"To tackle the challenges of tomorrow, young people need political capital today..."

AN ANATOMY OF YOUTH

Celia Hannon
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DEM⊙S

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Foreword

I welcome this publication which looks at the younger generation from a fresh perspective. We hear the voice of young people themselves. The polling undertaken by **v** brings interesting and worthwhile evidence to the discussion.

The report also brings out an important paradox—the generation gap in the sense of the cultural gap between different generations appears if anything to have reduced. But the economic gap between them has widened—with younger people finding it harder to make the transition through to adulthood.

Young people are often demonised in the media. This publication shows that there is nothing new in that. But that does not make it any more justified. Their hopes and aspirations are as deeply felt and legitimate as anyone else's and I hope this excellent publication helps make sure that they are heard.

David Willetts, MP
March 2010

Introduction

I want us to be a young country again, young.… a new age
but in an old country.
　　　Tony Blair, Labour Party Conference 1995[1]

Politics, at its most inspirational, offers people a new vision
of the future. Some of the most pioneering political leaders
allied themselves with youth—Obama, Kennedy, Blair—and
drew upon the association to project a sense of dynamism.
Politicians today readily reach for symbols of youth culture to
demonstrate their mainstream appeal—David Cameron lets it
be known that he wears converse trainers and Gordon Brown
that he watches *Britain's Got Talent.* [2] So why, on any indicator
that matters, is there such a gulf between political culture and
young people?

When it comes to the pressing questions that young
people face, British politics is failing to offer young people
a vision of their future. This gap between political rhetoric
and political reality is far from new, but it has become less
acceptable than ever before. Young people in 2010 are in a
particularly unstable position: there are real inequalities within
their generation as well as between them and older cohorts.
They are also poised to inherit a set of chronic social, economic
and political challenges that their national governments will
be unable to solve without their energetic engagement. Not
least amongst these is the largest budget deficit as a proportion
of GDP of all OECD member nations.[3]

Working in tandem with their government, young people
will need real ingenuity to devise solutions to these problems
over the next decades. This report presents an analysis of some
of the trends they have lived through and the challenges posed

by these trends. It outlines their attitudes and values to show how politics could become responsive to their needs on the issues that will matter over the long term.

If politicians and the media send any message to young people it is *'I know who you are'* rather than *'I know what you are facing'.* Considerable energy is invested by the media and by the political and voluntary sectors in attempting to define what or who young people are. We outline the familiar set of stories circulating about young people, which are effectively alienating young people from a public sphere desperately in need of their participation. Looked at from a historical perspective, these attempts to establish youth as a different, aberrant group seem particularly bizarre.[4] Culturally speaking, the generations alive today have more in common than ever.

The category of 'youth', as we now know it, emerged in the post-war period. This transitional interval brought with it disposable income, more leisure time, an extended period of education and greater freedom from National Service and the Church. People aged 16–25 today are the third generation to experience 'youth' in this post-war way; they share this experience with their parents and their grandparents.

While the UK may do poorly on inter-generational mixing, the generation gap, in a cultural sense, has become less and less discernible. Youth culture has become synonymous with popular culture. The generations have certainly not declared war — if anything they have more shared experiences than ever before.

But if contemporary generations are brought together by a shared experience of 'youth', they are divided by economics. Take a closer look at the data and it becomes apparent that young people in the UK are a generation lacking in both political and economic clout. This fact has provoked much debate about whether we are neglecting our responsibility to younger or future generations. And the idea that the short-termism of the political cycle impacts negatively on the young and unborn generations is gaining momentum internationally, as the German Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations asserts:

People belonging to future generations cannot vote today. The principle of democracy can, in its traditional and narrow form, conflict with the maxim of intergenerational justice. The need to appease the electorate every four or five years means that politicians direct their actions towards satisfying the needs and desires of present citizens — their electorate. The interests, therefore, of future generations are all too often neglected.[5]

The government should certainly pay closer attention to the emergence of inequalities in the labour and housing market, but perhaps the most important redistribution of all should take place in the political sphere. A transfer of political capital to young people is required, so that they can enter into a broader set of policy debates about issues such as care, localism, climate change and the decline of our political institutions. Politicians need to devise sustainable policies to inspire the next generation of voters and they should take their cue from the attitudes and values of young people today.

An anatomy of youth

Good government values the future, bad government takes from it.
David Willetts, The Pinch[6]

This book maps young people's attitudes against the trends that are set to shape their lives in families and communities, in a changing climate, online and in their democracies. It should be used as a resource on young people in 2010, an 'anatomy' of their lives and the trends they will live through. We will identify some of the key influences on them and on their attitudes — since if anything defines the character of a generation, it is shared experiences.

The evolution of the most written about of recent generations, the baby boomers, illustrates why understanding the trends and social shifts that a generation lives through can be the most revealing way of understanding them. The baby boomers are widely viewed as a confident, trend-setting,

prosperous and liberal generation. But these 'innate' characteristics were a product of the social change they lived through: the introduction of the welfare state, the expansion of higher education and the arrival of the contraceptive pill. Their attitudes were shaped by these trends, and in turn they are leaving their own imprint on society.

The chapters that follow isolate some of the social, economic, environmental and technological shifts shaping the values of young people in 2010. These thematic areas have been chosen because they have had an impact on young people already, or because they will present young people with significant challenges in the future.

Adapting to climate change

There is a slow shift towards more environmentally sustainable patterns of living. Over their lifetimes young people will face the greatest challenge to adapt—but without obvious tools to use or purely rational reasons to change their everyday behaviour. Governments have to be clearer about how the move to a low-carbon economy will change their lives for better or for worse.

Living and caring in fluid families

Families are assuming new hybrid forms and young people are at the forefront of this shift. Over the decades ahead, their families will face acute pressures to provide more care, support and security with fewer resources. Governments have to find ways to build resilience in these new families and make fair decisions on paying for care.

Owning a digital identity

There is now no opting out from sharing personal information or having a presence online. But young people are unsure how to assess and limit the risks of an identity scattered across the digital environment. Governments need to consider how they protect people's digital rights and guide the choices of a generation who are exposed to an unprecedented degree.

Belonging to changing communities

There are more ways for young people to belong to groups, networks and communities than ever before—belonging is no longer only tied to geographical location. This has brought obvious benefits, but young people are inheriting local communities under strain and low on trust. Local and central governments will need to invest in spaces that can foster inter-cultural and inter-generational exchange between people.

Being an effective citizen

Young people are inheriting a democratic system where there are more ways for them to make a difference as citizens. Disillusioned with traditional politics, they are drawn to these alternative spaces for social action. But many of their cohort will be left behind by this shift. Governments will struggle to find ways of collaborating with a generation who exhibit such differing levels of engagement.

We curate evidence on young people's views on these trends and challenges in order to outline 'political blind spots', where policy currently fails to address their concerns. This report contains results from v's 'Voicebox' survey of young people's views and attitudes. *An Anatomy of Youth* draws on this poll of a representative sample of 1,000 British 16–25-year-olds.[7] A much larger, but unrepresentative, group of 8,273 young people have also participated in the Voicebox project overall, the results of which can be found at the Voicebox website. There were six thematic areas in Voicebox:

'Labels and stereotypes'; 'Time'; 'What do you care about?'; 'Places'; 'Values'; and 'Community'.

Alongside this, we have conducted a wide-ranging review of other surveys on British youth attitudes published within the last few years. In some cases we have included data on young people of slightly different ages, as long as the profile includes a significant portion of the cohort we focus on. These surveys were conducted by a range of organisations including government departments, youth charities, think tanks and youth brands.

We have also invited six public figures or thinkers to respond to the themes outlined in each chapter. Katherine Rake offers her perspective on young people living and caring in changing families, danah boyd on digital identities, Peter Madden on living low-carbon lives, Zygmunt Bauman on community and Stuart White on citizenship in a troubled democracy. All of them give their take on the challenges specific to this generation and how they might rise to meet them. We conclude by drawing on their essays to pose six questions to politicians about young people's future.– in the interests of inter-generational justice, politicians should be debating these now.

Finally, young people are not simply the passive subjects of social and political change. They are also actively shaping and responding to issues that concern them. During the course of this research we profiled 15 young people, all motivated by different issues, who were finding distinctive ways to bring about change in society or in their own lives. Their models of citizenship and perspectives on society have much to offer political culture. Their voices give life to the dilemmas that confront their generation, sometimes lost in the mechanical policy-making process. Five of these portraits can be found in Part 1. While they cannot be representative of *all* British youth they showcase the ingenuity and energy of a generation that, while tested on many fronts, is far from 'lost'.

Part 1
Young people today

1 Perspectives on youth

Values are changing and the impact of the change is felt most of all by the young … those who are so critical of contemporary youth are, we suspect, in fact objecting not so much to the behaviour of the young as to new features of post-war society. It is well to remember therefore that we, not they, are its authors.
Labour Party, The Younger Generation, 1959.[8]

Britain has long maintained a confused and contradictory relationship with its young people. While it is common for societies to project their anxieties about change onto the young, in the UK both politicians and the media seem to be especially drawn towards slotting young people into a set of well-worn categories. These narrow stories trap young people within a certain set of issues, making it less likely that they will be invited into broader political discussions about the future.

The efforts to 'define a generation' in the media and in politics also further alienate young people from formal political processes. The less young people recognise themselves or their concerns in these cultural narratives, the less incentive there is for them to participate in the public sphere. The heavy focus on youth policy in the past ten years has been a poor substitute for taking young people's perspectives more seriously in other debates. This chapter highlights the pitfalls of 'generational generalisation', and the extent to which this approach has become the dominant way of talking about youth in British society.

Mythologising generations

*The Millennial Generation will entirely recast the image of youth
from downbeat and alienated to upbeat and engaged — with
potentially seismic consequences…*
    Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising.*[9]

The birth cohort at the centre of this book, young people aged
16–25, have already attracted a raft of labels and attempts
to describe them. In America, a country now absorbed by a
political rhetoric of change and renewal, they have come to be
known as the 'Millennials'. For Strauss and Howe this cohort is
poised to become America's 'next great generation'. A number
of other American publications have made similarly bold
claims about their politics and their progressive, civic virtues,
as in this report from the Centre for American Progress, which
credits them with sweeping President Obama to power:

*Millennials want to end the culture wars; move America's foreign
policy toward a more cooperative and multilateral approach;
rebuild a strong, positive role for government; achieve universal
health care; reform and expand America's educational system; start
the transition to a clean energy economy; and much more.*[10]

There is some dissent about the birth years of this cohort,
although in general it is thought that they were born between
1981 and 2000. Some commentators have branded the group
'Generation Y', the younger siblings of Generation X and the
children of the later baby boomers. Others refer to them as
'Generation Next', but they almost always employ the same
hopeful rhetoric about their attitudes and perspectives on the
world. They have even spawned a literature designed to help
managers to bridge the generation gap in the workplace:

They combine the teamwork ethic of the Boomers with the can-do attitude of the Veterans and the technological savvy of the Xers. At first glance, and even at second glance, Generation Next may be the ideal workforce — and ideal citizens.[11]

But on both sides of the Atlantic there is one trend above all that this birth cohort will forever be identified with: the explosion of digital technologies. The past 15 years have seen a flurry of publications about a generation who have been characterised as 'born digital' or digital 'natives'.[12] Social networking sites and internet videos have showcased youth culture to adults in an extraordinary level of detail. The rise of digital technologies has made young people's lives more visible to adults but also more mysterious. The relationship between the young and technology has assumed a larger cultural symbolism, as Julian Sefton-Green observes:

The most salient image of a contemporary child in western society is a picture of a rapt face staring entranced at, almost into, the computer screen. This image is powerful not just because it encapsulates the hopes and fear within popular narratives of childhood but because it also tells a parallel story, the narrative of technological progress.[13]

Ambitious projects to capture the character of the next generation are inevitably subject to challenge and revision. As a cohort grows older and the context of their lives changes, assumptions about their attitudes and behaviour have to be revised. These stories may have applications for the short-term needs of journalists and advertisers — but they do little for wider society. Consequently, *An Anatomy of Youth* will not be attempting to arrive at a definitive account of who or what young people are today, but instead will present the evidence on the era they are living through and the challenges they will face in the future.

The media perspective on youth

We reviewed press coverage in UK newspapers since 1999, analysing the content of articles featuring the words 'Young Britons'. Unsurprisingly, the majority of stories communicate alarm about the attitudes and behaviour of young people. Many position one news story about a group of young people as being indicative of *all* young people when another social category may be a more significant causal factor in their behaviour, for example, being a student, a middle class professional or an inner-city working class youth. This may reflect a journalistic desire for simplicity, but it could also reflect a reluctance to use the loaded language of class, race and education when talking about young people.

Of course, many social groups are portrayed in stereotypical terms by the media — however, the frame of issues within which young people are discussed is particularly narrow. These themes 'trap' young people in a certain set of issues in the media, limiting the ways they can be represented. So, they are either 'committing violent crime' or 'not committing violent crime', they are either 'having sex' or 'not having sex'. They are rarely 'volunteering', 'designing clothes' or 'trading on the internet' — and when these stories do appear, they are usually are focused on individuals rather than on young people en masse.

The stories that we researched broadly fall into one of the following five categories: 'Hedonism' (young Britons are indifferent to the risks of unprotected sex, drugs and spending money); 'Violence' (young people are more aggressive towards each other and the rest of society); 'Independence' (young people are leading lives which are increasingly disconnected from the rest of society); and 'Character' (young people have poor moral fibre). Just one headline provides a typical example of ten years worth of coverage:

The binge drinking, drug taking, sexually careless behaviour of today's adolescents is setting them up to become the most obese and infertile generation of adults ever, warns a report from Britain's doctors.[14]

The long history of this type of representation makes bemoaning the 'demonisation' of youth in the media something of a pointless exercise. An Anatomy of Youth is not simply a celebration of the virtues of young people — such sweeping counter-representations can be just as inaccurate. But it is important to recognise that these narratives inevitably find their way into policy, playing a part in distorting the relationship between political culture and young people.

The political representation of youth

We will discover, coach, develop and showcase the wealth of aspiration and talent that exists in Britain … We will never allow teenage tearaways or anybody else to turn our town centres into no go areas at night times. No one has yet cracked the whole problem of a youth drinking culture.

Gordon Brown, Speech to 2009 Labour Party Conference[15]

The interplay between cultural narratives about 16–25-year-olds and politics is vividly apparent in this speech, where Gordon Brown portrays young people as both the future and the destabilising force that could undermine that hoped-for future. Young people are either unable to vote or are very unlikely to, so politicians have little reason to avoid lazy representations of them.

However, over the past ten years young people have become more politically relevant in one important sense: as the object of policy making. When the Labour Party fought and won the 1997 general election, two of its five key manifesto pledges were directed at young people and a third aimed at primary-school-aged children.[16] While a focus on education has been a key characteristic of the party's time in government, considerable energy and resources have also been invested in other areas of youth policy. These strands of youth policy are extremely revealing about the relationship between politics and young people.

On the one hand, there has been a more holistic conception of youth policy with a greater emphasis on 'soft' outcomes such as emotional well-being, active citizenship and participation. On the other hand, there has been an increasingly punitive approach to youth crime and a tough focus on anti-social, subversive or risky behaviour. Overall, policy in the last decade has tended to relate to youth in four distinct categories:

Socially excluded, violent or anti-social youth

Over the past ten years, youth crime has been consistently high on the government's agenda, responding to the increasing media focus on anti-social behaviour and crime. Considerable resources have been directed at tackling the problem of a group of disaffected, socially excluded young people. This strand of youth policy is exemplified by the government's Respect Agenda,[17] launched in 2006, and by Anti-Social Behaviour Orders.

