.5 Data analysis

### 5.5.1 Mixed Methods Research

As this research employed a mixed methods approach, the analysis in this study comprised of two forms. The mixing of quantitative and qualitative approaches was decided upon because they add depth to each set of findings. The analysis of labour market experiences using the Understanding Society survey set the context of a 'big picture' and the qualitative interviews with young men in Glasgow and Liverpool were conducted to provide a more in-depth, meaningful view that cannot be achieved through independent quantitative analysis (Wheeldon, 2010).

I was granted access to Understanding Society's Special Licence dataset prior to conducting my interviews. Initial quantitative analysis of the Understanding Society (US) labour market data for 2016 and 2018 showed that the majority of young people and young men continued to occupy liminal and marginalised labour market positions in both Glasgow and Liverpool, following on from Furlong, et al.'s (2018) analysis of the UK labour market for 2010 using the same dataset. Each variable of the US dataset was generated from the US mainstage questionnaire (Understanding Society, 2023). With the initial findings, I was then able to construct my qualitative interview questions based on the US mainstage questionnaire which are detailed in [Appendix 2: Stage 1 Interview Questions](#) and [Appendix 3: Stage 2 Interview Questions](#). The five economic categories I sought to interview were influenced both by the Zones of (in)security conceptual lens and the variables in the US dataset. The traditional, liminal and marginalised (TLM) zones were easily identified in the US dataset, for example fulltime and parttime employees, self-employed, students and unemployed were assigned to the three TLM zones. I was then able to interview young men occupying these economic positions to provide a deeper insight into the experiences that would have been unavailable using the quantitative dataset alone. The central premise of combining both approaches was that they could provide a more extensive understanding of the research problem (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017). As Mason (2006) notes, research questions can be pursued separately, and data can

be produced for specific parts of a whole, eliminating the predominance of one research approach (Mason, 2006). Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) had posited that the mixed methods approach combines the reliability of quantitative data which can be validated by lived experiences and perceptions and enables different ways of presenting meaning and knowledge. However, Mason (2006) suggests that thinking beyond the qualitative-quantitative divide helps to allow the distinctiveness of different methods to best answer the research question(s). On this point, Bazeley (2018) reminds her readers that the notion that mixed methods research is simply a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches can distract from the purpose of the research process. Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that artificially dividing the data obscures from the research process and that a more productive exercise is to focus on whatever approaches best answer the question.

Busetto, Wick and Gumbinger (2020) explain that there are three main types of mixed methods study that mix quantitative and qualitative data. They are *convergent parallel* design, the *explanatory sequential* design and the *exploratory sequential* design. This research adopted the *explanatory sequential* design in which the quantitative study was carried out first to understand local labour market experiences leading up to 2020 and then qualitative interviews were used to help explain the results from the quantitative study. Following on from the integration of methods that informed the selection criteria for economic activity types, the quantitative analysis revealed that the majority of young men in both cities were located in the Liminal and Marginalised zones. The data from the qualitative study was then used to understand young men's experiences of labour market marginalisation, potential explanations for how they occurred, and explored perspectives on how conditions could be improved.

Specific questions were asked of each dataset, as mentioned, the quantitative analysis allowed big picture insights. Utilising Furlong and colleague's *Zones of (in)security* conceptual lens, I was able to gain insights into labour market experiences of male samples in Glasgow and Liverpool including income, employment activity, unemployment, education statuses, and wellbeing indicators such as satisfaction and optimism levels. There was an iterative back and forth between the datasets because findings from the quantitative data

analysis allowed new questions to be asked of the qualitative dataset. Similarly, I could go back to the quantitative data to ask new questions upon new discoveries in the qualitative data (Bryman and Burgess, 1994). This approach allowed me to experiment with both quantitative and qualitative datasets with the research questions in mind (Wheeldon, 2010), one of the major strengths of mixed methods research (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009).

### **5.5.2 Triangulation**

The consolidation of these two prior research philosophies depends on the way that all strategies have inherent predispositions and constraints, so the utilisation of only one strategy to examine phenomena could yield one-sided results. Yin (2011) argues that the mixed methods approach can provide more robust analysis as it is not dependent on any one source. On the other hand, Bryman (2017) warns that quantitative and qualitative methods have different strengths and weaknesses which present issues for comparing different data. However, the use of only one method could produce biased results, a problem which Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) suggest is addressed through the triangulation approach in mixed methods research. As a result, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) suggest that triangulation is mixed methods research's primary strength. The ability to balance the weaknesses of each paradigm with the strengths of mixed methods gives it an edge over other approaches (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Flick (2017) discusses the development of triangulation from phase 1 which had built on the works of Campbell and Fiske (1959) and Denzin (1970) where it was introduced as a discussion of the combination of methodologies such as data triangulation, investigator triangulation and theory triangulation. Phase 2 saw the previous version critiqued by Silverman (1985) and Fielding and Fielding (1986) which prompted Denzin (1989) to reformulate triangulation as an approach closer towards generating more knowledge rather than as a tool for validity or pursuing objective truth. In phase 3, Flick suggests that a strong program of triangulation “is used as a source of extra knowledge about the issue in question and not just for confirming what is already known from the first approach” (2017, p.53). In other words, triangulation is not only used for identifying convergence of findings or evaluating the results of other methods or

previous research. Instead, triangulation can be used for generating extra knowledge about a phenomenon under study and not just for confirming previous findings. Therefore, in this research, a mixed-method study design was chosen that included the triangulation of literature, theory, methods and data sources. Such an approach enabled a focus on the impact of structural forces on individual experiences and perspectives that could contribute to answering the research questions which had aimed to extend and contribute new knowledge and understandings of the experiences of young men in the UK youth labour market.

For example, the purpose of utilising the zones of (in)security was not just to confirm or assess whether labour market conditions were still uncertain for young people. Instead, it extended knowledge of the experiences of young men by applying this model in specific locations (i.e. in Glasgow and Liverpool). This also demonstrated the powerful abilities of this model which showed that it could be used to compare different locations and included various demographics such as employment status, age, location and education levels. With this big picture derived from the data, the nature of the semi-structured qualitative interviews then allowed deeper insights to be gathered to gain more insights into individual circumstances which were then thematically analysed, and the subsequent presentations of findings and discussion extended knowledge of young men's labour market experiences, an under-researched demographic in the literature. The nature of grouping experiences in these themes made it possible to identify experiences that transcended social class, such as the perception of the scarcity of secure jobs, the unpredictability of employment outcomes, the gambling terms articulated, and the embracing of learning and employment in the contemporary service economy. In doing so, it also extended the counter-narrative to the masculinity-in-deficit explanation of the plight of young men which had been influenced by hegemonic masculinity theory evident in the literature in both youth studies and skills policy.

In the process of going back and forth between these findings and the literature, the need for new theory emerged as I encountered limitations in the initial theoretical framework. While I was able to bring in Marx's surplus labour to conceptualise the utility of workers in the liminal and marginalised zones, it was

through analysis of the qualitative interviews that the notion of gambling came through in the findings as the young men were using terms such as “it’s a gamble any way you go,” “I put it down to luck” and “you’ve won a watch.” This necessitated new theory to be brought in from outside the field of labour market and youth studies, and Gerda Reith’s Age of Chance gambling theory provided the explanatory power to explain a common experience articulated by the young men in my sample. Bringing existing knowledge from studies of youth and young men to date, and education and skills policies, and the quantitative and qualitative data analysed through the lens of the theoretical framework, I was then able to formulate the Individualised Gambling Pathways (see [Figure 8.1](#)) that illustrates the interconnections between structural circumstances and the individuals’ agentic responses. The iterative back and forth between the accounts of the qualitative sample, analysis of the objective labour market data and critical analysis of skills policies in both Scotland and England also produced policy recommendations relating to young men’s education to labour market transitions.

Overall, the process of triangulation allowed me to gather rich data and as such the findings, discussion and conclusions were informed by multiple sources. This approach has informed new understandings of the contemporary labour market, added to the discussion of young men’s performances and experiences, contributed to theory extension and provided policy recommendations.

### **5.5.3 Analysis of quantitative data**

Quantitative analysis of the Understanding Society dataset focussed on economic activity in Glasgow and Liverpool by constructing Traditional, Liminal and Marginalise zones of employment outlined in Table 5.1. The Special Licence confidential data related to each household and individual and it allowed me to group the samples into Depressed, Declining and Prosperous residential groups based on their postcode level data (Lower-layer Super Output Area and Datazone data). The Understanding Society data was entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and recoded into new datasets for each city and year. This produced six datasets, namely, Glasgow 2016, 2018 and 2020, and Liverpool 2016, 2018 and 2020.



The criteria for the Zones of (in)security and residential locations are detailed in Table 5.1 and Table 5.2 below:

**Table 5.1 The Zones of (in)security criteria**

Traditional	Liminal	Marginalised
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fulltime employment: &lt;30 hours per week</li> <li>• Permanent contract</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Part-time employment: 16-29 hours per week</li> <li>• Temporary/insecure fulltime employment</li> <li>• Self-employed &gt;30 hours per week / NMW</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Part-time employment: &gt;16 hours per week</li> <li>• Unemployed</li> <li>• Fulltime student</li> <li>• Family care / sick / maternity</li> <li>• Apprentice</li> <li>• Government training scheme</li> <li>• Self-employed &gt;16 hours per week</li> </ul>

Source: Furlong, et al. (2018)

The Traditional zone in Table 5.1 above includes employees working more than 30 hours per week with a permanent, secure contract. The Liminal zone includes people who are in part-time employment working between 16-29 hours per week and also fulltime workers who do not have a permanent contract. The Marginalised zone includes the unemployed, students and those working under 16 hours per week (Furlong, et al, 2018). There were cases that required more than one variable to understand the labour market position. For example, fulltime students may also hold a part-time job, so they could be placed in the Liminal zone.

**Table 5.2 IMD/SIMD Ranking**

Area Type	Depressed	Declining	Prosperous
IMD/SIMD ranking	1-3	4-7	8-10

The depressed, declining, prosperous (DDP) residential locations are quantitatively analysed in relation to economic conditions in this chapter. The DDP categories in this study are constructed using Datazone (DZ) and Lower-layer Super Output Area (LSOA) data assigned to each individual identifier in the Understanding Society dataset. This data was used to identify each individual's ranking in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) and the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) as outlined above in Table 5.2. An individual living in the Datazone S01010233 for example, would be checked in SIMD, in this specific case the overall ranking is 1 (the most deprived decile), and falling within the 1-3 range in Table 5.2 would be categorised in the Depressed residential type. The SIMD/IMD ranking was applied to each individual in the quantitative datasets for every wave observed in this research (namely waves 6, 8 and 10 for years 2016, 2018 and 2020) to perform the identify areas of relative deprivation or prosperity.

The data was analysed using descriptive statistic procedures to present the findings and were useful for organising, presenting and analysis of the data (Fisher and Marshall, 2009). Within each dataset, variables were identified to group personal identifiers into the three Zones of (in)security outlined in Table 5.1. Using the Traditional, Liminal and Marginalised zone outputs for each city, 100% bar graphs were created that made it possible to perform cross-sectional analysis of local labour market positions. For example, Chapter 7 will show it was possible to see there were 35% of young men in Glasgow in the Traditional zone of employment in 2016, 8% in the Liminal zone and 57% in the Marginalised zone. These outputs were created for every year in each city.

#### **5.5.4 Qualitative analysis approaches**

Before qualitatively analysing the interview data, I had considered six types of qualitative analysis approaches for analysing the interviews, namely content, thematic, grounded theory, discourse, narrative and conversation analysis. First, content analysis, classifies data using codes to find important groups and issues. It can be used for analysing written text and is useful for exploring theories. However, the main approach employed in this research was thematic analysis. While it is similar to content analysis in that it reduces the data into summary form, instead of generating codes it analyses patterns found in the data to

interpret the information and then group related codes together in those themes. The themes generated were used to support and extend conversations within the theories used in the theoretical framework. However, as thematic analysis does not start with predetermined ideas and expectations, the new themes generated allowed new theories outside of the field of youth studies to be brought in which provided novel interpretations of unique aspects within the findings (Social Change UK, 2023).

The third approach considered was grounded theory analysis. It is similar to content and thematic analysis in that it uses coding techniques, however, it does not start with pre-existing theories. Instead, grounded theory starts from the 'ground up' to allow themes to emerge. Some of the techniques used in grounded theory were employed in this research, such as inductively examining the data and examining the data before all the data had been collected, and revisiting the examination of the data. However, I had entered the examination of the data with prior knowledge of the topic and a theoretical framework, and although theoretical contributions and new theory arose, the purpose of this research was not to generate new theories exclusively (Social Change UK, 2023).

The fourth approach was discourse analysis. Discourse analysis offers a variety of methods to investigate written, verbal or non-verbal communication data, with a special attention given to the language used in these kinds of communication. Narrative analysis was the fifth qualitative analysis approach. Exploring stories and narratives is a key part of narrative analysis which seeks to gain a better understanding of how organisations, social groups, and even individuals shape and form their own identity. By examining the ways in which stories and tales are conveyed, it is possible to gain a better appreciation of the ways in which people think and how groups are structured. Narrative analysis is a useful approach for combining both verbal and written data, such as in-depth interviews, participant observation, and any written material that contains narratives or stories, such as organisational documents that provide information on the foundation and history of a particular organisation. However, as its strength is to be found in the self-expression of participants, it was not enough on its own to provide conclusions or insights independently (Social Change UK, 2023).

The sixth approach considered, conversation analysis, investigates verbal communication like conversations and verbal interviews thoroughly as the interaction is in progress. It is driven by the idea that all conversations are guided by regulations and patterns that stay uniform in every exchange, and that what is being said can only be comprehended by looking at what was said before and after it. Conversation analysis however is best suited for verbal exchanges and discussions, and can be used to evaluate interview recordings, focus group recordings, and data from ethnography or participant observation. It can be beneficial for studying social connections in organizational environments such as doctor's offices, helplines, and educational contexts, such as a recording of a lesson (Social Change UK, 2023).

While there is sentiment that 'perfect' qualitative analytic approaches await, and there is only one ideal analytic approach, Braun and Clarke (2020) refer to this as "a hallowed method quest" as the researcher identifies a perceived superior method/s (p.37). They argue that there is rarely one ideal method and that there is no requirement to use the most well-known method. Instead, it is recommended that the method chosen fits the purposes and design of the research. For the purposes of this research, which was to understand young men's experiences of education to employment transitions and their range of choices, thematic analysis was employed as the best fit for semi-structured interviews. It allowed me to group the codes into themes and it provided the flexibility to present a rich account of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

### **5.5.5 Thematic Qualitative Analysis**

This research conducted thematic analysis (TA) of the themes generated to identify themes and patterns in the qualitative data. Limitations and confusions of TA exists as to how it is implemented and understood (Braun and Clarke, 2019). At the same time, Chamberlain (2000) notes that it is important not to succumb to methodolatry, and King and Brooks (2017) on the same note warn against proceduralism, resonating with Mason's (2006) point that the methods used in research should not overshadow the purpose and aims of the research. However, in addressing errors of previous understanding of TA (e.g. Braun and Clarke, 2006) Braun and Clarke (2019) warn against 'either-or' choices in TA

approaches. Instead of coding inductively *or* deductively, the researcher can code both inductively *and* deductively.

Braun and Clarke (2019) also argue that the researcher generates initial themes rather than searches for themes, in other words the themes are not in the data independent of the researcher - it is the researcher that influences the themes produced, which are informed by the researcher's values, knowledge and assumptions. Braun and Clarke (2019) distinguish between two conceptualisations of themes, namely "themes as patterns of shared meaning underpinned or united by a core concept," and domain summary themes which "are organised around a shared topic but not shared meaning" (p.593).

Based on understanding of the youth labour market, skills and labour market policies, theoretical assumptions and the data collected from the interviews, I arrived at four main themes which contained subthemes that were relevant to the research questions. Those themes are (a) experiences of education choices; (b) precarious labour market perceptions and experiences; (c) jobs search strategies; and (d) experiences of unemployment. Other themes not relevant to the research questions were grouped into an 'other' category which have the potential to be used in different research projects. These four main themes relevant to the research questions in this research informed the findings in Chapters 6 and 7 and the subsequent discussion in Chapter 8.

Braun and Clarke (2006) outline six phases of TA. These phases are outlined in Table 5.3 below. They are familiarisation with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining, refining and naming themes; and producing the report (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.87). For the semi-structured interviews, I transcribed the interviews, saved them in order of the date of interview, and then uploaded the data to NVIVO software. While the process of transcribing was time-consuming, it allowed me to get to know the data intimately and initiated the process of critical reflection (Silverman, 2011). I also added comments to the word documents to capture my initial reflections. (Phase 1). I then produced approximately 140 codes in NVIVO (Phase 2). I subsequently revisited, organised and reorganised the codes and nodes in hierarchical branching systems. Jackson and Bazeley (2019) suggest the use of hierarchies helps to organise the data and creates order. This provided

conceptual clarity and identified areas of overlap, I could see where the data was becoming saturated and this helped to identify an initial 8 themes (Phase 3).

**Table 5.3 Phases of thematic analysis**

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	<i>Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.</i>
2. Generating initial codes:	<i>Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.</i>
3. Searching for themes:	<i>Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.</i>
4. Reviewing themes:	<i>Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.</i>
5. Defining and naming themes:	<i>Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme. The final opportunity for analysis.</i>
6. Producing the report:	<i>Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.</i>

**Source: Braun and Clarke (2006, p.87)**

Jackson and Bazeley (2019) suggest when the codes are established in this way, they “will ‘tell’ your project” (p.148). Sorting the codes into hierarchies also prompted the coding of relevant data. Hierarchies made the identification of patterns more efficient because they were organised together, this made

contributions to the emergent analysis an easier task. I then looked to see where I could merge the themes and was able to merge 8 themes into 4 main themes. Within these 4 main themes I looked to see where I could merge the codes/subthemes (Phase 4). I also paid attention to gaps between the themes and the conceptual lenses I started with, for example, helping me to identify gaps in the theoretical framework. One of the findings that emerged for example was that of the perception in which the outcomes of higher education were unpredictable that they were likened to a gamble. I found Beck's Risk Society and Furlong's Zones of (in)security did not adequately account for these experiences I had uncovered. This prompted me to investigate alternative theories outside of youth studies to provide a conceptual basis to understand the meaning my sample were conveying. Although not used in studies of labour market transitions, I enrolled Gerda Reith's *Age of Chance* which had explored gambling's relationship with Western culture to provide explanatory power of the young men's undermined sense of agency and unpredictability of outcomes in relation to their actions within the education and labour market context. This process coincided with the refining and renaming the themes and codes (Phase 5). I then started writing the findings chapters (Phase 6) before proceeding to the discussion and conclusion chapters.

## 5.6 Validity of findings

As this research is not following the positivist paradigm, I do not make any claims to establish social facts. While positivists seek the objective truth, the interpretivist/constructionist paradigm suggests truth is variable (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). As Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) posit, the interpretivist/constructionist approach is usually operationalised through qualitative data collection methods or mixed methods. Debate exists in the literature as to which research paradigm is the most accurate in understanding the research problem, and argument exists as to the incompatibility of these opposing worldviews (Bryman, 2006). While *positivist* researchers predominately use quantitative approaches, and *interpretivist/constructivists* subscribe to qualitative methods (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2002; Arthur, et al, 2013; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004), the *pragmatic approach* provides the

philosophical underpinning to employ a mixed methods approach (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006) and is open to “multiple methods, different world views, and different assumptions, as well as different forms of data collection and analysis in the mixed methods study” (Creswell, 2003, p.12). Thus, the pragmatic approach adopted in this research allowed the selection of the most appropriate data collection and analysis methods for the research problem (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). However, validity in positivist and constructivist research differs as different criteria are used to measure the quality of the research (Kuzmanic, 2009).

Cutcliffe and McKenna (1999) argue that qualitative studies should not be judged using the same criteria as quantitative studies. Instead, they argue that what is more important is the establishing of credibility in qualitative research. Cutcliffe and McKenna explain that credibility can be achieved by the researcher providing a rich description of the qualitative approach they have used, and what attempts/methods they used in the interpretation of the data. The research should also state their theoretical stance that informed their interpretation. Constat (1992) argues that the process of providing a thick description makes the qualitative analysis open to inspection. Liao and Hitchcock (2018) posit that credibility in qualitative research is promoted by demonstrating a systematic process throughout the research stages. I have achieved this throughout this chapter - demonstrating the research approaches adopted, how the data was collected, the theoretical stance, describing my personal background and experiences, and the impact of reflexivity throughout the research process. However, while there are various assessment criteria to establish credibility and trustworthiness, Busetto, Wick and Gumbinger (2020) argue that there is no ‘gold standard’ to assess qualitative research. Nevertheless, reflexivity in how methods were selected and used, transparency of the relationship between researcher and the researched, and the ways in which the background and experience of the researcher informed the data collection and analysis are important because the researcher cannot be isolated from the research process in qualitative research.

Sampling and saturation were also crucial for ensuring information richness which allowed the issues discovered to be seen from various angles (Fossey, et



al, 2002). Midway through the interviewing stage, the information being gathered became repetitive, in other words the data began to reach saturation point. The purposive sampling adopted in this research allowed participants to be selected to cover variations of issues that were expected to be of relevance (Russell and Gregory, 2003), in this case males aged 16-30 and residing in Glasgow and Liverpool to discuss experiences of local labour markets. As saturation was recognised, the process of data collection found its end point before the pre-defined target of 40 young male interviewees had been reached.

As has been covered in this section, the potential transfer of knowledge produced from the emergent findings of this research is assessed to different criteria than from generalisation in the positivist sense (Lewis and Ritchie, 2003). However, the researcher cannot prove the findings are applicable to other contexts, rather, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit “It is, in summary, not the naturalist’s task to provide an index of transferability, it is his or her responsibility to provide the data base that makes transferability judgements possible on the part of potential appliers.” (p. 316.). In other words, the researcher’s duty is to provide the *evidence* that the knowledge produced can be transferred (Creswell and Miller, 2000).

## 5.7 Ethics

Ethical approval for this research was granted by the University of Glasgow, conforming to the university’s ethical code of research. I completed the participant information sheet that details how the data would be managed and stored, ensuring the privacy and protection of participants’ confidential data (see [Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet](#)). As the interviews switched to online platforms in response to the 2020 Covid19 lockdown measures, I obtained recorded informed consent at the beginning of each telephone or video interview. I was cognizant that ethics are not a one-time event but are an ongoing process throughout the duration of the research project and beyond (Hopkins, 2010). The primary obligation of the researcher is towards the people of the study, who take precedence over the project and research discipline (Denzin, 1989). As such, I informed my participants that their personal views and

stories that they shared with me would be protected through safe storage and would remain anonymous by the assignment of pseudonyms.

Participants were informed about the aims of the project, why their participation was needed, what they had to do during the interviews and how the data would be used. Although no sensitive issues were to be covered, and no vulnerable groups were included in the sample, nonetheless interviewees might have been uncomfortable talking about personal circumstances and opinions. Elmir, et al. (2010) suggest that a sensitive research topic is any topic that has the potential to elicit powerful emotional responses such as anger, embarrassment, sadness or anxiety. The online nature of the interviews due to the Covid lockdowns mitigated the dangers of meeting in comfortable and safe environments. However, I was also aware that some of the participants may have experienced other issues of privacy in their households. I informed the interviewees to ensure they were in an environment where they would feel comfortable disclosing information about their lived experiences. I had planned to temporarily terminate interviews in cases where a participant displayed signs of distress or became emotional, however this did not occur at any time in the interviews. As there can be a relationship between research and stress (Gibbs, et al, 2018) details of mental health and counselling support information was also provided at the beginning and end of the interviews.

On the other hand, research participants can experience positive and therapeutic effects from sharing their life stories to an interested learner (Draucker, Martsolf and Poole, 2009). East, et al. (2010) argue that individuals can undergo a reflective process and interviews may have a cathartic effect when elucidating personal stories. As stories cover values and emotions, the sharing of experiences and personal thoughts can provide relief from anxiety and insecurity about the future and possibly help to build personal resilience upon reflection. Several of the young men I interviewed were enthusiastic about the research topic and seemed encouraged their circumstances were being studied. They enjoyed having someone with whom they could share their present circumstances who understood where they were coming from.

## 5.8 Summary and conclusion

This chapter has explained and justified the research process adopted to address the research problem outlined at the beginning of this thesis. Mixed methods underpinned by the pragmatist approach in combination with the conceptual theories discussed in Chapter 4 and throughout this chapter will be used to answer the research questions.

It was decided that the issues of labour market insecurity for young men in the postindustrial context were best explored utilising Beck's Risk Society thesis, Reith's Age of Change gambling theory, Furlong's Zones of (in)security conceptual lens and Marx's theory of Surplus Labour, and the semi-structured qualitative interviews and quantitative analysis of labour market data worked well in combination with these theories. These theoretical perspectives were lenses through which both datasets could be analysed and understood. The mixed methods approach complemented these theories as it "can produce more robust measures of association while allowing multiple paths to meaning exist" (Wheeldon, 2010, p117).

As the literature review revealed, youth transitions are extended, young men are more responsible for navigating education to work transitions as individuals where strong competition exists for a declining supply of secure jobs, and employment uncertainty is more than a temporary condition in the youth labour market (Beck, 1992; Furlong, et al, 2018; Roberts, 2018). The analysis of quantitative labour market data was analysed through the lens of the Zones of (in)security to gain insights into variations of local labour market conditions. The qualitative interviews understood through the lenses of the Risk Society thesis and Age of Chance gambling theory added depth to the quantitative results as they reflected young men's points of view and experiences of their complex and unpredictable education to employment transitions.

Whilst the limitations of this research are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 9, it should be noted here that the study does not claim to be representative of the locations in which they were conducted. As the sample sizes were 19 in Glasgow and 10 in Liverpool, they were relatively small. However, as mentioned in this chapter, the aim was to ensure parity of interviewees within each of the

five pre-defined labour market categories. The numbers for employment and fulltime students were satisfied early on in the recruitment and interview phase and more effort was given to recruiting interviewees for the self-employed, unemployed and apprenticeship categories. Nevertheless, caution should be exercised in generalising the experiences of the young men in this research. The research was also contextualised in terms of location, future research could explore the findings from this research in both similar and different locations to test the results from this study. Another limitation is the wide age range in relation to the sample size. Future research could achieve more parity of age range by increasing the number of young men interviewed within each of the labour market categories.

Despite these limitations, this research provides valuable insights into the perceptions and experiences of the young men as they navigated labour market transitions in ex-industrial cities. Quantitative data analysis of objective data provides the big picture of labour market conditions in Glasgow and Liverpool. Qualitative analysis of the semi-structured interviews draw on the perspectives and experiences of young men in these two cities and the challenges they face in the current context. It is my sincere hope that both the congruence and divergencies identified through the mixed methods process in this research offers some degree of transferability for future studies. It has been the aim of this research to provide findings of interest for conversations relating to young men's education to labour market transitions, particularly those in contemporary British labour markets.

This chapter has discussed the research methods adopted to address the research problem. The following chapters (Chapter 6 and 7) present the findings based on the data collected in the quantitative and qualitative phases, before proceeding to discuss the findings in Chapter 8.

## Chapter 6 Education to employment transitions

### 6.1 Introduction

The findings of this study are presented in Chapters 6 and 7. This chapter explores young men's experiences of education to employment transitions. Included in this chapter is an exploration of the education pathways available according to the young men's accounts, experiences of the youth labour markets of Glasgow and Liverpool, and perceptions of employability in relation to education qualifications.

There are five main sections in this chapter. The first and second sections (6.2 and 6.3) describe findings that emerged from thematic analysis of the interview data namely, *experiences of education choices*, and *precarious labour market perceptions and experiences*. Section 6.2, *Informed post school choices*, explores the post-compulsory education advice the young men received while they were at school in light of the skills policies reviewed in this research. This section aims to comprehend the esteem in which apprenticeships, university, college and employment destinations were held and how the young men perceived these education choices.

Section 6.3, *The impact of qualifications in the labour market*, focusses on the young men's perspectives of these educational pathways and the qualifications they provide in relation to their perceived and experienced employability in the labour market. The settings, in postindustrial Glasgow and Liverpool's depressed labour markets, provide a crucial understanding of the risks perceived by young men and the individualisation of responsibility they experience in navigating their education to employment transitions. The data from these qualitative findings integrate with quantitative analysis of Understanding Society's main survey labour market data for both cities which focusses on labour market positions and job classifications in relation to education status. The findings presented in these two sections addresses the first supplementary research question: How have young men perceived and experienced their education and employment choices?

In light of the various skills policies reviewed in this research that have found broad policy overlaps in the Scottish and English context despite supposed divergent ideological backdrops, the third section (6.4) compares the findings between Glasgow and Liverpool and discusses the main points of convergence and divergence in the data presented in this chapter. The fourth section (6.5) summarises these findings, and the fifth section (6.6) introduces the theoretical lenses that will be utilised for the discussion in Chapter 8.

## 6.2 Informed post-school choices

This section describes the demographics of the qualitative sample in terms of current economic activity and highest education qualifications (Table 6.1) before exploring the insights on the young men in the following section. The full demographics of the sample are outlined in [Appendix 5: Qualitative sample demographics](#).

The majority of the young men in this sample had engaged with post-compulsory education. Table 6.1 below shows that of the 29 young men across both cities, 15 had graduated from university. Appendix 5 shows that 4 of the remaining 14 without a degree were fulltime students at college or university. It also shows 4 were apprentices, 8 were employed fulltime, 1 was self-employed, 8 were fulltime students and 8 were unemployed.

**Table 6.1 Highest qualification: Glasgow and Liverpool**

		City		Total
		Glasgow	Liverpool	
Highest qualification	Postgraduate degree	4	3	7
	Undergraduate degree	5	3	8
	College (HNC/HND)	4	1	5
	Highers/A-level	4	2	6
	SG/GCSE or below	2	1	3
Total		19	10	29

Source: Qualitative sample

The thinking that informed the young men's decisions on whether to engage with post-compulsory education is explored in this section. Looking at how young men were guided while they were at school reveals the impact of advice and information provided by schools and their families. This in turn provides insights into how the young men understood the choices they had available to them and the importance of their decisions. Firstly, the comments in the proceeding section below shows the ways in which the young men experienced how university destinations were prioritised by their schools and how the links between university and employability were assumed.

### 6.2.1 Pushed on a university path

The young men indicated their 'informed choices' were strongly influenced by their schools:

most of the time a lot of the teachers and staff kind of pushed you towards college more than that [apprenticeships]. They kind of pushed you on a path, you know "you'd probably be better going to college or university rather than that" that's the way they kind of try to change your mind really (William, Glasgow)

Not only did William say his school was more focussed on channelling young people into colleges and universities, in his words pupils were "pushed" on that path and they would actively try to change his mind. Ian reflected his decision to go to university had been influenced by his school:

it was kind of drilled into me, I just did a degree and then from my degree I can get anything I want, it's what was told to me anyway, just "I need a degree" is what I thought (Ian, Glasgow)

Explaining the reasons why he thought a degree was necessary, Ian believed he could 'get anything' he wanted with a degree which made him feel the 'need' for a degree.

When thinking about the reasons why schools wanted their students to go to university, school culture and reputation was also cited:

[my school was] kind of like a high-performance school like academically ... these types of schools are very much like "uni, uni, uni" (Jim, Glasgow)

it was kind of a given and also furthermore like I say with the kind of high achieving nature of this school too, even despite being a state school they promoted the idea of university above all else (Stevie, Glasgow)

Jim believed the status of his prestigious school and its location influenced the institutional culture and its strong emphasis on going to university. Stevie went to a high-achieving school where university was also the main assumed pathway. As the following sections will reveal, the high esteem in which university was held at school was a common experience for the young men.

### **6.2.2 Increased choices: “what do you want to do?”**

One unemployed young male in Glasgow described his experience with how his school dealt with his poor performance. Fred, who indicated he was regarded as an ‘at risk’ pupil, believed his careers adviser at school was unhelpful upon hearing he did not have strong qualifications and hurriedly signed him up for a college course without much discussion, which made him feel as though he did not have many choices:

he [careers advisor] was like “what do you want to do?” and I was like “I don’t know, I’ve not really got like the pure best of qualifications” and he went “what’s your best qualification?” and I was like “woodwork” and he was like “aye, do you want to go to college and do construction then?” and I was like “nah, like everybody goes and does construction” like a construction course, so I was like “no, you’re alright!” and then I was like “honestly joinery and carpentry” and he was “aye, City of Glasgow have got a course there” bang and he just applied for it and told the head teacher (Fred, Glasgow)

For the young men who were considered ‘on track,’ the pressure to go to university was mostly attributed to influence by schools, and this pressure often came at the expense of carefully designing a career path. Chris, for example, did not know what he wanted to do in life and left school believing he had to get a degree before thinking about a career, which he said was the same for most of his peers:

like most people I knew, no one knew what they wanted to do in 4th year, 5th year, 6th year ... I think the aim was just to try get yourself



into university or college and then and enjoy the experience and if you come out knowing what you want to do after it then you have won a watch. I mean who knows? (Chris, Glasgow)

The young men indicated a high level of uncertainty over their career paths and employment outcomes prior to entering university. It seemed to be a common experience for young men such as Chris and his peers who did not know what they wanted to do. Having a career plan at the end of university was likened to winning a watch, a phrase that indicates a jackpot prize, in this case in relation to career outcomes from his university pathway. In other words, despite the perceived need to go to university, a clear link between university education and employment was not perceived to exist and employment outcomes were seen as unpredictable and uncertain.

University entrance took precedence over the actual subject being studied. Stevie, Mark and John, for example, prioritised getting into university above subject choice:

partly being pragmatic with like quite weak Highers, I think the philosophy degree was easier than some other options. And it was like a foot into the door at university and in that sense, it was quite a smart decision (Stevie, Glasgow)

cultural studies, it was the only option available to me really, so I said “yeah” and that’s kind of where university started for me (Mark, Liverpool)

As long as you went to university that was the thing, I don’t think they cared about which course you did (John, Liverpool)

For these young men such taking the only subject that would grant them access to university was described as a rational action. In John’s case, the perceived need by young men to get into university was combined with pressure and inadequate guidance provided by schools.

