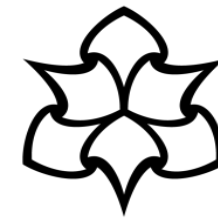




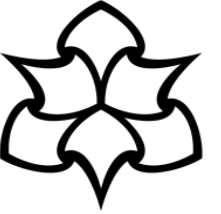
Decent Work and Productivity Research Centre

The impact of Covid-19 on Young Workers Presentation for NICEC Network Event

Fiona Christie, Researcher and AGCAS Director and NICEC Fellow – f.christie@mmu.ac.uk
[@FCChristie](https://twitter.com/FCChristie)
Adele Swingewood, Research Assistant - ADELE.H.SWINGEWOOD@stu.mmu.ac.uk



Funded by the British
Academy



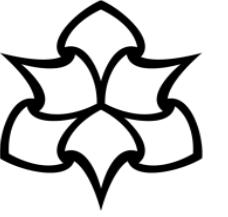
Theorising work: some ideas which influenced the project

Decent Work – access to work, rights at work, social protection, social dialogue (ILO, 2019)

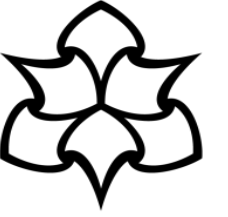
Psychology of Working Theory - Need for survival and power; social connection and contribution; self-determination (Blustein, 2018)

Young workers - Marginalised, liminal, traditional (Furlong et al, 2018)

Lives in limbo - A continuous present (Bone, 2019); The [im] possibility of planning a future (Cuervo & Cesters, 2019); Waithood and Cruel optimism (Pettit, 2019)



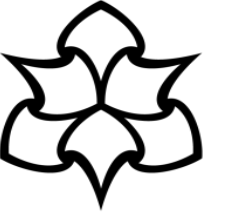
**Covid-19 has amplified
existing concerns about
young people and
precarious work**



Volatility in Careers provision despite GM Mayoral pledges

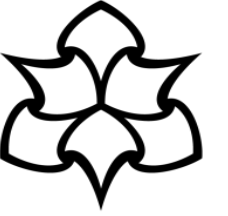
- We will implement the **Young Person's Guarantee**
- We will approach all **bigger employers** in GM and ask them to register at **least five job-related opportunities on GMACS**
- We will develop a plan, working with industry and education providers, **to get all under-25s online** and expand digital skills provision
- We will lobby Government for **full devolution of post-16 skills policy**
- We will **continue to build GMACS** as an alternative to the UCAS system





Our project

What we are doing?



Our project - *Young People and Work in an Age of Uncertainty*



Greater Manchester context



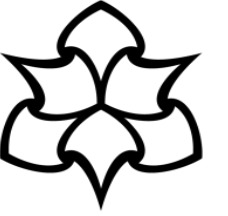
The lived experience of insecure work. Priority sectors included 'accommodation and food'. 'retail' and 'arts, entertainment and recreation'



Twenty one young people (18-30) to be interviewed twice in 2021. Wave A completed. Wave B underway (n13)



Advisory Group to support project – TUC rep, a business owner and academics from Sociology, Youth Studies and Management

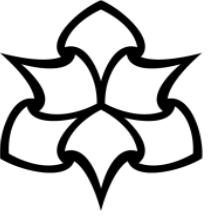


Methodological approach

Longitudinal, qualitative project (Neale, 2018)

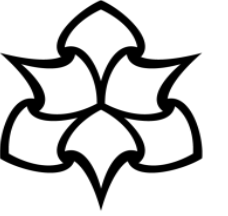
Biographical interview methods (Merrill & West, 2009)

Anthropological, social practice theory 'Figured Worlds' (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998)



Early empirical findings





Consequences: Disrupted dreams and delayed transitions

Disrupted dreams – numerous opportunities cancelled/postponed – eg., overseas placements, music gigs, placement at BBC, event organising

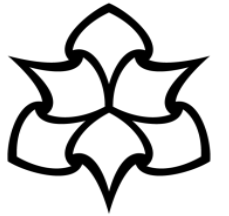
Delayed transitions – numerous obliged to return to family home

Lives on hold – reduced confidence in planning for the future, but still having to keep networking and applying for scarce jobs.

Mental health and wellbeing – isolation, anxiety due to changes experienced

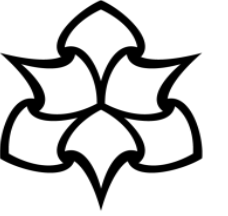
Uncertain lives **reduce ability to be active citizens** – eg., many have done volunteering previously but not able to now (temporal uncertainty)

Economic instability for all in varied ways



I will say that the pressure that I'm under has forced me to get **mental health** help which is a positive but of course all of these things take so long because of this Tory government underfunding, critically underfunding the NHS... The stress and pressure of not being able to see people as a single person, as a single childless person who doesn't really have much in the way of family, it's been a lot to handle. So it's completely changed my life really, this pandemic and completely changed my work circumstances. Now I'm not really available for any kind of work unless it can be done from home because I can't, I still can't risk my mother's health.

