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*Conditionality then and now? Moral ordering and the young unemployed: policy lessons from the 1930s.*

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Submitted for examination for a PhD in Employment Research

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## Conditionality then and now: Moral ordering and the young

### unemployed: Policy lessons from the 1930s..... 1

#### Contents

<i>Conditionality then and now? Moral ordering and the young unemployed: policy lessons from the 1930s</i> .....	5
Contents.....	7
Acknowledgements.....	11
Abstract.....	12
Abbreviations.....	13
Glossary.....	14
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	16
1.1 Welfare reform, novelty, and youth.....	18
1.2 Contributions of the thesis.....	21
1.3 Research questions.....	24
1.4 The structure of the thesis.....	27
Chapter 2: Literature review.....	30
2.1 Contemporary debates on youth unemployment in the UK.....	30
2.1.1 Critical perspectives on ‘welfare reform’.....	32
2.1.2 Mythbusting the ‘dependency culture’ narrative: debating the poor as ethical subjects.....	38
2.1.3 History in contemporary policy debates.....	46
2.2 Studies of the 1930s in History and Social Policy.....	48
2.2.1 Histories.....	48
2.2.2 Youth unemployment in the 1930s.....	50
2.2.3 The 1930s in contemporary social science.....	52
Chapter 3: Theory and Methods.....	57
3.1 Theory in this thesis.....	58
3.1.1 Governmentality in Foucault.....	59
3.1.2 Discipline.....	60
3.1.3 Unemployment benefits as disciplinary institutions.....	62
3.1.4 Justification and moral ordering in unemployment benefits.....	64
3.1.5 Political rationalities, liberalism and capitalism.....	68
3.2 Methods.....	72
3.2.1 Historical analysis in this thesis.....	73

3.2.2 Sources and the use of archives.....	78
3.3 Concluding remarks .....	86
Chapter 4: Unemployment and juvenile unemployment in the UK and Birmingham in the 1930s.....	88
4.1 Unemployment in the 1930s .....	88
4.1.1 Geographical differences: the depressed areas .....	91
4.1.2 Geographical differences: Birmingham .....	92
4.2 Timeline of major events .....	95
4.3 Austerity in public finances.....	97
4.4 Understandings of unemployment.....	102
4.4.1 Unemployment and unemployability .....	102
4.4.2 Gendered understandings of unemployment .....	103
4.4.3 Understandings of juvenile unemployment .....	105
4.5 Casual work.....	108
4.5.1 Blind alley work.....	109
4.5.2 Juveniles in Birmingham .....	111
4.6 Institutional structures of unemployment policy .....	114
4.7 Summary .....	119
Chapter 5: Moral ordering in the benefit system of the 1930s .....	121
5.1 Moral ordering and the threefold division of benefits .....	122
5.1.1 Insurance.....	122
5.1.2 The extended claimants.....	125
5.1.3 Public Assistance .....	129
5.1.4 Marginals.....	133
5.1.5 Surmising this division.....	135
5.2 Unemployed youth and moral orders: paupers or future contributors? .....	136
5.3 Unemployed young people and the household unit .....	140
5.4 Summary .....	146
Chapter 6: Conditionality and disciplinary technologies in the benefit system of the 1930s .....	148
6.1 Benefit conditionality in the 1930s.....	149
6.1.1 The Genuinely Seeking Work test and its legacy .....	151
6.1.2 Detecting voluntary unemployment.....	153
6.1.3 Juveniles and conditionality.....	156
6.1.4 Downward labour market mobility as condition? The ‘normal occupation’ rule .....	159

6.1.5 The question of geographical mobility .....	163
6.1.6 Settlement and irremovability .....	167
6.2 Remnants of pauperism? Deterrent relief and ‘workfare’ in Birmingham.....	170
6.2.1 Public Assistance in Birmingham in comparison with other areas .....	172
6.2.2 Deterrence or employability? .....	176
6.2.3 Compulsory training in extended benefits.....	177
6.3 Summary .....	180
Chapter 7: Institutionalisation and its meanings .....	183
7.1 Institutionalisation in Public Assistance and the poor law tradition .....	184
7.1.1 The workhouse.....	185
7.1.2 Casual wards .....	186
7.1.3 Punishments in institutions .....	188
7.2 The JIC: a punitive institution for unemployed youth? .....	189
7.2.1 National curriculum guidelines .....	194
7.3 Migrant juveniles .....	198
7.4 Placement work .....	201
7.5 Summary .....	202
Chapter 8: Post 2010: neo-liberalism and moral ordering in a residual benefit system .....	204
8.1 Welfare benefits since 2010 .....	205
8.1.1 Opposition and constraints on austerity .....	213
8.1.2 Changing labour markets .....	216
8.2 Similarities.....	220
8.2.1 Dependency discourses since 2010: worklessness/dependency vs demoralisation .....	220
8.2.2 Unemployed communities in discourse.....	222
8.2.3 The re-introduction of ‘workfare’ .....	225
8.2.5 Additional punitive measures .....	227
8.2.6 Unemployed young people as subject for cuts.....	229
8.3 Differences .....	232
8.3.1 Decline of the respectable worker and the contributory principle .....	232
8.3.2 Job search conditionality: actively seeking work.....	236
8.3.3 Failure to comply: sanctions .....	240
8.3.4 Exchanges, Jobcentres and the labour market .....	242
8.4 Summary .....	244
Chapter 9: Conclusions .....	245

9.1 Research questions .....	246
9.1.1 Unemployed subjects in policy discourse .....	247
9.1.2 Rights to benefit and conditionality.....	249
9.1.3 The 1930s and the post 2010 period: similarities and differences.....	252
9.2 Contributions of this thesis.....	258
9.2.1 To current debates on Conditionality .....	259
9.2.2 To current debates on youth transitions .....	262
9.2.3 To the study of the 1930s .....	264
9.3.4 Theory .....	265
9.3 Methods and possibilities for future research.....	266
9.3.1 Methodology.....	266
9.3.2 Possibilities for further research.....	268
Bibliography .....	271
Parliamentary Papers and documents from the 1930s .....	300
Archive sources .....	301
Of Birmingham City Council (At the Library of Birmingham).....	301
At The Modern Records Centre (University of Warwick) .....	302
At The National Archives.....	303

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## Abstract

*This thesis sheds light on welfare reform since 2010 through the study of similarities and differences in policy during the depression of the 1930s. It sets out to make an empirical, analytical and theoretical contribution to the study of welfare reform and policy in the 2010s and in the past by undertaking a new analysis of the 1930s. This analysis of policy discourse uses as its sources, original, primary documents from national and local government in the 1930s. It provides a new empirical case study of local benefit administration in Birmingham, and looks at the far less studied issue of young people's unemployment. It adopts a governmentality approach to policy analysis informed by Foucault's ideas of 'discipline' in social institutions. The thesis examines how welfare claimants have been constructed in policy discourse and how this then feeds into policy interventions. It explores the way these views are institutionalised in policy in different disciplinary measures that groups of claimants are subjected to. Its main findings are that 1) many new technologies of behavioural regulation represent revivals of practices from the past; 2) similar preoccupations with the subjectivity of claimants are present in each period but they have been translated into policy differently, since 2010 access to benefit has been determined primarily through behavioural assessments, in the 1930s this was dependent on status distinctions; 3) Youth had a special status in the 1930s, and was subject to specific forms of discipline which contrast with the treatment of adults.*

## Abbreviations

DWP - Department for Work & Pensions

ESA - Employment & Support Allowance

ESA WRAG - Employment & Support Allowance: Work Related Activity Group

HB - Housing Benefit

IS - Income Support

JEWSC - Juvenile Employment & Welfare Sub-Committee

JIC – Junior Instruction Centre

JSA - Jobseekers Allowance

LA - Local Authority

MWA - Mandatory Work Activity

PA - Public Assistance

PAC - Public Assistance Committee

UC - Universal Credit

UA - Unemployment Assistance

UAB - Unemployment Assistance Board

UB - Unemployment Benefit

UI - Unemployment Insurance

TP - Transitional Payments

WP - Work Programme

## Glossary

Casual Ward - a locally run institution that provided overnight accommodation to the homeless. Inmates were subjected to penal treatment and compulsory labour.

Employment Exchange - an institution which administered Unemployment Benefits and sought to place the unemployed into jobs.

Extended Benefit - benefit paid to unemployed who had exhausted their contributory benefit, introduced in 1924 as a successor to Uncovenanted Benefit.

Junior Instruction Centre – an institution which the juvenile unemployed (14-18) were obliged to attend to maintain their employability.

Public Assistance - successor to the Poor Law established by the Local Government Act of 1929, administered by Local Authorities.

Public Assistance Committee - local body for Administering Public Assistance.

Out of Work Donation - payment made to the unemployed in the aftermath of World War One paid mainly to demobilised soldiers and munitions workers.

Uncovenanted Benefit - benefit paid to unemployed who had exhausted their contributory benefit, introduced in 1921 to replace the Out of Work Donation.

Unemployment Assistance - introduced in 1934 to provide relief to unemployed who had exhausted their contributory benefit, to replace Transitional Payments.

Unemployment Assistance Board - central government body established to administer Unemployment Assistance.

Unemployment Benefit- Insurance based unemployment benefit.

Unemployment Insurance- Scheme of state provided insurance against unemployment introduced in 1911.

Transitional Benefit- benefit paid to unemployed who had exhausted their contributory benefit, introduced in 1927 to replace Extended Benefit.

Transitional Payments- benefit paid to unemployed who had exhausted their contributory benefit, introduced in 1932 to replace Transitional Benefit.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

“[B]y reforming the welfare system, including benefits reform, we will take welfare into the 21st century.” Iain Duncan Smith (Cabinet Office 2010)

In the debates and discussions of the merits of ‘welfare reform’ in the UK since 2010 there has been a distinct emphasis on its novelty. ‘Welfare reform’<sup>1</sup> has been described as the biggest change in the UK’s social security system since Beveridge. It has been marketed as a great innovation, as a novel project informed by the behavioural sciences and implemented through modern digital technology. In the eyes of many of its critics ‘welfare reform’, in the context of austerity, represented an unprecedented rolling back of the welfare state established in the post-war period and the end to the guarantees this system offered to protect the population from poverty. As ‘welfare reform’ was progressing the youth unemployment problem was becoming especially acute.

This thesis takes these discussions in a different direction, toward a different comparison point, by looking at the development of state welfare during the great depression of the 1930s. It makes an original contribution to knowledge by 1) bringing a historical perspective into contemporary debates on conditionality and youth unemployment 2) its empirical examinations of sources and material from the 1930s and 3) making a theoretical contribution in its use of and assessment of, a form of governmentality analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase ‘welfare reform’ is placed in inverted commas here to denote a degree of scepticism about its use as a description and to indicate scepticism towards the normative claims implicit in the designation of ‘reforms’.

This thesis seeks to engage with contemporary debates on welfare conditionality, with specific reference to - arguments that there has been a disciplinary or punitive turn in social security policy which has involved a reduction of claimant rights. The thesis engages with the work of authors associated the *Welfare Conditionality: Sanctions, Support and Behaviour Change* project such as Peter Dwyer, Sharon Wright and Del Roy Fletcher; but also with other critical analyses of 'welfare reform' which draw upon Marxist, Foucauldian or Bourdieusian analyses. These perspectives are often found in journals like *Critical Social Policy*, *Social Policy & Society* and the *Journal of Poverty & Social Justice*.

The thesis argues that the image of novelty often present in discussions of welfare reform is rather misleading. In the first place, many new technologies of behavioural regulation represent revivals of practices from the past. In the second the thesis finds a similar preoccupation with the subjectivity of claimants. However, this research also reveals that different ways of conceptualising and of measuring desirable subjectivities dominate in each period. Since 2010 access to benefit has been determined primarily through behavioural assessments whereas, as will be set out, in the 1930s access to benefit was highly dependent on status distinctions. Thirdly it finds analytically significant similarities and differences between the conceptualisation of, and treatment of, youth in the benefit system in the two eras.

This introductory chapter will begin by introducing the context for the thesis within the current discussion of youth unemployment and 'welfare reform' in section 1.1. Section 1.2 describes the original contribution the thesis makes to knowledge. The research questions of the thesis are introduced in section 1.3. The structure of the thesis is described in section 1.4.

## 1.1 Welfare reform, novelty, and youth

In a context of growing job precarity, young unemployed people will often need to claim the support of the state. While youth unemployment has been presented as a problem, the policy response to this has taken place during a period of great change in the benefit system. ‘Welfare reform’ is an ongoing process but has been shifted into a new gear by the 2010-15 Coalition Government and the subsequent Conservative Governments. The post 2010 programme of ‘welfare reform’ has been described as the biggest change in the UK’s social security system since Beveridge (1942) and as “a vision for a new welfare settlement; a welfare state fit for the 21st century” (DWP 2014a). It has continued the trend “from a more enabling programme of employment assistance to a more punitive and controlling activation strategy” (Edmiston et al 2017: 254) via increases in the conditions attached to the receipt of benefits. Whilst the ethics of conditionality increases were controversial and debated during the New Labour years (1997-2010) (e.g. Dunn 2010, Carpenter et al 2007) escalations under the Coalition Government have added urgency to the discussion (Dwyer and Wright 2014). A sense of novelty pervades the discussion of escalating conditionality. In political debate there is a degree of historical inaccuracy. Sanctions and conditionality are held to be either an eternal principle underpinning any benefit system, or an innovation of the 1980s or 1990s. For instance in a recent report of the parliamentary committee with responsibility for an inquiry into the future of Jobcentre Plus, they write that “[c]onditions have always been applied to the payment of unemployment benefits. The concept of a conditionality regime enforced by financial sanctions—i.e. stopping benefit payments for a limited period—for claimants who fail to comply with the rules dates from the 1980s” (House of Commons, Work and Pensions Select Committee 2014: p23), while others see the introduction of Jobseeker’s Allowance (e.g. Watts and Fitzpatrick 2018) in 1996 as the key change.

Claimants are cast as victims not so much of economic circumstance but of the welfare state itself, socialised into the acceptance of easy money and immoral lifestyles. Statist bureaucracy is blamed for its inflexible and antiquated nature

which has led to a failure to create incentive structures to which claimants can respond (Cabinet Office 2010). Policy has therefore sought to arrest this decline in working discipline through escalations of conditionality and sanctions, such as the introduction of compulsory unpaid work schemes and reductions in entitlements that are billed as restoring 'work incentives' (DWP 2010). This agenda has gone alongside, or arguably contributed toward, increasing public antipathy to the unemployed as well as to the social security system itself (Sage 2012, Hudson and Lunt 2016). In a narrative of inadequate socialisation, problematisations of youth almost necessarily play a major part. Welfare reform has identified them as special targets. With many young people supposedly having been brought up under a welfare system which encouraged a culture of entitlement and a lack of understanding of the reciprocal nature of payments.

This rapid change to entitlements and regulations came at a time when young people's place in the labour market was already becoming less and less secure. Reform of this kind in a climate of high youth unemployment has had a major effect. Sanctions and conditionality have been found to have had a negative impact on claimants; they are experienced as disempowering and they have had a disproportionate effect on young people (Webster 2013).

Where these issues have been discussed it has, generally speaking, been in terms of the breakdown of the post-war labour market. The decline of secure contracts and long-term employment patterns leaving a generation unable to prepare for the future. The historical view here stresses the novelty of the new situation, the rise of neo-liberalism and decline of the post-war consensus. Less attention has been paid to the possible relevance of a longer-term view.

This thesis examines policy perspectives on youth unemployment in the 1930s, focusing on how unemployed people were perceived and how this justifies policy. This information is then used to provide insights into present day policy and to

establish a more informed long-term historical perspective than is often offered. Both periods were times when economic collapse and rising unemployment presented challenges to policy makers and when governments were committed to liberal social and economic orthodoxies. Into this common situation came labour market entrants who were consequently unable to get jobs. Governments both now and then feared that the unemployed would become vulnerable to 'demoralisation' and 'dependency' and young people were feared to be especially vulnerable. The behaviour and character of claimants were seen as determinant of their right to support and as the subject for disciplinary interventions. The use of historical study serves to de-naturalise policy discourse and to enable a historical-sociological understanding of its roots.

The 1930s has a bad reputation. References to the decade can be a byword for the untold misery to which a generation decided that there could be no going back. In accounts of the development of the post-war regime (Mencher 1967) it is the crisis which made change necessary if not inevitable. It was the "the devil's decade, the locust years, the dark valley" (Gardiner 2011 p103) characterised by social despair and economic catastrophe, as well as the ominous build up to global war. The administration of the UK's benefit system in the 1930s is most famous for the profoundly degrading treatment of the unemployed under the means test. The poverty of the decade has been depicted famously in journalism in George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1986b), in fiction in Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole* (1993), and Walter Brierly's *Means-Test Man* (2011). It is perhaps for this reason that comparisons with the decade are unlikely to be sought out by those searching for justification today. Restorations of policies from the pre-welfare state era should mark a disturbing turn in policy. It presents opportunities for the reassessment of both periods.

## 1.2 Contributions of the thesis

As is set out in the next chapter, most social scientific responses to welfare reform have examined the period since the 1980s. These have largely tended to produce accounts of the development of neo-liberalism and the breakdown of the post-war welfare state. Accounts have paid attention to the game of ‘policy leapfrog’ (Deacon and Patrick 2010) between Conservative and Labour administrations, within which conditionality has repeatedly escalated.

There have been fewer examinations of the inter war years. Rather than tracing the decline of welfare state and social democratic ideas since the 1980s, this thesis compares policy and practice in the neo-liberalism of post 2010 and in the liberalism of the 1930s. From these policies and practices the ideologies of the periods can be deduced and compared. The study of policy in the 1930s adds a new dimension to this discussion and thereby makes an original contribution to knowledge. The purpose of this comparison is to fill a role in the current debate by bringing history back in. Historical research can serve to expand policy debates by bringing a longer perspective than is the norm in social research. It can serve to de-naturalise the present and allow questioning of the assumptions which underpin debate. The comparison with the 1930s, as well as shedding light on the present day, can also be used to question the image of the ‘devil’s decade’. This image comes from the comparison with the alternative policy perspective of the post war period. The view from post 2008, might provide quite a different image than is commonly assumed.

This historical approach of contrasting the 1930s with the policies of post-2008 governments, makes an analytic contribution using the evidence of the 1930s to problematize current policy perspectives and theoretical assumptions. The study is concerned directly with contemporary welfare reform and particularly with the role played by disciplinary regulation and the sanctioning of claimants. The resemblance to pre-war welfare institutions is much less remarked upon. These comparisons can

allow a new questioning of the apparent novelty of post 2010 social policy. Most study of welfare reform has been “predicated on the notion that there has been an historical rupture in the approach taken by the state to the long-term unemployed” (Fletcher 2015 p329). Continuities with earlier periods of liberal governance have been explored less than the shift from a social democratic post-war consensus to a neo-liberal one. However the comparison with the 1930s is a useful one. It is a comparison of two recessions, with similar characteristics, as Fletcher argues “both periods were characterised by an analogous set of circumstances, including the near collapse of the banking system and structural transformations of the economy” (Fletcher 2015 p330). But it also is a highly relevant period for the study of policy response because “economic liberalism was hegemonic during both periods” (Fletcher 2015 p330). This liberalism however is not just economic rather it has a wider ‘political rationality’ (Brown 2015), a mentality of rule. It encompasses recurrent pathologies and fears, of the ‘scrounger’, of ‘abuse’ of ‘the system’ of ‘dependency’ and ‘demoralisation’ of the people by the loss of the discipline of work. All these are present post 2010, but all can be seen in the crisis of the 1930s. The study of these recurrent preoccupations which underpin policy can strengthen the critique of ‘welfare reform’ as a project. Importantly it enables one to question the view of the apparent novelty of ‘welfare reform’ shared by many of its advocates and detractors. Policies which return to the 1930s sharply contradict recent claims that current changes represent ‘21<sup>st</sup> century welfare’.

Additionally, there has been less attention paid to the way youth transitions from education into employment were handled during the 1930s. Juvenile unemployment in the 1930s has received some attention from academics in the 1980s when youth unemployment emerged as a distinct issue. In the contemporary literature of the post-2008 period this earlier recession has not been examined from a youth unemployment standpoint. The thesis has a focus on youth. It makes a contribution to understandings of youth transitions in the 1930s, but also in bringing a historical perspective to understandings of youth transitions in the

2010s. Young people's benefits have been at the heart of the welfare reform agenda. They have been seen both as a legitimate subject for cuts and as a natural target for disciplinary interventions. The unemployment generated by the 2008 crisis has been heavily concentrated among young people: the thesis examines their status as a subject for intervention in two recessions.

The original contribution to knowledge made by the thesis lies in its object of study as well as its methods. In both senses the thesis makes an empirical contribution to knowledge by looking at the less studied subject in the 1930s of youth unemployment, and by comparing the present situation to the 1930s rather than more recent recessions. The focus of study on Birmingham in the 1930s is also novel as most studies of unemployment have been concerned with the 'depressed areas' rather than the relatively prosperous West Midlands (Pilgrim Trust 1938) (Merseyside Socialist Research Group 1992), choosing to examine the problem where it was at its worst. This thesis examines Birmingham and provides a new dimension to the studies of welfare in the 1930s as a case study where policy is local. Birmingham to some extent provides an exemplar of how policy was supposed to work. The city was widely praised in government for its implementation of policy without unrest or defiance. The purpose of this case is to show the translation of policy objectives into practice and the ways that alternative approaches are justified to central authority.

This approach also makes a theoretical/conceptual contribution. By applying contemporary theoretical perspectives to the 1930s, it enables a refinement of governmentality theory through its application to a new case and a new historical period. As set out in Chapter 3 the thesis takes a governmentality approach drawing upon Foucault's understandings of discipline. This perspective is integrated with Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) insights on 'moral ordering' and thereby helping to refine the use of governmentality perspectives through the use of supplementary concepts and ideas.

Historical analysis re-historicises and de-naturalises present policies and discourses; it re-opens relatively closed avenues for critique.

### 1.3 Research questions

The aim in this research is to analyse similarities and differences in the construction of youth unemployment as a policy object in two different recessions. Therefore, the research questions are:

1. How were/are unemployed young people perceived as a subject by policy makers? How did/does this differ from the adult unemployed? How were these perceptions justified within public policy discourse?
2. How were these judgements reflected in different entitlements to unemployment benefits? What determined the type of intervention and degree of coercion that the unemployed were subject to?
3. How are these judgements and treatments different and similar in the 1930s compared with post 2010?

Question 1 examines the view held of the unemployed by policy makers, but also the categories in which claimants are placed and against which they are assessed. The categorisations employed by policy makers are of key interest for the thesis. Placing people into categories like 'underclass' 'troubled family' or 'genuine claimant' is a "classificatory decision" an "exercise in value choice and evaluation, not a description" (Bauman 2005 p73). The state has a capacity to "trace salient demarcations and produce social reality through its work of incalculating of efficient categories and classifications" (Wacquant 2009 pxvi) onto the population. Official judgements about who should receive unemployment benefits are rooted in moral assessments of the ordinary worker and ordinary household: in other words, they reflect assumptions about how people should behave. However these understandings are problematised by young people's unemployment, they can be

viewed as inheritors of situations they did not create and therefore less deserving of discipline or punishment. So young people's unemployment caused a problem for those attempting to distinguish between different groups of unemployed. In the 1930s the school leaver caused problems for a system which made distinctions between different groups of claimants mainly through contribution records. This thesis seeks to understand how the views of policy makers towards the unemployment problem have changed. Is the problem framed as one of economic failure or of a deficient 'unemployable' section of the population? This is less a question of the 'reality' of the situation as it is one of how the construction of it in discourse fits with understandings of liberal thought.

Such a judgement will then feed into which actions are considered appropriate for specific groups. This leads on to question 2 about how these views are translated into action. The state attempts to use administrative devices to distinguish between claimant groups and it also seeks to use these to 'send messages' or even to intervene. What form of intervention follows from the perceptions of the unemployed as a subject? The thesis is concerned with the relationships between discourse and policy formation. This often crystallises in 'conditionality': the conditions that claimants are required to fulfil in order to receive state support. Conditions for eligibility are derived from judgements of claimants; they filter people between classifications based on judgements of who the benefit is designed to help and who the state can reasonably be expected to help. This overlaps somewhat with what Clasen and Clegg's (2007) typology of forms of conditionality. They distinguish conditions of category i.e. belonging to the working age population, from conditions of circumstance like unemployment, having a low income or childcare responsibilities.

Conditionality links receipt of support to desired forms of behaviour and is often justified as a means to correct problematic behaviours. Conditions placed upon those receiving payments, such as demands that they train, search for work or carry out unpaid work, are also based upon judgements and assessments of the person. These are what Clasen and Clegg's (2007) third category; conditions of *conduct* (Watts and Fitzpatrick 2018). The examination of these mechanisms and the justifications used to explain them enables an understanding of the view of the unemployed which underpins policy: how categories are formed and decisions to support are made. For instance, contribution-based benefits attempt to limit payment to those with an established work history, whilst in recent years benefits have been more linked to immediate behaviour such as job search activity.

The thesis pays particular attention to the changing understandings of 'youth'. 'Youth' as a category denotes a period between childhood and adulthood and therefore exists in relation to ideas and expectations about both. The point of transition will be different in the two periods concerned. Institutions which structure the life course have changed (such as the school leaving age) along with cultural expectations (for instance about the age of independent living). But so, have the structure of households and household finances. The thesis will also note how the changing status of women in the labour market affects conditionality regimes. While there would be a case for also examining the role of racial discrimination in effecting the conditionality regimes to which claimants have been subjected in the two periods, this was not a viable option for historical comparison due to the lack of data in the sources used from the 1930s.

However this is not intended to be a purely historical work. In order to intervene in the debate on welfare reform it explicitly decides to compare both eligibility criteria and conditionality in the two periods. Question 3 looks at how these answers to questions 1 and 2 appear similar and different in the 1930s and since 2010. While the similarities between the 1930s and 2010-2015 provide a key justification for this

comparative exercise, the differences between two periods of liberal hegemony can provide important insights into the present as a historical moment. The changing statuses of different groups in policy discourse are a key subject for analysis. The thesis asks what determines the judgements made of claimant's rights? Are they seen as morally deficient and responsible for their situations, or as victims of circumstances?

#### 1.4 The structure of the thesis

The thesis explores policy in the 1930s and what its implications are for policy in the present day. As such its material is balanced towards the study of the 1930s, which is presented in chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7. In Chapter 8 the implications of this evidence for present day policy is explored.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature that has been engaged for the thesis. As such it also locates the thesis in the context of existing scholarship on welfare reform and on welfare in the 1930s and makes clear the original contribution made by the thesis. It examines debates over the nature of the unemployed subject, the 'dependency culture' and 'intergenerational worklessness' since 2010 and how these have been applied to recent debates on welfare reform. It examines the way the 1930s has been used in contemporary debates on unemployment and in historical literature.

Chapter 3 sets out the methodology for the thesis and the theoretical analytical perspectives to be used. As this is a thesis using a textual analysis the theoretical perspectives shape the methodology. The thesis is influenced mainly by the governmentality literature on welfare and by Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) concepts of justification and moral ordering. The chapter closes out with a discussion of the archive and documentary sources consulted and the criteria that have been used to select sources.

Chapter 4 begins the second main section of the thesis dealing with the findings of the archival research into the 1930s. The chapter provides the necessary context for understanding the empirical data on youth unemployment in the 1930s. It describes the levels of unemployment and its distribution throughout the country. It introduces the policy landscape and the systems that dealt with the unemployed.

Chapter 5 examines the nature of the distinctions made between different categories of the unemployed. There are distinctions between those covered by the insurance schemes and those made to rely on the poor law, or Public Assistance. However this was complicated by those whose insurance eligibility expired but who were still unemployed; were they to be forced to rely on the poor law? The chapter describes the principles which were used to distinguish these groups from each other and the arguments and tensions caused by groups with ambiguous situations. The question arises about where the juvenile unemployed fitted into this system when they left school. Were they to be 'credited in' to the insurance system, or made to rely on Public Assistance? Were they regarded as a special problem group?

Chapter 6 looks at behavioural and disciplinary measures employed as conditions attached to benefits. Using the categorisations established in Chapter 5, it asks how technologies of power are applied to different categories of claimants. How is the search for work enforced? Which groups are mandated towards compulsory training or work? And how are these conditions different for juveniles and adults? Conditions placed upon those receiving payments, such as demands that they train, search for work or carry out unpaid work, are also based upon judgements and assessments of the person. The examination of these mechanisms and the justifications used to explain them enables understanding of the view of the unemployed which underpins policy: how categories are formed and decisions to support are made.

Chapter 7 examines disciplinary institutions in the 1930s. Whether or not claimants could be compelled to attend institutions depended upon their status within the system. However their treatment within the institutions also is indicative of this status. This chapter looks at how the treatment of Juveniles in the Junior Instruction Centres can be compared to that of Public Assistance claimants in more traditional poor law style institutions. The conduct of this system can show a great deal about how the subject was perceived. These disciplinary institutions sought to alter subjectivity, but what sort of discipline was to be imposed: that of the school or the prison?

Chapter 8 presents a discussion of the implications for the present-day practice of welfare reform of the findings of the previous chapters. What are the similarities and differences between these technologies and practices and those of the present day and how can these shed new light on welfare reform in the UK?

The concluding Chapter 9 brings the discussion back to the research questions set out in the introduction. It assesses how these questions have been answered by the evidence of the previous chapters. It then considers what implications evidence from the 1930s can have for contemporary social policy. Chapter 9 considers the contribution the thesis makes to social scientific analyses of welfare reform and youth unemployment. Reference is made to some specific contemporary policy debates and suggests what implications its findings have for policy. In particular there are implications for the extent to which benefit systems should be based on contributions. But more importantly the evidence feeds into developing a critique of the behavioural conditionality which has become increasingly ubiquitous and severe.

## Chapter 2: Literature review

“[W]e cannot very well state any problem until we know *whose* problem it is”. (Wright-Mills 2000 p76)

Before beginning to discuss the evidence and findings of the thesis, it is necessary to set out where this study belongs in the context of the many studies of ‘welfare reform’ and the history of provision for the young unemployed in the UK. Any review of what has been done before must be highly selective owing to the sheer number and variety of interventions on the subject of ‘welfare reform’. This chapter makes clear the original contribution of the thesis, identifying the gaps in the existing body of knowledge in which it makes its intervention. The first part section 2.1 is concerned with how youth unemployment has been identified as a problem in the present day. Section 2.1.1 provides an outline of how recent policy has been questioned and criticised by authors working in critical social science traditions. After that 2.1.2 sets out how the youth unemployment problem has been perceived in current policy debates focussing on arguments around the ‘dependency culture’ of ‘intergenerational worklessness’ which supposedly creates a crisis of socialisation of the young. Thirdly, in section 2.1.3 the chapter examines the uses of history in current policy debates. Section 2.2 examines describes that histories of the 1930s which have informed this thesis. These consist of general histories, the histories of particular institutions (2.2.1). But also, histories of youth and ‘juvenile’ unemployment in the 1930s (2.2.2). It concludes by setting out how the history of the 1930s has been used to critically understand contemporary social policy in section 2.2.3.

### 2.1 Contemporary debates on youth unemployment in the UK

Youth unemployment in the UK has been written about a great deal since the crisis of 2008. Youth unemployment was concerning policy makers even before then,

having been gradually increasing since 2004 even during periods of economic growth (Resolution Foundation 2012). It has been described in many different ways including as a problem of low skills and qualifications (UKCES 2015), as one of human capital deficiency, of entrenched vulnerability, as a failure of employment policies, or as a failure of communities to socialize workers with the required work ethic (CSJ 2013). These discourses have been developing for some time, Mizzen (2003) described the development of youth as a core site for policy interventions in the New Labour years as policy attempted to realise their visions of reconciling economic efficiency and social justice.

The problem can be perceived and measured in different ways. For instance Britton et al (2011) undertook a quantitative study whereby they claim that the likelihood of teenagers becoming NEETs (Not in Education Employment or Training) can be predicted by their circumstances as 13-14 year olds. The main causes of 'NEETHood' are identified as lack of qualifications, and work experience while still in school. But also institutional failures to monitor school leavers, and the gap between mandatory education or training and eligibility for benefits and therefore help finding work: "by the time they enter the formal benefit system, the damage may already be done" (ibid 2011 p4). This gap was filled by raising age at which participation in education and training was mandatory to 18 in 2014. This concurred with Gregg's earlier identification of the objective of policy as ensuring they "gain the necessary skills and qualifications both in and out of work" (2008 p17). This concern with unsupervised gaps is highly reminiscent of the 1930s where the gap between the school leaving age and contact with Employment Exchanges was blamed for allowing young people to 'drift'. Others refer to NEETS as "experiencing personal and social barriers to participation, such as learning difficulties, caring responsibilities or early parenthood" as well as the lack of job search resources (Russell et al 2014 p4). A slightly different perspective draws attention to the changing nature of the labour market in which young people are seeking employment, with increases in insecure employment and the rise in self-

employment (Gregg and Gardiner 2015). For instance 16-24 year olds are the group most likely to be on a zero hours contract (TUC 2016).

These discourses have also zoomed in on notions of 'character', "capabilities and 'soft skills', such as the ability to communicate effectively, apply oneself to a task, commit to long-term goals, and work effectively in a team" (Demos 2011 p19). The lack of these characteristics is often employed to explain why young people experience periods of unemployment. These discourses on character have intersected with a discourse on 'employability' (UKCES 2009). The Prince's Trust (2017) stresses the deleterious effects of labour market struggles on young people's sense of capability, and autonomy, reporting a sense of despair and lack of self-belief among its clients.

So the youth unemployment problem has attracted a debate on interpretation. This thesis is interested in the operation of the benefit system and how young unemployed figure in the debate over 'welfare reform'.

### 2.1.1 Critical perspectives on 'welfare reform'

This section is an examination of some of the explanations that have been offered by social scientists for this direction in policy, the deeper social meaning of 'welfare reform', since 2010 as well as during the New Labour period, of escalating conditionality, and of its application to the young. Some (like Wiggan 2015) have focussed upon the changing political economy of advanced capitalist states which is argued to necessitate increasingly punitive measures in the welfare system in order to enforce less and less appealing working conditions. Other approaches (e.g Young 2003, and Tyler 2013) look more at the cultural consequences of economic change and the ways in which claimants are demonised or rendered as 'abject' subjects. The approach taken by this thesis is strongly influenced by a strand in the current literature represented by the Foucauldian governmentality approach. As this

literature is discussed at length in the theory chapter to come, it is dealt with here only briefly.

Welfare reform has often been discussed as part of a punitive or vindictive turn in social policy (Grover 2010). So what constitutes a 'punitive turn' and what explains this? Criminologist Jock Young (2003) provided an interesting account of this in attempting to provide an explanation for the increasing 'vindictiveness' in the UK's criminal justice system. Young drew upon the work in the 1930s of Danish sociologist Svend Ranulf who sought to explain why people were so frequently outraged by crimes committed by others against others whom they had never met. Why was is that:

“[p]eople interfere in affairs which seem to be no concern of theirs, merely for the satisfaction of giving vent to their indignation and of collaborating in the chastisement of strangers for acts which have been materially harmful only to a likewise unknown third party or perhaps nobody at all” (Ranulf quoted in Barbalet 2002 p286).

Young echoes Ranulf in arguing that 'underclass' theory taps neatly into the resentments felt by the lower middle class of society. The condition of a lower middle class generates a degree of stress and insecurity which requires them to exercise restraint and self-discipline, while at the same time they lack an anti-authoritarian impulse (Barbalet 2002). Young argues that stereotypes of the underclass depict unrestrained and undisciplined behaviours including inactivity, dependency on others, hedonism, and short termism (i.e. lack of thrift, or having more children than they can afford to raise). “In its stereotype the 'underclass' is feared because of its economic threat (it and its children have to be paid for by the 'respectable' and 'included' taxpayer); its physical threat (the perpetration of 'incivilities and predatory crimes') and its social threat (the reproduction of its burdensomeness across generations)” (Grover 2010 2.8).

Also examining the political cultural dimensions of social resentments is Imogen Tyler who discusses the way crises of the post-industrial economy have been rendered as moral crises e.g. of 'broken Britain' (2015). The crisis is discussed through 'abject' figures, a series of despised social archetypes: "national abjects, such as 'the benefits cheat', are mobilized as *technologies* of social control through which the transition from welfare to 'postwelfare' states is effected" (2015 p495). 'Abjection' denotes a surplus population excluded from common humanity and seen as without rights. The abject population is created by the exercise of sovereign power: "its processes of inclusion and exclusion, produce waste populations: an excess which threatens from within, but which the system cannot fully expel as it requires this surplus both to constitute the boundaries of the state and to legitimate the prevailing order of power" (Tyler 2013 p20). The abject is often dealt with through a 'hygienic governmentality' which asserts it to be a threat to the good or moral way of life of the majority and to therefore need to be subjected to surveillance and monitoring (Tyler 2013 p38).

Punitive welfare has also been described in terms of a convergence between the penal/criminal justice system and the institutions of social welfare. Wacquant (2013) argues that the rise of 'workfare' is intimately linked to the rise of 'prisonfare' in the United States and that most European countries have emulated this approach. For Wacquant western states have increasingly adopted widespread punitive measures to control the consequences of de-industrialisation. Increased incarceration neutralises those within subaltern classes who openly rebel against the social order. The 'workfare' net normalises and enforces extreme low paid work as a discipline for the post-industrial proletariat. Both together "serve[s] the symbolic mission of reaffirming the authority of the state and the newfound will of political elites to emphasise and enforce the sacred border between commendable citizens and deviant categories, the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor" (Wacquant 2013 pxvii).

Wacquant is not the only writer to note the increasing convergence of practices between the two systems. This can take the form of increasing similarity in discourse, applying criminal sanctions within the welfare system, and/or applying welfare sanctions for violations of the wider law. McKeever (2004) for instance discusses the use of benefit sanctions for those who defy civil court orders; the use of such a practice means that the welfare system becomes available as a disciplinary tool to enforce compliance. The blurring of criminal and welfare sanctions can also be seen in social housing where 'anti-social behaviour' can see tenants evicted and behavioural conditions have been increasingly integrated into contracts and tenancy agreements whereby the failure to comply can lead to a loss of housing (Flint and Nixon 2006).

Marxist perspectives on welfare reform reject individualistic explanations for unemployment. Instead unemployment is explained by the chronic instability of capitalism as a mode of production. This argument sees social welfare and active labour market policies as means of regulating labour displaced by capitalism's crisis tendency. If capitalism's inherent instability causes periods of disruption and ceaseless change, then a mechanism is required for redirecting displaced workers back toward the labour force. Fox-Piven and Cloward (1972) argue that there is no automatic relationship between the economic imperative to adopt a new way of life and actually doing so. Often "market incentives do not collapse; [however] they are simply not sufficient to compel people to abandon one way of working and living in favour of another" (1972, p6). "There may be a 'propensity to truck, barter and exchange one thing for another', as Adam Smith put it, but there is clearly no propensity to get a job" (Denning 2010). Offe concurs that a simply economic assumption that market incentives will re-integrate workers back into the workforce is flawed in assuming no other option is available, and that "emigration, delinquency, and political revolt" (1985, p124) are examples of alternatives. Another might be working intermittently in what industry remains but abandoning permanent working life. Policy, he argues, has taken the form of enhancing the saleability of labour power by enhancing "education, training, regional mobility and

improving the general adaptability of labour power” (ibid). Active policy like ‘welfare reform’ has been explained in this manner by some contemporary Marxist commentators. Greer (2016) for instance argues that the central purpose of such programmes has been to ‘re-commodify’ labour and to undo the ‘loosening’ of labour market discipline enacted by post-war welfare states. This will, for instance, have the effect of lowering reservation wages by reducing the time workers are able to survive outside of employment. Grover (2012) argues that welfare conditionality regimes represent a kind of ‘active proletarianisation’. The aim to ‘personalise’ conditionality represents an attempted adaption to post-fordist working patterns and practices, but also the extension of conditionality into new groups. Grover argues that extending conditionality to lone parents and those previously viewed as unable to work for reasons of disability has been driven by an agenda of increasing the size of the reserve army of labour.

Wiggan (2015) takes an autonomist Marxist perspective which sees labour as having the capacity to disrupt the accumulation process by withdrawing from the labour market. He argues that under de-industrialisation “mass unemployment transferred the refusal of work to the social security system. The availability of unemployment benefit and other out of work benefits effectively provided the means for a portion of labour power to live outside the employment relation” (Wiggan 2015 p375). This tradition takes much more seriously than the social democratic or anti-poverty tradition the idea that many of the unemployed are reluctant to take employment on the terms offered, and thus (although coming from a very different perspective) has something in common with Dunn’s ‘choosiness’ (2013) (Wright 2013). Wiggan’s “intention is not to suggest claimants are feckless individuals, or are expressing a radical rejection of employment, but to draw attention to labour power’s autonomous questioning of the demand they make themselves available for *all* existing job vacancies” (Wiggan 2015 p377).

Marxist perspectives, in that they are inherently critical of the wage labour relation in and of itself, are not morally invested in the welfare of the state or the unity of

society, as expressed in contributions to GDP or the payment of taxes, in the way that left-liberal or social democratic perspectives are. Additionally they are unconcerned with rendering the working class as deserving recipients of aid. Indeed the perspective is critical of mainstream social scientific approaches. Cole, for instance, sees sociology as engaged in a battle that started with an “ideological conflict with the Thatcher government over the meaning of unemployment [that] hinged on the social sciences producing research that defended the unemployed from governmental charges that they lacked a work ethic” (Cole 2008 p28). Cole accuses mainstream sociology of sharing the view that “achieving the status of working citizen w[as] the pinnacle of human experience” (2008 p29) and that the central criterion by which policy should be assessed is ‘does it increase the numbers of people in work’? In countering Thatcherite narratives which accused the unemployed of having a cynical and instrumental attitude to work which would lead to benefit fraud or exploitation of the system, Cole charges mainstream sociology with constructing an account of the working class which stressed not only the intrinsic (e.g. psychological) benefits of work but also its inherent cultural import. This fed into New Labour’s paternalistic justifications for its active labour market policies whereby increases in conditionality were justified as good for the claimant as any waged work is seen as providing a holistic benefit.

There have been a variety of attempts to understand the upsurge in punitivity represented by welfare reform. Some perspectives understand this as a psychological response to increasing social insecurity breaking down solidarities. Others see these programmes as means of enforcing participation in increasingly undesirable jobs in post-industrial capitalist labour markets. The governmentality approach steps away from making statements about what the cause of the measures is to study the way subjects are constructed in discourse and the way that the technologies employed by governments seek to alter this.

### 2.1.2 Mythbusting the 'dependency culture' narrative: debating the poor as ethical subjects

The thesis contends that in accordance with the research questions contemporary debates have focussed on how to classify claimants. Are they seen as 'vulnerable' or as 'morally culpable'? This question has been key to debates on conditionality, sanctions in the benefit system and whether or not they can be justified.

We could begin with the reactions of social scientists to the claims by several figures including then DWP Minister Chris Grayling that there existed a large number of families in Britain where three generations had been continually unemployed: "Some areas of Britain are suffering from intergenerational worklessness, which is why we must act now to ensure that children living in workless households are not left behind like their parents have been" (Quoted in Shildrick et al 2012 p9). The claim was that such families generated a 'culture of dependency' and were failing to instil the desired working dispositions into young people. In this narrative the benefit system itself has a negative role in this socialisation as "[t]ime and again people were not just allowed to do the wrong thing, but were actively encouraged to do so" (ibid). People were allowed to "grow up with a series of expectations: you can have a home of your own, the state will support you whatever decisions you make, you will always be able to take out no matter what you put in" (Cameron 2012). Shildrick et al sum up the position as "the idea that worklessness might, in large part, be explained by people's cultures (their values, outlooks and behaviours), and that such cultures of worklessness are passed down between the generations, has been influential in the way that the current and previous UK governments have sought to tackle unemployment" (2012 p10). This account of Britain's welfare state as generative of a moral crisis has played a key role in justifying heavy reductions in entitlements as well as punitive increases in the severity and ubiquity (Dwyer and Wright 2014) of conditionality. Resisting and countering this narrative has therefore been a central feature of social scientific responses as well as those of anti-poverty organisations. The balance of social

scientific evidence does not favour the 'dependency culture' narrative (e.g. Wright 2013, Shildrick et al 2012, MacDonald and Shildrick 2014), however this has not stopped it playing a major role in justifying policy.

Shildrick et al's 2012 study is one of the best-known attempts to challenge the narrative about intergenerational worklessness attempting to put to an empirical test the claims of politicians that families with three generations have never worked. This was done through statistical analysis as well as an ethnographic study of two areas of high unemployment in Glasgow and Middlesbrough. It concluded that: "When subjected to rigorous investigation the 'three generations who have never worked' idea starts to crumble as a serious explanation of worklessness in the UK" (Shildrick et al 2012 p20). It is seen as representing a 'zombie' argument; one that seems to keep coming back (and therefore requiring to be dealt with) despite its death through refutation (MacDonald and Shildrick 2014). Generally speaking social scientists and anti-poverty organisations have seen their job as to "continue to challenge the negative stereotypes and judgemental comments, the mistruths and misuses of data for sure (CPAG 2013)". In other words, many social scientists have sought to portray claimants truthfully in their own discourses as holding the same values and work orientations as the rest of the virtuous population.

Shildrick's earlier work also bears this out, for instance an investigation into the 'low-pay, no-pay cycle'; that is the tendency for people to cycle between temporary and insecure work and unemployment benefits concluded that:

"A key finding points to the resilience and lasting work commitment shown by our interviewees, despite the frustrations and setbacks associated with their repeated periods of unemployment and low-paid jobs. It would not be an overstatement to say that most deplored claiming welfare benefits. Some avoided making claims altogether, or at least for as long as they possibly could. This strong work attachment

was learnt across generations. Interviewees were aware of the social and psychological benefits of a job, and of the personal negative consequences of being unemployed” (Shildrick et al 2010 p5).

In fact the attachment to work was even affecting the manner of youth transitions into the labour market: “Deeply embedded class-cultural expectations and attitudes about the necessity and value of working for a living drove earlier, post-school transitions and led young people quickly into the labour market (in preference to extended education)” (Shildrick et al 2010 p16). These expectations were formed by notions of both the value and the necessity of work. In contrast to the ‘intergenerational worklessness’ hypothesis a working disposition was learned from parents, even if parents had experienced insecure working lives cycling in and out of employment rapidly.