### **6.2.3 Informed choices**

The young men intimated that their families and friends were unable to provide guidance or assistance in this current environment as it was a new experience previous generations had not encountered. Andrew, who was one of the

employed graduates, needed careers advice but found himself overly reliant on his school because he was the first person in his family to go to university:

Neither of my parents went to university and to be honest they were not able to give much information at all, and so I was reliant on the school (Andrew, Liverpool)

Andrew was disappointed with the advice given to him by his school despite being dependent on them for guidance:

they were the only people that I relied on, not my parents because my parents didn't give me any advice at all basically [laugh] it was purely the fact that I relied 100% on the school and they literally just said do something you enjoy and you're good at, but with no kind of information around how that would provide useful in the future, how one subject may well be better to study than another subject at university and for your career, salary etcetera, etcetera. So, yeah, I do feel looking back that the advice I got was not particularly comprehensive at all (Andrew, Liverpool)

The advice was important for many young men, particularly since they were the generation to experience the expansion of education participation resulting from HE expansion policies since New Labour. As their parents had not been to university, they were unable to offer advice, meaning that the cultural capital in the form of their parents was not useful in making these decisions. Thus, they depended on other sources for advice, in most cases their schools advised them to embark on university.

While social capital could be influential in institution entrance and type of subject studied, for young men who lacked this capital they were dependent on schools for advice. However, the advice given by schools was not always appreciated. Tommy, one of the three unemployed who had withdrawn from university, rued going to university and only discovered while on his degree programme that his qualification would not lead to a stable career in his desired field. This experience made him feel that the value of university degrees were falsified:

I think that is just a bit of a myth that you do need a degree to get on with life. I just wish that there was more of an emphasis, like just from my personal experience, you know, I wish I'd had someone to

just tell me that “you maybe don’t need to, and if you do like here are the negatives, here are the cons” (Tommy, Liverpool)

The young men felt they was not given the right advice prior to going to university and wished he had been warned of the disadvantages of the university path in relation to employment outcomes. What seemed to be the case was the better information young men received was to simply gain admission to university. The so-called ‘informed choices’ and ‘better decisions’ underpinning skills policies reviewed in Chapter 3 comprised solely of university entrance for these young men. The prioritisation of university entrance above subject choice had implications for young men’s choices. Just getting into university meant that the young men were choosing subjects almost at random and whichever would result in admission to a degree programme:

I started realising that I’d chosen journalism pretty much out of a hat ... it was a weird one I chose journalism because I had no ideas what else I should pick (Tommy, Liverpool)

Tommy realised he had chosen his degree subject without much consideration which indicated that going to university and getting a degree was prioritised above considering the suitability of the subject and future employment. The young men were choosing subjects on the basis on gaining university entrance. Stevie, another unemployed young man who had withdrawn from university, explained his rationale for choosing any subject to get into university, in this case philosophy, was explained by way of “that’s just the way it worked” indicating that the way he navigated the education system were commonplace:

looking back I’ve got no idea what possessed me to go into philosophy. Honestly like, I was seventeen and yeah, that’s just the way it worked (Stevie, Glasgow)

It seems career plans were deferred until after university entrance had been achieved, However, this may have been a misinformed strategy. Anthony, who was unemployed after withdrawing from his college programme, explained the high number of young people studying towards degree qualification has devalued the value of having a degree and many students were only at university because of uncertainty over alternative post-school destinations:

I think they've devalued degrees a little bit ... the sad thing is, you go to a lot of university classes around the country and about 70% of students are just there because it was something to do, or it seemed like a good idea or the least offensive option at the time (Anthony, Glasgow)

Tommy believed degrees had lost their previous value and wished he had been told to focus on gaining work experience rather than going to university as a pathway into his chosen vocation:

at the end of the day, it's probably just a way of, whereas a while ago it might have been a really big accolade, now I think it's just a way of cutting the CV pile in half ... especially with what I picked, going to journalism. It sounds terrible but I wish someone would've just sort of told me "You should be doing it, not learning about it straight away" ... yeah that's my sort of personal experience of it (Tommy, Liverpool)

Although HE participation had been promoted by policymakers as important for social mobility, without a simultaneous growth in graduate level jobs, young men such as Tommy soon discovered that their investment in university education was unlikely to provide access to stable employment or a secure career.

On the other hand, Jamie did not depend on his school for guidance because he had a clear idea of what he wanted to do:

I always had a better idea than most. So, I didn't necessarily get a bunch of career options from the school because I kind of already knew I suppose (Jamie, Glasgow)

Elaborating on why he did not require guidance from his school, Jamie explained that his clear idea for his career pathway had been informed by help from his dad:

my dad was an engineer, so I think it was just an idea of his ... I got a lot of help from home, like my dad has had a lot of different experiences so he's helped a lot. So, I kind of felt like I just had all the tools I needed anyway (Jamie, Glasgow)

For young men like Jamie, there was a perception that guidance was available at school but that it was neither necessary nor specific. They placed more trust in

the advice given by their parents who had demonstrable experiences in navigating career pathways.

Parental influence also acted to prevent career decisions that could be erroneous. Mark had considered joining the army as a way to escape the limited opportunities in his working-class area before his dad acted to prevent this decision:

it's something I contemplated myself for a little while, the only reason I didn't do it is because my dad wouldn't sign the waiver (Mark, Liverpool)

In a sense, young men without clear pathways into employment were at risk of making career decisions they could later regret. This emphasises the importance of guidance given by schools and parents. However, not all of the young men were able to rely on their parents to guide their pathways which brings the guidance given by schools to the fore, which is outlined in the next section.

#### **6.2.4 Non-university pathways “there was always a bit of a stigma”**

As the above findings have shown, schools in both Glasgow and Liverpool enforced the idea that university entrance was more important than having a career plan or subject choice. Those deemed ‘on track’ but indicating they were not intending on applying for university were actively persuaded otherwise. This section explores how alternative pathways were regarded at school.

Ian, who had withdrawn from a university degree and was unemployed, found that getting a university degree was held in the highest regard at his school and apprenticeship pathways were associated with poorer employment outcomes and pupils who were school dropouts:

It was the people that were dropping out in fourth year and stuff would be going to do your apprenticeships. And it was just there was always a bit of a stigma as they're not going to end up as good as the people that have a degree (Ian, Glasgow)

However, as mentioned above, the way in which young men were informed about their post-school destinations seemed to be favoured towards going to

university more than anything else. George, a fulltime employed university graduate, shared his former belief that BTECs (work-related qualifications combining practical learning with subject and theory learning) were for less academic pupils and those who were doing them were less intelligent. University pathways were held in higher esteem than other pathways in his school:

We got the option to do A-Levels or BTECs, so automatically if someone did a BTEC, you know, in my eyes, very wrongly, they were less academically intelligent, they weren't going to get the better grades and it was kind of going to university was put on a pedestal (George, Liverpool)

With the emphasis at school on going to university experienced by the majority of the sample, there were similar experiences in both Glasgow and Liverpool that early school to employment transitions were as discouraged as apprenticeships. Harry, an employed graduate, was made to feel that leaving school at fourth year instead of going to university would be an unsuccessful pathway:

I think it was drummed into you at school that you needed to go to university ... it was never like; well, you could actually bow out at fourth year and get a job and that would still be [pause] you could still be a success. It was like "if you leave school at fourth year, you're a failure" (Harry, Glasgow)

Andrew shared his experience of the ramifications for his classmate who wanted to enter employment straight from school:

it seemed to me that the school were not interested in those people ... one of my very good friends absolutely didn't want to go on to further study and he kind of felt like he was just discarded, and he wasn't really told what options were out there, and no mention was ever given of things such as an apprenticeship or whatever (Andrew, Liverpool)

Andrew saw his friend was abandoned when it became clear he intended on entering employment from school instead of going on to university. Part of this abandonment was a lack of support or advice for alternative career pathways.

On the other hand, there were accounts which suggest that schools were beginning to promote apprenticeship more frequently. Jamie, who had promoted

apprenticeships across schools in Scotland was of the view that apprenticeships were promoted more nowadays compared to when he was at school:

things have changed a lot now because to my knowledge ... apprenticeships weren't on offer like what they are now (Jamie, Glasgow)

On the other hand, Chris, who had also performed the role of promoting apprenticeships in schools believed that his former high school, which was located in a prosperous area, did not want to discuss apprenticeships because it was a "quite a good school":

we asked, we kind of went to schools and stuff to talk about apprenticeships and options [and they] weren't interested in having a talk about it still. So that spoke volumes (Chris, Glasgow)

Not all schools prioritised university entrance. Robert found that his school presented various pathways without pressure and did not channel pupils into those capable of going to university and those who were not:

they kind of presented different [and] diverse things, they never kind of grouped people together and said, "oh you need to do this" (Robert, Glasgow)

Robert's school provided support for various pathways and did not exclude young people who did not want to go to university:

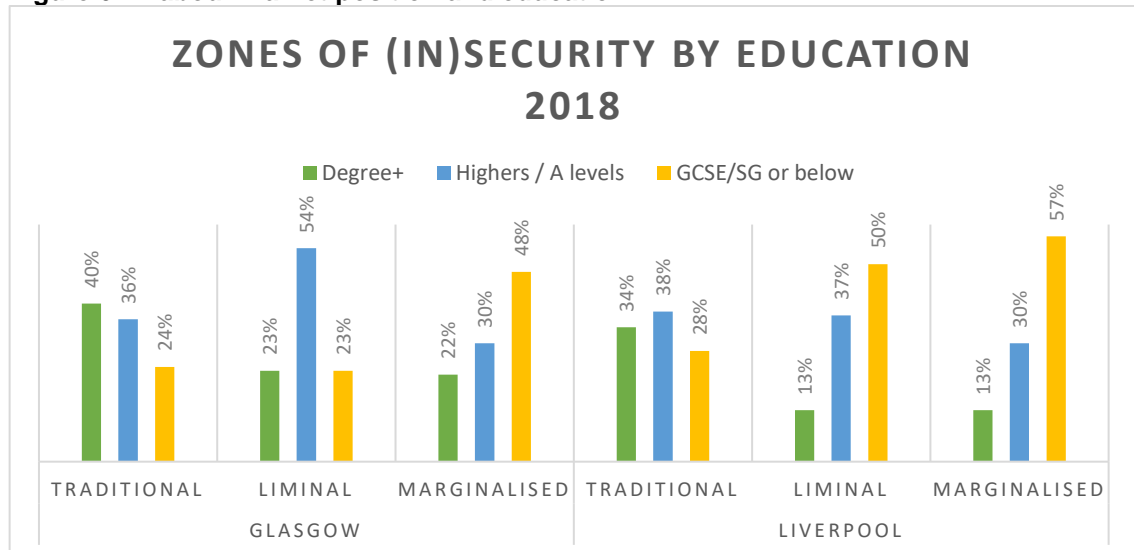
they were really supportive [and] would often suggest things for you to do but they would say "if you want to do something else, we're happy to kind of push you to do that" (Robert, Glasgow)

Overall, however, the majority of the interview participants experienced a strong push to go to university. Alternative pathways were discouraged and stigmatised. Those considered 'at risk' were channelled onto college. Those who were 'on track' were encouraged to go to university, and if they resisted were then ostracised. The accounts of the young men resonate with literature that argues vocational education was overshadowed by HE expansion which saw the monopolisation of universities as the main gateway into employment.

## 6.3 The impact of qualifications in the labour market

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 suggested that while education did not guarantee a better life, it did offer some protection from labour market marginality. It also found that young people with lower levels of income and lower educational attainment perceive themselves to have less control over life compared to those with higher levels of education and income (income levels are analysed in Section 7.2). Figure 6.1 below shows the education levels within each of the Zones of (in)security in Glasgow and Liverpool in 2018 for young men aged 16-30 using the Understanding Society dataset.

**Figure 6.1 Labour market position and education**



**Source: Understanding Society (Wave 8, 2018)**

Of the young men in the traditional zone, 40% had a degree or higher, 36% had Highers or A-levels and 24% had GCSEs (General Certificate of Secondary Education) or SGs (Standard Grades) or below. The dominant group in the Liminal zone were 54% of young men whose highest qualification was Highers or A-levels. The Marginalised zone was mostly populated (48%) by young men with GCSEs or SGs. The outcomes were similar in Liverpool although the biggest education group in the traditional zone were those with Highers or A-levels (38%) closely followed by degree holders (34%) and the smallest group were those with GCSEs or SGs (28%). Those with GCSEs or SGs were the largest groups in both the



liminal (50%) and marginalised zones (57%) and the smallest groups were degree holders (13% in both zones). As can be seen, higher level qualifications may offer some protection from the likelihood of labour market marginalisation but not absolute protection. Table 6.2 below shows the job classification of employment occupied by both graduates and non-graduates aged 16-30 in Glasgow and Liverpool.

**Table 6.2 Job classification by education: Glasgow and Liverpool**

	Glasgow 2020		Liverpool 2020	
	Degree+	No degree	Degree+	No degree
Professional Occupation	12%	0%	11%	0%
Managerial & technical occupation	35%	18%	56%	26%
Skilled non-manual	41%	27%	0%	32%
Skilled manual	6%	32%	22%	26%
Partly skilled occupation	6%	23%	11%	16%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

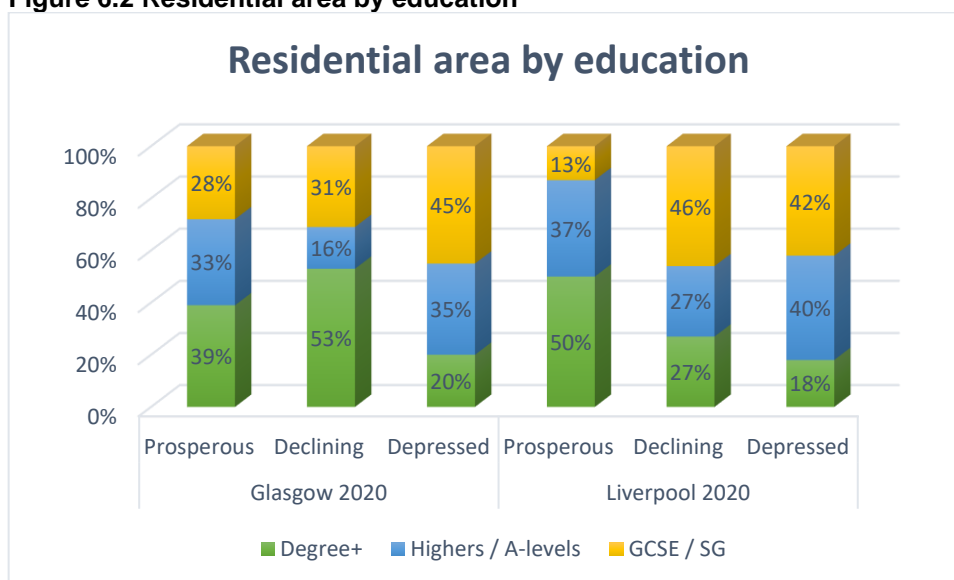
Source: Understanding Society (Wave 10, 2020)

Table 6.2 shows the job classification of employment occupied by both graduates and non-graduates aged 16-30 in Glasgow and Liverpool. In Glasgow, male degree holders were most likely to be in skilled non-manual (41%), managerial and technical (35%) and professional occupations (12%). They were least likely to be in skilled manual (6%) and partly skilled (6%) occupations. Male degree holders in Liverpool were mostly employed in managerial and technical occupations (56%). There were more degree holders in skilled manual occupations (22%) than professional (11%) and partly skilled (11%) occupations. As with Glasgow, there were no young men in professional occupations without a degree qualification.

While higher level qualifications do not guarantee good employment outcomes for everyone, the Figure 6.2 below explores the residential locations of the

Understanding Society sample in relation to educational attainment. It shows the relationship between education level and levels of residential deprivation.

**Figure 6.2 Residential area by education**



**Source: Understanding Society (Wave 10, 2020)**

Having lower-level qualifications increased the likelihood of living in declining or depressed areas in Glasgow. Being educated to at least degree level ensured some likelihood of living in declining or prosperous areas rather than depressed areas. Of 100% of young men living in the prosperous areas of Glasgow, 39% were educated to at least degree level, 33% held Highers/A-levels, and 28% had GCSE/SGs or below. In declining areas, 53% had degrees, 16% held Highers/A-levels, and 31% had GCSE/SGs. In the depressed areas, 20% had at least a degree, 35% Highers/A-levels, and 45% had GCSE/SGs.

In Liverpool, being educated to at least degree level increased the likelihood of living in prosperous areas. Those with lower-level qualifications were more likely to live in declining or depressed areas. Half of young men living in prosperous areas (50%) were educated to at least degree level, 37% had Highers/A-levels, and a minority had GCSE/SGs or below (13%). In declining areas, the majority group was those with GCSE/SGs (46%). In the depressed areas, the largest

education level group was those with GCSE/SGs (42%) followed by 40% with Highers/A-levels and only 18% were educated to degree level.

The remainder of this section explores the experiences of young men from the qualitative sample.

### 6.3.1 “It’s a gamble any way you go”

Despite the pressure to go to university based on a perceived need to obtain a graduate degree, the section 6.2 found that the young men were unclear about their career pathways. Going to university did not have a clear link to careers or employment for this sample in Glasgow and Liverpool. Described as winning a watch by Chris in the previous section, Alistair and Jim describe below the action of pursuing higher education as a ‘gamble’:

I could do that qualification and not even find a school job and end up somewhere silly like in B&M ... you’re going to think “what was the point in me doing that course?” I think it’s a gamble any way you go because I think it’s similar everywhere you go, isn’t it? (Alistair, Liverpool)

I would say like with the current format it feels almost like a gamble, like when you go to university it’s a gamble in getting a job. I know people that have chemical engineering degrees ... like I know people with master’s in engineering degrees and [they] just cannot get jobs (Jim, Glasgow)

Alistair was worried that doing a degree was not a secure pathway into employment. It seems uncertainty of outcome was in most choices for Alistair as he felt every decision was a gamble. The concern relating to outcomes from education was compounded by the investments required. Alistair was also aware of the strong competition due to the high supply of graduates in the labour market which made his potential investments in getting qualifications all the riskier. Despite graduating with a master’s degree in mechanical engineering, Jim had seen his graduate peers in STEM degrees struggle to find employment after graduating. This, combined with his own experiences seeking employment, informed his perception that the university to employment route was precarious.

Embarking on a career in the army to escape limited education and employment opportunities led to the ultimate loss for some young men from Mark's deprived geographical area:

I know two or three people from my school who have since been killed in Afghanistan and stuff. But they only ever went there in the first place because they felt they had no path and had no encouragement. So, you're almost driving students to an extreme of thinking the only way to get out of the situation is to literally get out of the environment (Mark, Liverpool)

The young men across the sample described their education and labour market experiences using gambling metaphors. Phrases such as winning a watch, all decisions are a gamble, university was a gamble, all were common sentiments used to convey the uncertainty and unpredictability they perceived in their local labour markets. As will be seen in the next chapter, these sentiments appear in several contexts and related terms such as fate, luck, probability and luck encompass the feelings of the young men in the current environment.

However, Peter, who had graduated from a prestigious university, had subsequently worked in several locations in England and Scotland, and he had developed an understanding of the differences between FE routes either side of the border. He saw that there was a difference in how young people transitioned into apprenticeships in Scotland and England. In England, young people's decisions at school to a large extent determined their future pathways:

from what I can gather down south you basically have to make a decision after GCSEs to do A-Levels or an apprenticeship and that's pretty much the only time that you can choose to go one way or the other (Peter, Glasgow)

In Scotland, Peter believed there to be more options for young people to change course along their education journey which may have mitigated a sense of risk from education choices:

there's a lot more flexibility, so you can kind of do some Highers and then you can do and do an apprenticeship, or you can do like an HNC, a HND with your Highers and Advanced Highers if your institution allows that. You can also go to university from your Highers, you don't have to have Advanced Highers, and then you can do like a baseline year and then do your degree. It seems like there's a lot more

flexibility in Scotland than there is in England for that (Peter, Glasgow)

Those increased options and flexibility in Scotland may help to mitigate some the risks involved in unsuccessful education pathways compared to England. However, for university students, the accounts of young men in Liverpool and Glasgow pointed towards the same issues, such as an oversupply of graduates and shortage of jobs, as is discussed in the next section and next chapter.

### **6.3.2 “Literally hundreds of graduates”**

The young men in both Glasgow and Liverpool samples explained why university to secure employment outcomes were believed to be uncertain, and while not all used the gamble metaphor directly, a risky unpredictability of outcomes was described in other ways. One of the reasons for these labour market conditions perceived by the young men was the shortage of graduate level jobs in relation to the quantity of graduates continuously being supplied into the labour market:

like there's more forensic science students per year than there are jobs in forensic science in the entire country ... like the British government or the British police there was only eight official forensic science roles in the country because they only have two labs, and they've got literally hundreds of graduates in this subject every year (Anthony, Glasgow)

The value of university degrees had fallen in young men's experiences because of the high number of graduates. As will be explored in more detail in the next chapter, the young men and the young men perceived it was work experience that was of higher merit than degrees in the competition for employment.

Jamie, one of the four apprentices in Glasgow, viewed university degrees below employer led training:

The degree almost doesn't matter to me anymore because experience is kind of everything now. I think degrees now [are] almost just a fancy bit of paper. They don't mean as much, certainly not to me than what they might have done because experience is more what people are looking for (Jamie, Glasgow)

Stephen, a fulltime university student, thought degrees had lost their value for young people in the labour market due to an increase of graduates, and academic performance did not always equate to professional competence:

I don't think a degree means now what it used to ... I think, academic performance isn't always essential in work like in ... you don't need to be the best academically to secure the best work because people might not test well, some people might not be able to handle deadlines in coursework, it doesn't necessarily mean they won't perform well at working level (Stephen, Liverpool)

The young men were critical of the transferability of skills developed at university. Thus, academic education in and of itself was not perceived as a golden gateway into employment. This suggested there were other qualities that were important to gain employment in young men's experiences.

### **6.3.3 Only some degrees “guaranteed”**

There was a perception that certain university programmes were more likely than others to lead to employment. These subjects were referred to in terms of guaranteeing clear pathways to careers or secure employment. Harry, an employed graduate, believed that specific programmes at university had established links to careers:

whereas like nursing was so, you, like, just pass your exams and you immediately get a job and then you, if you do well there then you get a bump up. Same with like school teaching you get a probation year. So, everything, you're guaranteed that, so you just need to make sure that you're really good at your uni work and you excel at your probation year (Harry, Glasgow)

Harry talks about the value of degree qualifications being dependent on the subject and career, and certainties relating to employment security. He gives examples of medical fields and teaching as offering guaranteed jobs at the end of the programmes through clearer pathways and specific education matched to occupations. As opposed to subjects that guaranteed clear pathways, there were subjects believed to have limited options post-graduation:

Mechanical engineers are involved in absolutely everything that's developed on the planet, you know, whereas if you study, I don't know, say geography, you're much more limited in terms of what jobs are available to you (Kirk, Glasgow)

Kirk, who graduated with a master's degree in mechanical engineering, believes that mechanical engineers have more employment options than students of subjects such as geography. While geography may or may not provide abundant

employment options, the point being made was that he perceived there to be a hierarchy of subjects and career fields relating to employment options and security in the labour market. This specific account may have been influenced by Kirk's positive experience studying at a relatively prestigious university that offered plentiful opportunities for work placements and engagement with employers which eventually lead to employment upon graduation.

The perception of university prestige was referred to directly by two young men in the sample. Andrew, a permanently employed graduate, made the point that it was not only the subject that determined employment options but also the prestige of the education institution:

if you come away with a first in maths from Cambridge University or Oxford University then I think you pretty much are guaranteed to have the option of quite a good job (Andrew, Liverpool)

Stevie, one of the unemployed who withdrew from university, reflecting on the reasons why he withdrew from his university, posited that a lack of institutional prestige as being a perceived disadvantage in the labour market and this lowered his motivation to finish his studies:

because I went to the University of [...] you see this isn't, it's a good university in its own right 100% but it wasn't Edinburgh, it wasn't Durham or whatever do you know what I mean like (Stevie, Glasgow)

Tommy, unemployed, was informed by his university lecturer that his university degree was unlikely to lead to a career in the field, and this influenced his decision to withdraw from his university programme:

he said [laugh] he said to me like, you might as well [throw in the towel] because the people who are learning about journalism who aren't right now breaking their backs trying to find like low-paid jobs in newspapers and doing it right now, they're the ones who aren't going to get anywhere because the people who want to get to the point you know get into these jobs they're doing them already. ... it was a bit of a joke I think hearing that from someone, but I totally sort of agree (Tommy, Liverpool)

Not only were Tommy's student peers leaving university feeling as though their employability and job outcomes were not worth their efforts, but Tommy also began to suspect that he might be wasting his time. This was confirmed by his

lecturer who did not try to stop him from quitting his programme on the basis that he wanted a job in journalism. The point made by his lecturer seemed to be that gaining experience from working in the field was more important than obtaining the degree qualification for his career prospects. As will be explored in the next chapter, work experience is a significant employer requirement. Those without matching skills and qualifications to employer demands encountered difficulties in gaining access to secure employment. The next section explores the links between education institutions and employers experienced by the young men.

### **6.3.4 Employer education links**

Another reason believed to be preventing the young men from experiencing smooth university to employment transitions were the discrepancy between the skills developed in education and those that were in demand in the labour market. Moreover, all but three of the young men complained about weak links between employers and their education institutions. Harry was concerned that that were inconsistencies between the skills graduates develop at university and employer needs, and he questioned the need to go to university:

if you're doing all that and you're walking out the place and the employers and going "well, you've not actually been skilled appropriately" well what like, what is the actual point? I definitely think there needs to be more communication between the employers and the educators (Harry, Glasgow)

Harry wanted there to be better links between education providers and employers to ensure graduates were not entering the labour market with irrelevant skills. This demonstrates a desire for clear pathway into secure employment which was not fulfilled by university.

As the literature in Chapter 2 had shown, young people had been channelled into post-compulsory education under various guises. The expansion of supply-side policies had neglected the needs of employers which resulted in skills mismatches and overqualification in relation to the shortage of graduate level jobs. The economy was unable to absorb the scale of highly skilled young people into lower and intermediate level jobs. The assumption by policymakers that



increasing the supply of skills would stimulate high-level jobs growth was fallacious.

Tommy, who withdrew from university, said his peers that graduated felt they had wasted their time in relation to their employability and the needs of employers, which vindicated his decision to withdraw:

they've gone through their university courses and from that point on they fell like, a lot of them feel like they wasted their time and money and there wasn't, you know, it wasn't what the jobs they were looking for were after ... they've come out of it just feeling totally unprepared (Tommy, Liverpool)

University education should develop student's practical skills according to Tommy who has seen his friends graduate and end up in unskilled labour:

It has to be made clear or adjusted in some way to make it more practical because at the end of the day most of my friends who went on and finished their courses, they're all intellectual, they're all really smart people but they're working in supermarkets (Tommy, Liverpool)

Tommy's point resonates with Alistair's assertion in section 6.3.1 that investment in education was a gamble because of the likelihood of ending up in unskilled employment.

Mark complained that his university course content was behind the times in relation to labour market demands:

Employers evolve quicker than universities ... how closely government, business and education should work together, if we know that certain sectors are evolving frequently and when they do it, it's quite dramatic, maybe they should work with universities to help provide a syllabus or curriculum for that degree (Mark, Liverpool)

Mark wanted to see more communication between education providers such as universities, government and employers to provide education that is in touch with the demands of employers.

Weak links between university and employers was a common experience for the young men, with all but three university graduates expressing disappointment. Andrew was disappointed his university did not have strong links with employers:

we had expected that there would be links with industry as part of the course and opportunities to spend some time with employers etcetera. And literally there had been nothing, just nothing at all and I remember the students on my course were really quite agitated about this and felt to some degree that they'd been mis-sold the qualification (Andrew, Liverpool)

Andrew and his classmates had expected there to be more engagement with employers as part of their master's degree programme. When it transpired that the promised links with employers did not exist, and no apparent discussion of careers or workplace cultures, he felt that the degree had been "mis-sold" as the programme had not been tailored to develop the students' careers. This was a cause of disdain for several students on the programme. It seems Andrew's university used the promise of routes to employment, and he believed it was too easy for his university to employ bait-and-switch tactics to increase student uptake:

the fact that that didn't come was quite disappointing really, and certainly on reflection I think in a way universities kind of get away quite easily ... that was actually something they used to market the course, yeah so it was quite disappointing really (Andrew, Liverpool)

A lack of employment links at school and university was a common theme. If Andrew's assertion is true, it would imply that the university was exploiting an in-demand need without delivering on its promises.

While Alex, a self-employed graduate, explained that there could have been links between employers and his university, they were not apparent because he did not go out of his way to look for them:

I'm sure there are a lot of links between like industry and [my university] but those are not visible to someone who does not actively seek it out in the first three years of a degree (Alex, Glasgow)

While the above accounts provide indicate weak employer links, graduates from prestigious universities appeared to have different experiences. Jim's university

encouraged him to apply for work placements which he appreciated as it gave him the chance to experience the job:

the university were like very, very, like almost made you apply for it [work placement] ... it gave me the experience to see if, obviously I liked it (Jim, Glasgow)

After facing uncertainty post-graduation, the employer of Jim's internship eventually employed him after he completed his studies:

the placements were definitely valuable because that's the company I've ended up getting a job for (Jim, Glasgow)

Jim also saw his peers gain employment through similar processes which gave him a positive opinion on their value as they led to win-win outcomes:

from people I know anyway that have done internships, the chances, it's quite likely that if they like you that you'll get kind of fast-tracked for a job after you graduate. So, it kind of benefits both parties if that makes sense (Jim, Glasgow)

These universities also provided access to extended networks and potential employers:

they invite employers in and politicians and all sorts of people to speak to. I think the networking aspect was really good at university (Peter, Glasgow)

Such opportunities were helpful in developing more awareness and expanding horizons for Peter:

if you didn't know what to do, you kind of went along to a few of the events and you found out about a career that you'd never heard of that you found really interesting (Peter, Glasgow)

Overall, with the exception of those who had attended prestigious universities, this section has found that there were weak links between education and employment providers, and this had a detrimental impact on the young men's employment transitions from university. Engagement with the contemporary labour market was important for these young men which was why they had invested in learning. However, while they had joined university for the fundamental reason of a perceived or promised link to a career, when these

links did not materialise, both graduates and those who withdrew from their programmes were disappointed. Delving into this yearning for clear pathways into employment, the next section explores the perceptions and experiences of the young men towards apprenticeships.

### **6.3.5 Apprenticeships “a certain level of security”**

The young men perceived that university outcomes were uncertain due to an oversupply of graduates in relation to graduate jobs, a shortage of graduate jobs, and weak links between employers and education providers. Secure employment and stable careers were important for the young men, and this was demonstrable given their investment in education. However, as the previous sections have unravelled, when it became clear that the promised graduate premium was unlikely to manifest, the young men became disenfranchised. Some continued with their studies, but some withdrew.

Apprenticeships emerged as a perceived solution to the uncertainty of employment outcomes from university education. Andrew, who was a fulltime employee with a master’s degree, was impressed by apprenticeships because of the pay, opportunity to gain qualifications, and a perceived employment outcome certainty:

they [apprentices] don’t get less pay at all by being an apprentice there’s no difference to a normal employee. And they have a structured pathway where they do qualifications, they’re paid by the business, they have a guaranteed job at the end of it, obviously they have no loan to pay back ... For me, they are absolutely a brilliant option for people rather than going the standard route to university (Andrew, Liverpool)

The uncertainty of outcome described as a gamble in the previous section by Alistair and Jim was not perceived for the apprenticeship path. For Ian, who had withdrawn from his degree programme, the apprenticeships would be preferable because of the perceived certainty of employment outcomes due to the development of relevant work experience. Compared to degrees, apprenticeships gave the opportunity to experience the realities of specific job roles:

I think it's a certain level of security with it that would make you feel good about it instead of knowing that you're studying and then you might not end up getting a job after it or even being able to use your degree ... you can also get to see the job that you'd be doing as you're studying as well (Ian, Glasgow)

The accounts of the four apprentices interviewed in Glasgow were positive and optimistic because they provided an education and qualification, development of in-demand skills, provided a salary, and gave them a clear pathway to a stable career that could be determined by their actions. Eric, one of the four apprentices interviewed, described graduate apprenticeships combined the best of both academic and vocational worlds:

the graduate apprenticeship is the ideal scenario [because] you're getting paid, you're getting experience, and you're getting that exact same degree as someone who has went to university is getting (Eric, Glasgow)

Eric justified his point about the value of graduate apprenticeships by highlighting they gave the apprentice an advantage over university graduates because of the work experience gained on top of the qualification:

if you've got someone that has a degree and just has a degree, and then you've got someone that has a degree plus four years of work experience in the same sort of field, then you're probably going to go with the person, assuming everything else is the same, you're probably going to go with the person with four years' experience ... so I think that's definitely an advantage (Eric, Glasgow)

It was not only young men who had attended university who had positive perceptions of apprenticeships, as they were regarded favourably by the unemployed. Nick, unemployed, regretted not doing an apprenticeship when he left school aged 16, and saw his friend had benefitted from such a route:

It's something I regret not doing. I would've loved to have done an apprenticeship to be an electrician or something. I've got a friend who's an electrician who's done it that way, he's only my age and he's got his own business now (Nick, Liverpool)

If he was advising younger people today, Nick would recommend they do an apprenticeship:

That's what I'd tell my son to do when I have a son 100%. Definitely, because that's the best way 'round here mate because if you can get your apprenticeship, you can be a fully qualified electrician and then the world's your oyster, you can go around the world as an electrician. You can start your own business (Nick, Liverpool)

For Nick, apprenticeships were the 'best way' in his locale to enter a career, and the outcomes presented potential opportunities such as working abroad or starting a business.