Economically inactive youth

Even before the recession, the existence of a group of long-term economically inactive young people was proving to be a stubborn problem for the government. A number of wide-ranging skills and employment programmes have been initiated to help those who are not in education, employment or training. At the centre of these efforts was the New Deal for the Young Long-term Unemployed. The New Deal promised to move a quarter of a million 18–24-year-olds who were long-term unemployed into work. This was a flagship policy of the first Blair government, and this issue is once again rising up the political agenda for both political parties.

Empowered / participative youth

Policy has sought to give greater 'voice' to young people in their communities and schools. Over the past ten years the government has demonstrated a renewed commitment to the concept of active citizenship across society, and this has found its strongest expression in youth policy. In August 2002 the

subject of Citizenship was made statutory for Key Stage 3 pupils. Following the Russell Commission report of 2005, this has been accompanied by efforts to offer young people more opportunities to volunteer and 'give something back' to their communities.[18]

Risk-taking, unhealthy youth

As the media stories about youth illustrate, one of the most enduring sources of public concern is the risky behaviour of young people. Youth Matters contained a number of cross-departmental strategies for improving young people's health. There have also been several intensive public information campaigns directed at young people, focusing on unprotected sexual activity, drinking and substance abuse.

While much of this policy activity has certainly been welcome and constructive, it cannot be a substitute for making bigger political decisions in a way that reflects the needs of the next generation. It is for this reason that *An Anatomy of Youth* is less concerned with youth policy and more concerned with the youth perspective in policy making. As Babetunde, the 21-year-old founder of a new think tank, phrases it:

They will talk about 'young people's issues' but the reason young people's think tanks and a lot of young people's bodies have failed is because they're only trying to push young people on 'young people's issues' … By only talking about 'young people's issues' we alienate ourselves and allow politicians to patronise us…. If we fail to challenge thought on wider issues we're just boxing ourselves into today we will be affected by those very same issues we choose to ignore now, tomorrow…

If we search for one authoritative perspective on British youth, we will look in vain. The quest to define a generation can easily become a distraction from identifying the way social change is affecting young people now. And, while youth policy is an important part of making provision for future generations, it is only part of the story. Young people need to be liberated from the limited parameters of 'youth issues', and brought into a wider set of political decisions.

2 Young people in 2010 — living the crunch

The era during which each generation starts to build an independent life will play a crucial part in shaping their perspective on society. *An Anatomy of Youth* takes youth attitudes as its starting point, but it is impossible to disentangle these from the socio-economic context in which they are forged. Commentators have recently seized on the familiar narrative of a 'lost generation' to highlight the fact that young people are being hit by a crunch in the labour market. But as we will see, this trend is underpinned by a set of persistent inequalities that are more pernicious and long-term.

This chapter examines the position of young people in 2010 from three perspectives: their demographic profile; levels of socio-economic equality within the cohort; and inter-generational equality.

Young people in 2010

The number of young people in Britain has remained relatively stable since the 1970s, but as a proportion of the wider population they are diminishing. There were 7.5 million 16–24-year-olds in 1991, accounting for 13 per cent of the population, and 7.4 million in 1971 accounting for 13.2 per cent.[19] In 2007, the resident population of the UK was just under 61 million and young people accounted for 12 per cent of this number (7.4 million).[20] According to ONS population estimates, by 2051 16–24-year-olds will account for 9.92 per cent of the total population.[21] Within the next two decades we will pass a point where over-65s will outnumber 16–24-year-olds by two to one[22].

So, while they are set to shrink in size relative to other age groups in the UK, the youth cohort at the centre of this

report is actually slightly larger than that directly before and after them. They are subject to what David Blanchflower has termed a 'demographic echo' that dates from the baby boomers. This has created a slight bulge in the number of young people about to enter an already competitive labour market, with obvious ramifications for the youth unemployment crisis. There are 13.5 per cent more 20-year-olds today than there are ten-year-olds and 11.5 per cent more than the number of 30-year-olds.[23]

People from ethnic minorities also make up a higher percentage of young people than they do of older age groups. In 2007, 18.4 per cent of all young adults aged 20–24 in England were from minority ethnic groups. Amongst the over 50s, the figure is just 5 per cent.[24]

Over the next two decades of their life the population of the UK is projected to increase, to around 65.7 million by 2031; the greatest proportion of this growth will occur in England. This calculation assumes net migration of 3.6 million in the period to 2031, and most of these migrants are expected to be younger adults.[25] During the same period the number of people aged 65 or over is projected to increase to 22.3 per cent of the population.[26] The trend toward young people representing a more ethnically diverse, but smaller, section of the population seems to set to continue.

Though disability is more common in older people, according to the Disability Rights Commission there were in 2005 still over 700,000 young adults aged 16–24 in the UK living with a disability (9.5 per cent).[27] In 2004, Mencap estimated that there were around 158,000 young people aged 15–24 with a learning disability in England.[28]

As this generation grows older, they will be the beneficiaries of the huge extension in longevity; currently life expectancy is 78 for men and 81.3 for women. And, according to current trends, by 2051 projected life expectancy at birth will have risen to 84 years for males and 88 years for females;[29] there are currently 11,000 people aged over 100 and by 2050 it is projected that there will be 281,000.[30]

Of course, young people are not evenly spread across the UK. The greatest concentration of young people in proportion to older people can be found in Northern Ireland, followed by Yorkshire and the Humber and thirdly by the North East.[31] As the UK ages, it seems likely that this shift will be most visible in rural areas. Currently some 18 per cent of people in rural areas are 65 and over, compared with 15 per cent in urban areas, but the migration of older people to rural areas is predicted to continue over the next few decades.[32]

Intra-generational inequality

Young people have grown up with a government that set out its commitment to tackling inequality and child poverty over a decade ago. Over this period that generation is likely to have benefited indirectly from rising employment, the introduction of the minimum wage and some redistribution to low-income families and pensioners through the benefit and tax credit systems. But despite these important interventions, the picture of equality within this generation remains patchy. Voicebox asked young people whether we live in a fair society. Only 13 per cent of those asked thought that they did—71 per cent thought they did not and 16 per cent were unsure.

These results suggest that young people think that the odds are stacked against many of their cohort, particularly those with the most disadvantaged starts in life—and the evidence would suggest they are at least partially right.

Young people in the UK are set to inherit an unequal society that compares poorly to many others in Europe. The extent to which inequality has increased in recent years is hotly contested and the answer is often dependent on the measure used. As measured by the Gini coefficient inequality continued rising after Labour came to power in 1997 and then fell year on year between 2000 and 2004, the only period of continued decline since 1979. However, recent rises in the Gini coefficient have left this measure at its highest level since 1961 and well above the OECD average.[33]

The UK performs poorly on other indicators of equality between young people. Young adults and people from minority ethnic groups are the most likely to be living in areas of poverty and deprivation. More than one in five 16–24-year-olds (21 per cent), of all ethnic backgrounds, are living in the most deprived areas of the UK.[34] Meanwhile, young people's disposable income varies considerably: the wealthiest 10 per cent of teens get an average allowance of £1,476 a year, while the poorest 10 per cent receive £144.[35] As they get older the disparities in the support they receive from parents or other social networks becomes more significant. One survey from 2005 found that nearly half of young first-time buyers benefited from assistance from family or friends with their deposit for house purchase. Those receiving such assistance were able to pay deposits of £34,000, compared to only £7,000 for others.[36]

Does more higher education mean a more equal generation?
This government, like many before, has explicitly acknowledged the link between academic attainment and the life chances of young people.

As a result of a range of initiatives and greater investment, there has been marked improvement in attainment for this generation (although there is some debate around whether this is partly attributable to 'grade inflation'). Around half of young women (51 per cent) and two-fifths of young men (40 per cent) achieved two or more A level qualifications or equivalent in 2006/07. So, the proportion of both men and women achieving two A levels or equivalent has increased, but the performance gap between the sexes has also grown. In 1990/91, the proportion of women achieving this level was 2 percentage points higher than men but by 2006/07 the difference had increased to 12 percentage points.[37]

But it is a university degree that continues to represent one of the most stubborn markers of advantage between young people. The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions reports that wages of graduates are typically 60 per cent higher than wages of those with no qualifications, estimating

that graduates typically earn over £160,000 more during their lifetime than non-graduates.[38]

Consequently, the widening of participation in higher education for young people today should mean more equality within the age group. Indeed, there has been a rise of 45 per cent in the number of young adults achieving higher education qualifications between 1994–95 and 2006–07.[39] According to HEFCE, young people today in England are 20 per cent more likely to go on to higher education than they were in the mid-1990s.[40]

Despite these trends, participation in higher education is far from evenly distributed across all groups of young people. Those who had been receiving free school meals at 16 were less likely to go on to higher education than others, even when they had achieved the same top exam results.[41] There are also large differences in participation rates by where young people live: currently fewer than one in five young people from the most disadvantaged areas enter higher education compared to more than one in two in the most advantaged areas.[42]

The gender differences present at A-level stages are also in evidence in Higher Education. Over the past 15 years around 270,000 fewer young men than young women have entered higher education and women from the 2009/2010 cohort are 23 per cent more likely to enter higher education than young men. The relative difference in the proportion of men and women entering higher education is higher in disadvantaged areas.[43]

Of the group fortunate enough to enter higher education, some young people will find that their degrees are not as valuable as others. Research from the Centre for Economic Performance at LSE studying the Graduate Cohort Survey finds that a university degree significantly raises the earnings of graduates who attend the best universities. A graduate who went to a university in the top quarter of 'quality' will have earnings 10–16 per cent higher than a graduate who went to a university in the bottom quarter.[44]

This snapshot of just a few dimensions of young people's lives in 2010 shows that despite improvements on some measures, there are still many inequalities between them.

The uneven distribution of resources is an important fact to stress — the category of 'youth' is far from a homogenous one.

Inter-generational inequality

I believe that a lot of our social and economic problems can be seen as the failure to understand and value these contracts between the generations. Much of what we see as social breakdown is the breakdown of relations between the generations, much mistrust is mistrust between generations, much of what has gone wrong with our economy is failure to get the balance right between generations.[45]

As David Willetts argues in *The Pinch*, the history of greater economic growth since the Industrial Revolution has taught us to bet on the future prosperity of successive generations. We often use up resources today and assume that our children, and their children, will have a better quality of life than those before us — but at this point in history, this seems to be an increasingly risky gamble. We explore three social trends which exemplify a failure to 'get the balance right' between generations, namely unemployment; spiralling house prices; and stalling social mobility.

Generations at work

In 2010, the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities between the generations is most vividly expressed by young people's relationship with the labour market. While the UK has always had an underlying problem of youth unemployment and young people who are Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET), it is younger age groups who suffer most acutely from freezes in recruitment in times of recession. According to **v**'s Voicebox survey, 54 per cent of those surveyed thought that the recession had affected them — a striking finding considering that many of those asked were in education.

According to recent figures (as of February 2010), the youth unemployment rate has now reached 17.6 per cent. The rate for those 25–49 is now 6.2 per cent and for those 50 and over is 4.7 per cent. The rise in unemployment rates since the recession started has been 5.4 percentage points for young people, 2.3 points for the 25–49 age group and 1.9 points for the over-50s.[46] As David Blanchflower has demonstrated, those young people who experience early spells of unemployment will encounter a long-term scarring effect, particularly in terms of wages and mental health.[47] The graph below illustrates the differing impact of the recession by age group.

Figure 1   **Unemployment rates by age**
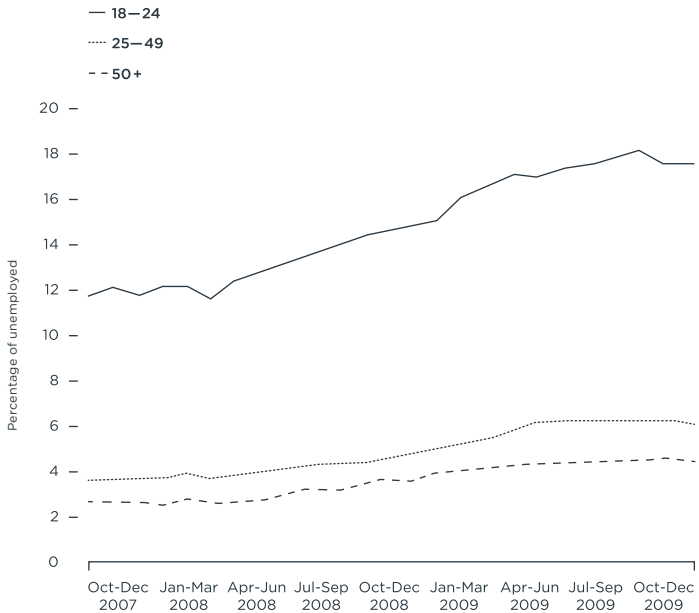
Source: CESI, 'Labour market statistics: February 2010'[48]

Unemployment is not the only indicator of inequality between generations. For those young people who do enter the workplace early, many do not seem destined to earn highly, at least initially. According to the National Equality Panel the median wage of the youngest teenage employees, is in the bottom 8 per cent of the overall distribution and the median wage for those in their early twenties is still in the bottom 26–28 per cent.[49] There is also compelling evidence of a widening gap between the earnings of younger and older workers. In 1974 the average male 50–59-year-old employee earned about 4 per cent more than the male 25–29-year-old, but by 2008 it had become 35 per cent more.[50] This is surprising — as a smaller generation they should have been in a comparably stronger labour market position.

Generations at home

Although levels of equality between generations are notoriously difficult to capture or quantify, house prices do offer a telling example of the disparities between young people and their parents' generation. Since 1995 average house prices for first-time buyers have risen 204 per cent while average incomes have risen 92 per cent.[51] Unsurprisingly, for young adults who are living independently today, the most common housing tenure is private rented accommodation — but it was the least common option just 20 years ago. See Figure 2.

Figure 2   **Housing in England, 2006 — 2007**
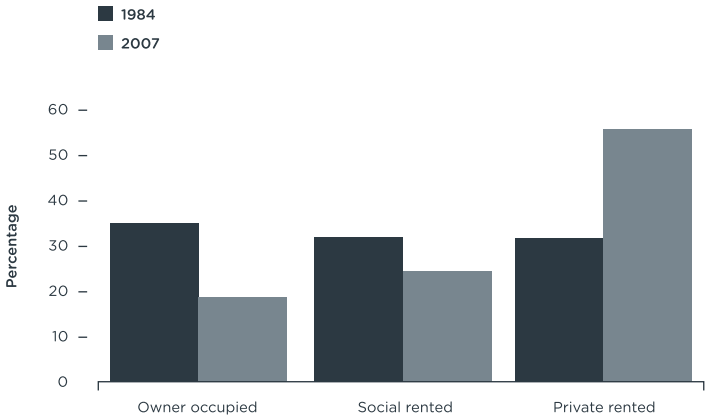
Source: K Devitt, L Knighton and K Lowe, Young Adults Today[52]

Fuelled by a paucity of affordable housing, the house price boom has meant that younger homeowners have had to finance larger and larger mortgages (some of which were on an interest-only basis) to secure homes that their parents' generations paid comparatively less for. Since the crash, many of these first-time buyers, who overstretched themselves to get on the housing ladder, now find themselves in negative equity.