However in arguments supporting ‘welfare reform’ as undertaken by the UK Coalition Government (2010-2015) the thesis of the intergenerational problem is insisted upon regardless of its refutation by social scientists. For instance the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) worked hard to contest Shildrick et al’s (2012) findings. They evidenced this mainly through a series of statements from the heads of charities affiliated with the CSJ who affirm the thesis “that intergenerational worklessness not only exists, but that it is common in some parts of the country and can involve two, three or even four generations of the same family” (CSJ 2013 p45). These organisations assert that their lack of socialisation into the labour market means that young unemployed people are reluctant to take work that is ‘menial’, low paid, or with irregular hours. The affiliates criticise young people’s tendency to regard unemployment benefits as ‘earnings’. One reports young people saying: “they don't want to work in places like McDonalds/Burger King – even though we know that some university students do (CSJ 2013 p63)”. The complaint is that young people within these families have not been socialised into working routines. The affiliates’ statements are echoed by Andrew Dunn’s (2013) work on the reluctance of the unemployed to accept undesirable jobs or their ‘choosiness’. Dunn argues that left

leaning social policy academics have been too prepared to accept socially acceptable answers from benefit claimants about their attitudes to employment. They have therefore generated counter-intuitive and implausible findings from respondents stressing their own virtuous qualities. His own approach is twofold: firstly in asking questions about specific undesirable jobs to draw out refusals, and secondly in using interviews with welfare to work practitioners and 'activation workers' who were prepared to state that significant minorities of their clients didn't really want employment (Dunn 2013). However, Dunn's activation workers also possessed a tendency to refer to elements of the wider political discourse, including to television programmes, when describing their own clients. They too referred to 'third generation' unemployed who "were said to hold very negative attitudes towards employment and were the least likely to meet employment's typical behavioural demands, notably around punctuality, social etiquette and accepting authority" (Dunn 2013 p810).

However this evidence is perhaps not incompatible with Shildrick et al's finding in the course of their ethnography that practitioners often discussed the phenomenon as a reality yet struggled to direct them to real 'intergenerationally workless' families. The conservative think-tank Policy Exchange makes a similar argument that localised social networks shape young people's norms about work and unemployed friends and family can 'normalise' benefit receipt (Tinsley 2013).

Investigations into the attitudes to work of the unemployed have been an important part of governments' own research agendas. For instance a DWP 2011 'customer insight' report developed a segmentation of the attitudes to employment of the UK's unemployed population in order to enable targeted communications. The claimant population was divided between such categories as: determined seekers, thwarted seekers, balanced seekers, status quo seekers, constrained by circumstance, defeated by circumstance, benefits are better, and home focussed (DWP 2011 p14). Such investigations reveal a great preoccupation with the attitudes and dispositions to work of unemployed people as a driver of policy with

the which seeks to identify “those who have been out of work for some time and become accustomed to a life on benefits” (ibid p7). The report itself provides relatively little support for a widespread ‘dependency culture’; even those identified as preferring benefits to employment had very ambiguous attitudes, tending to lack confidence that any employer would hire them anyway, or to think that there was no one available to fulfil their role at home were they to find employment.

Psychological and behavioural discourses are also trained onto the unemployed. The Behavioural Insight team, once part of, and still supported by, the Cabinet Office, has applied its modelling to the study of poverty and welfare dependency. Their models propose that there are a series of sets of resources individuals can possess to prevent their sliding into poverty, which in true neoliberal spirit are labelled ‘capitals’. As well as social and economic capital there are human capital (educational attainment and childhood brain development), character capital (self-control, self-efficacy, and motivation), and cognitive capital (mental bandwidth and freedom from behavioural biases) (Gandy et al 2016). Whilst economic disadvantages are acknowledged as variables the primary subject of discourse is the poor and ‘dependent’ themselves and how they apparently fail to take advantage of the opportunities on offer to them. The report advises that Jobcentre Plus develops tools for identifying ‘capital defects’, and ‘identity-building’ exercises to build up ‘intrinsic motivation’ to work, as well as tailoring conditionality in a way that boosts self-efficacy. In other words enforced positive thinking or ‘psychological conditionality’ has become a technique of intervention (Friedli and Stern 2015). This is not necessarily a call for tightening of conditionality in a conventional sense nor is it ‘moral’. However it is an individualising discourse in which deficiencies are blamed for the failure of individuals to succeed in a (perhaps flawed but essentially) just society.

This debate around Shildrick et al's intervention on 'intergenerational worklessness' is only one episode in a wider policy debate on the nature of the unemployed subject and on the unemployment problem. Jensen has argued that the dominant discourses have had the effect of transforming "social problems of deepening poverty, social immobility and profound economic inequalities" "into problems of 'welfare dependence', 'cultures of entitlement' and 'irresponsibility'" (2014, p2). Patrick documents the development of a 'framing consensus' on the nature of the welfare 'problem' as one of culture and individual deficiency (Patrick 2017).

Debates over whether the poor are 'victims or villains' (Brown 1990) are not new in British politics. Still they have had a particular resonance in recent years. Fletcher et al (2016) argue that opposed views of claimants as 'gamers or victims of the system' underlie the debate between governmental and opposing social scientific and anti-poverty discourses. The conceptualisation of the problem by policymakers has "increasingly attributed primacy to causal explanations, and responsibility for poverty, unemployment and social marginalisation by emphasising the orientations and behaviour of individuals" (Fletcher et al 2016 p172). This approach draws upon underclass theory in holding the problem to be less to do with a lack of opportunities for the poor as of the poor lacking the means and/or inclination to take advantage of those opportunities. The perspective held by government's mainstream opponents in anti-poverty organisations stresses either structural disadvantages embedded in the economy or the 'vulnerability' of subjects. In order to be seen as 'gamers of the system' claimants would have to be characterised as having "the capacity to act rationally to maximise personal benefit; sufficient knowledge of welfare systems and processes to facilitate such rationality, including calculating risks and rewards; sufficient agency to undertake manipulative acts; and a normative or moral propensity to do so" (Fletcher et al 2016 p174). However their empirical findings from interviewing claimants found little evidence of such an attitude or of a separate culture amongst claimants; rather benefit claimants tended to distance themselves from the manipulative behaviour they attributed to other claimants. Vulnerability, however, would seem to imply the lack of these characteristics; and the lack of the knowledge and calculative capabilities to

manipulate a system. This vulnerability can be conceived of in a couple of different ways; for instance as something innate “problematic drug misuse, mental ill health and learning difficulties often severely compromised the ability of some individuals to behave in a rational fashion” (Fletcher et al 2016 p179). Secondly, as something situational created when individuals attempt to interact with the system, and exacerbated by its demands, as for instance when inappropriate conditionality requirements render claimants vulnerable to sanctions. In the policy discourse of anti-poverty organisations and ‘stakeholders’ notions of vulnerability are used “to better sensitise mechanisms of conditionality, such as benefit sanctions, in order to reduce their propensity to penalise those whose agency is weakest; rather than to argue for the removal of conditionality altogether” (Fletcher et al 2016 p183). The agenda of ratcheting up conditionality and ‘work first’ policy objectives were criticised during the New Labour period as well. For example by Carpenter et al (2007) who argued that target driven activation regimes aiming for immediate employment could undermine long term progress towards secure employment. Such arguments have been repeated under the coalition.

Contemporary debates over ‘worklessness’ have sometimes focussed on the geography of unemployment. This is seen as making a difference in the way in which policy makers formulated the problem. Beatty et al (2017) have shown that there is a substantial amount of hidden unemployment in the UK. They calculate that there are 760,000 hidden unemployed who are mainly claiming disability benefits but who might be able to work in a genuinely fully employed economy. The hidden unemployed are mainly located in post-industrial regions. Whilst Beatty et al 2017 are clear that these do not represent fraudulent claims, the numbers of disability claims in post-industrial regions are interpreted by influential right-wingers like the Centre for Social Justice as evidence of social dependency.

Birmingham appears in these discourses as a city with a particular problem with youth unemployment. Towns in the Midlands (although the worst hit areas tend to be northern cities, mapping well on to the depressed areas of the 1930s) were hit

with increased unemployment in the recessions of the 1980s and by deindustrialisation (Beatty and Fothergill 2016) with Birmingham facing particular losses in skilled industrial jobs for instance in motor vehicle manufacture. The city's high benefit spending and high levels of deprivation have meant that it has been hit hard by the spending cuts imposed on local authority areas under 'welfare reform'. Birmingham is the district facing the single greatest financial loss of £419m per annum, and the 43<sup>rd</sup> worst affected on a head by head basis losing the equivalent of £610 for every working age adult resident (Beatty and Fothergill 2013).

This had some influence in the formation of arguments for 'welfare reform'. The CSJ published *Breakthrough Birmingham* in 2007 as part of a series of studies which proved influential in formulating the case for what became government policy. This report identified high numbers of 'workless households' characterised by educational failure, family breakdown and high levels of crime and 'anti-social behaviour' as responsible for the city's high level of youth unemployment (17% in 2007). Official claimant count statistics show rates of youth unemployment for the city exceed the regional average, which in turn exceeds the national. The overall unemployment rate for the West Midlands stood at 14.3% (against 5.3% for people of all ages) in January 2017, down from 17.4% earlier in the year.

The chapter thus far has described some of the most relevant currents in the ongoing policy debate over 'welfare reform'. The subjectivity of the young unemployed has been a key subject of discussion in the ongoing debate between government and its supportive organisations and a majority of social scientists and anti-poverty organisations. This debate concerns how unemployed people should be seen and involves a series of rival interpretations of the nature of the problem. Social scientists have been concerned to 'mythbust' the 'dependency culture' narrative as it applies to unemployment and refocus the debate upon the structure of the economy. Yet this mythbusting is also involved in a rival depiction of the poor as hardworking and deserving of aid. The disciplinary turn represented by escalations in sanctions and conditionality is argued to be harmful but also

unnecessary as the work ethic already exists. The ‘victims or villains’ (Brown 1990) debate still characterises a great amount of debate around social policy in Britain today.

### 2.1.3 History in contemporary policy debates

The introductory chapter of the thesis asserted that modern understandings of ‘welfare reform’ and the neo-liberal policy response can be enhanced by a study of the 1930s. The thesis examined how histories of unemployment and the benefits system have influenced and informed contemporary debate. The use of history in the pronouncements of policy makers and the research outputs of professional ‘influencers’ in thinktanks are often rather disappointing or even misleading.

On occasion justifications for ‘welfare reform’ have sought to establish continuity with the aims of the Beveridge report of 1942 and so to establish the legitimacy of, for example, welfare conditionality as an ever-present feature of welfare systems. Lord Freud, for instance, cites the Beveridge report as proving that “even in 1942, it was understood that it was not enough just to provide a safety net – the welfare state also had to support people back into work in an active labour market policy” (Freud 2007 p2). In 2013 the then Labour DWP Shadow Minister Liam Byrne defended his decision not to oppose a bill retrospectively exempting the government from paying compensation to jobseekers sanctioned for refusal to take part in unpaid work schemes, on the grounds that: “This Bill restores to the Department of Work and Pensions its legal power to sanction anyone who gets Jobseeker’s Allowance if they did not take steps to find work. It’s a power that government has had since 1911” (Byrne 2013). As Webster (2013) points out, this is a mistaken impression, ignoring the relative novelty of active job search.

Furthermore research organisations seeking to influence the design of welfare policy have seen the Beveridge report as a point in history at which assistance for the poor was rendered (and is still regarded as) highly legitimate and have posed their own proposals as restoring its spirit and or unsullied original intentions. The Social Market Foundation (Mulheirn and Masters 2013), for instance, has framed a

series of reports as 're-booting' and 'reloading' Beveridge. A series of proposals to restore the contributory principle to the benefit system look back on the report as a source of legitimacy e.g. IPPR (2015) and (Hughes 2014 p5). The Labour MP and former Welfare Reform Minister Frank Field (2011) has proposed the restoration of what he argues was the welfare state's original principle of mutual aid. This is to be done through the mutualising of the social security system and taking it outside of direct governmental control. The conservative think tank Policy Exchange sums up the ambitions of these uses of the past in a promise that its proposals will "simultaneously bring the social security system back to its founding roots and ensure it is fit for the 21st Century" (Hughes 2014 p5).

Most of these schemes stress the foundation of the post-war welfare state as constituting an organic relationship between citizens and welfare. The approach is often to stress the political legitimacy of contribution-based benefits, the notion of contribution being taken to be deeply embedded in the cultures of the British people or working class. However very often such accounts give little detailed consideration to the design of the post-war welfare state, of why it might have deviated from these fine liberal principles, apart from references to a kind of straw person 'statism' or the like. Nor is there often any real reference to those systems that existed before the war except occasional similar statements about the intentions of the 1911 Act, when the first Unemployment Insurance system was introduced. One might conclude that history here is invoked either as a means of making shallow references to an idealized past or as a means by which organisations can pose themselves as the 'heirs to Beveridge'.

The inter-war years tend not to be mined for political legitimacy by governments or lobbyists. References in the type of literature described above are rare, for example IPSOS Mori's Social Research Institute's report on 70 years since Beveridge (Hall 2012) refers only briefly to the inter war years as creating the atmosphere in which Beveridge's report was to be well received. The brevity is unfortunate as in many

ways (as will be argued in subsequent chapters) the decade illustrates many problems with liberal orthodoxies which reappear in the numerous proposals for reform issued by political parties and thinktanks. Hudson and Lunt (2016) in their study of public attitudes to welfare fear that nostalgia for the post-war welfare state may lead left critique into an uncritical and small 'c' conservative direction. Writing in 1991 Whiteside remarked that in policy discussions of unemployment the "[s]econd World War forms a historical benchmark beyond which current understanding does not run" (Whiteside 1991 p20) and 25 years later it is entirely possible to make the same statement.

## 2.2 Studies of the 1930s in History and Social Policy

### 2.2.1 Histories

There are general histories which have been examined as part of this thesis. They introduce the political context but also (usefully for a study looking at Birmingham) move away from the focus on the 'depressed areas' to show those parts of the country which were relatively prosperous. Those consulted include Stevenson and Cook (1979) and Constantine (1980). These works are useful for providing an overview of the political events of the time and for enabling one to read the more specialist accounts of social security administration in the appropriate context.

Histories of unemployment in the 1930s that have been examined include Booth and Glynn (1987), Ward (2013), Whiteside (1991), Constantine (1980) and Garside (1990). There are also histories of particular aspects of unemployment policy and administration including Deacon (1976) on the Genuinely Seeking Work test, Deacon and Bradshaw (1983) on the Means Test and Field (2015) on the operation of work camps. There have been regional studies of the 'depressed areas' for instance Nicolas' (1986) study of Teesside and a study of Merseyside in the 1930s by the Merseyside Socialist Research Group (1992). Other sources include social surveys conducted by contemporary observers; these include Bakke's *The*

*Unemployed Man* (1933), *The Pilgrim Trust's Men Without Work* (1938) and *Burn's British Unemployment Programs, 1920-1938* (1941).

Accounts of the behaviour of particular institutions like the Ministry of Labour (Lowe 1986) or the Treasury (Peden 2000) tend to defend the chosen institution from the charge of inertia in the face of crisis. Price (2000) and King (1995) have examined the operation of Employment Exchanges. This approach revives the way the situation and consequent policy options appeared to policy makers themselves.

Attempts to draw policy lessons from the 1930s can also be found in economic history such as Eichengreen (2015) and Garside (1990). As with other disciplines there are conflicting interpretations, and contemporary controversies are rarely far away from the minds of writers as they examine the past. Advocates of rival economic paradigms have argued over how to interpret mass unemployment and its policy response. Keynesian historians have criticised 1930s policy makers for their unwillingness to embrace the solutions that succeeded in the post-war period (Garside 1990). Accounts published in the post-war period (e.g. Mencher 1967), stress the reluctance of states to take an interventionist role in the economy. Their insistence upon liberal principles being regarded as a severe obstacle to economic recovery.

A challenge to Keynesian accounts comes from neo-classical writers. Benjamin and Kochin (1979) in a much discussed and controversial paper argued that unemployment support increased unemployment through excessively high payments. Their argument specifically uses the lower rate of unemployment amongst juveniles (who received lower wages and unemployment payment) to argue that unemployment payments kept reservation wages high. Benjamin and Kochin have been strongly challenged by other writers whilst making this case (e.g. Collins 1982). Its importance is in its illustration of the modern relevance of arguments about the 1930s and perhaps the consistence of neo-liberal and liberal

interpretations of the problem of flawed incentive structures in the system encouraging 'homo-economicus' to remain unemployed.

In recent years historians have turned some attention back toward the 1930s. Bradley (2008) has framed a study of juvenile delinquency in the inter war years in the context of contemporary moral panics over 'anti-social behaviour'. Cunningham has examined the foundation of the Youth Hostels Association in 1930 and its links to charitable missions to relieve poverty.

### 2.2.2 Youth unemployment in the 1930s

There have been a relatively small number of policy studies of the 1930s motivated by the post-2008 crisis and post 2010 governments. Interestingly more such studies were undertaken in the 1980s by policy scholars. This uptake of interest in the 1930s during this period was perhaps motivated by the desire to make comparisons with contemporary experiences, with mass unemployment and mass youth unemployment returning to the scene after decades of absence. In fact this is particularly useful due to the lack of attention to the 'juvenile' unemployed noted above, and more attention to this group was paid in the 1980s than it has been in recent years. "Public concern for their future was high. Then as now, commentators and social analysts expressed fears about what was then referred to as the 'demoralization' of the young: that they would become disillusioned and would 'settle' to a life on the dole" (Whiteside 1991 p10). Rees and Atkinson (1982) used the 1930s to scrutinise policies like the Youth Opportunities Programme concluding that youth unemployment "is not a one-off crisis, born of a short-term recession but has indeed been a recurring crisis" (Rees and Atkinson 1982 p9). Rees and Rees argued there were not only 'straightforward' policy continuities in the handling of youth unemployment but also 'analytical continuities' in the relationships between class groupings. Dominant classes were able to define the issue on their terms, and the solutions put forward were largely on the terms of dominant groups (Rees and Rees 1982).

Memories of the 1930s also helped to shape expectations about how high unemployment levels would manifest themselves politically. Bagguley's (1992) article, for instance, attempted to explain the relative political passivity of the unemployed during the 1980s in particular contrast to the militancy of the National Unemployed Workers Movement of the 1930s. Mungham (1982) argued that evidence from the 1930s showed that the fears of social unrest resulting from youth unemployment at the beginning of the 1980s were likely to be overblown and resembled a 'moral panic'. The study of particular policies from the 1930s was also motivated by observance of policy continuities. For example Deacon and Bradshaw's 1983 study of the means test in the inter war years sets out its context in the growth of means testing from the 1960s to 1980s.

Studies of youth unemployment are of particular interest for the thesis. While youth and juvenile unemployment in the 1930s have received less attention than that of adults, a variety of perspectives have still been employed in studying the issue. There has been a relative lack of attention to the problem of 'juvenile' unemployment. It has been examined in a macro economic sense by Garside (1977, 1990), whose main concern was to assess the success or failure of government to reduce the problem. The policy of compulsory attendance at the Juvenile Instruction Centre (JIC), which is central to this thesis, was assessed by Garside; however his focus was government's failure to roll out their provision on the required scale. JICs have also been assessed by Pope in two articles on the Lancashire 'dole schools' in the 1930s (1977, 1978). However Pope's focus was on the JICs as educational institutions which he was critical of for providing an unimaginative and 'alienating' experience. Fowler (1996) is less critical covering the institutions in the context of a general account of the inter war years and was concerned to argue that the period was a better one for young people than often thought. There is also Meera's (1936) study of South Wales JICs. These studies undertaken of the JICs, although informative do not study them as disciplinary subject forming institutions and tend to leave unintegrated their relationship with

the rest of the benefit/assistance/relief system; while histories of the broader system have omitted these particular institutions.

As well as its choice of time periods and theoretical frames another area where this study makes a unique contribution to knowledge; its choice of local area to focus on. As discussed in the introduction Birmingham is the focus for its examination of local relief systems, which is the Public Assistance system and the JICs. The choice of Birmingham (which will be mainly examined in Chapters 6 and 7) is unique from this point of view. Local studies have tended to focus on the 'depressed areas' of the country, for example Nicholas' study of Teesside (1986), Pope (1977, 1978) and Fowler's (1996) studies of juvenile unemployment in Lancashire. In many ways a focus on the areas of the country with the highest unemployment has been intuitive, the natural choice if one is interested in studying systems in crisis or conflicts between radical local authorities and central government. However this study is concerned with the 'normal' within liberal governmentality, the relatively prosperous and politically orthodoxly liberal city of Birmingham providing an appropriate subject for developing a different perspective.

### 2.2.3 The 1930s in contemporary social science

So what has been written about the 1930s by writers interested in the welfare system today? Present day writers have been informed by the general view of the decade: "the Thirties has had a bad press. It was an era darkened by economic catastrophe, social despair and international prevarication and misjudgement" (Gardiner 2011 p103).

The tendency in social policy and social scientific literature examining 'welfare reform' is to chart the emergence of neoliberal welfare since the 1970s and its escalation from Thatcherite to New Labour to Coalition to Conservative governments. However, for the most part, social scientists have paid less attention to the possibility of drawing longer historical parallels apart from a tendency to make reference to the 19<sup>th</sup> century poor laws or to the return to a 'Victorian'

mentality and fixation on the deserving and undeserving poor. For example, Pantazis notes that 'less eligibility' as well as the 'more eligibility' problem (Pantazis 2016) of 'work incentives' goes back to the New Poor Law of 1834.

Some attention has been paid to the inter war years by social scientists studying the contemporary benefit system. Lynes (2011) examined the transition from Unemployment Insurance to Unemployment Assistance in the 1930s; however, this did not contain any commentary on the post 2010 benefits system. In one of the most significant recent analyses of the 1930s in light of 'welfare reform', Fletcher (2015) studied 'workfare' type regimes in the 1930s and compared them to policy under the Coalition Government, concluding that there was significant similarity (Fletcher 2015, Fletcher and Wright 2017). Fletcher's study of workfare is methodologically similar to this thesis in that it examines the 1930s to bring history into debates on welfare reform. However the scope of Fletcher's article is limited to forced work schemes; additionally the article does not examine youth specifically. This thesis broadens the scope beyond forced work schemes and focuses on a particularly important sub-group: young people.

Elsewhere the focus has been on policy discourses; similarities between the lexicons and problematics of poverty used by governments in the two periods have been noted. The "current interest in concentrations of worklessness, and in intergenerational poverty, also carries striking echoes of earlier debates" (Welshman 2006 p604). Welshman argues that the theme of 'worklessness' in contemporary discourses on poverty has resemblances to earlier discourses on unemployability; 'worklessness' as a concept appears to represent a revival of a cultural view of poverty. Welshman's article traces changing uses of the concept from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It does not, however, focus on the 1930s exclusively nor examine youth or the 'juvenile' unemployed in depth. Price (2000) has written a history of the employment service including the Employment Exchanges of the inter-war years and the Jobcentres introduced since the 1980s.

William Walters (2000) attempts a similar study of the changing discourse which have governed 'the social' in Britain in the later 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Walters applied Foucault's historical/genealogical approach to the history of UK social policy in 2000, so does not cover 'welfare reform' under the coalition and later Conservative governments. Walters uses a Foucauldian 'genealogical approach'<sup>2</sup> to "bring a greater degree of analytical reflexivity to the study of unemployment" (2000 p1) to emphasise its construction as an administrative category and to study how official understandings came to frame it as a problem and how this has changed over time. Unemployment was first recognised as a "problem for liberal government. It is in terms of key liberal patriarchal principles and norms that the issue is discussed" (Walters 2000 p3). Unemployment can be seen through many lenses, as a form of risk, as a sign of an irrationally organised labour market, as a moral problem, as a psychological problem or as a sign that individuals are not skilled or educated enough. It is in similar terms that this thesis assesses discourses on unemployment. This thesis is quite different, Walter's book does not examine youth or 'juvenile' unemployment in the 1930s and the 1930s in general is covered as part of a much longer period. Additionally, as can be seen in the next chapter, whilst the Foucauldian perspective provided the largest theoretical influence for this thesis it is not the only one, so the theoretical perspectives are not identical.

Other attempts to examine the 1930s also have different foci. Tyler (2016) is examining the 1930s as part of an ongoing research project into stigmatisation in the welfare state as a continuation of her work on 'social abjection'. Some similar work on the history of welfare benefits in Britain has been undertaken by Taylor (2014) working more in the tradition of the history of political economy and economic thought. No other piece of recent research has examined youth unemployment in discourse and policy practice in the same way as in the thesis.

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<sup>2</sup> This approach will also form a key component of the theoretical framework and approach behind this study as such it will be discussed in further detail in the theory and methods chapters.

This review shows that there has been an inattention to the history of the welfare state in contemporary policy debate. Frequently the debates have focused on an investigation into the ontological truth of the work ethic. It is worth noting that the debates over 'worklessness' in general tend to focus upon waged work as opposed to unpaid, and it is in general waged work which is seen as important in ensuring self-sufficiency. While it is common to refer to the resurrection of the idea of the 'deserving and undeserving' poor it has been less common to examine the longer history of this distinction especially in respect of new labour market entrants. Some of the uses to which history has been put in contemporary policy debates have also been problematic. The invocation of the Beveridge report has frequently been at times nostalgic and at other moments characterised by opportunistic invocations of the report to support specific proposals.

There have been recent examinations of the inter war period by authors who are concerned with welfare reform. Yet there is still an original contribution to knowledge to be made by this thesis. Fletcher's (2015) article on 'workfare' practices is the closest recent work in methodological terms to this one. It takes a two snapshot comparison approach to examining policy. It examines only 'workfare' practices and does not cover the wider system. Walters's work applying a genealogical approach to the study of the UK's system also takes a similar approach to this thesis but, written in 2000, does not examine the agenda of 'welfare reform' under current governments'. Also in addressing a longer historical period (from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to 2000), it does not focus on any one period, or its application in a particular area. Other examinations of the system have examined how the unemployed have been perceived e.g. Welshman (2006) and Brown (1990).

The other area where this thesis makes a unique examination to knowledge is in its examination of Birmingham's Public Assistance (PA) system and of unemployment and the administration of relief in the city. As far as can be ascertained from the literature review this is the first such study to examine Birmingham's PA system in

this way. Briggs's (1952) wider history of the city provides important background on the city's history, politics and economy but does not examine the PA system in depth and does not give detailed consideration to unemployment in the 1930s.

To conclude, this review of the relevant literature has identified that there are substantial areas where this research makes an original contribution to knowledge. Much of the debate over 'welfare reform' has suffered through its lack of historical perspective. Far more study of the inter war years appear to have been conducted by social scientists interested in contemporary issues in the 1980s than over the last decade.

Having set out the context into which this research project makes an intervention the thesis moves to how this is to be done. The next chapter will build outline the theoretical approach to be taken in the thesis.

## Chapter 3: Theory and Methods

“The disciplinary mechanism also constantly codifies in terms of the permitted and forbidden, or rather the obligatory and the forbidden, which means that the point on which the disciplinary mechanism focuses is not so much the things one must not do as the things that must be done. A good discipline tells you what you must do at every moment.” (Foucault 2007 p68)

The last chapter outlined some of the ways in which contemporary social scientists have analysed ‘welfare reform’ and the problem of unemployed youth.

This chapter outlines the theoretical and methodological framework used in the thesis. Its main theoretical reference points are found in the literature building upon Michel Foucault’s work on discipline and governmentality.

This chapter is divided in half. The first begins with concepts of governmentality and discipline as developed firstly by Foucault himself and then by subsequent writers (section 3.1.1). Governmentality is a concept which denotes attention to the techniques and technologies of a power understood to be decentralised throughout society and to operate through discourses and modes of subjectivity. It then (3.1.2) introduces the concept of discipline. Discipline is about how and why institutions apply regularised and calculated ‘technologies of power’ to alter the subjectivity of individuals contained within them.

Section 3.1.3 follows from the discussions of ‘disciplinary welfare’ and welfare reform covered in the literature review as well as the first section of this chapter. It examines how Foucauldian conceptions of discipline, as developed in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault 1977), can be applied to the question of social welfare. The section

then shows how they can be used to make a valuable intervention in debates around conditionality and sanctions policy as applied to the young unemployed. The section references the way writers operating within a governmentality tradition e.g. Walters (2000), Dean (2002) and Boland (2015) have attempted to apply the concept to understand social policy. 3.1.4 introduces a supplementary means of analysis, Boltanski and Thévenot's work on justification and moral orders. 3.1.5 brings together the preceding sections and considers how this approach can contribute to contemporary understanding of a particularly neo-liberal social policy. How these studies of mentalities, discourses and practices can be located within a wider understanding of society. In particular it explores Wendy Brown's (2015) notion of 'political rationalities', along with contributions from the 'varieties of capitalism' literature and Boltanski and Chiapello's (2007) work on 'spirits of capitalism' to outline what welfare reform can demonstrate about changing mentalities of rule.

In its second half the chapter addresses how this theory is to be translated into a practice considering what methodological guidelines are appropriate for undertaking analysis of policy in the 1930s and since 2010. It also sets out the main documentary sources for the thesis.

### 3.1 Theory in this thesis

The methodology of this thesis is theoretically informed. The analysis of text must be informed by some form of social understanding and interpretive framework. It is concerned with not just recording but interpreting policy discourses and devices. Such a study must be theoretically informed in order to be able to move beyond description to analysis. It needs to be able to engage with the contemporary debates on how to interpret welfare reform.

### 3.1.1 Governmentality in Foucault

The governmentality perspective on welfare provides a central aspect to the analytical framework of this thesis. Foucault's own use of the concept is set out across numerous essays as well as lecture series at the College de France. These writings provide an account of the operation of power which has influenced a great deal of subsequent academic writing, including on topics of social welfare.

The development of governmentality in Foucault's work is linked to his account of the changing nature of the exercise of political power in European states from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. States shifted from a Machiavellian problematic of the exercise of sovereignty, or preservation of the state itself via repression, to one of the management of a population (Foucault 1991). 'Population' is conceived of as an object of management which emerges from the development of a kind of government that "has as its purpose not the act of government itself, but the welfare of its population, the improvement of its condition, the increase of its wealth, longevity, health, etc." (Foucault 1991 p100). With new understandings come the development of new tactics and techniques.

Foucault's conception of governmentality is linked to his understanding of social power as spread throughout society rather than being centred. His analyses are concerned with the techniques and mentality of those in positions of power and with understanding the extent to which government under liberalism operates *through* a form of freedom, rather than being concerned purely with repression. The place of disciplinary systems should be understood within this context as will be discussed below. Foucault's understanding of 'freedom' is at odds with a conventional liberal understanding of it as personal liberty existing in opposition to a regime of coercion, stressing instead the mutual dependency to the two concepts forming part of a single governmental regime. This is not a denial of either but an understanding that freedom relies on regulation and regulation on freedom. "Freedom is never anything other... than an actual relation between governors and

governed” (Foucault 2008 p63). Liberalism requires certain ‘freedoms’ be exercised in order to function.

Governmentality analysis adopts a highly constructivist epistemology and ontology. It is concerned with the analysis of discourses rather than an empirical analysis of their truth. The thesis to come examines the statements of policy makers on the ‘employability’ of a group of the unemployed in the 1930s. It analyses the way these terms are constructed not whether the unemployed were really ‘unemployable’ or deviant. However it contends that “the activity of posing unemployment as a problem is no less material and practical than other aspects of its governance” (Walters 2000 p4). The discourses of policy elites are enabled by technologies of recording and description.

This methodological analysis enables this thesis to examine key changes in how unemployment, and especially that of young people, was thought about in different times. How authorities formulated their views of unemployment, but then how these views were implemented in the government of the unemployed (Walters 2000). It looks at what governmental techniques can show about the rationalities that underpin them. As a form of analysis, it shows how historical sources can show shifts in perception.

### 3.1.2 Discipline

We have discussed the conception of ‘governmentality’ in use here. Another key concept is ‘discipline’. Discipline in Foucault’s work has a particular meaning. It is an exercise of power which has the aim of altering the subjectivity of those to whom it is applied. Discussions of the rise of ‘disciplinary welfare’ in the UK often use the term to denote a disciplinarian or punitive direction in policy. This is certainly not incorrect, but it tends to stress the coercive aspect to ‘governing through freedom’. From a more normative perspective the straightforward condemnation of punishment can, if not augmented by such an understanding, miss the more insidious aspects of ‘welfare reform’.

Whilst governmentality is concerned with discussing the rise of particular means of how power is exercised within a wider society, the complementary concept of discipline is more concerned with what is done within institutions. If individuals are to be able to be governed through freedom, they must be capable of and inclined to exercise this in a manner considered desirable. Discipline is the power that “‘makes’ individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and of instruments of its exercise” (Foucault 1977 p170) the power which makes individuals “docile [so] that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (ibid p173). Docility is not the whole focus, as discipline is a power which seeks to bring people up to standard, unlike a legal or judicial standard, which judges whether one is in breach. Discipline can define the degree to which one deviates from the desired behaviour and make the “whole indefinite domain of the non-conforming [...] punishable” (Foucault 1977 p178-9) including incapability. Discipline represents a system of ‘infra-punishment’ which “defined and repressed a mass of behaviour that the relative indifference of the great systems of punishment had allowed to escape” (ibid p178).

Foucault’s disciplinary institutions were those which both punished and rewarded: a system of “gratification-punishment” (Foucault 1977 p180), in which all behaviour was classified as existing on a spectrum of acceptability. Within such a system a differentiation and ranking of individuals can entail very different forms of treatment. “The distribution according to ranks or grades has a double role: it marks the gaps, hierarchizes qualities, skills and aptitudes; but it also punishes and rewards” (ibid p181). Discipline is to be associated with not only punishments but with a wider regime of monitoring and intervention which “differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it *normalizes*” (Foucault 1977 p182-3). So discipline is associated with regimes of knowledge and the classification of subjects. The way this power functions is varied; as well as the penalties and rewards present in a system there is a kind of ‘gaze’ placed upon the detainee, a regime of measurement and assessment linked to an ideal against which the

subject is to be judged. The subject is rendered a visible and observable object by such a series of mechanisms of assessment: “[i]t is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his [sic] subjection” (ibid p187).

In *Discipline and Punish* (1977) the examples of disciplinary institutions were mainly drawn from prisons and hospitals but also, importantly for a thesis looking at youth transitions, schools and other educational institutions. Youth has a central place in disciplinary problematics as an unformed and malleable subject.

### 3.1.3 Unemployment benefits as disciplinary institutions

So what contribution do these concepts make to the understanding of the welfare state? Rose and Miller (2010) argue the subject of study of a governmentality approach should be the “projects, plans and practices of those authorities – economic, legal, spiritual, medical, technical – who endeavour to administer the lives of others in the light of conceptions of what is good, healthy, normal, virtuous, efficient or profitable” (Rose and Miller 2010 p273) or “[t]he intervention of the state through organisations, procedures, rules and categories” (Boland 2015 p3). In welfare a governmentality approach examines the devices that administer the lives of the unemployed.

Concern with the subjectivities and working orientations of unemployed individuals can be seen in recent government policy. A key plank of the Coalition government’s justification for ‘welfare reform’ was a depiction of the existing system as giving “little consideration to the behaviours it generates” (DWP 2010 p10). This understanding of welfare programmes as aiming to alter behaviour is ‘disciplinary’ in a Foucauldian sense. Unemployment programmes act “upon the financial plight of the unemployed, and upon their job prospects, but also upon those attitudes, affects, conduct and dispositions that present a barrier to the unemployed returning to the labour market, and alienate them from social networks and

obligations" (Dean 1995 p572). Welfare agencies are concerned with the formation of the self, how subjects perceive themselves and understand their situations.

Friedli and Stern (2015) agree that a docile willing subjectivity accepting of responsibility for one's condition is what disciplinary welfare systems are trying to instil.

"What the Jobcentre requires is a good but not particular attitude to work in the abstract and a capacity for adaptability that has no object. As a jobseeker you are required to accept that what differentiates you, the failed and undeserving jobseeker, from other more deserving and successful jobseekers is a set of attitudes and emotional orientations. The aim is not a job, but the generic skill, attribute or disposition of employability" (Friedli and Stern 2015 p40-1).

So discipline in the contemporary welfare system is linked to an analysis on the part of government of the labour market, of the requirements of employers, of the wider economy and of the kind of ethic, 'spirit' or subjectivity needed from the unemployed. This concern with 'formation' of subjects finds as its natural target those who are 'unformed' or whose future is not already set; young people are seen as a central target for disciplinary interventions which are framed as solutions to long term problems. However, programmes of welfare conditionality should not be seen only in terms of persuasion or 'support': liberal 'governing through' freedom does not necessarily behave liberally (Dean 2002) and may well be authoritarian.

Government 'through freedom' under liberalism involves to a considerable degree the government of people by market incentives. Attempts to ensure that any de-commodifying (Offe 1985) effects of social welfare are limited have been a central feature of social policy at least since the New Poor Law of 1834 which introduced the principle of 'less eligibility': that is that the relief available should provide a

standard of living considerably and appreciably lower than the lowest paid labourer. Marxist analysis has well understood the problematic nature of a liberal vision of freedom based on the need for one class to sell labour in order to survive, which constitutes a form of 'market discipline'.

Behavioural or 'conduct' (Clasen and Clegg 2007), conditionality, a central subject of the thesis, is disciplinary. It is the practice of making access to payments or services conditional on the applicant "first agreeing to meet particular obligations or patterns of behaviour" (Welfare Conditionality: Sanctions Support and Behaviour Change) usually on pain of the loss or reduction of financial support or access to services (although certain policy lobbyists express an interest in 'non-financial' penalties). The various historical incarnations of conditionality can be seen as solutions adopted by policy makers to the perennial problem of 'out-relief', the difficulty in exercising a regime of surveillance and behavioural enforcement for those receiving support but existing outside of institutions. Conditionality post 2010 is an individualising system of constant assessment which externalises the functioning of disciplinary institutions.

#### 3.1.4 Justification and moral ordering in unemployment benefits

Of central interest to the thesis is how administrators or governors perceive subjects and populations and how ideal outcomes and subjects are constituted in discourse. This is about the *representation* of problems, and about the *justification* of actions (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006). Boltanski's 'pragmatist sociology' can supplement the understanding of representation and justification of policy (and the unemployed subject) that is provided by the governmentality literature. Institutional structures enforce normative ideas but also communicate them and make them visible to observers.

The application of disciplinary power within institutions seeks to create certain forms of subject. In welfare systems in the two periods of this thesis these subjects were broadly liberal, seeking to introduce self-regulating mechanisms that

encourage the person to conform to market-based norms and values. But the treatment of claimants even within the same system can be highly heterogeneous. In the 1930s some of the unemployed had no right to claim at all and were excluded from the system while others were viewed as more competent to exercise freedom and subjected to minimal conditions. Examining why this is so leads to some weaknesses of a governmentality perspective. The governmentality approach can be accused of exaggerating the capacity of the state to “engage any strategy to realize its objectives” (Whiteside 2015 p153), of failing to pay enough attention to the constraints faced by policy makers and their need to justify and gain consent for action. In that the governmentality approach examines the schemes and blueprints of architects of social institutions, it can be said to be idealistic, seeing subjects as formed by institutions and providing little account of the way they may resist subjectification.

The pragmatic sociology (or ‘sociology of critical capacity’) approach can help to analyse how judgements about difference are institutionalised in policy. This “takes seriously the justifications provided by people for their own actions as well as their repertoires of evaluation for the actions of others” (Wagner 1999, p346). Wagner (1999) argues that Boltanski and Thévenot’s work is neither a theory of society in a sociological sense nor a normative political theory. Rather than a theory of society their work is a ‘step back’ from such a theory urging sociologists to understand the working of justifications within the social world and to include them within theories of that world (ibid). Because of this, the approach is compatible with a fairly heterodox theoretical approach and need not be seen as introducing contradictions into the methods of analysis.

Justifications, to be successful, must depend upon shared social understandings. In order to make their cases effectively, actors make reference to pre-existing understandings and conventions (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999): “Even forms of economic organisation must, in order to be motivating and attractive, be able to engage its actors by convincing them that they contribute, at least potentially, to

the common good” (Presskorn-Thygesen 2015 p743). This does not mean that this does constitute a ‘common good’ in a normative sense, just that shared criteria exist. These criteria will be historically specific and relating to a particular form of ‘political rationality’.

So, then, how does this relate to welfare? Justified disputes are “grounded on a disagreement whose object is the relative size or worth (*la grandeur*) of the different beings present in a situation” (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999 p363). In such a situation the disagreement will often be over which criteria of assessment is relevant to assess the particular person or situation. The key claim is that “morality is connected to a series of *orders of worth* that each contain: (1) a specification of value, (2) a definition of worthy individuals, and (3) a moral grammar for the evaluation of actions” (Presskorn-Thygesen 2015 p731). Boltanski and Thévenot’s (2006) model covers situations when all concerned have, on the basis of a principle of common humanity, an ability to rise to a position of acclaim or ‘grandeur’, so there is the possibility of a behavioural judgement. For instance the unemployed of the 1930s were able (if they possessed a good enough record of National Insurance contributions) to reach a higher status within the system as ‘genuine’ claimants with a right to support as opposed to ‘paupers’, ‘unemployables’ (Welshman 2006) or deviants. The thesis examines the criteria used by officials and policy makers to assess the moral worth of those who approach the state in need of assistance. Of course this thesis is concerned with those leaving school or losing work with very limited records of ‘contribution’. Where they are situated in this ‘moral order’ between contributor and pauper is a central question. Foucault (2008) saw his method as examining regimes of ‘veridiction’. This idea of verification is close to and influenced Boltanski and Thévenot’s ‘justification’; justification is an appeal to a means of verifying, to a set of principles held to provide a common reference point for the analysis of situations, people and objects.

Boltanski and Thévenot generate a set of criteria for the judgement of situations from a broad set of textual analysis from different periods of history. A “plurality of

mutually irreducible moral grammars” (Presskorn-Thygesen 2015 p731) through which situations will be assessed by actors. In the market ordering of neo-liberalism economics is saturated with morality. The worthy are those who succeed, are ‘winners’, who get ‘to the top’. By contrast the unworthy is that which is left, or rejected, and those who are failed or stagnant: “Lacking any means of buying and selling, poor persons come close to escaping the convention of the common good and to being deprived of the dignity of human beings in this world” (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006 p196-7).

Textual analysis shows (in each period), which criteria and ‘moral ordering’ was/is used to differentiate ‘worthy’ and ‘unworthy’ claimants and (returning to the governmentality theory), and what ‘mundane’ devices are subsequently used to provide practical tools of measurement to compare individuals to social ideals and perhaps to find them wanting. In this context, conditionality can be seen as a measurement or verification device. For instance the ‘Jobseeker’s Agreements’ and ‘Claimant Commitments’ that the UK’s unemployed, as well as low paid workers and the partners of claimants, are required to sign at the present time are said by their designers to resemble contracts of employment. This “form of contract takes a distinctly contemporary form and is used to describe the relationship between citizens and the welfare state and indirectly with other (tax-paying) citizens” (Hamilton 2012 p463). Here ‘independence’ is acclaimed as a high moral virtue. Those who work tirelessly to fulfil to acquire paid work acquire praise, they are asked to be adaptable and flexible, to be grateful rather than ‘entitled’ for their state support, to adopt the habits of the employed (as ideally constructed), to be positive, active, to understand paid work as core to their identities, to be prepared to embrace (downward) social and geographical mobility. Those who are to be despised are portrayed as passive, antisocial, to feel entitled to an income, to be ‘dependant’, to await assistance, to stubbornly stick to old working habits and standards.

### 3.1.5 Political rationalities, liberalism and capitalism

With these frameworks in place the question arises of how a governmentality influenced study of institutions is able to make wider statements about the nature of society? After all, if governmentality studies ‘mundane techniques’ at a ‘surface level’ and the pragmatic sociology ‘steps back’ from statements about social structure and causation of the arguments actors employ, might such a methodology be accused of producing a shallow, rhetorically focussed and descriptive account of policy?

The historical aspect of this thesis enables some comment on the relationship between discourse and other changes in society. It contends that for all his statements about the rejection of grand narratives, there is something like an account of the development of capitalism in Foucault’s histories<sup>3</sup>. This is rendered slightly opaque due to Foucault’s citation practices which he confessed often intentionally avoided what he regarded as the ritualistic references to Marx widespread in the French academy (Foucault 1980). In his lectures on *The Birth of Biopolitics* Foucault writes that a liberal economy requires that “[t]here must be a free labour market, but then again there must be a large enough number of sufficiently competent, qualified, and politically disarmed workers to prevent them exerting pressure on the labour market” (Foucault 2010 p64) and so economic liberalism “and disciplinary techniques are completely bound up with each other” (ibid p66). In a series of lectures leading up to the publication of *Discipline and Punish*<sup>4</sup> Foucault argued that “to understand a society’s system of morality we may have to ask the question: Where is the wealth? The history of morality should be organised entirely by this question of the location and movement of wealth” (Foucault 2015 p108). In the context of a developing industrial capitalism the body of the worker became a potential factor of production, it could be seen as

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<sup>3</sup> The use of ‘histories’ here may well not be Foucault’s preferred term. He always denied that he was a historian preferring the term ‘archaeology’ (Foucault 1972).

<sup>4</sup> Published only recently in English these lectures provide an interesting supplement to *Discipline & Punish* providing a greater focus on the development of policing as driven by developing capitalist production and urbanisation. It raises questions about why the emphasis in lectures leading up to the book’s publication is so different from the published work.

something that was inadequately utilised under a new rationality. It became “the worker’s duty to offer his [sic] labour-power on a free market” (Foucault 2015 p173), and idleness became seen as a threat to the productivity of society. *The Birth of Biopolitics* also produces an account of extensions in state welfare measures in the 1930s and after the end of World War 2, described in a quite Polanyian (2001) way, as ‘compensatory mechanisms’ in order to stabilise a liberal regime. However these measures frequently became denounced as a threat to freedom. This is close to Offe’s (1985) account of the ‘contradictions of the welfare state’ as both necessary for, and simultaneously a drain upon, capital accumulation. It is different: there is no investigation into whether ‘contradictions’ are manageable, and Foucault is also adamant that he is not producing or attempting a theory of the state (an ‘indigestible meal’), instead focussing upon its practices. Still there is a suggestion that policy contains unstable and contradictory drivers and an attention to crisis as moments which bring about challenge and change to governmental practices.

So the thesis uses a conceptual architecture to assess the wider meanings of governmental technologies for regulating unemployment and their justifications within policy discourse. Governmental practices form part of a wider ‘political rationality’, whereby a particular type of reasoning comes to “capture the way a normative order of reason comes to legitimately govern as well as structure life and activity as a whole” (Brown 2015 p117). Political rationalities are ubiquitous governing principles that can be said to govern society in the sense that none of the discourses that crisscross them can. Neo-liberal rationality is one such formation, as was a form of liberalism in the 1930s. Political rationality is not “timeless or universal, but always comes in a particular form, secures and circulates specific norms, and posits particular subjects and relations” (ibid p115). It is not an instrument of governmental practice (like a technology of power) but a regime of power-knowledge which has acquired a dominant position within society.

The concept of changing 'political rationalities' is not far away from the 'spirits of capitalism' discussed by Boltanski and Chiapello (2007). Indeed Boltanski and Chiapello's characterisation of the most recent 'spirit' of work under capitalism, a 'projective' or project based ethic, is of some use in understanding the work regime that the UK's welfare system is seeking to enforce. Shifting from Boltanski's previous work, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* contains an explicit account of historical change arguing that changes in the world of work (especially for educated professionals) should be seen in the context of capitalism's need to restore its legitimacy after the revolts of May 1968 in France. According to this account systems are capable of adapting in the face of critique, in this case to justify labour markets as providing greater autonomy, mobility, flexibility and scope for creativity. They provide an account of what is argued to be a new 'spirit' or 'world of justification' (see above), a 'projective' or project based ethic.