Coinciding with such positive perceptions, the apprentices interviewed in Glasgow explained why they appreciated their apprenticeships. Chris was happy that employment outcomes were "guaranteed" as he seamlessly entered employment:

Well, the good thing about the [company] apprenticeship was that we were guaranteed, it was basically 2½ years apprenticeship training and then at the end of it that was you just fully pledged into your work. There's been literally no difference between my last day as an apprentice on the first day of being a full member a full team member (Chris, Glasgow)

The literature in chapter 2 indicated that HE expansion and increased participation had reduced the bargaining value of graduates and this had resulted in increased competition for a shortage of graduate level jobs. The outcome of graduation inflation had thus been declining incomes and overqualification for lower-level and intermediate jobs, for which employment was uncertain. Unlike many university graduates who face such uncertainties in their job search, Chris did not need to worry about searching for employment at the end of his employer-led training:

there was no "right, you need to apply for a job here" - I was straight into it - but obviously with a degree there's absolutely no guarantee. In fact, a lot of people are struggling after university degree education (Chris, Glasgow)

Chris was certain apprenticeships provided a clearer pathway into employment compared to the university route:

there's no doubt in my mind that going through an apprenticeship guarantees you a job more than getting a degree (Chris, Glasgow)

William was optimistic that his apprenticeship had equipped him with skills and experience that employers wanted which made him confident about finding employment:

I think there's a lot of jobs I could go into quite easily. Just kind of looking at experience knowledge and so on if I've got all these things under my belt and I kind of say this to the employer, this is what I've got, I've got the experience, I've got the qualification, I've got this and that ... most employers now, over the UK look for experience over qualifications now mainly ... So many opportunities there with what I've got, so really, I'm not limited then to what job you can get  
(William, Glasgow)

Jamie was confident he had the upper hand over university graduates in securing employment because he had working experience:

the people who were in my school are probably just about finishing university now with their X, Y and Z degree but they've not done anywhere near the amount of real-life stuff that I've done. So, I imagine myself in a situation where if I was up against one of them going for a job, even if I didn't have the degree, I would still fancy my chances over them because I've been 'doing it' (Jamie, Glasgow)

The young men wanted clear pathways into secure employment and careers. None of the young men were resistant to learning and they all had demonstrated a focus to engage with the contemporary labour market. However, despite following their advice of the experts in their schools in the absence of relevant assistance from traditional sources in this current environment, and despite their best efforts in gaining entrance to post-compulsory education, when it became clear that university was not a guaranteed pathway into gainful employment, the young men questioned the veracity of the guidance they had received. They also began to question why alternative pathways had been framed in a negative light when they were at school.

## 6.4 Comparing the two cities

The Understanding Society quantitative data presented in this chapter demonstrate generally positive results for degree holders, with some caveats.

Figure 6.1 Labour market position and education showed the relationship

between education levels and labour market position. In both cities, the lowest education level group (GCSE/SG or lower) dominated the Marginalised zone (48% in Glasgow, 37% in Liverpool). Those educated to degree level were mostly located in the Traditional zone (40% in Glasgow, 34% in Liverpool). Degree holders were the least likely of the three education groups to occupy Liminal and Marginalised labour market positions - those positions were dominated by the Highers/A-level and GCSE/SG groups, in other words those who did not have degrees. However, that is not to say that degree qualifications offered absolute protection from marginalised positions as 22% (i.e. 1 in 5) of all young men in the Marginalised zone in Glasgow and 13% in Liverpool had degrees.

The findings in [Table 6.2](#) assessed the relationship between occupations and education. In short, the professional and managerial occupations were dominated by degree educated young men, and manual and partly skilled occupations were dominated by non-degree holders in both cities. There were no non-degree holders employed in professional occupations. More degree holders than non-degree holders were employed in managerial and technical occupations (35% vs 18% in Glasgow, 56% vs 26% in Liverpool). Non-degree educated young men were more likely to be employed in skilled manual and partly skilled occupations in both cities. The findings show that higher level qualifications increased the likelihood of living in prosperous areas and reduced the likelihood of living in deprived neighbourhoods. Of those living in the most deprived areas (Depressed areas), the majority had qualifications below degree level such as Highers/A-levels or GCSEs/SGs (only 20% in Glasgow and 18% in Liverpool had degrees).

However, despite these findings, the young men in the qualitative sample complained of weak links between education institutions and employers, irrelevant skills developed at school and university, a shortage of graduate jobs and the devaluing of degrees resulting from increased participation in higher education. Although the data indicates that university education offers some protection from precarity, the young men, including university graduates who were employed in secure jobs, held more positive views towards apprenticeships because they were perceived to provide clearer pathways into careers.



## 6.5 Summary

Contrary to the promises of recent skills policies which suggested that there would be an increase in employer-led training and “good jobs for all,” and that pledged to provide more guidance to help young people make better decisions and more informed choices, the young men in the qualitative sample experienced a strong push from their schools to enter university. Non-university post-school destinations such as employment and apprenticeships were actively discouraged and the opportunity to seek and find employer-led training was undermined (however, the next chapter explores the extent to which those employer-led training opportunities existed for the young men).

A common theme was the perceived need to enter university and obtain a degree propagated by schools, and this was prioritised over choice of subject and career. Also apparent in both cities was the uncertainty of employment outcomes from the university pathway and education choices were described in terms of risk and gamble. As will be explored in the next chapter, this perception of uncertainty was apparent in job search experiences too, including young men with postgraduate qualifications in STEM subjects. Based on primary and second-hand experiences, the young men perceived that the value of university degrees in the labour market have diminished. Several young men regretted going to university as the promised *graduate premium* failed to materialise, and graduates believed they were ill-equipped and unprepared upon entering the labour market. There was a perceived disconnect between universities and employers, and employer links were said to be invisible unless actively sought out. A perception of weak links to employment was cited as a justification for those who had withdrawn from their non-prestigious universities.

What emerged from the findings was the desire for clearer educational pathways into employment which was reported to be largely absent from both Glasgow and Liverpool labour markets. Apprenticeships were mostly regarded as a clearer pathway into employment because they provided the chance to gain in-demand work experience, qualifications and skills, hence the positive appraisal of this pathway. The young men, including university graduates, would advise the next generation to do apprenticeships or seek other employer-led training over

university degrees because of a perceived safer bet in comparison to the odds offered by gambling on a university degree.

## 6.6 Conclusion

One of the key findings drawn from the results in this chapter that will be discussed in Chapter 8, is that while social theories commonly used in youth studies are useful in explaining individualised personal decision-making within a larger structure characterised by insecurity, how the young men perceived and framed uncertain education to labour market transitions has been inadequately conceptualised. This is not to say that the theories typically used in youth studies are redundant as there is evidence in the findings that habitus influenced young men's possibilities for action (Bourdieu, 1986) although the young men could not rely on traditional sources of advice (Beck, 1992; 2000). Given the recent expansion of HE participation since New Labour, many young men were the first in their family to engage with post-compulsory education, partly through necessity. Despite the increased perception of the inherent risks of these paths, and assertions in academic and policy literature, there was little evidence in the sample that the young men were resistant to engaging with post-compulsory education as the majority of the sample had been educated to at least undergraduate degree level. However, it could be seen that those in the very lowest marginalised positions were disengaged with education, although whether their disengagement was a manifestation of working-class masculinity seems negligible (Roberts, 2018, p. 94).

Rather than an individual deficit explaining disengagement as suggested in the policy and academic narratives reviewed in chapters 2 and 3, the accounts of the marginalised young men in the qualitative sample indicated that they lacked resources at home to perform well at school, and they may have been ostracised by their schools after being screened as off track for university entrance. Meanwhile, the perceived risks expressed across the sample as they engaged with their increased education choices resonate with Furlong and Cartmel's (1997) rejection of the rhetoric that the challenges of late modernity can be solely mitigated by personal agency. What emerges from the data is that young

men perceive a disjoint between education and employment to the extent that their engagement with academic education is described as a gamble in relation to attaining gainful employment outcomes. This is where Reith's (2002) concept of the Age of Change allows for a novel and more nuanced understanding of young men's experiences and their responses as they navigate the unpredictable waters of education to employment transitions apparent on both sides of the border.

The next chapter assesses young men's experiences of employment in the labour markets of Glasgow and Liverpool and explores how they searched and applied for jobs.

## Chapter 7 Adjusting to an unjust labour market

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter explores young men's experiences of the labour markets of Glasgow and Liverpool. This includes the strategies employed by young men to find employment and the realities they encountered in their job search processes. This chapter also explores the young men's experiences of unemployment and their engagement with welfare.

There are six main sections in this chapter. Drawing on three of the four main themes that emerged from thematic analysis of the primary interview data, namely, *precarious labour market perceptions and experiences; jobs search strategies; and experiences of unemployment*, and quantitative analysis of Understanding Society labour market data, the findings are presented in sections 7.2, 7.3 and 7.4. In Section 7.2, *The Zones of (in)security in Glasgow and Liverpool*, the analysis begins with findings from Understanding Society's labour market data that explores the employment statuses of young men in both cities. A key finding is the dominant populations within the liminal and marginalised zones, which are a consistent feature for every year observed (2016, 2018 and 2020). These labour market conditions set the context for the proceeding exploration of the data from the qualitative analysis in Section 7.3. This section proceeds to explore how the young men approached their jobs search and based on their perceptions and experiences of the nature of the labour markets, the strategies they adopted to finding work.

Allied with this is an interest in how the young men had found work and what obstacles were perceived or encountered in finding employment. Thus in Section 7.4, *Detraditionalised Pathways into employment*, the accounts of the young men are explored in relation to perceived and experienced employer's needs and demands. There are various and contradicting perspectives in this section, and it provides insights into a complex youth labour market in which there appears to be no consensus in how best to find secure employment.

The focus of Section 7.5, *Unemployed and on benefits*, then turns to the experiences and perspectives of the young men who had struggled to find

sustainable employment and had engaged with the UK's benefit system. Far from the now infamous narratives emanating from welfare policy and mainstream media which propagates that young unemployed men have behavioural, attitudinal and character deficits, this section explores young men's attitudes towards the necessity of claiming out of work benefits, their exposure to precarious employment conditions, experiences of welfare conditionalities including mandatory training programmes and their support needs. The findings from these three sections provide data that aims to answer the main research question: *What are young men's employment experiences of postindustrial labour markets in Glasgow and Liverpool?* and the two supplementary research questions in the employment context, namely:

1. How have young men perceived and experienced their education and employment choices?
2. What are young men's experiences and perspectives of unemployment and welfare?

In the context of regional and national skills and labour market policies that have pledged to create more jobs of higher quality for young people, encourage stronger links between employers, education providers and learners, and ensure the skills developed better met the needs of employers, Section 7.6 compares the findings from the young men's accounts in Glasgow and Liverpool. This chapter concludes with a summary of the findings in Section 7.7. Section 7.8 relates these findings to the theoretical framework that will be used for analysis in the discussion chapter.

## **7.2 The Zones of (in)security in Glasgow and Liverpool**

With acknowledgement of the uncertainties that young men face in the contemporary UK youth labour market, and the rise of insecure and precarious types of employment, this section uses the zones of (in)security as a basis for analysis of the Understanding Society datasets and casts light on the youth labour markets of Glasgow and Liverpool between 2016-2020. Table 7.1 below

begins by outlining the current economic activity for young men aged 16-30 in Glasgow and Liverpool in 2020 based on the Understanding Society survey.

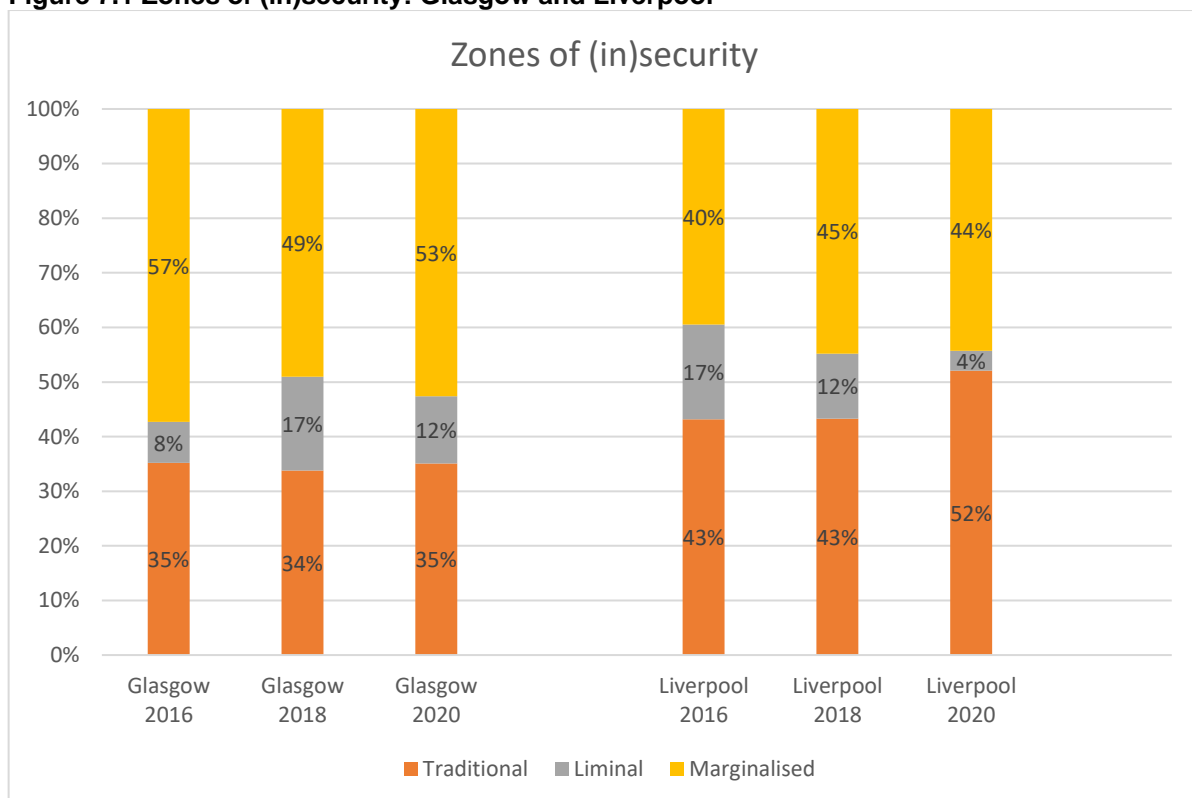
**Table 7.1 Employment status: Glasgow and Liverpool**

Employment status	Glasgow 2020	Liverpool 2020
Self employed	9%	2%
Paid employment(ft/pt)	49%	55%
Unemployed	12%	9%
Full-time student	28%	21%
LT sick or disabled	0%	7%
On apprenticeship	2%	4%
Doing something else	0%	2%

Source: Understanding Society (Wave 10, 2020)

Around half of the sample in Table 7.1 were employed in Glasgow (49%) and Liverpool (55%). In Glasgow, almost the same percentage of young men were self-employed (9%) as were unemployed (12%). There was a higher percentage of students in Glasgow compared to Liverpool (28% vs 21%) although there were slightly more young men in apprenticeships in Liverpool (4% vs 2%).

While average employment rates in the UK have increased since 2010 (Marmot, 2020), the caveat to these figures is that fulltime and part-time workers have been lumped together. Furlong, et al. (2018) argue that the classification of employment status (which could include an individual working only 1 hour and an individual working 50 hours) masks labour market marginalisation. A person working 1 hour or 16 hours is regarded as part-time in official statistics. This is why the zones of (in)security is useful in capturing the shades of grey in the labour market. Figure 7.1 below assesses the labour market activity in Glasgow and Liverpool of young men aged 16-30 during 2016-2020 through the lens of these zones.

**Figure 7.1 Zones of (in)security: Glasgow and Liverpool**

**Source: Understanding Society (Wave 6, 2016; Wave 8, 2018; Wave 10, 2020)**

As the classification of both part-time and fulltime workers as simply ‘employed’ can miss the true picture of economic activity, the Zones of (in)security provides a more accurate picture of local labour market circumstances. Although Table 7.1 shows that 49% of young men were in employment in Glasgow in 2020, Figure 7.1 shows that only 35% of the sample were employed in the Traditional zone (that is in permanent, fulltime, secure employment and working 40+ hours per week) and those in the Liminal zone ranged from 8% to 17% (Table 7.3 in Section 7.5 will show the disparity between unemployment rates and the percentage of young men in the Liminal and Marginalised zones).

There were more young men employed in the Traditional zone in Liverpool than in Glasgow. Although the majority of young men also mostly occupied insecure labour market positions as they did in Glasgow, those in the Traditional zone had increased from 43% in 2018 to 52% by 2020 which was higher than the 34-35% range in Glasgow. This increase is reflected in the decreased Liminal zone which fell from 17% in 2016, to 12% in 2018 and then 4% in 2020. Those in the Marginalised zone grew from 40% in 2016 to 45% in 2018, falling slightly to 44% in

2020. As the findings in Section 7.5 will demonstrate, young men continued to be vulnerable to occupying the Liminal and Marginalised zones. These labour market circumstances impact on young men's lives in several ways. Their vulnerability to precarious and temporary employment exposes young men to British welfare, which has been characterised by strict conditionalities and punitive sanctions (Berry, 2014; Rodriguez, 2015; Crisp and Powell, 2017).

While the majority of the sample occupied the Liminal and Marginalised zones, this does not in itself mean that the young men were experiencing poverty. However, the dataset also provides income data which allows examination of income levels in relation to labour market position. Table 7.2 below shows the difference in income levels for young men occupying the three zones of employment.

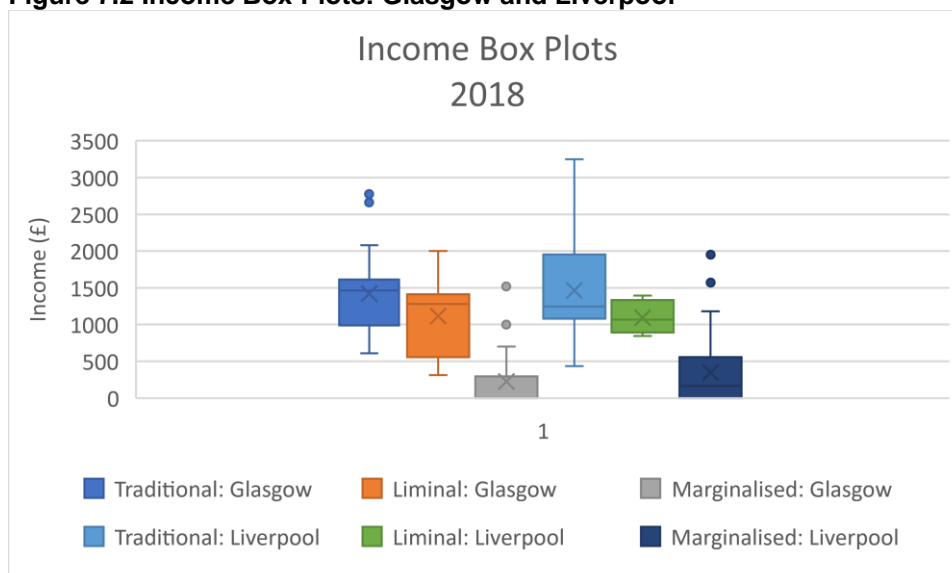
**Table 7.2 Income Quartiles: Glasgow and Liverpool**

	Glasgow 2018			Liverpool 2018		
	Traditional	Liminal	Marginalised	Traditional	Liminal	Marginalised
<b>Minimum (£)</b>	606.75	311.8	0	433.33	843.25	0
<b>Q1 (£)</b>	1030.83	628.33	0	1083.33	894.3925	0
<b>Q2 (£)</b>	1463.67	1282.33	1.67	1248	1068.335	164
<b>Q3 (£)</b>	1600	1334.67	270.83	1906.67	1238.775	521.0025
<b>Maximum (£)</b>	2777	2000.83	1516.67	3250.86	1392.4	1950.13

**Source: Understanding Society (Wave 8, 2018)**

In every quartile in Table 7.2 above, also illustrated in Figure 7.2 below, young men in the Traditional zones in both Glasgow and Liverpool had a higher average income than those in the Liminal zones, who in turn had higher average incomes in every quartile than those in the Marginalised zones. For example, in quartile 1 (Q1) in Glasgow, the income in the Traditional zone was £1030.83, £628.33 in the Liminal zone and £0 in the Marginalised zone. Q1, Q2, Q3, minimum and maximum values were all higher in the Traditional zone than the Liminal zone, and the values in the Liminal zone were all higher than those in the Marginalised zone.



**Figure 7.2 Income Box Plots: Glasgow and Liverpool**

**Source: Understanding Society (Wave 8, 2018)**

As seen in Table 7.2 and Figure 7.2, occupying the Liminal and Marginalised zones increases the likelihood of being in lower income brackets. Meanwhile, occupying the Traditional zone of employment increases the likelihood of higher financial income. While good quality employment is a source of money and a way out of poverty (Marmot, 2020) Figure 7.1 showed that the majority of young men in Glasgow and Liverpool (with the exception of 52% in 2020) were not in the Traditional zone of employment. Therefore, the majority of young men in the Glasgow and Liverpool Understanding Society samples were experiencing poverty and/or in-work poverty. The prevalence of low-quality employment in the UK youth labour market means that work in and of itself is not a way out of poverty. This is contrary to the claims in skills and labour market policies reviewed in Chapter 3 that young people can lift themselves out of poverty through hard work and enhancing their employability. The low percentage of young men occupying the Traditional zone of employment impacts their income levels.

To gain deeper insights into these labour market conditions, the next section explores the accounts of the young men's experiences of the precarious labour markets of Glasgow and Liverpool.

## 7.3 Accounts of the precarious labour market

This section explores the young men's experiences of finding employment in the Glasgow and Liverpool labour markets. It draws on data from two of the main themes from the thematic analysis, namely precarious labour market experiences and job search strategies. The young men had described their perspectives of the job opportunities that existed during their job search and the quality of the jobs available. They provided insights into their experiences of employer responses (or lack of) to their job applications. In the context of a reported unpredictability in the labour market, the young men described their approaches to finding work in which there appears to be a diminished sense of personal agency or power to determine their employment outcomes.

### 7.3.1 The shortage: six jobs, one thousand people

Illustrated in the Zones of (in)security ([Figure 7.1](#) Zones of (in)security: Glasgow and Liverpool), the Liminal and Marginalised zones were the dominant positions for young men in both Glasgow and Liverpool. Drawing on experiences of these labour market positions in the qualitative data, it can be seen that the young men in both cities perceived there to be a lack of jobs which reflected an excess of applicants for each employment opening. Nick, who was unemployed in Liverpool, perceived a limited number of jobs combined with high numbers of applicants:

I went on indeed[.com] today to search for new jobs in the Liverpool area and there were six new jobs ... there's at least 1000 people in this city that have done the same as me today. There's probably about 10,000 - 20,000 on them six jobs (Nick, Liverpool)

The situation was no different in Glasgow. Ian, who was also out of work, looked at the number of applicants specified by the job search websites:

Ian, Glasgow: Yeah, well whenever I look back on it and if I use Indeed[.com] or one of those sort of job sites they actually tell you how many other people have applied for the job.

Interviewer: What are the kind of numbers?

Ian, Glasgow: It's, you know, anywhere from a couple of hundred up to, you know, two thousand or so.

Interviewer: How many jobs did that company have?

Ian, Glasgow: Yeah, yeah, mentioned on the websites they're advertising maybe two vacancies or three vacancies

In Ian's experience looking for jobs online, there was an excess of applicants for a limited number of job vacancies. William described a scramble for jobs arising from these conditions:

particularly in Glasgow when you see a position come up, a lot of other young people are going to see that position and you know there's always going to be a really high number (William, Glasgow)

Consistent with the findings of the labour market data for Glasgow and Liverpool in which liminal and marginalised positions dominate, the young men described local labour markets as having too few jobs. However, in addition to these findings, the interviews have extracted information that suggests there is strong competition for job vacancies posted on employment websites. It could be inferred that there was a willingness to work, at least for the young men interviewed, which goes against the idea of the attitudinal or behavioural deficit espoused in welfare and skills policies.

The next subsection draws on interview data where the young men described the quality of jobs available in their job searches.

### **7.3.2 "Too many insecure jobs"**

While there was a perception of excess labour in relation to a scarcity of jobs, the young men perceived the jobs available to be insecure. John in Liverpool, who was fulltime employed, theorised high competition for limited jobs gave employers more power over young people:

I think there's definitely too many insecure jobs and I think like, especially for young people, I think a lot of employers have a lot of power over young people because they know that they need the job more than the employer needs them if you know what I mean. So they'll kind of use that to kind of control how many hours they'll give

them and stuff and sort of maybe knowing that maybe they can drop them in a second if they need to (John, Liverpool)

According to John, employers are able to reduce working conditions and use labour only when needed. For Stevie, who was unemployed as he was ineligible for furlough, not only were jobs insecure ‘everywhere,’ but it was difficult to find employers who paid above the minimum wage. Stevie’s perspective resonates with the income data in [Table 7.2](#) Income Quartiles: Glasgow and Liverpool:

it’s like you know, zero-hour contracts, minimum wage everywhere, and hardly anyone pays the living wage even, and I don’t see how they can validate that because there’s been no wage increase due to inflation like for ages (Stevie, Glasgow)

Anthony, who was also unemployed, spoke of the employment insecurity that he and young men his age were experiencing in Glasgow:

Everything’s temporary, like fixed term employment, or even if you’re not supposed to be fired, people just get fired for dumb reasons all the time (Anthony, Glasgow)

Anthony’s reflection provided insight into a perception among the young men that employment was insecure and unpredictable, and that unemployment could happen to anyone.

Two of the three college students interviewed in Glasgow believed that there were more secure jobs:

most jobs are secure now. Most jobs are giving you a contract saying this is how many hours a week we do really (Liam, Glasgow)

According to Robert, there were enough jobs for young people in specific sectors:

there is a lot out there ... like working in supermarkets and stuff like that (Robert, Glasgow)

On the other hand, there were instances where the young men were able to use insecure jobs to their advantage. George used a fixed term position to tide himself over while he looked for better opportunities:

I managed to find a role in Liverpool in the Albert Dock with Yodde ... it was a fixed term contract for three months and that was going to tide me over and during that time I was going to explore what was out there (George, Liverpool)

Exploring “what was out there” enabled George to meet his future employer:

I saw the sign go up on the door and I just walked in one day and said like, who’s in charge here ... I took him for a coffee, and I said this is where my passion is ... we connected on LinkedIn and then he sent over some job proposals for me (George, Liverpool)

George believed that his optimistic and confident attitude was important in mitigating challenges in the labour market:

maybe that’s just because of my background and what I’ve done but I’m definitely a believer in “get out there and do something and see if you like it” (George, Liverpool)

The young men’s responses to the narrative propagated in policy and mainstream media that unemployment is the fault of the individual will be explored in the section 7.5 of this chapter. However, another finding from the interviews uncovered in this section is the experience and perception of widespread employment insecurity. These accounts add depth to the findings extracted using the Zones of (in)security in Figure 7.1 where it showed that the minority were in secure, fulltime jobs. The prevalence of zero-hour contracts, temporary and insecure employment and low working hours detail explicitly the contemporary labour market experiences illustrated. The next section looks at the instances where flexible working arrangements benefited the young men.

### **7.3.3 Flexibility: it works both ways**

The young men expressed favourable sentiments about flexible working, however, with some caveats as will be seen. Jim, who was employed fulltime, had a positive memory of his previous tutoring job because he could control when he worked:

I could do my own hours and control when I was working rather than now where my shifts are just picked by someone else ... I really enjoyed the flexibility (Jim, Glasgow)

The value of flexible working was higher than income for Kirk in his secure job:

Like whilst the remuneration isn't like class leading, the flexibility that you get from working is worth more than that (Kirk, Glasgow)

Likewise, Andrew enjoyed the choice of location from where he could do his secure job:

I work a minimum of two days a week at home which is quite nice (Andrew, Liverpool)

A zero-hour contract suited John who was able to audition for acting roles and visit family whilst having a subsistence income. The freedom it provided suited his lifestyle and wellbeing needs:

With wanting to go into acting as well, you kind of need to be able to drop stuff quite quickly and if you get a job or an audition ... it was also quite good for my mental health [because] if I needed to go back home for a week I could (John, Liverpool)

This type of freedom also made it possible for students to balance their student timetable. Stephen, for example, could switch shifts with his colleagues:

there was enough staff there for me to swap shifts with or get someone to cover so it was far more flexible to suit my uni life (Stephen, Liverpool)

However, the young men demonstrated awareness of the difference between flexible working conditions and secure employment:

I just I think that flexibility needs to be accompanied by security and I don't think corporations can provide that (Alex, Glasgow)

Without job security in his flexible working arrangements, Anthony expressed a sense of vulnerability in the longer term:

I've always got in the back of my mind I need to start at some point getting a salary job that's going to allow me to qualify for mortgages and stuff (Anthony, Glasgow)

The young men struggled to manage their lives outside of work when flexibility was one-sided:

I just wanted stable hours because then I could focus on my studies ...  
I really didn't have much choice in the matter (Ian, Glasgow)

Such one-sided flexible employment negatively affected Nick's mental health who had no control over his schedule:

it demised because I had to work three shifts and it was earlies, then lates, and then nights ... and I already suffer from mental health issues anyway (Nick, Liverpool)

The above accounts show a generally positive perception of flexible working conditions. The young men were also not resistant to working on zero-hour contracts in the instances where they could be used while working towards their aspirational vocations. Ultimately, however, secure employment and personal control over working hours were viewed as important, without which the young men perceived undesirable outcomes could arise. The young men's acceptance of insecure employment was dependent on the condition that it was a temporary rather than a permanent measure, in other words it was a compromise. Additionally, the young men accepted flexible working hours when they were mutually agreed with their employers but complained when they were one-sided as it negatively affected their mental wellbeing and economic security.

The findings in Section 7.3.2 saw how the young men perceived secure jobs to be in short supply. Section 7.3.4 explores how the young men had to compete for these jobs and their job application experiences.

### **7.3.4 "They don't get back to you"**

With the above findings I was then interested in how young men looked for employment and what they experienced. Given the perception of high supply and short demand for workers, at least at the time of interviews leading up to 2020, the next revelation was that employers were not responding to the young men's applications, particularly for those in the liminal and marginalised positions. Alistair, who was unemployed after being let go from his agency job, was not hearing back from employers after applying for jobs or when asking for application forms:

They're just not getting back to you. You email them and ask for an application form, or you apply for them, and they just simply don't get back to you (Alistair, Liverpool)

Ian, who was out of work but not claiming benefits, was applying for jobs but not receiving any responses:

I was always applying for jobs and applying, and I'd just never hear back from anybody, that was my problem (Ian, Glasgow)

Not receiving responses was upsetting Ian:

And it's not even that I'd get replies back, it's just I wouldn't even hear back off jobs I was applying for, that was just, made me not want to do it and I ended up sinking into a really deep depression during that time just because nothing seemed to be working out (Ian, Glasgow)

Ian describes the fruitlessness of his actions in seeking employment. At one point it seemed as though all he was doing was applying for jobs, but his efforts were in vain. This situation depressed young men like Ian because personal agency could not change the circumstances they were experiencing. One of the unemployed young men expanded his search by applying for jobs and apprenticeships, but the lack of responses was also deflating:

It puts you down a bit and a bit like "oof" and then if one has got back to you, it's usually "no, sorry we've moved onto the next stage in our hiring process" ... I've tried to just apply for apprenticeships ... they don't get back to you ... so you stop sitting there hoping that this job gets back to you (Fred, Glasgow)

Fred was shocked that employers and apprenticeship providers were not responding to his applications. He explained he was applying for a high number of jobs but on the rare occasions he received a response the outcome was usually negative. For the young men in these marginalised positions, it seems that their experiences had eviscerated their hope. In other words, they did not feel optimistic about their future employment prospects, again personal agency was negated.

This last point is analysed using Understanding Society data which shows the levels of optimism for young men in the Glasgow and Liverpool samples. Table



7.3 below shows that almost 1 in 5 young men answered negatively to the question relating to future optimism. 17% were ‘Rarely’ optimistic and 2% ‘None of the time’ equalling 19% in Glasgow. In Liverpool 12% answered ‘Rarely’ and 6% answered ‘None of the time’ equalling 18%. However, the majority of the Glasgow sample were optimistic about the future with 47% answering they ‘Often’ felt optimistic, and 8% ‘All of the time’. In Liverpool, 22% ‘Often’ felt positive and 12% felt optimistic ‘All of the time’.

**Table 7.3 Optimism about the future**

<b>Future optimism</b>	<b>Glasgow 2020</b>	<b>Liverpool 2020</b>
<b>None of the time</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>Rarely</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>12%</b>
<b>Some of the time</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>48%</b>
<b>Often</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>22%</b>
<b>All of the time</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>12%</b>

**Source: Understanding Society (Wave 10)**

The young men are having to cope with irreversible precarious forms of employment. Rather than experiencing with the realities of contemporary labour markets as a new change, the young men expect the threat of marginality in the contemporary environment. This may explain why their levels of optimism are not high, as those in the most disadvantaged positions tend to have the lowest levels of optimism as they tend to have least control over their lives (Furlong, et al, 2018). However, an interesting difference between optimism levels in Glasgow and Liverpool is the Glasgow sample answered more positively despite having fewer young men employed in the Traditional zone (see [Figure 7.1 Zones of \(in\)security: Glasgow and Liverpool](#)).

As the young men struggled to gain access to employment, and faced strong competition for jobs, they resorted to the use of employment agencies to find work. The next section explores the young men’s perspectives of the necessity of employment agencies.

