

Supporting disadvantaged young people into work: does the Capability Approach offer a new policy perspective?

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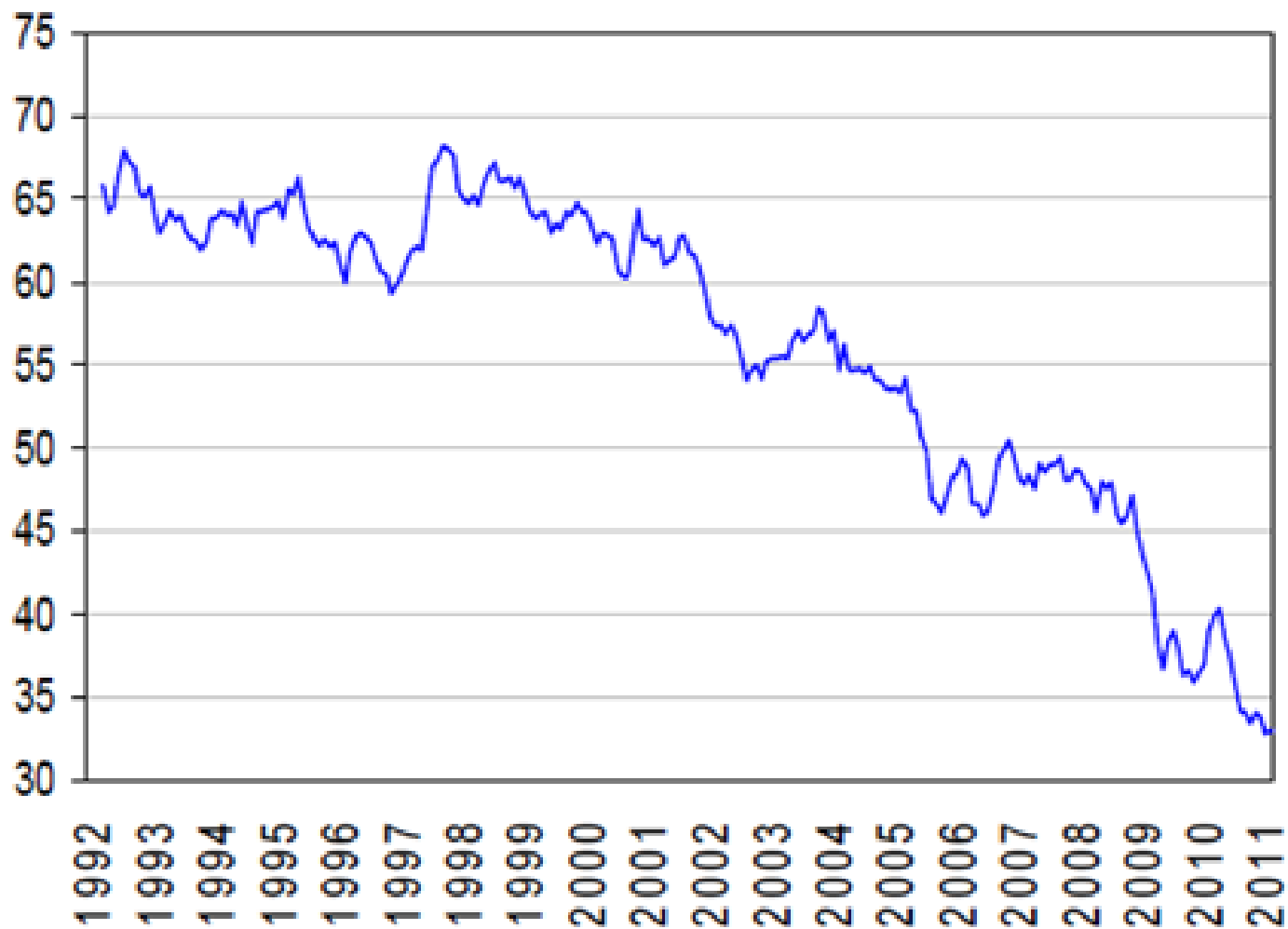
Overview

- Youth unemployment in the UK
- The Capability Approach
- Research questions
- Research methods and data analysis
- Findings
- Conclusions

Youth Unemployment in the UK (I)