In different historical epochs with their different 'spirits', 'political rationalities' and models of political economy there were different constructions of 'ideal' and 'problematic' individuals. Desirable and undesirable patterns of working life were historically specific, as were criteria for assessing the extent to which people were 'employable' or 'unemployable'. Unemployability after all has been a concept which has been through several different incarnations (Welshman 2006). The 'unemployable' have been diagnosed as such in different ways as a largely, moral, psychological or economic problem. The thesis shows changes in the way the unemployed subject is perceived in different periods of time and differences in the 'moral ordering' and criteria of assessment used to decide upon solutions.

So what sort of moral underpinnings for unemployment benefit regimes can be seen in liberal systems? Liberal type state welfare systems should not be seen as passive with regard to social policy. In the first historical instance liberal government involved the elimination of non-liberal systems of aid and solidarity which were associated with the perpetuation of pauperism and the obstruction of market dynamism (Esping-Andersen 1990), for instance in the introduction of the

New Poor Law of 1834 (Polanyi 2001). These practices reflect a classical liberal faith in markets as emancipatory institutions. Systems of relief were blamed for either causing or perpetuating poverty (“an argument which has found new life in recent neo-liberalism”, (Esping-Andersen 1990 p42) through diminishing incentives to work. The hope and design of a liberal system of unemployment relief is fundamentally that “‘social-policy outcomes’ would parallel market outcomes: those who had been frugal, entrepreneurial, and self-reliant will be rewarded” (ibid p63). A central problematic and task of policy design will therefore be the minimisation of any de-commodifying effect. Behavioural assessments took place to verify the individual’s conformity with these principles which decided their place within this ‘moral order’.

However social insurance has often been found by liberally minded reformers to be able to occupy a greater place than often thought, with the state being acknowledged as a legitimate provider. The actuarial and contractual nature of insurance benefits have made them acceptable from this point of view as “[s]ocial insurance, like its private sector kin, pegs entitlements and benefits to employment, work performance, and contributions”. Insurance can also provide an enforcement mechanism for desired values “[o]nly the client’s subscription ensures the provident cover: it therefore implies: regular work, ordered time, disciplined consumption, individual responsibility” (Defert 1991 p231). The development of insurance as a technology also allows a potentially different kind of responsibility to the moralism of judicial responsibility or of the poor law in that “one retains responsibility for one’s affairs by possessing the means to repair its effects” (Ewald 1991 p207).

The structure of a welfare state is a form of ‘moral ordering’ in accordance with a set of principles consistent with a dominant ‘political rationality’. Disciplinary institutions assess individuals against bureaucratic criteria based on this ordering and attempt to modify the subjectivity and behaviour of individuals accordingly. The moral element in policy is important and is embedded even in discourses which

pose as technical or objective 'value free' exercises. "'Morality' signifies a discursive mediation which allows a whole range of technologies to be brought to bear on the social as behaviour. 'The behaviours of a people are its morality; the task therefore is to give them nothing but good ones'" (Procacci 1991 p158).

### 3.2 Methods

So far, this chapter has set out the theoretical framework for the thesis. The rest of the chapter describes how this is to be translated into practice and the main sources for the research.

The method used in this research is a form of theoretically informed qualitative textual/discourse analysis upon original historical documents from the 1930s. There are reasons why this has been selected over other possible methodologies. Governmentality analysis enables the thesis to do things that other methods would not.

A programme of interviews with those who claimed support or administered the system in the 1930s was not feasible. As this is a study of policy, the aim would be ideally to contact those involved in policy debates and formation in the 1930s. However, none of these people would still be alive at the time of the research. Even a 14-year-old school leaver in 1934 would have been 95 in 2015 when the archival research began and so there would therefore be a great practical difficulty in locating subjects who had experienced particular unemployment programmes, as well as issues of recall. But these practical constraints are not the main reason why a documentary analysis method has been preferred. This is a study of the discourse surrounding and justification for policy. The best sources of knowledge for this are the documentation policy makers generated. For the reason of wanting to compare like with like, the thesis compares documentary evidence from the 1930s with the documentary output of government since 2010.

Quantification of text, as in corpus linguistics was also decided against. Such an approach is less useful for a historical piece of work as the thesis examines texts from different periods of time. Language is something which shifts and evolves and changing word counts will not be very informative if the meanings of such terms have shifted, the thesis would not be comparing like with like.

### 3.2.1 Historical analysis in this thesis

The methodology of this research, a form of historical comparative analysis, bridges commonly practiced methodological divides between history and the social sciences. In this sense it could be thought of as innovative, but it raises issues of how to insure methodological rigor.

Historical analysis has long formed a part of social scientific method, however in practice it often seems that there is a methodological and disciplinary divide between the disciplines. In practice social scientists mainly concern themselves with the present. The reasons for this vary a great deal. Some structuralist social scientific perspectives have been accused of believing themselves to have identified social processes, entities, components and concepts to the point where they become less interested in the particularities of events (Dean 1994). For others the imperatives of policy relevance, response and impact mean that an historical analysis is not the obvious approach. Current disciplinary boundaries and divisions of labour within universities and research institutions have encouraged social scientists to see historical analysis as a luxury, less than central to understanding the situations and practices of the present – which are their primary concern.

While refuting this approach may cause some problems for disciplinary classification, the contention of this thesis is that historical study can add a great

deal to understandings of 'welfare reform'. Historical methods can de-naturalize present discourses; they also bring the past back into current debates. The aim of such a method is to bring previous statements and publications back into the present as actors so that reports and texts become more than tomes 'gathering dust' on shelves. To the extent that the past is already a participant in these debates (Grady 2010) it can be hidden behind assumptions and meanings unspoken. Study brings it back in. The sources for this thesis are valuable materials with which to challenge the interpretations of the past which are used to provide legitimacy for current policy. For instance the literature review (section 2.1) noted a series of invocations of the Beveridge report by think-tanks as the beginning of welfare in Britain and as a source of legitimation. Examination of the preceding period serves to re-contextualise the report and of the proposals which lean upon it for support.

Where a dominant 'political rationality' has acquired the appearance of 'common sense' and is able to set the limits of possible or reasonable actions, then rediscovering past practices can reopen the field of possibilities. This is especially the case if policy is justified with 'there is no alternative' type arguments or makes claims to follow from reason itself, 'human nature' or other transcendental ideals. It is often at foundational moments of institutions and practices where one will see debates take place, however once said institutions and practices are established alternatives recede over the horizon. Historical awareness can rediscover what has been lost. "It is not so much the history of the true or the history of the false as the history of veridiction which has a political significance" (Foucault 2008 p36-7).

The method used to analyse historical materials is a form of discourse analysis informed by theory. Governmentality stresses the importance of language, the way subjects are described and how actions are justified. Historical sociology, has taken up aspects of the 'linguistic turn' in the wider social sciences (Wagner 2003). This 'turn' included Foucault's investigations of "the subject centred human sciences"

(Wagner 2003 p7) and his arguments that these sciences were incapable of examining their own linguistic practices. Foucauldian approaches are critical of what they see as having been structuralist account of historical development which have used fixed and unexamined categories like 'development' and 'modernisation' (Dean 1994) without accounting for the changing understandings of these concepts over time.

Such a perspective attempts to counter these perceived neglects through its own method, genealogy. Genealogy denotes attention to long term shifts in the meanings of words. Genealogy, like other methods used by governmentality analysts, often involves qualifications about the empirical truth claims being sought. Fraser and Gordon (1994) in their article on the changing uses of 'dependency' write that "[w]e do *not* present a causal analysis. Rather, by contrasting present meanings of dependency with past meanings, we aim to defamiliarize taken-for-granted beliefs in order to render them susceptible to critique and to illuminate present day conflicts" (1994 p310-11). Rose and Miller too 'eschew the burden' of causal analysis in their work on governmentality: Foucault's insistence that to take discourse as 'document' or sign of something else (Foucault 1969) brings its own problems is a key source for this eschewal. Genealogy instead 'suspends' structural questions "because it holds that there are also interesting things that we can learn about the past and the present if we focus on surfaces, that is if we trace out imagined territories and spaces of government" (Walters 2000 p10). This contrasts to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which seeks to make systematic connections between discourse and social structure (Fairclough 2010).

The distinction between the social, the economic and the political is seen as historically specific and is, in and of itself something to be worthy of study. Welfare will instead be an entity with its own history, without of course being self-contained and hermetically sealed away from other fields. Governmentality studies' claims are to some extent less ambitious than those of structuralist social science. Their

grounds for political optimism is a more low key one: “the thought that ideas which go without saying, which make possible existing practices and our existing conceptions of ourselves, may be more contingent, recent and modifiable than we think” (Gordon 1991 p48). The analysis in the first instance is one which opens possibilities. Institutional forms and techniques are often seen as ‘spin-offs’ whereby accidental, contingent discoveries are adapted to serve new purposes and solve new problems (Walters 2000), again this opens new possibilities.

Foucault’s method in genealogy was not to generate a critique of forms of knowledge which is able to identify these as true or false but, as referred to above, to understand how different regimes of truth come to function as means of ‘verification’ in different historical moments. Hence, this study of unemployment is less concerned with for instance the real level of unemployment or the reality of the ‘dependency culture’ than with the extent to which the preoccupations of governments with these concepts are translated into policy. For instance, being less concerned with the real psychological state of the unemployed, ‘the applicant’s mind’, than with the tests set up to verify them and the standard used to deem them acceptable. If the problem is represented to be a psychological one it is in this light that the behaviour of the claimant will be assessed. Policy will be to design a test to verify, and justifications will be advanced which establish the test as a valid way of knowing and ensuring that the subject conforms to higher principles.

This epistemological relativism can be defended as somewhat pragmatic. Historians have debated the extent to which historical ‘truth’ can be said to be represented by sources and whether historical knowledge can be regarded as ‘objective’. E.H. Carr (1987) in his reflections on the nature of historical study argued that historical facts are never ‘pure’, but are always reflected through the mind of recorders. Written history is similarly always reflected through the minds of historians. Both cannot but reflect their times. The historical object is always somewhat uncertain as “the

past has vanished and our ideas about it can never be verified as we verify our scientific hypotheses” (Collingwood 2014 p5).

Judgements of quality are difficult to make in the case of such a qualitative methodology. No ‘tick box’ set of criteria can be employed to ensure that analysis has been done correctly. What can be done to demonstrate the rigour and validity of the research is to adopt reflexive practices, thick description, and transparency about influences and perspectives. Reflexive practice involves being open about one’s own perspective (Bauer and Gaskell 2000 p16) but also having an awareness of how this might threaten objectivity. As can be seen earlier in the chapter a fairly heterodox theoretical approach allows for some ‘triangulation’ of theoretical approaches when assessing texts. The relationship between theory and text should work both ways: theory should help one interpret texts but equally texts should enable one to problematize theory. This boils down to work conducted in a spirit of intellectual openness which is “clear about the values in terms of which [the problems] are selected, and then to avoid as best one can evaluative bias in their solution” (Wright Mills 2000 p78). An aspect of this is a commitment to examine with most attention precisely the areas where evidence contradicts expectation as “[i]n qualitative research one wants to see evidence of this labour with inconsistencies, as by struggling with inconsistencies” (Bauer and Gaskell 2000 p16). An additional way of demonstrating openness and good faith is by utilising ‘thick description’ in the writing of the thesis itself which is especially important considering that this work consists of an analysis of texts. This is a commitment to quoting at length to avoid “the practice or appearance of the careful selection and editing of soundbites judged to support the writer's prejudices” (ibid p19). Historical research requires reflexivity in a particular sense as it is from the standpoint of a current regime of knowledge that the past one can be assessed, which implies the necessity of a methodologically reflexive standpoint with respect to one’s own truths.

A final issue to be discussed here is the problem of making comparisons between different periods of time. After all, 'the past is another country'. The method of this thesis follows Foucault in its 'presentism', it reads the past purposively as a 'history of the present' (Dean 1994). The question of comparison is whether a period of the past can be meaningfully compared with the present. There are relatively few methodological reference points to provide guidance. Genealogical accounts e.g. Walters (2000) tend to trace the development of institutions, concepts, discourses over time rather than focussing with any depth on a single period. What is referred to as Historical Comparative Analysis has tended to use international comparisons, examining the development of more or less similar events or institutions in different countries, a good example of which is Skocpol's (2015) study of the French, Russian and Chinese revolutions. None the less this should not lead to the conclusion that it is invalid to use historical evidence to inform the present. Scholars have undertaken comparisons of particular documents from past and present eras (e.g. Grady 2010). Others have undertake comparisons on the basis of observed similarities in discursive themes (e.g. Macnicol 2017). Examining the past to inform present discussion is a valid method.

### 3.2.2 Sources and the use of archives

One concern of great importance is of how to sample texts. Foucauldian approaches to textual/discourse analysis do not provide specific guidance on how to select texts. Because of the aim of this research to inform present day discussions the selection of texts has been purposive, based on the extent to which they discuss policy areas of interest to a present-day observer. It is thus a 'history of the present'. The thesis is concerned with the justifications for policy that are contained within texts and therefore texts which seek to explain to and gather support from different social and political constituencies. There is the additional issue of access to texts. Archived civil service files from the 1930s often contain multiple drafts of documents and of the correspondence and debate that surrounds

them as well as final published documents. Post 2010 of course this is not the case, and it is necessary to rely upon the published outputs of government.

There are a number of issues to consider when using documentary sources.

Documentary sources can be considered to be highly robust, constituting 'traces of the past'. However the availability of such sources is to a great extent a 'matter of survival' (Scott 1990). The production and survival of documents is assured by continuous state institutions and their record keeping practices. Documents were and are not written with the needs of historical researchers in mind, rather they were produced by actors at the time to carry out or justify a particular action, and are "integral elements of policy and administration" (Scott 1990 p84)". These records provide an account of 'situated decisions', meaning that rules and concepts need to be applied by officials to particular cases. "It is never possible for a general rule to be unproblematically applied to particular cases: an official must decide" (ibid p90) whether or how the rule is to be applied to a case. Hence a lot of the debate this project has found in official records concerns cases (in this case types of claimant) which cause particular problems for the application of the rules, where the case is between categories or arguably inside or outside the purview of the organisation.

In assessing the usefulness of official records as sources Scott suggests that four main criteria are considered. Firstly 'authenticity': whether the documents in question are what they purport to be? In the case of the official sources used in this thesis authenticity has already been verified by the record holders. Secondly 'credibility' or the 'sincerity and accuracy' of its content: whether the record is likely to have been 'distorted'? Whether those who compiled them sincerely attempted to record reality accurately (Scott 1990)? Intent is hard to judge but it is clear that the agendas and perspectives of organisations influence the way they describe the world, Carr shows that:

“[o]ur picture has been preselected and predetermined for us, not so much by accident as by people who were consciously or unconsciously imbued with a particular view and thought the facts which supported that view worth preserving” (Carr 1987 p13).

Archive documents are not neutral or straightforwardly factual. They consider matters from the point of view of the organisation concerned. For instance, files of the Unemployment Assistance Board looked at problems which might be viewed as political or moral, as administrative problems. Where and how political critiques were considered, depended on how these were likely to impact the department. It can be seen in correspondence that a great deal of departmental activity was directed at defending/advancing the authority of the department in question against their rivals within government. Many disputes in these files concerned which department should take responsibility for claimant groups of ambiguous status. Departments were concerned to reject unwanted costs. This could mean deflecting responsibility elsewhere or to centralise control over the sources of expenditure.

Thirdly, in Scott’s criteria, is the ‘representativeness’ of the documents. Documents are retained or destroyed according to priorities which are not necessarily those of the researcher in years to come. Here the ‘presentism’ of social science noted above is particularly pertinent, as it gives rise to questions about past practices that could not have been anticipated when decisions were made to destroy records.

Fourthly there is ‘meaning’: the possibility of ‘literal and interpretative’ understanding of these sources (Scott 1990). ‘Literal’ problems could include terms which have fallen out of use. ‘Interpretative’ problems are of more concern for this thesis they pose a challenge to its comparative method. The researcher is seeking to interpret statements from another time, another context and “no researcher can

escape the concepts and assumptions of his or her own frame of meaning” (Scott 1990 p31). Interpretation is therefore a kind of dialogue, a mediation, between the interpretive frameworks of the researcher and those which produced the text. The researcher must learn as much as possible about the conditions under which texts were produced. The quality of such learning will greatly affect the quality of interpretation and thus the research. The issue of justification re-emerges here as centrally important. Official documents are written for a reason – to convince the reader at that time of the rectitude of a given argument, or possibly to explain recent trajectories or practices. Common knowledge, the collectively accepted understanding of how things are done, is rarely written down but has to be deduced from associated evidence and argumentation. This makes archival interpretation qualitatively different from rigorous social science as the material available is incapable of sustaining rigour in the vast majority of situations. So, alongside judgements on the quality of the evidence, the researcher is required to assess what was on the writer’s mind, fill in the gaps and simultaneously translate past values and assumptions into present vocabularies in order to render the past accessible to the present.

Aside from the need to understand the ‘situated’ nature of documents there are other practical problems. While the intentions of record keepers should be taken account of. Despite their design, documents may be lost or damaged in their time within the archive and may not be ordered in such a way as to make ready sense to the reader years later.

There is also the issue of how to find documents within an archive. The archive sources in the thesis have been chosen purposively i.e. selected according to how best they would enable the thesis to answer the Research Questions. They were identified via the online catalogue systems of the host archives, in this case of The National Archives, Birmingham Library and Warwick University’s Modern Records Centre. The approach was to search the catalogue lists of ministries and

organisations with relevant remits for administering unemployment benefits. The decision on whether to read a file would be made on the basis of its archive catalogue entry. Every file of relevance to the situation of unemployed youth in the 1930s was examined as well as many records of general policy. In the selection of files there was sometimes no real 'choice' in what these sources should be, in Birmingham Library the only files relevant to situation of unemployed juveniles were the ones examined. The examination of archives was initially exploratory to allow a degree of flexibility, to allow leads to be followed up within the archives. One thing which made this necessary was the language of policy making in the 1930s. The initial unfamiliarity with terminology from the 1930s of a researcher from the present day meant that assembling a set list of files prior to exploring the archives would have been overly restrictive and inflexible, rather it was necessary to follow up areas of interest and 'snowball' to other sources. Given that source selection was purposive and exploratory a 'saturation' criterion was used to determine when to stop searching files. This ruled out 'systemic review' as a methodology.

The bodies selected were all centrally involved in the provision of relief/assistance/benefit to the unemployed and in policy formulation. The files of a number of government agencies were of particular interest for this project. As previously described, systems of aid for the ('able-bodied') unemployed in the 1930s were divided into three main categories, Insurance based, extended insurance based, and Public Assistance. As might be expected this system involved several different administrative departments amongst whom responsibility was divided, often in changing and overlapping ways. Of particular interest were:

- Ministry of Labour files: LAB19 file series related to youth employment. The Ministry of Labour was responsible for the administration of the Unemployment Insurance scheme from its inception. Files from the Ministry address the general direction of policy. But the LAB19 file series is especially focussed on the juvenile unemployed, the ministry's role in forming policy and in deciding to what extent the juvenile unemployed would be permitted

to access the insurance scheme. Its files also describe efforts to prevent the deterioration of the unemployed through the provision of courses and the compulsory attendance of juveniles in the JIC.

- Unemployment Assistance Board files: AST7 files relating to the administration of assistance schemes. The Unemployment Assistance Board (UAB) which came into being to administer the post 1934 system of extended benefits was an independent central government body reporting to (and drawing most of its personnel from) the Ministry of Labour. The UAB in dealing with the intermediate category of unemployed, those who had exhausted their contributions, is an important body in comparing conditionality regimes to those existing post 2010. Its files consider 'voluntary unemployment' and the means by which it could be determined, as well as the situation of young unemployed claimants of extended benefits.
- Ministry of Health files: MH57 files of the Ministry of Health Poor Law Department and its successors. The Ministry of Health had been historically responsible for the Poor Law and retained this supervisory responsibility for Public Assistance; the guise taken on by this system after its reform under the 1929 Local Government Act. The Ministry was responsible for the setting of the overall limits within which policy operated and of supervising the conduct of local institutions. Their files provide vital data on Public Assistance schemes on a national basis (supplementing the material from Birmingham). They consider the policies of test and task work, compulsory training and other aspects of conditionality and technologies of power such as the payment of relief 'in kind'. Sources examined also consider treatment of the homeless in Casual Wards and conditions in remaining Workhouses.
- In Birmingham the main sources are Birmingham City Council's Public Assistance Committee (PAC) and its Juvenile Employment and Welfare Sub Committee. Local authorities were given the responsibility of taking on the roles of the abolished Boards of Guardians of the poor law, however in

many areas the same local notables who ran the Boards constituted the personnel for the PACs.

- Birmingham's Juvenile Welfare and Employment Sub-Committee (JEWSC) of Birmingham City Council. This was responsible for placing school leavers into work. Its reports and records contain assessments of the health of local labour markets for juveniles and the scale of juvenile unemployment in the city. More importantly, this was the body responsible for the running of that central pillar of government policy toward the young unemployed the JIC. Of course this contains a further blurring of responsibility as in this case the local authority reported to the Ministry of Labour (responsible for the JICs) rather than Health. The records of these bodies are available to view in Birmingham City Library.

Research on the 1930s has been done in an exploratory manner. It was not possible to have a comprehensive idea of the contents of the archives holding material on unemployment of youth prior to beginning to explore them. Files were examined according to their descriptions in archive catalogues. The research identified an initial range of sources and explored outwards from there, following up references in secondary sources as well as in other files and 'snowballing' additional material in the light of conclusions reached in the analysis of previous documents. Files were examined in the reading rooms of archives, read and supplemented with longhand notes and digital photographs where possible. It should be noted that as files of Birmingham's PAC and JEWSC are subject to 100 year closure under the Data Protection Act so copying (photographing) documents was not possible. Use of material from the files in publications is subject to the approval of the Library of Birmingham and is conditional upon the anonymity of any children named in the files.

In practical terms a discourse analysis pays attention to the linguistic construction of objects in the text in question, the identification of key concepts, ideologies justifications etc in the text (Fairclough 2010). The aim of the thesis is to examine

the way the unemployed are characterised in policy discourses, governmentality analysis provided a framework for reading. Within the files identified, documents were searched for key topics of interest in line with the research questions of the thesis. Accordingly, in reading these documents it has been important to seek out statements of senior civil servants which contain justifications for policy which were recorded in order that they could be communicated. Descriptions of claimants which referenced their character or their nature as subjects, were of particular interest. Such descriptions are sometimes somewhat hidden in files, as mentioned above common-sense understandings often go unstated. They can sometimes be found in situations where anomalous cases or protests challenged underlying understandings and therefore prompted a defence, and therefore a restatement, of the groundings of policy. For example, the Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance is of interest as a body appointed by the government to examine wide ranging questions about the nature of the unemployment problem and to generate acceptable solutions. This is in keeping with governmentality analysis. While working in the archives documents longhand notes were taken and documents photographed for later reference whenever possible.

There are some specificities in referencing archive documents which require some explanation. In the archives that have been explored, multiple documents are stored together in files. It is the file that is referenced in the catalogue which can be searched, but these can be of various sizes and methods of organisation so a more precise reference to the document is needed. The thesis therefore employs a hybrid referencing style. The Harvard system is used for the most part but for archive documents footnote references are provided giving a reference to the document referred to specifically and the catalogue item number for the file in which it is found. A full list of all files used in the thesis is included in the bibliography.

In the post 2010 period the thesis uses academic examinations of policy (many of which are mentioned in Chapter 2) as well as the outputs of research organisations

interesting in the welfare state. It also uses several sources from government itself with, as in the 1930s, with a focus on the documents which make the case for policy.

### 3.3 Concluding remarks

This chapter has outlined the theoretical framework used in the subsequent chapters to assess the sources which have been described. The research questions concern firstly how authorities conceptualised/ understood the problem of unemployment, how they segmented and differentiated the unemployed from each other. Secondly it considers how this view of the problem fed into the development of regulatory technologies and strategies for correcting the problem. Both cases examine how mentalities of power and rule can be perceived and how they are similar and different in the two liberal Britains of the 1930s and post 2010.

The approach taken by a governmentality literature provides the guiding approach to this thesis with its concern with the mentalities of rule. The term denotes an approach to the study of government which is based on a diffuse understanding of power and a concern with its techniques. It examines the way in which power can be seen as 'constructive' rather than purely repressive (which is not to say that it is not repressive) and seeks to enable the growth of desirable capacities and subjectivities on the part of its citizens. The way institutions seek to construct these subjectivities in individuals is addressed in particular through a use of the concept of discipline provides a useful complement to and development of the contemporary discussion of 'disciplinary welfare' in welfare reform. However in order to adequately answer the first Research Question it is necessary to use additional analytical frames to examine what might determine how these classifications work. In the last section the chapter introduced several ways that this kind of analysis can connect with wider social theory introducing the idea of 'political rationality' and considering how this might be applied to liberal welfare regimes.

One final thing to note is that while its anti-structural ethos may seem to avoid clear normative conclusions, the governmentality approach does enable a degree of normative criticism by opening up alternatives. In a normative sense this study of welfare reform under two eras of liberal hegemony is unlikely to point the way to a predetermined alternative but to the questioning of myriad forms of policy and their objectives. In practice Foucauldian political approaches often question liberalism's claims to provide an enlightened form of governance to be contrasted to authoritarianism, because the view of governance as operating through freedom problematizes conventional understandings of both freedom and power.

The next chapter sets out the broad political and economic context of the 1930s including describing the level and distribution of unemployment in the country. The chapter undertakes an institutional analysis of the structures of state support and of policy making. It also sets out the prevalent discursive framings of and understandings of the unemployment problem.

## Chapter 4: Unemployment and juvenile unemployment in the UK and Birmingham in the 1930s

“You fell into the habit of slouching, of putting your hands into your pockets and keeping them there; of glancing at people, furtively, ashamed of your secret until you fancied that everybody eyed you with suspicion” (Greenwood 1993 (1933) p169)

The previous chapter set out the theory and methods of analysis. The thesis now moves to present the findings of archival research into the operations of the system in the 1930s. It does this over chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7. In order to do this, this chapter surveys some relevant political economic and institutional developments in order to understand the government of unemployment in the 1930s.

Section 4.1 introduces the level of unemployment in the 1930s prevailing for the adult population and of juveniles. It describes the geographical distribution of unemployment, with reference to the situation in the depressed areas and the contrasting case of Birmingham. A timeline of major events can be found at 4.2. 4.3 provides some information on the policy context within which the administration of support occurred, the prevalent austerity approach to public finances, and some of the wider political conflicts this caused. Section 4.4 is concerned with how unemployment had been understood as a problem leading up to the 1930s and Section 4.5 looks at the related problem of bad or irregular work. Finally section 4.6 introduces the administrative context, the key institutions which set the policies described in the chapters ahead.

### 4.1 Unemployment in the 1930s

There was unprecedentedly high unemployment in Britain that never dropped below two million between 1931 and 1935 and in the depth of the Depression

during the bleak winter of 1932-3 reached almost three million (Gardiner 2011 p104). Unemployment rose from about 10% of the insured workforce (8% of the total workforce including the uninsured<sup>5</sup>) in 1929 to hit a high in 1932, returning to the 1929 level by 1937 (Glynn and Booth1987).

Table: Unemployment, expressed as a percentage of the insured workforce

	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
Total Insured unemployment	16	21.3	22.1	19.9	16.7	15.5	13.1	10.8	12.9	9.3
Juveniles 16-17s boys	5.5	7.8	8.3	6.3	5	5.1	5.2	3.6	4.2	
Juveniles 16-17s girls	6	7	6.3	5.1	4.4	4.7	5	4.1	5	

Sources: Denman and Macdonald 1996 p6, Garside 1977 p337

The above table gives an overview of the levels of unemployment of juveniles against the overall population. Figures for insured 14-15 year olds begin in 1936 when 2.1% of boys and 2.7% of girls were unemployed, in 1937 this was 1.6% and 2.3%, and in 1938 1.8% and 2.6% (ibid). Unskilled workers were twice as likely to be unemployed as skilled. Long term unemployment (that lasting a year or more) increased from 5-10% of total unemployment in the 1920s, to there being “a hard core of about 25 per cent had developed by the 1930s and tend to persist” (Glynn and Booth 1987 p8).

Unemployment figures from the 1930s need to be treated with a degree of scepticism, as indeed do those from the present day. All such figures are, to a degree, administrative artefacts structured by the design of the insurance scheme and the multiple rounds of legislative change over the period.

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<sup>5</sup> See section 4.3 for an explanation of who was and was not covered by the insurance scheme.

Although an imagery of mass unemployment in the 1930s is widely identifiable this tends to come from particular areas of the country. Britain's poverty and prosperity during that decade were very unevenly distributed geographically. It was a 'divided country'.

"Britain's traditional heavy industries – iron, steel, coal-mining, shipbuilding, and textiles – had been in trouble since before the First World War when Britain was losing its hegemony as the workshop of the world and being overtaken by the more recently industrialized countries namely the US and Germany" (Gardiner 2011 p104). These staple export trades were those hit hardest by the Wall Street crash of 1929. However there were also "areas of production – cars, light engineering, synthetic textiles, pharmaceuticals, house-building, largely located in the south-east and the Midlands – that were increasingly prosperous and belied the epithet the 'hungry thirties'" (ibid). It was regions already in general decline which were worse affected by the crisis. The "problems of a new industrial and commercial era" (Garside 1990) were exacerbated by the economic instability of the inter-war years. These discrepancies were peculiar to the interwar years, "before 1914 the old industrial areas on the coalfields of Britain were relatively prosperous and had a lower incidence of unemployment than London, the Midlands and the South" (Glynn 1987 p6).

As discussed in Chapter 2 there has been more attention paid to the situation of the depressed areas. Policy analysts are concerned to assess the success or failure of policy and so have been focussed on the areas where policy was failing in the face of mass unemployment, or on the defiant local authorities who refused to implement national policy, i.e. the depressed areas. Studying Birmingham provides an opportunity to assess policy to a much greater extent as it was intended to operate. This thesis is concerned with how the construction of the unemployed subject in discourse feeds into policy, and to what extent modes of liberal governmentality in different eras can be seen as comparable. Considering this

method the study of disciplinary mechanisms and justificatory discourses policy in Birmingham is a better case study than a defiant Local Authority for this particular form of analysis. The city was governed by principles amenable to the National Government, and recognisable to an observer from the neo-liberal 2010s, rather than by dissent from and conflict with national government. As well as having more comparable levels of unemployment with the present day. There is another reason to examine prosperous areas, the level of unemployment in a local labour market may be a determining factor in the way the unemployed subject is perceived.

#### 4.1.1 Geographical differences: the depressed areas

The unemployment problem was concentrated in the 'depressed areas' which were considered to be the North East the West of Scotland and South Wales where shipbuilding, steel manufacturing and coal mining had been major employers. Textile manufacturing areas of Lancashire were also affected and feature in Pope's studies (1977, 1978) of the Lancashire Junior Instruction Centre (JICs).

Coal mining areas were particularly heavily effected. In June of 1928 insured unemployment for the industry was twice the national average at 25.7% (Garside 1990 p243). This was seen as a problem of long term decline with the industry becoming unable to absorb the numbers of workers looking to enter or re-enter it. There were thought to be 300,000 workers insured from their work in coal with no realistic chance of re-entering it (ibid). Nicholas' (1986) study of Teesside described the region as effected by the decline in the shipbuilding and steel industries. These were badly affected by the crash but also by increased competition from the US and Japan. British industry had also been slow to embrace new technologies and methods of management.

Many studies of the unemployed focus upon these depressed areas. It was in these areas that local political impacts of mass unemployment were felt and where the unemployment problem was at its worst. There was feared to be a particular problem in the depressed areas where the widespread nature of unemployment

would increase its social acceptability. In relation to the juvenile in the depressed areas the fear of demoralisation was especially acute. Those who had never formed a settled habit of work were thought to more easily accept life without it. Where large employers were no longer taking on staff, school leavers could be left with nowhere to go. Meera's (1936) study of JICs in South Wales found that the region's concentration of employment in the coal mining, iron and steel industries made it especially vulnerable to trade depression, leading to higher proportions of the juvenile population coming through the JIC.

#### 4.1.2 Geographical differences: Birmingham

In 1929 insured unemployment in the midlands stood at 9.3%. In 1930 this jumped to 14.7%. In 1931 it hit a high of 20.3%, remaining at 20.1% in 1932 until beginning to reduce in 1933 (17.4%). In 1934, 1935 and 1936 the unemployment rate was 12.9%, 9.2% and 11.2% respectively. In 1937 unemployment reached a low of 7.3% (Garside 1990 p10). The slump did not have the same impact as elsewhere but still it had an effect; Briggs' history of Birmingham (1953) describes it as a 'bomblet' with its worst moments in early 1931. In September 1932 there were 53,000 insured unemployed in the city, or 14% (Briggs 1953), compared with over 22% in the country as a whole.

Birmingham presents several interesting contrasts with the depressed areas. Its economy was growing and it was a centre for emerging industries like cars and consumer goods (Constantine 1988). Nevertheless there was still significant unemployment. It was a destination for migrants from poorer areas of the country. For the study of state support for the unemployed in the 1930s it is necessary to use a local case study: this is because at the time significant parts of the system were run locally.

This strong economy made Birmingham a centre for migrant workers from the depressed areas. Between 1921 and 1938 the population of Birmingham rose by 11.6% (Constantine 1988). However, there may have been disadvantages to inward migration. Constantine (1988) argues that there may have been a depressive effect on wage rates and pressure on housing and services in receiving areas. Certainly, some workers perceived this to be so and there was evidence of anti-Welsh sentiment in receiving areas as a possible consequence (Rees and Rees 1982). Migrants may also have been forced to take unskilled work in the new locations.

The economic structure of the city can go some way to explaining why it is that Birmingham's unemployment rates were lower than average in 1936 when the city had about 21,000 unemployed (Stevenson and Cook 1979 p57). The diversity and variety of the city's industries made it resilient to unemployment. A report to the British Medical Association in 1873 had stated that "the sub-divisions of labour are unusually great; hence the fluctuations of commerce rarely fall heavily upon the entire class of artisans, and famine is of very rare occurrence" (quoted in Briggs 1952 p5). This industrial diversity persisted into the 1930s. In 1938 over 1,500 trades were found to be operating in the city although motoring and engineering industries were increasing in their significance (ibid p6). It also may have been significant that Birmingham's industries tended to be home market oriented, avoiding the problems faced by the staple export trades caused by the collapse of global markets. Birmingham had large numbers of small factories and workshops; Briggs reports over 10,000 factories with fewer than 20 workers in 1938. Perhaps in part because of this trade unionism retained a guild like quality. This prevalence of small employers enabled a degree of social mobility wherein skilled workers would be able to run their own firms in the later stages of their careers. This is put forward by Briggs as a cause of the city's relative 'social peace' and absence of class conflict (1953 p55).

Birmingham's politics can be seen as coloured by its religious history. The city had contained large numbers of nonconformists and religious dissenters. This tradition had a strong ethic of individualism and salvation through personal effort, and perhaps accordingly its Poor Law authorities had a reputation as amongst the strictest in the country (Whiteside 2015b). This strictness continued into the 1930s as is described later in the thesis. It can perhaps also be seen in the local Public Assistance Committee's (PAC) administration of the means test on Transitional Payments whereby 34.8% of claims were rejected outright (Deacon and Bradshaw 1983 p21).

Local government in the form of the Corporation of the city tended to leave social problems to philanthropic solutions from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century up to World War 1, reflecting a degree of laissez faire. Until 1905 the city had rejected public works or relief works as means of assisting paupers, and even when the provision of work placements was mandated by national policy Birmingham applied poor law type tests and criteria, like the use of test work<sup>6</sup> to police access (Whiteside 2015b). The city had some of the worst slum housing in the country in its central districts which included in 1933, about 40,000 'back to back' houses (Stevenson and Cook 1979 p48). This laissez faire approach to some extent continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the city's poor law practice.

Birmingham politics also had a particular resonance and importance in national politics due to the positions of the city's MPs. Neville Chamberlain who held the positions of Minister of Health and then Chancellor from November 1931 before becoming Prime Minister in May 1937 (Peadar 2000) was not only a Birmingham MP but a member of a dynastic family which had been prominent in the city's politics since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Chamberlain as Chancellor was for instance an

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<sup>6</sup> In the Poor Law tradition, a claimant would have to perform a 'test of work' to prove that they were of good character and worthy of relief.

important figure in the debates that led to the establishment of the Unemployment Assistance Board (Deacon and Bradshaw 1983). He promoted Birmingham's punitive philosophy on relief as Minister of Health in the 1920s. Chamberlain advocated for the maintenance of the test work (on which more later) being applied to Birmingham's poor law cases, as a model for national policy (Lowe 1986 p165). Additionally, in some cases<sup>7</sup> Birmingham authorities directly lobbied Chamberlain for instance on the issue of Settlement and Irremovability, criteria used to determine if authorities were obliged to provide relief to migrant workers (about which more will be said in the next chapter).

It is for this reason that Birmingham politics is especially useful for a study of the Public Assistance system. In Birmingham the thesis is able to demonstrate clearly how Public Assistance was meant to work in relative harmony with national policy.

#### 4.2 Timeline of major events

Detailed accounts of the legislation passed affecting the unemployed in the inter war years can be found in Burns 1941, Garside 1990 and elsewhere (see Chapter 2). This section of the thesis provides a list of the major events, including the passing of legislation, that are most relevant to the material to come.

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**1911 December 16<sup>th</sup>. National Insurance Act. The introduction of the Unemployment Insurance scheme.**

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**1921 March. Under a new Unemployment Act, Uncovenanted Benefit replaced the post war Out of Work Donation. The Genuinely Seeking Work Test was introduced.**

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**1924 January. The First Labour Government was elected.**

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<sup>7</sup> TNA AST7/13 1933 12<sup>th</sup> March 1934 Loxley to Chamberlain.

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**1924. Under the first Labour Government Extended Benefit replaced Uncovenanted Benefit, and the means test was abolished.**

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**1924 October. A Conservative Government under Stanley Baldwin elected.**

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**1927. Following the report of the Blanesburgh Committee, there was an extension of the use of the Genuinely Seeking Work Test and 'tightening up' of contribution requirements.**

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**1929 March. Local Government Act. Transferred control of Poor Law Administration from the Boards of Guardians to Local Authorities. Established the Public Assistance Committees and replaced the Poor Law with Public Assistance.**

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**1929 May. Second Labour Government elected, Ramsey MacDonald became Prime Minister.**

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**1929 October 24<sup>th</sup>. The Wall Street Crash.**

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**1930. Public Assistance. 1930 Relief Regulation Order.**

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**1930. The Genuinely Seeking Work Test was abolished.**

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**1931 February. The May Commission's findings were published. They recommended 20% cuts in unemployment benefit and the replacement of Transitional Benefit with poor relief.**

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**1931 June. The interim report of the Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance published.**

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**1931 27<sup>th</sup> October. National Government elected MacDonald remains Prime Minister.**

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**1931 November. Transitional Payments introduced to replace Transitional Benefit, Means Test reintroduced. To be administered to the same scales as local poor relief.**

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**1932 30<sup>th</sup> October. The first Hunger March arrived in London.**

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**1934 28<sup>th</sup> February. The second Hunger March arrived in London.**

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**1934 June 18<sup>th</sup>. Unemployment Act. Created the Unemployment Assistance Board.**

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**1935 January 7<sup>th</sup>. The ‘first appointed day’ of the Unemployment Assistance Board.**

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**1935 February 15<sup>th</sup>. The Unemployment Assistance (Temporary Provision) Act or ‘Standstill’ Act. Following mass anger and protest about the proposed scales of Unemployment Assistance the ‘Standstill’ was a commitment to pay whichever was highest out of UA and the TP, to undertake a reassessment.**

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**1936 October 5<sup>th</sup>. The Jarrow Crusade reached London.**

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**1937 April 1<sup>st</sup>. Standstill ends. New Unemployment Assistance regulations came into force.**

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### 4.3 Austerity in public finances

We have seen problems in the economy and a desire to intervene at the level of the individual to maintain liberal values. However the ‘political rationality’ of liberalism was at work at the level of the perception policy makers held of the wider economy and informed the role of government in overcoming the crisis. There is a degree of consensus that governments stuck to liberal policy orthodoxies which demanded spending restraint. “The dead weight of orthodox ideas and policies continued to prevent more effective responses” (Constantine 1980 p68) throughout the decade. The National Government opposed calls to implement public works or deficit financing; instead their priority was to ensure that cheap money would stimulate recovery along ‘natural’ lines (Constantine 1980). Ultimately “government remained under the leadership of aging infirm men, all harbouring old hatreds ... and judging policy by past parallels not by future objectives” (Lowe 1986 p24). The UKs policy response to a deep economic crisis has been described as ‘muddling through’ (Carpenter and Jefferys 2000), attempting to respond without going beyond its liberal traditions. However the country had only recently extended the franchise to women and a significant portion of working class men (Carpenter and Jefferys 2000). The establishment was required to adjust to the demands of an expanded electorate (Lowe 1986, Blyth 2013). Additionally there were powerful oppositional currents in society, strong trade unions and the opposition of militant organisations of the unemployed.

In the 1930s, as now, containing public finances was seen as crucial to setting the economy in good stead until recovery. Austerity presents a major parallel between the two eras. It was set out very explicitly in the May Committee on Public Expenditure in 1931, appointed to undertake a wide-ranging review of public spending headed by Sir George May the retired head of the Prudential Assurance Company, a leading actuary (Eichengreen 2015). The underlying view was that balancing budgets was essential to restoring market confidence. The committee took the existing 'unduly large' 'burden' of taxation as given and outside the scope of the enquiry providing recommendations for reductions in spending. The growth of social services, since World War One was identified as a major source of expanding spending having grown five times between 1911 and 1929 (May Committee 1931). "Under the difficult conditions of the post war period, the increase in burden has been a grave handicap, ... the prime cause of the present crisis in the national finances" (May Committee 1931 p145). Unemployment benefits in particular were problematic. Originally the Unemployment Insurance scheme had been planned as being self-financing and run on an 'actuarial' basis. In response to this the Committee pushed for deep cuts to benefits and did not regard a 20% cut as excessive. This view of benefits as wasteful and profligate was shared by the Treasury. For instance, in 1930 the Exchequer was concerned that extended benefits for those who had exhausted their contributory benefit had become over generous and advocated making the payments entirely discretionary (Peden 2000 p219).

The aim to develop a self-financing insurance scheme was challenged by the level of unemployment, but importantly also by the need to provide extended benefits to those whose entitlement had expired. In 1941 Burns reported that "[s]ince 1921 the system has never been out of debt" (p68), as at this point all reserves had been exhausted. The costs of extended benefit had originally been borne by the Insurance Fund. However the Treasury assumed responsibility for half of the costs

for 1929-1930 and the full cost thereafter. Despite the persistent failure of the scheme to remain 'solvent' and self-financing, solvency remained a key policy objective (Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance 1931). Lowe's contention that policy was judged by 'past-parallels' appears justified as policy makers continued to believe that it was possible to restore a good liberal normality. This objective shows resistance to change on the part of the political establishment (Garside 1990) which meant a constant struggle with the countervailing need to provide for the unemployed when markets were unable to deliver employment.

This demand for constraint in the administration of public finances was key in the collapse of the Labour Government in 1931 and the formation of the National Government. It was the Labour Chancellor Snowden's attempt to cut benefits by 10% which prompted most Labour MPs to break with the 1929-31 Labour Government. So while there can be seen to be continuity between the two periods in the austerity consensus, this consensus could be argued to be less widespread and stable than in 2010-2015.

A key influence enforcing austerity in government was the Treasury. After the First World War Treasury power within government was increased in order to unify the civil service (Lowe 1986). This was the most fiscally conservative part of government, committed to a predetermined view of the need to minimise expenditure, which often acted as a gatekeeper for departmental initiatives earning the nickname the 'abominable no men' (Lowe 1986 p1). They were regarded by the Ministry of Labour as discouraging long term thinking and initiatives and favouring whatever policy option was cheaper at any given time. Spending departments could appeal Treasury refusals to Cabinet. On these occasions the Treasury's most effective argument was that spending increases would necessitate tax increases (Peden 2000). Even if unsuccessful in these arguments in high level Cabinet debates, the Treasury retained a great deal of influence over the details of policy

implementation. There was a sustained opposition to public works; the preferred policy was to lower interest rates to increase private investment.

Policy makers had strong preferences for spending restraint and therefore for devices to identify any claimants whose receipt of support could be seen as inappropriate. Yet as can be seen in the chapters to come, they were faced with strong counter pressures from the labour movement and the unemployed themselves.

The Labour Party itself largely accepted the fiscal orthodoxy of the time (Miliband 2009), presenting itself as a 'national' rather than a class party able to make an appeal to the middle classes as a safe custodian of a liberal capitalist economy (Glynn and Booth 1987). Its MPs were not willing to inflict pain upon its working-class core constituency by cutting benefits. Only its most fiscally orthodox leaders like Macdonald and Snowden broke off to form the National Government. The coalition, labelled the National Government, was dominated by the Conservatives with 'national Labour' and the Liberals reduced to minor roles. The National Government then faced little organised parliamentary opposition, so any constraints on its actions were likely to come from outside.

More significant in constraining the National Governments intentions to cut might be the opposition of organised labour more generally in society. Precedents for militant mass action by trade unions had been established by the general strike of 1926. Unions were mainly concerned to protect the interests of their members when they became unemployed but also to ensure that the governance regimes claimants were faced with did not undermine the conditions of employed workers.

Many of the unemployed themselves however were prepared to be more militant. The major organisation for unemployed workers was the National Unemployed Workers Movement (NUWM), which demanded work or full maintenance at trade union working rates. The NUWM, under communist leadership, was prepared to undertake militant protests such as the occupation of Employment Exchanges, government offices and businesses where jobs were threatened (Hannington 1936). It was also the NUWM which organised the hunger marches in 1932 and 1934 (Stevenson and Cook 1979) which were a particular lightning rod for dissent. There was a great deal of public sympathy with the unemployed. For instance the TUC's Head of Social Insurance described the response to the 1935 UA regulations which contained deep cuts to benefits; "a storm of indignation swept through the country, and caused their speedy suspension" and this "[i]ndignation and resentment w[as] by no means confined to the unemployed workers and their families"<sup>8</sup>, but was characteristic of wider public opinion.

During the inter-war years, the UK retained a relative political stability (Booth 1987) compared to much of continental Europe. However, the fear of unrest and public disquiet constrained policy. It should be remembered that the Russian Revolution of 1917 was a recent event, although historians have concluded that there was no danger of revolution in the UK, many in the establishment during the inter-war years feared it. Mass mobilisation of the unemployed was feared. Additionally, the franchise had been extended in 1920 to cover many more working-class people who then became the subject of party competition for their votes.

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<sup>8</sup> MRC MSS.148/UCW/6/13/38/95, National Council of Labour: notes on the *unemployment assistance* regulations, 1936. J, L Smythe

#### 4.4 Understandings of unemployment

The 1930s was a time when previously held understandings of unemployment were being reassessed. Although the attitudes held by policy makers are explored at length in the chapters to come it is necessary to provide here a brief introduction to the understandings of unemployment which were being debated at the time.