### 7.3.5 “You can’t get nothing without agency”

A lack of control was described by the young men in their search for employment. With the lack of response from employers for young men who did not have secure employment, they turned to other avenues to gain access to employment. All three of the unemployed young men in Liverpool, and two of the four unemployed in Glasgow reported that the use of employment agencies was their only route into employment. However, they complained that these positions were temporary and insecure. Nick struggled to find employment in his field before turning to an employment agency which seemed to be the only pathway:

Honestly, you can’t get nothing without agency first, absolutely nothing mate (Nick, Liverpool)

Nick felt his work was insecure through the agency, and was left to hope that his efforts working over the years resulted in being offered a secure contract, or at least not being let go from his temporary arrangements:

And with getting into an agency the job security is never there. It’s either a zero-hour contract or agency, then you’ve got to work there for a couple of years, hope that you don’t get let go and then hope to get a contract through them (Nick, Liverpool)

He explained the process he had to go through to get a secure contract:

I spent four years there. It was agency work to start with, but I managed to work my way up and get a contract (Nick, Liverpool)

The young men explained they had to work with an agency for a period of time before getting the chance of being hired on permanent contract. This route was not described as a safe or secure pathway, and personal agency could not determine their employment outcomes. The risk of unemployment was unyielding yet the best they could do was to hope for better outcomes. Permanent employment outcomes were not guaranteed however, and the majority of these unemployed young men who had been employed through agencies often found themselves being let go irrespective of their positive work behaviours and attitudes. Michael, 30 years old at the time of interview, had only ever experienced temporary employment contracts through agencies since

graduating from university aged 22. He described one of the instances where he was released from an agency job:

then I got a call from the agency, I mean the six months were quite good, the feedback had all been good, I was a hard worker but basically, I got the call in November saying the job's no more basically (Michael, Glasgow)

While the unemployed young men could only find employment through agencies as they could not gain employment directly through employers, the agency work did not provide a likely route to permanent employment. Studies of youth have highlighted the importance of family contacts in facilitating employment transitions. However, young men with a limited range of resources tend to have family and friends in unskilled and insecure occupations, meaning that their networks were not a strong source of support or guidance into secure employment. In other words, these young men were disadvantaged by their networks. In the absence of strong social and cultural capital, access to employment through agencies was a source for building networks which could lead to other employment opportunities. Sean explained how he networked with employment agencies and other temporary workers:

once you've worked for one agency they can refer you, or you'll meet people on different jobs who have worked with different agencies, so they sort of say "this agency's got this, get your application in for that" (Sean, Liverpool)

Being registered with several agencies facilitated entrance to the word of mouth circulating among other agency workers for employment opportunities. This was a form of the probability approach described below. It seems that for those who could not access secure employment, juggling temporary work through several employment agencies was a way to make ends meet. With a perceived excess of job applicants combined with a scarcity of good jobs and lack of employer responses, the next subsection shows how the young men approached their job search and the methods they used in applying for jobs in this environment.

### **7.3.6 The probability approach**

One of the dominant themes that emerged from the interviewees was the way in which the young men would apply for a high quantity of jobs as opposed to

carefully selecting a choice few job vacancies on which to focus. In other words, the young men applied for as many jobs as possible and described a reliance on the law of averages to increase the probability of being invited for an interview. Jim, who had graduated with a master's degree in mechanical engineering, employed a probability approach in his job search:

I kind of just went for the tactic of like applying for so many things kind of like, to try and, that saying “throw as much shit at the wall” [laugh] (Jim, Glasgow)

Eventually, Jim would go on to secure employment with an organisation that had provided a work placement during his studies. However, he believed the positive outcome from his probability approach was down to luck:

right now, it's almost kind of like, luck like, if you're lucky enough to get one [a job] rather than it kind of being a standard practice (Jim, Glasgow)

Jim, who in the previous chapter described the university pathway to employment was a *gamble*, suggested getting his graduate-level job was down to good fortune rather than university being a 'standard' gateway into employment, or as a result of his job search strategy. These experiences of employment and university degree uncertainty left graduates such as Jim feeling as though their investment in education was a gamble in which the probability of landing secure employment was left to chance, which may explain the action of applying for the maximum number of jobs available. George was another graduate who had applied the probability approach to finding employment post-graduation:

I found quite a lot of difficulty, I was applying for maybe a hundred to two hundred jobs a month, like very easily hitting those numbers, and hearing back from maybe ten to fifteen, and then actually only securing an interview with five to seven ... I was always applying and having phone interviews but never securing an in-person interview, luckily enough after that in-person interview they offered me the position (George, Liverpool)

For graduates such as Jim and George, their experiences converge with the perception in the previous section that there were an excess of applicants for each vacancy. Luck and hope from the probability approach to finding

employment seems to be a response to the perceived scarcity of jobs and strong employment, and the gamble to invest in education. Alistair, one of the unemployed young men in Liverpool, provides insight into how it feels when the probability approach failed:

that's all I can do, just apply and hope for the best ... I've rang a couple of people, but you know, there's only so much you can ring a company before you think, I'm not getting anywhere here ... I've done all kinds and I'm still sat here now unemployed. It just feels impossible (Alistair, Liverpool)

The word "impossible" arose again, this time from Alistair, as did "luck." He had regarded his previous successful applications as lucky:

I put it down to luck when I've found a new job. I've put it down to luck that I've just looked at the right moment and just nagged that job (Alistair, Liverpool)

Instead of employing a probability approach by applying for as many jobs as possible, Jamie used the probability approach in a unique way, which was to try every avenue he could think of, in his words "covering all bases":

it's hard to say what's the best way [to find a job] is because I'm still figuring that out ... I've obviously made a lot of good contacts through my work and any other networking events. So, I think it's being present on like LinkedIn, that's quite good for it because, you can get spotted on there for jobs as well as looking for jobs. So, I think it's covering all bases really (Jamie, Glasgow)

Jamie said he was still trying to work out pathways into employment but mentioned networking and social media among his need to cover all bases. However he felt job search engines facilitated the probability approach to seeking employment as they allowed him to apply for multiple jobs:

I would just relentlessly look online across all the job provider websites. So, that's what I did at my time at the call centre. Every day I applied for multiple jobs every day. So, just kind of being relentless with a fine-tooth comb just looking at that (Jamie, Glasgow)

The happenstance way the young men described gaining employment indicated a lack of clarity in the labour market towards finding employment. Despite exercising their agency in improving their skills through education, seeking

employment and applying for high numbers of jobs, all of which was contrary to the deficit narrative in academic literature and skills policies, the young men such as Alistair ascribed their employment outcomes as “down to luck.” However, given that the young men were reliant on luck in their job search, there was a lack of clarity on how to find employment and where the best places to find employment were located.

### **7.3.7 Where are the jobs located?**

This subsection draws on data from the subtheme that included the accounts of where the young men believed were the best places to find jobs. This could have included specific job search websites, social media, personal networks, directly through employers (both in person and through company websites). It shows that the young men believed that most jobs had to be found online but that there were different ways of approaching employers. Peter, who gained employment through his work placements, perceived there had been an increased shift in online job searching which was where people had to look for employment:

I would probably say more people would use online resources than they used to. If you're talking about ten years ago then obviously people did use online resources but now probably it must be like 90-95% of the market rather than 70% or something like that would be my estimation. See online stuff is much bigger, I think in terms of the last ten years if I think about when I was applying for jobs, and when friends and family have applied for jobs (Peter, Glasgow)

This shift was experienced by himself but also observed in the job-seeking behaviours of his family and peers. All of the eight unemployed young men believed jobs had to be found online. Fred, for example, who was unemployed, echoed Peter's assertion by saying which specific websites were the most useful in his experience:

Honestly, I don't apply for jobs on anything else other than Indeed[.com]. I wouldn't even say anywhere else is helpful except Indeed or maybe Facebook (Fred, Glasgow)

It was not just that the young men could not always apply directly to employers and instead had to apply through job search engines such as Indeed.com and social media such as LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook, it was where agency work

was being posted too. Alistair, who had become unemployed after his temporary teaching job ended, found the job through an agency online:

I've found it easier by agency or the jobsite Indeed[.com] they're where I've come across the majority of jobs and actually some of the agencies are on Indeed (Alistair, Liverpool)

Not all of the young men believed applying for high numbers of jobs online was the most effective way to gain employment. One of the employed young men in Liverpool was aware that many young men may just be using a probability approach which was possibly ineffective:

I think there's an over-reliance on, if you easy-apply in LinkedIn easy-apply, easy-apply, easy-apply you're just going to get a job because your just playing probability and that's what people do ... they don't look at the job spec, they see a title and a few things they meet and then [they apply] (Mark, Liverpool)

Embedded in the probability approach is the concept of luck, and William was aware that this approach meant that applicants were not being specific enough in their job hunt:

Now if you're just plugging things in, you might get lucky but more than likely you're just going to go into things that are a load of rubbish ...

they [job applicants] kind of do a lot of searches online and maybe they don't look at the best places online. They're just doing random searches rather than looking at specific areas, which is not always the best I've kind of noticed (William, Glasgow)

Given the perception of excess applications and scarcity of jobs, it seems that the use of the probability approach on online job search engines did not produce good quality results because the outcome was dependent on luck. While this last section provided examples of young men who believed that most jobs were to be found online, the next section explores the various ways in which the young men found employment and how they responded to employers' demands.

## 7.4 Detraditionalised pathways into employment

Young men enter a contemporary labour market in which traditional pathways to employment have all but disappeared. While previous generations were able to depend in traditional sources of information such as family and local community for help and guidance, the process of detraditionalisation has seen young people and young men lose these clear pathways. This has resulted in increased risks for young men as they must navigate precarious labour market conditions as individuals without support systems, particularly if they lack social, educational and cultural forms of capital.

Considering the shortage of jobs combined with excess applicants reported thus far in both cities, the young men occupying all the zones and of varying education statuses were still compelled to enter into competition for those job opportunities. The accounts of what employers want are incongruent, but their expectations seem to be high. The young men's experiences of pathways into employment were categorised into five subthemes: first, *employers want experience more than qualifications* (Subsection 7.4.1); second, *employers want qualifications over experience* (Subsection 7.4.2); third, *employers want applicants with both experience and qualifications* (Subsection 7.4.3); fourth, *who one knows is more important than qualifications or experience* (Subsection 7.4.4); and fifth, *Traditional pathways* (Subsection 7.4.5). These subthemes are drawn from the precarious labour market theme from the thematic analysis of the interviews.

### 7.4.1 Employers want experience

This first subtheme revolves around the employer expectations reported by the young men. When the young men were looking for jobs, or applying for them, they found that employers had set high experience requirements, such as applicants must have a certain number of years' experience doing the job. Peter, who had received training from his employer through a work placement before going on to develop a stable career after graduating from a prestigious university, argued that qualifications alone were insufficient:



What was really hammered into me by anyone a spoke to was that if you wanted a job you had to get experience, you had to get work experience. If you didn't have that as a grad you could be unemployed, you could come out with a first-class degree and be unemployed and that happened to people in that time (Peter, Glasgow)

Peter explains that his peers at university emphasised the importance of getting work experience and not relying on his degree qualification alone. He saw graduates from his prestigious university struggle to find an employer because they did not have work experience. Peter explained the support structures and culture at his institution enabled him to get an internship where he was able to cultivate his work experience:

they encourage work experience so much at university ... the internships together with all the study and the extracurricular stuff, yeah that made me ready for work. If I'd just gone to university and done the course and come out the other side, no way, I would not be ready (Peter, Glasgow)

Peter provides an example of the need for graduates to have work experience combined with qualifications. He thinks it was his graduate work experience through an internship with Rolls Royce that enhanced his employability and without it he would have struggled to gain employment.

Harry illustrated his perception work experience was more important than his degree in getting his job as a media communications officer:

I did the degree for four years but for me the reason I'm where I am isn't because of my degree, it's because of the work experience that I conducted when I had my degree (Harry, Glasgow)

Highlighting perceptions of the declining value of undergraduate degrees in the labour market, Harry was thankful he had gained relevant work experience during his studies at university. Not going on a work placement while at university was one of George's regrets. After seeing how one of his classmates had benefitted from a work placement, he regretted not seizing the opportunity to develop work experience:

I'd say he definitely got the upper hand in going off and doing that work placement. That's one of the retrospect's I have, I would not, if

I was to go through it again, I would probably choose to go down to London or come back home and do an industrial work placement for the whole year (George, Liverpool)

George, who was furloughed from his fulltime job, had an opportunity to do a work placement during his time at university to gain relevant work experience but chose to focus on his studies. George, who had previously worked as a recruiter, explained that the main criterion for processing job applicants was experience:

we want to know “have you used this IT system, how long have you been doing it, are you ready to start working immediately?” ... an employer in my opinion would hire me because of my education but if they’re looking for welders “have you weld for two years? Perfect, you can come and do what we’re doing” (George, Liverpool)

While the young men perceived the significance of work experience, not all of the young men believed that they could get such relevant experience which is discussed in the next subsection.

#### **7.4.2 Can’t get experience**

This subtheme provides insights into the young men’s perspectives of the experience requirements of employers. For those without the necessary experience, there appeared to be confusion as to how they could meet those requirements, with no apparent ways in which they could develop the necessary work experience.

David, who was already employed fulltime in a permanent job, found it difficult to apply for other jobs because he did not have the necessary experience, which made him feel condemned to his current position:

it’s “highly skilled” or “5 years-experience required” ... or even management jobs, it’s all like “years of experience required”, and it’s all for areas of work that I’ve never worked in (David, Glasgow)

David shared a problem described by the unemployed - a perceived deficit of work experience and no knowledge of how to get that experience. Nick, was one of the eight unemployed interviewed who had found it difficult to find

employment because many jobs he saw advertised required experience that he was unable to get, which he believed excluded him from applying:

I think it's definitely experience, that's something on every job you look at, "experience" ... it's qualifications as well, but it's mainly experience ... It seems impossible. You need experience and if you can't get it in your first job then, you know, where are you getting that experience from? (Nick, Liverpool)

Nick did not know how to get the necessary experience for the jobs he saw advertised. There seemed to be a sense of hopelessness if a young person could not get relevant work experience early on in their working lives which in turn excluded them from many jobs. This sense of hopelessness had tempered Michael's aspiration. Although he was a graduate, his non-prestigious university did not have strong employer links or opportunities for work placements. After experiencing a cycle of unemployment and underemployment for all of his post-graduation working life aged 22-30, he seemed resigned to settling for an office job because he did not have relevant work experience and his degree qualification paled in significance:

at the end of the day all I want is an office job ... whether I'm qualified or not. You know, because I don't have any management experience, I don't have experience managing people, I don't have experience of being a director or something, I don't have experience of being a supervisor. So, admin is, I'll kind of do it (Michael, Glasgow)

There was a perception among the young men that without relevant work experience it would be difficult to enter gainful employment. Within this perception was a belief that qualifications were not as important as work experience, yet with the exception of the young men who had gained experience through work placements or apprenticeships, the young men did not know how to get relevant work experience. There was an air that it was already too late for them to rectify their circumstances and employers were unwilling to provide opportunities to gain work experience. Alistair, was one of the unemployed who experienced this problem:

It's impossible because every job like wants you to have the same. They all want you to have at least three years' experience in that role ... no-one wants to offer you it [chance to gain experience] (Alistair, Liverpool)

Although it was not only the unemployed who experienced this difficulty, it seems that the unemployed were particularly sensitive to this perceived barrier to employment due to a work experience deficit. Despite their best efforts, it led to the young unemployed men such as Alistair saying that it was “impossible” to find employment because employers want experienced workers and are unwilling to provide the opportunity to get experience.

One of the unemployed young men in Glasgow, who was cognizant of the importance of work experience while studying at university, had tried to gain entry onto internships. Michael had been assured by the programme leaders on his university course that he would be able to enter work placement, but after applying the probability approach in applying for “every single internship for miles,” he was unable to secure a trainee position anywhere:

I thought it was easy to get into an internship with an agency but apparently [not]. I applied for every single internship for miles across Glasgow, Edinburgh ... I did online tests, psychological tests it was quite hard because you can't get past, they are too hard ... so basically, I failed every single one. So, I thought getting an internship would be easy but it's just [sigh] (Michael, Glasgow)

Michael's university had assured him in the early years of his programme that getting an internship would be easy, but his experience shows a different reality was awaiting him which made him feel as though he was given a false sense of hope by his university advisors. This has parallels with the account of the graduates in the previous chapter who had complained about a lack of employer links with their universities despite their programmes being advertised as such. Jim provided an insight into his experience of applying for graduate jobs, which may explain why young men such as Michael had encountered difficulties in securing an internship:

The issue is probably just the amount of people applying. So, they have to make it hard because they have to have a way of, like they can't possibly interview that many people. They have to have some way of narrowing it down ...

I mean some of them are like games on your phone, and then you're getting rejected for the job if you don't meet the threshold score ... it's just a like very easy way for the companies, because they have to

somehow weed people out. They can't even read the CVs, they don't have enough manpower to even read the CVs [laugh] (Jim, Glasgow)

Jim's account explains his perception of excess graduate labour in relation to the quantity of graduate vacancies and this has resulted in a situation where employers have to deliberately make the application process as difficult as possible to reduce the applicants to a manageable number. This chimes with the excess of applicants referred to in section 7.3.

For graduates of prestigious universities such as Jim, Peter and Kirk, they were able to gain relevant work experience because their institutions had links to employers, and in some cases, traineeships were a core component of their programmes. Jim provides an insight into how he gained work experience which led to his eventual permanent employment:

the company that I'm starting work for in September is that same company ... the placements were definitely valuable because that's the company I've ended up getting a job for, like after I graduated (Jim, Glasgow)

He explained how the experience gave him an advantage in quickly securing employment:

it gave me the experience to see if, obviously I liked it, but then from people I know anyway that have done internships, the chances, it's quite likely that if they like you that you'll get kind of fast-tracked for a job after you graduate (Jim, Glasgow)

Jim had learned that doing an internship while at university was an opportunity to secure employment because the companies were likely to employ their interns upon graduation and they felt fortunate that their institutions had such opportunities.

For graduates such as George who had not done an internship, he was not reluctant to work in jobs beneath his qualification. He was of the view that having no work experience reflected poorer on an individual's CV than working lower-level employment:

for me, an empty CV or I'm waiting for the perfect opportunities are a lot worse than, you know, when I went and worked construction for a week (George, Liverpool)

Engaging in trial and error and gaining these experiences were a good opportunity to discover one's preferences and also give birth to new career ideas that may otherwise not arise:

it [construction] wasn't for me, then I went and tried retail, it wasn't for me. Perfect, you've now found that you want to be a bar manager, or you want to open up your own bar. Great, go and do that (George, Liverpool)

However, not all of the young men believed experience or knowing what one wanted to do was enough to secure employment. Without the necessary qualifications in demand by employers, experience and ability could be overlooked. This is explored in the following section.

### **7.4.3 Employers want qualifications**

Analysis of the interview data found that the young men had also reported that employers wanted applicants to have appropriate qualifications. This suggests that experience and skills may not be sufficient to meet employer demands.

For example, two of the young men who were employed in fulltime jobs believed that qualifications were important. David, who had struggled to apply for jobs because he did not have necessary experience, also did not apply for other jobs. This was because he did not have the necessary qualifications despite being confident that he had the skills and experience to perform the roles of some of the jobs he had seen advertised:

Like I've seen a job working as a first aid instructor part-time for Arnold Clark. Brilliant job, car, laptop and everything, delivering all the training that I can do here just now, but I needed that Level 3 bit of paper so didn't even bother applying. So, you need that something. Sometimes you need a bit of paper to get in the door, despite being able to push through an interview and do the actual job, without having that bit of paper, that's you (David, Glasgow)

While the need for relevant work experience was evident, so too was the need for qualifications. His expression of qualifications as a "bit of paper" shows how

he felt ability was overshadowed by qualifications and this excluded him from making the application. Mark, a fulltime employed graduate, had experienced the necessity of qualifications which are expected by employers:

I could be a great accountant or a great lawyer without ever going to university ... self-taught, but I think we live in a society where people and employers they want to see accreditation (Mark, Liverpool)

Before doing his postgraduate degree, Mark had experienced different responses to the grades he put on his CV and had also experienced differing responses by altering his degree grades in his applications:

It's funny, you put a "Third" on a piece of paper on your CV nobody touches you. If you just put "History degree" you get phone calls (Mark, Liverpool)

The caveat to the accounts of David and Mark is found in the previous chapter. Section 6.3 found that while university degrees offered some protection from labour market marginality, it did not guarantee protection for all graduates. The reasons were manifold but included the need for employer links and work placements to develop in demand skills and experience and networks, and this has been the experience of the young men in this sample, this was largely influenced by institutional prestige. There was also a perceived excess of graduates in relation to the availability of high-level employment opportunities in the labour markets.

The first three subsections of this section have provided insights into young men's perceptions and experiences of employer expectations. These expectations have centred around the attributes and skills the job applicant can bring to employers. However, analysis of the interview data also produced a subtheme that centred around the importance of networks for providing opportunities for entrance to jobs.

#### **7.4.4 "It's who you know"**

This subtheme centres around the significance of social capital for success in job applications. The accounts in this subsection indicate that the young men perceive that social connections give job applicants an advantage in securing a

job, particularly if all other areas such as qualifications and experience were either close or equal.

As alluded to by the eight young men who were either in fulltime permanent employment or apprenticeships with a clear pathway to employment, qualifications alone were insufficient. What was just as important was work experience and that had been developed through various types of traineeships. However, competition for entrance onto those work placements was often strong as young men such as Michael had experienced, and the young men had accessed this employer led training through links with their universities and personal networks such as peers or family.

The experience of these work placements in themselves also provided another opportunity to develop additional networks and it was often through these projects that the young men were able to take advantage to get an interview, in which they were able to excel. This is why in Chapter 6, graduates such as Peter and Kirk believed their experiences at university were beneficial, compared to Michael and Andrew who were left disappointed that their university did not have strong links to employers. For the young men who did not graduate from university, there was a perception that people's connections were more important than skills or ability for accessing employment:

you would think it was based on ability level but it's the way the world is, it's who you know kind of thing (David, Glasgow)

Jim had got his job through the company that gave him an internship while he was studying at university. However, he was aware of the difficulties young men faced in finding employment:

I would say it can be tough to get a part-time job without, just through applying because there's so much, like there's a lot of like 'get a job because you know the manager' type thing (Jim, Glasgow)

For young men such as David, their perspectives indicated a lack of confidence in their skills and lack of qualifications, which had been compounded by several failed attempts to improve their employment situations. Without the right connections, applicants would be relying on luck according to Nick:



if you're applying to a company and you don't know anyone in there, no, you'd need a lot of luck mate (Nick, Liverpool)

This may explain the embrace of the probability theory and reliance on luck employed by so many of the young men in the sample. However, there were more nuanced perspectives on the value of social and cultural capital. Three of the graduates in Liverpool explained the positives that building networks could have on employment prospects. While having the right skills and knowledge were important for Stephen, he believed that having a connection in the company did act as an advantage in securing a job, all other things being equal:

I do think it's important to have a good fundamental understanding of what you're getting into as well, but I definitely think knowing the right people can help like massively. I think if you were going for a job and you were similar to another candidate maybe they'd pipped you to the post ... I think you'll be in a better position with who you know (Stephen, Liverpool)

Stephen's view converges with the increasing number of graduates discussed in the literature in chapter 2, and the data assessed in chapter 6 and 7. As there are a high number of suitably qualified candidates, having additional attributes could potentially set applicants apart, and having the right connections were perceived as important to get the interview. However, it was then up to the individual to demonstrate they were suitable for the role, according to John:

I think who you know can be really useful and it's about the way you use your contacts and connections to progress yourself, but then you also need to have the skills and knowledge to back it up when you do get into a position (John, Liverpool)

Contrary to the belief expressed by some individuals that connections were the most important factor in gaining employment, they were only the first step in John's opinion, and it was still up to the individual to display their capacity for the job. For John, using connections to find an employment opportunity acted as getting one's foot in the door but it then was important to have the right skills and knowledge for the job.

This section has demonstrated the complexity in securing gainful employment as described by the young men interviewed. There did not appear to be a consensus within the interview data analysed as to what were the clearest

pathways into secure employment. The findings in this section resonate with the discussion that the process of detraditionalisation has resulted in increased risks for young men as clear routes to adulthood have disappeared. The uncertainty around whether qualifications, experience or personal connections were most important for successful employment transitions indicates that the young men are facing these risks without adequate sources of guidance and help.

### 7.4.5 Traditional pathways

While the literature brings attention to how pathways into employment have become detraditionalised, there were still some examples of young men finding employment through family and friends. Personal networks were still important in regard to awareness of job opportunities, rapport with employers and knowledge of application and interview processes.

Peter was of the view that personal networks were useful for shaping career pathways. It would have been easy to have become an electrician through the help of his father:

my dad was a tradesman and knew a network of people and I could have got a job as a trainee electrician at the drop of a hat, but that's just the kind of family experience I suppose and the network that you're in (Peter, Glasgow)

Jim's early employment experiences came from his father's employer:

I worked in [a company] part-time at the weekends, and then I would, my dad works for them so that's kind of how it came about (Jim, Glasgow)

Anthony was able to get a job as an office manager in the civil service with the aid of his uncle despite being only 16 at the time:

my uncle works for [civil service] and he'd been told that these jobs were coming up so he insisted that I apply for it ... my uncle gave me the heads up on that [the interview process] so therefore the interview was very much just going through the processes of saying exactly what they wanted to hear ... to this day I still find it baffling

how at the age of about 16 and a half I was in charge of like a team of people (Anthony, Glasgow)

Ian was able to gain employment in his father's place of work after dropping out of university:

I went and started working with my dad, for a bit ... after I dropped out of uni, I needed something to do, so I worked with him fulltime (Ian, Glasgow)

However, Ian did not like the type of work which result in him withdrawing from this traditional pathway:

but it hit me that the factory work isn't a career I can see myself in either [laugh] it was just it was degrading me away

This was a source of friction with his dad who had wanted him to follow in his footsteps:

It ended up a big blow up between me and my dad ... I didn't want to end up being him because that's what he wanted me to do was take over his role in it eventually (Ian, Glasgow)

Fortunately, Ian was later able to get another job through one of his father's friends:

One of my dad's friends was the head chef ... Just I pretty much mentioned yeah, I'm probably going to need a job and I want a bit more money and stuff like that, and then that's when I ended up getting included into that but that was after I'd spent months of applying and getting nowhere (Ian, Glasgow)

Ian considered himself lucky that he was able to get a job through his networks after being unable to find employment by applying for jobs on his own.

Fred was made aware of an apprenticeship opportunity while working part-time in his grandfather's business. He believed that he was provided with more support than he had received from his school:

see when the part-time job, it was actually my grandfather's business that I was doing it in, and there was like the woman in there she ... she did all the things with the apprentices ... and she showed me, she was like "city building, that's the council, that's a good apprenticeship" and that's how I applied and got that. I did that myself, the school never helped me do that (Fred, Glasgow)

Eric had also struggled to find employment before getting an apprenticeship created by his father's employers:

but I actually ended up, my dad works in the same company as I do ... so he actually ended up getting me an interview in here to join as an apprentice, and this is where I've ended up (Eric, Glasgow)

Nick was able to get a job in a factory with relative ease through a friend of the family, which led to his employment for two years:

I got in there straightaway through somebody that I knew like a friend of the family, so I was in there for two years and I got a really good job from them (Nick, Liverpool)

Sean recounted how he was helped by the father of a former girlfriend who introduced him to an employment agency which had contracted him to perform work in the financial sector. This was quick access to employment:

her dad was working in sort of financial services he had like his own financial advisory ... basically he said, "do you want to come and do a bit of work with me?" ... he said, "what I can do, I'll introduce you to the agency and they should be able to find you some contracting work" (Sean, Liverpool)

After withdrawing from university, Sean had been struggling to find work until his mother told him of an opportunity through one of her contacts. Sean was able to secure work as an Apprenticeship Liaison Officer:

my mum got quite close to the managing director ... she was telling them she had kids and "this is what my son's been doing, he's been working all over the country" ... and they said, "we've got an opening coming up for a job" (Sean, Liverpool)

The above accounts highlight the importance of personal networks in navigating education to employment transitions. These young men were made aware of opportunities for employment and training, and it was easier to enter these positions when they had friends or family working for the companies. They were instructed how to apply and what to say in the interviews which made the process more of a formality. While some of those positions did not become permanent, having these connections gave the young men a second and third chance to enter employment. A recurring sentiment throughout these accounts

was that it would be difficult for the young men to find employment on their own compared to knowing someone on the inside.

The next section explores the experiences of the young men who were unable to find secure employment, and who occupied the liminal and marginalised labour market positions in Glasgow and Liverpool, and had experienced the UK's welfare benefits system.

## 7.5 Unemployed and on benefits

In this section, which follows on from the findings in [Figure 7.1 Zones of \(in\)security: Glasgow and Liverpool](#) that showed the majority of young men occupied insecure labour market positions in Glasgow and Liverpool, the perspectives of the young men interviewed are explored in relation to unemployment and welfare practices. This section draws on data from the fourth main theme drawn from thematic analysis of the interview data, namely, *experiences of unemployment*.

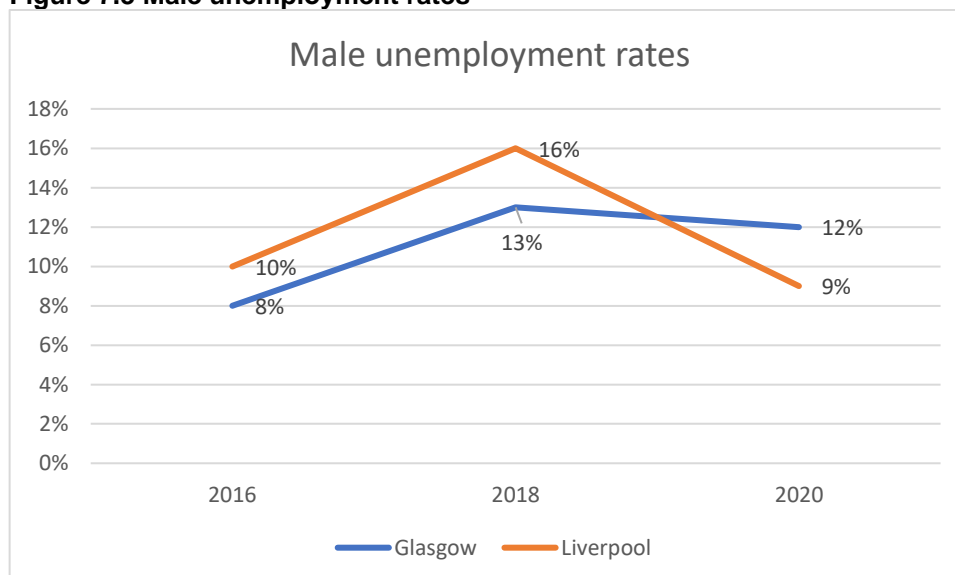
This section presents five subthemes related to these experiences and perspectives of unemployment and welfare. First, in Subsection 7.5.1, the young men talk about the prevalence of employment insecurity in the contemporary labour market where this risk has been diversified beyond those occupying the lowest social class stratifications. Subsection 7.5.2 discusses the young men's attitudes towards work and claiming welfare. These accounts offer an important insight into young men's reluctance to claiming welfare benefits that runs counter to the narrative in welfare policy that unemployment is a lifestyle choice and is a result of character deficits.

While reluctant to being unemployed yet on benefits through necessity of survival, the young men are exposed to welfare conditionalities that mandated participation on compulsory training schemes. Subsection 7.5.3 presents the young men's experiences and perspectives of the usefulness of these training courses in relation to the promise that they foster employability and help them to (re)enter employment. Failure to comply with this training is one of several

types of breaches of welfare conditions. Subsection 7.5.4 explores the experiences of young men who had been on the receiving end of welfare sanctions and the implications those punitive measures had on their subsistence. Considering the prevalence of employment insecurity, the cynical portrayal of young unemployed men in policy and what that meant in their everyday experiences including the conditions they had been coerced into accepting, Subsection 7.5.5 brings in the young men’s perspectives of how the welfare system could best support the facilitation of unemployment to sustainable employment transitions.

Using the Understanding Society labour market data for young men aged 16-30, Figure 7.3 below shows that unemployment rates in Glasgow increased from 8% in 2016 to 13% in 2018 and decreased slightly to 12% in 2020. Overall, unemployment increased between 2016-2020. In Liverpool, unemployment rates were 10% in 2016 rising to 16% in 2018 before falling to 9% in 2020. By 2020, male unemployment rates were higher in Glasgow than in Liverpool although the rates in both cities were above the 4.9% UK average for 2020 (ONS, 2020).

**Figure 7.3 Male unemployment rates**



**Source: Understanding Society (Wave 6, 2016; Wave 8, 2018; Wave 10, 2020)**

Considering the qualitative sample, the demographics of the sample in [Appendix 5](#): Qualitative sample demographics shows that while 8 of the 29 young men were unemployed at the time of interviews, only 9 were employed in the Traditional zone which meant that 20 of the 29 young men were vulnerable to labour market marginalisation and many were likely to need welfare at some point. Of the 8 young men who were unemployed, 2 were degree holders and 2 were educated to HND/HNC level. The remaining 4 unemployed were educated to Highers/A-Level or SG/GCSE. They ranged from 21 to 30 years of age, 5 were in the 25-30 age group, 3 were in the 18-23 group. This section delves into the young men's experiences and perspectives of unemployment and out of work benefits.

### **7.5.1 Job insecurity: it could happen to anyone**

This subsection the young men described their experiences of employment insecurity in the Glasgow and Liverpool labour markets. Some of the accounts relate to the discussion of the use of employment agencies as they relate to the prevalence of temporary employment. However, employment agencies are more a reflection of the quality of employment available to young men in a broader sense, and their accounts also provide insight into the precarious nature of other types of employment. Moreover, the young men's perspectives indicates they were conscious that these risks existed for many young men in their environment at the time.

