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New deal or raw deal?: dilemmas and paradoxes of state interventions into the youth labour market.

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Introduction

New Deal 18-24 (NDYP) is the latest in a long line of youth training and employment 'New Deals' designed to tackle problems of youth unemployment. In their 1997 election manifesto Labour stated their intention of getting 250,000 young people aged 18-24 off benefit and into work, education and training by 2002 as part of their welfare to work programme. It is claimed to be distinctive in reflecting the current British government's Third Way approach to policy-making which aims to recast the relationship between the state and young citizen whilst at the same time promoting economic growth and tackling social exclusion. The development of the Third Way, and New Deal in particular, is the government's response to wider economic and cultural changes associated with late modernity and a risk society. These have led not only to the restructuring of youth transitions, but also youth cultures and identities in contemporary societies, posing significant challenges for intervention practices. This analysis of education, training and guidance (ETG) interventions for unemployed young adults thus offers insights into the dilemmas, paradoxes and contradictions of Third Way politics in terms of mainstream youth labour market policy as espoused in rhetoric and enacted and experienced in practice through the New Deal.

New Deal was heralded in government circles as having the potential to make a real difference to youth unemployment (Labour Party 1997) yet data suggests it has fallen short of its original aims. These concerns have led to a stepping up of targets and a move away from the client-centred approach that was originally intended. This shift raises questions about whose agenda New Deal is really working for, about the effectiveness of mainstream interventions such as New Deal and the ambiguity of the state's commitment to socially excluded young people and the achievement of an inclusive stakeholder society.

This chapter is based on a case study exploration of New Deal as an example of a mainstream intervention into post-compulsory ETG for the young unemployed. The objective of the study was to learn from New Deal about what it means for interventions to effectively enhance the social and economic participation of unemployed young people. One of the key insights is how competing agendas at play give rise to tensions between the interests of clients, advisors and government ministers which can undermine the effectiveness of interventions. Despite official interpretations of New Deal as a success (Midgely 1999), closer investigation suggests that long-term benefits of New Deal may be limited due to predominance of professional rather than young adult's interests. This study therefore argues that to improve initiatives such as New Deal, they should be sufficiently client-focused and flexible to accommodate the complex biographies of disadvantaged young people.

New Labour, New Deal

New Deal is the flagship of Labour's welfare-to-work strategy. The programme aimed at 18 – 24 year olds will cost £2.6bn over the 4 years between 1998 and 2002. After six months of unemployment the young person meets with a New Deal Personal Advisor (NDPA). Each individual receives personalised support and guidance during the initial four month Gateway period. If after four months the young person is still unwaged they are expected to participate in one of four options: full-time education and training (FTET), subsidised employment with at least one day a week training, work in the Voluntary Sector (VS) or Environmental Task Force (ETF) options, with at least one day a week training.

The ETF and the Voluntary Sector provide an allowance equivalent to the rate of unemployment benefit plus an extra £15 per week. The FTET option offers an allowance equivalent to benefit plus expenses, although there is the possibility of accessing a discretionary grant in exceptional circumstances. The maximum duration for the options stage is 12 months. It is stressed there would be 'no fifth option of life on full benefit' (Brown 1997). Finally, the third stage offers a 'Follow-Through' period in which the client receives continuing support from their advisor after their option, to find work. Sanctions, in the form of cutting benefit, are applied to individuals who consistently do not attend appointments or who fail to co-operate with New Deal procedures.

After the initial piloting of New Deal, responses from young people were generally positive (Hill and Stern 1998). Even the most cynical were positive about the programme's ability to help young people find the kind of work they want to do, rather than employment of any kind (Legard *et al.* 1998). However, given the investment in New Deal, initial soundings suggest that New Deal is less effective than originally intended. Of particular interest in this study is why, given the espoused commitment to tackling social exclusion and the apparent radical nature of New Deal, so many young adults are failing to reap the intended benefits? For example, figures from the Department for Education and Employment (2001) suggests that by the end of Apr 2001 out of 641,600 starting on New Deal 546,800 had left. Of those leaving, 39% have entered sustained unsubsidised jobs, 11% have transferred to other benefits, 20% have left for other known reasons and 30 % have left for unknown reasons.