- Youth unemployment is a major area of concern at the UK level
- In the 3 months to January 2013, 993,000 young people aged 16-24 were unemployed and the unemployment rate for those economically active 16-24 year olds was 21.2% (Office for National Statistics 2013)
- Periods of unemployment may blight a young persons future in terms of their future labour market outcomes – so called ‘scarring’ effects (Raeside et al. 2012)
- Risk of young people falling into long term unemployment, loss of work experience, income and deprivation, physical and mental health and wellbeing damage (depression, mortality, suicide)
- Hidden barriers facing workers and job seekers (age discrimination, lack of experience etc.)
- ***This raises the issue of how best to support young people into work...***

Long-term trend: Under 18s employment rate if not in full-time education UK



Source: DWP (2011). Youth Employment Support Measures Equality Impact Assessment:
www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/eia-youth-employment-support.pdf

Inactivity rates by age and gender, UK (Labour Force Survey)



Source: Gregg, P., and Wadsworth, J. (2010). The UK Labour Market and the 2008 – 2009 Recession: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/28758/1/op025.pdf>

Youth Unemployment in the UK (2)

- The previous UK government's (New Labour, 1997-2010) approach to activation policy was primarily driven by a 'work first approach' concerned with rapid labour market entry (Handler 2006; Daguerre 2007; Mitchell et al. 2007; Lindsay & McQuaid 2010)
- But it also had hybrid elements – acknowledging that the unemployed may need substantial and long-term support when seeking work (Lindsay et al. 2007; Lindsay 2010)
- Arguably the current UK Coalition government's (2010-present) approach follows the same 'hybrid' lines e.g. the Work Programme, launched in 2011 to replace previous welfare to work programmes (DWP 2012)

The Capability Approach

- Developed by Sen (1985, 1998) and is concerned with the opportunities available to an individual to make choices that they have reason to value
- *“The main objective of public action in the field of welfare should not be to put people back into work at all costs...but to enhance their real freedom of choice with regard to the labour market”* (Bonvin, 2009, 56)
- It is concerned with the resources (goods and services) an individual has access to and the conversion factors (individual characteristics and the social environment that allow them to convert resources into freedoms) (Lindsay & McQuaid 2010)
- The Capability Approach advocates that job seekers and local stakeholders should have voice in the development of programmes, and that local agents need to be enabled to be flexible so that they can meet the needs of local labour markets, as well as their service users (Bonvin & Farvaque 2007; Bonvin 2008; Bonvin & Moachon 2008; Bonvin & Orton 2009)

The Capability Approach could offer a valuable additional contribution to current approaches to addressing youth unemployment...

Research Questions

- 1) Which conversion factors and capabilities does the programme seek to enhance?
- 2) Are sufficient resources available to young people to enhance capabilities?
- 3) How do external factors impact on the availability of resources, commodities or opportunities?
- 4) Have the young people been sufficiently empowered to have autonomy and a voice in the delivery, implementation and evaluation of the programme?

Research Methods

- Two innovative and capability friendly UK third sector run programmes supporting young people who encounter difficulties in their transition towards employment through the provision of training and work placements
- While the programmes had ‘capability friendly’ aspects in their approach, they had not been specifically designed using the Capability Approach
- Qualitative interviews with: project managers; project workers; young people engaged in the two programmes
 - Programme 1: 18 staff and 22 young people
 - Programme 2: 5 staff and 5 young people

Data Analysis

- Thematic coding using Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) 3 stage approach

See: Hollywood et al. (2012) for discussion of methodological issues in operationalising the Capability Approach in empirical research

Programme I

- Provides supported work placements for disadvantaged 16-24 year olds.
- The programme comprises of a short induction period followed by a six month work placement with an employer.
- Placements are found in a variety of sectors depending on the preferences of the young people, although the availability of employers willing to participate in the programme can restrict choice.
- Throughout the placement both the young person and the employer are supported by project workers.
- Generally in the first half of Programme I young people continue to receive their unemployment benefits, and in the second half the employer meets the fifty per cent of the wage cost with the programme meeting the rest of the cost.
- Optional aftercare is offered to all young people leaving the programme.

Programme 2

- Voluntary programme aimed at disadvantaged 16-25 year olds who are unemployed and not in education.
- Provides a mixture of, sometimes externally sourced, training and placements in specific work sectors.
- The structure of the programme depends on the sector, and the length varies as well, ranging from five to ten weeks.
- Participants on unemployment benefits normally can continue to receive these while on the programme, and their travel costs are also covered by the programme.
- Courses are run throughout the year in different areas, with approximately 15 young people on each course.
- Demand is high and project workers spend several weeks selecting suitable participants.
- Optional six month progression support is provided.