##### 4.4.1 Unemployment and unemployability

The predominantly moral understanding of the problem of pauperism predominant in the Victorian period had been subject to challenge for some time by social investigators. The notion of 'unemployment' can be said to have emerged as distinct from 'pauperism' in the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The idea depends upon the increasing development of wage labour as the normal way of working class people making a living, as industrialisation and urbanisation progressed households lost access to traditional agricultural resources which supplemented wages and became solely dependent on wages. The increasing influence of trade unions had also played a role in distinguishing the two (Walters 2000). Social investigators like Booth and Rowntree also played a role in identifying the 'deserving poor': those whose conduct was defined by thrift and hard work and yet who still lived in poverty. The unemployed were increasingly no longer assumed to be unemployables (Welshman 2006); "compared to the writers of the early 1900s, the interwar social surveys as a whole were less concerned with the willingness of people to work, and more with the effects of unemployment in leading to unemployability" (ibid p599). The experience of full employment during the war had shown that many of those traditionally thought to be physically, mentally, or morally incapable of work had been proven capable of work. However individual explanations still persisted alongside others. Beveridge's early works, for instance, despite regarding unemployment as a problem of unorganised labour markets also retained a view of the casual worker as an 'inferior social specimen' (Welshman 2013). The Webbs were also discussing unemployables until 1929. The desire to identify the workshy never went away completely but they became increasingly

seen as the product of poor social organisation rather than constituting a new part of the population. Poverty was to be studied in R.H Tawneys words “first at its sources, and only secondly in its manifestations” (Welshman 2013 p50).

However by the 1930s other perspectives were increasingly proving influential. Psychological perspectives (the most famous study of which was Jahoda’s *Mariantal* study, (Jahoda et al 1972), investigated unemployability as a consequence of the loss of the psychological benefits of work, seen as a form of purposeful activity which provided structure necessary for life, as well as companionship and stimulation. This led to apathy, hopelessness, a declining sense of personal autonomy, as well as declining physical capability. This lack of purposeful activity would lead to ‘demoralisation’. Demoralisation was a central concept used in the 1930s to understand the effects of unemployment. In this understanding the breakdown of the place of employment as a central feature of people’s lives would lead to a growing acceptability of life without work, or at least life not centred around work. It sees the loss of values and dispositions favourable to liberal labour markets as the consequence of prolonged unemployment. The concept should be read as De-Moralisation; the loss of morale and morals is essentially the same thing. This is a kind of de-socialisation; the loss of values taken to be socially prevalent and integrative. The concept is steeped in the individualist assumptions of liberalism (Walters 2000), ‘adjustment’ to unemployment as a normal state of life contradicting the liberal ideal of independent self-sufficient households. So the danger was present that young people might be too content to receive state support.

#### 4.4.2 Gendered understandings of unemployment

The subjects of concern of social investigators and the state were primarily male the unemployment of women being regarded often as secondary as a social problem. From the start authorities were determined to limit the access of unemployed women to the Unemployment Insurance scheme, reflecting a desire to

delineate them from the core workforce. Male unemployment was problematised as a failure to keep their families independent of the state, and the corollary of this was to regard women as their dependants. When both in a household were unemployed the man's allowance would be increased to reflect his responsibilities.

The Pilgrim Trust's investigation into unemployment understood the problems women faced because of unemployment in terms of three categories. Firstly there were women who did not expect to work but whose husbands were unemployed. Secondly there were women who would ordinarily balance work and family, and thirdly those who would have intended to work only until marriage, but who were unemployed (Pilgrim Trust 1938). This varied to some extent by region. For instance women in the coal mining areas of South Wales were rarely employed, but in the Lancashire cotton towns like Blackburn they worked side by side with men. From the evidence of the Birmingham authorities it was expected that women would work only until marriage.

The "necessity for special conditions" for married women was said to follow from "the fact that it is the exception to the rule for women, after marriage, to earn their living by insurable employment" (Royal Commission for Unemployment Insurance 1931 p242). This is reflected in statistics on insured unemployment with the result of married women in particular being undercounted due to the practices of subjecting them to additional contribution tests and offering work in uninsurable employment. The Anomalies Act of 1931 was the mechanism which introduced these extra tests. These meant that married women were pushed to dependence on their husbands or made to rely on the Public Assistance system (Burns 1941). The designation of the group as an 'anomaly' is revealing of the place they hold in normative imaginings and visions of ideal labour markets.

#### 4.4.3 Understandings of juvenile unemployment

Compared to that of the general population the situation of the juvenile unemployed was somewhat different. Their unemployment was, in contrast to the situation in the present day, lower than that of adults. For instance in September 1932 22.7% (Royal Commission for Unemployment Insurance 1932) of insured workers were unemployed whilst 8.3% and 6.3% (Garside 1977) of insured 16-17 year old boys and girls were out of work. There may be several reasons for this, “the answers which suggest themselves [being] in terms of lower wages, lower benefits, non-entitlement to benefits and under registration” (Glynn and Booth 1987 p8). This lower rate of unemployment was enabled by the low wages customarily paid to juveniles. This group was often employed as apprentices and in what were known as the ‘blind alley’ occupations (described in more detail in Section 4.4.1).

The concept of demoralisation has much in common with that of benefit dependence. The unreciprocated receipt of public money was seen by some at the Ministry of Health as a “more insidious evil”<sup>9</sup> than the insufficiency of benefits to meet needs. ‘Demoralisation’ was seen as a particular problem for the juvenile, and introducing young claimants, to some extent 18-21s but particularly juveniles (14-18s) to state support was seen as dangerous<sup>10</sup>. Elsewhere the benefit system was seen, through the provision of extended benefits on too generous a basis, as having encouraged the development of a culture of receiving benefit as of a right, especially in the depressed areas<sup>11</sup>. It is therefore a behavioural concept which appears to indicate the need for interventions to provide alternative means of maintaining morale and ‘employability’.

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<sup>9</sup> TNA MH57/8: Brief for the ministers speech to the 1935 Public Assistance Conference attached to minutes of 18<sup>th</sup> March 1935.

<sup>10</sup> TNA Cab27/502 Memorandum from Betterton (Minister of Labour) of 1933 on policy toward Juveniles.

<sup>11</sup> TNA MH57/14 1931 Transitional Payments administration general conference.

In the 1930s the school leaving age was 14 and the 14-18 year old group were known as 'juveniles' who could be employed but did not have the right to adult wages. The juvenile lay between adulthood and childhood not only in legal terms but also in the terms within which they were discussed by policymakers. As is explored at greater length in the following chapters the juvenile was in a unique position with regard to the legal rights which constituted adulthood. They began to be treated as adult workers at 18 but acquired the right to vote at 21 (for men this had been the case since 1918, but women under 30 were still prevented from voting until 1928). There were also complicated gradations in rights to support in unemployment. Unemployment insurance benefit until 1934 could begin to be claimed in practice at the age of 16 and a half (requiring 6 months of contributions after the age of 16). Up to this point the claimant was treated as a dependent for the purposes of their parent's benefits presuming that their parents were unemployed. Up until 1928 adult rates of benefit only came into place for 18 year olds, however this was changed to introduce staggered rates of benefit up to the age of 21. Gender differentials were also institutionalised in the benefits system with lower rates of benefit paid to girls.

Legal rights were not the only area where the juvenile was in an ambiguous position. The juvenile's status for employment and benefits assumed a dependant position within the household. The juvenile's earnings were assumed to be supplemental to the earnings of an adult male wage earner. This view was often employed as a justification for their employment as cheap labour (Todd 2007) especially in the 'blind alley' jobs. The assumption of parental support was also factored into the scales of benefit unemployed juveniles could expect to receive. Todd writes that juveniles were "treated paradoxically by the interwar state and labour market. They were primarily represented and treated as dependent on their parents, but there was a silence about the precise reasons why they went out to work at all – namely, family reliance on their earnings, and employers' reliance on cheap labour" (Todd 2007 p59).

So legal rights, including to benefits, were variable for this group and staggered in a rather inconsistent way as they made the transition to adulthood. Their status also presented something of an anomaly for systems based on contribution records. The next chapters will explore how policy makers attempted to resolve this.

The juvenile was seen as being particularly vulnerable to demoralisation. The Industrial Transference Board (ITB), a government body responsible for assisting migration from the depressed areas, reported that “[i]n no other group is the demoralising influence of unemployment so rapid and disastrous in its effects. The habit of work has to be learned and to leave school at 14 and to loaf in idleness for one, two, three or more years destroys the will to work” (ITB 1928). Voluntary organisation the Pilgrim Trust concurred that “we are dealing with lads and young men whose psychological condition is a more important consideration even than it is with the middle aged and elderly men” (1938 p227). Meara’s study of the South Wales JICs began from a similar premise that “[e]nforced idleness leads ultimately to demoralisation, to loss of pride in one’s own person and appearance, to envy of those better placed in society and envy leads to hatred as hatred leads in the last resort to social conflict” (Meara 1936 p11).

It is worth noting that the 1920s had been a period of rising concern about juvenile delinquency. There had been a movement to establish juvenile courts (Bradley 2008a). But there was also a rising movement amongst charitable organisations and social reformers to improve the health and welfare of children. This was overwhelmingly focussed on the delinquency of working class children: the elimination of ‘bad behaviour’ was seen as a key component of the alleviation of slum poverty.

#### 4.5 Casual work

As well as the problem of unemployment (i.e. the problem of no work), there was the problem of not enough work. Casual workers had traditionally posed problems for Poor Law administration; they were feared to be happy to subsist on allowances and subsidies, picking up small bits of work at their convenience to enable a rootless and anti-social lifestyle. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century 'casual work' was widely regarded as a problem, as a generator of inefficiency in industry but also of social problems. It was seen as source of dependency, "as expensive, inefficient and a source of social and moral degeneration (poverty breeding criminality, sickness and incapacity)" (Whiteside 2015 p155). Irregular employment was seen as insufficient to create a developed habit of work. The Pilgrim Trust said "spells of casual work which a "general labourer" finds for himself are not enough to give men the habit of working" (Pilgrim Trust 1938 p151).

The young William Beveridge saw casual labour as a feature of poorly organised labour markets, and as a waste of human capital (Phillips and Whiteside 1985). Beveridge linked casual work to overmanning of certain industries e.g. on the docks: an inefficient thin spreading of work. This method of work on the docks had been identified as a driver of poverty by Booth's studies in London between 1886 and 1903 (Charles Booth's London 2016). It was associated with slums around centres of employment where workers who depended upon securing a day's work at short notice would have to live (Whiteside 1991). The earliest proposals for Employment Exchanges aimed to order the labour market to eliminate casual work and so render these industries more efficient. The Exchanges were to be used to identify and exclude the least efficient workers in the industry. In 1909 Churchill had argued that it was not possible to divide the 'vagrant and the loafer' from the legitimate workman without a set of work tests (i.e. the offer of permanent work) like those offered by the Exchanges (King 1995); by offering these tests the Exchanges sought to impose the discipline of regular work. The Exchanges therefore sought to be used by the respectable or legitimate workman. This can be seen in

the name with, 'Employment Exchange' preferred to 'Labour Exchange' from the mid-1920s because of the latter's association with low skilled work and the "desire to eliminate the odious word "labour" from the original title. This was in order to avoid any misunderstanding as to the character of the labour which the Exchanges could supply"<sup>12</sup>. De-casualisation had essentially conservative aims to "foster economic independence of the individual and the integrity of the family" (Phillips and Whiteside 1985 p108).

One particular problem seen in chapters 5-7 in the local evidence from Birmingham is that of migrant workers. The PAC, amongst the other policy making organisations faced the problem of distinguishing between tramps and casuals, an anti-social problem group, and respectable migrant workers. This problem is explored further in Chapter 7 which considers the operation of casual wards. Poor law practice had traditionally used 'settlement and irremovability' criteria (which required that the applicant prove their permanent residency in the area) to exclude migrants from the right to relief. In times of high unemployment, migrant workers continued to present a problem for the authorities. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the decline of agriculture drove migrants towards the cities (Price 2000), but trade depressions increased their numbers, pushing previously employed men onto the roads in search of work. The exchanges were meant to reduce the numbers of men 'tramping around' in search of work by countering the lack of information about job vacancies which was a generator of unproductive mobility.

#### 4.5.1 Blind alley work

The casual work problem affected juveniles as well. There was the particular problem of 'blind alley' work. The 'blind alley' was one which led nowhere, or least provided no prospect for long term employment and/or training. These were occupations seen as storing up unemployment for later. Young people, in taking

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<sup>12</sup> TNA Lab 19/41 Policy Note: Minute by L. Gordon Lee 7<sup>th</sup> April 1934.

these occupations “endangered their future prospects of useful employment” (Garside 1977 p324) by taking unskilled work from which they would be dismissed at the age at which they would come to receive an adult wage. At which point the employer would hire another juvenile. Birmingham’s Juvenile Welfare and Employment Sub-Committee reported that “the number of unemployed for each age group over 18 is far higher than for any group below that age, and that the biggest increase in employment (sic) is at 18 years of age, although there is another important jump as far as males are concerned at the age of 21”<sup>13</sup>. They attributed this pattern to the ‘blind alley’. These jobs included ‘van boys’ and ‘messenger boys’ as well as street sellers and were often paid at a higher rate than apprenticeships. The decisions of juveniles to take such ‘unprogressive’ work was labelled as a problem of short-termism and lack of thrift on the part of juveniles and their families, as well as raising expectations of the wages they should accept. The Ministry of Labour’s Divisional Controller for London in a Memorandum of April 1937 described the effects of this kind of work:

“[t]he main reasons for the boys unemployment appeared to be that some had drifted unguided from one unskilled job to another without considering prospects in later years. Work had been easy to get and the wages they had earned high, and they were not prepared to consider employment offering a wage usually paid to boys of their age”<sup>14</sup>.

Going further juvenile justice movements often “argued for a link between the high wages earned by boys in ‘blind-alley’ labour, the paucity of constructive leisure activities in some areas and higher rates of juvenile crime” (Bradley 2016).

Finding ‘progressive’ work for the young unemployed was one of the duties of Birmingham’s Juvenile Employment and Welfare Sub Committee (JEWSC) and of its

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<sup>13</sup> BCC 1/BH/14/1/1/7 (1929) Report on the juvenile employment situation in districts of the city February 1929.

<sup>14</sup> TNA LAB19/243 Memorandum of the London Divisional Controller April 1937.

educational authorities who increasingly sought to apply a 'scientific' approach to careers guidance. The desire to delineate legitimate and illegitimate 'progressive or unprogressive' employment for young workers is a thread which runs through policy. For example from 1933 Local Authorities had the right to impose licencing upon street vending, Birmingham's preference was to prohibit under 16s from taking the work and licence 16-18s. The rationale for this was the 'blind alley' character of the work and its "particularly undesirable associations for girls"<sup>15</sup> i.e. with prostitution.

#### 4.5.2 Juveniles in Birmingham

With regard to the situation of juveniles in the city the crash of 1929 brought about a rapid reappraisal of the extent and nature of the unemployment problem, as can be seen in the Annual Report of the council's Juvenile Employment and Welfare Sub Committee (JEWSC) from 1930:

"The year ended 31<sup>st</sup> July, 1930 can only be regarded with very mixed feelings. During the latter half of 1929 and the early part of 1930 the industrial outlook was good, and excellent opportunities existed for placing young people suitably in employment, and for giving them vocational advice which had a reasonable chance of being followed. From the Spring of 1930 onwards, however, the industrial position nationally became acute, and local trade was gradually affected so that there was an ever increasing difficulty in securing permanent and progressive work for young people."<sup>16</sup>

This problem had not been anticipated. The Committee's reports from the late 1920s show that the unemployment of juveniles was not seen as the biggest problem to be faced. In fact the disinterest shown by employed juveniles to

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<sup>15</sup> BCC 1/BH/14/1/1/12: Note on the 1933 Children and Young People Act March 1934.

<sup>16</sup> BCC 1/BH/14/1/1/9 Birmingham JEWSC 1929-30 Annual Report.

organised social and religious life appears to have been seen as the greatest difficulty facing the JEWSC. In a sense this is a concern about growing juvenile prosperity and its leading to an ethos of commercialism. Juvenile unemployment then had been low and population projections for the city had expected a decline in the juvenile population and consequently a further decline in unemployment. The Western District sub Committee of the JEWSC further reinforces the picture of a healthy labour market in the late 1920s:

“A few years ago opportunities to place juveniles in suitable employment was a fairly easy matter, in fact so easy, that any young person who found himself in an occupation for which he had no liking, either because of ‘long hours’, ‘job too heavy or dirty’, ‘foreman too hard’ or insufficient wage, could with a minimum of assistance find a more congenial task”<sup>17</sup>.

The problem of the young unemployed is here cast as one of drifting from job to job rather than learning a trade, e.g. through an apprenticeship. Institutionally this had meant that the ‘unemployment schools’ of the 1920s had by this point been shut down due to lack of demand.

However contrary to expectations the situation was worsening and the same report states that “[i]t was thought desirable in April 1930 to re-open the schools which had previously been known as Unemployment Schools, but which now became known by the better title of Junior Instruction Centres”<sup>18</sup>. However this decision was also the mandate of national policy which had required the opening of centres<sup>19</sup>. The problem had shifted from one of juveniles ending up as casuals in

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<sup>17</sup> BCC 1/BH/14/1/1/10 Birmingham JEWSC 1931 Report of the Western District Sub Committee December 1931.

<sup>18</sup> BCC 1/BH/14/1/1/9 Birmingham JEWSC 1929-30 Annual Report.

<sup>19</sup> TNA Lab19/234 Reports by Wear and Metcalf on problems of attendance.

later life because of their unsettled habit of work, to one of school leavers being unable to secure employment.

The situation continued to get worse. In 1933 the JEWSC described the year as:

“one of frequent and extreme fluctuations in industry, as in other areas of national life. It is difficult to imagine that any period of like length could present more or greater problems to those seeking to minister to the industrial and moral well-being of youth” and noted that “[t]rade conditions of almost unprecedented difficulty have prevailed not only in Birmingham but throughout England”<sup>20</sup>.

Different economic conditions presented different sorts of challenges to the organisation:

“In the Committee’s dealing with employers difficult problems continually arise – thus – Is trade good? Then children tend to flit from job to job and many employers are left with vacancies to spare and orders crying out for fulfilment. Should trade be bad, then orders are scarce and employers feel that the constant pressure brought upon them to find situations for young people is an added burden.”<sup>21</sup> But “[w]hether trade be good or bad the “special case” is always with us demanding initiative, patience, time and tact”<sup>22</sup>.

The level of unemployment however began to fall shortly thereafter. By 1935 the caseload attending the JIC fell low enough for the institution to be closed down.

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<sup>20</sup> BCC 1/BH/14/1/1/11 Birmingham JEWSC 1933 20th Annual Report.

<sup>21</sup> BCC 1/BH/14/1/1/12 Birmingham JEWSC 1934 Annual Report, comment on relations with employers.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

#### 4.6 Institutional structures of unemployment policy

In order to go forward in discussing the moral ordering underpinning conditionality it is necessary to provide some account of the institutional structures within which policy was decided upon. Unemployment Insurance Benefit had originally been established by the 1911 Act. The scheme had originally covered “selected trades with an almost entirely male labour force” (Lynes 2011) and was expanded in 1916 to take in workers in war related occupations. A further extension of coverage in 1920 took in most other occupations with the significant exceptions of agriculture and domestic service (a broad category including a variety of occupations such as cleaning and catering occupations).

After World War One a non-contributory payment called the out-of-work donation was introduced and ran from 1918-22. This was paid out to demobilised soldiers (and to civilian ex-munitions workers from 1919-22) to prevent them having to resort to the poor law. Whilst this arrangement was intended to be temporary the high unemployment which persisted throughout the 1920s necessitated that a form of ‘extended’ benefit for those who had exhausted their UIB remained in place. From 1921 this was labelled Uncovenanted Benefit and was paid to those who could satisfy the Genuinely Seeking Work test. Under the first Labour government of 1924 it was renamed Extended Benefit and the means test was removed only to be re-imposed by a Conservative government in the following year. This changed in 1927 when the system was relabelled Transitional Benefit and the means test was again removed (Lynes 2011). In 1932 however, with concerns mounting about the rising costs of Transitional Benefit, especially after the abolition of the Genuinely Seeking Work test, the means test was re-introduced. It was to be administered by local Public Assistance Committees (PACs) and the benefit renamed Transitional Payments (TPs). This administration by PACs was especially controversial because of their traditional responsibility for the poor law. While many authorities (including Birmingham) administered the Means Test in TPs harshly, some refused to

implement the means test. Importantly the policy response to this was a centralisation of administration.

Finally the system became Unemployment Assistance under the 1934 Act, run by the Unemployment Assistance Board, a statutory body which was intended to be independent of ministerial departments and therefore take the question of how to provide assistance for the long-term unemployed out of party politics. The Board's first set of proposed scales however provoked the anger of the unemployed, as the severity of the means test combined with its now universal application (as in many areas PACs had softened the blow under TPs) meant many claimants stood to be worse off (Lynes 2011, Deacon and Bradshaw 1983). Running parallel to this system of course is the Poor Law to which it was becoming increasingly unacceptable to require claimants to apply. This system was transformed into Public Assistance by the Local Government Act of 1929 which abolished the Boards of Guardians of the Poor Law and placed their responsibilities upon Local Authorities. The Act aimed to modernise and rationalise poor law practice by introducing higher national standards and removing antiquated practices. The PA system was supervised by the Ministry of Health which set the regulatory framework within which a PAC would have to design policy. At least this was the case in England and Wales, the Scottish Poor Law having long been run autonomously and even under Public Assistance retaining its own traditions of administration. In this thesis it is the English and Welsh system that is examined. The PA system in Birmingham is examined in some detail in the chapters to come.

The Ministry of Labour had been established in 1916 by Lloyd George's administration under Labour pressure. The Ministry was responsible for the administration of unemployment insurance benefit and for the operation of a network of Employment Exchanges. This was differentiated from the Public Assistance system run by local authorities under the supervision of the Ministry of Health. Conflicts between the two ministries occurred over their division of

responsibility but also over the different models of social policy that each represented. Whilst the Ministry of Labour had initially been set up with the aim of abolishing the poor law, the Ministry of Health continued to support its methods. The Ministry of Labour represented a less classically liberal philosophy of administration, its civil servants administered varied types of unemployment benefits and ran the employment exchanges. It also might be noted that the Ministry of Labour ran a national policy centrally through a network of local offices, whereas by contrast Ministry of Health was operating through elected local authorities. The shift toward a centralisation of administration was in part implemented through the shifting of caseloads toward the Ministry of Labour and later the Unemployment Assistance Board. As can be seen in the next chapter these disputes would often concern the model of treatment appropriate for those in the intermediate category of extended benefits.

It is in the context of these disputes that the Unemployment Assistance Board came to be created in 1934. The UAB was formed because of the perceived inadequacies of local administration of Transitional Payments (TPs). Chamberlain - from November 1931 an "exceptionally strong" (Peden 2000 p249) Chancellor - and the Treasury in particular wished to constrain a number of defiant local authorities which had refused to implement the means test (Lowe 1986): The Ministry of Health had also felt that laxity in TPs was having a knock-on effect on the PA system.

A number of Labour controlled local authorities had refused to implement the means test in TPs, paying the maximum allowance in all cases. These included Durham and Glamorgan counties and the cities of Rotherham and Barnsley (Stevenson and Cook 1979, Garside 1990). Defiance in local authorities in the 1930s had been preceded by the example of the east London borough of Poplar in 1921. Wherein the borough, under the leadership of George Lansbury (who would later go on to become Labour leader), developed a relatively generous system of social

relief than was typical. Rather than raise local taxes to pay for this the Poplar councillors refused to collect taxes to protest against funding inequalities between rich and poor areas (Branson 1979). In the 1930s Garside (1990) notes that defiant authorities “regarded transitional payments as an extension of insurance and therefore a matter of contractual right” (Garside 1990 p68). Officials were concerned that this attitude had been embraced by the unemployed themselves<sup>23</sup>.

Concerns about lax administration had been around a long time; TPs had themselves been established in response to Treasury concerns that its predecessor Transitional Benefit was too laxly administered. There were particular concerns that married women were too easily able to claim following the abolition of the Genuinely Seeking Work test (Peden 2000). High rates of locally funded relief would put pressure on local taxes and could further undermine the competitiveness of the depressed areas. This led to a push toward centralisation and a tightening up of standards, spearheaded by Chamberlain. In many ways the establishment of the UAB was an attempt (unsuccessful) to put extended benefits outside of the political sphere, Chamberlain (in language reminiscent of later right critiques of the welfare state) wanted to prevent assistance being ‘put up for auction’ by local government (Peden 2000 p293). As it happened the UAB was staffed by ‘safe choices’ with regard to economic orthodoxy but some of the more extremely punitive plans for removal of the right of appeal or the imposition of task work were not imposed.

Chamberlain was accused by the Ministry of Labour accused of seeing unemployment “not as an industrial, but as a poor law problem” (Lowe 1986 p159). The Ministry of Labour view was that the ‘tightening up’ methods advocated would represent an inappropriate encroachment of Poor Law methods into extended benefits; Eady a Ministry of Labour civil servant wrote that it “purports to repeal the poor law but contains the poor law tradition and extends it” (Lowe 1986 p163).

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<sup>23</sup> TNA MH57/14 1931 Transitional Payments administration general conference.

The overall context for policy here was one observers of contemporary austerity policy will recognise whereby expenditure on social services was seen as “the prime cause of the present crisis in the national finances” (May Commission 1931 p145). The conclusion the May Committee drew was that large reductions in Exchequer costs would be necessary to restore national prosperity. A further aspect of the drive to centralisation in this period was the Treasury’s attempts to gain control over public expenditure. However, there were countervailing tendencies, the growth of social services which contained within them nascent elements of what was later incorporated as part of the post-war welfare state. There was also a degree of class consciousness and conflict over benefits which is quite unrecognisable if viewed from post 2010.

The Ministry of Labour took over the administration of JICs from local educational authorities at the beginning of the decade (Burns 1941). In 1930 the running of centres became a statutory obligation of the Ministry. Prior to this point claimants could be obligated to attend but only where centres existed, and local authorities were free to run them or not depending on their preference. JICs were in many ways the cornerstone of policy toward the juvenile unemployed retaining cross party support despite their questionable effectiveness (Garside 1990). In 1930 the average daily attendance of the centres was 16,400, however this was only a fraction of the 110,000 juveniles on the records of local employment bureaus (Burns 1941). The 1934 Act contained provisions to wider the compulsion to attend the centres which will be explored later on In Chapters 5 and 6.

There is a common theme that runs through these discussions. A general feature of policy in the 1930s was a drive toward centralisation to eliminate local practices seen as irrational or not conducive to national policy aims and also to conserve resources. In the case of PACs they were gradually relieved of responsibility for the

able bodied poor, for instance losing responsibility for the administration of Transitional Payments to the UAB which could be counted on not to 'put them up for auction'. As juvenile unemployment was seen as more of a problem the responsibility for maintaining their employability was taken over from locally elected educational bodies by a central government ministry. Indeed for juveniles local authorities were relieved of responsibility earlier than were PACs for the extended claimant. An example of where this change in responsibility might be seen is the change of name of the Unemployment Schools which became Instruction Centres. Which institutions were given responsibility is an important factor in understanding the debates about what the nature of the institutions should be.

This particular shift in responsibility shows a decision to see the issue of juvenile unemployment as an employment issue rather than educational one. Additionally that the PACs were not given responsibility for juveniles shows that their practice of running deterrent institutions was not thought to be appropriate for juveniles. The somewhat blurry nature of the distinction between deterrence and training institutions is a theme in policy making in the 1930s, with policy makers aspiring to render deterrent institutions more 'constructive' and concerned with employability, and at the same time intending to use the offer of training to identify 'scroungers'. However the planting of juveniles outside of the deterrent systems and moral orderings of adult benefits is informative.

#### 4.7 Summary

This chapter has provided some political and institutional context for the discussions of the government of unemployment found in the following chapters. It has described the levels of unemployment in the UK, for adults and juveniles in the depressed areas and in Birmingham. It has also set out some of the institutional background to the welfare systems of the time and the divisions of responsibility between the governmental institutions involved. The chapter also discussed the

way the unemployment problem appeared in policy discourse including the problem of 'casual' and insecure work. The problem of juvenile unemployment was less severe than that of adults but was of a particularly threatening nature to the social order in the long term. The juvenile was a distinct problem though, both in the immediate and the long term.

This chapter has contributed to the thesis by establishing the necessary context within which to situate the research questions. It has set out how unemployment had been understood up to the 1930s, which is necessary to address Question 1 on how different groups of unemployed were constructed. Question 2 addresses the policy response, so this chapter has described the institutional context within this response was developed. This context is also required to enable comparisons to be drawn with the situation of the present as in Question 3. The context for present day policy will be set out in Chapter 8, which will enable a comparison with the image of liberal austerity in the 1930s.

The next chapter discusses the importance of these institutional divisions in differentiating claimants according to their deserts.

## Chapter 5: Moral ordering in the benefit system of the 1930s

“A sharp line of division between Insurance and Relief will correspond with a dividing line among the recipients which has no relation either to industrial conditions or to human needs” (From the Minority Report of the Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance 1931 p393-394)

Chapter 3 described the way perceptions of the nature and meaning of unemployment influence policy. The concept of ‘moral ordering’ from Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) was used to show how different criteria are applied to assess situations, objects and people. This chapter is concerned with how these orderings are institutionalised in policy.

This Chapter begins by describing the different benefits available to the ‘able bodied unemployed’ and their rationales and justifications. The conflicts and debates concerning the boundaries between these categories illustrate the perpetual problems policy faced where it has been concerned with identifying the deserving and undeserving poor. Of central importance are the administrative mechanisms for distinguishing them and their justifications. It explores the position of youth within these formulations. Younger claimants were regarded as posing a different sort of problem e.g. in the ‘juvenile’ group where classificatory arguments involved distinctions between childhood and adulthood and their position within dependent households.

It is structured as follows. Section 5.1 examines the different categories of unemployed, their construction in policy discourse as a ‘moral order’ and the mechanisms used to sort and distinguish them from others. 5.2 then shows how

young unemployed people caused problems for this scheme of distinctions. 5.3 takes this further showing how the unemployed young were situated within unemployed households and communities.

As set out in the Introduction to the thesis this chapter is concerned with how claimants were sorted between different systems, according to what criteria. Chapter 6 addresses the conditions attached to the receipt of these payments which the claimant received. Following from this Chapter 7 looks in greater depth at those situations where conditions involved a form of institutionalisation.

### 5.1 Moral ordering and the threefold division of benefits

The overall structure of entitlements for claimants had three main categories of unemployed (Brown 1990). The first category was insurance-based unemployment benefits paid on an 'actuarial' basis for limited periods of time, but as a right to workers with sufficient records of National Insurance Contributions. The second category was those who had exhausted their contribution-based benefits, but whom were judged to normally be in insurable employment and unemployed only due to the continuing depression. Thirdly there was Public Assistance: the reformed poor law regarded as a stigmatising system for the unworthy characterised by a lack of rights and deterrent treatment. These three categories are now explored in turn.

#### 5.1.1 Insurance

First, the system of insurance-based benefits. As discussed in previous chapters unemployment had become increasingly acknowledged in policy discourse as constituted by risk (Walters 2000) and governable via methods of insurance.

The Royal Commission for Unemployment Insurance in 1931 re-iterated the principles on which an 'insurance' system of unemployment benefits should be

based. These principles were argued to be that “(a) that, in return for premiums paid, the persons insured obtain a right to compensatory payments on the occurrence of the specified misfortune; and (b) that the premiums paid by the whole body of the insured should be so adjusted as to cover the payments out together with administrative expenses” (1931 p114). The unemployment insurance system rarely if ever in practice met criterion (b) which demanded that the scheme self-finance (Garside 1990). Since this thesis is concerned with the basis on which individuals are ranked and ordered, criterion (a) is the key one. In this case “the contributors title to benefit ... is not a matter of discretion but of right, subject to the satisfaction of whatever conditions the scheme may impose” (ibid) and “benefits may properly be restricted in duration and amount but they must be definite” (1931 p115). Insurance benefits could be paid without the worker having to prove they were in economic distress (as in means tested benefits). They aimed to reduce the danger of workers having to resort to the poor law or to ask for charitable help, allowing them to avoid “feeling that he is a charge upon the community. There is no interference with, or enquiry into, his domestic economy; he retains full control over his private purse; and the wages and conditions of employment which he may be called upon to accept as suitable are safeguarded” (ibid p157).

The benefit aimed only to tide the worker over until they found work again. The insured contributor was regarded as in a temporary situation. This understanding acted against the tendency to pathologize the workers condition; in contrast for instance to discourses on pauperism which see the pauper as ever present. The mechanisms of fixed benefit in return for fixed numbers of contributions had originally been envisaged as making the system self-policing. In Winston Churchill's phrase it was the “morality of mathematics” (Deacon 1976), which eliminated the dangers of demoralisation and abuse. The 1934 Act re-established this principle and it was argued that relaxations in the insurance scheme during the 1920s had undermined its credibility.

A further noteworthy aspect of the way a 'moral order' was established in these divisions between claimant groups is the kinds of work covered by the insurance scheme. The dichotomy between insurable and uninsurable work divided workers into a core and periphery. This system incentivised workers to move into and to remain in insured rather than uninsured industries. This point proved controversial where the unemployed on extended benefit had the opportunity to take work outside insurance. Some might have thought about setting out as self-employed, but Bakke (1933) suggests they were often reluctant to do for fear of loss of insured status. There are two areas of particular significance where the lack of 'insurability' marked a form of work as peripheral to the ideal labour markets envisioned by policy makers: firstly 'casual' workers excluded by contribution criteria. Secondly in the attempts to exclude married women from insurance benefits. Married women had been a central target of the Genuinely Seeking Work Test of the 1920s (Deacon 1976) which is discussed further in the next chapter.

Dominant conceptions of women's involvement in the labour market at the time largely tended to assume that they would leave employment, or at least leave *insurable* employment upon marriage, so to remain was seen as "the exception rather than the rule" (Royal Commission for Unemployment Insurance 1931 p242). It was feared that this enabled the exploitation of the insurance system by women who had no intention of returning to their old jobs. Measures to counteract this 'anomaly' were undertaken; women were required to prove a record of contributions following their marriage to make a claim. Additionally, they had to prove that they were 'normally' in insured employment, and that similar insured employment was available in the district where they lived. The 'normally' insured employment test (a variant of which was applied to men on extended benefits) embodied a vision of work and the labour market which sought to police access to support. While the modification of the rules on 'anomalies' indicated a desire to ensure that women remained dependent upon men rather than the state.

It had been imagined throughout the 1920s that the insurance system would prove sufficient to cover the majority of the 'genuinely unemployed'. However extensions in the coverage of insurance benefit and relaxations of the contribution conditions were also problematic. They were blamed on the desire of governments "to find the politically easiest way of providing relief for the unemployed" and were held to have inadvertently "br[ought] about a change of attitude toward the public provision for unemployed workers and some confusion as to the nature of an insurance scheme" (Royal Commission for Unemployment Insurance 1931 p117). The principle remained that "[w]hen they have exhausted the provision towards which they have contributed out of their wages, then, if they are still unemployed, they must seek relief from another source" (ibid p156).

#### 5.1.2 The extended claimants

What this other source should be was the question. The political climate simply did not allow for the respectable worker, pushed out of employment in times of depression to be treated in the manner of the pauper. The extended claimant group was initially constructed in the years following World War One, when their payment was first labelled the Out of Work Donation. This served to relieve the unemployment generated by demobilisation and the dismantling of the war economy, as it was considered unjustifiable to expect the returning soldier to rely on the poor law. The question of the long term unemployed who exhausted their entitlements under the Insurance scheme was also soon to be addressed by these methods. Policy was founded on the view that if "these workers are capable of work and show that they will normally seek to obtain their livelihood in industrial employment, the community has a duty to provide for their needs during unemployment, and to take such steps as are practicable to check the deterioration, in employability and character, which may follow" (Royal Commission for Unemployment Insurance 1931 p118-9). So the extended group was one of workers designated as having been respectable but now in danger of

decline. This danger as well as the changed basis on which assistance was issued created a different policy imperative. "It [wa]s important in the interests of the community to avoid a system of unconditional relief. The state of continued unemployment has almost inevitably a demoralising influence and, if prolonged, may result in a definite decline of initiative and independence" (Royal Commission for Unemployment Insurance 1931 p119). Because demoralisation was a process of gradual decline it became necessary to escalate conditions as one moved into a new scheme.

Birmingham PAC's response to the Royal Commission in 1931 sums up well the questions which emerged in constituting the extended group. The key question was "is it desirable to establish on well-defined and consistent lines an intermediate class between the insured and those in the charge of Local Authorities? If so, what should be the condition of the admission to this class, and what provision should be made for it, and by what authorities?"<sup>24</sup>. It would need to be determined whether assistance should be paid as of a right as in Insurance or means tested as in PA (the preferred option of the writers). But even "[a]part from the question of need should the form of assistance be conditional on the acceptance of (a) training (b) test work, or (c) relief work"<sup>25</sup>. This is a question about whether the extended claimant is really a different subject to the poor law one. Perhaps reflecting the poor law tradition the PAC argued that the extended group should be subject to "training or instruction classes or suitable work arranged by the Employment Exchanges" (op cit). However the question of applying any sort of compulsory training to this group was much more complicated as can be seen in Chapter 6. Traditional Public Assistance technologies could not be brought into play; in-kind relief was forbidden to be applied to this group as was payment by loan and the workhouse<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> BCC1/CD/1/1/1 1930-1931 Public Assistance Committee: Birmingham PAC's response to the Royal Commission.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> TNA MH57/6 1932 Public Assistance Conference.

This group created dilemmas for policy makers as the 'morality of mathematics' (Deacon 1976) had clearly failed with regard to this group. With mass unemployment causing many workers to exhaust their contributions, the ratio was not an adequate means to assess their character. At the same time, it was politically impossible to force so many previously 'respectable' workers to rely on Public Assistance. If the 'morality of mathematics' was unable to function as a device for 'veridification' of the legitimacy of the subjects making claims upon the state, alternative means of 'veridification' would have to be found. The extended group were subject to ever changing forms of conditionality. These means of treatment often involved a mix of methods between those typical of the insurance scheme and of the poor law. Many political controversies of the period involved working class opposition to modes of treatment once reserved for the pauper being brought into the extended group. The liberal reformer and economist William Beveridge regarded the extension of extended benefit as having created a qualitative shift in its meaning. From a contract between the contributor as an individual and the state, to a benefit paid, not on the basis of contributions, but awarded by demonstrating membership of the insured class (Beveridge 2015).

The division between extended cases and PA had (as explained in Chapter 4) gone through a series of institutional forms. The movement of insured workers onto a means tested system had posed problems as "[t]here was an individual right attached to unemployment benefit and it has been very hard for people to realise that that right no longer exists"<sup>27</sup>, when they were moved onto the extended system. A senior Ministry of Health civil servant saw this as a cultural consequence of the system's generosity but one which created political difficulties. "That is one of the troubles; people have thought their benefit was so certain and so much of a right that they have built up their lives on the certainty of getting money from the

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<sup>27</sup> TNA MH57/14 1931 Transitional Payments administration general conference.

Employment Exchange on Friday. Their family life has centred round that principle. We cannot allow that principle to go on"<sup>28</sup>. The distinction between insurance and extended benefit then did not occur as naturally to the unemployed as it did to administrators experienced in poor law administration. This was in itself interpreted by the Ministry of Health as a consequence of the over generous administration of the insurance scheme and as itself a symptom of de-moralisation.

If the view of the insured contributor can be seen in the provision of benefit as a right, then the official view of the extended claimant group can be seen by examining the conditions attached to the receipt of extended benefits. As opposed to being paid as a right, benefit was subject to a 'test of need' i.e. means tested. The group was also subject to a greater degree of monitoring and conditionality. The conditionality attached to extended benefit is examined further in Chapter 6 but its importance here is to indicate the view of the claimant underlying their classification in this group. However, the limits to conditionality and failure to develop a fuller system of compulsion show that government's powers with regard to the extended group, was constrained.

In the run-up to the introduction of Unemployment Assistance, consideration was given to the option of transferring all responsibility for the 'able-bodied' unemployed away from local authorities<sup>29</sup>. The Association of Municipal Corporations appears to have equivocated on the merits of this idea noting that a national independent body could not show the 'discretion and care' toward individual cases that local authorities could. But in the end Public Assistance survived.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> TNA AST7/5 1932-1935 Unemployment Assistance Scheme: Preparation of.

### 5.1.3 Public Assistance

For the Public Assistance group, treatment was very different from that granted to the Insured Contributor. Public Assistance was a locally administered system run by local authorities under the control of the Ministry of Health. Burns categorises the role of the Ministry as providing “guidance rather than “control”” (1941 p22), through the issuing of regulations concerning the treatment of particular classes of the unemployed. This section discusses the characteristics of national policy and then looks at a case study in the Birmingham Public Assistance Scheme. While Burns (1941) wrote that the Ministry’s interventions were mainly against recalcitrant ‘over generous’ authorities in urban Labour controlled areas it can be seen that in Birmingham the Ministry still shaped the scheme in particular ways.

Birmingham’s response to the Royal Commission showed the need for a system which would deal with the ‘third class’ “of persons who were unable, or unwilling, to satisfy the conditions attaching to the intermediate grade or the insured class. This group raises the issue of employability”<sup>30</sup> and of the causes of their failure to compete for work.

For the ‘third class’ claimant, payment was not regarded as a right as can be seen from the following paternalistic comments to the Public Assistance conference of 1933: “relief is not a matter of right of the individual but a matter of duty on the part of the community; the poor law administrator is not a cashier paying on demand but a guardian acting in the interests, but not necessarily in accordance with the wishes, of his wards”<sup>31</sup>. The traditional administration of the poor law was based on a few fundamental principles: discretionary relief (i.e. no legally guaranteed right to relief), deterrence and ‘less eligibility’. Deterrence meant that the conditions attached to the receipt of relief would be sufficiently unpleasant as

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<sup>30</sup> BCC1/CD/1/1/1 1930-1931 Public Assistance Committee: Birmingham PAC’s response to the Royal Commission.

<sup>31</sup> TNA MH57/7 1933 Public Assistance Conference. Draft note of the ministers speech.

to ensure only the genuinely desperate would apply. 'Less eligibility' was the principle that the relief on offer should provide a significantly worse standard of living than enjoyed by even the worse off 'independent labourer' (Fox-Piven and Cloward 1972) (Polanyi 2001) (Burns 1941); in the present day this is called a 'work incentive'.

The group of 'paupers' was viewed as characterised by incapability, immorality and in need of firm guidance. The traditional view of the pauper had been as the "antithesis of all that is considered 'social' and 'respectable': its members are improvident and lack 'character'; they survive on the basis of occasional work, crime, prostitution, and begging; they revel in gambling, promiscuity, vice and drink" (Walters 2000 p20-1). The traditions of the poor law had seen the pauper as largely responsible for their condition, which reflected their innate characteristics. Lax administration encouraged their vices and therefore increased the pool of paupers. The availability of aid generated poverty rather than alleviated it (Whiteside 1991).

The reference to 'occasional work' here is important in defining the poor law subject and to the question of moral ordering. If the insurance scheme was meant to cover the respectable skilled working class (Walters 2000), and the extended to cope with their unanticipated long term unemployment, the Public Assistance system was increasingly dealing with those thought to have either little connection to the labour market or the wrong kind of connection. This links to the question of 'casual labour', which served as a bridge between the moral and the social-economic understandings of pauperism (Walters 2000). The casual worker when applying for relief was frequently the subject of suspicion, the fear being that the worker could exploit any relief paid in order to maintain a lifestyle of only occasional work. In the 1930s these views persisted. Social investigator E.W. Bakke associated casual employment with the tendency of unemployed young men to 'loaf' around in the streets, becoming a source of what today might be called 'anti-

social behaviour'. The casual problem was understood as related to the 'blind alley' one: the tendency for firms to lay off young people at the point they were able to demand an adult's wage creating "young men for whom the lessons of self-discipline and the influence of working experience have not come with any great force. They are a problem now. They will be more of a problem as they grow older" (Bakke 1933 p188). The design of the insurance scheme excluded many of these workers, pushing them onto PA.

This view still influenced the administration of Public Assistance but the 1930s was also a time when authorities were attempting to rationalise the poor law. The view was that disciplinary measures must become attuned to the constructive purposes of employability and improvement: "[t]here must be discipline but the discipline should be that of the school rather than that of the prison"<sup>32</sup>. Burns (1941) links this to the expansion of out-relief after 1920 which had previously been marginal. Accordingly the 1930 relief regulation order sought to introduce a national standard of training and task work in out-relief. The order forbade the practice of some authorities of excluding whole categories of people from claiming relief such as 'able-bodied' men without dependents or young 'able-bodied' men, encouraging instead judgements on the merits of their case.

Separating extended claimants from the poor law cases and having each dealt with by a different bureaucratic authority was important in gaining consent for policy. After 1934 claimants of Insurance and Extended Insurance based benefits "remained physically separated from paupers (being paid, for example, at employment exchanges and not the Public Assistance Committee [...] offices) and were threatened by none of the paupers' traditional disabilities (such as payment in kind and institutional confinement)" (Lowe 1986 p156). However this separation was partly a reaction to the unpopularity of mandating extended benefit claimants

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<sup>32</sup> TNA MH57/7 1933 Public Assistance Conference: Draft of the Minister's address.

to attend PAC offices under Transitional Payments. One PAC official complained that “objectors appear to take the view that the mere bringing of an applicant for transitional payments into contact with the Public Assistance Committee is so objectionable”<sup>33</sup> as to outweigh all the administrative advantages of the arrangement. Attendance at separate offices made visible the boundaries between groups. The pauper’s lack of rights was well illustrated by the fate of a proposal reaching the Birmingham PAC to display the usual relief scales in the relief office to be seen by claimants. This was rejected by the PAC who were “very strongly of the opinion that it is neither advisable nor necessary” and likely to create a false impression of entitlement to a usual scale where “no applicant for out-relief or Transitional Payments is entitled as of right to any specified amount” so posting some ‘usual’ scale was likely to cause “disappointment, and, possibly unpleasantness”<sup>34</sup>. So the pauper was regarded as morally suspect, and it was therefore an imposition to expect ‘respectable’ individuals to share a queue or office with them, and furthermore they were credited with little rationality, being the sort of people to cause ‘unpleasantness’ when not given what they want.

Birmingham’s authorities applied forms of ‘moral ordering’ of their own. In Birmingham Public Assistance authorities were highly suspicious of the residents of Common Lodging Houses, adopting the policy of refusing to pay out-relief to their residents, many of whom were thought to be:

“young men who make no attempt to get regular work: if they can obtain a weekly allowance from some source they are content to be dependent upon that allowance and to supplement it by such small sums as they can obtain for casual work or for casual services rendered.

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<sup>33</sup> TNA MH57/6 1932 Public Assistance Conference: Paper by Harold Fieldhouse Public Assistance Officer for Leeds.

<sup>34</sup> PAC BCC1/CD/1/1/4. 1934 Report of the Central Relief Sub-Committee (83).

The fact that outdoor relief has been prohibited for so long, proves that they can and do subsist by their own resources”<sup>35</sup>.

They justified this with a further claim that in the past 6 months (from January 1934) 212 applications had made by residents of the lodging houses of which only 36 had accepted an offer of institutionalisation in the workhouse and only a small portion of the 36 had entered the institution. A low number of applications appears to have been taken as proof that the men did indeed subsist on their casual earnings. Consistent with the traditional logic of deterrence, refusals to enter the workhouse proved that the men were not truly desperate for relief.