These patterns suggest that at best, less than half of those eligible for New Deal are gaining any tangible benefits. In spite of governments claim that youth unemployment is down by 40%, it could be argued that individuals are simply being relocated within the unemployment system, for example, transferring onto other benefits or on one of New Deal's three non-employment options (File on 4, 20/6/99). Sykes (cited in Milne 1998) also suggests that approximately 40% of those going through New Deal are likely to find work, education or training anyway. It is also not clear how many of those that leave and go into employment are any better off than they were previously. There is little evidence to demonstrate whether these individuals stay in work, whether the work is permanent or provides adequate conditions and prospects to sustain employment for that person in the future. This suggests that there are either inadequate employment opportunities for young people or that employers are reluctant to make a commitment to New Deal. A key concern therefore is that for these young people New Deal may actually be having a negative impact on their transition into full-time waged employment.

The social and political context of New Deal

Underpinning New Deal as Labour's flagship welfare-to-work initiative are three political imperatives: social exclusion, lifelong learning and labour's 'moral crusade'. The setting up of the Social Exclusion Unit symbolised a commitment from the New Labour administration to tackle problems of social inequality, poverty and exclusion. The chancellor Gordon Brown declared the need for a 'national crusade against unemployment and poverty' (Brown 1997).

Some observers, however, have criticised New Deal as being a coercive measure to reduce the benefit burden (Lister 1998; File on Four 20/6/99; Dwyer 1998; Player 1999), which Tonge (1999) highlights as the second highest social security bill amounting to £8bn, whilst offering few real opportunities (Jeffs and Spence 2000). Nonetheless NDYP, through the provision of training and employment subsidies, was looked to as the means for getting unemployed young adults into work and training and therefore for addressing problems of social exclusion. There is a concern however that focusing on New Deal and employability obscures wider structural issues of providing quality employment and reducing inequality (Lister 1998; Stepney *et al.* 1999; Jeffs and Spence 2000).

The second political imperative involves the lifelong learning agenda. Partly in response to changing labour market opportunities and the consequent lengthening of youth transitions, but also because of the need to ensure a flexible and skilled labour force, increasing emphasis has been placed on education and training for youth. It is envisaged that by 2010 50% of young adults will be in higher education. But it remains to be seen how relevant lifelong learning is for those young adults who have already become disaffected from education and learning and excluded from mainstream social and economic participation. The third imperative is Labour's moral crusade which emphasises individual responsibilities. This has been informed by the notion of 'communitarianism' (Dwyer and Martell 1997) as well as recent Third Way theorising (Giddens, 1997, 2000). Le Grand (1998) highlights the components of communitarianism as: community, opportunity, responsibility and accountability. The aim is to (re)create a new relationship between citizens and the state where welfare rights are only provided if individuals fulfill their responsibilities by, for example, seeking employment (Heron and Dwyer 1999).

New Deal embodies many of the elements of the Third Way approach to policy making. In particular the key principles underpinning New Deal are:

- *Partnership* – New Deal is founded on local partnerships with employers, voluntary organisations, education and training providers and career services.
- *Individual focus* – New Deal is tailored to individual job seekers
- *Quality* – it provides high quality support from New Deal Personal Advisors and access to a wide range of high-quality training and job opportunities.

- *Resources* – it is backed by £2.6 billion pounds over four years financed by the Treasury through an hypothecated tax. (Employment Service 1998)

New Deal is based on ‘workfare’ rather than welfare principles (Player 1999), as unemployment benefit is conditional on individuals accepting personal responsibility to find employment - the Third Way principle of ‘active citizenship’ (Giddens, 1997). Only by entering into such a contract will unemployed individuals be guaranteed a basic level of income, specific training, assistance in job searching and career decision-making. However, commentators suggest the emphasis on fostering individual responsibility within New Deal through compulsion and the use of sanctions, raises questions about the conditionality being attached to social rights of citizenship (Dwyer 1998; Lister 1998; Stepney et al. 1999). Lister for example argues that the emphasis on social inclusion and individual responsibility has been promoted at the expense of equality and social rights. What she argues is that instead of ‘good quality work as a right’ emphasis is now on integration into an unequal labour market.

