

LLAKES Newsletter

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Professor Alison Fuller

Editorial

As this issue of the LLAKES Newsletter goes to print, the country has been gripped by some of the most ferocious and persistent storms in many years. In contrast with the gloom cast by the wind, rain and dark skies, there are some brighter signs for the economy. Articles by political and economic commentators reporting economic 'green shoots' are starting to appear. Modest growth has returned and unemployment is coming down. Debates about interest rates abound too. It is now a case of when and by how much, not if, interest rates should rise to control the pace of the upturn. However despite some encouraging signs for corporate Britain, the negative effects of the financial crisis such as job insecurity, low pay, cuts in public spending and pressures on living standards are still being felt in many households.

The big public policy debates are central to the interests of the LLAKES Centre. Studies our researchers are undertaking identify and examine how different social groups are being affected by socio-economic change.

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For example, results from the latest Skills and Employment Survey (led by Alan Felstead, Francis Green and Duncan Gallie) provide a comprehensive picture of contemporary working life in Britain which, amongst other things, highlights the growing phenomenon of 'fear at work' – including fear of job loss and unfair treatment; and also 'work intensification' (for further details visit www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/ses2012).

This Newsletter begins with a strongly argued article by LLAKES Director Andy Green, identifying the historical reasons that underpin weaknesses in the English education system and which are fully examined in the newly published and extended edition of his book *Education and State Formation*. Alan Felstead then reports on a successful ESRC Festival of Social Science event held in Cardiff, and there is an article by Karen Evans and Helena Helve stressing the importance of taking a fresh international and multi-disciplinary look at youth transitions.

Key public policy concerns represented in LLAKES second phase projects include: the challenges of achieving greater social mobility; equity in labour market entry and career progression for young people; the effects of increased tuition fees on patterns of participation in and outcomes from higher education; and the factors that are linked to competitiveness, economic growth and improved productivity, such as skills,

changing forms of work organisation, innovation, and knowledge exchange.

We are delighted in this issue of the Newsletter to introduce the four new researchers, Kate Lyle, Michela Franceschelli, Nicola Pensiero and Rachel Wilde, who have all joined LLAKES in recent months. They are playing an integral role in formulating these studies as well as collecting the evidence that will generate new analyses, insights and implications for policy and practice.

The Newsletter also provides a photographic record of the highly successful symposium organised to mark the retirement of Professor Lorna Unwin (co-founder and Deputy Director of LLAKES Phase 1). Lorna's enormous contribution to research, policy and practice relating to vocational education, apprenticeship and workplace learning has been characterised throughout by her commitment to finding ways in which they can be enhanced for the benefit of individuals, employers, communities and wider society. The symposium provided an opportunity to celebrate Lorna's achievements and to remind us that the importance of this agenda will remain long after the dark, wet days of this winter have passed.

Opinion: Andy Green identifies shortcomings in the English education system

The recently published OECD Survey of Adult Skills revealed again the shockingly low levels of basic skills of many young people in England. Like the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), conducted 16 years previously, it shows that England has an exceptionally large proportion of adults with very low levels of literacy and numeracy – the so-called 'long tail of under-achievement'. But this time it also shows little improvement amongst young people aged 16-25 – during a period when their peers in other countries have advanced rapidly – so that they now score on average lower than those in most other countries. Almost uniquely, there is little difference between age groups in skills in England, and yet adult skills inequality remains higher than in almost all countries.

Political arguments about which governments are to blame are rather irrelevant since the problem is a longstanding historical one with deep political and cultural roots. As I argued in my book *Education and State Formation* – first published in 1990 and now re-issued in an extended edition – England was one of the last major powers in the 19th century to develop a national education system and the most reluctant to put it under state control. This relative underdevelopment in state education, which seemed so anomalous in the

world's most industrialised nation, had a number of historical causes.

Whereas educational development in many advanced countries was driven by an intensive process of nation-building, in Britain, where state formation had occurred early and where the state was already largely consolidated, there was little incentive to use public education as an engine of state formation. Successful early industrialisation, occurring with minimum state intervention, and owing little to educational provision, taught the wrong lessons, including a deep complacency about the importance of skills to economic development. It was only after the 'second industrial revolution', when Britain's shortcomings in applied science and craft skills became recognized as a barrier to industrial innovation and efficiency, that a public education system was finally created, including the wider provision of technical education which had long since been available on the continent.