FINDINGS

Addressing wider barriers (I)

- The programmes focused was on ensuring that the young people were enabled to achieve sustainable employment and in order to do so considered the resources young people had access to, to get a job, their motivation and what they value
- This required a holistic approach to support that went beyond simply finding young people a job e.g. Support with housing issues
- *“Because we're supporting them into employment we also need to take into account the other factors that are going on in their lives”* (Project worker, Programme 2)

Addressing wider barriers (2)

- The barriers to employment that the young people faced were varied and deeply engrained. Many lacked clear aspirations and many cited that they had not known what they wanted to do once they left school.
 - *“There is a part in the application form where we ask them to open up about their aspirations and the majority of the time you need to explain what that means. Especially if they are kind of school leavers and they have just been kind of manoeuvred in that kind of manual labour because possibly they have not done too well at school”* (Project worker, Programme 1)
- Staff from both programmes cited that it was important to identify the needs of the young people in order that the support they provided was appropriate. However, they did face difficulties doing this
- The skills of the staff were crucial in the successful running of the programmes - building a rapport and trust with the young people was seen as very important

Providing Young People with the Capabilities for Work (I)

- The programmes put the young people at the centre of their approach - working with the ‘right’ young people, so as to not set up the young people to fail
- Flexibility in delivery in Programme I so that the support provided met the needs of the young people - although programme staff were also keen to stress that the targets and needs of funders were also met
 - *“In terms of the main means of delivery it’s, whatever is most appropriate. So what we don’t do is be too prescriptive about the way in which it will work in a community...we keep the core of the programme the same, but we are happy to be flexible in terms of our outreach, in terms of our engagement with employers and in terms of things like subsidy, delivery of programme, transport and things like that to make sure it fits with whatever the local need is” (Head office manager, Programme I)*

Providing Young People with the Capabilities for Work (2)

- Programme 1 staff were keen to ensure that the young people went to placements with appropriate employers – not putting young people into any job and also developing the aspirations of the young people
 - *“Part of that is making sure that, it’s easy to say well here is a job and get on with it, but if it’s not the right job then they’re not going to stick at it. So it is about making sure that it is a role that they’re going to be happy in”* (Project worker, Programme 1)
- Project workers from Programme 2 had to assess whether the young people would be suited to the sectors and really were interested in them, through a long recruitment process
- There was also careful selection of the employers that the programmes worked with – ensuring that they could offer a nurturing and supportive environment for the young people.
- The programmes provided a lot of support to the employers - regular visits and contact

External constraints in delivering youth employability programmes

- While programmes tried to provide choice there were some constraints in delivering youth employability programmes in this way
- The contraction of labour markets means that the placements available to young people are dependent on whether there are the job opportunities available
 - *“Unemployment is so high and there is a lot of skilled unemployed people out there that are competing for jobs along with our young people who will just not get to interview stage because there’s lots of other individuals there with more valuable work experience and skills. So that is hugely detrimental to the young people that we work with, so we’ve got a big challenge to overcome”* (Project worker, Programme 1)
- The way in which the programmes themselves were structured, as a result of the demands by funders, could also present constraints in the support that could be provided - some of the barriers experienced by the young people were deeply engrained and six months was not often enough to address them all, although both programmes provided aftercare

Conclusions

- The programmes highlight the importance of socially and culturally embedding young people's experiences of unemployment
- Disadvantaged youth may find that their personal circumstances and individual factors act as barriers to employment, and therefore employment activation needs to focus on additional issues beyond skills and qualification deficits.
- However, the analysis of the programmes highlights difficulties that need to be overcome by any capability informed employment activation programme - enabling unemployed youth to choose the work that they have reason to value cannot be achieved without taking into account the importance of the external context
- While young people's choices may be developed it is still a choice shaped and restrained by the context of wider labour markets and education and training opportunities (including the educational opportunities they had at school before they entered the labour market)

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- Workable project website: <http://workable-eu.org/>
- Employment Research Institute website:
www.napier.ac.uk/employmentresearchinstitute/projects/Pages/MakingCapabilitiesWork-WorkAble.aspx

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