Furthermore, given the collapse of youth labour markets in many parts of the country critics have argued that the emphasis on supply side employment policy, with little emphasis placed on investment in labour market opportunities, is unlikely to give rise to long term successes. For example Campbell *et al.* (1998) highlight the changing nature of local labour market opportunities for youth and argue the need for policy to be more responsive to local conditions. Furthermore, Sykes (cited in Milne 1998) suggests that in areas where there is an acute shortage of jobs, New Deal will create ‘a pool of people qualified to work but unable to find employment.’

Young people’s experiences of guidance, training and employment

The emphasis of current policy on increasing the employability of unemployed youth reflects an underlying assumption that the problem rests more with the ‘individual’, rather than their inter-relationship with the economy and society or the quality of opportunities provided. Numerous studies, however, show that training opportunities are not always attractive to young people (Mizen 1995; Williamson 1997; Hocking 1998; MacDonald 1998; Lloyd 1999). Even when they are, they do not always lead to tangible employment opportunities. Tonge (1999) suggests three broad sets of criticisms of previous training policy. First, that schemes amount to a form of cheap labour. Second that the schemes have provided inadequate

training. Third, that large numbers of individuals who complete training return to unemployment. As a result, writers such as Sutherland (1998) reiterate the need to ensure quality placements in the current New Deal programme on the basis that young adults who are put off training once are unlikely to accept a further option. What young people seek is not just training but employment with training opportunities (Evans *et al.* 1997; Gardiner 1998; Sutherland 1998). However, by concentrating on predetermined trajectories the complexity and diversity of individual transitions may remain hidden (Pollock 1997).

New Deal seeks to succeed where previous policies have failed by offering a 'Gateway' period for young people providing careers assistance and a range of training and employment options. Yet, as Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) and Dwyer (1998) highlight, there is a challenge to intervention practices in that young people often make decisions which appear irrational or irresponsible to policy-makers and welfare professionals but are none the less rational for the young people concerned. The authors also suggest young people make decisions which are often pragmatic, rather than systematic, context-related and based on partial information located in the familiar and the known. They concluded that career decisions could 'only be understood in terms of the life histories of those who make them' (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997 p.33). This echoes previous research which stresses the significance of the 'biographization' of the lifecourse in youth transitions (Buchner 1990; du Bois-Reymond 1995).

Understanding youth transitions

The impact of globalisation and detraditionalisation on young people's lives has given rise to calls for new ways of understanding youth transitions, cultures and identities (Bynner et al, 1997). In particular there have been calls for a 'more interactive research process that enables the participants to articulate their own meanings and experiences' (Wyn and Dwyer 1999: 5), thus foregrounding the importance of individual biographies and agency in the construction of the lifecourse (Chisholm et al. 1990; Evans and Heinz 1995; Evans and Furlong 1997; Roberts 1997; Wyn and White 1997; Looker and Dwyer 1998; Rudd and Evans 1998; Wyn and Dwyer 1999). In the search for new models of youth transitions some writers have drawn on discourses of social change in which youth transitions are seen to involve a process of individualisation as young people negotiate the risks and uncertainty which characterise late modernity (Furlong and Cartmel 1997). Yet Furlong and Cartmel also argue that whilst

transitions are no longer predictable, life chances are still structurally differentiated in terms of race, class and gender. Hence many now talk of a process of ‘structured individualisation’ (Rudd and Evans 1998) in which transitions are understood in terms of individual actions and choices as young people navigate their way through ‘ a sea of “manufactured uncertainty” ’ (Evans and Furlong 1997).

In spite of the reflective stance of youth researchers, discourses of youth and youth transitions in late modernity, and the changing nature of the youth labour market, policy responses have been slow in embracing these changing agenda. Yet in the space between theory and policy professionals struggle to mediate the disjunctions between policy intentions and the lived realities of young people. At the same time, young people live out their own lives but often in ways which are ‘worlds apart’ from the lives of professional policy-makers (Percy-Smith 1999). This chapter explores further some of these contradictions and paradoxes between policy rhetoric and lived realities of young people in the context of the New Deal. The focus is simultaneously grounded and systemic, drawing on the experiences of young people and professionals, whilst staying attuned to multiple agendas at different levels in the system.