Underlying all other causes of England's educational backwardness, however, was the pervasive culture of political and economic liberalism, with its veneration of free markets and hostility to the state. This deeply-rooted individualist creed blocked the development of national education for many decades after it had become obvious that voluntary provision could not meet the educational needs of the people or the economy. It also left a potent legacy. The public education system put in place at the end of the 19th century remained exceptionally fragmented and socially divided, with elite interests still dominating in the provision of secondary education – not least through private schooling – and with technical and vocational education still undervalued.

Throughout the last century these underlying flaws in the organization of mass public education were never suitably rectified. Comprehensive education was introduced half-heartedly, without the support of an accompanying national curriculum, and with so much organizational variation that it never looked like an integrated national system. It is now being dismantled altogether. A national curriculum was not implemented until 1988, more than a century and a half after having been established in most continental European nations, and this is also now being eviscerated. We are still the only country in the world to persist in the absurdity of having national examinations organized and run by private commercial organizations. And since the 1980s, all governments, of both left and right, have been hell-bent on marketising education, thus creating, in the name of the liberal dogma of diversity and choice, a byzantine complexity of school types, and a school 'system' so fragmented

and divided that it barely warrants the name. The idea of education as an essential public good is progressively undermined, and the inequalities which have always been the hallmark of English education become ever wider.

I concluded the first edition of my book with a clear warning to policy makers:

'If the past has any lessons at all it is that the mechanisms of the market and the ideology of *laissez-faire* serve education very ill indeed. It would be a sad irony if the country which was last to create a national education system, and which never quite completed the job, should be the first to dismantle it. It remains to be seen whether, in the name of market liberalism, England again becomes the "worst educated country in Europe".'

After three decades of neo-liberal reforms we are now where we have always been, with an education system which serves the elites but manifestly fails to promote a high standard of education for all. With such policies our performance relative to other countries which are rapidly improving can only deteriorate, with England's labour force starved of the skills to compete effectively in the global economy.

Education and State Formation: Europe, East Asia and the USA, revised and extended 2nd edition (2013), is published by Palgrave Macmillan

Major Events of 2013

ESRC Festival of Social Science: LLAKES goes to Cardiff

As part of the ESRC's Festival of Social Science, LLAKES organised a half-day conference on Monday 4 November 2013 at Cardiff University. The event focused on 'Skills and Job Quality during Economic Uncertainty' and was designed to make policy-makers in Wales aware of the work supported by the ESRC via LLAKES. This follows successful events held in previous years in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The conference was supported and promoted by the Bevan Foundation, an independent think-tank focused on poverty, inequality and injustice in Wales. The event attracted approaching 40 delegates drawn from a range of backgrounds, stretching far beyond academia, thereby extending the reach of LLAKES, and promoting the value and importance of social science research to policy-makers. Delegates included representatives from the Welsh Government, Wales TUC Cymru, NIACE Dysgu Cymru, several Regional Learning Partnerships, training providers and employers'

associations. The conference was designed intentionally to provide input from speakers as well as allowing ample time for debate and discussion. The feedback received suggested that an appropriate balance had been struck.

Three presentations were given. Two were based on research carried out by the LLAKES Centre and its researchers. These sessions drew from two particular projects. One was designed to monitor skill change and job quality over time through an analysis of the responses given by working adults to the 2012 Skills and Employment Survey. The other drew from research carried out in part as a result of a project examining how the extent, patterns and form of training had changed as a result of the 2008-2009 recession. The third and final presentation examined how recent changes in household income, wages and employment patterns have seen a rise of in-work poverty in Wales. This session was based on secondary analysis carried out by researchers at the Bevan Foundation. The speakers at the Festival event were: Alan Felstead (LLAKES, Cardiff University), Francis Green, (LLAKES, Institute of Education), and Victoria Winckler (Bevan Foundation) respectively.

In summary, the results presented and debated at the conference suggested some good news and some bad news. On the plus side is the news that calls for employers to raise their ambitions and make more effective use of qualifications are starting to be heeded. Qualification requirements for jobs have risen considerably since 2006, more jobs need degree-level qualifications on entry and levels of over-qualification fell in 2012 for the first time since collection of this type of data began. At the same time, training volumes have declined by almost half over the last fifteen years. Despite this dramatic change, the decline in training volumes has gone virtually unnoticed, until now. Part of the explanation may be that the decline has not affected the efficacy of training effort, and so the fall in training volumes need not be a concern. Existing evidence suggests that this may be the case, but it is inconclusive. Another worry is that in-work poverty is alarmingly high with one in five people in Wales now classified as living in poverty. To make matters worse, the growth of flexible labour contracts makes transitions out of poverty more difficult, so that getting a job is no guarantee of a financially better life.