It is notable that as the flow of assets between the old and young has become distorted in the public sphere, the onus is on families to divide assets up fairly in the private sphere. For the next generation of buyers, the support of wealthy parents will continue to be essential to help them find big enough deposits to avoid taking on cripplingly large mortgages. In addition, the significance of inheriting property from parents or grandparents has become exaggerated — and is perhaps now the most significant way of transferring wealth between generations.

Generational mobility

Levels of social mobility are at the heart of questions of inter-generational equality. Limited or non-existent mobility is a sure way of passing advantage from one generation to the next. Consequently, inequality between generations also has a symbiotic relationship with equality within generations. This is especially so when, as in the case of the baby boomers, one generation has been fortunate enough to stockpile considerable assets in pensions and homes.

There is now an established body of evidence indicating that, from the perspective of social mobility, this point in history is not a good moment to be young in the UK. An OECD study looking at 'elasticity' in inter-generational earnings found that mobility in earnings across pairs of fathers and sons was particularly low in France, Italy, the UK and the United States, while mobility is higher in the Nordic countries, Australia and Canada.[53] There was a substantial wage premium associated with growing up in a better-educated family that was particularly prevalent in the UK and south European countries. The link between a father's background and his son's future in Britain was three times greater than that found in Australia, Norway or Denmark.[54]

Although there is some evidence that the UK may have reached the bottom of this downward trajectory in social mobility, the rise of professional occupations is one of the factors that could further inhibit mobility within and between the generations. The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions found that access to society's top jobs and professions has become less, not more, socially representative over time. While at the start of the twentieth century there were few professional or managerial jobs — in 1911 only one in 14 jobs was professional — by 2001 this had risen to over one in three. And, although only 7 per cent of the population attends an independent school, well over half of those in many professions have done so.[55] This category of inequality will be particularly significant for future generations of young people — some studies suggest that up to nine out of ten new jobs created over the next decade will be in professional sectors.[56]

Professional jobs and roles in the service economy also demand a different set of skills than the type of occupations previous generations went into before deindustrialisation took place. Analysis of cohort studies tracking young people born in 1958 and 1970 in ippr's publication Freedom's Orphans demonstrates that, in just over a decade, personal and social skills became 33 times more important in determining relative life chances.[57] At the same time, young people from less affluent backgrounds have become less likely than their more fortunate peers to develop these skills. Young people entering the labour market in 2010 need a different set of capabilities to succeed, so the fact that these are unequally distributed means that many will have access to fewer opportunities than their parents or grandparents had.

The inequality amongst young people, and between this birth cohort and other generations, matters. It matters from the perspective of inter-generational justice and for the long-term health of society. But, while the socio-economic trends above seems to offer a bleak snapshot of British youth, this account omits an important dimension to the story of young people in 2010. The portraits of young people that follow this chapter capture the extent to which many young people are actively shaping society, rather than simply becoming victims of trends beyond their control.

Is the world becoming a better or a worse place?

BETTER: 16%, WORSE: 59%, NEITHER: 25%

Is euthanasia OK?

YES: 64%, NO: 14%, NOT SURE: 22%

Is it normal to have sex before the age of 16?

YES: 41%, NO: 56%, NOT TELLING: 3%

Has the recession affected you?

YES: 54%, NO: 29%, NEITHER: 17%

Are the people or politicians best able to change the country?

BOTH: 41%, PEOPLE: 36%, NEITHER: 13%, POLITICIANS: 10%

Do your neighbours help each other out?

YES: 49%, NO: 30%, NOT SURE: 21%

Are drugs OK for recreational use?

YES: 26%, NO: 68%, NOT TELLING: 6%

If money wasn't an issue, would you have plastic surgery?

YES: 24%, NO: 63%, NOT SURE: 13%

Are you happy with the relationship you have with your family?

YES: 76%, NO: 17%, NOT SURE: 7%

Do we care enough for the elderly?

YES: 33%, NO: 64%, NEITHER: 3%

Do we live in a fair society?

YES: 13%, NO: 71%, NEITHER: 16%

Is there a God?

YES:35%, NO: 36%, NOT SURE: 29%

Do you feel part of a community?

YES: 40%, NO: 51%, NOT SURE: 9%

Do you belong to an online social network e.g. Facebook, MySpace?

YES: 90% NO: 10%

Is your social network online stronger than your social network offline?

YES: 30%, NO: 70%

Do you consider drinking more than the recommended guidelines to be acceptable behavior?

YES: 56%, NO: 34%, NOT TELLING: 11%

Source: v Voicebox

Rachel

Rachel

Rachel graduated in summer 2008, just before the recession. She moved back in with her parents in Southend and applied for junior jobs in journalism. Nothing happened. She waitressed a bit. Then, around a year ago, a website she once interned at called Pink News phoned her up and offered her a couple of weeks work covering for the editor. It went well, and since then Rachel has haphazardly picked up bits of work here and there.

Rachel describes herself on her email signature as a 'freelance journalist'. She admits that this is a 'loosely applied term', describing her work experience as 'Local Government Chronicle, The Gay Times, G3, things on the internet, bits of editing, radio things, PR things.' It's hard to work out what she does for money and what's for love, but either way, living in Southend with her partner where rents are cheap—she reckons you can get by on 13 grand a year—gives her some flexibility and time to work out what she wants to do.

Her affection for Southend runs deep. Using 'stuff she learnt doing low-level PR' Rachel writes a WordPress blog called Councilbust where she investigates issues that she considers to be inadequately covered in local newspapers:

I kept reading my local paper and it kept pissing me off. Because it's 90 per cent advertising-driven and the rest of it is just like 'here's our MP kissing a puppy, or something. And I was like, well, there's got to be more to it than that.

She uses readily available tools on the internet like Hansard and Theyworkforyou to relay what local MPs are doing in parliament — she calls it 'using the different news that's out there to create different news here.'

But it's not the council she wants to hold to account — it's other journalists:

They might as well call the local paper 'Council Bust!' because that's what they do. They just blame everything on the local authorities. And it winds me up because people don't realise exactly what happens to their council tax and stuff. In order for your paper to be considered independent it has to say 'bad things about them' and I just don't think that people who would vote for our local councillors are that stupid. I think it's insulting, I don't think it's fair.

The reporting of supposed 'opposition' airport expansion is her current bugbear.

I started reporting the other side and the hits exploded. I'm like 'there you go — where did all these people come from? — that's why you need an independent news source!' They're easy to find … they set up their own social networking site which is cool so I was like — here's 500 people in one place that think it's a good idea so I can talk to all of them!' It's just all the stuff that the local journos haven't bothered to do…

Sabiha

Sabiha

Sabiha lives with her family in Bradford where she is at university studying Law. Having become wary of the compromises she believes she would have to make as a lawyer, she now wishes she had studied Criminal Justice or Politics — she sits at the back of those lectures when she can. Sabiha is an unconventional revolutionary. She believes that 'the current system' of multi-national corporations, media-conglomerates and supra-national bodies is best resisted through the creation of alternative 'sustainable structures' and an independently-minded grassroots movement. Her faith and her politics preach empowerment:

The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) said that 'Every man is a shepherd, and every shepherd is responsible for their flock'. We need leaders who create more leaders. Not leaders who we have to rely [on].

By opting neither to smash the system nor to assume control of its institutions, Sabiha is making life hard for herself. Every day she pieces together new ways to make a difference to issues that she cares about. She's involved in running a free shop in the university. She leads an anti-fascist group committed to stopping extreme right-wing protest groups from visiting Bradford. She's working on plans for a cooperative living space, supplied with food from a food co-op and powered by a gym where exercise bikes are hitched to generators. She's developing a school work-pack with a youth group she runs, that offers students a guide to their place to the world and how they can affect it.

In 2008 Sabiha was asked to a Government Advisory Council established to give young Muslims a voice in government policy.

When the Council was launched a DCLG press release mentioned that Sabiha was a member of the Socialist Workers Party. This was picked up by a popular blog and in turn by the Daily Mail who published an article with the headline, 'Teenage Trotsky is Cabinet's new adviser on radical Islam'. Sabiha laughs it off now, but feels less at ease with other websites she features on. These are run by extreme right-wing groups that publish photos, addresses and personal information gleaned from the internet on people who oppose them.

Sabiha is disillusioned with the Advisory Council. But she doesn't think that people should turn their back on democracy.

When people don't support democracy it's not because people don't support democracy — it's because it doesn't work like democracy.

Kit

Kit

Kit is a sabbatical officer at the University of Arts London Students' Union. He is currently standing for election as Vice President (Higher Education) in the National Union of Students (NUS) elections in April, and as a Conservative Councillor candidate for the London Borough of Barnet in the local elections of May 2010.

Kit's politics are practical rather than idealistic:

As a designer, my creative practice was always about improving things for people, problem solving, making stuff work better, and I think good politics should be about problem solving; it's about making the world a better place in the same way.

His politicisation came not from Karl Marx, Adam Smith or Naomi Klein but from his dissatisfaction with quality of teaching on his Art and Design course at Central Saint Martins where he volunteered as a course rep.

I had a feeling that the staff weren't there because they loved teaching. The amount of contact hours we had was bad.

He sees himself as 'an advocate', but doesn't see why he should need a huge amount of life-experiences to enter politics either:

The idea that somehow going and being an accountant for five years would qualify me better to represent the interests of a community—I find that a bit ludicrous.

And that seems fair enough; it's not like Kit has slipped from a back-room role in political PR into a safe Tory seat at the next election. Kit sits on countless boards, committees and representative groups and he's a governor of two secondary schools. He campaigns on internships.

You shouldn't be allowed to make a business plan that rests on exploiting unpaid labour … which is how lots of fashion houses and media companies are currently working.

He's willing to stand up for other people's rights, which stems from a readiness to stand up for his own. When he was freelancing to support his studies at Central Saint Martins he threatened to take a business to small claims court for unpaid wages.

You just have to go 'here's what it's my right to do if you don't respond to my invoice' — and they usually pay up.

Kit is a gifted communicator and he's willing to back it up by exposing himself to the kind of technologies that could make his words sound hollow. He has several hundred followers on Twitter:

I'm relaxed. I don't want to be an artificial persona. Yes, I go out to festivals. Yes, I enjoy a bit of 'responsible drinking' every now and then. But that's part of who I am. And that's representative of a part of the population. I don't drink more than an average person in the UK. I've got the same hobbies as a portion of the UK. I like being open. I keep all my photos on Facebook public. I don't have an issue with it. When I was running for election somebody left a comment saying 'you're a Nazi' on my discussion board. But I left it up, because if there was a valid justification for saying that I was effectively a fascist, I'd like that discussion to be open and I'd like to challenge that person.

Kelvin

Kelvin

Nothing is more frustrating when you labour to make dinner for somebody and they're like, 'yeah, that's enough'. I love food, I just constantly eat, eat, eat. Everybody hates me in the office for it because I keep bringing in food. I just love food.

Kelvin is a resourceful food-loving Canadian living in London. On completing his Masters at the LSE he took on internships at a large aid organisation and some smaller NGOs. The experience left him a bit cold.

I'm a doer. Enough talk, let's get on with it! I'm a very impatient individual. I see the issues of food poverty and food waste, and am angry and shocked that this is happening hand in hand. I want change, but I want results, now … not after a 500 page consultation.

FoodCycle is a social enterprise that 'empowers young volunteers' to set up their own youth organisations. The organisations collect food that would otherwise be wasted from local food retailers and take it to unused kitchens where it is cooked nutritiously and then served to local people.

We do stick to what we do. We do exactly what we say. We specialise in one thing, which is setting up these projects across the UK.

A simple idea that solves a series of of-the-moment social problems and appeals to young people spreads rapidly. Kelvin hasn't done any PR for FoodCycle:

If you have a good idea and you're doing something good, it's going to spread. We're already in Bristol, we're going to Oxford—people are looking for us—I don't know how the hell it's getting round, but it is.

Kelvin seems to have managed on a shoestring in London for the best part of the last three years. He's either been studying, working for free or working for a pittance. But he's taken it all in his stride. He's had a little help from his parents but has mostly got by tutoring and teaching spin classes—'You can get by pretty easily if you don't indulge in certain things. It's just rent and food and I have a bike'. His attitude to interning is positive but he stresses the importance of being assertive: 'Yes, you work for free, but the skills and opportunities that have come out of it have propelled me.' Kelvin thinks that the highly qualified and experienced graduates who are saturating charities, NGOs and voluntary organisations are evidence of a generation of people who are rethinking how they can best use their time on the earth in the face of massive global challenges—'If you're paid for your job, but hate it—why the hell are you doing it?'

He tries to make the experience for his interns as positive as possible.

My interns give us their time, I give them everything I can in return in terms of experience. They are a part of the team. They get the contacts and the knowhow — not just a few meaningless lines on your CV. My internship gave me the ability and confidence to start my own company. I want my interns to come out of FoodCycle being able to do whatever they want to do.

Rui

Rui

Rui is the eldest of seven brothers. He lives at the end of the Northern Line in Barnet, North London. He graduated last summer from Brunel with a degree in Business Management Studies. He's currently unemployed and has to make a weekly trip to the job centre to collect his JSA. For somebody who idolises motivational speakers, dreams of being an entrepreneur and is involved in several projects that involve raising the aspirations of young people in his local area, this is a bitter pill to swallow.

It hurts me to turn up once a week to get £50.
To be in the same line as people who just chill on the road. That hurts me.

But Rui is determined not to be crestfallen. He's just sorted himself out with two telephones — one for friends, another for business — and he's about to start a work experience placement at Barnet Homes. He's just registered with Toastmasters (an agency for motivational speakers) and has several ideas for companies he wants to start. He co-founded and volunteers for a youth empowerment organisation called Nutmeg where he organises debates and workshops. He goes to schools in his local area to talk about it — and he does it by talking about his life: 'The most effective way to get people to do something is to show them that you have done it too.' If ever he meets a celebrity he makes sure he gets a picture, 'so they'll be like, he's managed to meet this person, and he lives down the road from me — ha! So it can be done!'

Rui believes that stories can be powerful. That's why he started 'Grab Your Mic', a series of comedy workshops for young people in the Barnet area. But Rui isn't a comedian — he's serious about people finding their voice.

Comedy seemed like a good way to get people together and start learning their skills … [a] way of developing soft skills and self confidence … Your mic represents your dreams, your goals, your aspirations.

Rui thinks he could have done better at university and acknowledges that his involvement in various projects and the Entrepreneurs Society distracted him in the final year of his studies.

Throughout that year I learnt more than I have learnt in my whole life. But academically I performed worse than I have ever performed in my whole life.

He knows his grade is holding him back but he thinks that the society taught him to be 'more prepared to talk my way into things, get myself into certain situations.'

Last week he was asked to give a talk at the Barnet Homes AGM at the Council. The irony of having to be inspirational and motivational when you're on the dole isn't lost on him. But he's looking on the bright side.

I don't want to be someone who just talks — I want to have some substance behind me. I just need to get that job thing sorted out. But when it's done and it's sorted and I'm doing speeches about how I was doing motivational speeches without a job — that's going to be a good story to tell!