The use of employment agencies was common among the young men, in most cases providing the only route into any form of employment (see [Section 7.3.5](#)). However, these positions were temporary and did not lead to permanent employment. Alistair, an unemployed graduate, provides an example of how he had experienced employment insecurity which led to his unemployed status. He had been working as a teacher through an employment agency when he was suddenly let go:

I was on the books, so there was nothing I could do really ... it's sort of a screw-over if you know what I mean like ... I put all I had into that role and a lot of time and effort (Alistair, Liverpool)

Alistair was upset he had been let go after showing dedication to his previous job. Although Alistair had been promised the role would have lasted longer, he was powerless to prevent the job ending prematurely. He went from being employed to unemployed in a short space of time, and against his will.

Michael, the other unemployed graduate who had only ever worked temporary jobs, shared one of his experiences of being released from an agency job in the finance sector. He and his agency colleagues were dropped from their employment at short notice. Michael asked the agency for a reason:

I was working for the bank for three months and then I met up with the people who did the mortgage applications job and then I managed to basically challenge them and say: “why did I get let go?”

and they said to me a kind of excuse: “because the work has all dried up” ... it was through the same agency ... I was just sacked basically (Michael, Glasgow)

As described in the previous section, Michael desired permanent employment and was willing to compromise on his sectoral ambitions. He was indignant that his employment was terminated in such a swift manner without good reason, condemning him to another period of unemployment benefits.

Only 3 of the 8 unemployed young men had experienced fixed-term employment contracts, the other 5 had only ever worked casually or through agencies. None had ever experienced permanent jobs in their lives. Nick, who had “worked his way up” to a 2-year fixed contract after doing the job through an agency for two years, left the job because of the ill effect the split shifts were having on his health. However, Nick who was still looking for stable employment, saw that the company had let go of all their agency workers during the Covid lockdowns:

the company I used to work for, the big one ... there’s three other big automotive companies like that in Speke where I live, not in Liverpool just in Speke, and they’ve let go of all their agency [workers]. All four big companies during this lockdown (Nick, Liverpool)

Related to the excess of applicants in relation to job vacancies in section 7.3, Nick continued:



all four big companies have had to release all their agency. So, there's like another 3000 people on the streets that live by me looking for work, so it's going to be even harder now (Nick, Liverpool)

Nick saw that a high number of agency staff had been let go, and this increased the number of people who would be looking for jobs, increasing the difficulty for young unemployed men in the local area in finding a new job.

The view towards the unemployed was generally compassionate across all members of the sample from employment statuses. Perceiving a volatile and insecure labour market, and having lost his job unexpectedly, John, one of six fulltime students and a part-time employee, deduced unemployment could suddenly happen to anyone:

I think maybe the current situation has highlighted people can go from being in a job to being unemployed like that like in a second so it's really highlighted that it can happen to anyone, it's not like, no-one's exempt from it really (John, Liverpool)

Stephen, also a fulltime student and part-time employee, defended the unemployed and like John also pointed towards the prevalence of volatility in the labour market as the cause of unemployment rather than individual shortcomings:

so many companies might be going bust and there's so many jobs that were available but now are gone and with more jobs falling ... it's like a volatile place, isn't it? So, there's going to be ups and downs all the time.

You might find there's an abundance of opportunities, there might be none. So, there's so many reasons why someone might be unemployed and why they can't yet find the work (Stephen, Liverpool)

The rhetoric in policy that unemployment resulted from individual failings was squarely rejected by the young men. At odds with the dominant narrative that being out of work was a choice or a badge of honour, the young men who were both in work or out of work indicated an awareness of shifts in employment practices and the prevalence of low-paid, self-employed, unskilled and temporary jobs as illustrated in the objective labour market data in [Figure 7.1](#).

However, there was evidence that those who were out of work had internalised some of the individualising narratives but had reluctantly claimed benefits in order to survive after being unable to find a job. This is the focus of the next subsection.

### **7.5.2 Individualised deficits: attitudes towards benefits and work**

This subsection presents the accounts of the young unemployed men's attitudes towards employment and claiming out of work benefits. While welfare policy contains rhetoric that the unemployed just need to "get on their bike and find a job," the accounts of the young men in this research are at odds with the narrative that being unemployed is a deliberate choice over being employed. However, it also provides insight into how these narratives had been internalised by some of the young men.

Fred, who was one of the eight unemployed in the qualitative sample, seemed disappointed with himself for having to claim Universal Credit but felt he had no other choice:

It was a bit brutal sometimes [signing on]. It was something I'd never, like I'd said I'd never ever do ... I just said I'd always work for my money. I wouldn't ask the government for it. But needs must (Fred, Glasgow)

Fred indicated he wanted to depend on himself to earn a living and was reluctant to surrender his independence by claiming unemployment benefits. Despite his wishes, he had to sign on though necessity because he was unable to find employment.

Tommy, who had worked in the bar industry for several years before becoming unemployed during Covid lockdowns, was shocked at the way he was treated by the jobcentre when applying for Universal Credit for the first time in his life:

I feel like a bit let-down because as I say I've worked that hard for that long ... and I've never wanted, I've never claimed for anything ... so I didn't get a great attitude to it and I was trying to, like, explain that I've never claimed for anything and it just like isn't supporting for what I need ... it was disheartening (Tommy, Liverpool)

Tommy was saddened by the attitude he received from the jobcentre while applying for universal credit. As it was the first time he had ever signed on in his life after having worked consecutively for several years since leaving school, he felt he could have been treated more supportively while applying for benefits which were necessitated by the Covid lockdowns.

Alex, who was self-employed but had claimed unemployment benefits, rejected the narrative in welfare policy that young people were unemployed due to a deficiency in attitude and behaviours:

the idea of like poverty or unemployment are a moral failing and if people theoretically, somehow, if everyone just pulled themselves up by their bootstraps then they should be able to, everyone would have a job. Despite the fact that that is impossible with the way that our society and economy are arranged ... I think it's absurd, because if the number of available jobs is less than the number of people some people aren't going to have a job unless you make up jobs for them and that just seems [sigh] (Alex, Glasgow)

Alex rejects the narrative in welfare policy that unemployment is the fault of the individual and believes there are not enough jobs for all unemployed thus it is impossible for all unemployed people to find employment.

In contrast, David believed that unemployment could arise as a result of an individual's poor work ethic and there were enough jobs for the unemployed:

maybe folks' own work ethic. I reckon there's always a job, there's always going to be something ... no job is beneath me, like I'll do any job but maybe some people can't be bothered ... I can imagine there's always going to be something if you work hard (David, Glasgow)

By David's logic, there were enough jobs for everyone but the unemployed were refusing to work in jobs because they were perceived as substandard and they did not want to work hard enough.

Fred appeared to be simultaneously optimistic and pessimistic about job availability in Glasgow. On one hand he believed that a job existed for everyone. On the other, not all people could get a job at the same time:

There's a job out there for everybody. There is. Aye. But it's a time and a place that it comes available. There's no jobs available for everybody at every minute at every day (Fred, Glasgow)

Fred, who was unemployed, continued by saying that some unemployed people chose to be unemployed:

And there's people out there that don't want to work ... some people just don't want to try. Some people would rather just stick and get their wee monthly dole payment (Fred, Glasgow)

However, resonating with Alex's view, Michael argued that a scarcity of employment opportunities explained why young men were unemployed:

I think there's not enough jobs for everyone ... if the employer had five jobs, they can't give five jobs to everyone (Michael, Glasgow)

Rather than the fault being with the individual, unemployment was regarded as inevitable in a labour market where there is an excess of labour and relative scarcity of jobs. Alex believed the application process for welfare had been deliberately designed in such a way to deter people from applying:

I think that the requirements are absurd and delivery hostile and designed to disqualify as many people as possible (Alex, Glasgow)

Ian and Stevie were also unemployed but did not sign on. They provide insights in the perspective of those out of employment but choose not to claim benefits. Ian spent six months subsisting in his father's home and did not want to claim any benefits because of a perceived stigma surrounding claiming welfare support:

I spent a good kind of six months or so just bumming around my dad's flat ... there was kind of stigma with it [signing on] at the time. It made me feel a bit like I was failing ... my dad had mentioned it to me a few times but it was just something to do with the, I don't know, whenever I was growing up it always seemed like a bad thing to be on the dole if you will (Ian, Glasgow)

Ian would have felt like he was personally failing if had claimed benefits, indicating an individualised guilt for being unemployed. Despite being advised to claim benefits by his father, Ian was reluctant to apply for welfare. Stevie also refrained from applying for out of work benefits. This is because he was

confident in his ability to find employment despite having lost his fixed-term job during the pandemic:

I've never struggled finding jobs, for myself yeah, I'm quite, I'm ever optimistic, that's why I didn't sign up to the dole immediately (Stevie, Glasgow)

Inversely, Stevie may have internalised the view that claiming benefits was the fault of the individual, as being an optimist, he had the 'right' attitude to find employment. While the unemployed young men in this sample expressed aspirations to find employment, Nick provides insight into the difficulties in achieving the expectations required of him to maintain his benefits agreement:

So, what my one said to me was I've got to spend eight hours actively looking for work per day. Which, no-one does that for eight hours, but you've got to blag that you do, do you know what I mean? No-one spends eight hours, like I could apply for 30 jobs a day and that'll only take two hours (Nick, Liverpool)

Nick was required to seek employment for eight hours per day and his response was to apply for as many jobs as he could find available. Using the probability approach in applying for as many jobs as possible, he could not find enough suitable job vacancies in which he could apply for all of the expected eight hours.

Mark, fulltime employed, believed this requirement in welfare policy was conditioning the unemployed to receive gratification for applying for jobs:

I also think too many people now are too quick to say "oh, well done you've applied for jobs, that's great, that's really good work" but the reality is it's not good work, it's what is expected for any jobseeker (Mark, Liverpool)

George, who had worked as a recruiter for his previous employer, found that some unemployed people were applying for jobs only to gain evidence that they were looking for work, a condition to receive their benefit payments:

there was a lot of people applying as part of a job's seekers scheme so they had no interest in actually turning up for interview they just wanted an offer, so you know you'd offer them an interview and they'd say of can I get that in writing and our company policy was "no" (George, Liverpool)

He continued by saying that young people from deprived areas were complying with the rule to attain a basic level of income:

the rules of the game are there, you know, and the rules can be bent very easily. So, I live in a pretty deprived area, they're just playing the game and if they can get it why not (George, Liverpool)

These accounts of the young unemployed men have demonstrated that their attitudes towards work and welfare are at odds with the idea in welfare policy that the unemployed are lazy, workshy and have the wrong attitudes. Although the majority of the participants expressed compassion and solidarity with the unemployed, the idea that unemployment is the fault of the individual seems to have been repeated by some of the young men in the sample. However, for the unemployed men interviewed, their problem was neither their attitude nor lack of skills, but rather the prevalence of low-quality, temporary and insecure employment that made their periods of unemployment inevitable. They did not want to be unemployed and did not wish to claim out of work benefits but in the absence of viable employment opportunities, or their ability to secure access to the employment opportunities that existed, 5 out of 8 of the unemployed young men had had to claim these benefits, with the remaining three reluctant to do so.

### **7.5.3 Dead-end training**

This subsection explores the experiences of the young unemployed men's compliance with welfare conditionalities. This part focusses on their participation in mandatory training which have been argued in policy as being necessary to equip the unemployed with skills necessary for entrance to employment opportunities. Alongside this justification has been the rhetoric from policymakers that unemployment is partially a result of the skills deficit (alongside character, attitudinal and behavioural deficits) of the individual. Insights into the young men's perspectives of the value of these types of training is explored in this subsection.

While the purpose of welfare training schemes emphasises rectifying the deficient behaviours and attitudes of the unemployed, Nick gave an impassioned

view on his experience of the mandatory training courses presented to him at the jobcentre, which he thought were useless:

The thing that bothers me the most with them mate is they're trying to send me on dead-end courses. Like, one of the women said "right, you need to do a five-day course on team building exercises." I said: "how's that going to get me a job when my CVs got four years' of experience in the car industry?" You know? Team-building exercises, it's not going to do shit, is it?

I said: "look at my CV and you tell me, if I put that into my CV if anyone's going to look at it." I said "no employer's interested in these team-building exercises. They want experience, they want know-how" do you know what I mean? "If you want to send me on a course, send me on a proper one" (Nick, Liverpool)

A dominant theme emerging from the interviews with the unemployed was a lack of choice and denial of agency by ALMP. Nick experienced the irrelevance of the mandatory training, yet he knew what courses would improve his job prospects and asserted his agency to the jobcentre advisor. Nick was presented with alternative training which he found was inefficient and ineffective:

but with them they drag it out, you've got to go on a two-week course and do all this stuff that is irrelevant to it ... it's just a load of bollocks ... they're not really taking a proper look into it, because if they put the right courses in more people are going to go to work ... They're putting the funding in all these flimsy courses that are just not going to get anyone anywhere. ... most of them, they're just not relevant at all (Nick, Liverpool)

Nick continued to explain his dissatisfaction with the irrelevance of training available through ALMP which instead of enhancing his job prospects, he felt they were a waste of his time. Nick needed training to qualify for employment in his vocation, but explained that cuts to funding resulted in certain training provisions being removed:

It's getting worse. Our city's getting cut by the government, our council is getting cut by the Tory government ... when they've done that, all the training opportunities have gone down the drain like. I wanted to get funding you know for the HGV licence for the lorries, and because the government have cut the funding the council have had to take it off. So, I couldn't do it ... The Universal Credit would've paid for me to be able to go on like a week course and then do my test, then that would have put me into work then (Nick, Liverpool)

Alex, who became self-employed after being unable to find suitable employment while on benefits, did not have a positive experience of the careers support provided by either his former university or the jobcentre, with the latter being a worse version:

The university had like CV writing courses and things like that where you participate. So, any help that the employment office would give me would be like that but worse [laugh] ... I was applying for jobs, but it just seemed to be like it was something I had to do rather than something I was being helped with (Alex, Glasgow)

Alex also complained about the standard of support he received while unemployed. He felt that the support he received seemed to be done for the sake of it rather than being genuinely supported in finding a job. The work he was given links to the poor-quality employment described in the introduction of this chapter, articulated by Michael:

the jobcentre get emails and there was companies looking for an admin person so ... I could get back into work. I managed to get myself some work with this company ... but unfortunately the people in it ... they don't pay their staff and they were selling dodgy apartments (Michael, Glasgow)

Michael, unemployed, illustrates the substandard quality of employment that was arranged for him by the jobcentre, which facilitated a move out of unemployment into the informal economy. The job did not last long and he had to reapply for benefits again and in the end did not represent support into long-term, sustainable employment.

Fred painted a dismal picture of the lack of support he received while unemployed. He had asked for more support in securing employment from the jobcentre, but his pleas were seemingly unheeded. In his experience, it was easier to sign-on than find a job:

Fred, Glasgow: I think it's too easy to go to the jobcentre compared to getting a job. It's easier to sign on than what it is getting a job.

Int: How could it be better?

Fred, Glasgow: See when you go to your meeting, actually teach you stuff ... they don't tell me about any courses, I've not been sent on a



[course] ... it must be certain people they send ... but I do need help with it. I mean I've said that to them "I've still not got a job" ... I've asked them hundreds of times like "can you not help me find a job or help me apply"

The young men had not received as much support searching for jobs as they needed. The unemployed young men such as Fred wanted more support in searching and applying for jobs and the opportunity to learn in-demand skills. However, the usefulness of the training that was mandated did not increase their employability.

The purpose of these training schemes is to equip the unemployed with skills that will facilitate entrance to employment. This assumes that the unemployed have a skills deficit which also pins the responsibility for unemployment status on the individual. However, the accounts of the young men in this sample have demonstrated that the training was of low value and did not offer much in the way of providing useful skills to facilitate entrance to sustainable employment. The predicament for the unemployed was the necessity of compliance, for if they did not comply it would result in sanctions. The training schemes are one example of welfare conditions. The next subsection explores the experiences and perspectives of welfare sanctions.

#### **7.5.4 Austerity: sanctions don't work**

The mandatory training schemes described above are part of welfare conditions. If benefit claimants did not comply by attending the training, irrespective of its relevance or usefulness in finding employment, the young men would have been sanctioned and lost their benefits. The training schemes are only one of several conditions that the young men had to satisfy. Other conditions include the searching for jobs eight hours per day, the logging of job searches which are used for the surveillance of activities, and the punctual attendance of any and all meetings. This subsection provides insight into the young unemployed men's experiences of living under the threat of welfare sanctions.

Nick, unemployed after working for several years in the automobile industry, explains his experience of the ever-present threat of sanctions for claimants who are not actively seeking work:

they proper patronise like, they judge everyone the same, like the [jobcentre officer] says to me “listen, if you don’t start looking for a job and doing your credit commitments, then we’ll be on to you” ... I think they do have you on the ropes to be honest, especially my career’s officer or whatever you call them. If you don’t do everything right, they can press a button and stop your claim (Nick, Liverpool)

The narratives in welfare policy that the unemployed are workshy was experienced by the unemployed I interviewed. Nick provides an example of how unemployed young people feel as though they are all being treated the same, as guilty until proven innocent. Nick was made to feel as though he was deliberately choosing to be out of work and was unemployed as a lifestyle choice. Not only was he treated with prejudice, but it appears he was made aware in a pre-emptively curt manner that his benefits would be ended swiftly if he did not comply with welfare conditionalities. Not only did the young men believe unemployment could happen to anyone, but they also lived in fear of being sanctioned which was out of their control:

I think I’m just lucky that it hasn’t happened to me. Probably sooner than later that will probably happen to me but nothing yet (Michael, Glasgow)

Michael is aware of the threat of sanctions and feels it is down to luck his benefits have not been cut. He feels it is only a matter of time before his benefits are also stopped which suggests it is challenging to hold on to the safety net of welfare. Fred provides an insight into the ramifications of the punitive welfare sanctions for young men:

They sanctioned me once when I was in a hostel. It was because they said I hadn’t attended meetings ... I ended up getting the money 2-3 weeks later. But that’s only because I had proof. See if I never had proof of that, I would have had nothing ... I was stuck in a hostel, and see sitting with no money in there, it worse than sitting with money in there. If you’ve got money, you can “I’m going to go do this and get out of the place for a bit,” but you’re just sitting in a room yourself, with nothing (Fred, Glasgow)

In the end Fred was able to provide evidence that he had attended a mandatory meeting with the jobcentre, but it meant he had to survive his homelessness in a hostel “with nothing” for weeks before receiving his benefit entitlements on

which he was reliant. Fred explained he was unable to go outside due to not having any money, which affected his ability to seek employment:

The fact that I was in a hostel and then they tell you, you need to wait five weeks for your money, or you can take an advance today, but you need to pay it back ... see how I fell into the trap and I took the first advance? Well I've finally paid that off but I'd got a budgeting loan as well and I was hoping that when I'd paid the advance off, I'd be able to get like the first advance off it, I'd be able to get another one but, no. I need to finish paying my budget advance off before I can get another loan at all. I don't know why it's like that (Fred, Glasgow)

Fred felt as though the budgeting loan provided by DWP while he was waiting on his first benefit payment being processed was a debt trap of sorts. The extended period to administer his universal credit application put Fred in a position where he needed to take an advance and a loan to cover his immediate living expenses. He was perplexed by the complex process and necessity of having to take out two forms of overlapping loans that were then deducted from his first benefit payments which hindered his ability to get back on his feet and find employment.

Alex, self-employed but topped up his income through benefits, got the impression employment services were being run as a for-profit business, and there was pressure to reduce benefit claimants:

You have this definite feeling that the, that the risk-taking and liability is like down in a company and profit is pushed up. So, I definitely got the feeling when interacting with front line government service employees that they were like people trying to do what they could but also had a huge amount of pressure from above to like [do] unpleasant things (Alex, Glasgow)

Alex may have been referring to the austerity measures instigated by the Lib-Con coalition government and continued by successive Conservative governments to pay for the financial sector bailouts following the 2008 financial meltdown. Stevie was of the view government spending reduced from austerity measures could have been covered through other means, such as the tax-havens employed by big corporations, highlighting a contradiction in the austerity operation that claimed to be clamping down on 'tax dodgers':

Austerity never ended but it has become common knowledge, it's not even an opinion let alone a conspiracy that they allow plenty of money, like they encourage money to be sent offshore which would have covered all of this for a start (Stevie, Glasgow)

He perceived austerity to be a situation in which resources were being stripped from the poorest:

“Why are you taking money away from the poorest” and all these you know communities that are in dire-straits anyway and need the money. And meanwhile there is heaps of money out there (Stevie, Glasgow)

By targeting unemployed young people, the policy of austerity had attacked the easiest target, the low-hanging fruit, while big companies did not receive the same attention. Young people did not have enough support from the state, Stevie continued:

They don't have a leg to stand on. Like they can't, it's hard to fight the British state at the end of the day. It's hard to get what's yours. If you're a big company or you're rich or whatever well first of all you're probably, you are the state, in fact, you're the establishment, and the downtrodden are called that for a reason, like, they are! It's easy to do it. And they haven't got a voice you know? Yeah, it's just like communities are left to languish (Stevie, Glasgow)

Stevie, who was unemployed due to the impact Covid lockdowns had on his outdoor education industry, in which he was employed on a fixed-term contract, thought the government was not adequately supporting unemployed young people. In his view, government was intertwined with businesses, and both were working together to serve their own interests rather than the labour force. There was a sentiment throughout the sample that the unemployed were the easiest target for cuts and punitive welfare sanctions.

Although welfare and skills policies have been driven by an ideological perspective that employment is the best way out of poverty, and unemployment was a personal choice and way of life, the austerity operation seems to have overlooked the impacts of low pay due to temporary and insecure employment, a shortage of permanent employment opportunities, and structural inequalities and disadvantages experienced by young men in depressed labour markets. The young men interviewed in this research did not want to be unemployed, and

they also did not want to be claiming benefits. Rather they were unemployed because of the temporary and insecure nature of the jobs that were available to them. The next section focusses on the needs of the young men to find sustainable employment.

### **7.5.5 Back into work: more support needed**

*Well, I was depressed at the time because I couldn't get myself into work and nobody, no one would help me, and I couldn't get an internship to get some work experience (Michael, Glasgow)*

This subsection explores the expressed needs of the young unemployed men who had found that the welfare conditionalities and mandatory training schemes were ineffective in their stated purpose. Rather than being punished, forced to go on irrelevant training, and prejudged as having moral failings, the young men were critical of the cynical underpinnings of welfare policy and suggested how they would be better supported into employment by the British state.

There was a compassionate view from the employed towards the unemployed. Mark, a fulltime student and part-time employee, expressed his distrust in the government's stated intentions to support young people into employment.

*I feel, the more you're going to sanction people they become disenfranchised, you know? We've got a government who says "we're going to support and we want to help people find jobs" but then you have obviously sanctions, and other measures, then you've just contradicted your own statement, but how often do you see a Tory government do that when it comes to the working class? (Mark, Liverpool)*

For Mark, the nature of welfare sanctions were incongruent with the notion of support. Consistent with Stevie's perspective that the unemployed were downtrodden, Mark thought the punitive measures enacted by UK governments were an attack on the working classes which have the effect of further marginalising young unemployed men.

On the other hand, there were instances where the unemployed had received support from the jobcentre. Ian had a positive experience because his work coach was trying to help him to find an apprenticeship:

there are work coaches that have been assigned anyway you know they just seem to want to help ... they've been linking me more and more towards apprenticeships and stuff like that ... I've kind of enjoyed it (Ian, Glasgow)

Not all the those in employment had a compassionate view of the unemployed. In George's experience, some of the unemployed applicants were requiring evidence of arranging job interviews which he suspected were influenced by welfare conditionalities. He suspected some of young people were gaming the rules of those conditionalities:

I think there should be a different system in place where I think where you can just show you've applied to certain roles and that's enough to actually to then claim a benefit, I think there could be government schemes, community work, whatever that looks like, whether it's painting a fence or picking up litter in a park or working at the local community centre to help people, I think would then give people the appreciation of you can't just get everything handed to you, so you do actually have to maybe go and find something you'd like to get paid for (George, Liverpool)

George thought that unemployed people may have it too easy in getting their benefits by applying for jobs. He believes the unemployed should be more active to receive their out-of-work benefits. However, while the Covid pandemic had exacerbated labour market insecurity, Stephen was aware of the difficulties young people faced in avoiding unemployment prior to the pandemic:

right now, it's hard to, I don't mean right now in terms of this pandemic, I mean even before that they were looking into like lines of work and what they wanted to do and they just struggled to find anything that was right, or anything that they could get hold of (Stephen, Liverpool)

Stephen was not surprised by the impact of Covid on job opportunities on the local labour market. In his view it was difficult for young people to secure employment before the pandemic and it was unsurprising unemployment rates had not decreased. The young men rejected the notion that being out of work was a failing of the individual. Rather, the dominant view was that there were not enough jobs in the labour market.

Kirk was aware how the confidence of the unemployed could be damaged due to failures in the job search:

I think they need to keep giving as much support as they can because there's nothing worse than being totally discouraged from doing something. And you kind of get a cycle if you're just faced with constant rejection and knockbacks then you're not going to be motivated to look for a job and with the fear of rejection (Kirk, Glasgow)

Postgraduates had also experienced the 'constant rejection' Kirk mentioned, so he seemed compassionate about the difficulties less qualified unemployed young men may be facing while looking for work. Providing clear training routes into employment would help both employers and the unemployed according to Kirk, echoing Michael's experience presented at the beginning of this subsection:

if they were given more opportunity do an apprenticeship or something like that then that could definitely help them both person and the company (Kirk, Glasgow)

Harry wanted to see the unemployed receive more support because it was easy for young people to become disheartened:

I think that they [the unemployed] need help. Because I think unemployed people could maybe get themselves into a rut where they maybe just think that they have [pause] they've maybe got some qualifications, but they maybe feel ashamed going to the jobseekers because they're not, like they don't fit in (Harry, Glasgow)

This and previous subsections have demonstrated a dominant theme in the sample that the welfare conditionalities in the form of mandatory training and punitive sanctions are as irrelevant as they are ineffective. This subsection has shown that the young unemployed men want higher quality support from the British state to enter sustainable employment. It has also shown that the young men who were out of work did not wish to claim benefits, and this was evident as 3 out of 8 of those who were not employed had not claimed any benefits at all, and the 5 who had claimed benefits had done so reluctantly.

The young men's accounts presented in this section have shown that there was a perception that employment insecurity was so prevalent that it transcended social class stratifications and thus anyone could become unemployed. Those who were unemployed had become so against their will. They had been unable to remain in their jobs due to being let go and this had been experienced on multiple occasions in their early careers. Forced to claim welfare benefits in

order to survive in between periods of temporary employment, the young men had to comply with welfare conditionalities which they believed were set up to make them fail and were underpinned by an incorrect assumption that they had moral and skills deficits. Their experiences of mandatory training courses were negative and opportunities for training that would equip them with relevant skills for their chosen vocations did not exist. The young men felt that welfare sanctions were severe and did not best serve their career interests, and this was why they suggested alternative ways that they believed would better support young unemployed men into employment.

The next section compares the findings of Glasgow and Liverpool presented in this chapter.

## 7.6 Comparing the two cities

The data from the Understanding Society sample show that young men aged 16-30 in both Glasgow and Liverpool are vulnerable to labour market marginalisation, and this was a consistent feature for every year of observation. While employment status in [Table 7.1](#) Employment status: Glasgow and Liverpool showed that 49% of young men in Glasgow were in paid employment, and 12% unemployed, the Zones of (in)security in Liverpool revealed only 34% in Glasgow were employed in the Traditional zone with 53% in the Marginalised zone. There were more young men in the Marginalised zone than the Liminal and Traditional zones in every year in both cities with the exception of Liverpool in 2020 (52% in the Traditional zone). However, more young men were in the Traditional zone in Liverpool than in Glasgow in every year observed (43-52% in Liverpool compared to 34-35% in Glasgow between 2016-2020).

The findings in [Table 7.2](#) Income Quartiles: Glasgow and Liverpool showed the income quartiles for the Zones of (in)security. In every income quartile, young men in the Traditional zone had higher average income than the Liminal zone. Likewise, the Liminal zone had higher average incomes for every quartile than the Marginalised zone. As the majority of young men in both cities were not in



the Traditional zone the majority of young men in both cities had lower levels of income than young men employed in the Traditional zone.

Chapter 6 showed that despite the differences in post-school destinations, the young men in the qualitative samples of Glasgow and Liverpool expressed similar views relating to the perceived need to enter university and obtain a degree, and this was prioritised over choice of subject and career in many cases, and all these decisions were surrounded by a lack of clarity in terms of choices. Also apparent in both cities was the uncertainty of employment outcomes from degree qualifications and the university pathway was described as a risk and gamble. The findings in this chapter have found that these uncertainties were experienced by both graduates and non-graduates, with labour market uncertainty and risk a common theme expressed among the young men in both cities.

## **7.7 Summary**

The above quantitative findings indicate youth labour market conditions are precarious in Glasgow and Liverpool, with over half of young people aged 16 to 30 occupying the liminal and marginalised zones. The young men interviewed in the qualitative sample who occupied the liminal and marginalised positions were unsure of how to access secure employment. The only thing that was clear for the young men was that the university pathway was emphasised over other avenues by their schools.

However, the graduates in this study experienced varying levels of success in the labour market. Of the 15 graduates interviewed across both cities, only 7 were employed in the Traditional zone of employment. Both graduates and non-graduates perceived a lack of high-quality jobs and pathways into them, and they also found employers were not providing training as a means to enter employment. Rather, what the young men found were employers stipulating prerequisite qualifications, skills and experience. The graduates who had attended prestigious universities reported strong employer links with their institutions, and their programmes were set up with work placements as a core

component of their studies. It was these experiences with employers that benefited the graduates, as they developed employer networks which led to their employment.

For the rest of the sample, employment outcomes described by the young men were reduced to luck and chance, and they had adopted a probability approach in the job search process. However, they seldom received a response from employers, which had left many feeling hopeless in the face of countless rejections, perception of scarce opportunities and strong competition. There did not appear to be much certainty about definite or clear pathways into employment or optimism for a better future despite the aims of skills and labour market policies to improve labour market conditions. The probability approach was perceived as putting excess pressure on employer's human resources department as the young men felt reduced to applying for as many jobs as possible and hoping for the best. There were experiences of weeding out strategies which had been devised by employers in the form of various testing software programmes, and the use of employment agencies as a buffer. The young men reported resorting to using employment agencies after failing to secure employment by applying directly to employers, and the possibility that they would lead to permanent contracts was again left to chance, which for all of the young men interviewed led to unemployment. None of the young men interviewed in this sample who worked through employment agencies had ever experienced permanent employment.

There was little evidence of experiences or perceptions relating to growth of higher quality employment opportunities in either city. In particular, the unemployed with low level qualifications did not seem optimistic about their future employment prospects. These perspectives were based on their experiences as they were vulnerable to labour market precarity and they found it difficult to find employment despite their best efforts. For the young men in marginalised positions, they tried to cover all bases in the hope of finding employment. However, despite going through them with a fine-tooth comb, or employing a scattergun approach, the outcomes appeared to be the same. This made the young men feel that their chances of getting a job could not be

determined by their own actions despite being employable and exhibiting the 'right' attitudes and behaviours.

The majority of the young men interviewed rejected the narrative that unemployment was a failing of the individual, or of individual deficits. Instead, employment volatility and insecurity was a common perception, thus unemployment was regarded as a real possibility for anyone. Those claiming welfare benefits were subject to mandatory training schemes enforced by the jobcentre, and they were said to be ineffective for developing relevant skills to relieve them of their unemployment. Personal agency was said to be denied, and the unemployed wanted freedom to choose training for roles specific to occupational interests and career backgrounds which was denied by the jobcentre. While there were accounts of reluctance to claim benefits, those who did claim benefits felt they had no other choice after unsuccessfully exercising every known avenue to find suitable employment. The unemployed who experienced sanctions were stripped of financial resources to seek employment. A persistent fear of being sanctioned was described with suspicions that welfare policy was 'deliberately designed' to "make people fail." Despite conformity to welfare conditionalities, sanctions were difficult to evade due to the complexity of the rules and the unemployed believed they were treated as guilty until proven innocent. The findings show widespread disbelief that the government authentically supported the unemployed.

With a few exceptions, such as the accounts of the four apprentices in Glasgow, it appears the promises in national and region skills and labour market policies reviewed in Chapter 3 have had little noticeable impact on the young men analysed in the quantitative and qualitative datasets for both cities in improving job prospects or outcomes.

## **7.8 Discussion and conclusion**

The findings in this chapter have shown that young men in the youth labour markets of Glasgow and Liverpool are experiencing high levels of employment insecurity and precarity. It is such insecurities and uncertainties that are

characteristic of the *Risk Society* thesis (Beck, 2000) and it was apparent that the young men experienced casualised employment, periodic and near permanent unemployment, and complex education to employment transitions (Furlong and Kelly, 2005). While there may have been an increase in graduates from HE expansion since the late 1990s, the majority of the sample observed occupied non-secure labour market positions between 2016-2020. Furlong and colleague's *Zones of (in)security* in both findings chapters have made visible the extent of labour market insecurity within the quantitative sample and provided a conceptual basis to understand the marginalised experiences of the young men interviewed (Furlong, et al, 2018).

However, while the aforementioned social theories commonly adopted in youth studies still apply to the common experience of the young men in this research, a range of new findings were identified which have not been conceptualised in studies of youth to date. The risk prevalent in the young men's experiences were described in unique ways and manifested in various actions in many contexts. As found in the previous chapter, the young men described studying at university as a gamble because employment outcomes were so uncertain. It is undeniable that the majority experience for the young men analysed in this research have experienced high levels of unpredictability in their employment transitions and early career experiences.