To find out more about these LLAKES projects go to the LLAKES website or to the project websites, which contain downloadable reports: www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/ses2012 www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/research/researchprojects/traininginrecession

Vocational Education and Training (VET): Reaffirming its importance and value for the UK

Some 60 leading academics, policy-makers and practitioners attended a special symposium at the IOE to mark the retirement of Professor Lorna Unwin, co-founder of LLAKES, and Deputy Director of the Centre during its first phase.



The symposium was chaired, knowledgably and entertainingly, by Lord Boswell of Aynho.



Andy Green provided a historical and comparative perspective on why VET has always been important in advanced industrial societies.



David Guile explored the changing relationship between occupations deemed vocational or

professional and the implications for VET and professional education.



Ewart Keep explained why the UK has always struggled to accord VET the importance its status warrants.



Alison Fuller discussed ways in which VET could be improved for the benefit of individuals, workplaces and communities.



Finally, Lorna Unwin responded to the speeches in her typically elegant and forthright style.

New Research Officers

LLAKES is delighted to have appointed four new full-time researchers who are making an important contribution to the Centre's second phase research programme. The new Research Officers introduce themselves below:

Michela Franceschelli



After working for six years in social research at the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion (CESI), a not-for-profit independent organisation, I completed my PhD in February 2013, one month after I started working at the LLAKES Centre, Institute of Education.

My PhD drew on the social theory of Pierre Bourdieu and applied his concepts of habitus and social field to the study of young people's identity negotiation and intergenerational transmission in the context of South Asian Muslim families in the UK. The study was based on a mixed-method approach which started with an in-school exploratory survey with young people aged 14-18 from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. The survey aimed to provide a first descriptive snapshot of young people's identity and sense of belonging, while the subsequent qualitative stage involved semi-structured interviews with South Asian young British Muslims and their parents and visual methods in the form of photographs taken by young people.

At LLAKES, I'm currently involved in two main research studies. The first one is based on a national survey and semi-structured interviews with young people in their 20s and it explores how opportunities and barriers in educational, employment and housing relate to young people's civic values in the context of the current socio-economic climate. The other research study is based on secondary analysis of qualitative transcripts and is part of a wider project about 'Social Participation and Identity' (2009) which involved semi-structured interviews with a sub-sample of National Child Development Study (NCDS) cohort members who were born in 1958. This second study has an intergenerational focus and looks at what influenced the educational trajectories of a group of working class adults born in 1958 who continued education in the mid-1970s or later in their life, in a context where most people from the same socio-economic background did not. Follow-up family case studies looking at the relationship between parenting, educational aspirations, ethnicity and social class will be carried out next year.

As my research suggests, I am particularly interested in the influence of religion, ethnicity and social class on youth and identity formation and also on the related process of intergenerational transmission. My research interests also cover education, migration and social mobility, civic values, Bourdieu's social theory, sociology of education and inequality and, in terms of methodology, mixed method design and the use of visual methods.

Kate Lyle



I am the Research Officer currently working on a LLAKES project entitled 'Work organisation, lifelong learning and employee-driven innovation in the health sector' with Alison Fuller and Susan Halford. I am based at the University of Southampton. The project aims to explore how employee driven innovation can develop and flourish in the healthcare sector, with a particular focus on how different forms of work organisation and models of education and training impede or facilitate this.

Prior to taking up this post, I completed my PhD at Southampton in 2013, entitled 'Constructing workable technologies: the space for sociological research in technological development'. My thesis explored the possibilities of using sociological research to assess prospectively the field of use for a developing technology in order that this information might be used to inform the design of a device that is appropriate to the needs of the setting. My research formed part of a wider project which involved a diverse multidisciplinary team, including engineering, chemistry, biochemistry, medicine, and sociology, working to develop a point of care blood testing device for application within clinical settings. My research focused on exploring the potential use of this device within several settings, to explore if and how the device might come into service, and the implications of this for the design of the technology. I drew on theories from the field of science and technology studies to develop a theoretical framework capable of prospective research, which I applied using a qualitative methodology.