#### 5.1.4 Marginals

However, even though the threefold division in the system covered the great majority of claimants there was a fourth category to be dealt with. This category was necessarily an analytical one comprised of several groups falling below the required standards of ‘good character’, respectability and dignity which enabled others to receive Out-Relief. These groups of administrative marginals included those in the workhouses and the ‘vagrants’ in the Casual Wards<sup>36</sup>. Both of these groups however posed difficulties for authorities in maintaining distinctions between them and legitimate groups.

The ‘vagrants’ posed a different problem dealt with by local authorities and regional bodies. They were perceived as a menace, to be moved on. The ‘vagrants’ and ‘tramps’ were in many ways the lowest of the low. The traditions of the poor law dictated that ‘vagrants’ be displaced and moved on. While local authorities had a duty to assist the ‘settled’ poor, it was feared that leniency in Public Assistance

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<sup>35</sup> PAC BCC/1/CD/1/1/4 1934 Minute 21<sup>st</sup> January (54).

<sup>36</sup> A Casual Ward was an institution which housed the homeless overnight, after which they would be moved on, and forbidden from staying another night in the institution. In the institutions they would be subject to forced work and penal discipline.

administration might attract vagrants to settle in the area, and once 'settled' they would be able to apply for relief. Migrant agricultural workers were another typical client group of the Casual Wards. The seasonal nature of the work meant workers were frequently on the road. The decline of agriculture meant a drift toward the cities of men who were outside of the Insurance schemes and therefore had no alternative to the poor law. Birmingham during the 1930s was experiencing an increase in its population (Briggs 1953), to which unemployment in the declining industries of the surrounding Black Country was a contributing factor.

This created competition between authorities which sought to deter the 'vagrant' from staying in the area. It is in this context that the Casual Wards operated. However even among the 'tramps' the questions of moral ordering, distinction and veridification increasingly reared their heads, so generating a series of contradictory imperatives. It was difficult to separate the 'victims and villains'. It was argued that Public Assistance officials could not undertake the sort of personalised assessments as they could with the settled poor<sup>37</sup> of whom they may have long term knowledge. Hard times meant there was an increase in the numbers of workers 'tramping around' in search of work. Poor Law tradition had always been keen to distinguish the genuine worker or "better class of men" or "persons travelling the country in search of work who cannot be termed vagrants"<sup>38</sup> from the anti-social 'habitual vagrant'. Reports noted "quite a number of well-dressed young men who may be clerks, waiters or indoor servants"<sup>39</sup>, so not ordinary 'tramps'<sup>40</sup>, yet increased numbers meant strain upon the system. Suspicion also began to be raised that migrant workers were using the wards rather than paying for accommodation at

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<sup>37</sup> TNA MH57/6 1932 The Administration of the Public Assistance (Casual Poor) Order, 1931 W. T. Glass, Public Assistance Officer Somerset County Council.

<sup>38</sup> TNA MH57/71 Circulated paper 1932, Increases in Numbers of Casuals, Replies of Chief Constables in the Provinces to Questionnaire addressed to them.

<sup>39</sup> TNA MH57/6 1932 The Administration of the Public Assistance (Casual Poor) Order, 1931 W. T. Glass, Public Assistance Officer Somerset County Council p13 'Types'.

<sup>40</sup> They could even have been journalists, George Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London* consisted in part of his account of time spent tramping around the wards of London and the South East.

Common Lodging Houses. Birmingham's Chief Constable reported to the Ministry of Health that an unspecified number of men were entering the wards prior to signing for their benefits at the employment exchange on Fridays, spending the weekend out and then returning to the wards on the Monday.

Distinguishing was a challenge with regard to children and families as well. The Ministry of Health studied the far less frequent occasions where families resorted to casual wards. While they concluded that most of these were merely migrating families on long journeys local authorities were reminded to be vigilant and not to be afraid to confiscate the children of habitual attendees, with strong disciplinary language used for those families judged incapable parents, especially women who had children with different men<sup>41</sup>. With regard to young adult casuals there were also some different considerations. Distinctions were made between the 'habitual' casual and those (usually younger) who could be subject to a process of 'reclamation'. The Ministry of Health was willing in theory to allow casuals to remain in the wards for the time needed for applications for Unemployment Assistance to be processed<sup>42</sup>. In the cases of young casuals making use of Young Wayfarers Hostels, once their claims were approved the hostel organisation would receive the allowance for their maintenance. The aim of the hostels (voluntary organisations) was to "take off the roads and restore to employability young men in whose case there is a reasonable hope of reclamation from a life of vagrancy"<sup>43</sup>. As in the JIC, the young who had fallen into bad habits were seen as more redeemable.

#### 5.1.5 Surmising this division

In the organisation of support available to the 'able-bodied' adult unemployed there was a distinct set of principles, 'liberal and patriarchal' (Walters 2000)

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<sup>41</sup> TNA MH57/326 1936-1940. Vagrant Children.

<sup>42</sup> TNA MH57/356 Minute of March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1937: Casuals. Co-operation Between Local Authorities and Unemployment Assistance Board.

<sup>43</sup> TNA MH57/356. Minute of 24<sup>th</sup> March 1937. Central Association for Young Wayfarers Hostels: Co-operation in Training Scheme.

principles at that, which structured the system. The mechanisms of discernment between legitimate and illegitimate claimants are informed by a 'moral order'. Recall that "morality is connected empirically to a series of *orders of worth* that each contain: (1) a specification of value, (2) a definition of worthy individuals and (3) a moral grammar for the evaluation of actions" (Presskorn-Thygesen 2015 p731). The value here is of workers as contributors, as assessed against a definition provided by legislation and administrative devices. The grammar can be derived from the language used to describe the various groups. The worthy contributed, they paid in, they were viewed as independent, skilled, they provided for themselves against risk; they led organised and routinized lives, their employment was regular and normal, their unemployment was temporary and a transition to new jobs; they were viewed as active. By contrast the unworthy were seen to be casual, unthrifty, short-termist, dependent, disorganised and unplanned, they did not invest in their futures, and at worst were be semi-criminal.

## 5.2 Unemployed youth and moral orders: paupers or future contributors?

We can see then that the system of contributions played a key role in the categorisation of the unemployed and the verification of the worth of individuals. However, a system where one's 'industrial record' provided such a key means of proving one's status created difficulty for the position of the school leaver or other young workers, who, having had no or few opportunities to accrue contributions, might be expected to be excluded from the insurance scheme. Policy makers debated what the correct place of the juvenile group should be. On the one hand there was the desire for young workers prone to 'demoralisation' not to be introduced too early in life to the "bottomless purse of the state"<sup>44</sup>. The "objections which may be summarised in the phrase "doles for children"<sup>45</sup> concerned the dangerous effect of normalising or supporting life outside of work. On the other hand, authorities desired to exercise the disciplinary functions of benefit system

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<sup>44</sup> TNA AST7/94 Letter to Williams from Bullard 11<sup>th</sup> December 1937.

<sup>45</sup> TNA Cab27/502 Memorandum from Betterton (Minister of Labour) of 1933 on policy toward Juveniles.

institutions upon young workers. In this liberal system, benefit was used as leverage in order to require the individual to accept behavioural/disciplinary regulation. But this could not be done to those without a right to claim. There was therefore a question about how the objective of preventing the 'demoralisation' of juveniles would be best achieved.

The place of juveniles within the system depended upon their place within the 'victims or villains' division. Yet in many ways their treatment was rather anomalous. To understand this treatment, it is necessary to first look at how they were constructed in policy discourse. Unemployed youth was understood as being particularly vulnerable to 'demoralisation', a socialisation problem.

Young people without the integration provided by a long employment history were a matter of acute concern. The Pilgrim Trust's report of 1938 argued that "we are dealing with lads and young men whose psychological condition is a more important consideration even than it is with the middle aged and elderly men" (1938 p227). The Trust argued that young men adjusted themselves psychologically to unemployment more rapidly than those with longer work histories. Meara's study of the South Wales JICs reported similar findings: "[e]nforced idleness leads ultimately to demoralisation, to loss of pride in one's own person and appearance, to envy of those better placed in society and envy leads to hatred as hatred leads in the last resort to social conflict" (1936 p11). The perception held by policymakers was that juvenile and youth unemployment stored up problems for later.

The fear was therefore of unoccupied time, of young men and boys 'hanging around in the streets' unsupervised. To some extent this was associated with a concern about petty crime and 'juvenile delinquency' (Bradley 2008) which had been increasing throughout the 1920s. However this was an area where differing and competing discourses formed different views of the problem. The problem of unemployed youth and their desirable subjectivities can be seen from a variety of

different perspectives in the sense that Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) actors can approach problems from a variety of 'worlds of justification'. The problem could be posed as one of unemployment, as one of crime and delinquency, or as it often, was as an educational problem (for example debates about juvenile unemployment intersected with debates about the school leaving age (Garside 1990). These perspectives feed into debates over the eventual solution to the problem as well as the unemployed subject. The threefold division of the population of unemployed adults represented different models of practice.

The overall direction of policy toward juvenile unemployment was determined by the Ministry of Labour. The Ministry was responsible for both 'choice of employment' work (e.g. the provision of advice and guidance for school leavers) and for setting the conditions of access to the insurance scheme. The problem of youth for a contribution-based system was that such a system required one to have held an insured job for a given period of time in order to make a claim, therefore excluding the school leaver who could not find a job in a recession. This problem was of particular relevance in the early 1930s when the design of the insurance scheme required that the juvenile accrue 6 months of contributions after reaching the age of 16 in order to make a claim, leaving an effective two-and-a-half-year gap between the school leaving age and the ability to make a claim. It might appear to make sense in a policy based on liberal insurance and 'sound actuarial' principles that one would be expected to make one's contributions first. However, it posed a problem in allowing the unemployed juvenile to go without contact with the official agencies.

In 1931 the Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance recommended that entry into unemployment insurance should be lowered to 14 (Burns 1941). This would remove the need for the juvenile's family to claim Public Assistance should they become unemployed "or else the young person may suffer privation not

calculated to maintain his efficiency as an industrial unit"<sup>46</sup>. There would also be an additional benefit of bringing juveniles into contact with the Employment Exchanges to facilitate better job matching and act against the 'blind alley' problem. The Royal Commission "wish[ed] to express our strong conviction of the importance of this effort to save juveniles from the deterioration which, especially in early years, is inevitably the result of the prolonged absence of any regular occupation" (Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance 1931).

The attempts to close the gap lowered the entry age, but this would still not resolve the essential problem. To do so the government resorted to more coercive measures. Attendance in the JICs had been a condition of receiving unemployment benefit for juveniles. To close the gap between school and the disciplinary mechanisms for the unemployed, the Royal Commission went further than before. They concluded that attendance at the JIC not only should be a condition for the receipt of Unemployment Insurance but should be compulsory for all those without a job whether or not they were in receipt of benefit. The arguments for this were made by Labour party politician, and former Suffragist Clara Rackham (Harrison 2004), a member of the Commission who expressed a general consensus in seeing the JIC as a solution to the problem of 'demoralisation'. Rackham argued for compulsory attendance on the following grounds:

"there is [currently] no power to compel unemployed juveniles between 14 and 16 to attend Juvenile Instruction Centres, as this can only be done as a condition of benefit. Evidence has been given to show that boys and girls often arrive at the Centres at between 16 and 17 years old demoralised by long periods of idleness from which they have suffered since leaving school. This again would have been obviated if they could have been compelled to attend at an earlier age as a condition of benefit. And there would also be less resentment at having to attend and fewer disciplinary difficulties if the young persons were

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<sup>46</sup> TNA LAB 2/2043/1218 Note from Clara Rackham November 1931, Age of Entry.

brought into the centre before they had left their school work and training so far behind.”<sup>47</sup>

This was a case for disciplining unemployed youth via the centres which were supposed to maintain working habits. This case was based upon a perception of the juvenile group as vulnerable to demoralisation but also as malleable subjects for intervention.

### 5.3 Unemployed young people and the household unit

A key issue in how to treat the juvenile unemployed was their relationship to the household. For adult claimants other than the fully insured, household means testing was in force. One of the most widely commented on and controversial aspects of this test was its rendering unemployed fathers dependent upon their employed sons and daughters, by reducing assistance entitlement in line with their earnings. Dependency is an ideological concept; its meaning has changed over time and been interpreted differently. Its use serves to legitimate certain social relations, family structures, and forms of employment, and to delegitimise others (Fraser and Gordon 1994).

Policy aimed to reinforce normatively defined family units casting mutual aid as a moral duty. The means test aimed to distinguish legitimate from illegitimate forms of ‘dependency’. Translating these distinctions into practice ran into problems. A “tension between dependence on, and contributing to, marked the experience of youth” (Todd 2007 p57) characterised juveniles working lives. This tension can be seen also in efforts to relieve their unemployment. It was quite typical for juveniles to contribute to household incomes. This was not an extra but quite necessary for

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<sup>47</sup> TNA LAB 2/2043/1218 Note from Clara Rackham November 1931, Age of Entry.

the household to be kept afloat. Most discussions of poverty in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries focussed on household rather than individual incomes.

Objections to the means test cast the dependence of women and children on men as legitimate whilst the reverse situation would be profoundly humiliating for the unemployed man if he was forced to depend on the earnings of his wife and/or children (Deacon 1983). However, on the part of a liberal and patriarchal state there was also the objective of delineating the responsibilities of the state for the young unemployed from the family. The 'independence' of adult men from the state played an important role in describing and defining the ideal welfare subject (Fraser and Gordon 1994). So should the juvenile unemployed be regarded as dependents within the family or as claimants in their own right?

In Public Assistance it was "important that a clear distinction should always be maintained between the dependent and the independent status"<sup>48</sup>. A traditionalistic sentiment can be found in the views of the Public Assistance authorities. "It is sometimes urged, for example that relief or transitional payments should be given to a son whose father can maintain him in order that the son may be made independent of his father. Clearly, by the grant of relief, the son will lose his independence whereas if relief is not afforded the son will not lose but will share the independence of his father"<sup>49</sup>. In Birmingham's PA system there was an allowance for children in work in the form of a one third disregard on their means tested income. A 1937 proposal to increase the disregard argued that: "In numerous instances parents state that they derive no benefit from children's earnings for some time after they have started to work from the age of 14 due to the necessity for the provision of requisites such as overalls etc., the greater wear and tear of clothing and payment of tram fares."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> TNA MH57/7 1933 Public Assistance Conference Draft of the Minister's address.

<sup>49</sup> TNA MH57/7 1933 Public Assistance Conference Draft of the Minister's address.

<sup>50</sup> BCC1 CD 1/1/7 1937 Report of Minor Committee put in place to consider the scales of out relief in

The harshness of the means test as it was applied to the juvenile's income can be illustrated by these further comments by a Birmingham PAC Minor Committee which questioned the assumptions of juvenile's ability to contribute or their parent's ability to extract it as needed from them:

“It is doubtful whether more than a very small portion of elder sons or daughters pay into the home the amount recognised as reasonable by the existing regulations (two-thirds of their earnings). Generally parents do not know the actual earnings of the children and receive a sum barely sufficient to cover the wage earner's board and lodgings, and in consequence the relief recipient does not obtain the full value of the allowances made by the committee.<sup>51</sup>”

The negative impact of these programmes on the integrity of households was also of concern, as juveniles might resent the deductions from their incomes to care for their parents.

“From the point of view of this class, particularly those contemplating marriage, the assessment of a comparatively large proportion of their earnings for the support of their parents and other members of the family frequently causes dissatisfaction and dissention in the home. In some cases it undoubtedly leads to a wage earner leaving home.<sup>52 53</sup>”

This illustrates a certain tension. A great deal of concern in social policy discourse in the 1930s was placed on the long-term protection of the family as a guarantor of

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light of the UA Assessment of Need Regulations 1936. 56-7.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> The last sentence is crossed through in pencil in the file.

the socialisation of the young. However cuts to family benefits through the means test threatened to undermine these objectives.

Insurance allowed the juvenile to claim in their own right from the age of 16 but they would be considered a dependent up to that point. However the rates paid assumed continued residence in the family home (benefits for 18-21s were in fact cut in order to reinforce this in 1928 (Burns 1941)). It was not only benefits which assumed this but also wages: juveniles were used widely as a source of cheap labour and wages tended to assume that their income was supplemental to another wage earner in the household. In such a situation 'less eligibility' would tend to dictate a lower rate of support. For instance in the Insurance scheme from October 1931 until June 1934 an adult man would receive 17 Shillings per week, an adult woman 15 Shillings, a young man aged from 18-21 14 Shillings (and a young woman 12), juvenile boys aged 17 9 Shillings and girls 7.6 Shillings, and 16 year olds 6 and 5 Shillings per week respectively. The system paid dependents allowances at 9 Shillings for an adult dependant and 2 for a child (Garside 1990 Appendix 3.2). Benefits for a juvenile, if able to claim in their own right, were higher than for the dependent child a couple of years younger. A dependent child was considered to be under 14 but could also cover 14-16 year olds in attendance at schools, or those who were unemployed (Royal Commission for Unemployment Insurance 1931). Yet conditions applied to the receipt of a dependant's allowance for a 14-16 year old: they did not have to fulfil the contribution requirement, but if claiming on the grounds of unemployment the dependent had to be capable and available for work, must attend any course required and must not have refused employment (1933 Unemployment Act, Explanatory Notes p7).

Under Transitional Payments from 1931 to 1935 the rates were determined by PACs according to need for claimants over 18<sup>54</sup>. They were not available to workers

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<sup>54</sup> Ministry of Health, Annual Report 1931-1932 Cmd 4113

under the age of 18 (Burns 1941) and so this caused young workers to have to rely on Public Assistance.

The proposed rates of Unemployment Assistance to be introduced in 1935 were intended to have a similar structure of dependents allowances as in Insurance (Garside 1990 p78, but there were differences. Eligibility would ordinarily begin at 16 depending upon contribution records (1933 Unemployment Act, Explanatory Notes p34), this represented a further move to bridge gaps in juvenile benefit eligibility. This represented greater generosity than Transitional Payments where under 18s could not claim and were considered dependents (Ministry of Health Annual Report 1931-1932). However, in a household where both parent and child were UA claimants, when one was judged to be 'normally dependant' upon the other the 1933 Act allowed for the allowances to be paid to the parent (Unemployment Act 1933, Explanatory Notes p26) this was different from the insured juvenile who was paid in their own right.

A proposal to allow time spent in the JIC to count toward insurance credits had been rejected in 1924 (Garside 1977). This decision reaffirmed that the access of juveniles to assistance would depend upon a judgement of their occupational record as with adults. However there appeared in the later days of the established UA system to be a desire to include juveniles. When considering the cases of juveniles boarded out in Public Assistance institutions officials in the UAB considered it possible that juveniles "engaged in part-time or intermittent employment, in selling newspapers, as errand boys, domestic servants, or other casual work"<sup>55</sup> may be able to qualify for an allowance. However others were sceptical that the paper sellers would be able to qualify.

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<sup>55</sup> TNA AST7/94 Minute from the Glasgow District Officer 19<sup>th</sup> February 1937.

The low wages and payments paid to juveniles can be illustrated in the way they undermined particular policy objectives regarding juveniles in the depressed areas. As referred to above this group was the subject of particular concern. Amongst the policies government used to attempt to alleviate unemployment in the depressed areas was Industrial Transference. This involved identifying candidates in the depressed areas who could be relocated to vacancies elsewhere in the country (ITB 1928) (Garside 1990) (Rees and Rees 1982). Juveniles were considered a prime target for transfer, in danger of demoralisation yet existing in that pre-formed malleable state where introduction to new surroundings and habits might yet prevent it. Yet this proved to be problematic overall as large numbers of transferees failed to establish new lives in their destinations and returned home. There were several reasons for this including homesickness but significantly the cost of living in the destination areas combined with low wages meant it was difficult for juveniles to live independently of the family home.

There also arose difficulties when the household itself would appear to be able to make a claim from different systems. In the case that a household with an unemployed father contained unemployed juveniles aged 14-16 years they would be treated as his dependents and his allowance of UIB, UA or PA adjusted accordingly.

Ambiguity occurred where juveniles' resident in PA institutions either residential institutions or foster homes became unemployed. There were 'a considerable number' of such children in institutions and owing to the previously discussed low wages of juveniles, some PACs had provided subsidies to the wages of working juveniles. However there emerged the question of what would happen if juveniles in this position became unemployed and claimed Unemployment Assistance. Once they claimed UA they would join the insurable class and therefore become ineligible

for the subsidies once they regained work<sup>56</sup>. This would take them away from the surveillance of the Public Assistance authority which was seen as a dangerous position for these young people, and there were also concerns about a potentially harmful psychological effect of introducing them to the system on the part of PA authorities. The issue was resolved in favour of denying those in PA institutions access to UA. However where Public Assistance claimants were in ordinary accommodation they could move to UA if they were able to prove that their occupation was insurable and could engage with the Employment Exchanges in which case there would be no “serious difficulty in taking the cases over”<sup>57</sup>.

#### 5.4 Summary

This chapter has shown that the rights to support and classifications of the unemployed were strongly influenced by their construction in policy discourse. It contributes to the thesis by addressing Research Question 1, which is concerned with policy makers perceptions of different groups of unemployed people. The chapter finds that differential rights of claimants corresponded to a ‘moral order’ in which government sought “to create legal borders to map the moral boundaries distinguishing “deserving” from “undeserving” claimants” (Whiteside 2015 p151). This chapter shows the bases for these distinctions in the 1930s. Moral ordering can be seen in the distinctions between insured and uninsured, the legitimate and illegitimate workforce, and legitimate and illegitimate dependency were mapped out in the benefit/assistance/relief systems of the 1930s. This examination of the qualifying criterion for support systems and of their rationales and justifications has shown that it is labour market position which was primarily used as the criterion to assess virtue. This was measured mainly through insurance contribution records which also reflected distinctions between desirable and undesirable work and working patterns. The chapter has shown that the position of the juvenile was anomalous and caused problems for this regime of distinctions. Juvenile

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<sup>56</sup> TNA AST7/94 Ure to Montmorency 11<sup>th</sup> March 1937.

<sup>57</sup> TNA AST7/94 Ure to Reynard 24<sup>th</sup> of March 1937.

unemployed were seen as not yet out of childhood and not yet appropriate subjects for the moral judgements used on adult claimants. The trajectory of policy was toward an inclusion of the juvenile, seen as a victim of circumstance, within the insurance system where possible. But there was also a perceived need to discipline the juvenile through a regime of behavioural intervention.

This was a system designed to sort the deserving from the undeserving and therefore to enable differentiations of treatment. The next chapter addresses the other dimension of this ordering: the extent to which it enables discipline. What methods of verification were used to test the place of individuals within this system? And what measures were used to restore the various groups to the desired modes of subjectivity?

## Chapter 6: Conditionality and disciplinary technologies in the benefit system of the 1930s

“The behaviours of a people are its morality; the task therefore is to give them nothing but good ones” (Villierme quoted in Procacci 1991 p158).

The last chapter presented evidence of the attempts by policy makers to rank and divide the claimant population, to separate the deserving from the undeserving, the capable from the demoralised, and the respectable from the antisocial. It showed how administrative devices mapped out a ‘moral order’ based on “liberal and patriarchal principles” (Walters 2000 p3) in the 1930s this was done mainly through assessment of contribution records rather than behavioural assessment. This was however not a simple process, and policy makers constantly struggled to devise mechanisms with which to differentiate groups. In particular the chapter showed how youth presented a constant problem for categorisation schemes.

A means of investigation was necessary to enable this differentiation of treatment. It is to these investigations that the thesis now turns. Chapter 3 set out the theoretical framework for this thesis and the importance in a governmentality approach of ‘mundane’ administrative devices and ‘technologies of power’ as objects of study. This chapter outlines some of the devices used by authorities to enforce desired behaviours upon claimants. It specifically addresses Research Question 2, about what form of conditionality was applied to the different groups. Conditions attached to support can be thought of as both disciplinary devices and means of verification. They are the practical tests which seek to verify that the

claimant is correctly situated in the orderings discussed in the previous chapter. Discipline is a consecutive technology in that it seeks to construct ideal subjects where punishments are used to enforce desirable behaviours and to create incentives. The chapter addresses how these technologies apply to the young unemployed. Chapter 5 showed there was a great difference in entitlements between juveniles, young adults and adults, but how did this translate into different models of conditionality?

This chapter is structured as follows. The first main section (6.1) outlines the systems of conditionality that were present in the 1930s. The chapter examines the issues that arose around job-search enforcement in the 1930s, the means of identifying the 'voluntarily unemployed' (sections 6.1.1 and 6.1.2) and how this was applied to the juvenile unemployed (section 6.3). These sections describe how a different employment records and status affected the application of these rules. It examines the way that 'normal occupation rules' were used to police access to assistance and determine work search requirements. Sections 6.1.4 and 6.1.5 look at the way that these criteria were related to the requirement to relocate geographically to seek work. In the second main section (6.2) the chapter looks at the requirements to undertake forced work and training. To whom were these requirements applied? How were young people to be treated? Were they to be subject to compulsory training and instruction?

### 6.1 Benefit conditionality in the 1930s

In policy discussions on 'welfare reform', it has generally been considered common sense that there should be a regime of monitoring the unemployed that requires them to provide an account of their independent activity in looking for a job to receive payment. A benefit of historical study is that it can establish that in the past, at the very least, things were not always so clear cut.

In the tradition of the New Poor Law of 1834 should an 'able-bodied' man request relief they would be required to enter the workhouse, where they would be subjected to forced labour and penal discipline. This system was seen as a solution to the dependency encouraged by the preceding Old Poor Law 'Speenhamland' system (Polanyi 2001). The workhouse was intended as a deterrent. Conditions would be sufficiently harsh that no one who was not truly desperate would consent to incarceration there. However, at various moments when the need for relief was greater than the capacities of the workhouses, 'out-relief' outside the workhouse was permitted. This raised the question of how to verify the good character of applicants outside the surveillance of the workhouse. One of the solutions employed was 'test and task'<sup>58</sup> work to be undertaken by applicants to prove that their character was good. Out-relief payments were to be determined by the governing principle of 'less eligibility': that the pauper's standard of life should always be lower than the standards of life of the poorest independent labourer.

So enforced work in exchange for support in the tradition of the Poor Law was the key form of conditionality leading up to the development of unemployment insurance. This was the tradition which was carried forward by many Public Assistance Committees.

The introduction of Unemployment Benefit in 1911 created the new category of respectable claimants and as discussed above economic crisis subsequently created the intermediate category of extended claimants. If the question was to what extent claimants could still be seen as paupers, then what conditions (seen as technologies of power) were appropriate for them to fulfil to receive payment?

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<sup>58</sup> 'Test' work or a 'test of work' was work the claimants had to perform prior to being issued relief to demonstrate their 'good character'. While 'task' work would be work applied to existing claimants to continue their claims, inside or outside of institutions.

### 6.1.1 The Genuinely Seeking Work test and its legacy

The Genuinely Seeking Work test of the 1920s closely resembled the job search conditionality applied to claimants of Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) and Universal Credit since the 1990s. In the 1920s, as now, the debate over unemployment benefits had become increasingly dominated by the 'question of abuse'. Yet the test proved more controversial than any such method has been since JSA brought it back in 1996.

The test was introduced in 1921 for claimants of extended benefits who could no longer be adequately policed by the 'morality of mathematics' nor asked to rely on the poor law (Deacon 1976). The test demanded that claimants provide evidence of their job search activity: usually a written record of employers visited. Other tests could involve comparison with other claimants' job searches and intrusive 'character' assessments including seeking out the opinions of neighbours and local retailers. This regulation also increased the expectations of a claimant's willingness to travel to work and restricted the right of skilled workers to refuse inappropriate work. Importantly, however, the test found it possible for a claimant to be 'capable and available' for work, but unwilling. Testing against such a criterion became a matter of assessing virtue. In a phrase which was to become widely known from a judge overseeing an appeal against a refusal of payment under the tighter criteria introduced in 1927: "in considering whether a person is genuinely seeking work the most important fact to be ascertained is the state of the applicants mind" (Deacon 1976 p58). This decision became a binding criterion against which Insurance Officers and Courts of Referees made decisions.

One particular target of the test was married women suspected of being able to abuse extended unemployment payments after they had left the labour force following marriage. In 1922 the incomes of their husbands began to be taken into account for the means test. As a technology for discrimination against women this was accompanied by the offer of work in domestic service. As domestic service (a

category which included cleaning work in businesses, such as pubs and hotels) was outside the insured industries, women who accepted such jobs would exit the insurance scheme and so be ineligible to make future claims. Even after the abolition of the Genuinely Seeking Work test, the forms of discrimination it imposed on women were retained. Under the Anomalies regulations of the 1930s women were asked not only about their industrial records but also the incomes of their husbands and numbers of dependants; the test functioned as a means of filtering out those who were legally entitled but who had not been the intended recipients of benefit (Deacon 1976).

The test fell apart in 1930, scrapped by the Labour government with the shift to Transitional Benefit. Initially the test had a degree of cross party support in parliament. However it became unpopular and subject to widespread criticism, as it had been administered in such a way as to make claimants feel that the purpose was to catch them out rather than aid them in their search for work. Questions routinely asked included the location of local landmarks (like names of pubs outside factories), the names of foremen and managers, or asking for certification from employers that they had indeed been approached. John Hilton, a Ministry of Labour official, donned workmen's clothes and toured several exchanges to investigate the implementation of the test (Lowe 1986). He concluded that the questioning used by officials was more a test of memory and articulacy, than the 'genuineness' or not of the search for work. Knowledge of the injustices of the test became more widespread as time went by. It was responsible for nearly three million disallowed claims between 1921 and 1930, escalating as time went on (Deacon 1976). Labour MPs and unions who had initially approved the principle of the test and paid little attention to administration turned increasingly against the test which by 1927 was responsible for between one tenth and one third of disallowances (depending upon the location) (Deacon 1976 p9). One final reason for the scrapping of the test was the irritation caused to employers by worker's frequent enquiries; the Employment Exchanges had, after all, been expected to put a stop to this inefficiency.

Yet without a test like this, considered fundamental to present day conditionality regimes, how could the system be safeguarded from ‘abuse’ and the solvency of the Unemployment Fund restored?

### 6.1.2 Detecting voluntary unemployment

The clause brought in to replace the Genuinely Seeking Work test in Transitional Payments and later Unemployment Assistance was that the claimant be “capable of and available for work”<sup>59</sup>. The major distinction between these criteria and the Genuinely Seeking Test was that it placed the burden of proof upon the authorities to prove the claimant’s unwillingness to take work by providing proof that a claimant had been notified of a vacancy by the Employment Exchange. ‘Availability’ was understood to be a ‘passive state’. The Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance (1931) ensured that the Genuinely Seeking Work test was not reinstated and regarded the new criteria as sufficient to deal with very small numbers of genuine workshy through a ‘maximum disqualification’ of six weeks’ benefit. Officials continued to debate what could be done about claimants who refused work and who were suspected of belonging to a ‘troublesome type’<sup>60</sup>. Although the techniques of the Seeking Work test were excluded, the new criteria still allowed for a claimant to be judged unavailable due to barriers they had constructed themselves, deliberately or through negligence. It also, as discussed later, was related to assessments as to the possibility of obtaining work that was available in the area, so linked to views of local labour markets. As well as assumptions about what sort of work should be done by whom. Married women had been a major target of the test and they continued to be an object of suspicion interrogated about their willingness to leave the district or to take up domestic service work. The authorities were also keen to identify the obstacle to their ‘availability’ that their

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<sup>59</sup> TNA AST7/64 1934-1938 Files of the Unemployment Assistance Board. Capable and Available for Work: Interpretation.

<sup>60</sup> TNA AST7/79 1934-9 Files of the Unemployment Assistance Board. Voluntary Unemployment General Policy.

'domestic responsibilities' posed. A further criterion for exclusion was based on the hours of work that the claimant was prepared to accept. Appeals committees decided such cases in part through reference to employment history- had that claimant in the past been able to obtain work on the terms now sought?

To some extent the concern was still to exclude the 'scrounger' "if we could reasonably draw the inference from that person's conduct that he had so hedged about the field in which he was bona fide seeking employment that there was no reasonable prospect of his obtaining work at all"<sup>61</sup>.

However while this could appear to be similar to the Seeking Work Test that there was an aversion to reviving it and to appear to be too close to its methods. The Test after all, had acquired a bad reputation and been the source of a considerable protest (Deacon 1976). There appears to have been some internal debate within the Unemployment Assistance Board on the question of how to interpret the refusal of a job. On the one hand it could be thought of as clear evidence that the person in question was not available for work. However the Ministry of Labour was keen to make clear that the criteria should not be seen, including by administrators, as a means by which to replace or substitute for the Genuinely Seeking Work Test. Myrddin Evans of the Ministry of Labour went as far as to say "[t]here may be isolated cases, of course, but our experience shews that the reasons put forward for refusing to accept offers of employment are, in the main, genuine rather than frivolous and not such as to raise a resumption of non-availability"<sup>62</sup>. This was considered to be a matter for careful judgement on the basis of the individual case, not a relatively automatic disallowance. In this era of mass unemployment, the activation approach of the Genuinely Seeking Work Test increasingly lacked credibility and could not be seen as a viable solution. The experiences of the Hunger

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<sup>61</sup> TNA AST7/64 Bickerdyke's note 4<sup>th</sup> October 1935.

<sup>62</sup> TNA AST7/64 Myrddin Evans to Bullard 20<sup>th</sup> November 1935.

Marches and the fear of civil unrest arguably concentrated the minds of politicians who felt a strong need to placate the labour movement, which counteracted their preference for austerity.

But there could be no question of falling back on the poor law methods of “the work centres or the workhouse, [as] one can imagine the outcry”<sup>63</sup>: reducing the length of the determination was considered possible but ‘rather petty’, reducing the level of payment probably illegal. The option remained to consider claimants not available for work and to rule them ineligible (a six-week disallowance) but there was reluctance to use this power, with recommendations issued to officials to warn claimants not to continue to ‘fail to avail themselves’ of opportunities. Between 1935 and 1937 payment in kind was available on a case by case basis which required central approval in each case. This was first intended as an alternative to cutting off the benefits of men who could not be trusted to maintain their families, however by late 1936 this had only been used 37 times. But in 1937 it began to be used more often in cases of ‘voluntary unemployment’ as a form of milder punishment than cutting off an allowance (Lynes 2014 Chapter 24 p6). However even this remained a fairly minor practice. A far more serious issue was that of compulsory training.

The writings of these civil servants show a degree of frustration about their constrained options and inability to coerce the recalcitrant into compulsory training. Yet they also show a distinct nervousness about any measure which would be shown to impose poor law like measures upon the unemployed. In the context of mass unemployment there was a great deal of public sympathy with the unemployed, which had been demonstrated to the government by the Hunger Marches of 1932 and 1934 (Stevenson and Cook 1979). The concentration of the unemployed in the depressed areas and the numbers of highly respectable skilled

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<sup>63</sup> TNA AST7/79 Reid to Eady 14<sup>th</sup> January 1936.

workers affected meant that it was very difficult to justify treating those who would often have had no previous contact at all with the Public Assistance authorities or Boards of Guardians, like the ordinary poor.

To some extent the application of these technologies reflects different periods of government policy. The senior civil servants of the time will have begun their careers in the period before World War One when the only form of relief was the poor law. The insurance schemes, fully operable from 1912-13, were designed to provide a different 'actuarially' limited scheme for respectable workers. This was initially seen as an exceptional limited reform, not as the beginning of a welfare state. However, in the 1930s they were faced with very different policy challenges and a very different political context from that seen as the norm. Considering the philosophy of limited government intervention and spending along 'actuarial' lines it might be expected that treatment would get harsher as times went on? But this was not quite the case; as the crisis got worse government became more and more determined to reduce spending, but was actually more and more unable to do so. In this period of constant crisis, the need for social stability had to be balanced against liberal ideals about sound government. After all the Russian Revolution had occurred only a dozen years before the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the intervening years had been punctuated by domestic unrest including a general strike in 1926.

### 6.1.3 Juveniles and conditionality

We have seen a series of differentials in rights and status determining the means which could be used to enforce the correct behaviours. But where did the juvenile fit into this picture?

As is explored further in Chapter 7 the main way in which conditionality requirements for the juvenile (14-18-year-old) unemployed differed from those for

adults was the compulsion to attend the JIC. For juveniles this requirement moved from being an additional condition for the receipt of Unemployment Benefit for insured contributors, to a ubiquitous condition applied to all unemployed within the age group.

How did this happen? From 1930 Local Authorities were obliged by the Ministry of Labour to run JICs where there were more than 50 juveniles who had been claiming Unemployment Insurance Benefit for more than 12 days. Claimants aged from 16-18 had to attend the centres to receive financial support. To claim UB they would have had to have obtained six months of National Insurance contributions after turning 16. In 1931 the Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance recommended that entry into unemployment insurance should be lowered to 14 (Burns 1941). The aim was to remove the need for the juvenile's family to claim Public Assistance should they become unemployed 'or else the young person may suffer privation not calculated to maintain his efficiency as an industrial unit'<sup>64</sup>. Benefit conditionality could also bring them into contact with the Employment Exchanges to facilitate better job matching and act against the 'blind alley' problem. The Royal Commission "wish[ed] to express our strong conviction of the importance of this effort to save juveniles from the deterioration which, especially in early years, is inevitably the result of the prolonged absence of any regular occupation" (RCUI 1931 p319). The Commission went further than before, concluding that attendance at the JIC should not only be a condition for the receipt of Unemployment Insurance but should be compulsory for all those without a job whether they were in receipt of benefit or not. The case for attending the centres made by Clara Rackham<sup>65</sup> was based on a perception of the juvenile group as vulnerable to demoralisation but also as malleable subjects for intervention.

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<sup>64</sup> TNA Lab 2/2043, file 1218 part 1. Clara Rackham's note on unemployed juveniles 27<sup>th</sup> November 1931.

<sup>65</sup> TNA LAB 2/2043/1218 Note from Clara Rackham November 1931, Age of Entry.

From 1930 the parents of 14-16 year olds had been legally obliged to secure their child's attendance at the centre whilst for over 16s action was to be taken against the claimant themselves. Again this shows that the transition to adulthood was staggered, 14-16s being considered the responsibility of their parents. From 16 onwards they were certainly not considered adults but became legally the subject of coercion. The Commission was clearly of the belief that the gaps in insurance provision were allowing demoralised young people to exist away from the bodies which could help them. The solution was an extension of insurance to the working 14-16 year old juvenile, and an extension of compulsion to attend the JIC to all without a job, insured or not.

If attendance was to be compulsory there arose the question of how this attendance should be enforced. In the case of outright refusal there could be the denial of the conditional benefit, but was this considered appropriate for the juvenile? And what could be done about the non-claimant, or the schoolchild?

One instance of this problem can be seen recorded in a minute of February 1935<sup>66</sup>: the Ministry of Labour reported receiving cases from its Divisional Controllers of juveniles refusing to attend the centres, while advising that "as far as possible [...] all reasonable means of persuasion [...] be adopted to secure attendance at the Course"<sup>67</sup>. Where attendance could not be secured by disallowance there was the option of taking legal action to enforce it<sup>68</sup>. There was after all the problem of those who did not receive benefit and the children of the unemployed whose parents received dependent allowances for them. In such cases the main means of dealing with the situation was to be home visits and interviews to 'impress upon' the parents the importance of attendance. Other options included a fine under Section 21 of the Education Act of 1921, committal to an Approved School or to 'care of a

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<sup>66</sup> TNA Lab 19/67 Minute from Wolfe 11<sup>th</sup> Feb 1935.

<sup>67</sup> TNA Lab 19/67 Memorandum on the Institution of Legal Proceedings for the Enforcement of Attendance at Authorised Courses of Instruction for Unemployed Boys and Girls 1934.

<sup>68</sup> TNA Lab 19 67 Memorandum on the Institution of Legal Proceedings for the Enforcement of Attendance at Authorised Courses of Instruction.

fit person'. This could be employed as in cases of truancy from school when investigation brought up evidence of parental neglect or unfit homes, although this would only be of use in marginal situations.

However, it appears that claims were not disallowed en-masse; a Ministry of Labour report<sup>69</sup> concluded that "[i]t has, in fact, seldom been found necessary to prosecute a claimant for benefit. In other cases, resort is had, when necessary to legal proceedings, but always with the object of securing attendance rather than the imposition of a penalty for non-compliance".

#### 6.1.4 Downward labour market mobility as condition? The 'normal occupation' rule

Aside from the question of how to identify the 'scrounger' who was not seeking employment at all there were other considerations. One such consideration was the extent to which claimants had the right to seek employment on preferred terms, or on similar terms to their previous employment. This is equivalent perhaps to Dunn's (2013) argument about 'choosiness' amongst the unemployed as a case for 'welfare reform' as well as to neo-classical economic arguments about 'reservation wages'. Status distinctions institutionalised in the system meant different forms of conditionality. Liberal economic imperatives would seem to demand 'activation' measures to ensure the return to employment as quickly as possible. But a skilled worker with an employment status acknowledged as earned may have the right to protect this status. This raised the question of the school leaver, and whether one without a working history could claim a respectable status in such a system?

It is in this context that the 'normal occupation' question was asked by policy makers about the extended group. This was a part of a debate around the 'capable and available' criteria. Under the Genuinely Seeking Work test, people "who limited

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<sup>69</sup> TNA LAB 19/79 Draft report on the scheme of authorised courses of Instruction for unemployed boys and girls. 1937 Paragraph 10.

themselves unreasonably to a class of work which they could not obtain”<sup>70</sup> would lose support. After its abolition the question of a ‘normal occupation’ arose in a few particular situations, and while some status was given to the applicant’s ‘normal occupation’ as an insured contributor. The “position is not so clear in the case of a person who has paid no contributions or a negligible number for several years, or who has at no time had more than a few weeks in insurable employment”<sup>71</sup>. Again, this was a question thrown up by the failure of the ‘morality of mathematics’: for how long can an employment status lie dormant and retain influence? The long term unemployed in the extended system were seen differently from the pauper. The pauper was assumed to have little connection with the labour market. As in ‘availability’ the question of whether the claimant was ‘normally employed’ in insurable employment would form part of the assessment criteria:

“If a man has less insurable work than other men of his age and class, this does not prevent him from satisfying the normally condition: but if he has been unemployed for so long as five years he must prove that his unemployment is not due to his own fault. He can do this best by showing that he has at all times made reasonable efforts to find insurable employment. He need not go about looking for work day in day out, without regard to his chances of success, but he should leave nothing undone which he ought to know may lead him to find insurable work.”<sup>72</sup>

Such a regime appears substantially less onerous than that found in the much later era of ‘active job search’. Still normal occupation rules could be seen as creating something of a dilemma for skilled workers out of work. While attitudinal and behavioural assessments played a role here a person’s previous position still provided a degree of autonomy to define for one’s self what ‘appropriate’ work

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<sup>70</sup> TNA AST7/64 Bickerdyke’s note attached to note from Reid to Hancock 4<sup>th</sup> of October 1935.

<sup>71</sup> TNA AST7/20 "Normal Occupation" definition of term. Mr Price’s minute 10<sup>th</sup> October 1933.

<sup>72</sup> TNA AST7/20 "Normal Occupation" definition of term Note on the ‘Normally Condition’ attached to Minute Number 1 of 1933.

would be. But this provides little help for the juvenile claimant attempting to make their first transition into the labour market. They have no previous position to which a comparison can be made, yet as described in section 5.2 they could not be treated as the pauper. Would a 'normal occupation' criteria have any meaning for young people?

UAB correspondence of 1937 reveals that a particular group of juveniles raised questions with wider implications. Local officers made enquiries as to whether allowances could be paid to a small number of juveniles of 16-18 years old whose 'normal occupation' would have been to enter a particular trade. But who owing to the economic depression affecting that occupation were instead in continued attendance at school.

The UAB's position had usually been that any juvenile still attending school would be treated as a dependant of their parents. But it appears that some Public Assistance authorities (who would be responsible for paying dependant's allowances when parents were PA claimants) utilised the 'normal occupation' rule to argue for the UAB to take on these cases<sup>73</sup> on the grounds that they were only staying at school because of the absence of available work. UAB officials were sceptical about these claims fearing that this was an attempt to get the board to pay allowances to all juveniles still in school. They cast doubt upon the claims of the cases put forward by the LAs for instance describing one case by saying, "I very much doubt that any normal, healthy boy on Clydeside who really wanted work at the present time need be unemployed"<sup>74</sup>. In a similar case arising in South Wales toward the end of 1937 the board's initial response advised the educational authorities to treat applicants staying in school favourably. One official wrote, "I should be inclined not to enquire into the reasons why they have done so, but to

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<sup>73</sup> TNA AST7/304 Clipping from School Government Chronicle Oct 1937.

<sup>74</sup> TNA AST7/304 letter from Morton to Ure 9<sup>th</sup> Dec 37.

treat them in every case as you would if they had only continued at the school as a better alternative to hanging around the street corners". However this answer was quickly corrected by other officials who said that the answer had been given in the understanding that the question had related to the situation of the mining villages in the Valleys. But since the question was being considered in relation to Cardiff it "has no application in this District except in relation to lads who would have gone down to the Pits had industrial conditions been better. I do not think the section was devised to have regard to conditions in a city like Cardiff"<sup>75</sup>. So the UAB's willingness to pay allowances was contingent upon the state of local labour markets<sup>76</sup>.

This practice of 'crediting in' young people whose parents claimed PA into insurance benefit was linked to perceptions of the local labour market and accordingly to notions of desert, sympathy was afforded to the 'lads who might have gone down the Pits'. But not to those in more prosperous areas where they were thought to have failed to take advantage of some available opportunity. This was a clash of discourses between educational authorities and the more employment-focussed UAB. Educational authorities viewed staying in school as an equivalent and legitimate alternative to JIC attendance, stressing the boost it offered to the juvenile's future prospects. The UAB however was concerned to exclude those who were not seeking work but hoping to get a better job later by remaining in education from receiving an allowance. To some extent this shows the limits to the problematisations of casual and 'blind alley' work in policy discourse. Despite acknowledging these as serious problems there were limits to the desire of the Board to expand the scope of the 'normally insured'. The Board was not prepared to pay juveniles to remain in education in order to gain long term skills; at a certain point it became 'work first'.

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<sup>75</sup> TNA AST7/304 Letter by Bentley of 13<sup>th</sup> Dec 1938.

<sup>76</sup> TNA AST7/304 Note by Emmerson 8<sup>th</sup> Jan 38.

So a 'normal occupation' could allow an older skilled worker to maintain a degree of their status as skilled workers, even though the authorities were concerned to limit and police the reasonability of this behaviour. For juveniles, this criterion could allow them to gain access to allowances if unemployed despite not having an history in the industry, if of course the Board was sympathetic to their cases. In a wider sense it shows that the system in place was one in which status was as important as behaviour. Membership of the 'insured class' provided a degree of protection against the loss of social rights that occurred as a claim for state support became more prolonged.

#### 6.1.5 The question of geographical mobility

Another aspect of the question of what form of conditionality was appropriate for the different groups of unemployed, concerns geographical mobility. To what extent should claimants be required to travel or migrate in search of work? As before this question relates to skill and status of work. For claimants in some areas it also became tied into assessments of local labour markets. The question also involved a clash between local and national authority. On the one hand there was the desire of national policy makers to facilitate the movement of labour from the depressed areas to places where the unemployed might find work. On the other there was the desire of some local authorities (especially in prosperous places) to defend Settlement and Irremovability, a concept in poor law regulation continued under Public Assistance. This dictated that claimants would have to meet a given residency criterion and be seen as permanently resident in an area in order to be paid locally financed relief.