Part 2
Young people tomorrow

3 Adapting to climate change

In spite of recent controversies concerning the evidence, a scientific consensus on the existence of man-made climate change remains intact. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change asserts that unless carbon in the atmosphere can be stabilised below 450 parts per million by 2050 there is an unacceptable risk of triggering an irreversible, catastrophic escalation in global temperatures.[58]

There is an emerging set of targets for this stabilisation. In March 2008, The Climate Change Act introduced legally binding commitments in the UK to reduce carbon emissions by 80 per cent by 2050, and by at least 32 per cent by 2020.[59] At the COP15 Conference, governments debated how to create a binding international agreement on reductions in emissions.

People in the UK and throughout the developed world will have to adapt to less carbon-intensive ways of living. This will be a constant theme in the background of young people's lives as they start families, enter work and embark upon the most productive years of their life. They will be the first generation to know what it means to live without carbon.

Young people will learn to live with the government's response to climate change as much as they live with the reality of a changing climate. Like the generational menaces that haunted previous generations — nuclear annihilation, great floods, asteroids — climate change is a reminder of our vulnerability and a reason for people to reflect on how they want to live, work and the type of economy they want to be a part of. The mixture of pragmatic, spiritual and idealistic forces that will drive our adaptation to a low-carbon economy are emerging in four interconnected sites.

Government

The majority of government policy on climate change is currently directed upstream from citizens, focusing on how energy is generated, business is regulated and transport is managed. These measures currently have little direct impact on how people go about their daily lives apart from rare moments, such as the disappearance of incandescent light-bulbs in shops in 2009 after the ban on making them came into effect. In other countries the government's response to climate change is more tangible — in spite of little public support, France is currently introducing a system of carbon taxes that will be directed at households and businesses.[60]

Business

Conscious of consumers' environmental values, rising fuel costs and pending legislation, manufacturers, supermarkets and airlines are striving to make their businesses more carbon-efficient. Many are re-engineering supply chains and seeking to improve fuel and water efficiency. Danish shipping giant Maersk claims to have reduced emissions from its ships by 30 per cent over the last two years by halving their cruising speeds.[61] Consumers across all age levels are showing an increasing willingness to pay a premium for more green products.[62] In early 2010 Toyota, Mercedes, General Motors, Ford and Nissan all unveiled hybrid gas-electric and battery powered cars.[63]

Social innovation

There is a wave of social enterprises, charities and projects that are becoming a major force in de-carbonising the economy. The Carbon Disclosure Project voluntarily collects data on some of the largest corporations around world and coaxes them into reducing their emissions.[64] Julie's Bicycle does the same for the music industry.[65] Projects like Landshare aim to stop the waste of land that could be used for cultivation, FoodCycle aims to prevent food waste from supermarkets.[66] Social innovators are producing more tools and kitemarks to inform consumer choices like *GoodGuide* and Greenpeace's Guide to *Greener Electronics*.[67]

Campaigners and activists

Recent decades have seen an emergence of alternative lifestyle movements that advocate rapid changes to more sustainable, carbon-efficient ways of living. Transition Towns has become a wave of 150 grassroots movements to create greener communities in the UK.[68] Permaculture, a low impact form of gardening, has become popular with gardeners, designers and architects. In the same vein as The Otesha Project, We Are What We Do and Do The Green Thing, the 10:10 campaign is signing up people, schools and organisations to encourage them to cut their carbon footprint by 10 per cent in 2010.[69]

These four spheres of activity are making it easier to live a low-carbon lifestyle. The number of people who report doing environmentally-friendly things is increasing year on year,[70] while 61 per cent of people are aware that they can do more to fight global warming.[71] Seventy-six per cent of people report cutting gas and energy use.[72]

But the shift to a low-carbon economy currently sits at the fringes of people's everyday lives, many of which are carbon-intensive and will continue to be so for the immediate future. If Britain is to meet its legally-binding targets to reduce carbon emissions the carbon intensity of people's lives will need to be rapidly reduced. The government's Committee on Climate Change called for a step change in Carbon Emission reductions in October 2009 from reductions of an average of 0.5 per cent annually from 2003–2007 to 2 per cent now and then 3 per cent after 2012.[73] And, while national carbon emissions may be falling, personal carbon emissions are not. Researchers at the University of Surrey argue that personal carbon footprints, which tend to result in emissions in other countries, have grown by at least 8 per cent since 1990 despite reductions in aggregate national emissions.[74]

An economy where the environmental costs of lifestyles are costed into personal decisions via taxes or through a form of carbon rationing seems inevitable. Young people will either preemptively de-carbonise their lifestyles of their

own volition — or they will have to be nudged, coached and coerced into changing them by governments.

Youth attitudes

Young people's attitudes reflect widespread confusion about what a low-carbon economy is, how it will change them and how it will affect their daily lives. Although it varies according to personal conviction, taken as a whole young people do not appear to be more deeply concerned about climate change than their parents' generation.

They know it's important, but not what it means for them
The proportion of 16–24-year-olds who are concerned about what they can do to protect the environment and natural resources has grown by 60 per cent between 1986 and 2007.[75] Young people do believe in man-made climate change and accept that it will affect their lives. Seventy-nine per cent of 16–24s believe that climate change is a 'real issue' and that it is caused by 'our actions'.[76] Eighty-eight per cent of 16–24s think it will have an impact on their lives within the next 50 years.[77] But when it comes to the question of how people should adapt, this consensus breaks down.

A large proportion of young people, 75 per cent, believe that it's important to do 'something',[78] but it is unclear what that 'something' is. Only 10 per cent support making flying and driving more expensive. Young people seem to favour a combination of approaches to making this happen, with no obvious 'front-runner': 95 per cent support new technology, 94 per cent communities working together, 88 per cent personal lifestyle choices, 88 per cent government legislations, 71 per cent support individuals getting involved in politics to change things.[79] Some do not know how it will be achieved — 32 per cent report wanting to make a difference but not knowing how to.[80] A study carried out by the National Centre for Research Methods found that the most popularly cited reason for not taking action

on the climate is 'I don't want to change my lifestyle'. In any case, just 50 per cent believe their actions can make a real difference.[81]

A matter of personal conviction and morality

Although there may be other issues (for example, the economy, taxation) that poll as more important to young people as policy issues, data on youth attitudes show that the environment has become an issue on which people make moral judgments about other people, and that a number hold strong personal convictions about the importance of taking action. According to DEFRA 54 per cent of young people disagree with the statement 'it's not worth me doing things to help the environment if others don't do the same'.[82] Half have donated to an environmental charity.[83] For some, one's attitudes to the environment have even become a guide to their morality—nearly a quarter (24 per cent) are more likely to be friends with someone who cares about the environment and just over a fifth (21 per cent) say they would be more likely to go on a date with someone who cares about the environment.[84]

More affected but less concerned than their parents

Climate change does not appear to be an issue that 'belongs' to the younger generation. Only 17 per cent of young people regard climate change as one of the three most important issues facing the country, roughly the same as other age cohorts. If anything, they appear slightly less concerned or willing to change. Thirty-four per cent of young people disagree with the statement that 'I find it hard to change my habit to be more environmentally friendly', compared to 54 per cent of all adults.[85] Despite the emergence of groups like Plane Stupid, young people are less likely to think that 'people who fly should bear the cost of environmental damage'—45 per cent of older people and 35 per cent of young people think this.[86] Of all cohorts they are the least willing to pay more for an environmentally friendly product.[87] It is notable that they are marginally more likely to believe that governments have the greatest role to play in stopping climate change—46

per cent chose this over 'individuals', 'other nations' or 'companies.'[88]

Political implications

Adapting to climate change is impossible without a narrative of the future that outlines the role of government, the role of people and how their lives will need to change. The current government has made it clear in the Low Carbon Transition Plan of 2009 that there is a need to move to a low-carbon economy—but they have not articulated how it will change the lifestyles of people living in Britain over the next 35 years.[89] For a generation deeply ambivalent about making personal sacrifices, there are two issues on which politicians need to provide greater clarification.

Will less carbon mean less freedom?

The reasoned case for adaptation to a low-carbon economy is in danger of being lost in the battle between suspicious libertarians and environmental extremists. Recently publicised inconsistencies in the supporting evidence for man-made climate change have been seized upon on by the anti-authoritarian right, while the protests at the Copenhagen Climate Conference showed how 'low-carbon' has come to be conflated with 'anti-capitalism'. This debate is predicated on concerns about freedom. There is a strand of the environmental movement which implicitly believes climate change will mean constraining consumerism—while reactionaries at the other end of the spectrum suspect that climate change is being used as a Trojan horse to limit their liberty. Both focus on the idea that adapting to climate change will mean sacrifice, denial and less of everything.

This breeds uncertainty and creates suspicion about government intervention to mitigate the effects of climate change. Young people are clearly confused and governments lack the legitimacy to act. This is particularly damaging because it is governments who will need to do the heavy

lifting: subsidising building insulation; offering incentives to make vehicles electric; less carbon-intensive industry and agriculture; and offering international aid to countries hit by climate change.

Young people deserve a realistic assessment of how the low-carbon economy could affect their freedom and why those sacrifices are worth making.

Is technology the answer, or isn't it?

From the launch of Apple's iPad to the switching on of the Hadron Collider, the pace of technological innovation holds people across the world enrapt. Yet this ambitious narrative is nowhere to be found in the rhetoric surrounding the government's technology-based solutions to climate change.

The infrastructure and innovations required to avert climate change will be immense. The Carbon Trust describes the wind farm planned for the North Sea as an infrastructure project equivalent to building a Channel Tunnel every year.[90] Setting aside the sheer scale of infrastructure needed for a low-carbon economy, these innovations will make life palpably better beyond a contribution to a distant carbon target — they mean less dirt in the air, fewer smells and less noise. They are part of what the Italian artist and educationalist Michelangelo Pistoletto calls 'The Third Paradise' — the unification of technology with nature so that both can exist in harmony. This is not simply a disaster management strategy.

Young people's attitudes show an appetite for a world shaped and improved by technology. It is important that this forms part of the political story on climate change. Boris Johnson recently wrote that the two qualities needed to tackle climate change will be 'imagination and optimism'. There is a clear opportunity for young people to live better, more sustainable and equitable lives, and politics cannot neglect its responsibility to explain to young people the case for future investment.

Moving to low-carbon lifestyles

Peter Madden is Chief Executive of Forum for the Future.

In order to tackle climate change, we will have to decarbonise our entire economy over next 40 years. That means low-carbon lifestyles will be the norm. For the world's billion teenagers, reconciling their hopes and desires with the reality of environmental limits will be one of the defining challenges of their lives. As politics, society and attitudes transform in response to climate change, or as the climate system that we depend on transforms, carrying on as usual is not an option. But are young people ready for the changes?

A survey undertaken by Forum for the Future into the attitudes of young people painted a picture of a generation that is intensely aware of the big challenges facing the planet and eager to see broader social and political change, but which is less willing to adapt individual personal behaviour.[91] The survey results did, however, begin to highlight ways through this paradox. Respondents would like to see tougher action by government, business playing a positive role, and less of an obsession with material affluence.

Young people were convinced, in the main, that lifestyles will have to change significantly if we are to survive, with only 17 per cent seeing us set to continue on a similar path and nearly a quarter believing we will have to change radically. A startling 86 per cent believe that material consumption needs to decrease. Yet at the same time, despite their recognition that climate change was a major issue, most did not intend to curb their personal flying.

This paradox is at the heart of behaviour change for sustainability. People tend to be green in the abstract but anti-green in the particular. So, most will profess to care about the planet or to want to tackle climate change. But when it comes to paying slightly more, changing behaviour or curtailing individual freedom this concern evaporates. This generation, quite literally, wants to have it all.

It is understandable that young people are often confused and distrustful about sustainability issues. They are confused because there is too much bickering about the exact solution. They are distrustful because they wonder 'if things are as bad as everyone says, why are people in power not doing anything to change them?' They also make it clear that they do not want the green agenda to be one that is entirely about punishment and telling-off.

If we are to get the next generation on board, and unleash the wave of change we need, we have to think about how we frame the issues. We need stories of the future, to make sense of where we are going. This is true of us as individuals, as companies and as whole countries. These collective stories are important. If you are setting out on a journey, it helps to have an idea of where you want to end up, and what might lie along the way.

Yet think about the story of the future you get from most environmentalists. What is that story? The narrative is overwhelmingly pessimistic—a story of apocalypse, disasters, doom and gloom. Most normal people find this very unattractive. It turns them off. They disengage and stop listening. We can be pretty sure that a whole generation of young people will not opt wholesale for a programme of social change in which they think they are going to be worse off.

So, we have a real conundrum here: we need some negativity and fear to raise awareness of some quite frightening prospects. But too much becomes counter-productive. We need to find a better balance between fear and inspiration. Martin Luther King didn't stand up and declare: 'I have a nightmare'.

As well as the challenges, we also need to highlight the opportunities. We have to show how we can make our lives more secure, more enjoyable and more prosperous, how our businesses can be more successful by doing things differently. We need more positive visions of what a sustainable future could be like; and we need young people to be part of framing those.

If we get the transition right, low-carbon lifestyles

could lead to a cleaner, more pleasant local environment. A reduction in the amount of traffic, especially cars, will lead to less pollution on our streets. Vehicles themselves will be less polluting, with electric cars being emission-free and hydrogen-fuelled vehicles emitting water vapour.

Low-carbon lifestyles could lead to stronger communities. With more intelligent high-density housing, local communities will be able to support more amenities. This means more activity, more bustle and more vibrancy for local areas. Even though energy prices per unit might go up in future, we could save money by using less energy, through insulating our homes, using top-rated appliances and installing smart systems to ensure homes are run as efficiently as possible.

People will be moving about in a range of smaller electric vehicles — souped-up bikes, covered scooters, pod-cars and so on — which better suit personal needs, the purpose of the journey and local circumstances and fuels. People won't own these vehicles, they'll rent them on demand — stroll up to the nearest rack, swipe a card to grab a vehicle, then drop it off near the destination.

People will swap between different modes of transport more, perhaps taking an electric bike to the station, then a train, then a personal rapid transit pod at the other end. It'll be easier and more attractive to cycle or walk short journeys, and in many cases we simply won't need to travel if we don't want to. There will be more options for working at home or in our local communities, or socialising electronically.

We'll still occasionally fly on holiday or business, but there will be more and more enticing alternatives, from better holidays in the UK and telepresencing for meetings, to international travel by high-speed train, ocean liner or even a new generation of airships.

Low-carbon lifestyles could be healthier lifestyles. With less polluting traffic on the roads, it will be easier, safer and more pleasant to walk or cycle short distances. People could be more active in general, with less sedentary consumerism

and more doing things for ourselves, such as gardening and urban farming.

A low-carbon UK economy could be a thriving economy. New, highly lucrative industries will appear and there will be enormous opportunities for businesses and entrepreneurs in the UK to innovate new products and services that support low-carbon lifestyles.

We have a choice: we can sit back and see what happens or we can proactively create the kind of future we want. Today's young people truly have the hand of history on their shoulders: they are the first generation to face seemingly intractable global environmental problems right at the beginning of their careers, and the last generation with a chance to solve them in a positive way.

4   Living and caring in fluid families

As Britain has become more diverse, so too have its families. Families have altered considerably during the lifetime of British 16–25-year-olds. Growing up, they were less likely to have been part of a nuclear family than previous generations, and their families were also likely to be smaller. Their transitions out of the family have also been delayed: in 2006, 58 per cent of men and 39 per cent of women aged 20–24 were still living in the family home, compared to 50 per cent and 32 per cent in 1991.[92]

The family has always been an important source of care, but as the population ages the demands on it seem certain to escalate. So, despite uncertain times for the nuclear unit, families (whatever shape they take) look set to become an even more important source of support in the future.