I aim to publish several papers based on my PhD research, and am currently working on a paper that gives empirical insight into the challenges of cross-disciplinary working between the physical and social sciences. My experiences of being involved in this type of project have implications for other social and physical sciences embarking on similar multidisciplinary collaborations, which are being increasingly advocated by funding organisations.

Nicola Pensiero



After graduating in Sociology, I completed a PhD at the European University Institute on the transmission of educational and labour market inequalities across generations in the UK. It was an attempt to validate empirically – using the British cohort study 1970 – a model of the social and psychological mechanisms of educational attainment. During my PhD I had the chance to work as an evaluation researcher on the international project entitled ‘Praesidium IV’ which aimed to provide assistance to migrants debarking in southern Italy. During my doctoral research, I was also a researcher in the NEUJOBS project (EU funded 7th framework program) on the expansion of upper secondary education and inequalities in educational attainment in several European countries over the period from 1944 to the present.

My interests lie in the sociology of stratification and inequality, income inequality, and political economy. In particular I am interested in the barriers that prevent our societies from achieving the ideal that everybody should have equal opportunities to realise their potential and aspirations. In addition, I have an interest in how the equalisation of socio-economic outcomes can be achieved.

In LLAKES, I am a researcher on several ESRC funded projects on the transition from school to work, income inequality and distribution of skills. I am also a research fellow at PATHWAYS, an international postdoctoral Fellowship Programme for the Comparative Study of Productive Youth Development, funded by the Jacobs Foundation. I am currently working on a LLAKES project with Ingrid Schoon on how the association between social origins and educational attainment has changed over time, and informed the ongoing debate regarding the definition of social origins. I am also contributing to another project, directed by Andy Green, on the analysis of skills inequality across countries and cohorts.

Rachel Wilde



I am a social anthropologist and started my post as Research Officer at LLAKES in May 2013. I completed my undergraduate, masters and PhD at the University of Manchester before moving south to join the Institute of Education. Alongside my PhD, I worked on the widening participation team at Manchester informing young people about the

unique insights of social anthropology, the importance of the social sciences for understanding contemporary society and to encourage young people to study these subjects at university.

I completed my PhD in March 2013, which was entitled ‘Shaping Neoliberal Persons at a Gap Year Organisation’. I conducted a year of multi-sited, ethnographic fieldwork within a British charity in London, Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Taking an organisational approach, the thesis explored this charity's understanding of personhood in relation to ideas such as ‘personal development’, ‘global citizenship’ and ‘employability’. Within the broader analytical frame of personhood and neoliberalism, the thesis also explored the study of organisations, labour, humour, charity and value.

My key research interest is personhood, for which I am co-editing a volume on *An Anthropology of the Person*. This focus intersects with other areas such as labour, and I hope to develop work on what it means to be an employable person in Britain today.

At LLAKES, I am currently working on three main projects:

‘Getting in and Getting on in the Youth Labour Market: Entry Practices, Under-Employment, Skill Formation in Regional Economies’, for which I will be interviewing young people and conducting short-term ethnography on a variety of youth training programmes across Britain.

‘The Crisis for Contemporary Youth: Young People, Opportunities, and Civic Values’ which involves Michela and me in conducting 100 interviews with young people on their experiences of education, employment and housing and their views on British society.

‘The Effects of Private and Quasi-Private Schooling on Society’; I am interviewing head teachers in independent, state and free schools about competition and collaboration and how different types of schools affect their local areas in different ways.

I will also be working on the project entitled ‘Inter-Professional Learning in the Creative and Cultural Sector’ next year.

New Book: Karen Evans and Helena Helve outline why fresh international research into youth transitions is so timely

The recent economic crises have presented new challenges for organizations and individuals globally, particularly for young people whose life chances now appear worse than those of their parents' generation. We have been privileged to edit a new international collection of research papers focusing on these challenges, whose publication has been marked by a LLAKES seminar at the Institute of Education in November 2013.