In the depressed areas mass unemployment was understood to cause 'de-moralisation' but government policy was opposed to public works or any other state-run relief schemes for making work. Public works were rejected on orthodox

liberal economic grounds as expensive and as creating 'artificial' employment which would prove unsustainable and give 'false hope' to the depressed areas. In contrast to policy in the USA (Fox-Piven and Cloward 1972) public works formed a minor part of policy. Instead the orthodox view was that "the interests of the unemployed surplus in these areas require that the administration of poor relief and of unemployment benefit should not become an artificial barrier to the movement of labour" (ITB 1928). The principle of less eligibility was here reaffirmed: benefits should not enable people to resist the necessity of relocation. However, authorities in receiving should also not administer settlement laws in such a way as to hinder the mobility of labour. In addition to considerations of migration there were questions about the distance claimants should be prepared to travel daily to find a job. Older and younger claimants could each be problematized here. Younger claimants, and especially those without families would be seen as having little excuse to refuse distant offers of work, while older claimants could be suspected of attempting to retain comfortable habits.

This linked with whether the claimants could be considered to be 'available' for work. This would sometimes depend on whether work was available in the local district. "[w]here there is no possibility of obtaining work locally, and a claimant is unable or unwilling because of domestic ties or for other reasons to leave his home district, he cannot be regarded as available for work"<sup>77</sup>. Also "[i]f, therefore, it is clear on the facts that a person will not move from a district in which there is no reasonable probability of his obtaining work of the kind which he will accept, we should be justified in regarding the availability condition as not fulfilled"<sup>78</sup>. But conversely "[n]o doubt a certain licence in refusing offers of distant employment must be allowed to persons residing in districts where the local opportunities of employment are good"<sup>79</sup>. So if an occupation was considered to have 'vanished' from an area a claimant would be prevented from awaiting its restoration. An

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<sup>77</sup> TNA AST7/64 Note from Myrddin Evans to Bullard 25 Sept 1935.

<sup>78</sup> TNA AST7/64 4<sup>th</sup> Oct 1935 Note: Availability for Work.

<sup>79</sup> TNA AST7/64 14<sup>th</sup> November 1935 Bullard to Myrddin Evans.

example from the UAB's files concerned the case of two women in a small town in south east England who had been making a living hair weaving and had refused posts as domestic servants in another town. It was commented that "the applicants, who are getting on in years, are merely determined not to leave the environment in which they have passed their lives"<sup>80</sup>. To sum up "we should be justified in taking account of conditions attached by the applicant to the place in which he is willing to take work, as well as to the kind of work he is willing to take"<sup>81</sup> (emphasis in original). To assist the migration of labour, Employment Exchanges were implored to "when there is a local labour shortage bring the unsatisfied demand to the notice of suitable workpeople from other parts of the country, helping them, where necessary, to travel to the work"<sup>82</sup>. However this function of the Exchanges as agencies of labour market coordination and information also had a conditionality function in enabling authorities to apply the test of an offer of work.

That was for the older claimant; for the juvenile their migration was to be handled differently. The Industrial Transference scheme discussed in Chapter 5 was particularly targeted at juveniles.

In the depressed areas the Ministry of Labour operated Junior Transfer Centres (JTC) which sought to train and prepare juveniles for new working lives in the Midlands and the South through an employability boosting regime of instruction and physical conditioning (Rees and Rees 1982). These were residential institutions. One of the issues they faced was which body should pay 'pocket money' grants to juvenile attendees, as most of the claimant's allowance would be paid to the JTC if they received benefit. The Ministry of Labour believed that these could be paid by

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<sup>80</sup> TNA AST7/64 Bullard to Myrddin Evans 14<sup>th</sup> Sept 1935.

<sup>81</sup> TNA AST7/64 Oct 1935 Note: Availability for Work.

<sup>82</sup> BCC 1/BH/14/1/1/8 Letter of 1930 from Margaret Bondfield Minister of Labour.

the UAB<sup>83</sup> seeing these claimants as analogous to those who would 'normally' be in insurable employment. Hence it might be appropriate for them to receive an allowance for their attendance. This was a group who were to be secured long term secure 'progressive' employment in the receiving areas. The Ministry of Labour sought to classify the vacancies available according to 1) the degree to which there was certainty that the job offered training to secure long term employment in a 'skilled trade', 2) whether wages were paid at a higher level than was typical for the area, 3) the working conditions, 4) the degree to which the employer was prepared to pay 'special interest' to the juveniles welfare, including encouraging attendance at evening classes etc, and 5) the quality and availability of 'after care' facilities and clubs and social organisations. The Ministry would assign vacancies star ratings out of 5 according to how many of these criteria were met<sup>84</sup>.

These five ideal conditions show something of what the programme was trying to achieve as well as, in the desire that the vacancies be especially well paid, the reasons why its effectiveness was limited. The transference scheme aimed to exercise a long-term pastoral supervisory power over the juveniles in its care: 'after care' involved a form of moral protection for the juveniles away from parental supervision in a new city, and employers were also ideally to hold a paternalistic relationship with them. So carefully selected candidates were to be rescued from the depressed areas and given new lives under careful supervision from the authorities.

Given that the scheme was a device for moral rescue an important question regarding conditionality was what should be the attitude of the authorities to juveniles who were considered to have high 'transfer value' but who refused to transfer, and those who had transferred but had returned 'without good reason'<sup>85</sup>?

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<sup>83</sup> TNA Lab 19/63 Emmerson's minute 24<sup>th</sup> October 1934.

<sup>84</sup> TNA Lab19/234 Memo of 26<sup>th</sup> February 1937.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

These were people who had thrown “up work with prospects of progressive employment for no significant cause and returned home, knowing that no work is available to them in the home area”<sup>86</sup>. However, despite this evident frustration there “could be no question”<sup>87</sup> of penalising them; the strategy was to persuade families of the benefit of transfer. The Ministry of Labour considered paying allowances to the transferee’s families to eliminate any disincentive to transfer caused by the family losing the juveniles allowance. So the juvenile could not be forced to transfer, but UA “officers might be able to select suitable juveniles for reconditioning now that agreement to transfer does not have to be given by the juvenile or his parents in advance of proceeding to the Centre”<sup>88</sup>, so some effort would go into an intensive persuasion of the juvenile of the merits of transference. The Board would also, when they thought the attitude of parents was an obstacle to transfer, arrange direct interviews with them to gain their consent to the transfer of their children.

Again the status of the juvenile as a dependent in policy came to the fore, as parental consent was required for migration. The concept of ‘transfer value’ i.e. an assessment of employability intelligence and skill was important. This was a group who were seen as victims of circumstance in the depressed areas and who were, since their ‘value’ was high, afforded relatively good treatment. They were persuaded rather than coerced, and while the debate ran over the extent to which adults could be penalised and thrown off assistance for refusing to move, this could not be done to the juvenile.

#### 6.1.6 Settlement and irremovability

The mobility question had different implications in a city like Birmingham where inward migration into the city was a matter of concern to the authorities. Here the

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> TNA Lab 19/63 Emmerson’s minute 28<sup>th</sup> November 1935.

<sup>88</sup> TNA Lab 19/63 Emmerson’s minute 25<sup>th</sup> January 1938.

concern was to limit the rights to relief of unwelcome migrants, particularly unskilled workers 'tramping around' in search of work. While Birmingham normally followed central government policy, for example in the implementation of the means test, here there was some conflict. Not conflict in the sense of defiance or refusal but counter argument and lobbying to change policy.

This issue came to a head around the issue of Settlement and Irremovability. Birmingham as an area retained a strict poor law ethic in the conduct of its administration of Public Assistance, as well as being a relatively prosperous area, and destination for migrant workers. The city was keen to take a firm line with migrants. This desire brought the LA into dispute with central government over how criteria would interact with Unemployment Assistance. The Settlement rules had traditionally stipulated that an individual if resident in an area for one year would become irremovable and after three years became 'settled' e.g. eligible for relief from the authority from which they were resident. However the Association of Municipal Corporations representing the governing authorities in the UK's large cities<sup>89</sup> became concerned that the availability of UA would mean that claimants could acquire settled status whilst unemployed. Any time spent on Public Assistance was deducted from the time spent qualifying and the Association wanted the same rule to apply to Unemployment Assistance.

The Association argued that their Public Assistance scales were higher than those in nearby agricultural areas and were thus attracting migration from other parts of the country<sup>90</sup>. As was shown in the previous chapter though, these rights to support reflected views on who was and was not a desirable citizen. The Birmingham PAC's Chair W.J Loxley argued that "[t]he large industrial towns – and particularly those such as Birmingham, where unemployment is less rife than in others – have

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<sup>89</sup> Although in this matter the UAB was convinced it represented only Birmingham, Bristol and Leeds.

<sup>90</sup> TNA AST7/13 12<sup>th</sup> March 1934 Loxley to Chamberlain.

attracted men, many of whom are not skilled craftsmen but only of the casual labourer type" (ibid) many of whom he argued were on UA's precursor Transitional Payments but were likely to be excluded from UA under job search and readiness conditions and therefore likely to make claims to the PAC. This quote shows the local authority bemoaning the tendency for centralisation to deprive them of their discretion to employ traditional modes of exclusion. An explicitly moral argument was put forward that UA was not a true insurance benefit but indeed represented 'something for nothing'. Loxley went as far as to also attempt to use local connections and directly lobby Neville Chamberlain, then Chancellor of the Exchequer and former Minister of Health and future Prime minister. Chamberlain was a Birmingham MP but not only that, he was from a dynastic family which had dominated city politics since the later 19th century, his father Joseph Chamberlain having been a towering figure in the city becoming Mayor in 1873 (Briggs 1953). Chamberlain was also a supporter of the philosophy of Poor Law administration that dominated in Birmingham.

The argument presented by the Association and Mr Loxley however appears to have been given short shrift by the UAB who were emphatic that UA was not the poor law and there should be no question of the same principles applying. This entails a difference in moral judgements about what the new system (UA) should signify. On the one hand the Poor Law view was that since the receipt of the payment was not based directly on the ratio of contributions to payments, it should be seen as equivalent to PA receipt for the purpose of assessing claims to settlement. But on the other the national policy view was that this was a system for those who had exhausted their contributory rights in a depressed labour market and who were therefore qualitatively distinct from the PA claimant. The view of national policy makers was that settlement was anachronistic having "dated back to the Elizabethan age when the intention of the Poor Law was to keep people in the parish where they were born"<sup>91</sup> and these days functioned as an impediment to the

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<sup>91</sup> TNA AST7/13 Minute of 7<sup>th</sup> March 1934 Secretary's report on visit of delegation from the

free movement of labour and therefore as a barrier to national policy objectives. It was considered undesirable to associate UA with the poor law in the eyes of the public by introducing poor law type practices into its administration. Under Transitional Payments administration by local PACs had been understood to stigmatise claimants, and UA was supposed to defuse the anger about this by shifting control to an 'apolitical' central body.

This desire on the part of central authorities to move away from traditional means of administration was in keeping with an overall direction of travel in the 1930s. The poor law mentality and strategies gradually lost ground to new techniques of administration. PA treatment was increasingly the preserve of the marginalised and those viewed as antisocial.

## 6.2 Remnants of pauperism? Deterrent relief and 'workfare' in Birmingham

The thesis has examined some of the measures used by authorities to verify the work ethic of claimants and to enforce the pursuit of employment. This was not the only method used. Where there was substantial doubt over the motivation and 'employability' of the claimant (i.e. mainly in the Public Assistance system) older methods continued to be used. As mentioned at the beginning of this Chapter the classic poor law method had been to offer a 'test of work' prior to granting relief and Public Assistance maintained this, albeit in a modern guise.

Enforced work was an important part of Public Assistance. The Relief Regulation Order of 1930 had given local authorities the power (which had previously belonged to the Boards of Guardians) to compel relief recipients to undertake work or training as a condition of receiving relief. The circular accompanying the order described its purpose as "[t]o maintain the employability of those willing and able to work, so that when opportunity offers these men have no difficulty in resuming

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Association of Municipal Corporations.

their places in industry”<sup>92</sup>. According to the Ministry of Health the order sought to reorient the conduct of relief to the “fact that under present economic circumstances large numbers of able-bodied men and women have to recourse to the rates through no fault of their own”<sup>93</sup>. The order had expressed a desire to make the administration of task work more constructive and oriented toward the maintenance of employability rather than pure deterrence. This does not mean there were no continuities with past policy. London’s Chief PA Officer described the order as “re-interpreting by modern methods the spirit and aims of the Elizabethan legislation for setting to work men who used no trade to get their living by”<sup>94</sup>. Additionally the personnel who ran the PACs under the Local Government act would largely be continuous with the Boards of Guardians, bringing their experiences and practices with them.

A draft of the Minister of Health’s speech to the 1932 Public Assistance Conference said that.

“[T]he Minister attaches great importance to this method of securing that the able-bodied do not merely remain able-bodied, in the full sense of physical and mental fitness, but should even improve his capacity as a potential worker. While any form of discipline is resented by the few, there is every reason to believe that the many prefer occupation to idleness”<sup>95</sup>.

The work should be presented as an “opportunity not a penalty”<sup>96</sup>. London’s Chief Public Assistance Officer reported that his scheme had attempted to secure claimants “willing cooperation gained in work and training and instruction designed

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<sup>92</sup> Warwick MRC TUC 1924-33: Test and Task Work. Test Work, Industrial Review.

<sup>93</sup> TNA MH57/1 Memo describing poor law policy Howes to Cripps.

<sup>94</sup> TNA MH57/6 1932 Public Assistance Conference paper of London’s Chief PA Officer Allan Powell.

<sup>95</sup> TNA MH57/6 1932 Public Assistance Conference: Draft note for the Ministers remarks.

<sup>96</sup> TNA MH57/6 1932 Public Assistance Conference: Draft note for the Ministers remarks.

primarily for their own benefit”<sup>97</sup>. This language downplays punishment and stresses the modernisation of the system, with a focus on ‘employability’ and the prevention of deterioration and demoralisation. Policy aimed to be “systematic instead of haphazard and definite and remedial in object instead of aimless and negative”<sup>98</sup>. Once again it was the attitudes, dispositions and ‘character’ of the unemployed which constituted the subject for intervention. The focus on development of capacities recognisable since 2010 was present in the articulation of policy in the 1930s as well. Power can be said to be disciplinary in the sense of focussing on ‘improving’ the workers who were subject to the regime of conditionality. This discussion of enforced work for ‘out relief’ appears to have been very focussed on the ‘able-bodied’ man. The archive files examined for the thesis make no reference to the kind of work applied to the men on Birmingham PA being enforced upon women or on those claiming on the grounds of ill health. The aim of policy was to reinforce the traditional structure of the family through enforced work for men and reinforcement of women’s dependence on them.

### 6.2.1 Public Assistance in Birmingham in comparison with other areas

In Birmingham in 1930 Public Assistance claimants were set to work after receiving relief for 6 weeks. In 1931 under instructions from the Ministry of Health this criterion was toughened up with task work beginning after 4 weeks. The Ministry justified this with the statement that “unoccupied intervals must be prejudicial to the habit of steady work, which it is desired to maintain, more particularly for the man with smaller responsibilities”<sup>99</sup>, so the childless (and therefore likely young) man was a particular subject of intervention<sup>100</sup>. The severity of the conditions applied to the single claimant was escalated at the instruction of the Ministry of Health. This would mean that this practice began to be applied at the age of 18;

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<sup>97</sup> TNA MH57/6 1932 Public Assistance Conference paper of London’s Chief PA Officer Allan Powell

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> BCC1/CD/1/1/1 1930-1931 Minute 27<sup>th</sup> May 1931.

<sup>100</sup> In Birmingham’s PAC files I found no reference to work of this kind being applied to women, suggesting that traditional ideas about the appropriate household division of labour and dependence of women on men were influential here.

however according to the Ministry's annual report for 1931-1932 this could theoretically could be applied to 'youths' aged 16-18<sup>101</sup>. Prior to May 1931 the weekly hours of work to which a man was to be subject would depend upon the size of his allowance, with that in turn depending mainly on whether he had a wife and children (and how many children he had) to maintain. A single man would have to work 12 hours a week for 15 shillings a month, while a man with a dependent wife and 3 children would work 30 hours a week for 37 shillings. Part of the Ministry's objection to this was that the childless man would be inadequately disciplined. There was also the objection that by linking the amount of relief to hours worked, Birmingham had a system which resembled a wage and thus encouraged the claimant to see the work "not as a benefit conferred, but as a price to be exacted in return for the receipt of relief"<sup>102</sup>.

The work itself involved "levelling ground, cleaning out and straightening rivers, and excavations for sand and gravel"<sup>103</sup>. In 1933 the PAC was considering expanding the schemes, asking the Parks and Public Works department of the council to find more work for 90-100 men for whom none was available. The result of this was the allocation of 30 men to each of the following schemes to. 1. To clear a watercourse from Bordesley Green to Drews Lane. 2. Levelling land for future road widening, grubbing up old hedges and laying of turf in Howard Road, Kings Heath. 3. Excavating, levelling and soiling of Tennial Lane, southwest of Tennial Road and in the west boulevard<sup>104</sup>.

These tasks were similar to those found elsewhere. In 1933 the TUC issued a call for evidence from its affiliates on the practices of their local PACs. In Wimbledon and Sunderland men were put to work in sewage plants and rubbish tips moving and

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<sup>101</sup> Ministry of Health, Annual Report 1931-1932 Cmd 4113.

<sup>102</sup> BCC1/CD/1/1/1 1930-1931 Minute of 27<sup>th</sup> May 1931.

<sup>103</sup> BCC/CD/1/1/2 1931-1932 Report from CRSC March 1932.

<sup>104</sup> BCC/CD/1/1/3 1932-1933 May 1933 Outdoor Relief Regulations p36-37 insert.

burning rubbish. Other PACs (e.g. Mansfield and Chelmsford, Bermondsey) put claimants to work on the maintenance of the institutions themselves. Work constructing and maintaining roads was a feature of enforced work in Oxford, Crayford and Mansfield. In Chatham as in Birmingham, men were involved in excavating river beds and in Lowestoft in constructing a boating lake. Estates and grounds maintenance also featured in several local areas. The pattern appears to be one of hard unskilled manual labour. Hours of work varied considerably from location to location although four-day weeks were common, for instance 28 hours per week in Birmingham and 32 in Bermondsey, although some areas had a lower requirement (12 hours per week in Carlton and Netherfield<sup>105</sup>). Reduced hours could be a sign of the Local Authority lacking the resources to put claimants to work full time. Alternatively they could allow the authority to maintain the principles of less eligibility by reducing hours for the claimants receiving the lowest allowances.

Amongst the TUC's chief concerns about the practice appears to have been whether or not the work undertaken would otherwise have been done for wages and relatedly whether PA claimants were working alongside regular workers. Unions wanted to defend existing labour standards and wished to prevent them being undermined by the exploitation of PA claimants as cheap labour. While the TUC obtained ministerial assurances that policy was that the work would not ordinarily have been done for wages and that it was not policy for claimants to work alongside regular workers, they also found evidence of these practices in several local authorities. The London Trades Council alleged the London authorities were using skilled labour to undercut wages in trades including boot making, French polishing, furniture and brush making and hair dressing further alleging that the claimants had been remunerated with food tickets in Poor Law fashion. There was difficulty in distinguishing between useful 'productive' task work and work which was done for wages. It was "of course, extremely difficult to draw any hard and fast

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<sup>105</sup> Warwick MRC TUC 1924-33 Responses to call for evidence on Test and Task Work of 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1933.

line between useful work (which test work must be) and work"<sup>106</sup> which should be done for a wage. Where there were skilled workers there was a further problem in that the work best suited to the maintenance of employability would be in their area of experience and so especially likely to impinge on waged work. In particular working on the maintenance and upkeep of PAC and LA institutions appeared to be an area where claimants were being used as cheap labour. Administrators faced the difficulty of justifying this distinction between unpaid work undertaken to maintain employability and legitimate waged work. An example of the issue emerged around the issue of payment of relief in-kind (i.e. the direct provision of goods instead of money) and from the protests of trade unions and men put to work.

Policy in the Birmingham Poor Law in the 1930s had been to pay relief half in cash and half in-kind, this consisting mainly of food provision. However with regard to the men on the 'workfare' schemes payment in kind was not considered to be appropriate as "where men are set to work at wages equivalent to relief it has been regarded as proper that they should be paid wholly in cash on the ground that the money is actually earned"<sup>107</sup>. The desire of those in charge to reward work within the system often contradicted the desire to distinguish task work from waged work. Some credit was given to one who demonstrates his character through labour, and he should not be stigmatised by this clear demonstration of a lack of trust from the authorities. However, this practice also posed difficulty for the authorities in maintaining this distinction which was under challenge from not only unions but also from workers on PA themselves.

In September 1932 the PAC received a petition from men employed in widening parts of the Tame and Cole rivers. The men demanded to be paid the standard rate for the work as would be paid to waged workers, for the work to be covered by the

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<sup>106</sup> Warwick MRC TUC Test and Task 1924-33, Draft document Industrial Review p3

<sup>107</sup> BCC1/CD/1/1/1 1930-1931 PAC minute 2<sup>nd</sup> May 165-6.

Unemployment Insurance Scheme, and for an improvement in the food provided to support the hard physical work they were undertaking<sup>108</sup>. In arguing for these changes, the men drew attention to their disadvantage in seeking work against insurance claimants not obliged to spend their days labouring of the PAC schemes. Additionally, the claimants retained the view that the relief they were paid constituted a wage despite having been instructed otherwise by officers of the PAC. Claimants could interpret their payments (including the fact that they were paid wholly in cash rather than in-kind) as having a quite different meaning to that ascribed by officialdom. This was relayed by the PAC to the Ministry of Health with regard to the particular issue of those in receipt of very small allowances for whom the PAC was prepared to consider reducing working hours. However the Ministry's view remained that there was a danger of "serious deterioration in the able-bodied men if they were relieved unconditionally" and that "there must be a clear distinction between work for wages and relief given on condition"<sup>109</sup> which would be threatened by any relationship between hours worked and the amount of relief paid.

### 6.2.2 Deterrence or employability?

We have seen above that in its final incarnation PA poor law administrators were keen to show that the system had been modernised and that its methods were constructive, enhancing the employability of claimants as opposed to merely inflicting pointless punishment upon them. This can particularly be seen in national policy making at the Ministry of Health where PA is described as a modern system concerned with the employability of the 'able-bodied' recipient of relief. The arguments about employability and deterioration with regard to young men making claims upon Public Assistance are the same as those about the juvenile claimant. This may be especially relevant as they would be the same people who had made the transition from school in the depressed years following the 1929 crash or even

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<sup>108</sup> BCC1/CD/1/1/3 2-3 Report upon the receipt of a petition from men engaged in river widening work on River Cole at Hay Mills and River Tame at Salford Park.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

during the high juvenile unemployment of the 1920s and been unemployed or engaged in intermittent or casual and 'blind-alley' work. This group, according to official understandings, would be rendered demoralised by their unemployment.

This should not be taken completely at face value. Local evidence shows that this attempt at a cultural shift, did not totally eliminate the understanding of task work as punishment held by many for the former Guardians. The work was not always presented as the 'opportunity' of the Minister of Health's speech; this can be seen in evidence from Birmingham. Birmingham's officials understood the work as a penalty incurred by the unemployed man<sup>110</sup>. So if claimants derived benefit from the experience, this was positive but incidental, if they did not then work should still be imposed. The pauper was marked as irrational and would not be permitted to make this decision himself, rather officials who saw themselves, in the words of one, as "a guardian acting in the interests, but not necessarily in accordance with the wishes, of his wards"<sup>111</sup> would make such a judgement. Here the pauper is infantilised as a 'ward' and is discussed in similar terms to the juvenile claimant as lacking in self-discipline and rationality. Whilst Birmingham attempted to remove some of the harsher aspects of national practice, this is not the whole story. The severity of the Birmingham scheme was to a significant extent discretionary. The Ministry of Health allowed for the time of men set to work to be split between work and training, Birmingham decided to run a work only scheme, maintaining a faith in deterrence and the availability of work for those who wanted it.

### 6.2.3 Compulsory training in extended benefits

Under Public Assistance the use of compulsory work, training, and instruction was seen by the authorities as a modern and humane way of boosting the 'employability' of the claimant. The justificatory language of policy contained within it an account of the subject as demoralised, as exemplified by the provision of

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<sup>110</sup> BCC1/CD/1/1/1 1930-1931 Minute of 27<sup>th</sup> May 1931.

<sup>111</sup> TNA MH57/7 1933 Public Assistance Conference: Draft of the Minister's address.

training courses “for the purpose of the welfare and the making of provision for the improvement and re-establishment of the condition of such persons with a view to their being in all respects fit for entry into or return to regular employment”<sup>112</sup>. However under UA the picture was more complicated. Frustration was expressed about the lack of ability to coerce those who ‘fail[ed] to avail themselves’ of opportunities for training, and a lot of this discussion was focussed upon young men over 18 (as distinct from the juvenile). They were seen as a key problem group, subject to a special risk of demoralisation and often left unemployed by the loss of their ‘blind alley jobs’. There was some potential continuity with policy toward the juvenile, as the unemployed young men of the mid 1930s may well have been unemployed juveniles in the crisis of 1930-1931.

The question about who could and who could not be mandated to be retrained was particularly relevant to young adults. Training programmes could play a role in “mitigating any adverse effects of blind alley jobs upon progressive employment for the adult”<sup>113</sup>. There were set up, on the one hand Government Training Centres offering a six month ‘intensive’ vocational course oriented to toward equipping men for a specific job, and on the other Instructional Centres that aimed toward preparation for unskilled labouring work for those without “sufficiently high educational or educational standard to be able to absorb intensive instruction”<sup>114</sup>. These were generally intended to keep men who could perform heavy manual labour in a fit physical condition to do so.

Files of the Unemployment Assistance Board show a Parliamentary Secretary’s report considered the issue of training conditionality for young men. The report argued that, for young men with a poor record of employment, training at an instructional centre was “a valuable means of preserving or creating physical fitness

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<sup>112</sup> TNA AST7/76 Mason’s note 14/9/34.

<sup>113</sup> TNA AST7/314 Draft report by A.T Lennox-Boyd Paragraph 13 “Blind Alley” employment.

<sup>114</sup> TNA AST7/314 Paragraph 18.

and of improving the morale of those who are suffering from apathy which, in due course, degenerates into serious physical and moral deterioration”<sup>115</sup>. The Parliamentary Secretary’s report (of June 1938) is an interesting document, it presents a sense of the dynamic nature of the unemployment problem. The young men with a ‘poor record of employment’ were likely to have been school leavers in the earlier years of the depression. Then the report notes the failure of policies and institutions to deal with these who had been unemployed as juveniles and who were an even greater problem as young men on UA.

Whilst the insistence was mainly that training was voluntary “that the applicant had neglected such an opportunity of training ... could not therefore be ignored”; a single refusal would not necessarily mean disqualification from assistance but “if the record of employment were bad and training were obviously in the applicants interest and would promote his employability, the Board would not be carrying out its duty if it shut its eyes to repeated unreasonable refusals”<sup>116</sup>. However if one had a sufficient record of national insurance contributions and was a claimant of Unemployment Benefit or even extended benefits one was usually able to refuse training or the transfer to a work camp (Field 2015) (Burns 1941). Not all in government were happy about this; after all the Parliamentary Secretary’s report argued that “[y]oung men who have some 40 years or more of active life before them should not be allowed ‘in their own interests, to settle down as pensioners’<sup>117</sup> and “the general community ought not to continue the present generous payments to the unemployed without some regard to the will to work”. They argued insufficient efforts had been made to mandate training which a significant minority of young men refused unjustifiably and recommended that it be made a condition for the receipt of assistance. It was not recommended to be a condition applied to all 18-21 year olds in the style of JIC attendance but to be applied to specified

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<sup>115</sup> TNA AST7/314 Paragraph 31 Instructional Centres for young men with a poor record of employment.

<sup>116</sup> TNA AST7/76 Note of 20<sup>th</sup> November 1934.

<sup>117</sup> TNA AST7 314 Para 33 Instructional Centres for young men with a poor record of employment.

claimants who could benefit. Burns (1941), in a wartime assessment of the UK's various systems of support for the unemployed, thought that not enough had been done to enforce training due in part to the political difficulty in being seen to impose forced labour upon the unemployed. Whilst poor law precedent would seem to justify setting to work those who applied for support not based on insurance, in the 1930s this was no longer possible for the great majority of claimants. UA increasingly assumed responsibility for the 'able-bodied' poor and the rationality and tradition of poor law practice lost influence.

### 6.3 Summary

To conclude, this chapter has followed on from the analysis of divisions between different groups of claimants with an examination of some of the technologies of power applied to claimants in order to enforce labour market participation. It has addressed the thesis' Research Question 2 on the interventions to which different groups of unemployed were subject.

These technologies of power are equivalent to what in current debates is called 'conditionality': the judgements and devices used to assess whether individuals belong to their place in this moral ordering. These technologies were the means by which to test whether individuals possessed a sufficient work ethic. But they were structured by conventions and differentials in social statuses and rights. These included means to measure job search, the offer of work, but also mandatory training and labour; all of which have equivalents in the post 2010 system. Insured contributors, with the exception of the juveniles, could be subject to relatively little conditionality. The pauper on the other hand was to be subject to a relatively traditional regime of disciplinary labour. For the extended group there were debates about the extent to which they could be subjected to disciplinary treatment, of whether they were sufficiently deserving and capable to exercise the freedom to decide whether instruction or training would be of benefit. These differentiations contrast with the relative ubiquity (Dwyer and Wright 2014) of

behavioural interventions under 'welfare reform'. Furthermore outside of the 'pauper' it appears that administrators were required to show what appears, from the standpoint of an observer in 2018, to have been considerable restraint

There was a drive to modernise these forms of conditionality, from PA seeking to improve the employability of paupers, to the desire to provide constructive instruction to juveniles and young adults. In attempting to modernise these practices the authorities faced any number of problems. There were contradictory imperatives driving policy, for instance the contradiction between work and education/instruction. There were disputes between the three central government bodies and numerous local ones which made policy over who should be responsible for particular claimant groups, and therefore whose budget their support should come from. Looking at this messy and complicated policy making process it was perhaps not surprising that Beveridge sought to rationalise practice under a single authority.

We can see that younger claimants were a source of concern. The authorities saw them as especially likely to become demoralised and to be tempted by the casual lifestyle which would lead to them becoming long term dependants. This group was divided between the juvenile pushed into the JIC, and young adults who (if in the extended group) could not be subject to this sort of treatment but who were often discussed in similar terms. As time went on and the school leavers of the peak of the unemployment crisis in 1930-1931 became young adults, coercing this group into a regime of training centres was considered. Yet despite calls to do so they could not be made a special case as was the juvenile, and interventions upon them were restricted by their status in the three-fold distinction between insured, extended and paupers. The juvenile problematised these distinctions, and it was debated whether they should be credited in to the extended system. The answers to this depended on judgements of local labour markets. While discipline was the

concern for all claimant groups the type of discipline to be employed e.g. of the 'prison or the school' was a question of status.

The next chapter continues from this to examine further aspects of punitive practice in social welfare in the 1930s. That is, the use of detention in institutions, workhouses, casual wards and importantly, the JIC.

## Chapter 7: Institutionalisation and its meanings

“If this school was abolished and you had to wander about all day you would go in droves and gamble, bet and slowly sink lower and lose all ambition to get on.... I have found it is a wonderful chance for all the fellows to get on.”<sup>118</sup> (Statement from a boy who attended the Birmingham JIC included in its Annual Report for 1929-1930)<sup>119</sup>

The previous chapter examined the place of compulsory work and training in state support in the 1930s. This chapter turns to the practices of detention asking: what kind of restrictions and means of discipline were those institutionalised subjected to? And, returning to the themes of Chapter 5, what do these practices show about how the subject is perceived and constituted?

While previous chapters have examined disciplinary methods applied to the problem of ‘out relief’ this chapter examines the conduct of discipline in institutions, and is therefore somewhat closer to the subject matter of Foucault’s studies.

A crucial question here is about the JIC. Chapter 5 examined the decision to compel all juveniles to attend and the rationale behind it. What did it mean for unemployed juveniles to have been subjected to these measures? Since the other group subject to similar degrees of compulsion would be claimants of Public Assistance and the other marginalised groups (such as vagrants) forced to rely on the PACs, it might be asked whether the expansion of compulsion to attend JICs marks the unemployed juvenile as a similarly stigmatised subject?

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<sup>118</sup> This quote should be taken with a pinch of salt. It is a very good expression of the official view of the centres, and arguably does not read like the words of a working class 16-year-old.

<sup>119</sup> Birmingham JEWSC BCC 1/BH/14/1/1/9, JEWSC Annual Report 1929-1930.

However, the conduct of the JIC was very different to Poor Law institutions such as Workhouses and Casual Wards. It was something of a hybrid of institutional forms, combining aspects of adult training centres as labour market institutions linked to a system of benefits with elements of a school. The thesis examines the type of discipline such an institution represented and its links to a view of the unemployed juvenile as 'victim or villain' (Brown 1990).

The chapter is structured as follows. In section 7.1 it introduces the practices of institutionalisation in Public Assistance looking at workhouses and casual wards as semi-penal institutions. Section 7.2 moves on to examine the conduct of the JIC, its curriculums and the arguments about how it should work as shown in policy debate. 7.3 looks at juvenile migrants and the provision of instruction to those supported by government to relocate from 'depressed' to prosperous areas under the Industrial Transference Scheme. Lastly 7.4 examines another function of Birmingham's juvenile authorities, the placement of unemployed juveniles into vacancies.

### 7.1 Institutionalisation in Public Assistance and the poor law tradition

In the tradition of the New Poor Law after 1834, should an 'able-bodied' worker require poor relief they would be required (where out-relief was prohibited) to accept detention in the workhouse, for himself and his family as well, in order to receive relief. Sometimes the man's family could be relieved outside in exchange for the institutionalisation of the main wage earner. The Workhouse and the Casual Ward were the most punitive institutions which dealt with the unemployed. For the able bodied<sup>120</sup> unemployed they were quasi-penal institutions for those seen as

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<sup>120</sup> However, the workhouse also functioned as a precursor to public hospitals, providing medical care to those unable to pay. The 'able-bodied' unemployed were usually a minority within the institution. In Birmingham's Western House institution the unemployed occupied a wing. But there were sometimes questions raised about whether the 'able-bodied' inmates were indeed capable of

anti-social and lacking any right to support on preferable conditions in the tradition of the poor law.

### 7.1.2 The workhouse

If the workhouse marks a continuity with older Poor Law practice then how does this fit with the vision of a modernised system of Public Assistance set out in the 1930 Relief Regulation Order and the Local Government Act? This institution continued to play a role as a device of last resort for dealing with those who would otherwise have been refused out-relief. In Birmingham, as set out in Chapter 5, institutionalisation was offered to the men in the common lodging house who the Birmingham PAC considered to be ineligible to receive out-relief<sup>121</sup>. Following the 1934 Act which introduced Unemployment Assistance, Birmingham council files show that the UAB approached the council seeking permission to place their own cases into the Western House institution<sup>122</sup>. This option was written to assist the board “particularly in dealing with cases of special difficulty. Section 40 of the Unemployment Assistance Act provides certain methods of dealing with an applicant who has failed to avail himself of opportunities of employment or training, and where there is a necessity for protecting the interests of the applicant or the persons dependent upon him”<sup>123</sup>. So the workhouse was to be employed in cases where authorities were reluctant to disallow the claims of men with dependent families. The PAC referred as an example to the case of a man in such a situation who “has flagrantly misused the assistance given to him by the Board despite repeated trials and warnings” and who if a PAC claimant would ‘undoubtedly’ be a case for institutionalisation<sup>124</sup>. In the Unemployment Assistance system also, this role continued to be desired.

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work.

<sup>121</sup> BCC/1/CD/1/1/4 1934 Minutes p54-5 Central Relief Sub-Committee Report 21<sup>st</sup> January 1934.

<sup>122</sup> BCC/1/CD/1/1/6 1935-6 Minutes of the PAC, November 1935 20-21.

<sup>123</sup> BCC/1/CD/1/1/6 1935-6 Minutes of the PAC, Report on correspondence with the UAB, December 1935 27-28.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

Beginning in Birmingham, Birmingham PAC operated a workhouse at its Western House site which while being mainly given over to the elderly and disabled maintained a ward for the 'able-bodied' who are of interest for the thesis. Despite any intention in national policy to rationalise the conduct of the poor law under Public Assistance, these remained quasi-penal institutions which held a penal institutional view of those contained within them. Western House justified detention on the grounds that "[s]ome of this class are single people of doubtful character, others are married and to whom the Relief Committees have declined to grant out-relief, many are below then normal and although for the purposes of classification, they are described as able-bodied, are really incapable of earning a livelihood"<sup>125</sup>. It is not possible to know if this was objectively true but it seems this class was seen as being characterised by a combination of character defects but also incapability. The groups labelled incapable may well be thought of now as having mental health problems or learning difficulties which did not lead them to be regarded as unfit for work officially. This might resemble the way some JIC cases in the prosperous areas were labelled as less bright, 'facile' or even 'sub-normal' children.

### 7.1.2 Casual wards

Chapter 5 discussed the difficulty faced by the authorities in distinguishing between 'vagrants' and respectable migrant workers passing through the wards.

A partial solution to these problems was implemented by the Ministry as part of the Public Assistance (Casual Poor) Order in 1931 which brought in two-day detention. According to this practice, rather than be detained overnight and released the next day following task work, a 'vagrant' would be detained for two nights in the institution. As well as aiming to deter those who could pay for alternative

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

accommodation the measure had disciplinary aims: casuals faced being searched, their possessions confiscated, and being subject to compulsory medical examinations as well as being made to undertake task work. J.T. Gibbons of the Wayfarers Benevolent Association undertook a 7 day 'tramp' around three wards in the South East and discovered searches for "tea, sugar, tobacco matches and food"<sup>126</sup> upon entry<sup>127</sup>, confiscation of clothing, inadequate food, filthy conditions and being put to work scrubbing the floor of the one of the institutions. The latter, a form of task work, allowed the institution to save money by not employing cleaners.

This task work would involve "Eight hours' work in gardening or digging or pumping, or sawing or chopping or bundling wood, or carrying coal, or washing or scrubbing or cleaning" all this after stone breaking had been removed from the list of approved tasks in 1931<sup>128</sup>. There was a gendered division of tasks with women casuals tasked with washing, scrubbing, cleaning or needlework. The casual who wished to leave earlier would have to show a Vacant Ticket issued by an Employment Exchange verifying that they were traveling to a notified vacancy<sup>129</sup>. Once discharged from the wards, claimants would be sent on their way, and issued food. Even this decision was not exempt from disciplinary considerations. In Birmingham the South Midlands Vagrancy Committee abandoned the practice of providing food vouchers for midday meals to tramps released in the morning and provided food directly instead, because of 'certain abuses' of the system whereby the vagrants had been able to use them to buy other things, presumably institutionally prohibited items like tobacco and alcohol<sup>130</sup>.

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<sup>126</sup> TNA MH57/66 Report by Mr T. J. Gibbons Founder of the Wayfarers Benevolent Association.

<sup>127</sup> Although Gibbons notes that many men were smoking suggesting this was not particularly effective.

<sup>128</sup> TNA MH57/6 The Administration of the Public Assistance (Casual Poor) Order, 1931 W. T. Glass, Public Assistance Officer Somerset County Council.

<sup>129</sup> TNA MH57/70 Postponement of Article 7 (casual poor) order, 1931: circular 1258.

<sup>130</sup> BCC/1/CD/1/1/4 1934, South Midlands Vagrancy Committee March 1934 p77 insert.

### 7.1.3 Punishments in institutions

The view of these institutions as quasi-penal is backed up by the systems of punishments and disciplinary methods utilised in them. A report by the Ministry of Health in 1933 revealed methods ranging from the confiscation of tobacco and placing inmates on a bread and water diet to the cancellation of 'leave', to turning over to the police. Another option was bringing the inmate before the Master to be 'reprimanded', "a dreaded ordeal apparently"<sup>131</sup>. It was noted that where the institutions' inmates were mainly 'able-bodied' there tended to be a greater number of punishments. 'Penal provisions' rested almost entirely at the discretion of the Master of the institution with little oversight of objection from management committees or prescription from central government. 'Offences' ranged from 'overstaying leave' to refusal to work and assaults on officials or other inmates and "'[o]nly serious offences-generally assault on an officer, persistent refusal to work or obey orders and wanton damage-are taken before the justices"<sup>132</sup>. One London institution retained a room for solitary detention during the day hours (to be released back to normal sleeping quarters at night) as a form of punishment and an alternative to giving the man over to police custody. The punitive view of the claimant to be put into the workhouse referred to in Chapter 6, was accompanied by a penal mode of treatment once inside, and the accompanying language was also overtly penal, liberty being surrendered in return for relief. Chapter 6 referred to Birmingham's Western house, the conduct of which provides further evidence of this status: men were issued uniforms, denied leave and subject to task work.

While this was a system to some extent falling from favour the workhouse was not thought by Birmingham's PAC to be an institution approaching its last days; redevelopment and modernisation works on Western House were planned for when local finances improved.

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<sup>131</sup> TNA MH57/26 Topping's note of Jan 1933.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

These episodes indicate that this status brings the institutionalised pauper close to the status of the convicted criminal. The pauper surrenders rights upon entering the workhouse. It was a form of voluntary imprisonment and once inside the individual is subject to austere conditions, e.g. the removal of personal effects as well as foodstuffs and especially tobacco. The provision of uniforms was reminiscent of a prison, as was the discretionary power of the Master, especially in the institutions where there was solitary confinement and the 'dreaded ordeal' of a confrontation with the Master.

### 7.2 The JIC: a punitive institution for unemployed youth?

This section considers whether the JIC fulfilled a labour market or an educational function. Some of the debates examined in Chapter 5 concerning whether UA could be paid to juveniles remaining in school on the grounds of a perceived lack of employment opportunities also reflect a debate about the nature of the JIC as an institution between the Ministry of Labour and educationalists. This concerned whether the JIC be considered an educational institution, equivalent to an extended stay in school. This was given some force by the fact that one of the alternative measures advocated by many in the inter-war period was increasing the school leaving age to 15 to alleviate juvenile unemployment (Garside 1990). Alternatively the JIC could be seen as a labour market institution similar to Employment Exchanges or adult instructional centres, functioning to move workers back to work quickly and boost labour market efficiency? Such a debate would also involve considerations on who should oversee these institutions as well as how they should be run. When the centres were re-established after 1930 they were put under the control of the Ministry of Labour rather than the local educational authorities which had run them during the 1920s. This marked a definitive statement in favour of the labour market view of their function, but also marked a centralisation of power away from a locally governed and elected body towards central government.

Chapter 6 looked at the move to make attendance at the JIC a compulsory measure. One of the questions to be addressed was to what extent the compulsion of claimants to attend the JIC marked them as a similar subject to the Public Assistance claimant? There was certainly the view that “the Centres contain on the whole the least intelligent and prosperous section of the juvenile population and as employment improves it is the more intelligent and active who leave the Centres”<sup>133</sup>, which would seem to mark the type of juvenile likely to become unemployed as a problem for staff in terms of the ‘technique of instruction’ to be employed. The JIC was generally agreed within government to be of value in “maintaining employability and discipline and in rendering the boys more adaptable to other occupations and probably more intelligent, smarter and cleaner in their appearance and habits”<sup>134</sup>.

Compulsory detention in the JIC would seem to mark the juvenile as different to the adult insurance claimant, usually able to refuse the offer of a course of instruction. At the same time these institutions, whilst certainly aiming to instil working discipline upon those thought to be in danger of losing it, practised a different sort of disciplinary programme to that found in Public Assistance institutions. The internal practices of both are discussed in the next chapter. But did detention in the JIC mean that these juveniles were regarded or marked as a ‘bad type’? There is evidence of this in the reactions to this extension of compulsion. There were arguments put against compulsion to attend. One such opinion was that of a Councillor Hume, the then head of the Birmingham Education Committee who when representing the Association of Municipal Corporations to the Royal Commission for Unemployment Insurance opined that he:

“was opposed to the idea that every claimant of benefit should be made to attend the Junior Instruction Centre because many of these claimants

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<sup>133</sup> TNA LAB 19/79 National Advisory Council Draft report on the scheme of authorised courses of Instruction for unemployed boys and girls 1937.

<sup>134</sup> TNA Lab 19/234 Emmerson to Parminter 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1937.

were “nice” boys and girls, whereas the Centre contained rough characters, incipient criminals and the residuum of undesirables”<sup>135</sup>.

This approach shared some of the conceptualisations of the advocates of institutionalisation in seeing juveniles as vulnerable to negative influences only this time they were to be found in the Centres as well as the streets. It also suggests that the main rationale for incarceration in state-run institutions was disciplinary. Councillor Hume challenged the universalism of the national approach by making distinctions between deserving and undeserving juvenile claimants. This may be an indication of the ‘poor law’ mentality staying strong in Birmingham amongst senior figures most of whose careers might have been spent in at a time when the official line was that all detention was the disgrace that it had been under the poor law and marked claimants as the poor law type. Perhaps the annual reports adopt a view acceptable to the Ministry of Labour whilst an unguarded moment in giving oral evidence reveals an alternative view of a punitive institution detaining the city’s problem cases.

As well as the culture of local government and attitude towards unemployment, assessments of the local labour market played a role in the assessment of the character of the subject the JIC contained. The demoralisation problem was seen as particularly dangerous in the depressed areas where unemployment was high and where many juveniles “sense of discipline is being restored or maintained” in centres (ITB 1928 p10). In the depressed areas passivity and dependence were seen as exacerbated by a ‘psychological factor’: “a tendency to wait in some vague hope that something will turn up to restore the local trades” (ITB 1928) which was seen as a ‘false hope’ but also as generating the expectation of payment of benefit as of a right.

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<sup>135</sup> TNA Lab2/2043 1218 part 1 Evidence by Educational Authorities’ Associations before the Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance.

Whether a centre should exist in an area was determined by a central criterion; need might be seen to have been greatest in the depressed areas, but that does not mean that prosperous areas were seen as unproblematic. During 1935-7 Wear and Metcalf's<sup>136</sup> investigations into the London JICs argued that in the light of a relatively low caseload due to the improvement of the economy and a high turnover of claimants, there was a case for eliminating some centres. However Ministry of Labour civil servants were unconvinced, arguing that "it is clear the juveniles who are unemployed for a fair period in areas where employment is good are prima facie more in need of a course, than those unemployed for the same period where unemployment is bad"<sup>137</sup>. A 1936 report into the Nottingham JICs drew similar conclusions:

"Trade in the city is brisk; consequently, many of the boys unable to obtain employment are of the less promising and more difficult type, with little ability or ambition; some have apparently little inclination for work; a few have been in "bad company"; all need firm but generous discipline and a constant spur to their energy."<sup>138</sup>

This assessment of the caseload is linked to an assessment of how quickly 'demoralisation' sets in. The Ministry considered that Wear and Metcalf's proposals to lengthen the period of unemployment before the juvenile would be compelled to attend from twelve to twenty-four days falsely "imply[d] that, unless the boy or girl is continually unemployed for a month [...] there is no danger of deterioration". As well as an educational function, there was a deterrent one: the opinion of one civil servant was that even if attendance was too short term or irregular to be educationally useful it was still worth enforcing as "the fact that the centre is there does make boys who lose their jobs more eager to find a new one"<sup>139</sup>.