New family forms, with fewer formal ties

The move towards smaller families is primarily due to two trends at play since the mid-1960s: that of fewer women having large families and an increase in the number of women remaining childless. Growing up in smaller families means that the wider family network — cousins, aunts and uncles — will have been less a feature of family life for today's young person than in past generations. This trend, in combination with the ageing population, means it is now commonplace to speak of families becoming less horizontal and more vertical. It was estimated that 73 per cent of people may now belong to three, four or even five generation families.[93]

As the family has changed, 'partnership' is now less likely to mean marriage to young people. The proportion of

children born outside marriage increased from under 10 per cent in 1971 to 45 per cent in 2008 in England and Wales.[94] In 1961, the mean age to marry in England and Wales was 25 for young men and 23 for young women. In 2007, however, the average had increased substantially to 32 years old for men and 30 for women[95]. First marriages have dropped by almost 10 per cent between 1976 and 2006.[96] Young adults aged 20–24 have particularly high cohabitation rates, with nearly one in three young women in this age group living with a partner and nearly one in five young men.[97] It is estimated that by 2031 there will be 3.8 million cohabiting couples in the UK.[98]

Despite the rise of cohabitation, for many people in the UK marriage continues to represent an aspirational form of partnership. A considerable portion of the British population—59 per cent—agree that 'even though it might not work out for some people, marriage is still the best kind of relationship', while only 9 per cent agree that 'there is no point getting married—it's only a piece of paper'.[99] And of course, cohabitation and marriage are not mutually exclusive; 73 per cent of cohabiting people aged under 35 expect to marry each other.[100]

The family as a source of care

The delicate balance—both in the home and across the welfare state—between dependent members of society and active earners or care-givers is becoming skewed. The combination of the declining birth rate over past decades and the fact that people are living longer means that while in 2006 there were 3.3 people of working age for every person of state pension age, this ratio is expected to fall to 2.9 by 2031.[101]

This trend means that the age profile of the family will become older and grandparents will play a more central role in family life. They have already become a much relied upon source of support—one in three families depend on grandparents for childcare[102] and the value of grandparental childcare has been estimated to be some £3.9 billion.[103]

In any one year over 301,000 adults in the UK become carers, equivalent to a 6.6 per cent chance of any one of us becoming a carer.[104] The economic value of the contribution

made by carers in the UK is estimated to be £87 billion per year.[105] In the years ahead a growing number of family members will have to assume this role in order to meet the gap in social care provision for the elderly. Carers UK has estimated that by 2037, the number of carers is set to increase by around 60 per cent or an extra 3.4 million carers.[106]

The ascent of new family values

These shifts within families have been accompanied by a widespread liberalisation in attitudes to different family forms. These 'new family values' have revolutionised the British perspective on pre-marital sex, marriage, divorce and homosexuality. It is this shift, which has taken place to some extent across all age groups in society, that will have played the biggest role in informing the attitudes of young people to their own family lives.

Between 1984 and 2000, the proportion of people thinking there is 'nothing wrong' with pre-marital sex increased from 42 per cent to 62 per cent, while the proportion thinking it is always wrong decreased from 17 per cent to 9 per cent.[107] In 2000 two-thirds of people thought that living in cohabitation was perfectly acceptable, over half of whom thought it was a good idea for those intending to get married. Fewer adults now agree with the statement: 'People who want children ought to get married'—the agreement rate fell from 70 per cent in 1989 to 54 per cent in 2000.[108]

In tandem with an increase in the visibility of same sex families and the legislation to give more rights to gay couples, the UK has seen a rise in more accepting attitudes towards homosexuality. Fifty-eight per cent of people agree that 'civil partners should have the same rights as married couples' while only one in five (27 per cent) disagree.[109] However, it is notable that over a third (36 per cent) of people still think that sexual relations between two adults of the same sex are 'always' or 'mostly' wrong.[110]

For some commentators this step change in attitudes represents the demise of 'family values', paving the way for an amoral attitude to personal behaviour. This reading is

challenged by the fact that the liberalisation described above does not extend to all issues. One such example is extra-marital sex. The British Social Attitudes Survey has been asking two questions since 1984, which show a distinct increase in tolerance or acceptance of premarital sex over time, but a practically unchanged level of disapproval of extramarital sex, which has remained high throughout.[111]

Youth attitudes

As families stretch out, with more dependent members than before, young people will have to 'do more with less' as carers and parents. Fortunately, it seems that as a generation they value good relationships with family members and recognise the importance of caring for the elderly.

Optimistic about family life

Given that many young adults are staying in the family home for longer, being able to sustain positive relationships within families will be key to their happiness. According to **v**'s Voicebox survey three-quarters of young people are happy with the relationship that they have with their family and only 17 per cent are not. There were some interesting ethnic differences: Black respondents were less happy, with 60 per cent saying they were happy with their relationship with their family, compared to 77 per cent of White and 76 per cent of Asian young people.

Other surveys seem to reflect a similar degree of optimism about family life. In one Prince's Trust poll, 79 per cent of young people were very, mostly or fairly happy with their relationship with their families and 82 per cent were confident about their future relationship with family. Fifty-six per cent said their relationship with their family was the most important factor in their overall happiness.[112]

A more liberal generation?

The Voicebox survey conducted by **v** also suggests that young people demonstrate particularly relaxed attitudes on pre-marital sex, even during the teenage years—41 per cent thought that having sex before 16 was normal, representing 46 per cent of males compared to 35 per cent of females. It seems that these liberal values even extend to teenage parenthood—only 61 per cent thought it was 'irresponsible' to be a teenage mother, and nearly half (46 per cent) of NEETS thought it was not irresponsible.

Differences in attitudes to family life can still be seen at the more extreme ends of the age spectrum. While 85 per cent of people aged 65 or above think that marriage and parenthood should go hand in hand, this contrasts with just over a third of 18–24-year-olds who agree.[113]

While young people are not entering into marriage as enthusiastically as their parents and grandparents, it seems they do still aspire to the security associated with the institution—a survey from several years ago found that 89 per cent said they would like to get married at some stage.[114] The survey below, although it deals with a slightly older age group, indicates that there is very little difference in terms of attitudes towards married couples being given tax breaks, but there is a contrast when it comes to whether single parents should receive additional government support. See table 1.

Table 1 **Attitudes on tax breaks for married couples and single parents**

Married couples should be given breaks to reward and encourage commitment	Agree	Disagree
All voters	51%	45%
18–34 years	49%	41%

Single parents should get more help from the government than married parents	Agree	Disagree
All voters	34%	61%
18–34 years	51%	45%

Source: Populus/The Daily Politics, 'Marriage'[113]

This reflects a recent MORI publication which reported that there is an age (and class) divide on government support for families, with working class and older people less likely and middle class and younger generations more likely to think that those with children need strong government support.[116]

How much does the next generation of carers care?
It is perhaps surprising that, as their generation will need to become a major source of care, we know very little about young people's attitudes towards providing it in their own families or paying for it as a society. Voicebox asked young people whether they 'respected their elders', and 78 per cent said they did. They also asked whether 'we cared enough for the elderly'. Nearly two-thirds (64 per cent) thought we did not and only 33 per cent thought that we did. Interestingly, satisfaction with the care we give to the elderly decreases with age, with only 26 per cent of 22–25-year-olds believing that we care enough for the elderly.

Connected to the emotive question of caring for the elderly is the even more divisive issue of euthanasia, which is now surfacing regularly in the media. It seems inevitable that in the next decade the government will be forced to resolve the confused legal position on the question. The evidence on public attitudes suggests a more liberal approach — 82 per cent of the general public believe that a doctor should probably or definitely be allowed to end the life of a patient with a painful incurable disease at the patient's request.[117] So it is instructive that the Voicebox survey found that 64 per cent of young people share the view that euthanasia is acceptable while only 14 per cent oppose it outright.

Political implications

The trends at work in the private sphere of the family echo broader social trends: mounting pressure on young people and the growing needs of the next generation of pensioners. But the challenges confronting British families also reaffirm the interdependence of generations. The flow of care and assets will certainly not be one-way.

In 2010 family is the subject of intense political interest. Fierce debates about how to pay for social care and whether it is the government's place to support the institution of marriage are raging in the media. But even before the family became so central to electioneering, the past decade had seen a remarkable level of investment in policy on parenting, couple relationships and children's outcomes. There is now a cross-party consensus that this, the most private sphere of our lives, is now a legitimate subject for governmental activity and even scrutiny.

But the political discourse on the family often lets young people down. This is exemplified by inertia and division on one of the most long-term policy challenges of our age — the care deficit. All too often there is a gulf between the complicated, diverse families young people have grown up in and the political rhetoric about straightforward nuclear families. The perspective of young people is rarely centre-stage on these

issues. Given the change to the shape of families which has taken place and the pressures ahead, it is likely that family *functioning* will become more significant for young people than family *form*. So how can politicians help young people to navigate these changes to family life?

What are the fair decisions on care?

The ageing population is likely to lead to greater pressures within the family, and also on the state. A greater tax burden for the current generation of 16–25-year-olds seems likely as public spending on health increases in the future. The Treasury's 'Long term public finance report' predicts significant rises in health spending (from 6.9 to 9.5 per cent of GDP between 2003/04 and 2053/4).[118] The social care system is already struggling to meet the needs of those who currently require support and is ill-prepared for the wave of ageing baby boomers.

In July 2009, the government published the Green Paper, 'Shaping the future of care together', spelling out its vision for a National Care Service and the options for how it could be organised and paid for. The consultation ended on 13 November 2009. Since then, there have been a number of alarmist political scuffles about a possible 'death tax' on elderly people's homes to pay for care.[119] This emotive issue is sure to be a vote winner among elderly voters, but both political parties have a duty to make such decisions in a manner that does not place a disproportionate burden on the next generation, who will also need to fund a long period of old age.

Nevertheless, the attitudinal data outlined above would suggest that young people think it is right that older people are cared for properly, and given the value they place on their family relationships, the least helpful approach is to position their needs in opposition with those of older generations.

Flexible working as standard?

Most families now rely on having two earners and the pressures young people will confront in bringing up their own children were already experienced by many of their parents. Recent policy activity in this area has sought to introduce more flexibility in the workplace. Legislation introduced in 2003 allowed parents with children under the age of six, or with disabled children up to the age of 18, to request flexible working from employers, who were obliged to 'seriously consider' any application. This right was extended in 2006 to people caring for an adult partner or relative and in April 2009 to all parents with children aged 16 and under.

These represent great strides forward in government moves to support families, but for the next generation of parents and carers far more flexibility will be necessary. An inquiry into inter-generational fairness in employment policy concluded that the government should legislate to extend the right to request flexible working to all employees.[120] This step will be a crucial support to the next generation of families seeking to meet a range of complex needs over their lifecycles.

Care in twenty-first century families

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In survey after survey young people tell us how much they love their families and how important to their happiness their families are. The older generation will need to be able to draw on this love if they are to receive the care they require in later life.

To read the headlines you might believe that solving the care equation was just a question of money: that the conundrum to be solved is how to get young people to pay more taxes so that society will be able to afford to care for its growing elderly population. Of course money is going to be important. But there will never be enough money for the state to pay for all older people's needs. Nor will this generation, many of whom do not even have adequate pensions, succeed in saving enough to pay for their own care in its entirety.

A large part of that care is always going to have to be met by members of the family. The challenge is then how we can ensure that the younger generation (and particularly younger women) are able to give their time without paying too high a financial price. We are going to have to re-think how we value care, and also look at how we create stability for young people in the job market and in housing, as well as flexibility, so that young people have a firm base from which to care.

Caring for elderly relatives already ranks in our polls as the issue besides employment that families are most worried about. It is hardly surprising. Modern family life is complex — the idea that frail and elderly parents, aunts or uncles may need time, money and decisions made about their future just adds to that complexity.

It would be wrong to say that families were ever simple. But there was a time when roles were more defined. The model of stable, lifelong relationships with clearly defined gender roles has been replaced by multiple relationships over people's lifetimes with men and women playing different and more fluid

roles. They may get married, have children, get divorced, live with someone else, look after step-children, or have a second round of children with a new partner.

This all means that the wider family and friends becomes more important again. It is true that we are not living in families where there are myriad brothers and sisters. And yet paradoxically as the nuclear family becomes rarer we cannot deny the role that wider kinship networks of friends and relatives will need to play.

Younger people are also going to be relating to a very different generation of pensioners, a baby boom generation of individualists who are going to be more technically savvy, who expect personalised services and will want to be in control of their own care budget, at least until they are mentally incapable of doing so.

The older generation may have a large network of friends and possibly current and ex-partners, but as they reach pension age, many won't have the large bank balances of their parents. They are likely to work into their late sixties and seventies. They may live longer and frailer lives. At the same time, there are likely to be fewer young people to do the caring. The problem is not so acute in the UK as in other European countries because of the impact of greater immigration, but as second and third generation immigrants start having fewer children, that positive effect will diminish.

And young people have not been used to doing the caring. The expectation that young people work to supplement the income of their parents and siblings has today been replaced by a generation of young people who are much more likely to rely on the financial help of their parents well into adulthood.

Solutions to providing care for older people in these new and diverse family forms requires that we solve the problems in the here and now. The solutions may lie, first and foremost, in ensuring that young people can access secure employment and housing, so that they have a base from which to work and care. But we also need to make the workplace more flexible

for all so that younger people, men and women, can care for their children, and also have time to care for older relatives. We will have to look at how movements from work into caring and back again can be made possible and how benefits can be personalised for carers as well as those that are cared for.

When they look to their own old age, the middle-aged generation now running the country need to consider putting in place measures that help young people balance work and care today. It is crucial that we enable the younger generation to secure their own financial and family futures. If not, they may end up being unable to afford to pay for care and discovering that the younger generation is reluctant, or unable, to help out.

5 Owning a digital identity

The digital age is built on a culture of sharing transferable, tangible information, from which there is no opting out. Using the internet is virtually inseparable from everyday requirements to work, shop, socialise, create, learn and access government services. Executing these tasks online means completing transactions, conversations and explorations that are imprinted in email trails, social networking profiles and the databases of internet service providers and governments. This personal information makes up a 'digital identity'—information that, when pieced together, can tell other people about you. Although web users may try to 'own' and manage these identities in social networking profiles, information about us is scattered across the whole digital environment. By their nature, digital identities are out of our control.

Young people are particularly affected.[121] The 16–25-year-olds we profiled for this research interchangeably equated Facebook to 'crack', 'society' and 'conformity'; illustrating the conflicting emotions young people have about a digital environment in which their lives are inextricably bound up. They are the generation whose identities are the most embroiled in the web. At this point in their lives, they are predominantly occupied with socialising and learning, the two activities the web is best at servicing. They are also the age group most absorbed with their personal identity and their status within a scene or social sphere. Today, 90 per cent of 16–25-year-olds use social networking sites.[122] The Oxford Internet Survey estimates that this compares to 49 per cent of all internet users of all ages.[123]

The new digital landscape

The information internet users share about themselves falls into two categories. Firstly, there is information people knowingly share about themselves, primarily through social networking. Secondly, there is information they unknowingly share about themselves, which is collected by third parties. Currently, people have very different levels of awareness about what the implications of sharing such information are today or could be in the future. This is leading to considerable unease over whether the digital age empowers people to create, express and expand their own identities, or whether it limits, constrains and ultimately robs us of our sense of our self.[124]

There are several ways in which our personal information can enter and remain imprinted on the digital landscape. Information shared with others can be deliberately or accidently shared with second or third parties. Meanwhile, Web 2.0 applications expand and exacerbate the possible connections between people and lengthen the echoes of past relationships and selves. One Swedish company now offers a service to clean the web of personal information shared on social networking platforms of people who have died. Smartphones blur the line between online and offline worlds—creating new maps and geographies of towns, cities and public spaces. Google recently announced a new product, 'Google goggles', which enables people to identify where they are by taking a photo of their location.