Wellbeing, leisure and personal relationships are often relegated to side issues to the main game of education and employment; their influence on education and employment patterns and decisions are often ignored. This book sets out to explore these flows of influence from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. A new generation of research studies is focusing on the ways in which young people respond to and cope with sudden downturns in employment opportunities and the changing pressures involved in decision-making about vocational and higher education. Economic downturn is not new and there is rich previous research on which to build. Research from the recessions of the 1930s has demonstrated long-term scarring effects that endure from generation to generation. Panel studies internationally are revealing the longer-term impacts of experiences rooted in the previous recessions. But there are marked differences in the wider social context in which life and work navigations are being experienced in the aftermath of the latest financial crises. Through longitudinal and panel studies of various kinds we can now examine changes in housing, family status and a wide range of personal and wellbeing factors which are crucial to ways in which young people navigate changes that can impact fundamentally on their life chances. We should also be probing young adults' views on the social unrest that has erupted in many parts of Europe, while bringing these phenomena into global perspective by reflecting on, for example, the harsh realities of youth experiences in countries such as South Africa, where growth in inter- and intra-race inequality leaves the poor, even in wealthy provinces, locked out of the economy.

Bringing different disciplinary perspectives together presents particular challenges. Foundations are laid for what we, as editors, hope will become a new interdisciplinary dialogue. In the concluding chapter, James Côte develops, from his overarching review of the contributions, a typology of personal and structural resources that helps in

exploring the risks and benefits associated with the transitions to work for young adults with high and low 'agentic' resources as well as high and low economic or 'structural' resources. An important conclusion is that, while we must continue to identify structures that discriminate against people in harmful ways, structures are slow to change. In the meantime we need to learn how to help people 'penetrate' structures that might otherwise constitute barriers for them. These considerations raise further questions about exactly what it is young people are transitioning 'through' and 'to', including a questioning of the concept of transition itself and of 'adulthood' as the supposed destination. This in turn calls for much greater attention to what today's younger generation feel they belong to and are becoming, as well as policies that understand better both the personal and structural resources needed by young people of all economic backgrounds if they are to manage their life courses under late-modern conditions.

Helve, H. and Evans, K. (eds) (2013) *Youth and Work Transitions in Changing Social Landscapes*. London: Tufnell Press

EVENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

LLAKES Research Seminars

Forthcoming seminars to be held at the Institute of Education include:

23 January 2014

Matthias Pilz

Modularisation for flexibility and mobility in VET – findings from 15 European countries

15.00-16.30, Room 780

5 February 2014

Tara Fenwick

Materialities of innovation and learning in everyday work practice: tensions and alternatives

15.15-16.45, Room 826

6 February 2014

Ka Ho Mok

Research, Development and Innovation in Hong Kong: Questing for Entrepreneurship, and Academic Reflections

16.15-17.30, Room 709a

19 February 2014

Simon Marginson

Western education with Chinese characteristics, or post-Confucian model? Reflections on state-shaped higher education in north-east Asia and Singapore

15.00-16.30, Room 736

27 March 2014

Ruth Lupton

Better or worse? Education policy and educational inequality under the Coalition

15.00-16.30, Room 784

Details of these events, and other seminars to be held during the Summer and Autumn Terms of 2014, will be posted on the LLAKES website, at www.llakes.org. You can also follow LLAKES on Twitter, via @llakescentre

Other books by LLAKES authors, published in 2013

Deissinger, T., Aff, J., Fuller, A. and Jorgensen, C.H. (eds) (2013) *Hybrid Qualifications: Structures and problems in the context of European VET policy*. Zurich: Peter Lang

Green, F. (2013) *Skills and Skilled Work: An Economic and Social Analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Janmaat, J.G., Duru-Bellat, M., Green, A. and Mehaut, P. (eds) (2013) *The Dynamics and Social Consequences of Education Systems*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

LLAKES Research Papers

The following LLAKES research papers were published in 2013.

Paper 41: 'Vocational Education and Training in Eastern Europe: Transition and influence' by John West

Paper 42: 'All in the Mix? Top team demographics and business performance in UK firms, 2008-9' by Max Nathan

Paper 43: 'What has been Happening to the Training of Workers in Britain?' by Francis Green, Alan Felstead, Duncan Gallie, Hande Inanc, and Nick Jewson.

Paper 44: 'Gender Segregation, Apprenticeship, and the raising of the Participation Age in England: Are young women at a disadvantage?' by Alison Fuller and Lorna Unwin

Paper 45: 'Skill premia and immigrant-native wage gaps', by Anna Rosso

All the LLAKES research papers can be downloaded from:

<http://www.llakes.org/llakes-research-papers/>

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