Background to the study

This chapter is based on research undertaken as part of a collaborative, cross-European research programme exploring professional interventions into youth transitions to the labour market. The research programme aimed to learn better what constitutes effective provision in post school ETG for unemployed youth. The project featured cycles of collaborative action inquiry with professionals and young people using narratives, metaphors, critical incidents, case histories, participant observation, informal interviews, video and inquiry groups. The research involved working simultaneously on different levels. At the outset a collaborative inquiry group with NDPAs, drawn from across the county, was undertaken to draw out and explore critical issues and concerns. Participant observations were undertaken of the encounters between NDPAs and clients in Employment Service offices, followed by individual interviews with young people and NDPAs.

The aim was to seek out a diversity of experiences at different stages in the New Deal process. We included young people currently going through Gateway, participating on New Deal options, as well as some who had completed New Deal, had chosen to opt out of New

Deal or who, despite being eligible, had as yet remained beyond the reach of New Deal. In all a total of seventeen interviews were conducted with New Deal clients. Many informal conversations were also undertaken with young people in training settings, in work placements and with homeless young people in the YMCA. Eleven formal interviews and numerous informal conversations were conducted with training providers, employers, guidance professionals and other youth workers. Emerging issues were then explored further in ongoing collaborative inquiry groups of professionals, New Deal Advisors and young people.

The Strengths and Weaknesses of New Deal: Navigating between Policy Targets and the Needs of Young People?

Competing agendas

Those involved in New Deal all have very different agenda. There are tensions and contradictions between the rhetoric of New Deal as client-centred and the reality of pressures on NDPAs to meet targets; between the political priorities of getting young people off benefit and into work and the broader social and biographical concerns of young people; and between the ‘respectable passions’ of New Deal Advisors and the possibilities of practice. Empirical data suggests that young people were concerned to find ‘quality employment’ which was meaningful in terms of providing a sense of self worth and relevant to their own biographies. But such jobs were rarely available. At the same time, advisors expressed a commitment to making a difference in the lives of unemployed young adults. For advisors, doing a ‘good job’ meant:

- Helping someone get what they want out of life
- Making a difference with that client
- That the young person is happy with the end result
- Seeing them increase in confidence and motivation
- Placing the young person in the job most suitable and desirable for them
- Helping a client in a way the Department or Employment Service doesn’t particularly count as a ‘result’ but the client benefits from and can move forward.

(Comments from NDPAs, Inquiry group, 27/4/99).

In spite of this espoused client-centredness, contradictions emerged in practice with some young people who related stories of having to do things they didn't want to do. One client was told by her advisor "Well maybe you can't do what you want to do". The data in this study suggests that young people viewed New Deal as successful only if it conflated with their needs and interests. Advisors, driven by targets, tend to be more concerned with getting young people into any work rather than work that was appropriate for the young person. NDPAs often expected unemployed young people with few qualifications should accept and even be grateful for, menial work. However, even those who were unsure about what they wanted to do, knew that they did not want to do boring, menial jobs. As one young claimant suggested:

The worst thing is to get a warehouse job ... I'm not going to be stuck in that ... just shuts off your mind really ... become a robot. ... You get disheartened a bit really. (Paul, age unknown, New Deal Office, 26/6/99)

As NDPAs expected young people to accept and remain committed to poor quality jobs it seemed that a key role of professionals was to manage or 'cool out' the career expectations of young people, based partly on an assumption that as guidance professional 'they know what's best for young people'. This fuelled conflict for many young people as they struggled to retain the right to self-determination in their life. It also brings to the fore the contradiction of 'social responsibility' being imposed rather than nurtured. In a risk society this means helping empower young people to develop the skills and capacities to negotiate and survive uncertainty and make informed choices.