This digital environment has altered how we conceive of public and private, as Miyase Christensen, Associate Professor of Media and Communication Studies at Karlstad University, puts it: 'in a heavily mediated environment what is private and what is public and what is publicly permissible (on the basis of consent) are elusive and contested concepts.'[125]

Youth attitudes

Young internet users, sometimes referred to as 'digital natives', are working out how to shape their identities online without obvious guidelines or templates. They may use the web more than other age groups and in ways older people find perplexing, but youth attitudes show that deciding what to share is not simple. They still perceive a boundary between the 'online' and the 'real' world, and their concerns about privacy are not dissimilar to those held by older generations.

Thinking about privacy

Recurring headlines about cyber-bullying, sexting, happy-slapping, identity theft, file-sharing prosecutions and exposure to viruses and worms do not capture the full range of risks of sharing information. Most young people have a personal story about being caught out by a text message, a forwarded email or their web-browser history. Attitudinal data confirms that privacy will be something that young people have to constantly think about and evaluate in ways that previous generations simply did not have to.

Some 85 per cent of 16–24-year-olds report being more aware of the value of their personal information than they used to be[126] while 42 per cent claim to know someone who has been embarrassed by information uploaded on the internet without their consent.[127] No doubt for good reason, 36 per cent have taken information off social networking sites.[128] While 55 per cent remember before posting information that it might later be used by third parties without their consent,[129] worryingly 60 per cent of 14–21-year-olds have never considered the potential future effects of posting personal details about themselves online.[130]

Digital natives or digital visitors?

Youth attitudes reflect a sense that they depend on the web and digital technologies but that this is still a separate environment that they move in and out of, rather than one that is 'seamlessly meshed' with the real world. Fifty-four per cent of students think that they spend too much time online.[131] One in four

report being addicted to their mobile phones.[132] This may stem from a sense that there is something 'unreal' or unproductive in mediated relationships; 73 per cent expect more support from friends in 'real life' than online and 70 per cent believe their 'offline network' is stronger than their online network.[133] For those young people who opt out of using social networking sites the most popular reason is that they would 'prefer to meet [their friends] face to face'.[134]

Different behaviour, similar concerns

Despite embracing social media, there is little to suggest that younger generations have a significantly different attitude to their privacy and personal information than older generations. A YouGov poll found that 19–24-year-olds cited 'privacy' and 'avoiding harm or offence' as the top two considerations in how a social networking service is run—identical priorities were expressed by all other age cohorts. However, there are some subtle differences. The same survey also showed that young people are nonetheless marginally more concerned about freedom of speech than older groups and marginally less concerned about privacy.[135] This slight difference corresponds to the levels of trust young and old groups show towards their mobile phone companies —21 per cent of 18–24-year-olds trust mobile phone companies with their data compared with just 5 per cent of those over 55.[136]

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Political implications

The extent to which the digital society can grow social innovation and creativity will depend on a generation of young people willing to share information. However, it is unclear as to how government policy supports this. Proposed policies which involve the threat of cutting off broadband access for file-sharing encourage the perception that governments are penalising young people for doing what the web encourages them to do — sharing and exchanging content.[137] Meanwhile they have yet to provide an adequate response that can help young people mitigate some of the risks of owning a digital identity. Under pressure from the creative industries, governments are propping up a faltering paradigm while young people are left to fend for themselves in a new one. It is through young people's sense of injustice on this issue that The Pirate Party has become the third biggest political party in Sweden.[138] There is an imperative for policy makers to connect with young people in the UK on these issues.

Do I have digital rights?

Despite massive public investment in the switchover to Digital Britain, there has been little attempt to assert the rights of the individual in this new environment or to tackle thorny international questions of privacy, data protection and access to technology. Gordon Brown's 2009 TED talk outlined a vision of a digital age that could engender a 'shared global ethic' for a 'global society', and was an important start in devising this political narrative for the long term.[139] But this speech does not match up with other government behaviour on this issue: in 2009 the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust concluded that a quarter of government databases were illegal and should be immediately scrapped.[140] The time is right for politicians to articulate the rights of the individual online and across the digital environment.

Digital identity

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Who am I? This is a question that we all ask ourselves at varying points in our lifetime. Self-reflexivity is often common at key transitions, as we are forced to think about where we've come from and where we're going. Teenage-dom is a canonical transition point as teenagers begin to question who they are and how they fit into society writ large. Social media has added a new twist to this process by forcing teenagers to question themselves in order to simply be present. This creates new challenges and new risks.

We take our bodies for granted. When we walk into a room, it's there with us, making a statement about who we are. Aspects of our identity are written on the body; who we are biologically shapes how others read our race, gender and age. Yet, there's so much more to who we are. Often, we use clothing and mannerisms to express salient aspects of who we are, aligning ourselves with social communities and value systems.

By default, online, we are nothing more than a series of bytes. In order to exist in any meaningful way, we must write ourselves into being. We must tell others who we are so that they can see us, so that they can interpret the signals that we give as well as those we accidentally give off. This requires us to question who we are.

Creating a profile requires self-reflection. Most of us want to put our best foot forward, to be received as the person we wish to be. At the same time, people who see us know us, know that we're not always happy even if our profile picture signals that we are. Still, what we choose to put up online is a reflection of our identity, or at least of our idealised self.

Today's teenagers are growing up in a world where self-reflection and online identity creation are intertwined. Teenagers are working out how to present themselves online

at the same time as they are trying to make sense of who they are and how they fit into their peer groups and society more generally. What they experience online is part of their everyday lives, connected deeply with what they are doing offline. They are learning about themselves while they are trying to showcase who they are.

The process teenagers are going through is not new, but technology is inflecting it in new ways. For example, social network sites force teenagers to think about their relationships with others in order to publicly articulate their 'friends' on these systems. As any teenager knows, choosing who to include and who to exclude is extremely fraught and the source of tremendous drama. Even if we had to choose who to invite to our birthday party, most adults did not experience such public formalisations of social interactions while friendships were still forming.

Most adults approach social media with a set of expectations they developed through experiences with unmediated sociality. Most teenagers approach social media in the same way that they approach any other public social situation—with curiosity and uncertainty. There are no rules about what's best; teenagers are developing them for us as they work through the social pitfalls presented because of the technology.

The mediated environments which youth inhabit are also a new type of public. Young people have always had to learn how to navigate public life as part of the process of coming of age, but networked publics have affordances that are fundamentally different than those present in unmediated environments. The content that teenagers produce through social media is often persistent, searchable and replicable. Even though most content is accessed by few, the potential audience of teenagers' content is of a grossly different scale than what most young people in previous generations ever faced. Teenagers must also learn to navigate invisible audiences, manage the collapse of social contexts and handle the blurring of what is public and what is private. All of these

issues have emerged in the past, but were primarily only experienced by public figures, celebrities and journalists. Today, teenagers must face these dynamics as part and parcel of participating in public life.

Many adults fear the public nature of these environments, raising concerns about dangerous people and the potential costs of lost privacy. The fears adults have are an extension of age-old fears about teenagers and public space, projected into a new environment. While it is unclear that the online environments magnify bodily risks, there is little doubt that the degree of publicness teenagers experience today is greater than ever before. This is both a blessing and a curse.

Privacy is not dead among teenagers, but it is being realigned. Historically, young people had to go out of their way to make something public; spreading rumours widely was possible but not always easy. Today, sharing publicly is often the default. Instead of thinking about what to make public, today's teenagers think about what to make private. And their ethos of 'public by default, private when necessary' is often upsetting to adults. Yet, their logic makes sense, given what they can gain from being public. At a local level, teenagers are concerned about being seen by their peers; social media enables them to be digital *flâneurs*, strolling the digital street to see and be seen. At a larger level, teenagers who want to contribute to public discourse — through their political speech or creative works — can engage with a broader audience and, perhaps, be recognised by people they respect.

Of course, there is a dark side to this. Some forms of publicity can come at a cost, either among their peer group or more generally. Racist epitaphs and drunken misdeeds may not be valued by all who see them. And not all social interactions that take place in public are cordial. The presence of online bullying is a key example of where interactions can go awry. Yet the visibility of such content also introduces new opportunities for intervention. The presence of hate speech creates an opportunity for education. Parents are often unaware of when their children are being bullied; the internet

makes this more visible, creating a situation where parents can know what's going on and develop strategies with their children. As for records of foolishness… well, each generation has its skeletons.

Social technologies are reshaping social and public life and today's teenagers are experiencing this as a core part of growing up, but it's the adults who are most destabilised by these new technologies. For teenagers, this is just the way it is. Not surprisingly, they approach social media with the same goals that teenagers have always had and use the tools to do the same things that teenagers have always done — socialise, joke around, flirt, gossip, share information, collaborate and just simply hang out. As adults, it's easy to be afraid of the technology because it's what has changed, but all the technology is doing is mirroring and magnifying what has always been. If we don't like what we see, it's best to focus on the root causes rather than blame the messenger.

Consider, for example, the constant complaint about how teenagers are 'addicted' to the internet. If anything, teenagers are 'addicted' to their friends. They want to hang out and socialise and they prefer face-to-face interactions, provided that adults aren't hovering. But we've systematically taken away unstructured opportunities for them to engage with peers in public places. Between the culture of fear, limitations on geographic mobility and the increase of structured activities, teenagers have very little time to just hang out. They are using the internet to replace what has been taken away. Perhaps we need to ask ourselves why we are so afraid of teen sociality.

We dismiss social interactions as meaningless and a waste of time and yet, it is through sociality that teenagers learn who they are, how to interact with others, and how to navigate social hierarchies. These skills are absolutely essential to the workforce; few of us have professional jobs that don't require collaboration, communication and managing professional politics.

As we think about the role of social media in teenagers' lives, the biggest challenge we face is not what teenagers are

doing there but the inequalities that emerge surrounding these technologies. The 'digital divide' may be fading, but a new 'participation gap' is emerging. Not all teenagers have the same opportunities to engage, both because of their own social positions and because of the dynamics in their community. Social divisions are being reproduced in digital environments, reinforcing historical divisions. As we look to what young people are doing, we must also account for who is absent, invisible or not being heard.

Today's teenagers are teaching us about how technology is reconfiguring public life, highlighting both pitfalls and opportunities. We should watch and learn.

6   **Belonging to changing communities**

The term community is now used as much to identify groups of people who share a behaviour, ethnic background, a belief or a lifestyle as it is used to describe a group of people who share the same location. We speak of the online community, the gay community, the black community, the local community, the YouTube community. The broader application of the term tells us a good deal about how British society has changed during young people's lifetimes — there are simply more ways to identify ourselves and more ways to belong to groups than there were 50 years ago. As one young interviewee put it:

Everyone keeps on going about community at the moment — that's the big word at the moment… It doesn't have to be about location — it can be about lifestyle: it doesn't have to be about where you live, it can be about what you like.[141]

A series of factors underpin this shift. Firstly, the scope for belonging to communities that you choose, rather than communities that choose you, has been broadened by consumerism, increasing levels of education, personal mobility and greater visibility for minority groups. Secondly, the rise in immigration in past decades has expanded the number of cultural connections and affiliations of people living in the UK. Thirdly, mobile phones, email and social networking sites make it easier for people to sustain their networks within existing communities and extend them to new ones. These digital networks make it markedly easier for people to connect with others with whom they share a common interest or cause.

The proliferation of such 'chosen' communities has fuelled a collective anxiety that there are fewer fixed local communities for people to rely on. This is reflected by surveys

demonstrating the declining levels of trust between British people—in the 1950s surveys reported that two-thirds of people trusted one another but by the late 1990s this had fallen to 29 per cent.[142] Public spaces have become the source of greater fear and even paranoia; some claim there has been a 'retreat' of shared spaces in our cities and towns. According to The National Trust 87 per cent of parents wish their children spent more time playing outside and 79 per cent of children agree—but 25 per cent of parents are too worried about their children's safety to let them.[143]

In recent decades British cities and public spaces have also shown an increasing tendency toward entrenching difference and disadvantage geographically. Danny Dorling's maps of Britain have shown that we are seeing increasing polarisation in communities, with rich and poor now living further apart. In particular, urban clustering of poverty has been increasing. Wealthy households have similarly concentrated more over time in the outskirts and surrounding areas of major cities.[144]

The idea of 'community' has become increasingly contested as policy makers search for ways to make towns and cities across Britain more liveable and cohesive. Central and local governments have sought to introduce a raft of policy measures aimed at encouraging shared communities focusing on where people live and the nation of which they are citizens.

At street level this has translated into a focus on correcting 'anti-social behaviour' in towns and cities. Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, curfews and community support officers have all aimed to create a sense of security in the past decade. Localities are increasingly surveyed by authorities or commercial interests. In London the councils alone operate 8,000 CCTV cameras—one for every 1,000 residents.[145]

At the city level, public policy has focused on building more cohesive communities by investing in cultural regeneration and 'place making' projects. There has been considerable public investment in the creation of monuments, public art projects and festivals that express the 'distinctiveness' of towns and cities around the UK and aim

to provide a focal point for local communities. Gateshead unveiled the Angel of the North in 1998, Portsmouth got the 170 metre Spinnaker tower in 2005, while Mark Wallinger's colossal White Horse planned for Ebbsfleet may become a defining image of London's Olympic Games.

At the national level politicians have focused on the idea that the British national identity is splintering, under threat from subversive elements such as terrorism or far-right extremism. They have been increasingly keen to evoke 'Britain' and 'Britishness' in political narratives and to define shared national values. Gordon Brown has called for 'British jobs for British workers',[146] while David Cameron claims the current election campaign is about a 'patriotic duty' to save the country.[147]

Youth attitudes

It is somewhat ironic that messages from the media and politicians about escalating anti-social behaviour — thought to be perpetuated by teenagers — have found their most receptive audience amongst the young. They are almost twice as likely to consider that their localities suffer from anti-social behaviour. This is even more exaggerated amongst young women, 29 per cent of whom worry about anti-social behaviour compared to 17 per cent nationally.[148]

It seems that young people have been influenced by growing up in communities with greater levels of fear and mistrust, with many now displaying a greater sensitivity to crime in their local areas compared with other groups. A greater percentage of young people (40 per cent) than the national average (36 per cent) believe that crime is on the increase in their localities.[149] Of course, this may be partly due to the fact that young people are more likely to be the victims of crime than other age groups.

At ease with diversity, ambivalent about locality
Overall, young people are less likely to feel a fixed sense of attachment to a local area. This is not to say that they feel no sense of belonging at all, rather that they hold several ties of identification and affiliation simultaneously.