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<sup>136</sup> TNA Lab19/234 Committee Paper no.2 Junior Instruction Centres - Length of Course, Sept 1936.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

We might look at the above evidence and see the JIC as a deterrent disciplinary institution; after all there is a deterrent intent, an impression of the subject as demoralised, and a compulsion to attend. However the JIC was a hybrid institution, concerned with the regulation of unemployment and with the maintenance of 'employability' but also suffused with educational discourse. This will be further demonstrated in a discussion of the curriculum of a JIC as a disciplinary measure in the next section 7.2.1. This question was also linked to the juvenile's ambiguous status between adulthood and childhood. This can be seen in the use of language; juvenile claimants were referred to constantly as children and as 'boys and girls' and instructors in the JIC were referred to as teachers and where one could claim insight into the running of the institution by "speaking as an old school master"<sup>140</sup>. Bureaucratic divisions of labour regarding the JIC also showcase these attitudes. Birmingham's JICs were run by its Board of Education until the 1930s when they became the responsibility of the Council's Juvenile Education and Welfare Sub-Committee under the control of the Ministry of Labour. Moving responsibility from education authorities to the employment focussed Ministry of Labour shows that the problem had been reconceptualised. This might be seen in the overlap in debate with proposals to raise the school leaving age which were advocated as an alternative solution to juvenile unemployment. Perhaps the construction of the juvenile as a child explains to some extent the decision not to rely on the PA institutions which handled the adult uninsured. Rather than being regarded as morally culpable for their unemployment they are unformed subjects seen as not yet having made the transition to adulthood. The JICs or 'unemployment schools' had a strong reformatory aspect. The institutions were predicated on the view that if the claimant if neglected, was going to develop into a long-term dependant.

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<sup>140</sup> TNA Lab2/2043 1218 part 1 Evidence by Educational Authorities' Associations before the Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance.

### 7.2.1 National curriculum guidelines

National policy aimed to maintain the employability of those inside the JIC. The idea was to arrest the demoralisation which would result from being outside of a socialising institution like the school or the workplace.

Curricula were oriented toward activity below the level considered vocational. Part of the reason for this was because of the short durations of juveniles' claims to benefit which were often considered to provide too short a period in which to supply worthwhile education (especially in areas with a low caseload). However, this also came from a desire to distinguish the JIC from staying at school.

Throughout the decade cases were raised concerning whether those continuing their attendance at school could be considered unemployed on the grounds that they only did so because of a lack of jobs to go into (see section 5.3). The JIC, as an institution run by the Ministry of Labour, was discussed in quite similar terms to the voluntary instructional centres for adults, as a labour market institution running adjacent to Employment Exchanges and juvenile placement agencies rather than as part of the education system.

Hours of attendance typically varied between centres and between 15-30 hours per week with a 15-hour week with 3 hours a day being quite common<sup>141</sup>. From 1930 Local Authorities were obliged by the Ministry of Labour to run centres in localities where there were more than 50 juveniles who had been claiming Unemployment Insurance Benefit for more than 12 days. In the 1920s the 'unemployment schools' had been run by local education authorities (Garside 1977).

The curricula of the institutions might be seen as substantially different from the quasi penal institutions for PA claimants. However there is another point of

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<sup>141</sup> TNA Lab19/79, 1937 Draft report of committee on authorised courses of instruction for unemployed boys and girls

comparison: aside from poor law detention there were also 'courses of instruction' put on for claimants of insurance benefit and extended benefit, although as discussed attendance would have been on a voluntary basis. Files of the Ministry of Labour show a debate over the provision of physical instruction classes to the unemployed. The maintenance of physical fitness of the unemployed was seen as an important objective and an important facet of employability. The Ministry provided certificates with which the claimants attending physical classes could demonstrate their fitness to prospective employers who were concerned they might not be able to "stand up to the work offered"<sup>142</sup>. In the curricula of JICs there was an emphasis on physical education as means of maintaining capacity for physical labour. Health and bodily fitness were a constant theme in discourses on poverty at the time. In an industrial setting, the physical strength of the worker was a key variable in determining their employability but also in a wider imagery of the body, the physical degeneracy of the pauper had also long been a semi moralised aspect of discourses of pauperism. As in the JIC the curriculum of such an instruction centre was set at a level below the vocational, designed to maintain a general 'morale' and 'employability' rather than prepare for a specific job. Pope writes that some juveniles "developed previously unrecognised abilities in woodwork, metalwork or commerce... For the majority, however, the practical aims of those providing and running the Centres were essentially negative ones of keeping them out of trouble" (Pope 1978 p16). The Centres usually included some school subjects like English and Maths and there were sometimes additional classes like civics or general knowledge and the occasional use of outside speakers or visits. But for the most part the core curriculum was handicrafts of a fairly basic nature for boys, domestic subjects for girls and physical training (Pope 1978).

In the curriculum of the Birmingham JICs there were some differences however with the national picture. These differences can also be seen as important to addressing the question on whether the JIC was seen as a form of detention or as

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<sup>142</sup> TNA Lab19/32 Letter to Leggett Oct 1937.

an educational institution. The JICs were re-established in Birmingham when the Ministry of Labour placed a statutory responsibility on local authorities to do so. Birmingham reported that:

“It was thought desirable in April 1930 to re-open the schools which had previously been known as Unemployment Schools, but which now became [known] by the better title of Junior Instruction Centres. Several hundreds of boys and girls put in a daily attendance, while others attended part-time, and it was thought possible to help many of them by ensuring that they spent some hours during the week in learning crafts, in physical exercises, and in revising certain academic subjects which many of them were found to have forgotten”<sup>143</sup>

Birmingham’s JIC opened in April 1930, with caseloads rapidly increasing. Throughout 1931 the Unemployment Insurance caseload was consistently over a thousand and JIC daily attendance at 400-500. At the beginning of 1933 it was reported that the preceding year had been “one of frequent and extreme fluctuations in industry, as in other areas of national life. It is difficult to imagine that any period of like length could present more or greater problems to those seeking to minister to the industrial and moral well-being of youth”<sup>144</sup>. Attendance at the JIC remained high until falling substantially in the second half of 1933.

Evidence from Birmingham shows what might have been when possible with a more specific employment focus to the training than the national requirement. The 1933 annual report of the Juvenile Employment and Welfare Sub-committee for instance attributes the employment of 50 boys directly to their having been taught the use

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<sup>143</sup> Birmingham JEWSC BCC 1/BH/14/1/1/9, JEWSC Annual Report 1929-1930.

<sup>144</sup> Birmingham JEWSC BCC 1/BH/14/1/1/11, JEWSC 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Report 1932-1933.

of Micrometre and Vernier precision measurement techniques used in engineering<sup>145</sup>. The more general:

“practical work of the School<sup>146</sup> has included woodwork, handwork in brass, tin-smithing, gauge making, electrical work, general property repairs, general motor repairs, mechanism of the internal combustion engine and boot repairs. In all shops drawings and diagrams had to be made together where possible with the necessary mathematical calculations.”<sup>147</sup>

Elsewhere this programme appeared to be oriented to the industries of Birmingham. There was preparation for work in the growing motor industry as well as electronics: “[e]lectrical- construction of various circuits, repairs to house bells etc”<sup>148</sup> and skilled manual work. “Science lessons on metallurgy were given with direct reference to the industries of Birmingham, and as the majority of the boys had been connected with the metal trades, they showed very keen interest” (ibid), specialist metalwork accounting for a great many of the city’s small to medium employers (Briggs 1953). Many of the skills taught involved repair and maintenance rather than manufacture; this might indicate that they were to be directed into the small firms dedicated to this work. These employers would not have the apprenticeship tracks of the large manufacturing firms.

Birmingham’s records about their JIC tend to focus upon the unemployment of boys, with girls usually discussed as a secondary group<sup>149</sup>. Where girls’

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<sup>145</sup> Birmingham JEWSC BCC 1/BH/14/1/1/11, JEWSC 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Report 1932-1933.

<sup>146</sup> Note that despite the official change of the names of the institutions from “Unemployment Schools” to JICs, officials continue to label the centre as a ‘school’.

<sup>147</sup> Birmingham JEWSC BCC 1/BH/14/1/1/10, JEWSC Annual Report 1930-1931.

<sup>148</sup> Birmingham JEWSC BCC 1/BH/14/1/1/11, JEWSC 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Report 1932-1933.

<sup>149</sup> There is consistently much less discussion of the unemployment of girls in the files of the Birmingham JEWSC.

treatment in the JIC is discussed the nature of the JIC as a segregated institution with different classes and curricula is highlighted:

“The curriculum on the girls’ side had a very practical bearing as in almost every case girls asked if they might bring to the school some special work in which they were interested. Dressmaking, Needlework, Embroidery and various handicrafts were especially popular. Cooking was a favourite subject. Commercial work, Household accounts, Hygiene Civics and Nature Study made less general appeal to the majority of the girls. Physical Training was not very popular except for the section which dealt with swimming. Singing was a source of pleasure not only to the girls, but to the many visitors to the school.”<sup>150</sup>

Girls’ attendance at the JIC was consistently lower and aspects of the description above might suggest that their instruction was given a lower priority; for instance the bringing in of work from home could suggest that there was little to do. Partially this could also be linked to the opinion of the authorities that their working lives would prove short; “because of their ultimate responsibilities great care must be taken in finding progressive situations” for young men while for girls “their future and their immediate employment are irreconcilable” i.e. that they would probably leave work upon marriage. This curriculum makes sense in the context of a view of women’s future as dependency on men. Policy priority was to find young men the kind of work which would enable them to fulfil their envisioned roles as the heads of self-sufficient families.

### 7.3 Migrant juveniles

Junior Transfer Centres were for those juveniles awaiting transference under the Industrial Transference Schemes. These centres aimed to prepare juveniles from the ‘depressed areas’ for employment in their destinations. There was also an

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<sup>150</sup> Birmingham JEWSC BCC 1/BH/14/1/1/10, JEWSC Annual Report 1930-1931.

ambition that some of these be residential camps where “boys can by a short period of healthy open-air life be prepared morally and physically prepared for employment in other areas”<sup>151</sup>. The bulk of their payment would be taken to pay for the costs of these residential centres, but the Ministry of Labour and the UAB debated whose responsibility it should be to pay the ‘pocket money’ of the juveniles<sup>152</sup>.

Juveniles were transferred or not depending on assessments of their ‘transfer value’ (ITB 1928). ‘Transfer value’ was composed partially of medical assessments. For instance an extract from the report of the Commissioner for the Special Areas in 1936<sup>153</sup> shows that they were alarmed by the number of potential transferees rejected on medical grounds. There were often disputes between the national and local authorities over who the receiving authorities were willing to take. Many authorities were reluctant to take juveniles for reason of wishing to prioritise their own unemployed; for example Birmingham was viewed by the Ministry of Labour as not doing enough to co-operate with the scheme<sup>154</sup> in 1935-6. Disputes over the degree of cooperation appropriate show the reluctance of local authorities to become responsible for juveniles who may end up as unemployed. In a way this is unsurprising given the concern of LAs with Settlement (see chapter 5). For instance in December 1934 Birmingham’s JEWSC received a letter from the Ministry of Labour stating that many local authorities had not done enough to cooperate with transference. Most transferees had gone to locations where the Ministry was directly responsible for receiving them rather than the LAs, and the Ministry argued that LAs should not regard small numbers of local unemployed juveniles as a good enough reason to withhold co-operation<sup>155</sup>. Birmingham’s reply promised that its officers would visit Liverpool and arrange the transfer of 50 boys and 25 girls to stay

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<sup>151</sup> TNA LAB 19/42 Letter sent to 63 LEAs 21<sup>st</sup> November 1934.

<sup>152</sup> TNA LAB19/63 24<sup>th</sup> October 1934 Emerson’s minute.

<sup>153</sup> TNA LAB 19/42 Extract from the Second Report of the Commissioner for the Special Areas.

<sup>154</sup> TNA LAB 19/42 Extract from yearly report on juvenile work October 1935 to March 1936.

<sup>155</sup> Birmingham JEWSC BCC 1/BH/14/1/1/13 Letter from Min of Lab (T W Phillips) Re Industrial Transference Dec 34.

in lodgings through the city as a first wave of transferees. But they stressed that “it is important that their [Our] officers should visit Liverpool and interview as many boys and girls as possible with a view to selecting those who are considered to be of suitable types for taking up such work in Birmingham”. The Ministry’s reply countered that after the first visit Liverpool should select the transferees, and that Birmingham should make contact with a greater range of locations, particularly South Wales and North East England. The Birmingham authorities were aiming to control the kind of migrants they received; they were seeking to avoid becoming responsible for the relief of unemployed migrants by attempting to select only the most employable candidates.

Those who were transferred would spend time in an ‘after care’ regime. Several authorities constructed hostels to supervise and provide subsidised accommodation to transferees. In part this was necessitated by juvenile’s low wages which were generally insufficient to support independent living. However, these institutions were also justified by a desire to prevent transferred juveniles falling into bad influences in the new cities. Authorities in the Ministry of Labour’s North Eastern division thought that the establishment of a hostel for transferred girls in their destination in the Midlands might help overcome the objections of parents to the transfer of their daughters<sup>156</sup>. Policy aimed to place juveniles in contact with ‘after-care’ from the receiving area authority who would be responsible for their welfare and in reporting back to the area they had come from.

So, the institutional treatment for those migrant juveniles accepted by the receiving areas resembles that of the claimants in the JIC. The training centres for those about to be transferred have similar objectives to the JICs as well as the physical training classes offered to adult claimants. However the hostels offered a

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<sup>156</sup> TNA LAB 19/42 S.R Todd to B.L Power 21<sup>st</sup> January 1936.

paternalistic form of treatment, seen as appropriate to children away from the influences of the home.

#### 7.4 Placement work

Regarding young people in the JIC there arose the question on what action should be taken to get them back into work. After all the JIC was intended to cater for short spells of unemployment. 'Instruction' was preferred to 'training' and 'education' and it was at a level below the vocational. Additionally, there was an effect of encouraging job search. However, the authorities still faced some challenge in placing the unemployed into work. There was an effort ongoing to introduce 'scientific' principles into careers guidance. In 1929 the Birmingham JEWSC began an experiment to introduce psychological testing for school leavers to inform vocational guidance<sup>157</sup>. The Committee's officers gave lectures at schools to encourage the use of their placement services and believed that "There is no doubt that in the majority of cases the discussion of employment which had taken place at the School Conferences had borne fruit"<sup>158</sup>. Regarding the unemployed juveniles the committee would undertake 'intensive canvassing' of employers on behalf of juveniles which was regarded as having had a "very marked" effect<sup>159</sup>. 'Intensive canvassing' was referenced as having secured posts for 'special cases' i.e. juveniles with particular problems accessing the labour market. One such example was that of a boy who had 'tramped and ridden' down from Edinburgh where he reported that the local authorities had become sick of him which was verified by contact during which the Edinburgh authorities called him "a real black sheep" and a "dog with a bad name"<sup>160</sup>, for whom the authorities had secured work and accommodation. Another case shows that racial discrimination was a feature of the labour market, dealing with the case of an unemployed juvenile who was described as "[a] coloured boy" whom "employers refused to accept". Here the "[s]pecial

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<sup>157</sup> Birmingham JEWSC BCC 1/BH/14/1/1/7 Minute of March 1929.

<sup>158</sup> Birmingham JEWSC BCC 1/BH/14/1/1/11 20<sup>th</sup> Annual report January 1933.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Birmingham JEWSC BCC 1/BH/14/1/1/12 March 1934 JEWSC annual report comment on relations with employers.

canvas [was] unsuccessful. Submitted to many current jobs – unsuccessful. A member of Committee induced a personal friend to employ boy” and in this job he was reported to be “doing excellently”<sup>161</sup>.

### 7.5 Summary

This chapter examined the different nature of institutions used to detain the different categories of the poor, introduced in Chapter 5. Under the poor law to be institutionalised was a disgrace and stigmatising and deterrent institutions continued in the Workhouses and Casual Wards. The chapter then asked what being mandated to attend the JIC meant. Evidence of institutionalisation provides another dimension to the view of the unemployed held, as in Research Question 1, as well as illuminating the conduct of a form of conditionality as in Research Question 2. This question is about the degree of institutional stigmatisation, whether or not claimants were marked as paupers by being placed inside. However, an examination of the practices of the JIC reveal it to be a different sort of institution.

The institutions may well have had an advantage from local administration as they were able to adjust their curricula locally to adapt to the needs of local labour markets. The JICs appear to have been mainly thought of as a labour market rather than an educational institution.

The chapter has contributed to the understanding of juvenile unemployment which forms a large part of the thesis. It was clear that the juvenile was a separate category to the adult claimant and could not be treated in the manner of the pauper. The type of discipline imposed was genuinely ‘more of the school than the prison’, unlike the PA institutions which were quasi-penal. This examination of PA

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

institutions shows that their conduct reflects the view of their subjects as without rights. There were also distinctions drawn between young migrant workers.

Amongst the socially marginalised in the Casual Wards there was some allowance for the 'reclamation' of the young who had not fallen into the habits of vagrancy. In the Transference system a voluntary ethos with regard to migration predominated, this also depended on judgements on the 'quality' 'transfer value' and employability of potential transferees.

In the next chapter, the thesis shifts to a comparison of the policies that have been examined over the last four chapters with those found since 2010. Since 2010 the government has shifted the project of 'welfare reform' into a new gear embarking on what has been billed as the biggest change to the welfare state since Beveridge. What resemblance does this have to the practices discussed? Is neoliberal 'welfare reform' a return to practices from the past?

## Chapter 8: Post 2010: neo-liberalism and moral ordering in a residual benefit system

“So Mr Williamson, what have you done to find gainful employment since your last signing on date?” (Sleaford Mods *Jobseeker* 2014)

In Chapters 5, 6 and 7 the findings of the research project and archive exploration were set out. These three chapters examined the operation of the benefit system in Britain in the 1930s. Chapter 5 examined the distinctions between different groups of claimants, Chapter 6 looked at the conditions attached to benefits and Chapter 7 examined the institutions which sought to ‘reform’ the unemployed. Now it is time to turn attention to Research Question 3, which asks what similarities and differences can be observed between this system and that existing in the present day. The focus is on the policy of the Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition Government of 2010-2015; a government which billed its policies as the most significant changes to the welfare state since its post-war inception and as a leap toward ‘21<sup>st</sup> century welfare’. The question is what the examination of the 1930s over the previous chapters can say about welfare reform post 2010 and to what extent the theoretical and methodological framework of Chapter 3 can be used to highlight and analyse similarities and differences.

This chapter is structured as follows. Section 8.1 establishes the post 2010 context for comparison with the 1930s. It describes some of the key ‘welfare reforms’ introduced by the Coalition government and makes some comment on the social and political context into which the reforms were introduced, including the strength of opposition to the measures. It finishes with a description of the labour market, changed greatly from that of the 1930s. Section 8.2 looks at similarities between the two periods, continuities between the discursive construction of unemployment and the young unemployed and the technologies of power used to

govern them. 8.3 Looks at differences which can be observed, in particular the decline of contribution-based benefits for the 'respectable unemployed' and escalations in conditionality and sanctions.

### 8.1 Welfare benefits since 2010

Since the 2008 financial crisis, but especially during the 2010-2015 Coalition Government and subsequent Conservative Government, the control of public spending became a key political priority. "Austerity is a form of voluntary deflation in which the economy adjusts through the reduction of wages, prices, and public spending to restore competitiveness" (Blyth 2013 p2). This was the key policy response to the 2008 crisis. In this context the benefit system has been a major area for cuts. The post 2010 administration has revived the Thatcherite critique of the welfare state to embark on state retrenchment policies among the most severe of the developed countries affected by this 'great recession' (Kersbergen et al 2014).

The Coalition Government promised "a strong, progressive coalition inspired by the values of freedom, fairness and responsibility" (Cameron and Clegg 2010 p8). 'Responsibility' would be the key watchword with regard to social policy, meaning "providing help for those who cannot work, training and targeted support for those looking for work, but sanctions for those who turn down reasonable offers of work or training" (Cameron and Clegg 2010 p23). For all departments this meant "strong financial discipline at all levels of government" (ibid p16). The aim was to restructure state institutions cast as bureaucratic and overgrown. This restructuring, it was argued, would contain debt and limit the demand for future borrowing (Taylor-Gooby 2012), as well as demonstrating the 'credibility' of the UKs governance to investors. Chancellor George Osborne's Treasury significantly embraced the 'Treasury view' of fiscal policy; the 'crowding out' objection to any fiscal expansion and the priority given to deficit reduction (Eichengreen 2015). Staunch believers in Thatcherite doctrines on the limited state, Cameron and

Osborne instead of learning the lessons of the 1930s, saw the crisis as an opportunity to reorganise Britain's welfare state.

To some extent many aspects of coalition policy had been prefigured by changes in the years of the New Labour Governments (1997-2010). Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) was introduced by a Conservative government in 1996 but the escalations in conditionality it involved were maintained and developed throughout New Labour's time in government. "From its arrival in office, New Labour had consistently declared its intention to 'rebuild the welfare state around work'" (Deacon and Patrick 2010 p162). JSA was "a pivotal change which intensified monitoring of unemployed claimants' job-seeking behaviour" (Watts and Fitzpatrick 2018). For jobseekers the Jobseeker's Agreement, added to JSA in 1997, involved signing a document modelled on a contract that set out the 'rights and responsibilities' of the claimant. The Agreement made claimants responsible for providing documentary evidence of their job search activities in order to maintain their claims. This escalation in conditionality for the unemployed, relabelled 'jobseekers', was accompanied by increases in conditionality for other groups of claimants as well.

For young claimants the New Deal for Young People (NDYP) aimed at those aged from 18-24 who had been receiving JSA for over 6 months, was introduced immediately upon New Labour entering government in 1997 (IER 1999). The NDYP accepted Conservative arguments in favour of applying compulsion to the young unemployed. It could compel claimants to perform mandatory work - including jobs in the Environmental Task Force, the voluntary sector, a subsidised private sector job, or full-time training. New Labour "'youth policy' conceal[ed] a substantial diminution of the rewards and rights that Labour governments have traditionally extended to the young" (Mizen 2003 p467). This was accompanied by similar escalations in criminal justice policy, for instance the introduction of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs).

Another target group for escalated conditionality under New Labour was lone parents. Whilst the New Deal for Lone Parents was voluntary, from 2001 mandatory Work Focussed Interviews were introduced for claimants of Income Support. Subsequent governments have increased the frequency of these interviews (Rafferty and Wiggan 2017). Additionally policy began to transfer IS claimants with 'older children' to JSA by reducing the age at which the claimants youngest child entitled them to IS (House of Commons Library 2010), this has shifted from 16 before 2008 to 7 when New Labour left office (Miller 2018) and 3 in April 2017. Lewis (2001) argues that policy in this period became increasingly informed by assumptions about women's ability to participate in labour markets that overlooked the continuing constraints that their childcare responsibilities posed.

In terms of overall policy however New Labour provided increased investment in public services. It reduced pensioner and child poverty but actually increased working age poverty (Watts and Fitzpatrick 2018). Conditionality was justified by the increased employment opportunities provided by a relatively strong economy (Deacon 2007), to embrace activation was justified by New Labour as the unemployed workers reciprocal relationship with an enabling state. It is perhaps odd given the increases in conditionality under New Labour that the Coalition upon reaching power portrayed these preceding governments as having fostered a 'dependency culture.

It was New Labour which commissioned the Freud Report of 2007 which recommended "intensive, individualized support" (2007 p6) for the 'workless' including increasing conditionality for lone parents and claimants of disability benefits. The report received cross party support and "was heralded as setting out the principles for welfare-to-work policies in the forthcoming decade" (Rees et al 2014 p224). It set the template for New Labour's reformulation of their previous New Deal programmes into the Flexible New Deal which contracted out back to

work support for those out of work for over a year to the private sector. This approach was extended by the Coalition as The Work Programme.

Under the coalition a series of 'welfare reforms' have been aimed at attacking 'welfare dependency' and dependent populations. The introduction of Universal Credit in 2013 integrated Income Based Jobseekers Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. Universal Credit began to roll out in 2013 and despite repeated delays it is still expected to be fully implemented by 2022 when more than 7 million people will receive it (Foley 2017).

The increases in conditionality associated with the shift to Universal Credit were front loaded and moved into the existing system. The escalated sanctions regime was brought in earlier, in October of 2012. The introduction of the Claimant Commitment into Jobseeker's Allowance to replace the earlier Jobseeker's Agreement in 2013 (Reeves and Loopstra 2017), established a new 'contract' between claimants and Jobcentre Plus, setting out the much more stringent requirements placed upon claimants to seek work. The Work Programme was also introduced for JSA claimants and those on the ESA Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) obliging them to participate in 'workfare' enforced labour schemes. These measures were accompanied by a drive to reassess and reclassify the claimants of disability benefits, claimants of Incapacity Benefit (IB) being required to reapply for Employment and Support Allowance. This benefit was considerably more difficult to qualify for. Claimants undertook the highly controversial Work Capability Assessment and were placed on that basis in one of two groups of ESA: the WRAG to which conditionality previously unseen in disability benefits was applied or the Support Group for those considered the most disabled. Alternatively, IB claimants were found to be 'fit for work' and required to claim JSA.

There have been cuts to housing support for young people. The shared room rate of Local Housing Allowance (which determines the rate of Housing Benefit to which the claimant was entitled) was extended from single under 25s to under 35s from April 2012 (House of Commons Library 2014). The shared room rate was one which sought to peg the eligible rent in an area to be equivalent to a room in a shared house rather than a one bedroom flat. Further cuts to Housing Benefit for 18-21s were introduced in April 2017. Significant savings were achieved by reductions in Income Support and Tax Credit eligibility, and reductions in the value of Housing Benefit awards (Lupton et al 2015). Cuts have been estimated to be equivalent to 13% of Treasury expenditure (Taylor-Gooby 2012): the largest in the post-war era. "The Coalition's long-term goals demand that state spending is not just cut back in the immediate future, but set on an entirely new trajectory" (Taylor-Gooby 2012 p67).

This belief in the necessity of restoration of liberal economies was rather reminiscent of the climate of the 1930s. Although Coalition politicians would seek to avoid the comparison, the attitudes to spending are very similar; the Osborne Treasury and National Government may well have regarded each other with some sympathy. The May Commission's (1931) arguments that the burden of social service expenditure was a prime cause of public debt are much like ones seen from 2010-2015. Economies on social spending were seen as key to resetting the nation on a more stable footing. The UK government argued this was important to maintaining the 'credibility' of the UK in international markets, to demonstrate the capacity and authority of the state. It was also misguided. In both periods governments cut expenditure to 'balance the budget' at the wrong moment and so worsened the crisis (Eichengreen 2015). In discourse this national narrative also filtered down to individuals; setting the nation on a sure footing required instilling discipline on individuals. The same concerns existed on a micro and macro level, so arguably what made a state and an individual disciplined and stable were portrayed in similar ways. The economy was portrayed as analogous to a household exercising thrift: for the state to be disciplined its citizens must not overdraw upon it.

Discursively austerity narratives retain a resemblance to earlier conservative framings of the crisis of the welfare state, like the 'ungovernability' narratives of the 1970s and 1980s (Offe 1985). In these narratives excessive welfare spending and the 'stickiness' of entitlements threatens the process of capital accumulation. The Thatcherite solution was to shrink the state and stop it from 'crowding out' private enterprise; this solution is being repeated under austerity.

A key difference from the 1930s is the centralisation of administration. From 2010-2015 the welfare benefit system was run almost entirely from Whitehall. There was no system of local relief equivalent to Public Assistance in England and Wales despite the localisation of support for council tax and the social fund. Although in Scotland a Scottish Welfare Fund has replaced the abolished Social Fund (scot.gov 2018). Centralisation within government continued steadily throughout the intervening decades. For instance, DWP decision making on sanctions was centralised within the department itself; the tripartite appeals bodies of the 1930s have been replaced. The Treasury under George Osborne was dominant over the spending departments. This sometimes meant conflicts between the 'constructive' aims of the benefit system as a disciplinary system to modify subjectivity, and between the perceived need for economy. For example, cuts to benefit levels could undermine the work incentives that were maintained by in-work subsidies; a system of sanctions and disallowances could be undermined as a behavioural tool if sanctioning was used in an excessive or arbitrary way to save money. Similarly third-sector observers have been increasingly concerned that cuts to Universal Credit will undermine its stated objectives and principles of 'making work pay' and reducing poverty (Foley 2017) (Finch 2016).

Whilst the thesis has largely discussed unemployment, *underemployment* posed an increasing problem for policy makers. In the system since 2010 in-work recipients of state support have greatly outnumbered the fully unemployed. The Institute for Fiscal Studies in 2016 found that the unemployment claimant count was 692,000

against 4,400,000 of claimants of Tax Credits and 4,781,000 claimants of Housing Benefit (Hood and Keiller 2016, figure 3.1) as well as accounting for considerably more spending. In 2015-16 benefits for unemployed people accounted for 1.11% of welfare spending against 12.82% on benefits for people with low incomes. In their search for solutions to this problem governments have largely focussed on supply side interventions. With the introduction of In-work Conditionality in Universal Credit (Dwyer and Wright 2014), disciplinary welfare has been extended to groups never before subjected to it such as part-time workers working over 16 hours per week and the employed partners of unemployed claimants. This shows that government conceived of this in-work receipt (even if not openly discussed in this manner) as a source of social dependency. Like the casual workers before them, huge numbers of workers were unable to earn enough to be independent of the state. Or arguably employers used the system of welfare benefits to subsidise wages below the real cost of living.

These cuts in expenditure have had a disproportionate impact on women. Social security cuts affect women more due to their lower earnings, their being more likely to head single parent households and their role as carers (TUC 2015). The shift to Universal Credit with its integration of multiple benefits into one payment has also been criticised for transferring income within the household away from women (Bennet 2015). Other measures such as the time limiting contribution-based ESA to a period of 12 months before the benefit becomes means tested can also reduce women's independent incomes within households. These measures reproduced assumptions about the household as a unit and enforced traditional dependencies on women.

In the 1930s women were largely viewed as dependents in social policy and had a great deal of difficulty proving otherwise. From 2010-2015 there was no longer a formal regime of discrimination in the benefit system in the same manner. This means that conditionality was applied to both genders in a 'gender blind' way. For

instance, the enforced work applied to able bodied men in the Birmingham PA system was only for this gender group, but Mandatory Work Activity (MWA) was applied to both in 2010-2015.

Expectations about women's working lives have changed and they are now included as part of the core workforce. When discussing unemployment since 2010 the object has shifted in policy discourse from one of unemployment to 'worklessness'. Worklessness as a concept extends the problem to disabled people and lone parents, groups who previously had not been expected to work but who are now seen as problematic. Those suffering from 'worklessness' have increasingly been understood to have sacrificed rights to full citizenship. The term has expanded to include women (Lister 1998), whose 'dependency' earlier in the century had been taken for granted (Fraser and Gordon 1994). Lone parents have been increasingly pushed toward employment from the 1990s through New Labour, Coalition and Conservative governments and are now a significant claimant group and subjects for intervention. This contrasts somewhat with the situation in the 1930s when their primary source of support was assumed to be their husbands, the Poor Law aimed to deal with men whenever possible. From the 1990s the aim has been to move them into the workforce and to subject them to conditionality. In the 1930s women appeared very little in discussions of the unemployment problem, only as a special category of unemployed - as an 'anomaly'. Married women in the 1930s were seen as dependents and policy makers sought to exclude from state benefits on the grounds that they were their husbands' legal responsibility. From the 1990s onwards very different assumptions about women's working lives have informed policy. Two-earner families have become an expected norm: a shift from a 'male breadwinner' to an 'adult worker' model of household support (Lewis 2001, 2002). Dual-earner assumptions underpin job search conditionality. Couple JSA claims have enforced job search on both parties. For Lewis (2001) these changing expectations ignore the constraints that women's caring responsibilities place on their workforce participation.

Disabled claimants are also discussed differently. The transition from Incapacity Benefit to Employment and Support Allowance, and then to Universal Credit has come with a series of escalations of conditionality applied to a group who were still technically regarded as unable to work. This is a 'tightening-up' of eligibility criteria (or conditions of category (Clasen and Clegg 2007), government was ratcheting up its policing people with health problems' access to out of work benefits. In the 1930s unemployment benefits were paid at a higher rate than support for disabled people. In discussions of the 'capable and available' criteria it can be seen that many workers sought to prove to the state that they were capable of working<sup>162</sup>. This is the inverse of the situation since the 1990s where disability benefits have been higher than those for the unemployed.

Generally speaking the subject in narratives of unemployment (or 'worklessness'?) is less male and less able bodied under 'welfare reform' than it was in the 1930s. With more inclusive labour markets has come a more inclusive social policy. However the other side of this is that the 'reciprocity' based justifications for conditionality, and a paternalistic model of 'support' toward work, apply to more 'workless' people. They are no longer seen as the natural dependents on able bodied men, but as potential workers to be activated.

### 8.1.1 Opposition and constraints on austerity

Austerity in the benefits system from 2010-2015, in a way quite contrary to the 1930s, enjoyed a high level of public support (Hudson and Lunt 2016). The Coalition's programme met with a degree of public approval. The British Social Attitudes Survey shows the public becoming increasingly critical of benefits and benefit recipients and increasingly opposed to spending money to support them. It reports that "agreement with spending more on welfare benefits for the poor fell

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<sup>162</sup> TNA AST7/64 1934-1938 Capable and Available for work: Interpretation.

from 61% in 1989 to 27% in 2009, and remained low, at 30% in 2014” (Taylor and Taylor-Gooby 2015 p1). This steady growth of anti-welfare sentiment has broken the tendency for public sympathy to increase in times of high unemployment, evident in the 1930s’ depression. This has been attributed to a variety of factors from media demonization along with the phenomenon of ‘poverty porn’<sup>163</sup> (Tyler 2015), to the changing orientation of the Labour party, to growing inequality in society undermining solidaristic impulses.

After its 2010 electoral defeat the Labour Party equivocated repeatedly in response to welfare cuts. Compared to the 1930s it provided a far less consistent defence of welfare entitlements. It was keen to move to neutralise the accusation of profligate spending by presenting itself as prepared to accept welfare cuts if implemented in a more pragmatic and humane manner. There were debates within the party as to whether to accept for instance the principle of the Household Benefit Cap, and an overall welfare spending cap. Continuing with the party’s policy during the New Labour period in government the party continued to regard intensive conditionality and behavioural regulation as justified in principle along contractualist lines (Deacon 2007). For example, in the 2013 debates surrounding the Reilly Wilson case, claimants who had been sanctioned for refusing Mandatory Work Activity placements were found by the High Court to have been misled over the nature of the mandating of the scheme (Court of Appeal Judgement 2013). This meant the government would have been obliged to backpay sanctioned JSA. The government response was to pass emergency legislation to avoid these payments and clarify the mandatory nature of MWA. In this situation the Labour party decided not to oppose this, instead taking the opportunity to affirm its support for the principle of sanctions. The then Labour Welfare Spokesman Liam Byrne misleadingly claimed that sanctions had been an eternal and inherent part of the UK’s benefit system since 1911 (Webster 2013). Rather than oppose welfare reform and its austerity

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<sup>163</sup> The phrase ‘poverty porn’ refers to a number of television programs which are argued to present poverty voyeuristically, and in particular out of work poverty as an object of moral disgust (Jensen 2014).

pretext the party largely chose to attempt to 'detoxify' its image as the 'welfare party' through a series of pledges to eliminate problematic dependency and even be 'tougher than the Tories' (Helm 2016) in a memorable phrase from Byrne's successor Rachel Reeves.

It can be argued that in some ways this state of affairs partly resembles that of the 1930s, in that the party both adhered to orthodox philosophies and sought to be seen as a 'national' (that is acceptable to middle class 'taxpayers') rather than class party (Miliband 2009), capable of fiscal prudence. There was also some continuity in attitudes to conditionality; Deacon (1976) shows that most Labour MPs failed to see the problem with the Genuinely Seeking Work Test which their government introduced. They saw themselves as the party of respectable workers not 'loafers' or 'casuals' and had faith in the ability of regimes of behavioural regulation to be able to tell the difference. However, it should be remembered that it was the unwillingness of Labour MPs to implement a 10% reduction in the cash values of benefits which brought down the Labour Government in 1931. Once again the difference was that in the 1930s a larger proportion of unemployed claimants were seen as respectable workers amid the mass unemployment of the 1930s. The predominance of underemployment and in-work poverty rather than mass unemployment has perhaps politically isolated the unemployed.

Chapter 4 discussed the National Unemployed Workers Movement (NUWM) which had a mass membership, claiming 100,000 at its peak in 1933 (Sevenson and Cook 1979), and was able to gain a great deal of public sympathy through its organisation of the hunger marches. The NUWM provided strong opposition to the use of unpaid work or residential labour camps. Post 2010 protest organisations such as Boycott Workfare have been much smaller organisations unable to directly oppose policy on the same scale despite enjoying some success in forcing the withdrawal of private companies from Mandatory Work Activity. The climate of public opinion

into which benefit changes were introduced has been very different, and protest groups have struggled to generate any truly mass dissent.

### 8.1.2 Changing labour markets

The labour market post 2010 is very different than in the 1930s (Eichengreen 2015); the service sector predominates and unionisation is low. In the 1930s there predominated an ideal of stable long-term careers as a guarantor of independence from the state. As mentioned in Chapter 4 this was predicated on an assumed gender division of labour where skilled men were responsible for preventing their families falling back upon the 'public purse'. The system was based on 'liberal and patriarchal principles' (Walters 2000) which problematised the failure of men to fulfil their given roles. The programme of the JIC was aimed at overcoming the problem of blind alley employment, and the Employment Exchange at decasualising the labour market. In this model youth was urged to reject short term gains e.g. the blind alley and take 'progressive' employment like apprenticeships. In the era of neo-liberal 'flexicurity' unemployed young people are urged to acquire 'work experience' through insecure short-term jobs if necessary. They are urged to utilize these experiences for human capital development to assist themselves to become employable for the next project (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007). Where young people have contact with the benefit system, the approach has been a 'work first' one.

While unemployment in the UK following the 2008 crisis has been lower than in the 1930s, as well as lower than in many comparable countries, but the UK's 'flexible' labour market has generated different problems. The growth of the underemployment problem and the necessity of a policy response has challenged the idea of good liberal 'independence'. Yet the problematisation of insecure work did not lead to any clear critique of the casual labour market on the part of the UK's government, instead the solutions envisioned have been increases and extensions

of the supply side conditionality applied to the precariously employed (Raffass 2017, DWP 2010).

This can be seen in the rhetoric accompanying the launch of the new benefit Universal Credit which pledged to incentivise and to mandate that claimants took even very small amounts of work (DWP 2010b). Universal Credit integrated in and out of work benefits. It aimed, through this integration to abolish the distinction between the two, to remove the need for reapplications as well as cliff-edges and uneven tapers (DWP 2012a). Its advocates envisioned a high-tech system which would “enable those with fluctuating earnings to receive benefit which is automatically adjusted through the receipt of ‘real-time information’” (Social Security Advisory Committee 2015 p5).

Neo-liberal employability is often synonymous with an ‘ethic of adaptability and self-management’ (Worth 2003). The view of insecure work in ‘welfare reform’ policy perhaps reflects the shift from employment security to employability security (Chertkovskya et al 2013) amid an ethic of ‘projective’ work (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007). That is, one in which the individual is expected to secure their independence through developing their capacity to adapt quickly to new roles, growing their human capital in each post in order to advance to the next. Boltanski and Chiapello’s (2007) investigation of this ethos of work was based on instructional books for management cadres, however this ethos has been extended downward to the lowest levels of the labour market.

Insecure and precarious work is increasingly prevalent in the UKs labour market. This has a particular relevance to those who have to claim unemployment benefits who are frequently engaged in a series of low paid insecure jobs in between claims, the ‘low-pay no-pay cycle’ (Shildrick 2010). This growth of insecurity has been discussed in the context of the ‘gig economy’ that is technologically enabled short term, often one off, jobs enabled by new online platforms. This adds to the

approximately 1.2 million workers employed indirectly by employment agencies (Taylor 2017). This sort of work was investigated by the Taylor Review of employment practices (2017) which found that it has become an increasingly prevalent feature of young people's transitions into the labour market. Another symptomatic feature of insecurity has been the 'zero hours' contract where an employee is expected to be available for work, but is not guaranteed any level of hours, hours being often allocated at very short notice. There are approximately 905,000 such contracts in the UK (2.8% of total jobs) of which a third are held by 16-25 year olds.

The way in which policy has been justified by a historical narrative has been inverted. De-casualisation drives in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Phillips and Whiteside 1985) were justified by a conception of state intervention as modern, as the state acquiring the capacity to intervene in the economy. This was seen as a process of rationalisation and development, in which sound management enabled the reform of the economy. In the 1930s there was a broad acceptance of the need for social services to help the cause of national efficiency, encompassing Fabian socialism and conservative and liberal pragmatism. Liberal reform was based on a changing understanding of the economy as based on "large combines, organisation, bureaucracy, human capital, and a more intricate and complex division of labor" (Esping-Andersen 1990 p63). There was a need to reconcile individualism with a greater degree of collective organisation in society, policy makers developed different models of political economy and different understandings of what liberalism meant.

One can compare these new employment practices with the casualism which so concerned inter-war policy makers, but their meaning has changed. Rather than representing an inefficient failure of industrial organisation, precarious work is seen as 'flexible' and a sign of a market mediated efficiency (CBI 2017). Neo-liberalism instead conceives of modernisation as a movement away from the state, while

social policy no longer builds efficiency but holds it back. In each period there was a construction of the ideal labour market, which underlined policy objectives. In each period the worker is encouraged to maintain their 'independence' from the state and to ideally not claim state support. Yet in the 1930s this was to be secured by his (as an overwhelmingly male subject) status within a trade which provided long term employment. In policy debates (at least until 2015) to argue for such a model of work or conception of it as an ideal was regarded as to hold out against modernity. Far from this security ensuring the efficient operation of labour (as in the critique of casualism) under neo-liberalism it would be regarded as stagnant and old fashioned. But since under the liberalism of the 1930s this was thought of so differently, this might enable a critique of the binaries 'flexibility/inflexibility' and 'security/precarity'.

The individual, rather than being demoralised by the lack of an organised working routine, has been seen as moralised by the flexible entrepreneurial activity involved in job search and taking jobs on as projects. The zero hours job has not been seen in the manner of the blind-alley one as a path to young people's unemployment but as an alternative to it; a step-ladder into more secure employment through the accumulation of 'work experience' and as a useful supplement to parental income or student loans (Oakley 2013) (Taylor 2013). The critique that by employing insecure labour a sector or industry is settling "down to batten on the taxation of other industries or of the general public in place of reforming their ways" (Beveridge 2015 p88) is not as influential as it was in the inter war years. This has been a shift in the nature of the justification used for social expenditure. Neo-classical/neo-liberal economics sees the individual as a kind of self-entrepreneur (Foucault 2010) a bearer of personal capital, whose personal characteristics are reconceived as forms of capital. The language with which an efficient economy is described and thought of has changed. In an integrated industrial society, planning should be long term, there should be a continuity between the present and the future. Workers should acquire specialisms and integrate themselves into an

integrated industrial structure (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006). In the predominant grammar post 2010 this is not the case, on the contrary flexibility and impermanence have been preferred.

## 8.2 Similarities

The study of liberal welfare measures in the 1930s provides lessons for understanding post 2010 'welfare reform'. This section shows similarities between the technologies of power employed in the pre-welfare state era and those since 2010 and undermines the innovative and modern picture of 'welfare reform' painted by its advocates. For all that government promises '21<sup>st</sup> century welfare' many current measures have a long history; such as active job search and enforced work. Moreover, they illustrate that the political rationalities and pathologies of the UK's governing liberalism are strikingly similar in both periods under discussion.

We find similar methods are in place in both periods to discipline unemployed people and identify the 'scrounger'. For instance, the introduction of unpaid work schemes since 2010 has a clear precedent in Public Assistance. However the version of job search conditionality employed since 2010 more strongly resembles the Genuinely Seeking Work Test of the 1920s than policy in the 1930s, by which time it was regarded as a failure. What is common between eras is the behavioural nature of the interventions, specifically the desire to reform individuals through disciplinary technologies (Foucault 1977).

### 8.2.1 Dependency discourses since 2010: worklessness/dependency vs demoralisation

The post 2010 programme of 'welfare reform' has been justified by a new right style critique of the welfare state as "a vast, sprawling bureaucracy that can act to entrench, rather than solve, the problems of poverty and social exclusion" (DWP 2010 p15). Benefit rights and the absence of intensive behavioural regulation have been framed as 'writing off' claimants; for instance in the following statement from the thinktank set up by Iain Duncan Smith the Centre for Social Justice: "[w]hilst

some campaigners accuse this Government of being callous for its benefit cap, the truth is there has been a much more damaging welfare cap in these communities for years – an unjust cap on personal potential.” (CSJ 2013 p4). Hartley Dean (2012) notes the ‘high moral tone’ of ‘welfare reform’, which has been sold as a quasi-missionary project to reform the spirit of communities. Such fears of the ‘demoralising’ effect of receiving support as an unearned income resemble the writings of 1930s civil servants in the 1930s who believed that workers in the depressed areas had acquired a false expectation of benefit ‘as of a right’.

Fundamentally de-commodification (Offe 1985) of the wage relation has been framed as an attack on the human spirit. Social-psychological arguments about the benefits of employment have been employed in a paternalistic fashion to justify the coercions of active labour market policy. In times of high unemployment more and more “families [fail] to enjoy the financial and non-financial benefits of paid employment” (Gregg et al 2008). This discourse sets up work, waged work and indeed any waged work as the ‘pinnacle of human experience’ (Friedli and Stern 2015). It suppresses worker’s possible opposition to undesirable employment (Cole 2008), indeed it regards opposition as symptomatic of demoralisation.

‘Psychological conditionality’ the requirement to hold and to demonstrate affects and inclinations toward work, has played an increasing role within this system (Friedli and Stern 2015). This went as far as the Gregg report ‘*Realising Potential: A Vision for Personalised Conditionality and Support*’ (2008) describing conditionality as a form of “[p]romoting social inclusion<sup>164</sup>. That imposing requirements on individuals will shape behaviours and mean they acquire new skills and habits that will improve both their own and their family’s life chances” (2008 p23). This is a paternalistic justification for conditionality, it is in the interests of the poor to behave in certain ways whether or not they see it this way, so one can compel them too comply. This resembles the poor law administrator acting as “a guardian acting in the interests, but not necessarily in accordance with the wishes, of his wards”. This paternalism has usually operated below the surface and an ethic of ‘what

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<sup>164</sup> Emphasis in original.

works' (Brown 2015) has been used particularly where social scientists were brought in to provide justification for policy. Gregg's 'promoting social inclusion' is promoted as a universal good the meaning of which is uncontested. In this discourse what is 'included' are atomised individuals. No social conflict or even pluralism of interests between employers and workers is acknowledged as waged work becomes not even just a moral imperative, but a form of therapy.