A further dilemma is that taking menial jobs can distract young people from making more appropriate long-term career choices. For example, Kristine had done menial jobs before but now wanted to, 'do something with her life':

"I've signed on before and been stuck in jobs I don't want to be in ... and could've done factory work ... but I actually wanted to find something I was interested in ... so I wouldn't be back here in 6 months ... I don't want to go into a job I don't want ... you've got to be happy in the job you've got.. I mean I was doing an office job for a year ... and I'd just see people that'd been there 25 years and thought, they're happy with their little life, but I couldn't do this ... until I find a job that ... I'm interested in"

(Kristine, age 20, New Deal Office, 30/6/99)

Sheila's story also echoes this finding. Despite a clear career orientation towards work in the caring professions, the NDPA decided she should be placed in the voluntary sector:

“They were going to bung me in a charity shop and OK ... I like working with people, but not in a charity shop. No way ... Just seems like they've got nobody else. All the people who are unemployed - or the 'dolies' as we used to call them - and we're bunged into things we don't want to do, like charity shops, and making paving slabs. ... we're pushed into them because we're unemployed as if it's our fault. It's like the thing for me is ... for your self worth because you're worth better than that. ... If they bunged me into a charity shop ... It wouldn't be taking into account what qualifications I've done, what experience I've got, and it would send me backwards”.

(Sheila, age 24, New Deal Office 24/6/99)

There are equally cases where appropriate choices were made, but these tended to involve less risky transitions. However, for young people for whom the education system has already failed and for whom gaining meaningful and sufficiently paid employment is problematic the only options left in New Deal are voluntary work (normally in care or retail) or work with the ETF. Moreover, if a client fails to choose an option by the third month of the Gateway Period advisors have to refer them to either the VS or ETF options. However, whereas employers, trainers and educators and voluntary placements can all choose who they are recruiting, the ETF is obliged to accept any referrals. What happens is that ETF seems to become a dumping ground for 'problematic young people'. Whilst advisors argue that a mandatory referral is only used in extreme cases, in reality, it appears that young adults are frequently obliged to accept a placement on ETF even though they may have no commitment to that type of work.

“I want to get into the working world - and there's this (ETF) option and I don't want to do it - but I've got no choice ... it's not what I want to do ... it's nothing to do with what I want to do. They say to me 'It'll give you experience and it'll give you skills ... but it doesn't matter because that experience ain't going to be nothing to do with what my life's about”

(Sean, age 21, New Deal Office, 30/6/99).

The paradox of New Deal in this case is exemplified by the illusion of choice and the charade of opportunity. Whilst there may be benefit in providing an opportunity to gain transferable skills, this appears only to be worthwhile if matched by individual choice and commitment. Instrumental measures are only likely to be effective if they also take account of social and biographical considerations. Many New Deal Advisors acknowledge the fallibility of the process of referring young adults onto ETF who don't want to be there, but are apparently

given no alternatives. The inflexibility of the ‘no fifth option’ and the failure to take sufficient account of young adult’s contexts and concerns produce the unintended effect of undermining the original policy intention. If young adults were provided with support rather than conditions and accountability there appears more likelihood of achieving positive outcomes which would be beneficial to both the state and the individual.

However, for many, finding what they want, making choices and taking action may not be so easy, especially since many of the unemployed have already been failed by the system. Many appeared to be frozen in a state of unknowing or inaction, or what Blackman (1997) refers to as a ‘fear of the fall’, as a result of low self-esteem, emotional disturbance or difficulties coping in the face of multiple disadvantage.

Evidence here suggests the New Deal’s focus on trying to get young people into work may in itself not be sufficient if long-term unemployment is to be addressed. This approach may well meet the short-term political agenda of getting young people off benefit and into work, but may be ineffective in harnessing young people’s commitment and abilities. If young adults are to find little more than low paid, temporary, unskilled work then there is little incentive for them to cooperate with New Deal. For example on one ETF ‘induction day’ only 6 of the expected 28 individuals attended. During a group interview with the 6 young males all stated that they did not want to be there, with some expressing anger and frustration at why they had been sent there at all.

“I only got two choices – the voluntary sector and this one. They should give us like four, five - six maybe – it gives us more opportunity to get out and learn what we need to learn. They said I was too old for college schemes. I’m 21 and I’m too old for college. I feel like I’m back at school now.”

(Group interview, ETF placement, 23/8/99)

Being too old for college is indeed ironic given Labour’s commitment to lifelong learning and the development of a ‘learning society’. When asked whether they will stay with ETF to gain whatever experience they can, the group of 6 responded that they would not stay on but would have to try and find a job somehow. Instead of helping young people, ETF in this case was making their situation even more difficult. They were not only being forced onto options they didn’t want to do, but at the same time faced sanctions if they quit. What they really wanted was a genuine opportunity to earn money and a skill or trade which would improve their chances of sustained employability, an objective apparently shared by New Deal. In spite of

the ethos of individualisation and the objective of achieving a competitive and skilled labour force, there appears to be more emphasis on directing young people into an uncertain labour market than enhancing their capacity for sustainable social and economic participation.