For young people, one of the more positive consequences of living in more ethnically diverse communities appears to be a greater willingness to move between different ethnic groups. The Citizenship Survey found that younger people aged 16 to 24 years (93 per cent) were most likely to have meaningful interactions with people from different ethnic or religious groups, while those aged 75 or over (52 per cent) were the least likely to.[150]

The citizenship survey also found that a strong sense of belonging to local areas was lowest amongst those aged 16 to 24 (65 per cent) and highest amongst those aged 65 to 74 years (86 per cent) and 75 or over (87 per cent). Similarly, the same older age groups were much more likely to 'definitely enjoy' living in their neighbourhood, whilst those aged 16 to 24 years (51 per cent) were the least likely to do so.[151] (Of course, this may change over time as younger generations move to areas where they choose to buy homes and have children). The Voicebox data also indicates that 'local communities' come fairly low on young people's prioritisation of different forms of community today. See figure 3.

Figure 3 **Young people's priorities**

■ Very important
■ Quite important
■ Not very important
■ Not important at all
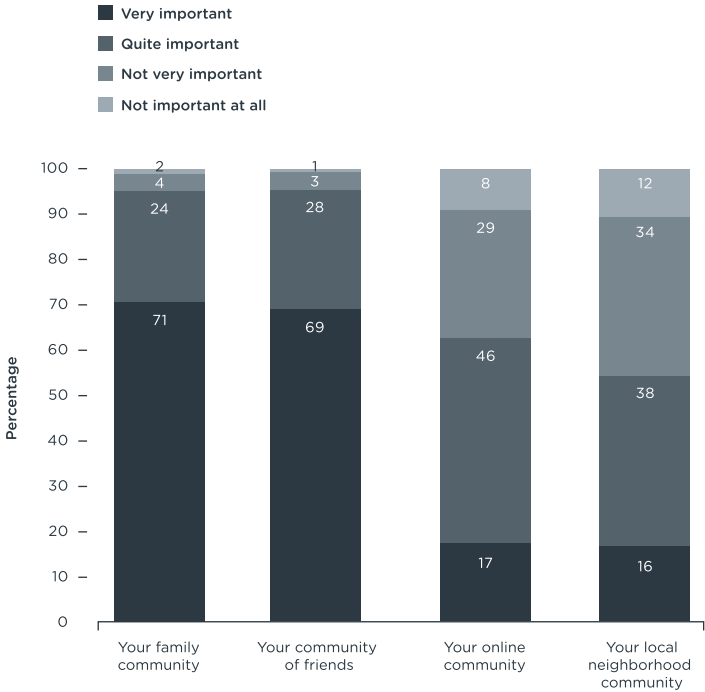
Source: v, Voicebox survey

And when asked, only 49 per cent of young people in the same poll said that their neighbours helped each other out—with White respondents more likely than BME groups to think that their neighbours did not do so. This reflects the findings of similar surveys that show young people are less likely than older generations to report high levels of neighbourliness in their local areas.

Belonging to Britain

This ambivalent relationship with their local communities is reflected in young people's attitudes to Britishness. One poll highlights the complex combination of factors that make up young people's views of the ingredients of their 'citizenship' in the UK:

1 Fifty-one per cent think being British is important.

2 Just over one in five identify with an ethnic group.

3 Three in ten identify with being European.

4 Being a member of their religion is very or fairly important for just over one-third.[152]

Patriotism has become a more complex and nuanced concept for young people. When asked by **v** whether they were 'proud to live in this country' (note that the word 'British' was not used), 58 per cent said they were. But the breakdown of the results is perhaps more interesting. Asian groups were far more positive (82 per cent) about living in Britain, as were BMEs in general (71 per cent), while only 54 per cent of White respondents were proud to live here.

Getting left behind by communities

The changes within British communities, from greater immigration to lower levels of trust, have had a different impact on different groups of young people and this is reflected in their attitudes. These findings indicate that that being disadvantaged or having little influence over local community generates a more negative response to local areas.

For example, Voicebox's question on youth attitudes to immigration points to an interesting a split in the youth perspective. While overall only 34 per cent thought immigration was a 'good thing for our country', those in education (39 per cent) were more positive than NEETs, with only 23 per cent of this group thinking it was a good thing for the UK. It is possible

that this is because unemployed or disadvantaged young people are exposed to some of the less beneficial dimensions of the influx of lower skilled labour into their communities.

Those young people who feel overlooked by their communities feel least positive about them, and by extension about society more generally. One study in 2007 found that there was a strong connection between young people having poor experiences of their community and the likelihood that they will become more engaged in them in the years ahead: young people who do not feel positively about their communities said they were less likely to participate in community affairs, both now and in the future. They were also more likely to feel apathy towards the government and to feel less able to influence future events.[153]

There is also other evidence that suggests that young people do not feel they are currently given sufficient say in decisions about their local area. The proportion of young people wanting a greater say in decisions is slightly larger than the general public—71 per cent compared with 64 per cent—while the proportion believing their views were taken less seriously because of their age was almost twice as high, at 63 per cent compared with 34 per cent.[154]

Political implications

In the political discourse on communities, young people are all too often conceptualised as part of the 'problem', with the government responding to survey after survey which shows that people fear groups of young people on street corners. However, if the political drive towards localism and empowering communities is to be successful, young people will need to be a part of that project. This needs to happen sooner rather than later. As the data above demonstrates, if they feel left behind or overlooked by their communities today, they are far less likely to participate tomorrow.

However, young people's identification with communities beyond their immediate 'locality' may not square well with

some aspects of government policy. So at street level, in cities and nationally, policy interventions will need to strike a balance between young people's natural inclinations to belong to communities based around 'what they like' and their need to be a part of safe, cohesive communities.

How can public spaces become shared spaces?

Young people have grown up in neighbourhoods and cities which were generally more territorialised and polarised than those in which their parents and grandparents lived. In their childhood, their freedom to explore their local area is likely to have been curtailed or significantly delayed by parental fear. So it is unsurprising that in many cases they choose to put their energies and loyalties toward communities that are not defined by geography. In this context, public spaces that can foster genuine everyday interaction within communities become more valuable—even essential. Intelligent public space design that supports sharing and interaction in libraries, art galleries, museums, gardens, parks and other shared spaces will be a key tool in drawing back a generation which has felt ignored or even stigmatised by the approach to the public realm in recent years. Policy makers are increasingly charged with encouraging pro-social behaviour rather than simply neutralising anti-social behaviour. They will be able to rely on young people's greater willingness to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds—the bigger difficulty in the years ahead will be in prompting inter-generational exchange and good relations.

The pursuit of Britishness

Many politicians have been keen to promote the idea of Britishness as a unifying theme that deserves greater cultural recognition. Gordon Brown even briefly proposed a 'national day' as a similar institution to Bastille Day in France or Independence Day in the US.[155] The reality for British young people today suggests this quest might be something of a red herring. Young people's sense of patriotism is inevitably complicated by their multiple loyalties. This is not to say

that politics should not try to foster a sense of a collective identity, rather that any attempt to foist a pre-defined version of Britishness on the next young people is unlikely to meet with success. A national identity will necessarily evolve, and it should remain open to definition by the next generations of citizens.

Belonging in the age of networks

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Young people emanate anxiety, restlessness and impatience as
they confront an apparent abundance of chances, and the fear of
overlooking or missing the best among them. Idols to watch and
fashions to follow are as profuse as they are short-lived. Chances
pop up and disappear with little or no warning, and the rules of
the game are changed before the player had time to finish.

Hence the resentment at 'long-term' engagements — be it
planning in one's own life or commitments to other humans.
Choices are reminiscent of 'light cloaks' which one could shake
off at will, instead of 'steel casings' that offer effective and
lasting protection against turbulence but also cramp and slow
down the movements. What matters most for the young is not
so much the 'shaping up of identity', as the ability to re-shape
it whenever a need arrives. Identities must be disposable. An
unsatisfying identity, or an identity betraying its advanced age
when 'new and improved' identities are on offer, needs to be
easy to abandon. Perhaps biodegradability would be the ideal
attribute of the most desired identities.

'More teenagers today are feeling pressure to create
larger identities for themselves like the celebrities they
see depicted in national media', said Laurie Ouellette, a
communication studies professor and reality TV expert at the
University of Minnesota[156] — restating an opinion common
among the experts. 'Larger identities' mean wider exposure:
more people watching, more internet devotees able to watch
and to be stimulated/excited/entertained by what they've
seen — stimulated enough to share it with their contacts
(courtesy of 'social networking' websites). MySpace, Facebook,
Second Life and the mushrooming multitude of blogs are the
ordinary folks' equivalent of *Hello! Magazine.* For those many
who wish to be chosen, blogs are the supermarket assembly-kit
versions of the boutique haute-couture originals. The chance

of cutting one's way to public visibility through the thicket of blogs is not much bigger than the survival chance of a snowball in hell — but the chance of winning a lottery prize without buying a ticket is nil.

The interactive capacity of the internet is welcomed for helping people to stay *au courant* of the latest talk of the town — the hits currently most listened to, the latest t-shirt designs, the most recent parties, festivals, celebrity events. This helps to update the emphases in the portrayal of one's self and promptly efface that which is outdated. This greatly facilitates, encourages and necessitates the un-ending labours of the re-invention of the self. This is, arguably, one of the most important reasons for the large amount of time spent by the 'electronic generation' in the virtual universe: time spent at the expense of time lived in the 'real world'.

Accordingly, the concepts used to map the habitat of the young tend to be transplanted from the offline to the online world. Concepts like 'contacts', 'dates', 'meeting', 'communicating', 'friendship' and indeed 'community' — all referring to inter-personal relations and social bonds — are the most prominent examples. Transplanting these concepts to the online world affects their meaning and the responses they evoke: one of its foremost effects is the perception of these social bonds and commitments as momentary snapshots of renegotiation in relationships, rather than as portrayals of lasting achievement.

More and more often the received idea of 'community' is elbowed out by the metaphor of 'networks', that is of tissues intermittently woven and ripped apart through the interplay of connecting and disconnecting. If communities precede (determine, direct, shape) actions of their members (and are expected to outlive them) — networks are the results of connecting initiatives. Networks would vanish if sending/ answering messages, making/taking calls or visiting the website stopped.

Unlike the old-style communities, networks are poorly institutionalised. They lack authoritative bodies able (and/or

willing) to issue entry and exit permits or regulate the traffic. Networks seldom demand the sole and undivided loyalty of communicators. Communicating with like minds online is one of the main motives of 'social networking' — as one of the eager community-seekers put it, 'my communities should have similar interests, if not, it will be duck and chicken talk'; but as everything else in the virtual world, the borderlines between 'like minds' are digitally drawn and like all digitally drawn entities their survival hangs on the play of connection and disconnection. Boundaries are drawn and re-drawn to set apart those with 'like minds' from the rest. 'Belonging' to any virtual community tapers to exchanges rotating around the common interest. Interests need not be mutually exclusive. One can 'belong' simultaneously to a number of virtual 'communities', whose members would not necessarily recognise 'like-mindedness' in each other and would probably dismiss cross-community dialogue as 'duck and chicken talk'.

All in all, 'networks' answer the postulates of the setting in which the lives of contemporary youth is lived better than orthodox communities. They respond relatively quickly to changes of circumstances, adjust relatively easily to successive redistributions of opportunities, permit participation without commitment and allow for 'keeping one's options open' — rendering every choice as revocable as it is free. For the young, born as they are into the electronically mediated world, 'keeping in touch' primarily means an exchange of emails and messages. This is an effortless activity compared with the time and energy consumed in times when elaborate rituals of gathering, visiting and letter-writing heavily taxed the energy and resources of everybody involved.

Paradoxically, the fact that the 'like minds' are easier to find and 'connect with' impoverishes instead of enriching the social skills of the 'virtual community' seekers. In the offline world, 'duck and chicken' talk proves unavoidable since the ducks and chickens in question tend to roost and forage in the same yard; it is only online that the translations, negotiations and compromises may be avoided by pressing the 'delete' or

'exit' keys. In the offline world, the necessity to engage in a 'duck and chicken' dialogue, to ponder each other's reasons, to critically scrutinise and revise one's own and to search for a modus co-vivendi, cannot be avoided and ignored.

This requires skills that internet 'networking' makes redundant—which means that moving from the online to the offline world can be a daunting and traumatic task for many young people. One can't help recalling Chance (a character played by Peter Sellers in 1979 Hal Ashby's film *Being There*), who having emerged into the busy town street from his protracted tête-à-tête with the world-as-seen-on-TV, tries in vain to remove a discomforting bevy of nuns from his vision with the help of his hand-held remote control…

'Belonging', as Jean-Claude Kaufmann suggests, is today 'used primarily as a resource of the ego'.[157] He warns against thinking of networks of (momentary) 'belonging' as 'integrating communities'. They are better conceived of, he suggests, as stations in the progress of individualisation; a series of inns along the road of the self-forming ego. François de Singly suggests that in theorising present-day identities, the metaphor of 'roots' and 'uprooting' (implying that an individual's emancipation from their community of birth is both a one-off as well as irrevocable), should be more accurately replaced by the tropes of casting and drawing of anchors.[158]

Indeed, unlike 'uprooting' and 'dis-embedding', there is nothing irrevocable in drawing an anchor. If, having been torn out of the soil in which they grew, roots are likely to desiccate so that their revival will be verging on miraculous, anchors are drawn out hoping to be safely cast again at many different and distant ports. Roots determine in advance the shape that the plants growing out of them will assume; but anchors are only replaceable tools that do not define the ship's qualities and resourcefulness. The time-stretches separating the casting of anchor from drawing it once more are but episodes in the ship's trajectory. The choice of haven in which the anchor will be cast next is most probably determined by the kind of load that the ship is currently carrying; a haven good for one

kind of cargo may be entirely inappropriate for another. All in all, the metaphor of anchors captures what the metaphor of 'uprooting' misses or keeps silent about: the intertwining of continuity and discontinuity in the history of a growing number of contemporary identities using ad hoc 'communities' as transport vehicles.

7   Being an effective citizen

The cultural revolution of the 1960s, the economics of the 1980s and the transformation in communications technologies over the last 20 years have shifted power from governments towards the market, the web and a more sophisticated, active citizenry. These forces have opened up rival spaces for social action in the flows of political power — for today's citizens, social change is not a linear process of electing politicians to take the decisions that affect their lives. There are more opportunities for a citizen to verbalise and perform their politics, rather than conferring authority on somebody else to represent them. For young people, citizenship is an act, rather than a duty.

Rival spaces for social action

At work, the imperatives of sustainable international development, a green economy and an ageing population have created more jobs and roles that enable people to make a difference to social causes. In the design and communications industry, firms like IDEO, Provokateur and Participle position themselves less as just designing 'things' and more as resolvers of social problems.

On the web, there are a bewildering array of ways to comment, offer feedback, vote, rate, tweet, retweet and petition individuals, organisations and governments. Public opinion can be 'watched' as it emerges on Twitter and Facebook, through campaigning groups like Avaaz and 38 degrees and on the Downing St ePetitions website rather than being summarised in social surveys and opinion polls released in the mainstream press.[159]

In everyday life, there are an increasing array of signals, kitemarks, awards and ratings that guide consumers about the differing ethical merits of products, services and organisations, blurring the line between spending, endorsing and giving. Consumers are able to make choices that reflect their views on carbon emissions, fair labour conditions, animal welfare, soil standards, religious preferences and local economic development.