Cherelle, worked as a care assistant, 1st Interview unemployed



Why accept insecure work: normalisation of 'indecent' work

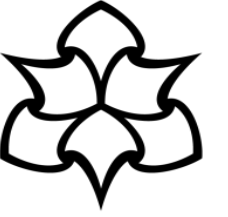
Limited choices. Covid led to some taking **any job available**

Spectre of unemployment makes them more willing to take 'worse work'

Creative jobs – this is normal – **not proper work**

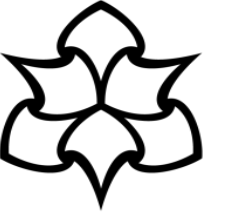
Students doing very **casualised work, rationalising as temporary**

Evidence of employers opting for **work conditions that give them flexibility** but aren't good for workers, e.g. 'family culture', 'pseudo self-employment'



Family culture - So it is a bit tricky sometimes because, and we're all, well a lot of us are quite close so the manager will often put it in our hands and say, one of you needs to go home, can you decide who? And you'll be looking at your mate like, well I need the money [LAUGHS].

Bea, Student 1st interview doing casual hospitality work



Making sense of insecure work

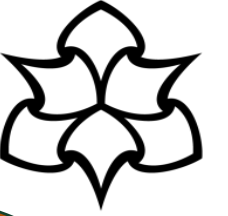
Neoliberal social imaginary –
faith in own ability to make their
way

Awareness of what decent work
should be in hoped for future
careers. Work that is **decent and
dignified and meaningful**.

**Re-appraisal of values
associated with work** both long
term, e.g., job security, work-life
balance and meaningful work
and short term, e.g., awareness
of the importance of keyworker
roles.

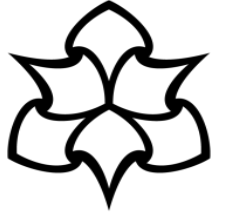
Politically critical and aware but
not of initiatives such as
Opportunity Guarantee

Much support of idea of
collective action via **Trade
Unionism**; some **faith in
employers** to do the right thing.



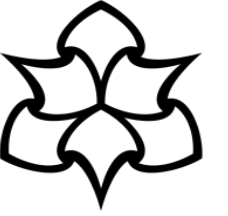
Yeah I think I've weathered the storm quite well but of course I've got the benefit of having my student loan that covers my rent with additional top ups from my family. I've managed to find work quite well.... I've had so many jobs and I always manage to find something new and find something quickly. I really struggle to understand these perspectives from people that say there's nothing out there.

Adam, Student – 1st Interview, working for Deliveroo



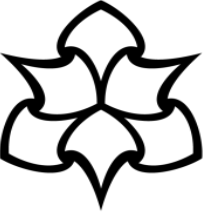
Scope for resistance: rejecting passivity

- **New opportunities** – eg., creatives making work at home, student starting a politics blog, unexpectedly rewarding work (social care)
- **Improvisation** – e.g., finding a job against the odds, students studying more (due to reduction of PT work). **Optimism against the odds** (aspect of being young)
- **Buffering** – lots of examples of support from family and friends insulating against worst impacts, other factors can also contribute to buffering (sympathetic employer)
- **Managing systems** such as universal credit (**contrasting stories** – some find advisers more sympathetic due to pandemic, while others have negative experience, e.g., being told to pay back benefits owed).
- **Politically opinionated but not generally active.** Ambivalence to political action and disparaging of mainstream politics. Willingness to walk away and challenge poor conditions/employment practices
- Willingness to appreciate role of **safety nets and back-up plans**



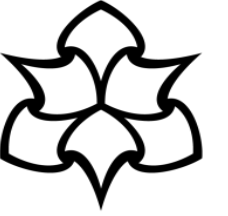
And so I think that should be a bit more regulated. I think if you're going to open a business and you're going to take responsibilities for employees, there should be safeguards there to make sure that you actually do look after the welfare of your employees. You have to pass a driving licence test to get a car but you don't have to get a business owner's licence to manage people.

Khaleel, 1st Interview - unemployed photographer



Project in progress – Wave B in progress (n13)

- Value of a longitudinal approach - lots of changes for participants in six months – things do get better.
- Evidence that varied interventions have helped (via job centre, university placements team).
- Importance of interaction with varied people in positions of support/power – e.g., lecturers, placements and careers staff, job centre advisers
- Too much work for some young people. Intensification even in work they like. Desire for meaningful work endures.
- Work remains a painful experience for some young people.



Questions for today? Implications of our research

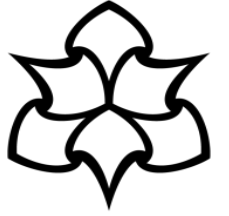
How to juggle realism and optimism in career interventions with young people?

How to manage and provide careers support services in a volatile policy environment?
Morale and motivation of practitioners/managers?

How to marshal evidence that interventions work and argue this with confidence?

As careers professionals, how to navigate the tensions between individual, organisational and socio-economic issues? What can a social justice approach offer?

What can employers, politicians, professionals and young people do to help improve working lives for young people?



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