Contrary to the assertions that young men reconstructed their masculine identities to integrate into the service economy in order to preserve a traditional masculinity (McDowell, 2020; Nixon, 2018), the young men in my sample were simply engaging with the demands of the post-industrial contemporary labour markets of Glasgow and Liverpool. Given the young men's exuberant determination to find employment, the narratives in policy and literature that underemployment and unemployment was a result of masculine, behavioural, skills or attitudinal deficits may in Roberts' words be "damaging and offers a simplistic, almost victim-blaming, rendering of young working-class men's labour market difficulties in contemporary times" (Roberts, 2018, p.145).

Rather than the "intergenerational cultures of worklessness" rhetoric found in policy (Carlin, 2019), and attitudinal and behavioural deficits, the issue facing young men was a shortage of jobs in depressed labour markets such as Glasgow

and Liverpool, and strong competition for them. In most cases the jobs available were insecure and temporary, which explains the high unemployment rates as young men often found themselves out of work and dropped by employers “at the drop of a hat.” Not only did the young men describe university as a gamble, but given the excess applicants for jobs, young men were applying a probability approach to their jobs search and application process. Embedded in such an approach is a reliance on hope, fate and luck, which resonated with the sense of hopelessness and lack of personal agency experienced by those in liminal and marginalised positions. The challenges and disadvantages they face are contrary to the idea that these young men had any form of moral failings or that they wear their precarious labour market positions as a badge of honour. In the following chapter, Gerda Reith’s *Age of Chance* will be used in tandem with Beck’s *Risk Society* and Marx’s *Surplus Labour* to analyse the findings presented in Chapters 6 and 7.

## Chapter 8 Discussion

### 8.1 Introduction

This research has explored young men's experiences of education to employment transitions in Glasgow and Liverpool. This chapter discusses the findings presented in Chapter 6 and 7 locating them in the relevant literature and examines (through the lens of the theoretical framework) the experiences of the young men to address the research questions:

What are young men's employment experiences of postindustrial labour markets in Glasgow and Liverpool?

1. How have young men perceived and experienced their education and employment choices?
2. What are young men's experiences and perspectives of unemployment and welfare?
3. How can social theory help to understand the experiences of young men in postindustrial labour markets?

The interest of this research was to understand young men's experiences in light of recent skills policies in both Glasgow and Liverpool which due to their locations in Scotland and England are subject to different national policies that aim to address labour market problems since deindustrialisation. As Scotland has a devolved government, it has certain powers that are distinct from the UK which can be used to address specific problems according to local needs (DfS, 2023). The skills and labour market policies created by the Scottish government have been widely regarded in academic literature as being ideologically divergent from the UK government, and the approach to tertiary education tuition fees and regulation of vocational education are two examples of where education circumstances differ for students (Hodgson and Spours, 2016; Keep, 2019b; Arnott and Ozga, 2016). England does not have a devolved government and as such policies designed by the UK government apply to all cities in England. In the case of Liverpool it falls within the Liverpool City Region (LCR)

and the Liverpool City Council has some degree of devolved powers to implement policies according to local needs (LCR, 2018a; 2018b; 2018c; 2019).

However, one of the key arguments in studies of skills policies in Scotland and England is the extent to which policies differ in their approach, and the problems they seek to address. The policies reviewed in this research found evidence of broad policy overlap in Scotland and England that appear to follow a similar neoliberal path. These similarities included the way in which the individual has been framed as responsible for marginalised labour market positions (Mackie and Tett, 2013), the shift from the skills utilisation approach to the employability approach following the GFC and the UK's subsequent austerity operation (Valiente, Lowden and Capsada-Munsech, 2020), and the profiling of youth as risky economic subjects, another indication of the individualisation of responsibility (McPherson, 2021).

The review of literature suggested that the economic shifts to the knowledge/service economy (McDowell, 2020), the disappearance of traditional industries that were major employers of men (Nixon, 2018), the reduction of social and welfare support services (McDowell, Bonner-Thompson, and Harris, 2022), and most recently the withdrawal from the EU (CIPD, 2023; Godfrey, 2023; Singh, 2023) were circumstances that both Scotland and England had to contend with as member nations of the same state (the UK). While Glasgow and Liverpool are located in two different nations, analysis of policies in Scotland and the UK had unifying and overlapping narratives and rhetoric (McPherson, 2021; Mackie and Tett 2013; Valiente, Lowden and Capsada-Munsech, 2020) and the findings in this research indicated that young men had experienced similar problems in their education to employment transitions and early careers. This chapter discusses these findings.

Section 8.2 begins by analysing the education choices that the young men recounted and focusses on the education and employment opportunities that were presented to them while at school and the esteem in which these destinations were held. This section discusses the guidance and advice that the young men received and how they perceived academic, vocational and employment post-school choices which ultimately informed their decisions (8.2.1). Also discussed is the value of these education pathways in relation to

their employability where the young men reflected on the utility of their qualifications and the returns from their investments in the labour market (8.2.2).

Section 8.3 analyses the young men's experiences of the postindustrial labour markets of Glasgow and Liverpool and their attitudes towards work. This section examines the young men's experiences and perceptions of employment insecurity, the risks they face within the contemporary labour market and their responses to this environment where there is seemingly an antagonism between perceived luck and merit in determining employment outcomes (8.3.1). In this context of employment insecurity, the young men went to extreme lengths in their quest for secure employment, and both successful and unsuccessful journeys are assessed alongside discussion of education pathways and individual background (8.3.2).

For those unable to enter secure employment, a life of unemployment interrupted only by temporary and precarious forms of employment appeared to be the dominant labour market condition. The experiences of the unemployed are discussed in Section 8.4. In the backdrop of the narratives and rhetoric in welfare policy that unemployment is an individual choice, and unemployment arises through skills and behavioural deficits, the attitudes of the unemployed are explored together with discussion of their education, skills and qualifications statuses, and views of their circumstances (8.4.1). This section concludes with discussion of the supposed utility of welfare conditionalities including mandatory training schemes and work programmes which arguably serve the purpose of coercing young men into accepting poor-quality labour market conditions (8.4.2).

## **8.2 Education choices**

This section discusses the education choices that the young men made while they were at school and their experiences of post-compulsory education (Main Research Question). Drawing on Beck's (1992) Risk Society thesis, this section discusses the ways in which the young men's decisions were informed. In the



absence of traditional sources of help and guidance, Furlong and Cartmel (1997) suggest that the challenges of late modernity cannot be mitigated by personal agency, although their choices have become increasingly individualised. However, to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of these current conditions, this section draws on Reith's (2002) Age of Chance gambling theory to provide a unique perspective of the ways in which the young men described the unpredictability of outcomes in relation to their investment in education and their returns in the labour market.

### **8.2.1 “Informed choices”**

The findings in Chapter 6 explored the young men's experiences at school and the guidance they received while choosing their post-school destinations. The findings suggest that the young men were pressurised by their schools to go to university. As Keep (2020) points out, the expansion of HE provision sought to provide education and training through higher education providers rather than by employers. Accounts from university students such as “they kind of pushed you on a path” provided insight into how young men's post-school choices were framed (Section 6.2.1). When the young men indicated inclinations for non-university pathways, their schools would “try to change your mind” and “they promoted the idea of university above all else” (Section 6.2.1). The young men found there to be “a stigma” for apprenticeships and were led to believe that those choosing them were “not going to end up as good as the people that have a degree” (Section 6.2.4). These accounts of the young men illustrate they experienced participation in university as “normative for young people in late modernity” (Wyn, 2017, p.92) which has been promoted as the route for individual prosperity (OECD, 2007).

The young men described how they were screened as ‘at risk’ or ‘on track’ by their schools. McPherson (2021) argues the profiling of young people in this way is part of a skills agenda that aims to increase the employability of the individual. Young men from working-class backgrounds such as Fred were deemed ‘risky economic subjects’ (Nudzor, 2010) because they did not have “the best of qualifications” and were subsequently channelled into vocational education routes (Section 6.2.2). For those who stayed ‘on track’ for university, entrance took priority over having a career plan. This led to ambiguity over

career futures. As Chris noted, if he knew what career he wanted to have after completing his degree at university, it would have been as though he had “won a watch” (Section 6.2.2). Winning a watch suggested bonus, or a jackpot from his action in investing in university education, and it also provided insight into the uncertainty the young men experienced in establishing links to careers or stable employment. As opposed to the economic man “acting rationally from perfect knowledge of certain conditions,” it appears the young men made their decisions “based on only partial knowledge” (Reith, 2002, p.40).

The young men did not receive extensive careers or subject guidance at school. As John noted “as long as you went to university ... I don’t think they [the school] cared about which course you did” (Section 6.2.3). University programmes were chosen “out of a hat” yet upon reflection the young men were disappointed with the advice they received (Section 6.2.3). Young men were dependent on their schools for advice as they were living through an era of declined collective structures which previous generations had depended on for guidance, such as the family (McDowell, Bonner-Thompson and Harris, 2022), as Andrew reflected “they were not able to give much information” (Section 6.2.3). While increased choices appeared to offer an increase in personal agency for the young men, as they were able to gain entrance to university due to the abundance of subjects available, Furlong and Cartmel (2007) argue these increased choices combined with detraditionalisation has created increased risks. The young men had to face the risks arising from these changes as individuals (Beck, 2000) and they had to bear responsibility for managing risks in through their personal decision-making (Beck, 1992) which was informed for the most part by their schools. The process of detraditionalisation has seen young people simultaneously lose clear pathways into employment but now have increased choices in terms of educational pathways (Beck, 1998). As they were often the first in their family to go to university, the young men were “reliant on the school” for advice. However, the advice they received “was not particularly comprehensive at all” (Section 6.2.3). The young men could no longer depend on traditional sources of information for guidance while navigating conditions of the risk society (Beck, 1992). This incomplete knowledge was expressed by Stevie when describing his subject choice: “I’ve got no idea what possessed me to go into philosophy” (Section 6.2.3). The priority placed on university entrance explained the action of getting

their “foot into the door at university” which was believed at the time to be “quite a smart decision” (Section 6.2.3). It appears the young men were choosing options “with the highest probability of success” to minimise risk (Reith, 2002, p.40). It seems the young men were advised by their schools that university was the ‘best bet’ of all available post-school destinations. The action of getting into university before deciding on a career path or subject formed the “basis of rational risk-minimising action in uncertainty” (Reith, 2002, p.40).

Standing (2014) and Skrobanek (2016) point to a public strategy that has influenced young people to regard the acquisition of HE qualifications as a rational strategy without which they are vulnerable to labour market insecurity. The young men were led to believe that they had the ability to determine their own outcomes by gaining entrance to university, as graduate William said: “from my degree I can get anything I want, it’s what was told to me anyway” (Section 6.2.1). However, three young men who attended university withdrew from their programmes after they realised that the graduate premium they were promised beforehand was unlikely to materialise. Tommy “threw in the towel” after he was advised by his lecturer that students who were not already employed in the journalism sector “aren’t going to get anywhere.” Stevie withdrew because he perceived institutional prestige was important for gaining access to employers, and his university “wasn’t an Edinburgh, it wasn’t a Durham” (Section 6.3.3). When the young men realised “institutional pathways and structures are not able to provide certainty or predictability” (Wyn, 2017, p.91), they withdrew from their courses to seek alternative routes into secure employment.

## 8.2.2 Opportunities for better jobs

*We will create a country where everyone can improve their skills at all stages of their lives, to boost their earning power and the opportunity for better jobs* (HM Government, 2017, p.95)

Within the 5 foundations of the now defunct Industrial Strategy, the above aim was to ensure that everyone could transform their life chances (HM Government, 2017). The quantitative findings in Chapter 6 indicate that university education offers some protection from precarious forms of employment characteristic of the youth labour market. [Figure 6.1](#) Labour market position and education found that of those occupying the Traditional zone, 40% had degrees in Glasgow

compared to 24% with Standard Grades or below. Of those in the Marginalised zone the opposite was true, 48% had Standard Grades and 22% had Degrees. While not offering absolute protection from labour market marginality, the data shows that those with low-level qualifications were more likely to occupy the zone of Marginalisation. This was evident in both cities; university degree qualifications increased the likelihood of occupying the Traditional zone of employment and the group of young men holding low-level qualifications were most likely to occupy the Marginalised zone (Section 6.3). Table 6.2 Job classification by education: Glasgow and Liverpool found that there were more degree holders in ‘Professional Occupations’ in both cities with 12% in Glasgow and 11% in Liverpool educated to degree level, and 0% without degrees. ‘Skilled Manual’ and ‘Partly skilled occupations’ were more populated by the young men without degrees (Section 6.3). Despite these findings showing relatively positive outcomes for degree holders, it is important to note that over 1 in 5 in Glasgow (22%) and over 1 in 10 in Liverpool (13%) of those with degrees were positioned in the Marginalised zone, with similar percentages in the Liminal zone which resonated with a perceived labour market vulnerability expressed by the young men in the qualitative sample (Section 6.3).

The young men perceived there to be an excess of graduates which had simultaneously increased competition *for* and exacerbated the problem with the shortage *of* graduate level jobs. As Anthony observed “they’ve got literally hundreds of graduates” for a “handful” of graduate jobs. This dynamic had reduced the value of degrees, as Stephen concluded “I don’t think a degree means now what it used to” (Section 6.3.2). The excess of graduates reported is unsurprising given the pressure to gain university entrance which as Keep (2020) explains has its roots in New Labour’s drive to expand provision as a main ground for providing education and training. The increase in graduates which the labour market has been unable to absorb has been described as graduation inflation by Furlong, et al. (2018).

Higher Education institutions rather than employers have become the main platform for providing training, which has resulted in employers having little incentive to invest in training provision (Fuller, et al, 2015). The reality for young men in both Scotland and England is that they need to assume the

financial burden of investing in their own training at university, and the skills being developed at university have tended to be inconsistent with employer needs due to the weak links between education institutions and employers. As Fuller and Unwin (2013) point out, links between employers and education providers that exist in Germany, Japan and Switzerland are virtually non-existent in the UK. This was noticed by the graduates interviewed. What emerged was a perception that without developing skills in demand by employers, then university could be fruitless, as Harry asked rhetorically “well, what like, what is the actual point?” (Section 6.3.4). The young men were concerned that their investment in high level qualifications such as university degrees would not universally improve their chances of entering stable employment.

However, there were nuances to this concern. The young men did not believe that all university graduates faced these same uncertainties. Employer access was perceived to be more likely at prestigious institutions, and there were points of convergence within the sample. As Andrew believed, graduates from Oxbridge were “guaranteed to have the option of quite a good job” (Section 6.3.3). Those graduating from prestigious institutions were strong in their convictions that their investment in university education had yielded worthwhile results, as Peter noted “the internships together with all the study and the extracurricular stuff, yeah that made me ready for work” (Section 7.4.1). However, there seemed to be a perception that as the number of graduates increase, graduate jobs had become mostly reserved for an elite, resonating with Ainley who argues:

Only some of those from elite universities are likely to be guaranteed ‘graduate jobs.’ Others - possibly up to one in three graduates - are likely to be ‘underemployed’ in jobs previously done by non-graduates, that is assuming they are able to find a job (Ainley, 2013, p.51).

Of the graduates from post-1992 universities, access to employers through their institutions was found to be lacking. Michael found it “too hard” to get an internship and left university without having developed work-related skills and experience (Section 7.4.3). His eight years’ experience of the labour market since graduating had been cycles of unemployment interrupted by low-quality

and temporary jobs through employment agencies, agencies from which the young men could be abruptly “just sacked” (Section 7.5.1). Rather than promoting upward mobility for graduates, high-level qualifications may only serve the purpose of preventing downward mobility (Ainley and Allen, 2010). However, for these unemployed and underemployed graduates, their mobility appears to be stagnant in the lower end of the labour market. The perception of substandard graduate employment outcomes (Bertrand-Cloodt, et al, 2012) had led Tommy to withdraw from his degree programme, and he observed his former classmates were “all really smart people but they’re working in supermarkets” (Section 6.3.4).

The interviewees perceived that prestigious universities provided better opportunities to develop in demand skills due to stronger links with employers (Section 6.3.3), and this appeared to be the case for graduates such as Peter who developed skills in his work placement before entering a secure job directly upon graduating (Section 7.4). Analysis of the Understanding Society labour market data shows that there are graduates distributed across the three zones of (in)security, indicating that a university education does not in and of itself guarantee smooth employment transitions (Figure 6.2). The young men interviewed who graduated from post-1992 universities found that their higher education institutions had little to no links with employers or opportunities for traineeships or work placements (Section 6.3.4) and were thus entering the labour market without in demand skills that increased their employability (Section 7.4).

Scottish and UK skills policies, such as *More Choices, More Chances* in Scotland (Scottish Executive, 2006), and *Positive for Youth* (HM Government, 2011b) and the Industrial Strategy (HM Government, 2017) in the UK emphasised a discourse of opportunity as a means for the individual to achieve successful economic outcomes, which propagates the idea that Scottish and English society are meritocracies (Mackie and Tett, 2013). However, degree holders were not a minority occupying the liminal and marginalised zones (Figure 6.2), and this was a point of convergence with the accounts of the interviewees who perceived there to be an excess of graduates in relation to the number of graduate job opportunities (Section 6.3.2).

With weak links between universities and employers, a mismatch between the skills developed at university and employer demands, the young men found that they were investing in skills that were of little value in achieving upward social mobility yet they carried the burden of responsibility for their unsatisfactory employment outcomes (Section 6.3). While the young men were led to believe that recruitment and selection was based on a qualifications based meritocracy (Keep, 2019a), and achieving entrance to university and a degree would merit access to secure employment, the young men's experiences of the labour market was at odds with this meritocratic vision as they had found their chances were somewhat random and reduced to luck (Section 7.3).

This was why the young men described their investment in education as a gamble because the outcomes were so unpredictable and achieving a university degree therefore offered no certainties (Section 6.3). The lack of clear pathways into employment from education translated into a sense of unpredictability and uncertainty, as Alistair explained "it's a gamble any way you go" (Section 6.3.1). Despite having a master's degree in a STEM subject, Jim also explained "when you go to university it's a gamble in getting a job" after he and his peers struggled to progress in the labour market post-graduation (Section 6.3.1).

Reith (2002) posits the term 'gambler' has been used to describe "both economic entrepreneurs and recreational players" and economic life has been described as "casino capitalism" in "post-industrial, 'post-modern' society" (p.90; Beck, 1992). In this 'global casino' risk has been invoked to "explain the social and personal insecurity" experienced by the individual in this environment (Reith, 2002, p.90). For Reith (2002), there is a difference between games of skill (meritocracy) and games of chance (gambling) as there is an 'illusion of control' where gamblers believe they could influence the outcome by virtue of their participation (Langer, 1975). Reith (2002) argues that gamblers believe they are "more likely to win when they were allowed to participate in games, for example, by selecting their own lottery tickets." In using the word gamble, the young men such as Alistair and Jim, their investment in education seemed to be their lottery ticket. They were given a paradigm of control by investing in education which offered the promise of influencing their employment outcomes by participating in the education game. However, their chances of winning had

clearly been removed from the game of skill as they described their investments according to a game of chance.

In light of these uncertainties and risks, apprenticeships emerged as a perceived safer bet because they offered clearer pathways into careers as they had stronger employer links and provided the environment to develop relevant skills and work experience (Section 6.3.5). Thus, apprenticeships were not described in gambling terms by the young men. On the contrary, they offered more security in the interviewee's eyes. However, despite promises to increase the number of apprenticeships in the Glasgow and Liverpool City Region Deal(s) (GCR, 2017c; LCR, 2018b; 2018c), it appears that the Apprenticeship Levy has gone largely unused. Apprenticeship targets have not been met despite the relative success of those who were able to get one, and England in particular has seen a 59% drop in all apprenticeships since the Levy was introduced (Moules, 2023).

This section has discussion the labour market experiences of young men in relation to education levels. With the exception of those who attended prestigious universities or otherwise managed to develop in demand skills and work experience, the young men faced notable challenges in finding work. The next section deconstructs and analyses those uncertain labour market conditions experienced by the young men.

### **8.3 Postindustrial Labour Market Experiences**

This section discusses the young men's experiences of the Glasgow and Liverpool labour markets (Main Research Question). As this section explores young men's experiences of their employment choices and their attitudes towards work, this section also answers aspects of Supplementary Research Questions 1 and 2. This section is informed by Beck's (1992) Risk Society thesis that offers a conceptualisation of the insecure and precarious employment conditions discussed in the findings chapters. However, while traditional social theories prevalent in youth studies still apply to the common experience of labour markets in contemporary Western societies, the risks described by the young



men in this research have not been adequately conceptualised. As such, the unique ways in which the young men conceived their chances in the labour market, and the actions they took in seeking employment are analysed through the lens of Reith's (2002) Age of Chance gambling theory.

### 8.3.1 Games of chance

Analysis of the UK Understanding Society labour market data in Chapter 7 showed that the majority of young men aged 16-30 during 2016-2020 in both Glasgow and Liverpool occupied liminal and marginalised labour market positions (Section 7.2). Drawing on the experiences of the qualitative sample, the young men provided insights into these conditions. While the findings in Chapter 6 revealed there was a shortage of graduate level jobs, in Chapter 7 the findings indicated that there were a shortage of jobs of all levels in both cities. As Nick lamented "there's probably about 10,000-20,000 [job applicants] on them six jobs" (Section 7.3.1). The young men entering the labour market may have stumbled upon "the new law of productivity" of global capitalism that "requires a reduction in the number of jobs" (Beck, 1998, p.58). As Beck argues, in the Risk Society, the destination of post-industrial nations is a 'capitalism without work' where insecurity has 'spread beyond the lower classes' (Beck 1998, p.55).

With the shortage of gainful employment opportunities reported in both Glasgow and Liverpool by both graduates and non-graduates alike, and strong competition for them, the young men adopted a probability approach in their job applications. Jim, a postgraduate in engineering, resorted to throwing "as much shit at the wall" as his main tactic for applying for jobs (Section 7.3.4). However, graduates from non-prestigious universities such as Michael struggled to make headway despite applying for every "opportunity for miles" (Section 7.4.3). The young men seemed to be operating in a labour market in which they perceived a high degree of uncertainty and unpredictability of outcome, and they responded to these circumstances by employing a probability approach in seeking and applying for jobs. Ferguson (2002, in Reith, 2002) suggests that gambling has "much in common with ... 'the risk society'; which is best viewed as the recovery and extension of the theory of probability theory to situations of everyday life" (p.xiv). In Reith's Age of Chance, the use of probability emerges as a form of human activity regulated by chance in response to uncertainty

(Reith, 2002). Reith (2002) argues that despite knowledge of the odds generated by probability theory, individuals continue “to play when the odds are against them, behaving as though they could influence games of pure chance and stubbornly expecting to win in the midst of catastrophic defeat” (Reith, 2002, p.156).

When Jim found employment, he described the ‘pure chance’ of finding a job as “luck like, if you’re lucky enough to get one” (Section 7.3.4). Zola (1967) argues “games of chance ‘help deny [the] fatality’ of lives over which the working class have no control” (p.31). For Reith “chance is understood as a constituent part of the world, codified in the rules of probability theory” (p.13). The young men did not perceive they had control over their circumstances and seemed to place their hopes on luck and chance rather than skill and merit. This indicated that the qualifications-based meritocracy idea they were sold at school had been abandoned. In this current environment, all young men such as Alistair could do was “just apply and hope for the best” and then “put it down to luck” when they were able to find temporary employment (Section 7.3.4). Golivich (1983) found that “gamblers attributed different causes to the outcome of races depending on whether they had lost or won” (Reith, 2002, p.157). In other words, wins were put down to agency (skills and effort) and loses were attributed to bad luck.

For the young men, successful job applications were not attributed to their agency, they were put down to luck - the young men were unable to tell the difference between their successful or failed applications. Given the vast numbers of jobs they applied for using the probability approach, their chances were perceived as random, determined by luck or fate. In describing their actions in finding employment, the young men were reduced to “a notion of ‘luck,’ the idea ... that the outcome of games is decided by providential forces such as ‘fate’ or ‘destiny’” (Reith, 2002, p.156). However, as Furlong and Cartmel (1997) argue using a car analogy: “what many of the drivers fail to realise is that the type of car which they have been allocated at the start of the journey [for example, their class] is the most significant predictor of the ultimate outcome” (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, p.7). While the young men were sold the ‘illusion of control’ in determining their outcomes (Langer, 1975), their

actions suggest they were aware that they were gambling against pre-determined odds to influence this game of chance (Reith, 2002).

Their perceived lack of personal agency was not hidden. As Alistair revealed “it just feels impossible” (Section 7.3.4). He had been let go by his temporary agency job as a teacher in a special needs school and bemoaned subsequent struggles to find secure employment. The shortage of jobs reported by the young men was experienced alongside “too many insecure jobs.” For those who were able to find work, they could be dropped “in a second” (Section 7.3.2). Stevie noted labour market conditions consisted of “zero-hour contracts, minimum wage everywhere” (Section 7.3.2). For Anthony “Everything’s temporary, like fixed term employment” and people could be “fired for dumb reasons” (Section 7.3.2). In the Risk Society, employment status is characterised by risk and uncertainty which affects all classes and is indicative of a destination of post-industrial nations to be the ‘capitalism without work’ previously mentioned. In Beck’s words:

Insecurity on the labour market has long since spread beyond the lower classes. It has become the mark of our times. The old ‘lifetime profession’ is threatened with extinction. No one wants to admit that with it an entire value system, a society based on gainful employment, will disappear (Beck, 1998, p.55)

The findings in Chapters 6 and 7 reveal the young men had adopted various means to find work. This included their engagement with education up to post-graduate level and employing a probability approach to finding work. While research has found that contemporary young working class men are most likely to be employed in low paid employment and experience poor working conditions and underemployment (Roberts, 2011), this did not deter the young men from seeking employment and they clearly adopted several tactics to finding work. These actions are at odds with the postulations in academic literature that men are resistant to learning and employment in contemporary feminised service-dominated labour markets (e.g. McDowell, 2015; Nixon, 2017). Instead what they have found is that despite embracing learning and employment in contemporary labour markets, and not exhibiting character deficits, their actions could not determine secure employment outcomes.

### 8.3.2 The most successful labour market in the world?

In the 2017 Industrial Strategy white paper, the United Kingdom was heralded as having “*one of the most successful labour markets in the world*” (HM Government, 2017, p.94). The near historic high employment rate, which in the introduction of the white paper praised the UK’s flexible labour market for keeping unemployment rates down, was also attributed to the higher education system and employers’ ever more involvement in the system.

However, as can be seen from the findings of this research, despite applying for jobs to the best of their abilities, the young men referred to the limitations of their personal agency. This perception was based on their experiences. Alistair noted, employers “simply don’t get back to you” (Section 7.3.3). Whether the young men were “applying and applying” or going through opportunities “with a fine tooth comb” the young men reported the same results, namely, employers were not responding (Section 7.3.4). This had negative effects on the young men, as Ian shared. He sank “into a really deep depression” because “nothing seemed to be working out.” The effect this current environment had on the young men made them give up their reliance on hope, as Fred said: “you stop sitting there hoping this job gets back to you” (Section 7.3.3). The young men indicated they had begun to blame themselves for their failure to secure permanent employment (McDowell, Bonner-Thompson and Harris, 2022). They had embraced learning and were clearly not resistant to employment in the contemporary service dominated labour market, hence their disappointment.

However, despite their best efforts, investment in education, a probability approach to seeking jobs, or a tailored specific application tactic, the end result for the young men interviewed appeared to be the same. The young men “were effectively locked out of the segments of the labour market that offer opportunities for secure employment, career development and a decent quality of life” (Furlong and Cartmel, 2004, p.2). The young men turned to employment agencies as a response to the challenges they encountered in receiving contact from employers. Aside from zero-hour contracts, not only did Nick believe “you can’t get nothing without [an employment] agency”, but it also appeared he perceived the only route into a permanent contract was to work through an employment agency “for a couple of years” and then “hope to get a contract

through them” (Section 7.3.3). This indicated that they could not find clear pathways into employment, as they were still left ‘hoping’ for secure employment in what appears to be a lengthy audition, with no guarantees, and in which employers derived the maximum benefit.

It appears the UK’s flexible labour market did not make it ‘easy’ for the young men “to participate in the workforce in a way that fits with their preferences and circumstances” (HM Government, 2017, p.95). For the young men who used employment agencies to get work, “the job security is never there” and they were always one phone call away from hearing “the job’s no more, basically” (Section 7.3.3). According to Furlong and Cartmel (2004) the prevalence of employment agencies and temporary contracts effectively lock young males into precarious sectors of the economy whilst simultaneously excluding them from potential work-related training that could enhance their future employment prospects. Employers were able to employ and release employees with ease, in other words the young men were subject to the flexible demands of employers (Beck, 2000). As the young men complained of their economic insecurity, they did not believe that they were benefitting from the flexible nature of employment. Lacking human, social and cultural capital, they were vulnerable to the precarious types of employment from which privileged groups are otherwise protected (Furlong, et al, 2018).

The young men believed that networks put applicants “in a better position” when applying for a job, without which they would “need a lot of luck” (Section 7.4.4). This was believed to be because of the strong competition for jobs in which there were many suitably qualified candidates. However, experience was also cited as crucial for gaining access to secure employment. Only 7 of the 29 young men interviewed had experienced internships, work placements or apprenticeships. It was access to these employer led training opportunities that led to their secure employment contracts, as Peter noted “if you wanted a job you had to get work experience” and he had benefitted from the access to employers at his prestigious university (Section 7.4.1). It appears that graduates with greater resources had an advantage in distinguishing themselves from graduates of the mass HE system and were thus able to boost their CV with extracurricular activities and expand their personal capital and networks

(Browne, 2010). As Brooks (2016) argues, social mobility inequalities for young people still remain despite the policy emphasis and justifications for HE expansion, and young people's education to labour market transitions remain differentiated by an individual's background such as their social class.

Young men from prosperous backgrounds, such as Jim, believed his placement at university was valuable "because that's the company I've ended up getting a job for" (Section 7.4.3). For those who struggled to enter the Traditional zone of employment, they complained that it seemed "impossible" to get "that experience" (Section 7.4.3). Without necessary work experience, the obstacles to entering employment tempered their aspirations in which they exclaimed "all I want is an office job" reflecting their hopelessness. The young men from less advantaged backgrounds seemed to have perceived a dead-end in a labour market where there were no perceived opportunities to gain the work experience employers required of applicants (Section 7.4.3). This situation rendered their investment in university education almost useless, as they complained that they felt "totally unprepared" for the labour market and it appeared they did not feel optimistic about their future prospects (Section 6.3.4).

The findings in Chapter 6 showed there was a positive view of apprenticeships held by the young men irrespective of their labour market positions. Andrew, who had a master's degree and was employed fulltime, believed apprenticeships were a better option than the university route because they had "a structured pathway" which led to "a guaranteed job" (Section 6.3.5). Apprenticeships were perceived to provide "a certain level of security" and were "the best way 'round here" to gain access to a career (Section 6.3.5). The accounts of the apprentices interviewed converged with these positive perceptions. As Eric noted his graduate apprenticeship was "the ideal scenario" as he was able to get work experience, a high level qualification and an income which made him believe he had the advantage over university graduates without work experience. Chris, who had withdrawn from university, was happy his job was "guaranteed" after his apprenticeship training and found there was "literally no difference" between his last day as an apprentice and first day "being a full team member." Aware of the strong competition for scarce jobs and intensive employer

demands, apprentices such as Jamie who believed he had better chances to enter secure employment over the competition, including university graduates (Section 6.3.5).

The positive views of apprenticeships appeared to stem from two factors, namely, the perceived clear pathway into secure jobs or careers which appeared as a break from the uncertainty that prevailed over all other pathways, and the platform to build relevant work experience that employers require for entrance to employment opportunities that were otherwise denied to young men from less advantaged backgrounds. Skrobanek (2016) had found that the decline in demand for manual labour and rise of service sector apprenticeships made it difficult for young men from lower SES backgrounds to gain apprenticeships. However, while the data from this research is not representative of Glasgow as only four apprentices were interviewed, the accounts of these apprentices are different from Skrobanek's claims. The young apprentices were not from particularly advantaged backgrounds, the industries in which they were employed as apprentices were not limited to service industries although they did not exclusively seek out manual occupations, and their school-leaving qualifications varied. The Scottish Government had pledged to support individuals "to increase control and choice over their skills and learning development" (Scottish Government 2010, p.29).

For the young apprentices interviewed in Glasgow, this appears to be the case for those who were able to gain access to apprenticeships. While the apprentices' experiences provided examples of clear pathways into work, for those unable to secure such positions and "denied a stake in the modern economy" (Furlong and Cartmel, 2004, p.2), their vulnerability to precarious forms of employment often necessitated engagement with unemployment benefits. Their experiences are discussed in the following section.

## **8.4 Marginalised young men in the modern economy**

The preceding sections have discussed the precarious employment conditions of the local labour markets of Glasgow and Liverpool which have been a common

experience for the majority of young men observed in this research. This section discusses the experiences of the marginalised labour market positions occupied by these young men, conditions that caused them to experience periods of unemployment and underemployment. For those completely out of work or working zero-hour contracts, welfare benefits became a necessity to ensure their subsistence, and this section will discuss the young men's experiences and perspectives of the welfare safety net in modern Britain. Drawing on the Marxian perspective of Surplus Labour to analyse the conditions in which the young men were unable to gain access to permanent employment and held in reserve (Marx, 1973; 1976), this section aims to address Supplementary Research Question 2. The discussion is aided by Beck's (1992) Risk Society thesis which argues that global capitalism requires fewer workers, and Furlong, et al.'s (2018) discussion of employment insecurity in UK youth labour market.