These spaces and many others offer new ways to express citizen power. If young people want to make a difference it is these arenas of social action and influence in which they strategise and act. These 'rival spaces' for citizen action have emerged alongside, or as a result of, the widespread disillusionment with more traditional forms of political expression. In the last election just 37 per cent of 18–24-year-olds voted.[160] Across all British citizens, 41 per cent think that political parties are a hindrance to democracy,[161] while politicians themselves are only trusted by 13 per cent.[162]

But while these arenas are appealing places to direct political aspirations, they also demand competitive, entrepreneurial activity — they do not confer equal rights on all participants. Work with a social mission is only accessible to those able to scale the barrier of internships and several months' unpaid work. Organising social or political action on the web leaves individuals open to unwanted exposure and personal criticism. New opportunities for social action do not have a clear-cut value attached to them — it is not always clear what counts. Young people are inheriting a world where there are more ways for them to make a difference as citizens. But this will require a new set of skills and a sustained commitment to their cause.

Youth attitudes

Youth attitudes reflect a widespread dissatisfaction with politics across the population, though it is even more prevalent among this generation. Most are sceptical about the ability of politicians' ability to deliver change and choose to place their political energies elsewhere.

No they can't

Long-term attitudinal data indicates that young people have always tended to be the least interested in the activities of governments and Westminster. But this disinterest is now greater than at any other point in history. Only 24 per cent of 16–24-year-olds are likely to have engaged in 'civic participation' as defined by voting, writing to an MP or attending a demonstration or protest — less than any other age group.[163]

Younger age groups are much less likely to see voting as a civic duty than older age groups. Fifty-six per cent of young people view it in this way, compared to 73 per cent of 35–44-year-olds and 92 per cent of those aged 65 or over.[164] At best this is a rational reaction to the belief that governments do not possess enough power to 'make change happen', at worst it points towards profound lack of faith in politicians to work for the interests of society rather than their own.

Only 63 per cent believe the way people vote actually makes a difference to how the country is run, while 90 per cent don't believe that politicians give straight answers.[165] Only a very small proportion believe that politicians exhibit the qualities they admire.[166] According to the Hansard Society, one in five don't trust politicians very much, while one in two don't trust them at all.[167]

Despite the steady growth in the size and reach of the public sector during their lives, young people remain inclined to believe that the government is not the most powerful agent in society. In research carried out by MORI, young people were asked to identify who had influence

over their everyday lives. Sixty-three per cent named The media and 42 per cent business—compared to 28 per cent who named the Prime Minister, 12 per cent who named Parliament and 7 per cent who named the Cabinet.[168]

Yes we can

Although young people's attitudes reflect scepticism about the reach of government, there is still a widespread belief that the country can be changed. The Voicebox survey found that 10 per cent think that only politicians are best able to change the country, 36 per cent believe that only people can and 41 per cent believe it takes both.[169] This 'shared version' of change is reflected in young people's attitude to other ways of making a difference. Research from the Nestlé Trust into investigating young people's perception of what it means to 'be a good citizen' has showed that voting is not considered the most important factor—protecting the environment and obeying the laws are considered more important.[170] Seventy per cent of students say that the ethical record of their future employer is a crucial factor when they decide who they want to work for.[171] Two-thirds want to achieve 'something of value to society through their work'.[172]

It also seems that traditional measures of engagement may be unkind to younger age groups. The Citizenship Survey reports that in 2008–9 62 per cent of 16–24-year-olds reported that they volunteered informally, compared to just 38 per cent who volunteered formally.[173] One study exploring charity and giving found that young people are engaged in a variety of activities that come under a wider definition of 'charity'; from giving goods to charity shops to buying the Big Issue, purchasing Fairtrade goods, recycling, campaigning and taking part in charity events. It argues that narrow measurements of giving and participating rarely include the type of activities mentioned by young people.[174]

The hyper-engaged and the hyper-disengaged

There has yet to be a mass substitution of one form of citizenship based on voting, duty and representation for another based on expression, action and 'making a difference'. The tendency amongst young people seems to be towards 'hyper-citizens' at one end of the spectrum, who mix and match old and new forms of political action, and an indifferent, disinterested block at the other.

A Radio 1 survey in 2005 found that 31 per cent of first-time voters intended to vote. Of those who weren't sure they would, 30 per cent said they did not believe their vote would make a difference, 20 per cent said they did not know enough about politics and 32 per cent said that 'they could not be bothered'.[175] Most surveys, whether assessing young people's interest in traditional forms of politics or broader forms of citizen participation, show a stubborn minority who are simply not interested.

Political implications

Bridging the gulf between young people and politics partly will mean re-orienting the political agenda towards the long-term needs of all generations, not just those that turn out to vote. But it will also require governments to collaborate with an active and challenging citizenry—who will have a key role to play in the resolution of the great challenges of the next 25 years. As budgets shrink, policy makers will have to find new ways they can work with the energy and convictions of young people, rather than doing things to and for them.

Paying to work for good

More equal access to higher education has not necessarily opened up access to all jobs, especially when it comes to work with a social or creative dimension. Although it contravenes the National Minimum Wage Act of 1998, the most creative, socially active occupations at the heart of the expanding social economy require a period of unpaid work, restricting access

to those who can afford it. In 2009 the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions drew attention to the importance of internships to progressing in the professions and highlighted the middle class stranglehold on these sectors.[176]

But overall, politicians can seem ambivalent or indifferent on this issue — Phillip Hammond, the Conservative front-bencher, recently refused to pay his interns saying that he would 'regard as an abuse of taxpayer funding to pay for something that is available for nothing'. Given that this generation particularly values working 'for the social good' or working for ethical companies, the opportunity to do so should be spread evenly — or we risk perpetuating the divide between the apathetic and the hyper-engaged.

'Correcting' citizenship

The debate around a new programme of National Service is an opportunity to improve the relationship between a more empowered citizenry and the state — and the starting point for this need not be 'duty' (in fact, research shows that young people dislike such terminology). Rather than National Service as 'boot camp' to conform and correct young people, it should train, educate and enlighten them as to how they can make a difference to society on the issues they care about. There needs to be a menu of options to allow young people to engage in different types of activity.[177] This need not be restricted to local areas; indeed, the evidence suggests that for many young people this would not reflect their experience of belonging to different types of communities. Such an 'apprenticeship for social action' would be more fitting in a society where the power is held in many different places, rather than a one-size-fits-all, corrective approach to citizenship.

A troubled democracy

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What kind of a democracy are young people inheriting? What challenges face them as they acquire the rights and duties that come with democratic citizenship?

On the one hand, democracy looks to be in bad shape. Across many countries voter turnout at elections has been on a downward trend for some time. In the UK, the decline has been particularly marked in the past decade or so (See table 2). Moreover, the decline seems to be greater for younger voters.[178] Membership in political parties has also been falling and at a greater rate than electoral turnout.[179] Relative to the 1970s, fewer people report having signed a petition, having gone to a political meeting, or having written to a politician.[180] Measures of trust in the state and politicians also show a downward trajectory.[181] The recent scandals surrounding MPs' expenses have almost certainly crystallised a sense of alienation from the state and 'politics' that has been growing in the UK over a long time.

Table 2 **Decline in voter turnout** [182]

Country	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1980s	2000s
USA (Pres)	59.3	61.9	54.4	51.9	51.2	54.8
USA (leg)	49.0	56.3	46.1	46.4	42.8	43.9
UK	79.1	74.5	74.2	73.5	72.4	58.0
France (leg)	71.3	67.2	65.8	64.0	60.6	48.4
Germany	84.1	82.6	86.3	79.3	73.6	72.8
Austria	89.3	90.1	87.8	87.0	76.9	74.1
Italy	92.7	94.2	94.3	93.1	90.1	82.0
Sweden	76.7	83.4	87.1	85.8	81.0	79.3
Australia	82.6	84.4	84.7	83.4	82.4	82.9
Canada	69.6	71.9	68.0	66.9	60.5	56.9

Source: www.idea.int

But is the picture entirely negative? Some political scientists argue that the growth of distrust in the state is actually a positive development. It reflects the death of deference and the emergence of a smarter, more realistic citizenry. Some argue that political engagement is not so much declining as shifting its focus.[183] They point, for example, to market-based forms of active citizenship such as ethical consumerism and ethical investment which citizens increasingly use to try to effect positive social change. Market activism of this kind, such as the anti-sweatshop movement, is often transnational in its

concerns and driven, in part, by a perception that states lack the will or capacity to take effective international action on a range of issues.[184] Pierre Rosanvallon also reminds us that democracy is not simply about the election of governments but about what he terms 'counter-democracy':

Not the opposite of democracy but rather a form of democracy that reinforces the usual electoral democracy as a kind of buttress, a democracy of indirect powers disseminated throughout society — in other words, a durable democracy of distrust, which complements the episodic democracy of the usual electoral-representative system.[185]

Concretely, this system of counter-democracy includes informal powers of oversight, obstruction and judgement. While participation in the 'electoral-representative' sphere has declined, he argues that 'counter-democratic' participation has increased.[186] In the UK, one might think of how ordinary citizens used their mobile phones and the internet to reveal the truth about police behaviour at the G20 protests in April 2009, and how their 'citizen journalism' arguably pressured the mainstream media and the political elite to take the issue more seriously, leading swiftly to an official review which called for a fundamental rethink of protest policing.[187]

Nevertheless, while these are positive developments, some political scientists are sceptical that the supposedly newer forms of activism can substitute for the more traditional forms. The democratic sovereign state is, potentially, a great leveller, providing 'we, the people' with the opportunity to fundamentally restructure our society. If this sovereign state loses too much legitimacy, then the result is not necessarily a vibrant polyarchy of egalitarian dissent and mutual accountability, but an entrenchment of private economic power. As Colin Crouch puts it:

Those who argue that they can work best for, say, healthy food, by setting up a cause group to lobby government and ignore electoral politics, must remember that the food and chemical industries will bring battleships against their rowing boats. A flourishing liberalism certainly enables all manner of causes, good and bad, to seek political influence, and makes possible a rich array of public participation in politics. But unless it is balanced by a healthy democracy in the strict sense it will always proceed in a systematically distorted way.[188]

If this is correct, then it gives at least one reason why we cannot view the trends cited at the start of this paper with indifference. But to reverse the trends, we need to understand what is driving them. One argument, developed in different ways by Colin Crouch and Colin Hay, is that decline in voting, party membership and similar trends are due to the growing lack of choice offered in mainstream electoral politics. If elections and the wider party system do not offer citizens meaningful choices about the future of their society, the argument goes, of course citizens will disengage from the system. But then we need to understand why electoral politics has offered citizens less and less choice.

On one view, the lack of choice reflects a real tightening of policy options as a result of globalisation. States are more constrained in what they can do than previously because of the danger of prompting the flight of capital and skilled labour. So, unless we are willing to 'deglobalise' economically, as some Greens argue,[189] we are just stuck with the problem.

However, this may exaggerate the constraints imposed by globalisation.[190] An alternative explanation sees the problem as about elite ideology rather than globalisation per se: a certain neo-liberal ideology has permeated political elites and narrowed their sense of what is possible.[191] In the UK, institutional factors might also be relevant. The general malaise of representative democracy in the advanced capitalist world seems overlaid and reinforced here by the particular dysfunctions of the 'Westminster model' of the state.[192] For example, how far is the problem of weak electoral choice

linked to the nature of the electoral system? Would a different system, such as proportional representation, encourage people to re-engage with electoral politics, perhaps in part because it would give them a chance to elect representatives from parties that challenge the mainstream consensus?

One might push the institutional argument much further. Perhaps the problem is not specific systems for electing representatives, but an overemphasis on representation as such? Do we need to think about ways of complementing the traditional institutions of representative democracy with institutions that give ordinary citizens a more direct say in policy making?[193] If so, what form should these new citizen assemblies take?

There is also promise in new forms of citizen organising such as London Citizens which brings together faith and community groups and trade union branches in an umbrella organisation to campaign around democratically-agreed objectives such as the Living Wage.[194] By increasing the pressure on politicians to be responsive to democratically considered popular demands, citizen organising could help to increase legitimacy and support for the electoral and party system, at least at a local level.

So we are bequeathing to young people a troubled democracy, albeit one with some promising new developments. The challenge is to consolidate and build on the achievements of a growing 'counter-democracy' while also taking action to increase the legitimacy of, and popular participation in, the democratic state itself.

Conclusion: Transferring political capital

The long-term challenges outlined by our expert contributors require young people, civil society and government to enter into an entirely different conversation about the future than can normally be heard during an election debate. To help young people in confronting an uncertain future and the social problems discussed in this book, there needs to be a transfer of political capital to the next generation of voters.

The economic inequalities young people face in the labour market and in the housing market make this political capital even more valuable to them. So, greater weight must be given to the attitudes and values of younger generations, and politicians need to say far more today about the issues that will dominate the lives of young people tomorrow.

They have to say more about how a low-carbon society, as described by Peter Madden, could affect individual freedom and social justice for the next generation. They need to explain whether they can protect the rights of individuals in the digital environment where, as danah boyd says, young people are required to 'write themselves into being'.

They need to articulate whether it really is the state's role to foster a sense of belonging amongst the non-committal, rootless generation of Zygmunt Bauman's essay. They have to be honest about how care will be paid for and what might alleviate the strains on the modern family that Katherine Rake describes. Most importantly, the existence of the vibrant 'counter-democracy' identified by Stuart White, means politicians have to say why they have something distinctive and important to offer the next generation of citizens.

As the political parties brace themselves for a closely-fought election campaign and the possibility of a new political era, they are unlikely to be concerned with many of these

questions, long-term as they are. But, while the consequences of these decisions may only be felt beyond the election after next, from the perspective of young people it is critical that questions like this are asked now.

The six questions below are examples of the type that should be asked of all political representatives on behalf of the next generation of voters, whether at the local, central or international level. They have two aims: firstly, to raise the profile of the type of issues that relate to young people's long-term future; and secondly, to challenge governments to be more specific about how they will work with an empowered citizenry and vibrant civil society rather than simply doing things to young people. These two priorities—describing a political future for the next generation and establishing a different contract with citizens—will be essential in creating a healthier political alignment with youth in the decades ahead.

1 Will a low-carbon economy make for a more equal society?

2 Is it the family's role to re-distribute assets between generations, or the state's?

3 What are my digital rights?

4 Are safe public spaces more important than shared, open ones?

5 Does it matter if political parties become extinct?

6 How can politics become more responsive to the long-term needs of young people and future generations?

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As they enter the next decade, British young people are in a precarious position — demographically, economically and politically. Stereotyped by newspapers, sensationalised by marketeers and pigeon-holed by politicians, our cultural narratives about young people are not fit for purpose. It is little wonder that young people are more alienated from formal politics than at any other point in recent history. But that matters, more now than ever.

Their generation will need to work with governments to solve an array of intractable problems; from adapting to low carbon lifestyles to caring for an ageing population. But the inequality between this cohort and older generations means that politicians will have to do more than associate themselves with the trappings of youth culture to prove their relevance. They need to start taking their cue from the values and concerns of the next generation of British citizens and find a convincing way to describe the future they face.

Starting from an analysis of the attitudes of 16 – 25 year olds and some of the key trends they are living through, *An Anatomy of Youth* is a resource for anyone interested in what politics can do for the next generation. With a foreword from David Willets MP, new essays from Zygmunt Bauman, dana boyd, Katherine Rake, Peter Madden, Stuart White, original data from **v**'s 'Voicebox' survey and portraits of young people, this report reveals a generation that is creating social change rather than simply experiencing it.

An Anatomy of Youth shows that the greatest asset we can give this generation is more political capital and the chance to shape the debate about the issues that will affect them tomorrow.

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