There appears to be a gap in the New Deal options that could be filled by a craft apprenticeship type scheme. There is ample evidence which highlights the potential value of work-based learning, as an effective way of facilitating young adult's transition from learning to work (Evans et al. 1997). For example, the VIP scheme for supporting 16-18 year olds in undertaking a national traineeship or modern apprenticeship, is achieving considerable success. Yet, despite New Deal's emphasis on partnerships, there is no coherent programme for work based learning provided through New Deal for the 18-24 year old age group. We suggest that this is a fundamental weakness which, if addressed, could provide positive opportunities for many long-term unemployed youth.

There are real problems facing policy-makers and professionals who seek to 'bridge the gap' between policy intentions and young people's lifeworlds through programmes such as New Deal. The most obvious is that the day-to-day lives, values and experiences of many young people are so often at odds with those of politicians and welfare professionals, as Hodgkinson and Sparkes (1997) cited above suggest. There appears to be a need for a new approach to ETG which accommodates and respects young people's values, visions and 'ways of being' - particularly around meaningful career choices - rather than being driven by short term pursuit of state objectives. The paradox here is that failure to take account of young adult's agendas results in young adults quitting options and coming back into the system, which fails to benefit young adults and undermines the chances of NDPAs reaching targets. A fundamental question for youth policy interventions such as New Deal therefore is, 'How relevant are the opportunities to young people and to what extent do the processes, choices and options empower or disempower these youth?'

Compulsion and commitment: sanctions and injustices

The low level of success achieved through ETF suggests that compulsory attendance is ineffective. One outcome is that young adults are unlikely to continue on the programme with the result that they rebound back into the system, are sanctioned and create a logjam for advisors. These situations seem to increase frustration for advisors and young people alike.

Rather than serving as a ‘kick start’, sanctions act as a disincentive for positive action, as they hit those who are least able to deal with them and further compound the difficulties they already face.

New Deal operates within a culture which treats lack of commitment or misunderstandings as punishable offences rather than opportunities for learning and development. They appear to be based on a ‘cultural deficit’ paradigm, stereotypes and misguided assumptions about the attitudes, motivations and orientation of unemployed youth, as the following story illustrates.

Sheila was due to start an option. It fell through, though apparently not as a result of her own doing. Yet, because she didn’t start the option and didn’t inform her advisor, she was sanctioned.

“My New Deal Advisor was very good. ... I found her very approachable. But I have seen another advisor while she was away and was given a real hard time. I was due to start this voluntary placement... and that fell through. I was told not to see my advisor anymore as I was on this option. Well I never signed last Thursday and of course I had no money going into my bank, I didn’t realise I had to sign. ... So they had to send it to adjudication to decide. The advisor was horrible to me. I felt really really tiny and it wasn’t my fault. I was nearly in tears. Then because I was arranging this new voluntary thing myself, she changed her tune ... I think she thought I was just bumming around ... but because I’d made the effort to go and ... get an interview ... it was alright, because if I was a no-hoper I wouldn’t have done that would I? I had been categorised as a no-hoper ...”

(New Deal Office, 24/6/99)

This story illustrates how Sheila had to fight for the right to be treated with respect. It also reveals how good relationships between advisor and client can be undermined because of the stereotypical views advisors may hold about young people. Given inappropriate interventions into young adult’s lives, it is no surprise that young people get frustrated and agitated with the system. In situations such as this young people express feelings of disempowerment rather than empowerment in their choices and actions. They can, as Sutherland (1998) suggests, undermine young people’s integrity as social actors, distract them from finding an appropriate course of action and may risk further alienating an already vulnerable group in society. Yet NDPAs similarly talk of feeling frustrated and disempowered by the system.