#### **8.4.1 A “lifestyle choice”**

The dominant narrative in welfare policy for much of the past four decades, from Margaret Thatcher onwards, has gradually framed the individual as having failed to gain work due to personal deficiencies (Crisp and Powell, 2017). This has been part of a neoliberal agenda that has shifted responsibility from the government onto the individual (Furlong, et al, 2018). Members of the 2010 Lib-Con Coalition government, such as David Cameron, George Osborne, Ian Duncan Smith, and Nick Clegg, subscribed to the idea that claiming welfare benefits was a ‘lifestyle choice’ as they sought to implement their austerity-driven attack on ‘undeserving’ ‘skivers’ who rely on out of work benefits (Patrick, 2017). As reviewed in Chapter 3, the focus of skills and welfare policies shifted to an employability approach which saw various initiatives aimed at addressing supposed individual deficiencies and increasing the supply of skills into the labour market (Valiente, Lowden and Capsada-Munsech, 2020). These policies tended blame the individual for structural issues beyond their control (France, 2008).

As this discussion has uncovered, the young men in this research found there to be a shortage of jobs that were not temporary, insecure or low paid in their local labour markets. These shortages were reported by those both with high and low level qualifications. Despite the aims to reduce unemployment by boosting



skills and the economy in the skills policies reviewed in Chapter 3, problems highlighted two decades ago in research appear not only to remain apparent today, but some circumstances also experienced by the young men suggest conditions have worsened. The message from Furlong and Cartmel's 2004 report was the need to reverse "the trend towards casualisation of employment that damages young lives and thwarts attempts to build a high-skill economy" (2004, p.2). However, the experiences of the young men in this research resonate with the pessimistic tone for the future of the UK youth labour market in the conclusion of Furlong and colleagues' book *Young People in the Labour Market* (Furlong, et al, 2018).

As the findings in Chapter 7 show, according to objective labour market data, the majority of young men in both cities were not employed in the Traditional zone of employment. The quantitative data showed that male unemployment rates ranged between 8-13% in Glasgow and 9-16% in Liverpool between 2016-2020 ([Figure 7.3](#) Male unemployment rates). On top of this, those in the Marginalised zone ranged from 49-57% in Glasgow and 40-45% in Liverpool ([Figure 7.1](#) Zones of (in)security: Glasgow and Liverpool). The qualitative data provided insights into young men's exposure to underemployed and unemployed circumstances which necessitated engagement with the UK's harsh welfare system.

Far from wanting to be on welfare, those who were unemployed such as Fred said he had never wanted to claim benefits because "I'd always work for my money" but "needs must." This indicated a stolen sense of personal agency where he did not have the environment in which to earn his own living but was instead forced to claim benefits necessary to survive (Section 7.5.2). On one hand, the young men were depressed about their failure to find work, indicating a degree of self-blame combined with hopelessness, on the other hand, the young men seemed acutely aware of the causes of high unemployment rates.

For unemployed graduates such as Michael who had only ever experienced unemployment interrupted by temporary jobs, he was aware that there were "not enough jobs for everyone." The young men's various approaches discussed in this research may stem from Alex's view that "poverty or unemployment are a moral failing" was "absurd" because of the "way that our society and economy

are arranged” (Section 7.5.2). Beck (1998) argues the development of flexibilisation of labour contributed to the reduction in employment security and jobs:

Here we have the new law of productivity that global capitalism in the information age has discovered: fewer and fewer well-trained and globally interchangeable people can generate more and more output and services. Thus, economic growth no longer reduces unemployment but actually requires a reduction in the number of jobs (Beck, 1998, p.58).

As discussed in the previous section, the young men sought employment through the use of employment agencies after being unable to get a response from contacting employers directly. However, these jobs were often temporary and ended suddenly which left them waiting in reserve until they could find the next temporary job being offered via the agencies. In Marx’s (1973) *Grundrisse*, surplus labour is held in reserve until required to be utilised as opposed to necessary labour which is utilised to its maximum capacity. It is a law of capital to reduce the amount of labour necessary and derive maximum value from it:

It is a law of capital, as we saw, to create surplus value, disposable time: it can do this only by setting necessary labour in motion - i.e. entering into exchange with the worker. It is its tendency, therefore to create as much labour as possible; just as it is equally its tendency to reduce necessary labour to a minimum. It is therefore equally a tendency of capital to increase the labouring population - population which is useless until such time as capital can utilise it. (Marx 1973, p.399)

In *Capital*, Marx (1976) argues the reserve army acts as a reservoir of disposable and potential workers for capital who are cyclically unemployed and experience relative deprivation. For those who had become unemployed or had experienced unemployment, they often found their unemployment had only been interrupted by precarious and temporary employment, particularly through employment agencies which were the only way many could find any work at all. The young men were trapped in insecure sectors which existing policies have failed to address demand for their labour. Furlong and Cartmel (2004) suggest few young men manage to recover from long-term unemployment and instead remained trapped in casual and insecure sectors. Contrary to the narrative that young men were unemployed due individual character deficits (McPherson, 2021), insecure

and informal work adopted by employers explains why the young men struggled to leave unemployment behind them. Moreover, the reliance on employment agencies reflects the flexible and temporary nature of employment in modern Britain. Such low-skilled and low-quality positions neither provided pathways into secure employment nor training, thus they were not able to develop transferable or marketable skills. This is why the young men felt it was “impossible” as they became trapped in a cycle of precarious jobs and unemployment.

Despite the promises by former Prime Ministers David Cameron that “we will look after the most vulnerable and needy. We will make the system simple” (David Cameron, 2011) and Theresa May “The government I lead will be driven not by the interests of the privileged few, but by yours” (May, 2016), the experiences of the underemployed and unemployed young men in this research was punishing. Alex believed that welfare requirements were “hostile and designed to disqualify” claimants (Section 7.5.2). Although Tommy had previously “never claimed for anything” he found that the system “just isn’t supporting for what I need” after losing his temporary bar job during Covid, circumstances which he found “disheartening” (Section 7.5.2). For these young men, the threat of sanctions loomed ever presently. As Nick noted “if you don’t do everything right, they can press a button and stop your claim” (Section 7.5.4).

However, doing ‘everything right’ was not easy. Michael believed he was “just lucky” he had not yet been sanctioned but “sooner than later that will probably happen” (Section, 7.5.4). Fred was sanctioned due to a system error in processing his attendance, in other words through no fault of his own, which left him “with no money” in his homeless hostel for weeks until he was able to provide documents proving he had attended a meeting. It should also be noted that the *burden of proof* was on Fred to prove his innocence following the system error. Not only were the young men struggling to survive on welfare benefits they did not wish to be on, but they had to cope with a welfare system they perceived was deliberately set up to make them fail. Their squashed personal agency had then been stretched from both directions - unable to find secure employment despite their wholehearted engagement, and then forced to

swim against the undercurrents of welfare conditionalities and impoverished conditions.

#### **8.4.2 Control and choice**

Section 8.3 discussed the experiences of how the apprentices interviewed had some degree of control and choice over the skills they were learning, and they had a positive view of the training because of the strong links promised to secure employment and careers. For those unable to gain access to relevant training and who ended up unemployed, they experienced welfare conditionalities that forced them to undertake mandatory training schemes, commit to a minimum number of hours seeking jobs daily, and eventually, mandatory work placements. The young men did not have a positive perspective of mandatory training. Nick was particularly scathing of the utility of the mandatory training, in his words “dead-end courses” that were “not going to do shit” (Section 7.5.3).

While those with the most basic skills are more vulnerable to marginalised labour market positions, the young men were not resistant to learning, rather, they wanted to be sent “on a proper” training programme and cited funding for courses in their occupations. Instead the unemployed were ordered on courses which the young men powerfully described as “just a load of bollocks” and were “just not relevant at all” (Section 7.5.3). The situation for the unemployed young men was that they were prevented from accessing training by employers that would protect them from labour market marginalisation. Furlong and Cartmel (2004) had argued two decades ago that the provision of basic skills by government driven initiatives were not enough to protect young males from unemployment. In other words, advanced qualifications and marketable skills were stronger determiners of transitions to employment for the unemployed yet they were denied funding for ‘proper’ training courses that would have genuinely facilitated integration into their chosen vocations.

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 revealed that the UK youth labour market was characterised by casualised, insecure and temporary employment (Furlong, et al, 2018) and the findings in this research have shown that periods of unemployment is the likely outcome from these conditions particularly for young men in depressed labour markets. As has been argued in Chapter 3, welfare

conditionalities are tools utilised by the British state to manage the reserve army of labour to coerce the unemployed into accepting poor-quality jobs (Wiggan, 2015). Nick complained about having to spend eight hours a day actively job-seeking because he was applying for “30 jobs a day” which only took “two hours” (Section 7.5.2). This appears to be a double standard in policy: the welfare condition assumes an 8 hour working day to inform a minimum job seeking period for seeking employment to meet the conditions to receive benefits, yet these young men were underemployed due to the flexible nature of the labour market in which it is unlikely they will be able to work in jobs that guarantee 8 working hours per day. Alex “was applying for jobs” but he believed it was an exercise of compliance rather than “something I was being helped with” (Section 7.5.3).

It seems that the young men were experiencing benefit conditionalities that were designed to pressurise them to accept substandard employment, under the threat of punitive sanctions (Berry, 2014). Michael was unable to refuse the “dodgy” jobs he was being channelled into that “don’t pay their staff,” which also turned out to be temporary. These exercises ultimately resulted in his return to the jobcentre and reclaiming benefits (Section 7.5.3). For Byrne (2005), the facilitation of entrance to low quality employment preserves the utility of the reserve army and ensures competition for low-wage jobs. However, it appears that the young men’s experiences of low-quality jobs is at odds with the assumption in welfare policy that getting any job is the best solution to unemployment (McPherson, 2021).

What these young men wanted was access to quality, secure, permanent employment. Instead, they were expected to make themselves available for all existing job vacancies irrespective of their quality (Wiggan, 2015). These temporary jobs offered little in the way of career development or advancement. The casual and part-time employment, temporary and zero-hour contracts that seemed to dominate the range of opportunities for the young men occupying the Liminal and Marginalised zones may explain why it was perceived that “employers have a lot of power over young people because they know that they need the job more than the employer needs them” (Section 7.3.2). The young men experienced supply-side policies devoted to the supply of labour for low-

paid and typically undesirable jobs in a labour intense, volatile and flexible contemporary labour market (Berry, 2014).

## 8.5 Summary and contribution

This chapter has discussed the post-school destination choices that the young men made and how they were informed, their experiences of the labour markets of Glasgow and Liverpool, and experiences of labour market marginalisation and welfare.

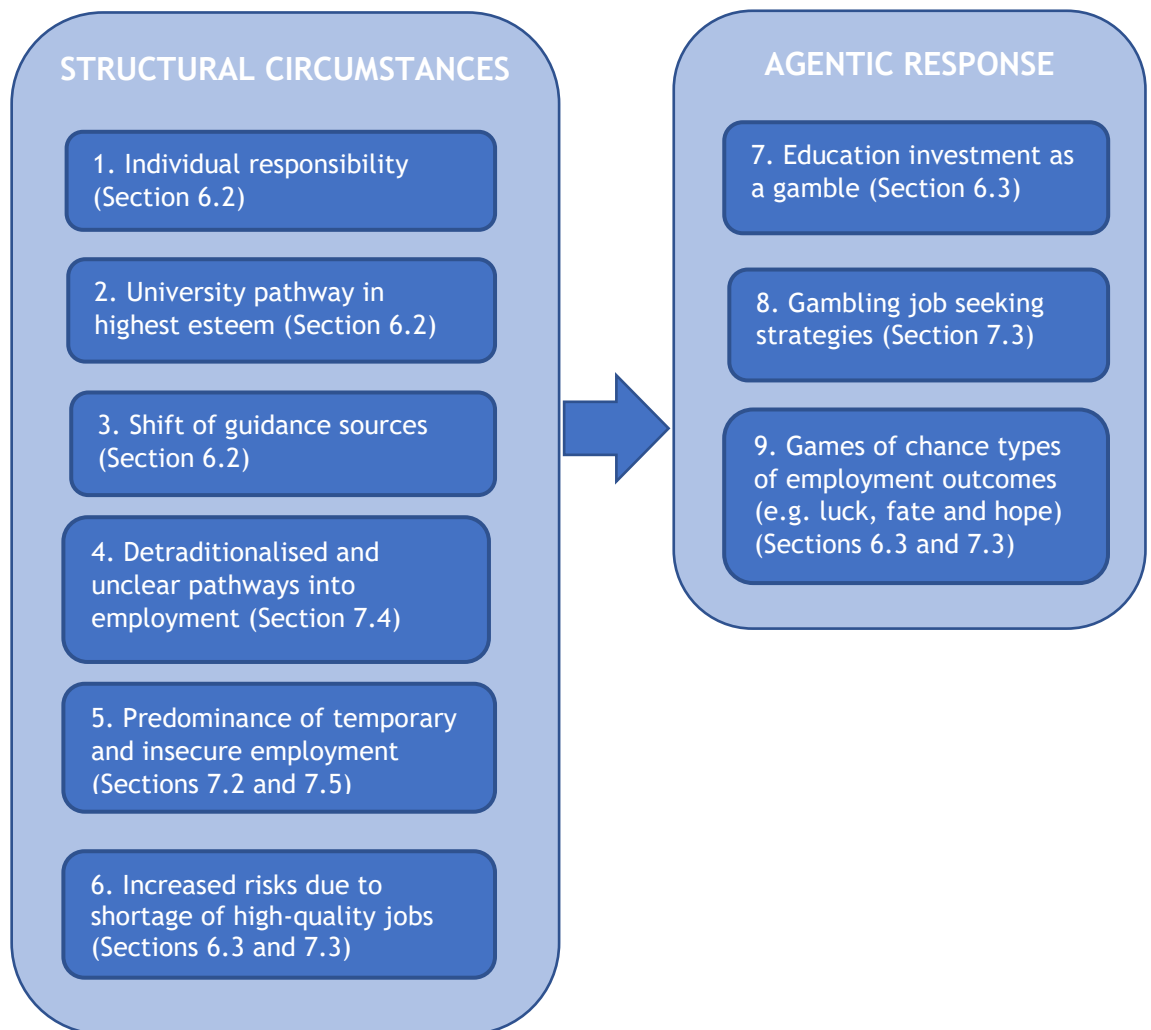
Based on the findings of this research, Figure 8.1 below, namely *Individualised Gambling Pathways*, outlines the structural circumstances that have led to the young men perceiving their actions to achieve upward social mobility as a gamble. The *structural circumstances* comprise of six main features, they are: *Individual responsibility* in which the young men face increased responsibility to navigate their education to employment transitions; *University pathway in highest esteem* where the young men were more reliant on their schools for guidance, and they were strongly pressurised to gain entrance to university; Shift of guidance sources that captures how traditional sources of guidance were no longer helpful; *Detraditionalised and unclear pathways into employment*; *Predominance of temporary and insecure employment*; and *Increased risks due to shortage of high-quality jobs*. There were three main *agentic responses* to these circumstances identified, they are: *Education investment as a gamble* where the young men treated investment in education as a gamble; *Gambling job seeking strategies* where jobs were pursued using gambling strategies; and *Games of chance types of employment outcomes* where the young men framed the potential outcomes from their engagement in educational and the labour market in terms of hope and luck.

First, is *Individual responsibility*. The male interviewees experienced an environment in which they have more opportunities for personal decision-making in their post-16 education and training (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; 2007). Although this has created a greater sense of choice and personal agency to mitigate the risks of late modernity (Beck, 1992), Furlong and Cartmel (2007)

argue the idea that these risks could be contended with at the individual level was the ‘epistemological fallacy of late modernity.’ However, the young men experienced pressure to make the *right* decisions and were actively persuaded by their schools.

**Figure 8.1 Individualised Gambling Pathways**

### Individualised Gambling Pathways



Rose (1999) argues that through a process of ‘governance through freedom,’ individuals in liberal societies assume responsibility for regulating themselves as autonomous agents. Rose (1999) also explains how the role of indirect government interaction creates a platform in which individuals “act upon

themselves through the exercise of ostensible freedom and personal choice” which shapes “individuals’ aspirations and calculations of ruling and ‘independent authorities’ - or ‘political aims’ - and the ‘personal aspirations’ of free citizens” (Rose, 1999, p.49 cited in Roberts, 2018, p.100).

While the young men were responsible for the choices they made “their actions need to remain in line with what is defined as possible” (Roberts, 2018, p.100). Thus, in the second factor *University pathway in highest esteem*, the young men were strongly influenced by their schools to aim for university admission and they found that other pathways such as vocational education routes and employment were held in low esteem. Despite promises in the Glasgow and Liverpool City Region Deal(s) to create more apprenticeship opportunities (GCR, 2017c; LCR, 2018b; 2018c), and acknowledgement in Scottish policy *More Choices, More Chances* (Scottish Executive, 2006) and UK policy that demand side factors would be encouraged to address the skills mismatch (e.g. HM Government, 2011a; HM Government, 2017), the young men in both Glasgow and Liverpool found that university entrance took precedence over career planning or subject choice for the interviewees in this research. The deferring of careers planning seemed to be *kicking the can down the road* as they then had to consider their future careers after getting into university on the back of any subject that had provided admission. The young men found that university was promoted more than anything else, thus their “informed choices” to make “good decisions” (Eisenstadt, 2017, p.7) mainly consisted of getting their foot into the door at university.

The third and fourth factors, namely *Shift of guidance sources* and *Detraditionalised and unclear pathways into employment* both capture the irrelevance of traditional sources of guidance. Due to the process of detraditionalisation (Beck, 1998), and as most of the young men were the first generation in their family to go to university (which can be attributed to the continuation of New Labour’s education expansion policy and the supply of skills), it appears that the interviewees were dependent on their schools for guidance as traditional sources of help and guidance were no longer useful in finding clear pathways into employment. The decline in these traditional sources of guidance was also apparent in the young men’s transitions from education to



employment. The interviewees could not rely on clear guidance into definite employment or career pathways.

The fifth and sixth factors are *Predominance of temporary and insecure employment* and *Increased risks due to shortage of high-quality jobs*. Although the young men were ashamed to be unemployed and underemployed, they were also aware of the structural causes of their precarious circumstances. The young men described the shortage of secure jobs combined with strong competition for them, the predominance of flexible and temporary employment vacancies in the labour market, the lack of employer led training impeding their ability to satisfy employer job requirements which were combined with oversupply of irrelevant skills. While young people have increased post-school education choices, Furlong and Cartmel (1997) suggest that this has created a false sense of choice and personal agency.

These difficulties were also perceived and experienced by university students and graduates who explained that a shortage of graduate level jobs combined with a relative excess of graduates increased the uncertainty and unpredictability of their employment outcomes. This resonates with Furlong, et al.'s (2018) description of graduation inflation in which the labour market is unable to absorb the quantity of graduates entering the labour market each year, but also the supply of particular skills being developed at universities that were not informed by employer demands thus resulting in the skills mismatch that recent labour market policies have intended to rectify in Scotland and England (e.g. Scottish Government, 2010; 2014a; DBIS, 2016b; Keep, 2019b).

In the face of these challenges which have arisen from the disjoint between the supply of skills and employer demand, and the types of employment that the young men were able to access with their experience, qualifications and skillset, these young Scottish and English males appeared to be aware that “underemployment is the 21st century global normality for youth in the labour market” (Roberts, 2009, p.4). Thus, the seventh factor *Education investment as a gamble* represents how the young men explained their post-school choices as “a gamble any way you go” because their efforts in obtaining qualifications were perceived as unlikely to guarantee smooth transitions to gainful employment. Their investment all the way up to postgraduate level qualifications were

described as a gamble and this conception illuminated the unpredictability of outcomes that were perceived.

Although the Understanding Society labour market data analysed in Labour market position and education ([Figure 6.1](#)) suggests university degrees offer some protections from labour market marginalisation, the young men described the insecurities and uncertainties they perceived and experienced. One of the key findings discussed was the shortage of graduate level jobs reported and difficulties in gaining access to them. With the exception of those graduating from high-level universities, achieving a degree was believed to have lost its value unless graduates had opportunities to develop relevant work experience and skills, something that was found to be lacking at non-prestigious universities. Three of those who studied at university later withdrew from their studies when they realised 'old inequalities' were likely to be reproduced - they withdrew when it became clear that their courses were not going to lead to guaranteed employment. For those who completed their studies, the outcomes were unpredictable. This led to graduates describing their investment in education as a gamble and discovering a viable career path while at university as like "winning a watch." These explanations captured the perceived likelihood of 'winning' their gamble. The prospect of securing access to stable employment were reduced to chance rather than being determined by the merit of their participation at university (Reith, 2002).

For Lawler and Payne (2018), upward mobility in the contemporary labour market is improbable and skills policies that promised equality of opportunity created "the impression of a fair deal, and so legitimating the established social order by the promise of meritocratic reward" (p.23). Thus "those who have not achieved upper mobility can be vilified for their lack of ambition and ability" (p.23). Part of that vilification process appears to be the deficit narratives reviewed in Chapter 2 and 3, and the UK and Scottish governments have appeared to attach young men's exclusion onto their attitudes, skills and behaviours (Mackie and Tett, 2013). The young men in this research exhibited no signs of these deficits, and instead indicated high levels of ambition. Despite their best efforts, and awareness that upward social mobility was increasingly

unlikely, the young men continued to engage with education and seek out employment under these circumstances.

In light of these employment uncertainties and inconsistencies between the supply of skills and employer demands, and employers' reluctance to lead training provision, the eighth factor, namely *Gambling job seeking strategies* sees that the interviewees, of varying educational statuses, adopted the probability approach in applying for jobs. With the exception of those who had developed relevant skills and work experiences through traineeships led by employers, the young men struggled to meet employers' requirements in their jobs applications. Resonating with probability theory discussed in Reith's (2002) gambling theory, the young men applied for as many jobs as possible and hoped for the best, leaving their fortunes to luck and fate.

This leads to the final factor, namely *Games of chance types of employment outcomes*. The young men described their employment outcomes in games of chance terms (luck and hope) and not in games of skill terms (skill and merit) (Reith, 2002). These accounts indicated that the young men's sense of personal agency was perceived as having limited effect in determining their employment outcomes. This is despite engaging with education and demonstrating willingness to be employed in the contemporary postindustrial labour markets of Glasgow and Liverpool.

To conclude, this chapter has analysed the findings of this research. It has discussed the education choices the young men made and how they were informed; employment opportunities in Glasgow and Liverpool; how the interviewees approached those circumstances; and how the young men responded to underemployment and unemployment. Based on this analysis, this chapter has also outlined the structural circumstances and agentic responses that were articulated by the interviewees. Examined through the lens of the theoretical framework and located in the relevant academic and policy literature, this research has found a high degree of uncertainty and unpredictability in the labour market described by the interviewees.

The findings indicate that young men, an under-researched demographic, have experienced increased responsibility for navigating education to employment

transitions in Glasgow and Liverpool. Traditional sources of guidance, such as the family and local community, have been unable to adequately support young men in navigating their transitions into adulthood as pathways into gainful employment seemed to be unclear. Moreover, a combination of strong competition for a shortage of secure employment opportunities, a predominance of temporary and insecure jobs and friction between the supply of skills and employer demand appears to have made the young men describe their behaviour in the labour market in gambling terms. This ranged from describing their investments in education as a gamble, employing a probability approach in their job search, and leaving the outcomes of their job applications down to luck, fate and hope. These experiences and responses indicate a diminished sense of personal agency in determining outcomes through individual skill and merit. This may explain why the young men described their circumstances and personal actions in gambling terms.

The following chapter will review the main findings of this research, outline the theoretical and practical contributions, and policy recommendations, as well as the research limitations and future research suggestions.

## Chapter 9 Conclusion

This research has examined young men's experiences of the labour markets in Glasgow and Liverpool. It has investigated young men's education to employment transitions in light of skills policies in Scotland and England. The main focus of this thesis was an exploration of the primary research question: What are young men's employment experiences of postindustrial labour markets in Glasgow and Liverpool?

The supplementary research questions were:

1. How have young men perceived and experienced their education and employment choices?
2. What are young men's experiences and perspectives of unemployment and welfare?
3. How can social theory help to understand the experiences of young men in postindustrial labour markets?

These questions were derived from an initial analysis of the relevant literature of young men's labour market conditions, review of skills and training policies in Scotland and England, and from construction of the theoretical framework. The questions were designed to expand current knowledge on young men's education to employment transitions and contemporary labour market experiences which have seldom featured in youth studies (Roberts, 2018; McDowell, Bonner-Thompson, and Harris, 2022). This chapter reflects on the research findings, contributions to research and theory, and policy recommendations. The limitations of the research are then discussed alongside future research suggestions.

## 9.1 Reflections of the research findings

### 9.1.1 Complex structural circumstances

When investigating young men's experiences of postindustrial labour markets in Glasgow and Liverpool (Main Research Question), this research found that the young men were vulnerable to complex structural circumstances where they are required to maximise their employability in order to be responsible economic subjects and autonomous agents (see Section [6.2](#)) (McPherson, 2021; Valiente, Lowden and Capsada-Munsech, 2020; Rose, 1999; Roberts, 2018). Upon their entrance to the labour market, the young men reported a shortage of secure, permanent jobs, combined with strong competition and excessive demands from employers (see Section [7.3](#)). Analysis of Understanding Society labour market data revealed that the majority of young men in both Glasgow and Liverpool between 2016-2020 occupied liminal and marginalised labour market positions (see [Figure 7.1](#)). The young men interviewed had responded to these circumstances in ways akin to gambling. They thus described a probability approach to applying for jobs and put their outcomes down to luck and hope (see Section [7.3](#)). These perspectives indicated a diminished sense of personal agency and autonomy in determining their employment outcomes.

### 9.1.2 Detraditionalised pathways into employment

The research investigated how young men perceived and experienced their education and employment choices (Supplementary Research Question 1). It appears the interviewees could not rely on traditional sources of guidance for help in deciding their post-school destinations. They experienced a strong push by their schools to go to university where non-university pathways were held in lower esteem. However, the priority that was placed on gaining access to university came at the expense of carefully selecting the subject choices and careers planning. The majority of those who entered university did so without a clear idea of their employment or careers trajectory (see Section [6.2](#)). While those who attended elite universities had access to employers through internships and work placements (and thus completed their studies with relevant skills and experiences that facilitated smooth entrance into permanent employment), on the other hand, those who had attended post-1992 institutions

often found themselves underemployed and unemployed post-graduation as they were unable to meet employer requirements for those secure jobs. While the young men explained that apprenticeships were discouraged at school, the apprentices interviewed in this research were optimistic that their training programmes would lead to gainful employment, and apprenticeships were regarded in higher esteem than university pathways across the sample (see Section [6.3](#)). The interviewees in both Glasgow and Liverpool explained that their local labour markets were dominated by temporary and insecure employment vacancies (see Section [7.3](#)), and high-quality jobs (permanent, secure and high paying) were either scarce and/or employer's qualification and experience requirements disqualified them from applying (see Section [7.4](#)). The young men therefore perceived that pathways into secure and permanent employment were unclear.

### **9.1.3 The state of liminality and marginalisation**

In light of these conditions in which the majority of young men were likely to occupy liminal and marginalised labour market positions, the young men's experiences and perspectives of unemployment and welfare were also investigated (Supplementary Research Question 2). Of the 8 young men who were unemployed, 3 had avoided claiming out of work benefits altogether, and the remaining 5 had done so reluctantly. The majority of the young men interviewed did not accept the narrative that being unemployed was a 'lifestyle choice' resulting from character deficits. Rather, as the young men were aware of the temporary and flexible nature of employment conditions in Glasgow and Liverpool, there was a sentiment that becoming unemployed was a common experience thus those who were reliant on welfare benefits should receive more support. For the unemployed, their experiences of welfare conditionalities such as mandatory training schemes were unequivocally negative. The training schemes were regarded as irrelevant and useless as they failed to develop the skills they needed for successful integration to the labour market. Funding for training in skills that were relevant and necessary for integration into their chosen vocations was not available (See Section [7.5](#)).

The accounts of the young unemployed men provided unique insights into the harsh circumstances of the British welfare sanctions regime where "culpable"

individuals are required to submit to various forms of pervasive surveillance in order to attain subsistence (McDowell, 2020). The diversification of unemployment is argued as reflecting the risk society and it is not only those occupying the lowest social class stratifications who are vulnerable to employment insecurity. As Beck posits “you can run into anyone down at the employment office” (Beck, 1998, p.55). Furlong and Cartmel (2004) argue that labour demand is crucial for young men to enter stable employment, yet this has been undermined by the casualisation of the labour market. Under such conditions, the young male participants interviewed in this research have been exposed to temporary employment conditions which offer little in the way of meaningful training or career advancement. It appears that the UK’s welfare conditionalities and sanctions regime has been fine-tuned to punish young men for structural circumstances outside of their control.

#### **9.1.4 A Risk Society in Glasgow and Liverpool**

The findings of this research were analysed through the lenses of the four theoretical perspectives that formed the theoretical framework, and provided empirical evidence to demonstrate how social theory can help to understand the experiences of young men in postindustrial labour markets (Supplementary Research Question 3). This research has verified the experiences of the Risk Society thesis in which there is increased competition for flexible and temporary forms of employment, the employer requirements for entrance to employment has necessitated young men to enhance their employability through participation in various forms of education, and the nature of employment has resulted in increased risks of economic insecurity for the individual (Beck, 1992) (see Sections [6.2](#), [6.3](#) and [7.3](#)).

The zones of (in)security adopted for this research has shown that the Understanding Society survey can be applied to the city/regional level and has proven that young men experienced liminal and marginalised labour market positions in Glasgow and Liverpool between 2016-2020 (Furlong, et al, 2018) (see [Figure 7.1](#)). For those occupying these marginalised positions, they are vulnerable and exposed to the UK’s harsh welfare system, and the Marxian perspective of Surplus Labour has demonstrated the ways in which labour is kept in reserve until it becomes necessary to utilise (Marx, 1973) (see Section [7.5](#)). In



light of these circumstances, the young men explained their perspectives and actions in ways that had not been conceptualised in studies of youth to date. This research has employed Reith's (2002) Age of Chance gambling theory which provides a unique explanatory power to understand the unpredictable nature of education to employment transitions (see Sections [6.3](#) and [7.3](#)).

### **9.1.5 Gambling for future careers**

The interconnections between these structural circumstances and agentic responses emerged from analysis of the research findings. Due to individualisation, the young men experience increased responsibility to contend with the risks of navigating education to employment transitions (Beck, 1992; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Rose, 1999). Resulting from detraditionalisation (Beck, 1992; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997), young men could no longer rely on traditional sources of support and guidance their educational choices and pathways to employment were unclear. They subsequently experienced a youth labour market that was dominated by insecure and temporary employment.

There was strong competition for permanent jobs and employers' skill and experience requirements disqualified many from applying. These conditions made the young men conceive their investment in education as a gamble because pathways into secure employment were not guaranteed, in fact, they could see for themselves countless unsuccessful education to employment transitions. In response to these unclear pathways, the young men adopted a probability approach in applying for jobs and hoped for successful outcomes. Those who had gained access to employment, failed in their applications, and those who had lost employment described their outcomes in terms of luck and fate rather than through skill or merit. The findings of this research indicate that young men have been pressurised to behave as responsible economic citizens by investing in their human capital in a society that was sold to them as being meritocratic, however, the unpredictable nature of employment outcomes has forced them into situations where they have to gamble for their future careers.

## 9.2 Theoretical and Practical Contributions

By investigating the perceptions and experiences of young men in two depressed labour markets in Great Britain, this study has made contributions to both theory and the field of youth studies. Utilising a theoretical framework that drew on Beck's *Risk Society*, Reith's (2002) *Age of Change*, Furlong, et al.'s (2018) *Zones of (in)security model*, and Marx's (1973; 1976) *Surplus Labour*, this project analysed the findings through the lens of these theories to understand the experiences of young people in the UK labour market (Supplementary Research Question 3).

### 9.2.1 Risk Society and Individualisation theses

This project extended the conditions described in Beck's Risk Society and the ways in which young people were experiencing employment insecurities and uncertainties (Beck, 1992). In terms of theory, this project advances the discussion on the role of Individualisation young people are experiencing in the UK and challenges the assertions that the individual has abandoned human interdependence and experienced a false sense of choice and personal agency which they may blame themselves for poor outcomes (Beck, 1992; 1998; 2000; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; 2007).

### 9.2.2 Individualised Gambling Pathways

However, those risks and insecurities were described in new ways by the young men in this research and are illustrated in *Individualised Gambling Pathways* (Figure 8.1) in the previous chapter, the key contribution of this research. Young men have likened their investment in education to a gamble in relation to employment outcomes and adopted a probability approach to job seeking and applications and appeared to reduce their outcomes to luck and chance. Upon examination of the literature, it became clear that their experiences had been inadequately conceptualised to fully understand the meanings they were trying to convey. This is where Gerda Reith's Age of Chance gambling theory provided a unique conceptual lens to analyse the findings in this research, and the theory related to gambling in modern economic systems is novel to youth studies.

### 9.2.3 The zones of (in)security

This research also operationalised Furlong, et al.'s Zones of (in)security conceptual lens in new contexts ([Figure 6.1](#), [Figure 7.1](#) and [Figure 7.2](#)). While the original study had focussed on the UK labour market as a whole, through access to Understanding Society's Special Licence data, this research has analysed data at the city level to compare and contrast labour market conditions of young men in Glasgow and Liverpool and examined average incomes for each of these zones. This research demonstrates the model's powerful capabilities in analysing labour market conditions and is evidence that it can be used in various contexts for future research. This research also adopted Furlong, et al.'s (2018) depressed, declining and prosperous categorisation of labour markets and applied it to the individual's residential location. It thus became possible to run analysis of the education levels alongside areas of relative deprivation ([Figure 6.2](#)).