Empowering and disempowering young adults in their choices and actions: the critical role of the professional relationship

Conversations with young people revealed how sensitive many felt towards issues of self, identity and power. The vulnerability of many on New Deal mean that effective interventions are crucial to enabling young people's successful transitions into the labour market. As Sutherland (1998) shows, all the evidence suggests that those who have had negative experiences of schemes in the past are less likely to accept further placements. This suggests that New Deal needs to ensure that initial placements are of relevance to young people and of the highest quality. Yet as has been shown in this paper, despite New Deal being marketed as client-centred, young people are often constrained in their ability to make their own decisions, as the following experiences from young adults suggest:

“They kept trying to send me to Link Training and I didn't really want to go to them, but if I didn't go they were going to stop my money, and it's like, they're trying to tell me what to do, I don't want this. ... You don't really want to be told that you *have* to go there ... it's like they're dictating to you, ... it's like being told by your parents to go and tidy your room. ... But I was quite happy going into full time education because that was my thought if I couldn't get a job with training, ... it was actually my choice ... You can't expect someone to go along with a decision that's not theirs”.

(Teresa, age unknown, local college, 25/5/99)

“It was their attitude ... they don't give you the time to explain yourself. They treat you as if you're a kid ... didn't like it at all ... I'd like to be treated with respect. As adults not kids ... instead of thinking they know our needs, they need to take time to listen to people.” (Martin, age 19, YMCA video¹, Aug 99)

These comments raise questions about the sort of role advisors should take. Whilst advisors have expertise and knowledge of training and job opportunities, interventions appear to be most effective when young adults are empowered to make an informed decision, rather than advisors acting in young adults 'best interests'. In situations where decisions are not clear, the tendency is for advisors to make a decision for young people in order to move them through the system. Instead, it may be beneficial to help young people achieve a situation where they are ready and able to make an informed and appropriate decision on their own terms.

One outcome of this study has been the construction of new models of professional practice in terms of the 'co-inquiring professional' (Janssens et al. 2000). They make the distinction between the 'expert professional' (who, by virtue of the authority invested in them, seek to *direct* decisions and courses of action) and the 'interpretive' or 'co-inquiring professional'

(who works *with* the young adult to better understand their situation and reach their own decisions for action rooted in the individuals lifeworld). There is the need therefore for personal advisors to shift the emphasis from directive approaches to more facilitative (or interpretive) roles in which the advisor becomes a supportive guide rather than an instructor. Having a supportive and empathic advisor makes a real difference for many young people, as Teresa related:

“She was really interested in how I was getting on with the course and everything ... so she was fairly helpful in that way. ... She wanted to make sure that I’d made the right decision in the right course that I wanted to go on ... When I started full time employment she actually rang me up on my first day to congratulate me. It’s important really ... nice to think you’re not just a statistic to them, but ... a human being. ... If they ring up ... to see how you’re doing on the course ... and not just say ... you haven’t been to your work placement ... it makes you feel better about yourself, about doing the course ... I think that’s a nice touch”.

(Teresa, age unknown, local college, 25/5/99)

However, even if advisors do listen more carefully to young people the solution to many of the difficulties they may confront are likely to lie beyond what is possible within New Deal, in particular in dealing with problems of multiple social disadvantage.

Beyond New Deal: dealing with disadvantage

For many unemployed young people their lives are very complex and the success of programmes such as New Deal are dependent on how well they work with social and biographical issues. The example of Mike who was homeless illustrates the challenges that NDPAs face:

“It was their attitude ... I mean I’d just been made homeless and they expected me to continue doing ETF ... and they didn’t give me any time off what so ever. They said ... ‘I’m sorry Mr. Dobson, you’ve still got to do it.’ ... Put me under a lot of stress, nearly had a nervous breakdown ... cos I was constantly reminded I had to go to this option rather than sort out my life. I don’t know why they call it the New Deal, might as well just call it the ‘nervous breakdown’.”

(Mike, age 23, YMCA, Aug 1999)

Advisors acknowledge the broader issues many youth face, but in reality can feel as powerless as young adults in responding to them. Although the Gateway period was designed to get young people work ready, in many cases it is insufficient for addressing the many deep-seated problems that some young people experience. Moreover, enforcing commitment to

New Deal procedures can have detrimental affects on other aspects of their lives. For example, one young male on the ETF option was frustrated as he really wanted to be working and earning a living.

“They stopped my claim before cos I was supposed to come in before and start here ... and I owe 600 quid on my rent. ... You’ve got no choice really you’ve got to pick something or you lose your money. I wanna job ... I’ve got to support my family somehow, I can’t wait for six months while I’m sitting in a classroom. The thing is, cos I’ve got my own flat and I’ve got a missus and my little girl and everything and my little wages come in and it’s not enough to pay my rent, and Council Tax and things like that. ... I just can’t afford to do that unless I get a decent wage”.

(Group interview, ETF placement, 23/8/99)

In response to this type of situation many advisors alert young people to the possibilities of getting extra financial assistance, but this is not guaranteed. Besides, applying for yet another benefit tends to constitute another burden for many young people. The problem advisors face is how to help their clients find employment which allows them to earn enough money to cover their bills, when many have no qualifications. What advisors are dealing with here is not so much a problem with young people, rather a problem of labour market disadvantage, which is in turn part of a broader problem of social disadvantage. Yet NDPAs are, by implication, expected to deal with such problems. There is a growing tension here in Third Way government policy of trying to balance commitment to economic priorities with issues of social inclusion, social justice and individual choice.

New Labour`s focus on individual responsibility means that programmes such as New Deal are unable to cope with the impact of social disadvantage on labour market transitions. A dilemma faced by many advisors is how to deal with those labelled as the ‘hard to help’. NDPAs repeatedly expressed frustration with clients who fail to start an option, who don’t attend interviews or who find it difficult to make a decision about what they should do. Our evidence suggests that some individuals lack confidence, are anxious about new situations or are overwhelmed by broader problems of social disadvantage such as: homelessness, few qualifications, low self-esteem, criminal records, emotional disturbance or substance misuse. In these cases there is a danger that the punitive effect of sanctions exacerbate marginalisation and exclusion, deepen sense of low self worth and further reinforce the histories and disadvantages that have contributed to their unemployment in the first place. If New Deal is to

truly help all young people then measures need to be provided to enable individuals to transcend these barriers to social and economic participation.

Despite the policy rhetoric around New Deal there is a need to balance the demands of meeting performance targets with the needs of young people and in particular to take account of their individual capacities, life stories and social situations. Despite Tony Blair's categorical insistence that there would be no 'fifth option' (of staying at home on the dole), many advisors spoke of the need to reconsider the merits of an alternative fifth option, to release the log jam of hard-to-help young adults who remain in the system. As one advisor said: "New Deal needs to be reviewed for those people with problems which can't be solved with a 4 month Gateway period." In light of the time and resources spent on these young people trapped in the system, it may be more cost effective to provide a referral system in which young people are supported in addressing difficulties through counseling and capacity building whilst still claiming benefit.

Conclusion: Lessons from New Deal

This chapter has shown that despite the commitment of advisors to 'making a difference', systemic factors and inflexibility in policy implementation can undermine the successful working of New Deal. Moreover recent tightening up of New Deal practice in order to achieve policy targets is likely to exacerbate the alienation of unemployed young people and further hinder their labour market transitions. In so doing the original policy intention of widening choices and options for young adults is compromised. This chapter suggests a number of ways in which New Deal and similar programmes could be improved.

Firstly, there is the need to develop a genuinely more client-centred and less bureaucratic service, in which social and biographical considerations central to young people's lifeworlds can be balanced with youth policy objectives. This requires a built-in critical reflexivity to enable continuous practice learning and development in the system itself (Weil 1998; Percy-Smith and Weil 2000). Secondly, interventions need to become more responsive to the problems of disaffection and multiple disadvantage that many unemployed young people experience, but which currently remain untouched by New Deal. Thirdly, because of options often being seen as inappropriate or unattractive, there is a need to broaden the range of opportunities to better meet the career aspirations of all young people. For instance by providing work-based training in mechanics, welding, plumbing, hairdressing, catering and

leisure services and which offer a genuine commitment from employers in terms of pay, conditions, training and security. Finally, inter-personal relationships between advisor and client are crucial to whether interventions are successful in making a difference to young people's capacity for social and economic participation. There is therefore a need to provide a space for empowerment in which young people have a greater degree of autonomy in choice making and choice taking on programmes such as New Deal. This requires new approaches to professional intervention practices.

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ⁱ Young people at the YMCA undertook a video project organised by themselves according to their own criteria and experiences of New Deal and being unemployed.