In terms of the findings of this research, the Traditional and Liminal zones enabled a distinction to be made between those working in fulltime permanent employment and those occupying insecure, impermanent employment and part-time employment. The Liminal and Marginalised zones made the distinction between those working above and below 16 hours. It was thus able to capture marginalised labour market positions occupied by young men who in other analyses would have been missed because of the way employment is categorised not only by policymakers, but also in surveys such as Understanding Society where part-time and fulltime workers had to be manually separated. For those who had become trapped in cycles of unemployment and underemployment, the Marxian perspective provided the descriptive power to understand the existence and utility of Surplus Labour. Thus, the marginalised labour market conditions experienced by the reserve army, in which the majority of young men appear to be vulnerable, could be understood.

The experiences of the eight unemployed young men interviewed in this research provide more evidence that "in many cases, employees are a disposable resource for employers - a modern 'reserve army of labour' in which workers are endlessly interchangeable" (Simmons, Russel and Thompson, 2014, p.586). For the young men in this research, their employment insecurity appears to stem

from flexibilisation and individualisation processes (Mackie and Tett, 2013; France 2008) which are exacerbating their disadvantages more than their aspirations, skills or behaviours.

#### **9.2.4 Mixed methods: Extended branches**

The research has found points of convergence between analysis of Understanding Society's objective labour market data and the semi-structured interviews which have provided novel insights into young men's perceptions and experiences of their education to labour market transitions and early careers experiences. It has explored young men's experiences at schools, their post-school destination decisions and how they were informed, their experiences of tertiary education, and experiences of the labour market. The study reveals the ways in which complex structural circumstances of the contemporary labour market have pressurised young men into engaging with various forms of education and employment where they have explained they are gambling for their future economic security.

This research has shown the problems that the young men experienced in their pursuit of academic qualifications. As subject choice and career planning was often overshadowed by the prioritisation of university entrance while at school, the young men entered university without a clear career plan. The findings indicate weak links between education providers and employers and this combined with inadequate careers guidance had negative impacts on young men's employment outcomes. While analysis of labour market positions and education status suggests university degree offer some protections from the Marginalised zone ([Figure 6.1](#)), the accounts of the interviewees who attended post-1992 universities undermine the notion that the *graduate premium* is guaranteed. The gamble referred to by students offered a signpost towards unpredictable labour market outcomes from which investment in high-level qualifications was not enough in and of itself. These accounts demonstrate how young men are struggling to find clear pathways into gainful employment.

### **9.2.5 Impacts of skills policies**

While skills policies in both the UK and Scotland have been designed to make young men more informed to make better choices to better adapt to rapid changes in the economy (DBIS, 2016b; Scottish Government, 2014a) the interviewees explained that non-university pathways were held in low esteem, thus the university pathway was prioritised. The uncertainty articulated by the young men was not just uncertainty about which way to go, the uncertainty is in the labour market, but it is also in the knowledge base in this current environment. The sources of informal learning and guidance, such as family and peers which were a traditional foundation of advice is no longer factual for the lived realities that young people are facing. Thus, the gamble expressed by young men point towards the unpredictable nature of their pathways into adulthood. For both graduates and non-graduates, job seeking and application approaches utilised a probability approach, and they relied on luck and chance for successful employment outcomes, indicating a weak sense of personal agency. With a shortage of gainful employment opportunities reported, it appears making choices, whether 'better' or not, are ineffective in a youth labour market dominated by temporary and insecure jobs. The inevitable outcome for many young men has been an ongoing churn between education, employment and welfare. Policies aimed at addressing cohesion between skills and sustainable jobs have so far failed to change the outcomes for young men, who are likely to end up in low-quality jobs (Furlong, et al, 2018).

### **9.2.6 Bridging the gap**

This study bridges a gap between the institutionalised accounts of the changes occurring in the labour market from objective labour market data (such as Understanding Society), the body of literature on the youth labour market and skills policies, and primary qualitative accounts of young men in both cities observed. This study has achieved what it originally set out to do which was to unify these data sources. As young men have not been the predominate focus of literature on labour market experiences, analysis of their experiences in Glasgow and Liverpool made for an interesting comparison which revealed that labour market conditions are more similar than they are different despite being subject to different national policies.

Not all of the findings are new or unexpected - however, the changes we expected to see had the skills policies had their intended impact, including different policies in Scotland and England, were not apparent in the data. Having said that, while Furlong and Cartmel (1997) rejected Beck's thesis that class had become mostly irrelevant for young people, the findings in this research indicates that conditions are more nuanced for young men. While it appears that those least well-resourced are at a disadvantage to mitigate the risks of the modern economy, a recurring theme from analysis of the findings was a concern with employment insecurity and unpredictable outcomes in the contemporary postindustrial labour markets of Glasgow and Liverpool.

Based on the findings and theoretical contributions, the next section provides policy recommendations.

### **9.3 Policy recommendations**

The policy recommendations emerging from this research are the following:

#### **1. Encourage employer ambition to boost skills utilisation**

In Section [6.3](#), the findings indicated that graduate's skills were going unused in the labour markets of Glasgow and Liverpool. Although the young men had invested in their human capital to increase their employability, they have experienced underemployment and unemployment. Meanwhile, as of 2023, employers in the UK have reported that there are 1.1 million unfilled vacancies (Singh, 2023), partly due to the changes of migrant worker conditions following the UK's withdrawal from the EU, employers have reported a skills shortage due to a lack of suitably qualified labour applying for existing job vacancies (CIPD, 2023). Instead of investing in training the domestic labour force, there are indications that businesses are pressurising the UK government to create special temporary visas to import in-demand skilled labour to satisfy short-term demands (IAS, 2023). If these special visas are issued, it could be business as usual if they become a de facto permanent solution, thus the domestic reserve army would be perpetually overlooked in favour of migrant labour. Employers

need more incentives and support to invest in the domestic labour market to meet their skills shortages by building upon the skillset of the domestic labour force. This leads to the next recommendation.

## **2. More employer-led training provision**

The supply of skills have overshadowed the increase in skills demand and skills utilisation. However, the accounts of the four apprentices in Glasgow, and three graduates who experienced work placements and internships are examples of how employer led training can lead to gainful employment (see Section [6.3](#) and [7.4](#)). Employers need more incentives to invest in training the domestic labour force instead of turning to migrant labour to patch over skills gaps.

## **3. Creation of gainful employment opportunities and improved conditions**

Chapters 1 and 2 showed how the process of deindustrialisation had caused vast job losses in industries that were employers of men. What replaced them was a growth in low wage sectors. The young men in this research reported a shortage of gainful employment opportunities, and this was an issue for both those with high and low skill qualifications. Furlong and Cartmel (2004) had found two decades ago that the problem facing young men was not being able to find any work, they were able to find temporary and insecure work, but rather there did not appear to be enough permanent and secure employment opportunities that would allow young men to break the cycle of precarious employment and unemployment. The young men I interviewed in 2020 reported similar problems despite engaging with various forms of training and employment and demonstrating a willingness to work in the contemporary labour market (Section [6.3](#) and [7.3](#)).

Pike, et al. (2016) suggests that the creation of new, mid-wage, mid-skilled jobs should be introduced to replace the jobs lost to deindustrialisation and the hollowing out of the economy. This would be a potential remedy to predictions that low-paying sectors will continue to grow in the UK youth labour market (Furlong, et al, 2018). It will require employers to move away from the utilisation of low-waged workforce to gain competitive advantage, and governments to stop measuring low-skilled jobs creation as policy successes

(Nolan and Jackson, 2016). The current two-tier labour market, in which rising wage inequality is experienced across most western economies, is particularly evident in the UK. The prevalence of low-pay and zero-hour contracts experienced by the young men in this research (Section [7.3](#) and [7.5](#)) is a weak base for economic growth (Nolan and Jackson, 2016).

Although employers have recently reported 1.1 million unfilled job vacancies because of a lack of suitably qualified and skilled labour applying for those roles, and the major factors influencing this has been the mass exit of economic migrants following the UK's withdrawal from the EU and low levels of well-trained domestic labour (CIPD, 2023; Godfrey, 2023; Singh, 2023), the caveat to this problem is whether employers are offering conditions that are good enough to attract British workers who are suitably qualified for these unfilled vacancies roles. While rising living costs have pushed more people to become economically active, at the same time in-work poverty has risen and professionals such as teachers and lecturers are using food banks. If employers want to attract and retain qualified workers for unfilled job vacancies, more investment in training and improving job packages is necessary.

#### **4. Welfare should meet the real needs of those out of work**

The findings in Chapter 7 showed that the majority of young men are not employed in the Traditional zone of employment ([Figure 7.1](#)). This means that low wage and insecure types of employment were the dominant employment opportunities in the labour market, and this was a point of convergence with the interviewee's experiences (Section [7.3](#)). While UK governments boast of record low unemployment rates (e.g. HM Government, 2017), integration into employment has been facilitated by part-time and flexible employment conditions and the young men appear to be trapped in a cycle of unemployment interrupted only by temporary employment. As they are exposed to unemployment, they are dependent on welfare benefits in order to subsist (Section [7.5](#)). However, the welfare conditionalities they experience are reported as harsh, they are victim-blamed as having made a 'lifestyle choice' (Patrick, 2017). The interviewees described the mandatory training schemes as useless and irrelevant for their reintegration to the labour market. The young



men also reported that funding requests for training related to their chosen professions were denied.

Instead of serving as a tool to erode labour autonomy to refuse poor quality jobs (Wiggan, 2015), welfare reform is needed to acknowledge the fundamental structural weaknesses of the UK economy and genuinely support the unemployed (Nolan and Jackson, 2016). Upskilling has not resulted in improved employment outcomes and the emphasis given to employability is ill-suited to explaining the economic marginalisation of young men. It would appear that the narrative of employability in policy discourses and increased sanctions have been a pretext for the political project of austerity to reduce public spending on welfare and urban youth have been the easiest target (Blyth, 2013; Toynbee and Walker, 2015). Future welfare policy should allocate funding for training according to individual needs that aligns with the chosen vocations of the unemployed to facilitate their entrance into sustainable employment. Meanwhile, taking a long term view, upskilling is unlikely to be effective in reducing the welfare burden if the pool of jobs are of low-quality and insecure.

## **5. Education institutions should better prepare young men for the labour market**

A common complaint by the young men who attended schools and universities was that they entered the labour market unprepared for employment (Section [6.3](#) and [7.4](#)). While they may have had strong qualifications, in the case of university graduates, they lacked vocational skills required by employers. Nolan and Jackson (2016) suggest that this is because schools and universities often focus more on qualifications and grades than skills provision. The young men reported that more focus was spent on gaining university admission than careers planning or subject choice whilst at school. This carried on to university where they reported weak employer links and inadequate careers counselling. Their subsequent search for jobs was undermined due to their lack of work experience and competencies which were cited as a key employer demand. This might explain why apprenticeships were held in high esteem by the interviewees (Section [6.3](#)). Future policy should focus on how education institutions can develop more work skills and competencies, provide better guidance on career

development and careful choice of subjects. This leads to the next recommendation.

## **6. Foster stronger education and employer links**

Connected to the above recommendations is the need for stronger links between education providers and employers. As the UK currently experiences 1.1 million unfilled vacancies which employers report skills shortages, the lack of well-trained labour in the UK labour market has been exposed following Brexit. Alongside an increase in employer led training provision has to be stronger links between employers and education providers, including universities. Various skills policies in Scotland and England, which were reviewed in Chapter 3, promised to improve these links, however, the figure of 1100000 unfilled job vacancies speaks volumes about the effectiveness of these policies to date.

Of the interviewees in this research, three of the young men who had attended university withdrew because they perceived their programmes would not lead to employment (Section [6.3](#)). For those who completed their courses, the lack of employer links and work placement opportunities was a source of disdain as they were denied opportunities to develop working aptitudes considered important by employers which subsequently disadvantaged them in the labour market (Section [6.3](#)). Research indicates these weak links can perpetuate a cycle of decline in local neighbourhoods as young men without employability skills tend to end up in low-paid, low-quality employment, making them vulnerable to unemployment (Nolan and Jackson, 2016) and this was apparent for the young men in this research (Section [7.5](#)).

## **7. Parity of esteem for non-university pathways**

In the absence of clear pathways into employment, the young men held positive views towards apprenticeships insofar as they provided structured pathways into a guaranteed job (Section [6.3](#)). The accounts of the four apprentices interviewed in Glasgow are examples of the benefits that the skills utilisation approach can bring to the economy and the individual. Continued investment in Further Education colleges in Glasgow and Liverpool and support for employers can build links between education institutions, employers and young men. These

stronger relationships would provide environments where the individual can develop skills considered important by employers, encourage employers to provide work placements and apprenticeships for students, and help raise the hopes and ambitions of young men who are currently vulnerable to exclusion (Green, 2012).

Scotland established Skills Development Scotland (SDS) to assist in achieving policy goals relating to apprenticeships, careers advice, and further education, and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) is in charge of issues pertaining to the HE sectors. In order to increase the demand for skills in the labour market, ensure that employers are using those skills, and work with employers to ensure compatibility with the supply of skills, these policy measures appear to be a response to the issues raised by the supply-side orthodoxy reviewed in Chapter 3 (Keep, 2019b). According to Keep, there is no such strategic strategy for skills development in England (Keep, 2019b). While the Liverpool City Region Deal (LCR, 2018b; 2018c) has promised to increase apprenticeship opportunities, apprenticeship targets have not been met. England in particular has seen a 59% drop in all apprenticeships since the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy (Moules, 2023).

This section has provided policy recommendations based on the research findings. The next section provides future research suggestions.

## **9.4 Limitations and future research suggestions**

The future research suggestions are presented alongside the limitations of this research. They are as follows:

### **1. Continue the focus of this research**

This research investigated young men's experiences of the postindustrial labour markets of Glasgow and Liverpool. Much has changed since the interviews were conducted in 2020 - the UK has finally withdrawn from the EU, there has been a tightening of the UK labour market, the ramifications of the Covid19 pandemic

will be felt for years to follow, and US-led foreign policies are impacting on living costs globally which have led to rising costs and expenditures in the UK. Future research can investigate Scottish and UK policy responses to these changes and their impact on how young men are experiencing local labour markets by emulating the mixed methods approach conducted in this research.

## **2. Investigate prosperous and depressed labour markets**

This research focussed on two depressed labour markets, namely Glasgow and Liverpool. While these cities are located in two different nations, as they are both members of the UK state, review of the policies found they followed a broadly similar neoliberal path. This combined with their related histories and current contexts may explain why the findings were more similar than they were different.

Mixed methods research, using objective labour market data and qualitative interviews, could investigate both prosperous and depressed labour market experiences. There is a question as to whether the findings of this research were because Glasgow and Liverpool have similar contexts, or whether it is because they are part of the larger UK system. Analysis of a broader range of locations would provide more insights into the wider UK labour market context.

## **3. International comparisons with the UK labour market and skills policies**

The findings from the above research suggestion would then form a robust foundation to invite international comparisons with comparator/competitor economies. Further, comparisons with developing and less developed economies provide the potential for theoretical contributions to Beck's (2000) Brazilianisation thesis. There is also potential for collaboration to explore the effectiveness (and ineffectiveness) of skills and training policies.

## **4. The impact of migration policies following Brexit**

Future research could focus more specifically on the impact of Brexit. Research by Rootham and McDowell (2017) found that economic migrants were preferred by local employment agencies because they accepted lower wages and poorer

working conditions. This situation has made it more difficult for unemployed British males to find employment as these jobs were typically low-skilled and easy entry. Future research could investigate the impact of the UK's recent migration policies to examine whether young men have experienced increased opportunities to access work.

Related to policy recommendations 1-3 above, future research could also explore the extent to which employers are pushing the UK government to create special migrant visas to plug unfilled vacancies in the UK labour market rather than investing in the training of the domestic labour force. Are young British males experiencing increased training opportunities for access to these unfilled job vacancies? For example, given the recent headlines that there are record vacancies in certain sectors, such as caring and nursing (RCN, 2022), research could investigate whether these increased vacancies are perceived as alleviating the problems arising from the shortage of jobs reported by the young men.

## **5. The impact of Covid**

The interviews in this research began just as the first wave of covid lockdowns were imposed on the UK population. There were examples of young men being furloughed and losing their temporary jobs. There are abundant research opportunities that could investigate the changes to young men's labour market experiences and how society has changed following those changes. These include the impact of rising national debt and inflation, the impacts on SMEs operability, changes to the working environment, and health issues such as long-covid. Additionally, there is potential to connect with my sample to follow up on their experiences, which would add a longitudinal perspective to the current qualitative dataset.

## **6. Outward economic migration**

Chapter 1 had found that postindustrial labour markets such as Glasgow and Liverpool had lost skilled labour following economic decline in the 1980s onwards. Recent headlines following the NHS crisis have suggested skilled labour have abandoned the UK in search of better employment and living standards (RCN, 2022). The implications from outward migration are linked to a certain

degree to employers' confidence in investing in training, however, it also pertains to the declining employment and living conditions in relation to comparator economies. Future research could investigate this phenomenon of young people taking refuge in overseas labour markets. Much was made of inward economic migration in the lead up to the EU referendum, however, research of outward migration could provide novel insights into the UK labour market as they are not in the UK to be recruited, which is a missing element of this research. The findings would also compliment international comparative research.

## **7. Sample demographics**

While I made several changes to my inclusion and exclusion criteria following an iterative process, one of the limitations of this research was the sample demographics. As the age range was 16-30, and there were five economic categories, this meant that there could be disparity of the age range within each category. Future research could, as a larger research team, interview more young men in each economic category, or reduce the age range as part of a smaller research team.

## **8. Impact of recent vocational education policies**

The accounts of the four apprentices interviewed in Glasgow provided positive insights into the success employer led training had on facilitating education to employment transitions. Future research could be conducted to examine the outcomes of the demand side policies reviewed in Chapter 3 as they continue to unfold. This is connected to recommendation 7 above, as the young men interviewed above the age of 25 for example would not have experienced the impact of more recent skills policies. Thus, a targeted age range to focus specifically on the effects of recent vocational education policies would produce more insightful findings that could be used to inform future skills policy decisions.

## 9. Contemporary employment experiences

The academic literature that focusses on young men's postindustrial labour market circumstances reviewed in Chapter 2 framed their exclusion as resulting from a deficit masculinity. It was argued that young men were resistant to employment in the contemporary labour market because traditional masculine jobs had been outsourced and young men were reluctant to working in feminised service-dominated labour markets which explained their unemployed and underemployed circumstances (Nixon, 2018; McDowell, 2020). One of the flaws of the abovementioned traditional masculine jobs argument, however, is that the countries in which those jobs were outsourced predominately employ women, not men. This is the case in countries such as the People's Republic of China (Yu, 2015) and Indonesia (ILO, 2022) where female workers are exposed to comparatively weak labour market protections.

My research, along with Roberts (2018) and Furlong and Cartmel (2004), adds to the body of evidence that suggests young men are neither workshy nor resistant to employment in the contemporary economy, but rather their labour market marginalisation stems from the flexible and temporary nature of employment in the UK youth labour market. Future research can continue contributing to the body of research investigating young male experiences of employment in contemporary labour markets, an under-researched demographic.

### 9.5 Final remarks

The findings of this research, while not representative of Glasgow and Liverpool, suggest that young men face increased responsibilities to navigate complex structural circumstances in their education to employment transitions. Although this study has investigated labour market conditions in light of policy changes of two different nations, the experiences of the young men were more similar than they were different.

In both locations, young men explained that they experienced increased responsibility to navigate their education to employment transitions and must do

so without traditional sources of support and guidance. While they have increased education choices, their schools made them prioritise university admission above alternative pathways and subject choice and career decisions. Pathways to secure employment were unclear and getting a university degree in and of itself did not manifest a guaranteed job or stable career. Instead, what both graduates and non-graduates alike discovered was that the contemporary postindustrial labour markets of Glasgow and Liverpool were dominated by temporary and insecure forms of employment, and in many graduate's experiences, they were likely to end up underemployed in jobs that they were overqualified to do.

This research was unable to identify any substantive differences of the impact of UK and Scottish skills and labour market policies on young men's education and labour market experiences. This may relate to one of the research limitations explained in this chapter, in that Glasgow and Liverpool are so similar, but it has also been argued in the literature critically analysing Scottish and UK policies that Scottish policy emulates the UK's neoliberal trajectory under a different mask (Mackie and Tett, 2013; Valiente, Lowden and Capsada-Munsech, 2020; McPherson, 2021) and in any case the UK's reserved powers create conditions that override the limited powers granted to the devolved Scottish Government. This is why farther international comparison emerges as an attractive proposition, with acknowledgement of a neoliberal globalised world economy, however, different sovereign states have different policy responses to these circumstances.

One of the unique discoveries of this research is the way in which young men have perceived their circumstances in contemporary British labour markets and how they have responded to them. Their investment in education is not regarded as a ticket to manipulate their outcomes as would be the case in a qualifications-based meritocracy. Rather, the investment is seen as a gamble that with the right luck might facilitate upward social mobility, but probably will not, based on their experiences and observations.

In conclusion, the issues unearthed in this research strongly suggest the need for investment in employer led training because specific skills, work experiences and competencies are what appears to separate successful and unsuccessful



transitions to secure employment. Upskilling has not resulted in improved employment outcomes for young men who have invested in their human capital only to enter a youth labour market where liminal and marginalised labour market positions are inevitable for the majority. Therefore, without a commensurate increase in the quantity of secure and gainful employment opportunities alongside clearer pathways into them, the inauspicious circumstances experienced by the young men in this research are unlikely to change.

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## Appendix 1: Policies Reviewed

### UK, English and Liverpool policies

1. *Building Engagement, Building Futures* (HM Government, 2011a)
2. *Positive for Youth* (HM Government, 2011b)
3. *Post-16 Skills Plan* (DBIS, 2016a)
4. *Technical Education Reform: The Case for Change* (DBIS, 2016b)
5. *Industrial Strategy* (HM Government, 2017)
6. *Liverpool City Region Deal* (LCR, 2018a; 2018b; 2018c; 2019)
7. Various welfare policies from New Labour, the Lib-Con Coalition and Conservative governments (e.g. *The New Deal, Young Person's Guarantee, the Work Programme, Universal Credit*) (Crisp and Powell, 2017; Patrick 2017)

### Scottish and Glasgow policies

1. *More Choices, More Chances: A Strategy to Reduce the Proportion of Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training* (Scottish Executive, 2006)
2. *Skills for Scotland. A Lifelong Skills Strategy* (Scottish Government, 2007)
3. *The Government Economic Strategy and Scotland's Economic Strategy* (Scottish Government, 2011a; Scottish Government, 2015a)
4. *Putting Learners at the Centre: Delivering Our Ambitions for Post-16 Education* (Scottish Government, 2011b)
5. *Developing the Young Workforce* (Scottish Government, 2014a)
6. *Education Working for All!* (Scottish Government, 2014b)
7. *Consequences, Risk Factors and Geography of Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training - Research Findings* (Scottish Government, 2015b)
8. *Glasgow Economic Strategy 2016-2023* (Glasgow City Council, 2016)



9. *Glasgow City Region Deal* (GCR, 2017a; 2017b; 2017c; 2019)

## Appendix 2: Stage 1 Interview Questions

1. What was your age at your last birthday?
2. What is your postcode?
3. What is your current employment status? Are you currently in fulltime employment, part-time employment, self-employed, studying, in training, or unemployed?
4. Have you been continuously employed for the past 12 months?
5. Is your job temporary or permanent?
6. What is your job title?
7. In what industry or sector is your organisation?
8. What is your highest educational qualification? What subject did you study?
9. Are you currently engaged in any education or training?
10. Have you received training at work in the past twelve months?

## Appendix 3: Stage 2 Interview Questions

### 1 School/Further/Higher Education

#### School

1. Were you expected to have a career plan at school? Do you feel you received adequate support or was it mostly left up to you?
2. What influence did school, family and peers have on your career path?
3. What were the main careers presented to you at school?
4. Did you leave with an adequate plan of action for pursuing a career?
5. Was it good or how could it have been better? *For example, more guest visitors, more work experience?*
6. Looking back, what structures were in place for you to pursue a career?
7. Were you encouraged by your school to go on to college/university rather than employment? Were certain subjects and careers encouraged more than others?
8. Do you think some jobs/subjects were stereotyped or carried stigma?

#### Further/Higher Education

9. Could you tell me more about your highest educational qualification? What subject did you study and what influenced your choice?
10. Was there prominent careers advice at college/university? What was your experience?
11. Were there suitable work placement/traineeship opportunities?
12. Were you able to cultivate career networks? How important were networks for you?
13. Do you feel there are strong links between school, education and employers in relation to work-readiness and employment outcomes?

14. Overall, do you think going to college/university was worth your time? Did it make you work-ready?

## **2 Employment**

### **Past/journey**

15. How did you get to where you are today?
- What jobs have you done since leaving school?
  - What circumstances influenced your decisions?
  - Are there any people that influenced your choices?
  - Were there any vivid sparks or turning points along the way?
16. Have you ever changed career paths, or did you follow a linear progression?
17. Have you ever been unemployed?
18. Did you feel overqualified for any of those jobs?

### **Current job**

19. What is your job title? Could you tell me a more about your job role?
20. Would you say your job is a permanent job or not a permanent/contract job?
21. What does the organisation you work for mainly make or do?
22. What do you enjoy about your current job? You don't have to comment on all of these, but for example: job role, income, working hours, treatment, employer expectations, working conditions, distance travelled to work, perks/benefits?
23. How flexible are you required to be? Would you prefer more or less flexibility in your job?
24. Do you feel you are over-qualified for your current role?

### Future aspirations

25. Do you aspire to do a different job in the future? Are there adequate opportunities at current job or in the labour market to progress to that next stage?

### Work training

26. Have you received any work-related training in the past twelve months?
27. What training opportunities are you aware of that you'd like to do?
28. Could you share experiences of any significant work-related training, whether provided by employer or self-funded?

## 3 Residential Area

29. Growing up, did your local area have resources that helped you in life? Did you have access to local groups, employers, training providers? Or it wasn't important?
30. Do you now live on your own home or share? Would you like to share or live alone?
31. Why do you live in your current area? Is it where you want to live? Would you have better opportunities if you lived in a different area?
32. Is it easy to get to college/work?

## 4 Overall

33. How do people search for jobs these days? What is the best way to find a job?
34. What do you think about unemployed people? Do they need more support or more incentives to get a job? Are they lacking a strong work ethic?
35. Do you think there are enough secure jobs for everyone? Or are there too many insecure jobs?

36. What are your perceptions of current employment opportunities, have you experienced or noticed changes in the labour markets?
37. Do you think apprenticeships are more valuable than university degrees for employment outcomes? What would you prefer if you had a choice?
38. Do you think there will be new industries in the future that will bring better jobs?
39. Should governments and employers work together to provide new training for those new industries of the future?
40. What do you think are the biggest challenges young men are facing today? How can they be overcome?
41. Do you think there should be more opportunities for young men to attend community hubs/groups?
42. How do you feel about social media/technology in relation to employment opportunities and employment conditions? Has it changed the nature of employment?
43. Should there be stronger/clearer pathways towards between school, training/education and employment? How can this be achieved? Who is responsible for those links?
44. What career pathway do you think is better? *For example, education arranged by an employer, or studying independently and then finding employment?* Or it depends?
45. Would you prefer it if you had a trade/apprenticeship?
46. What was your perception of vocational education/apprenticeships?
47. Did you study to improve your employability?
48. Did luck play any part in your journey? E.g. fate, chance
49. How important is it to have a strong work ethic?
50. Looking at jobs advertisements, what kind of things do you see in essential requirements? For example, experience and skills. Do you think it is easy to meet those requirements?
51. What do you think is a good job? Do you think it is easy to get a good job? Are there enough good jobs for everyone?

52. Do you think there are too many high-level jobs you cannot qualify for because you do not have the necessary experience or qualifications? Who do you think qualifies for those jobs? Who is applying for those jobs?
53. Do you think there are too many entry-level jobs and not enough jobs that give you the chance to get on in life?
54. Do you think apprenticeships are only for younger people or can anyone do them?
55. Do students have enough time to study to achieve excellent grades and make networks and get work experience? Or is there a trade-off between academic excellence and career development?
56. Do you think your job will still exist in the short and long-term future? Will you need to adapt?

## Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet



College of Social  
Sciences

### Participant Information Sheet: Young people aged 16-30

**Zones of in/security in the UK youth labour market, Researcher: James Gulgecer**  
[j.gulgecer.1@research.gla.ac.uk](mailto:j.gulgecer.1@research.gla.ac.uk)

You are being invited to take part in a research study. It is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

**Details** The study is interested in understanding the perceptions and experiences of young people in Glasgow and Liverpool in relation to employment outcomes. You are invited to take part in an interview which would last approximately 60 minutes.

Participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time and any information collected at this time would be destroyed. If you agree to participate, I will contact you to arrange a mutually suitable time for us to conduct the interview. Recorded audio consent instead of written consent will be obtained during the telephone/video interview.

With your permission, the interview would be digitally recorded, these will be encrypted and securely stored.

If you decide to take part, you will be assigned a pseudonym to disguise you so no one will be able to match your words to your identity. Confidentiality will be respected unless there are compelling and legitimate reasons for this to be breached.

Both the personal (eg your name) and research data I collect from you will be stored on a secure server and hard drive accessible only by myself and my supervisor team. The personal data will be destroyed on completion of my PhD. The research data collected will be used to complete my PhD and may also be used in academic journal articles, books, written summaries or conference papers. After the research is complete it will be stored by the university for ten years, and by the UK Data Service.

This research has been ethically approved by the College of Social Science Research Ethics Committee.

**If you require further information about the project or where to pursue any complaint, please contact the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, Dr Muir Houston, email:**  
[Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk)





## Appendix 5: Qualitative sample demographics

Pseudonym	City	Residential area	Age	Economic Activity	Economic Activity 2	Zone of (in)security	Highest qualification	Perm or Temp Employment	Training past 12 months	Employed past 12 months
<b>William</b>	Glasgow	Depressed	20	Apprentice	Employed (FT)	Liminal	HNC/HND	Temporary	Yes	Yes
<b>Jamie</b>	Glasgow	Prosperous	23	Apprentice	Employed (FT)	Liminal	HNC/HND	Temporary	Yes	Yes
<b>Stevie</b>	Glasgow	Prosperous	25	Unemployed	N/A	Marginalised	HNC/HND	Temporary	Yes	Yes
<b>David</b>	Glasgow	Declining	26	Employed (FT)	N/A	Traditional	HNC/HND	Permanent	Yes	Yes
<b>Chris</b>	Glasgow	Prosperous	24	Apprentice	Employed (FT)	Traditional	Degree	Permanent	Yes	Yes
<b>Harry</b>	Glasgow	Prosperous	27	Employed (FT)	N/A	Traditional	Degree	Permanent	Yes	Yes
<b>Alex</b>	Glasgow	Declining	28	Self-employed	N/A	Marginalised	Degree	Temporary	No	No
<b>Michael</b>	Glasgow	Unassigned	30	Unemployed	N/A	Marginalised	Degree	N/A	No	No
<b>Anthony</b>	Glasgow	Prosperous	25	Unemployed	Self-employed	Marginalised	Degree	N/A	Yes	No
<b>Eric</b>	Glasgow	Declining	19	Apprentice	Employed (FT)	Traditional	Highers/A-level	Permanent	Yes	Yes

<b>Liam</b>	Glasgow	Depressed	18	Student	Employed (PT)	Marginalised	Highers/A-level	Temporary	Yes	Yes
<b>Robert</b>	Glasgow	Prosperous	19	Student	N/A	Marginalised	Highers/A-level	N/A	No	No
<b>Ian</b>	Glasgow	Depressed	23	Unemployed	N/A	Marginalised	Highers/A-level	N/A	No	Yes
<b>Fred</b>	Glasgow	Depressed	21	Unemployed	N/A	Marginalised	Not Applicable	N/A	No	No
<b>Jim</b>	Glasgow	Prosperous	22	Student	Employed (PT)	Marginalised	Postgraduate	Permanent	Yes	No
<b>Kirk</b>	Glasgow	Declining	30	Employed (FT)	N/A	Traditional	Postgraduate	Permanent	Yes	Yes
<b>Peter</b>	Glasgow	Depressed	29	Employed (FT)	Self-employed	Traditional	Postgraduate	Permanent	Yes	Yes
<b>Eddie</b>	Glasgow	Declining	29	Employed (FT)	Self-employed	Liminal	Postgraduate	Temporary	Yes	No
<b>Stuart</b>	Glasgow	Depressed	19	Student	Volunteer	Marginalised	SG/GCSE	N/A	Yes	No
<b>Alistair</b>	Liverpool	Depressed	21	Unemployed	N/A	Marginalised	HNC/HND	Temporary	Yes	No
<b>Stephen</b>	Liverpool	Depressed	21	Student	Employed (PT)	Marginalised	Degree	Temporary	Yes	Yes
<b>Lee</b>	Liverpool	Declining	23	Student	Employed (PT)	Marginalised	Degree	Temporary	Yes	No

<b>George</b>	Liverpool	Depressed	25	Employed (FT)	N/A	Traditional	Degree	Permanent	Yes	Yes
<b>Sean</b>	Liverpool	Depressed	28	Student	Employed (PT)	Marginalised	Highers/A-level	Temporary	Yes	No
<b>Tommy</b>	Liverpool	Declining	26	Unemployed	N/A	Marginalised	Highers/A-level	Temporary	Yes	No
<b>John</b>	Liverpool	Depressed	23	Student	Employed (PT)	Marginalised	Postgraduate	N/A	Yes	Yes
<b>Andrew</b>	Liverpool	Prosperous	30	Employed (FT)	N/A	Traditional	Postgraduate	Permanent	Yes	Yes
<b>Mark</b>	Liverpool	Depressed	29	Employed (FT)	N/A	Traditional	Postgraduate	Permanent	Yes	Yes
<b>Nick</b>	Liverpool	Depressed	25	Unemployed	N/A	Marginalised	SG/GCSE	N/A	No	No