Brown (2015) sees a key aspect of neo-liberal governance in the concept of Responsibilization which "especially as a social policy" burdens "the entity at the end of the pipeline. Responsibilization tasks the worker, student, consumer or indigent person with discerning and undertaking the correct strategies of self-investment and entrepreneurship for thriving and surviving" (Brown 2015 p133). This logic denigrates collectives and dependencies and renders the individual as one who is "expected to fend for itself (and blamed for its failure to thrive) *and* expected to act for the well-being of the economy (and blamed for *its* failure to thrive)" (ibid p134).

Implicit here is the centring of attitudinal problems as a cause of unemployment. Such projects make sense in the context of the DWP's responsibility "for promoting work as the best form of welfare" (DWP 2011 p8). The problematic developed here is one of the subjectivity of the 'workless', it is a disciplinary problematic. As was discussed in Chapter 3 policy is concerned with making sure that the unemployed possess the correct attitudes.

### 8.2.2 Unemployed communities in discourse

Unemployed communities have been described in terms of 'intergenerational worklessness' (see the discussion in section 2.1), a critique of communities' of high unemployment where workless parents are held to be failing to socialize young people into working habits and to be 'normalising' the receipt of unemployment benefits (e.g. Tinsley 2013). The young unemployed have been portrayed as lacking

qualities like punctuality and the ability to work under instruction; and to therefore be in need of discipline. The concern with maintenance of the habits of self-discipline was there in the 1930s as well, the enforcement of the working week played a key role in the case for enforced labour in the PA system. The social surveys of Bakke (1933) and the Pilgrim Trust (1938) were concerned with the effect of 'demoralisation' on communities. However whilst the concerns are similar the findings were very different. The social surveys of the 1930s tended to find that those unwilling to work represented only the smallest fraction of the unemployed, in contrast to the fixation of the 'dependency culture' theorists who have proved so influential since the 1980s.

The thesis of intergenerational worklessness (see section 2.1) set youth unemployment in the context of problematic communities in which "variations in both attitudes to rights and responsibilities and social norms around work and welfare can all contribute to creating clusters of worklessness" (Tinsley 2013 p30). These ideas have underpinned a broader view of the problems of poverty and inequality in Britain. In 2012 the government's proposals for new child poverty measurements to replace those set out in the 2010 Child Poverty Act (which was abolished in 2016) (Child Poverty Action Group 2017) argued that parental worklessness (a category adjacent to say the least with benefit receipt) was a key determinant of childhood life chances and should therefore be included in poverty measurements<sup>165</sup> (DWP 2012c). Iain Duncan Smith argued that:

"It cannot be right that experiences so vital to childhood, like seeing a parent go out to work or growing up in a stable family, are not reflected in our understanding of child poverty. Only through a better representation of the reality of children's lives will we truly know how many children are in poverty in the UK." (DWP 2012c p1)

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<sup>165</sup> The confusion of measurement and definition, and of poverty and life chances is a noteworthy feature of the document.

As noted in the earlier literature review chapter social scientists have been critical of these narratives of intergenerational worklessness e.g. Shildrick et al (2012). The question is to what extent they resemble those earlier narratives of demoralisation or of pauperism seen in the 1930s?

Each case involves a problematisation of communities and of families. There is of course the long standing liberal preoccupation with the 'bottomless purse' and the dangers of de-commodification to workforce participation but there are also more specific resemblances. In the 1930s the unemployment of juveniles was seen as storing up problems for later on as young men would fail to take up their intended role as the heads of self-sufficient families. Post 2010 there are similar concerns with learned routines of work and young people failing to acquire an ethic of independence. These revive the view of the pauper, characterised by incapacity, distant from the labour market and in need of discipline.

These are questions of "the welfare of its population, the improvement of its condition, the increase of its wealth, longevity, health, etc" (Foucault 1991 p100), questions of governmentality. In liberal government, waged work was central to their acquisition of all of these things. Work was centralised as a source of social integration, as the 'best way out of poverty', as providing physical and mental health benefits and as a source of social status. In the 1930s also waged labour was viewed as central to social integration as well as providing status to individuals and proof of their morality.

In this context youth becomes an important subject for intervention, misshapen by the experience of a poverty of socialisation and by the 'workless' lives of their parents. The concern with problematic socialisation is evident in the category of NEETs (those Not in Education Employment or Training), but also in the identifications of problem communities e.g. in the Troubled Families Programme. It is central to the account of poverty in government discourse as caused by deficiency and cultural pathology.

### 8.2.3 The re-introduction of 'workfare'

The 2012 Welfare Reform Act, in addition to ratcheting up job search conditionality also introduced ostensibly novel measures in fact eerily reminiscent of older technologies of power (Fletcher 2015). Chief amongst these in terms of controversy was Mandatory Work Activity (MWA): the practice of mandating that claimants of unemployment benefits who had been transferred to the Work Programme undertake a period of work (usually a month), unpaid save for the standard rate of benefit, for a private (or sometimes voluntary) sector employer. The programme was justified as a means of boosting work experience 'employability' and soft skills DWP's White Paper *Universal Credit: Welfare that Works* describes the programme thus:

"Where advisers believe a jobseeker will benefit from experiencing the habits and routines of working life, they will have the power to refer the recipient to Mandatory Work Activity. The placement will be for up to four weeks and aimed at helping the recipient develop the labour-market discipline associated with full-time employment such as attending on time and regularly, carrying out specific tasks and working under supervision" (DWP 2010 p29).

This was concerned with teaching the experience of a full time working week and associated 'soft' skills and dispositions: obeying orders, standards of personal appearance, norms of language and conduct which the subjects have been deemed to lack. The Work Programme was framed as being particularly aimed at young people. Claimants aged from 18-24 would be referred to (and mandated to join) the programme after 9 months on JSA as opposed to 12 months for older claimants (DWP 2012b). This was a form of technology of power which mandates that subjects adopt a form of positive affect toward work, a form of 'self-creation'. This was not unlike the aspiration of the Minister of Health that the man set to work on

PA should “improve his capacity as a potential worker”<sup>166</sup> through the acquisition of a previously lacked discipline. In each period the programmes placed great stress on the importance that a full working week be worked. Wiggan (2015) sees MWA as a means to lower reservation wages and to overcome working class resistance to the message so often expressed by policy makers that *any* job is better than none. There is also a ‘deterrent’ effect (2015 p334); the offer of unpaid work was a means of ‘veridification’, forcing those reluctant to work to abandon their claims, as in the Poor Law.

We can observe a great deal of continuity between MWA and the treatment of ‘able-bodied’ unemployed men on Birmingham’s Public Assistance programme (see section 6.2). In both the aim was stated as being to improve employability, with an insistence on a full working week as a discipline especially for the poorly socialised young. The placements are meant to resemble waged work in the sense of imparting time discipline, and obedience.

What however has changed is the model of political economy within which this practice has been revived. The schemes themselves show some signs of this. The placements have gone from being restricted to able bodied men in the 1930s to including women and some claimants of disability benefits. While in most PA schemes work was undertaken for the municipal authority, post 2010 under the auspices of the Work Programme MWA was undertaken in private sector employers. Additionally, many MWA placements were in the service and retail sectors rather than the ‘pick and shovel’ work of the Birmingham scheme. This partially reflects the hostility of neo-liberals to state created employment, something that was visible in the 1930s as well, as public works were widely regarded as failures and/or unjustifiable expenses to place on local ratepayers. In the present day these ‘workfare’ placements are contrasted with the Future Jobs Fund of Gordon Brown’s Labour administration, which provided jobs (for fixed

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<sup>166</sup> TNA MH57/6 1932 Public Assistance Conference: Draft note for the Ministers remarks.

terms of 1 year at 25 hours per week at the minimum wage) in the public and third sectors for young people who had been unemployed for 6 months or more (Portes 2012), and was criticised by the Conservatives as 'ineffective' (BBC Newsbeat 2011) in a manner which recalls the inter war critique of public works as generating 'artificial' employment. Liberal orthodoxies in each period held that real prosperity comes from private initiative and government financed employment could only be a fetter to this development.

#### 8.2.5 Additional punitive measures

We have discussed the use of MWA for claimants on the Work Programme. However once long term unemployed claimants exit the Work Programme after two years there arises the question of what to do with them? The solution of the Coalition Government in 2014 was Help to Work a programme of additional punitive disciplinary methods which appear designed to enforce exit from benefits, one way or another. There were three channels designed to enforce this exit; the first entailed requiring the claimant attend Jobcentre Plus on a daily basis "for claimants who would benefit from regular support with looking for jobs, including those who need to build motivation, momentum and engagement" (DWP 2014b). Secondly activity which "could include gardening projects, running community cafes or even restoring historical sites and war memorials" (ibid) for 6 months of 30 hours per week with an additional 4 hours of 'supervised job search'. The third option was 'Intensive Jobcentre Support' a vaguer category of action including 'intensive training schemes' and ad-hoc financial assistance for, for instance, interview clothes (ibid). These schemes represent a form of neo-institutionalisation in the form of daily attendance and in the penal nature of the tasks which overlap with the criminal sanctions of Community Service. The status of the pauper is returning; the trajectory has been toward the unconscious revival of techniques of punishment thought to have been abolished long ago.

There are continuities with the poor law in the proposals of several influential organisations to pay unemployment benefits through prepaid cards. I.e. to restore the poor law practice of paying 'relief in-kind'. Prepaid cards already exist for Asylum Seekers whose allowances are loaded onto cards which restrict their purchases to approved retail outlets (gov.uk 2018). In recent years the use of prepaid cards for the payment of mainstream UK benefits has attracted a degree of interest from some right-wing policy thinkers and thinktanks (Demos 2013) (Miscampbell 2014). A 2013 private members bill from the Conservative MP Alex Shelbrooke advocated their introduction in order to restore public trust in the system by preventing spending of 'taxpayer money' on alcohol, cigarettes, satellite TV; symbolic items for the dependency culture ideology. The idea received some verbal expressions of interest from Iain Duncan Smith, the then Secretary of State as a means of dealing with those claimants with drug and alcohol problems (BBC News 2014), although the DWP sells the idea primarily by talking about a group of claimants who might wish voluntarily restrict their own spending in moments of lucidity. Think tanks have provided policy blueprints setting out case for this neo-payment in-kind and how it might work. One is Demos' *The Power of Prepaid*' (2013) (funded by Mastercard). A second scheme, more interesting from the point of view of the potential disciplinary uses, was the one published by the largely Conservative aligned Policy Exchange. Which advocated imposing restrictions on claimants rights to purchase consumer goods ('harmful' alcohol and cigarettes were the examples given: though they made no suggestion that the prohibition be restricted to those who are coming to harm) as a new tool in the sanctions system's disciplinary toolkit as well as possible daily spending limits (Miscampbell 2014). The suggestion was essentially to employ payment by prepaid card coupled with a regime of daily Jobcentre Plus attendance as a lesser sanction as an alternative to the blunt instrument of four weeks without payment, this smaller punishment was labelled a 'yellow card' (Miscampbell 2014). Quite inadvertently this proposal reproduced the infrequently employed practice in Unemployment Assistance (much more often used in the Poor Law and Public Assistance), of paying relief in-kind (Lynes 2014 Chapter 24 p6) See Chapter 6 Section 6.1.2.

The relevance to the 1930s is to be found not only in what these paternalistic proposals about the preoccupations of policy makers but also the extent to which one was trusted with cash could be a differential in a moral order. This signalled the regard in which the claimant was held, to them as well as to the wider public and other claimants. Certain goods were established as the legitimate preserve of those who have 'earned' them. In the 1930s the institutionalised pauper was forbidden to access alcohol cigarettes etc. through a regime of searches and confiscation, and in the case of those receiving out-relief through the direct provision of good instead of cash. The outside poor thus pose a perpetual problem for disciplinarians whose preoccupations have not changed from concerns about 'tramps' selling their Causal Ward issued 'meal tickets' to technological means of preventing the purchase of scratch-cards.

There was an ideological desire for the illegitimacy of pauperism to become better reflected in administrative technologies. The pauper was one who could not be trusted with basic freedoms but also one who, if not controlled, was likely to drift through a life of long-term dependency.

#### 8.2.6 Unemployed young people as subject for cuts

Youth is constituted in a variety of ways in this later regime of conditionality and behavioural regulation. The enforcement of 'work incentives' or 'less eligibility' has been a central concern in young people's benefits as they were thought to have lower living costs. For instance Universal credit pays a monthly standard allowance to a single person over 25 of £317.82 and below 25 of £251.77 (gov.uk 2017) this pattern has been the case in JSA as well since it was introduced: 18-24s claiming JSA receive £57.90 while those 25 or older £73.10 (gov.uk 2017a). This was predicated on the assumption that 18-24s have lower income requirements to the 25 and older group. In some ways these differential entitlements were paralleled in the

regulation of the labour market. The National Living Wage (a rebranded minimum wage was introduced for 25s and over in 2016 (£7.83 per hour), creating a new intermittent category of Minimum Wage workers aged 21-24 (£7.38) (Gov.uk 2017b). Those aged under 21 had been paid at a lower rate (£5.90) since the New Labour period. Generally younger workers have been assumed to have fewer needs partly due to their ability to draw upon parental support and this assumption has been built into legislation.

In housing support too, the age at which one is considered an adult has been increased. Housing support is handled separately under a means tested benefit called Housing Benefit. Its rates were calculated according to Local Housing Allowance (LHA) the levels of which are adjusted according to household composition. Since 1996 under 25s (without children) had been entitled only to the Shared Room Rate of LHA i.e. that calculated to cover the rate of a room in a shared house as opposed to say a one bedroom flat. However from 2012 this rate has been extended to claimants under the age of 35.

During the Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition the then Prime Minister David Cameron made the case for removing eligibility for Housing Benefit from 18-25 year olds in a 2012 speech. Prime Minister Cameron contrasted the situation of a young worker living at home with her parents and failing to earn enough to move out with that of a benefit claimant who was:

“only 19 years-old and doesn’t have a job but is already living in a house with her friends. How? Because when she left college and went down to the Job Centre to sign on for Job Seeker’s Allowance, she found out that if she moved out of her parents’ place, she was automatically entitled to Housing Benefit” (2012).

The arguments frequently brought out to support this reduction in available housing support tended to be pseudo contributory i.e. arguing that unemployed

young people should not expect state support until they have first worked. Hence Prime Minister Cameron's claim that "the system we inherited encourages them to grab that independence, rather than earn it" (Cameron 2012). Of course, this bore a weak relation to how the change would function as it applied to a means tested benefit which entailed no assessment of work records. The arguments resemble the concerns about the 'bottomless purse' and 'doles for children' seen in the 1930s. Cameron cast enabling a group of young people to have access to housing through benefits as generating dependency. The impact of such a policy was to recast young people as dependents upon their families rather than upon the state as adults, and to further extend the transitional periods between childhood and adulthood.

Chapter 5 discussed the place of juveniles within the 'moral order' of the benefit system as being exceptional; they were regarded as unformed and not culpable. As was the case with the pauper this meant a different model of treatment. Juveniles in the 1930s were seen as dependants whose earnings or benefits would be supplemental to the income of the household. This was why those juveniles who did attempt to live independently when they were transferred so often returned home, because their wages and benefits were too low to support independent living. There was some resemblance between this state of affairs and measures designed to displace the responsibility for 18-21s onto the family. Both imply a special status for 'youth' making a transition to adulthood. However in each period legal status was acquired at different ages. Section 8.3 shows differences in the way this exceptional transitory status was manifested in treatment.

That there was such a status is a continuity. In the post 2010 system lower rates correspond to reduced minimum wages and lower entitlements to support with housing. Youth then as now was a status which staggered the transition to adulthood, the period before which one was treated as a full adult.

### 8.3 Differences

There was a great degree of similarity between policy under the 'welfare reform' regime of the post 2010 Conservative governments and that of the 1930s. Claimants and communities were subject to similar regimes of assessment. Similar preoccupations with 'dependency' 'worklessness' and 'demoralisation' underpin these.

But there were distinct differences which can be observed. These relate to differences in policy, but also the context within which these policies were formed. While in both periods liberalism had a set of continuous principles, there were differences in how these principles were to be interpreted to provide justifications for policy. The continuing aim was to secure the 'independence' of families but there were differences in how this was to be interpreted and done. The main difference to be discussed is the comprehensive conditionality applied to the unemployed under 'welfare reform' which so strongly contrasts with the stratification of treatment seen in the 1930s.

#### 8.3.1 Decline of the respectable worker and the contributory principle

How does the treatment of the unemployed since 2010 compare to the 'moral ordering' in the benefit system of the 1930s as established in Chapter 5? One answer is that since 2010 there has been a more consistent application of conditionality. The figure of the insured contributor in the 1930s as a worthy subject necessitating a different sort of treatment does not exist under 'welfare reform' as it did in the inter war years; even someone with a contribution record was still required to prove their virtue immediately and behaviourally. Comprehensive conditionality has "become a founding principle of state financial support for people of working age in twenty-first century Britain" (Dwyer and Wright 2014 p33). Aside from an exemption from means tests there is little gain from claiming a contribution-based benefit over a means tested one in the UK in the 2010s. The 'ubiquitousness' of conditionality has involved a decline in status for

the 'respectable unemployed'. From the introduction of JSA in 1996 "the effect was to remove the long-standing distinction between the respectable receipt of benefits for unemployed workers with contributions records and the more needs-based principle for other groups" (Fletcher and Wright 2017 p6). These figures function as means of justification, they draw upon 'higher common principles' (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006) from wider liberalism to justify the provision of state support.

Contribution appeared little in political rhetoric toward the unemployed from 2010-2015. 'Fiscal discipline at all levels of government' has meant that contribution-based benefits were seen as an unnecessary expense. The rights of claimant were continually placed in opposition to those of 'taxpayers', the two usually being discussed as separate groups. The contributor as someone who pays in when times are good to be able to withdraw in different circumstances was absent from discussion.

"The goal is to strengthen work incentives through closer monitoring of claimants to ensure that they are 'deserving' of support and greater efforts to push them back to work. In other words, the legitimacy of a claim will increasingly come to depend on a claimant's *current* behaviour, rather than their past contribution." (Mulheirn and Masters 2013 p41)

Conditionality was very often justified through a 'contractualist' frame which regards the fulfilment of conditions as a form of reciprocal effort in exchange for payment a vision of 'fairness' to a community which provides help (Watts et al 2015). Demonstrations of worth come through current behaviour rather than by prior contribution. In the 1930s the system was structured to centre insurance contribution records in determining the individual's treatment and right to support, and the key was to demonstrate 'membership of the insured class'. In the 'reformed' social security system this 'contributory principle' has been marginalised.

The unemployed worker from 2010-2015 was seen as an insufficiently motivated subject in need of activation. Their previous status in the labour market, belonging or not to the insured class (Beveridge 2015), made little difference. The aim of policy was to transform them via activation and discipline into an active welfare subject “a figure of aspiration, a transformation possible only via coerced self-improvement” (Wright 2016 p2). This view of conditionality was predicated on a view of the subject characterised primarily by their lacks.

Partly this could be explained through the influence of neo-classical economics on the view of the subject, rather than status and respectability distinctions being determinant of kinds of treatment. The ‘homo-economicus’ view of the unemployed subject however claims a certain universality, and sees behaviour as guided by a common form of rationality. Neo-liberalism extends market logics into other spheres of life as markets become an organising principle for wider social relations (Whitworth 2016), but also a normative ideal for individual conduct. The individual was expected to be entrepreneurial in their conduct and to employ market behaviour. Individual responsibility as an ethic has become increasingly entrenched in the social security system.

This marginality has played a role in recent policy debates as proposals for the restoration of the contributory principle have been a major thread in alternative proposals to welfare reform. The contributory system for JSA has declined to the extent that a 2012 TUC report states that in February 2011 only 16 per cent of JSA claimants were receiving contributions-based support (Bell and Gaffney 2012 p18). Part of this low rate of contribution-based claims can be attributed to workers in ‘low-pay no-pay’ cycles not meeting the contribution conditions, but also to non-claiming by better off workers as the UK’s contribution based benefit is currently paid out at the same rate as its means tested version. The poor return on contributions has been referred to as the ‘nothing for something problem’ (Bell and Gaffney 2012).

In addition, the conditionality regime attached to unemployment benefits has become identical for claimants of means tested and contribution based variants. If liberal policy regimes have traditionally consisted of “one group at the bottom primarily reliant on stigmatizing relief; one group in the middle predominantly the clients of social insurance; and finally, one privileged group capable of deriving its main welfare from the market” (Esping Andersen 1990 p65), then the ‘group in the middle’ has been shifted onto the market (although it may not be as ‘privileged’ as would be implied). The neo-liberal preference for a small state means that better off workers are seen as better off getting their welfare from the market. The equivalent of ‘respectable’ skilled worker of the 1930s would not be seen as someone who requires state provision.

Comparing this situation with that of the system of the inter war years as described in Chapter 5 demonstrates that the place of the insured contributor which so stratified the inter war system has gone. The legitimacy of contributors was rarely discussed and in policy rhetoric and justificatory discourse they have become relatively invisible. Contribution records no longer function as a major means of verification and distinction between worthy and unworthy individuals. The ‘moral ordering’ in use in the 1930s permitted a greater variety of statuses, from contributor to pauper. Post 2010 the field has been flattened: the long-term decline of contributory benefit receipt, combined with the ‘ubiquitous conditionality’ referred to by Dwyer and Wright (2014) erases differences in treatment in favour of a universal escalation of disciplinary measures to push claimants toward the labour market. The ‘grammars’ of moral ordering in the two periods, whilst both broadly liberal, were different stressing and elevating different characteristics to a status of high worth (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006).

Regarding young claimants, there has been no attempt since 2010 to ‘credit-in’ those who were deprived of an opportunity to contribute as there was in the 1930s. While youth as a transitory state was still acknowledged in some stratification of benefit levels and conditionality, they were not treated as requiring fundamentally

different treatment in the way the juvenile claimant did in the 1930s. There is no longer a status for the respectable unemployed who are not considered to blame for their condition; all they gain is a six-month exemption from means testing if they are able to claim Contribution Based JSA. If there are unemployed people not considered to blame for their condition then, as in the social scientific defences of 'supportive conditionality', this is considered to have no implications for their treatment.

### 8.3.2 Job search conditionality: actively seeking work

Under Universal Credit active job search requirements have been codified in a contractual document known as the Claimant Commitment - a successor to the 'Jobseeker's Agreement' of JSA. The Commitment mandated that claimants must "do everything you reasonably can to give yourself the best chance of finding work. Preparing for and getting a job must be your full-time focus. If you do not do this without a good reason, you will have a cut in your Universal Credit, known as a sanction" (DWP 2015). The requirement that job search be a 'full time focus' differed even from the requirements of a Jobseeker's Agreement which demanded a set number of activities over a specified period. This was repeatedly set up as a point of principle that "[c]laimants will also be required to treat looking for work as their full-time job" (DWP 2011). "As a minimum therefore, claimants should be engaged in work search for at least the number of hours we expect them to be available for work. For many claimants this will be the equivalent of a full-time job" (ibid). Given the stringency of these requirements it becomes difficult to meaningfully speak of benefits for the unemployed as a 'safety net'. To some extent the new tests constituted a new version of the 'state of the applicant's mind' (Deacon 1976) test in that they were an interrogation of the claimant's ethics and orientations towards work. Claimants were required to be oriented fundamentally toward the labour market and to act as a good liberal (perhaps entrepreneurial) subject. "What the Jobcentre requires is a good but not particular attitude to work in the abstract and a capacity for adaptability that has no object" (Friedli and Stern

2015 p40). This is a discipline (Foucault 1977), a regime of monitoring and activity which sought to instil desirable subjectivities.

In the 1930s there was a degree of flexibility for skilled workers to attempt to maintain their labour market status by restricting themselves to their previous occupations. In the present less of an allowance is made. For those with a “**good work history**”<sup>167</sup>, advisers will have the discretion to limit their work search and availability to jobs that are similar in nature and carry a similar level of pay to their previous occupation. This limitation will be time-limited to a maximum of 13 weeks, after which the claimant will be expected to look for and be available for any job” (DWP 2011). There were innovations in surveillance based on new technology. Jobseekers could be mandated to use the Universal Jobmatch system by the Claimant Commitment. Work Coaches can monitor the activities of claimants on the website. This was primarily used as device to drive sanctioning, and there was little evidence that it had improved job outcomes. This was a technological means of discipline and surveillance “a digital panopticon” (Fletcher and Wright 2017 p10). Perhaps this form of monitoring fulfilled a similar function to the tests of memory and articulacy by officials of the Employment Exchanges as part of the Genuinely Seeking Work test in the inter-war years. These technologies sought to enforce desirable behaviour, but also to separate the ‘victims’ from the ‘villains’ (Brown 1990). It was assumed in the design of the policies that virtuous and well-intentioned claimants who understood the ‘commitments’ they made to the community and had the correct ‘active’ subjectivity and would be able to meet these requirements unproblematically. This confidence in behavioural mechanisms resembles that shown in the Genuinely Seeking Work Test, but it perhaps goes further given the wider application of conditionality in the modern day.

The faith in labour market rationalisation displayed in the early designs of Labour/Employment Exchanges has gone. The predominant belief in the modern period has been that the offers of work that can be provided by such institutions

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<sup>167</sup> Emphasis in original.

would be an inadequate replacement for mandated 'active' job search. This shows a loss of belief in the capacity of governments to make effective interventions in or to rationalise labour markets. In both periods payment was justified as guaranteed through a reciprocal or contractual logic, however this was conceptualized differently. With the claimant needing to prove their desert actively to the state, job search has been reconceptualised as labour and as virtuous in and of itself. This view contrasts with that of 'tramping around' and of the 'hawking' of labour, which were seen in the 1930s as wasteful and inefficient.

The nature of work search conditionality for young people is also rather different. The juvenile in the 1930s was directed toward compulsory instruction in the JIC, and this was prioritised over job search (although as seen in sections 6.1.3 and 7.2 the JIC was regarded by some as giving a spur to their efforts). The JIC was a quasi-educational institution which sought to maintain the employability of those outside of the labour market. In Birmingham the JIC worked alongside the Birmingham JEWSC which was responsible for placing school leavers into employment as well as advising those still at school. This juvenile status which required a different approach to conditionality was absent in the post-2010 period; the young unemployed are subject to the same regime of conditionality as adult claimants, but with some heightened characteristics.

This ratcheting up was part of a dynamic of 'infra-punishment', designating as problematic a "mass of behaviour that the relative indifference of the great systems of punishment had allowed to escape" (Foucault 1977 p178). The much-discussed 'scrounger' was the target, but so was one who was not searching hard enough or who was 'going through the motions' of job search or who was even in compliance with the minimum legal requirements of such a system. Indeed, requirements based on behavioural assessments or judgements of character are disciplinary in that they judge the subject not merely in terms of whether they are in conformity with or in breach of the regulations. Instead such disciplinary requirements codify all conduct short of a standard as a problem to be solved.

This focus on activation was a feature of changing political and economic orthodoxies and accordingly changing views of how the labour market should be regulated. The conditionality of the 1930s for adult claimants was based on the capacity of the Employment Exchanges to offer them work. This then depended on the capacity of these institutions to map local labour markets. In the initial stages of the establishment of the Exchanges they were intended to abolish the inefficient (and irritating to employers) tramping around in search for work undertaken by unemployed workers (Phillips and Whiteside 1985). Employers were encouraged to turn over the task of filling vacancies to the exchanges (Price 2000). Architects of the exchanges including Beveridge thought that vacancies being filled by a government agency with an overall view of the labour market would result in better job matches. The activation focus seen in 'welfare reform' was based on a repudiation of this view and scepticism of the capacity of the state to coordinate or rationalise the market. The Jobcentre or Jobcentre Plus was not seen as having the capacity to reform or restructure labour markets, and certainly not to adequately replace the job-search activities of the claimant. Activation has been justified on the grounds that even claimants with very little chance of finding work can be justifiably compelled to active job search so long as they have even the slightest statistical chance of finding work.

This regime of "monitoring of jobseekers as part of activation policies, combined with a sanctions regime and time-limited entitlements, is a clumsy, costly and often demeaning regime. It is also one that is incompatible with the Beveridgean idea of insurance benefits 'as a right'" (Mulheirn and Masters 2013 p74). Yet in dominant discourses around conditionality this has mainly been seen as unproblematic. Justifications for conditionality have shifted, the view of reciprocity has placed the obligation on the claimant to continually justify their receipt of benefit through compliance with behavioural regulations.

### 8.3.3 Failure to comply: sanctions

Unlike in the 1930s where 6-week disallowances of UA were the standard for those found not to be available for work for reasons of lack of inclination evidenced by persistent refusals, post 2010 systems are much swifter to deny subsistence to claimants. There exists a layered system of escalating ‘sanctions’ for perceived offences by claimants. The principles by which sanctions are justified are often thought to be inherent features of any system of benefit. Paul Gregg in his 2008 report to the then Labour government (discussed in sections 8.2.1 and 8.3.4) called for the system of ‘support’ for jobseekers to become more ‘intensive’ and sanctions to be increased. Gregg justified this with a statement that “In 1942, the Beveridge Report built on these ideas to create a clear understanding that rights to benefit and support were conditional for the unemployed and that the right behaviours had to be shaped” (Gregg et al 2008 p22). Gregg cited Beveridge’s statement that:

“[t]he unemployed should be required, as a condition of continued benefit, to attend a work or training centre, such attendance being designed as a means of preventing habituation to idleness and as a means of improving capacity for earnings’ (ibid)”.

This quote was used to describe sanctions and conditionality as almost timeless, or at least continuous with the beginning of the welfare state. Depicting policy as eternal and stemming from functional imperatives, renders historical change invisible. The role of historical analysis is to re-historicise the present and re-open the possibility of critique. Sanctions in their modern form were implemented with the introduction of Jobseekers Allowance in 1996. To ‘sanction’ a claimant rather than judge them ineligible for benefit (Webster 2013) is a sign that a different set of principles is at work, as the ‘sanction’ is a form with an intent to change behaviour built in to its design.

The principle of ‘intensive support’ has been implemented in the form of increased severity of the sanction itself. The maximum available sanction introduced in October 2012, “for repeated ‘high level’ non-compliance – is now complete

withdrawal of benefits for three years” (Watts et al 2015 p3). For ordinary ‘low level’ non-compliance such as late (or non) attendance at Jobcentre Plus appointments or presenting what was judged to be an insufficient work search over the preceding period (bear in mind the 35-hour standard) results in 4 weeks without benefit. A more serious ‘offence’ such as failure to apply for a specified vacancy identified by Jobcentre Plus, would result in a 3-month sanction, double the 6-week disallowance of the 1930s. This was the only direct equivalent of the disallowances that were in place under UA in the 1930s, whereby a claimant could be proven to have failed to ‘avail themselves’ of an opportunity that it could be proven that they were aware of. The contrast marked by this increased severity, with the 1930s, a time commonly thought of as part of a pre-welfare state era shows just how punitive the system has become in recent years.

So with these justifications in place, escalations in sanctioning claimants were implemented with consequent increases in the numbers of sanctions. The Welfare Conditionality: Sanctions, Support and Behavioural Change project reported that “monthly sanctions rates have risen from about 2 to 2.5 per cent of claimants in this earlier period, to around 3.5 per cent in 2008, and 5 per cent in 2010–11, and again to around 6 per cent by late 2013 (actually peaking at 7.3 per cent in October 2013)” (Watts et al 2015 p4). These escalations have disproportionately impacted younger claimants: the 18-24 group has accounted for 41% of all sanctions under the new regime of October 2012 to December 2013 (ibid). It has been suggested that this could be partially explained by young people who lived with their parents being less afraid of being sanctioned and less likely to comply for fear of being left without an income (Watts et al 2015). However critics have argued that this more likely reflects the greater difficulty of those with fewer resources and less settled lives in complying with the intensified regime, as well as perhaps a degree of direct or indirect discrimination by administrators against the young (ibid). For instance the YMCA attributed the sanctioning of many of its clients who were homeless or in

insecure accommodation to Jobcentre Plus and DWP decision makers insufficiently accounting for and adjusting to their circumstances (YMCAa 2014).

Sanctioning was to some extent a practice based on a view of claimants as 'homo-economicus', reacting rationally to the incentives provided by state allowances. If this was the case, then the suspension of the said allowance would lead them to step up their search for work. The 'dependency culture' narrative was similar: claimants took advantage of opportunities to avoid work, and unemployment was viewed as leisure. Sanctions as a form of discipline however were supposed to act as a 'wake-up call': a necessary 'shock to the system' for the demoralised subject. Some evidence of this can be seen in the senior DWP civil servant Neil Cooling's rather bizarre claim that Jobcentre Plus had received many thank you cards from former claimants for having sanctioned them (Daily Record 2014).

The thesis's examinations of the 1930s showed that disallowances were employed in quite a different manner. They required the state to prove that an offer of work had been refused and even, for fear of political unrest, then this was approached with a great deal of caution. This contrasts sharply with the sanctions regime since 2012 in which sanctions are applied with little such restraint. But contrasts can also be seen in the modern view of sanctions as useful for effecting behavioural change and therefore having a positive impact on employment outcomes. In the evidence gathered from the 1930s there is little evidence of disallowances being seen as a behavioural tool in the same way.

#### [8.3.4 Exchanges, Jobcentres and the labour market](#)

Another area of relevance for sanctioning is its relationship with the employment placement functions of the employment exchanges. Sanctions were recommended by a frontline Jobcentre Plus worker who passed this on to an 'independent decision maker' within the DWP. Appeals also went to the DWP, in contrast with

appeals for Unemployment Benefit in the 1930s which went to an independent body comprised of representatives of local employers and trade unions, chaired by a lawyer (Burns 1941). However the administrative responsibility for sanctioning raised questions about the purpose of Jobcentre Plus (JCP) as an institution and revealed a long line of historic tensions between its purposes as a labour market placement and organisation institution, and as one responsible for relief of poverty. In the early days of the Employment Exchanges these functions were debated (Price 2000, King 1995, Phillips and Whiteside 1985), with some believing that the exchanges should be perceived by the public as distinct from dispensing benefits to avoid the stigma of poor relief. This was associated with a desire to make them a respectable organisation of use to employers and skilled workers and to therefore rationalise labour markets by acting as a central coordinating hub for all vacancies. This concern with the division of functions has re-entered policy debates in recent years in a series of reviews into the future of JCP undertaken by the Work and Pensions Sub-Committee (House of Commons Work and Pensions Sub-Committee 2016-2017). This examined the contradiction between the 'hassle and help' functions of JCP, between its quasi-pastoral functions in coaching and employability support and its disciplinary role. Unions representing JCP staff responding to the enquiry argued that when claimants viewed Jobcentre Plus staff as 'enforcers' of conditionality regimes, the result was a distrust which undermined any aspiration to function as 'supportive' 'coaches'. However the solutions envisioned to this by the committee and the politicians and 'stakeholders' responding to it were attempts to resolve the contradiction through sound management.

These bodies date from a time when the state was trying to play a role in organising and coordinating industry. Neo-liberal political economy sees this role as illegitimate. Neo-classical economics has typically disputed the capacity of the state to adequately map labour markets and therefore to fulfil the job matching role, although the 'digital panopticon' of the Universal Jobmatch system attempted something of this nature.

Efforts to mitigate the harsh and harmful consequences of 'welfare reform' and its conditionality regime have been limited by an acceptance of the essential case for conditionality. Opposition has often been focussed on the quality of administration: the communication of requirements to claimants, or the effectiveness of Jobcentre Plus in identifying mitigating vulnerabilities.

#### 8.4 Summary

This Chapter has addressed Research Question 3 looking at what similarities and differences can be observed between the classifications and judgements applied to the unemployed in the 1930s and those from 2010-2015. It shows that there are many forms of continuity between policy in the 1930s and the 2010s. For all that government promises '21<sup>st</sup> century welfare' many of the measures introduced have a long history. The next chapter concludes the thesis. It looks back at the research questions of the thesis and sets out its findings and contributions to knowledge.

## Chapter 9: Conclusions

“Routinely, incoming Governments commit to reducing the cost of welfare at the start of their administrations, by creating new rules to govern access to existing benefits, and by creating new benefits. All this is accompanied by claims that they will improve the system’s efficiency”  
(From *Dynamic Benefits*, the report that first made the case for Universal Credit, CSJ 2009 p4-5)

Over the course of the preceding chapters the thesis has set out how young people were treated by the benefits system of the 1930s and in the post-2008 period. Overall this thesis has shown that studying policy in the 1930s can provide a great deal of insight into the present day. Current policy has been presented as innovative and novel but instead represents a revival in large measure. The practices that have been revived are not only arguably regressive in 2018 but were also increasingly being rejected even as the 1930s progressed. Policy makers appear largely not to recognise these resemblances with the past. One might say that the reinvention of policies from the 1930s shows something about the underlying mentality of British liberalism. This appears to have been apparently unconscious given the lack of evidence of knowledge of the period on the part of policy makers. For all it makes claims of innovation it continually recycles concepts and technologies of power from the past to the present under new guises.

The reputation of the 1930s is of the ‘devil’s decade’, social misery, mass hunger, inadequate social provision, and humiliating and degrading paternalism in social policy. Its reputation has often been as a period where the orthodoxies of liberalism retarded the development of an effective policy response to unemployment and so caused a great deal of unnecessary suffering (Mencher 1967) (Garside 1990).

The evidence set out in the previous chapters shows the multiplicity of histories and narratives, of change and of continuity. It shows a set of narratives and themes which enable potentially contrasting views of what constitutes progress. This chapter considers how evidence from the thesis may feed in to contemporary policy debates, such as the appropriate roles of contribution and conditionality within the UK's welfare system. More broadly it enables a wider questioning of its underpinning logics and philosophies.

The chapter is structured as follows. It first, in section 9.1 examines how the evidence gathered in the thesis can be used to directly address the research questions laid out in Chapter 1. Section 9.2 sets out the original contribution to knowledge that the thesis has made. Section 9.3 reflects on the methodology employed, its strengths and its limitations. It concludes with some possibilities for further research that the thesis has opened up.

### 9.1 Research questions

The introduction to this thesis set out the research questions, which are now re-examined in the light of the findings set out over chapters 4-8, framed in terms of the existing literature and theoretical context set out in chapters 2-3. The research questions were:

1. How were/are unemployed young people perceived as a subject by policy makers? How did/does this differ from the adult unemployed? How were these perceptions justified within public policy discourse?
2. How were these judgements reflected in different entitlements to unemployment benefits? What determined the type of intervention and degree of coercion that the unemployed were subject to?
3. How are these judgements and treatments different and similar in the 1930s compared with post 2010?

### 9.1.1 Unemployed subjects in policy discourse

With regard to Question 1 the perception of the problem varied between different claimant groups and depending upon their age and geographical location.

While there was a generalised fear of 'demoralisation' taking root among the unemployed, this was seen as a problem of the loss of values of hard work and self-sufficiency amongst those previously regarded as good citizens. The distinction was made between those whose unemployment was regarded as the product of an economic crisis, and the normal or ever-present poor.

The problem of demoralisation was also perceived as one of 'casualism' and irregularity of habits which prevented the development of respectable subjectivity. Factors affecting these judgements included:

- Employment records: status distinctions and particularly, 'membership of the insured class' were crucial in determining rights to benefit. The evidence of the preceding chapters has shown that this was a highly moralised set of distinctions. It involved identifying a core/peripheral labour force and distinctions on what forms of work were legitimate, 'progressive' and important to the nation. There were policy debates on how to account for those, such as school leavers, without a settled employment status due to the depression.
- Moral judgements: considerations of the personal 'character' of claimants were never far from the surface of policy and were often quite explicit. Policy sought to divide and stratify the unemployed according to their deservingness or undeservingness. The threefold structure of state support sought to differentiate groups of the unemployed to enable different types of intervention.

- The extent of their mobility: which could stand either for effort, activity and initiative, or for 'tramping', unsettled habits, and the evasion of discipline.
- Age: could mark them as either culpable for their unemployment as healthy and of core working age, or as a victim of circumstances which sabotaged their ability to transition from school into work.
- Gender: the 'problem' of unemployment was very much represented to be a male one. Because of the predominant view of the workforce as being usually and ideally male, it was male unemployment which was problematised. This study of policy shows that a degree of scepticism was held towards women's claims to be unemployed. Discrimination was built into the Genuinely Seeking Work test, the Anomalies legislation and the exclusion of domestic service from the insurance scheme, to filter out their claims. The problem was perceived to be that independent skilled men would become unable to fulfil their envisioned roles as the heads of self-sufficient families.

The language of unemployment and personal deterioration was mainly expressed in relation to men, women appeared in the archives as something of a special case and as an outlying category of the unemployed. As well as demoralisation, narratives of unemployment often discussed the physical decline of the male worker in an industrial order which prized physical strength. The maintenance of male bodies was an aim of all employability programmes.

Juveniles were a smaller part of the unemployment problem in the 1930s (Garside 1977) than the young unemployed have been since 2010. But they were regarded as posing a threat of a particular nature: juveniles were regarded as especially vulnerable to 'demoralisation' and to easy acceptance of a life without work. This was feared to be exacerbated by the problem of 'Blind Alley' jobs which would leave young adults unemployed without the stable career trajectories which were

thought to guarantee independence from the state. Trajectories and transitions are important here; the move from childhood to adulthood was a danger point where young lives may be lost to dependency and demoralisation. Perceptions of the buoyancy of juvenile labour markets held by policy makers affected whether claimants should be seen as 'problem cases'. As was shown in Chapter 5, in relatively strong labour markets unemployed juveniles were seen to be incapable, as educational failures or 'sub-normal', 'facile' or as an antisocial 'bad sort'. However in slack labour markets they could be given more credit; policy discussions took place about the extent to which they should be 'credited in' to UA and of whether they were part of the 'insured class' uninsured only through circumstance.

These variables would often intersect with each other, sometimes in unexpected ways. The worth of individuals within 'moral orders' is often highly disputable (see Chapter 3). There therefore emerged the need to develop tests and criteria with which to decide where individuals fitted in, and what sort of treatment they were entitled to.

### 9.1.2 Rights to benefit and conditionality

Question 2 is about the way institutional arrangements were put in place to map moral distinctions. Moral distinctions were (and are) first institutionalised in the distinctions between different systems of relief support for the unemployed. The differing conditionality regimes applied to claimants are technologies of power. They serve as means of verification for ensuring that claimants are correctly located within this 'moral order' of legitimate and illegitimate claimants. The three main categories were: 1) The Insured Contributor 2) The Extended Claimant and 3) The Pauper on PA.

In the 1930s Unemployment Insurance claimants were subject to relatively little conditionality with a preference for 'the morality of mathematics' (Deacon 1976) as

a sufficient means of policing. This reflects the view of the insured as contributors and as analogous to the purchasers of private products. The Unemployment Insurance system, in terms of the ratios between contributions and benefits, became more generous over time. In 1911 workers benefits were restricted by the rule of 1 weeks benefit for 6 weeks contribution to a limit of 15 weeks in a year. The maximum duration of claims was extended in 1921 from 15 to 26 weeks (Burns 1941). The system was expanded to become more inclusive over time with repeated rounds of concessions made to particular groups of workers as well as relaxations in the general requirements. Far from excluding claimants through escalations in conditionality, as is the practice in 'welfare reform', policy makers tried to make 'benefit as of a right' stretch as far as possible.

The extended group of unemployed in Unemployment Assistance and its predecessors faced more stringent tests than Insurance claimants to demonstrate that they were legitimately entitled to benefit. Efforts to enforce the work ethic via conditionality were a matter of constant controversy for this group because of their ambiguous status between the insured contributor and the pauper. They were subject to shifting conditionality; the Genuinely Seeking work test was applied to this group but then scrapped, and there was debate about the appropriateness of compulsory training. The thesis has looked at this debate in terms of how it applied to young people, but a great portion of the UAB's caseload was older men who had lost their jobs in heavy industry and were in poor health. For this group the question was of how to maintain them until they reached state pension age, not of training. Activation was a policy question that applied primarily to the young.

Public Assistance claimants on the other hand were the normal or ever-present poor who were by default regarded as incapable, poorly socialised, and perhaps even deviant and semi criminal. This view justified their subjection to Poor Law techniques. Claimants of working age could be subject to a regime of hard labour

designed to improve their employability, were segregated from other claimants and were without rights to any set standard of support.

For juvenile claimants a different set of conditions were applied. They were obliged to attend the JIC with its regime of compulsory employability boosting instruction. This obligation contrasted with the inability of officials to enforce training on the claimants of Unemployment Assistance. In the curricula of the JICs contrasts can be seen with the punitive institutionalisation applied to the Public Assistance Claimant. There were differences between local practice in Birmingham, that 'well governed' and relatively prosperous city and that mandated by national policy. In Birmingham the JIC seems to have adapted its curriculum to train boys for employment niches available in the city at the time in addition to the more general employability and morale maintaining activities mandated by national policy. The aim was to ensure that juveniles did not go unsupervised as they made the transition to adulthood. The need for discipline was paramount in policy; if juveniles were not under the eye of an employer they would be pushed into a quasi-educational institution to be instructed in an appropriate working subjectivity.

The treatment of juveniles reflected their anomalous status in a hierarchy based on contribution records. They were to some extent recognised as those who had not yet had the opportunity to contribute, although there was a degree of debate over who should be recognised in this way. This was assessed sometimes according to the condition of local labour markets, as for the adult unemployed. Remarks from officials at some local authorities indicate a view of young people in more prosperous places as being the least capable claimants.

The function of these distinctions, as was shown in Chapter 6, was to map moral distinctions and to make them visible through differential treatments. Once sorted, claimants could be subjected to interventions in an appropriate manner. Disciplinary

and deterrent systems sought to create 'incentives' for the individual to correct their behaviour, thereby enforcing ideal subjectivities.

The question which underlay bureaucratic conflicts and moral arguments over responsibility for the juvenile claimant was often about where childhood ended, and adulthood began. There is a trend for adulthood to be delayed further and further: from a school leaving age of 14 in the 1930s to a 'participation age' of 18 since 2014. Benefit entitlements from 2010 also follow this pattern, youth periods of reduced entitlements and heightened conditionality extending further into life than before. These cuts and restrictions aid austerity by making families rather than the state responsible for the young.

### 9.1.3 The 1930s and the post 2010 period: similarities and differences

The third question concerns how the system in the 1930s could be compared to post 2010 welfare reform. Chapter 8 discussed the benefits system since 2010. There were many resemblances to the system of the 1930s, but also some significant contrasts. These comparisons can provide a contribution to contemporary debates about how 'welfare reform' should be understood.

There were similarities in the way these problems are constructed in policy discourse. The unemployed themselves are the subjects of intervention, their 'morale', state of mind and character had to be discovered for policy to be formed. The concern in each period was to limit the 'dependency' which authorities viewed as being caused inevitably by the availability of state support, and limit support to those who demonstrated their deservingness. It can be noted that policy in each period sought to demarcate responsibility between the worker and the state. Employers were usually not subjects for intervention, rather employers played a role in defining the employable subject, and their requirements became the aims of policy. Supply side policies predominate with the main role of the state being to maintain the 'employability' of unemployed workers for when the economy was to

return to normal. Fiscal factors were seen as ruling out alternative courses of action, and austerity was the key to putting the nation back on a secure footing (Eichengreen 2015). That each period sees a form of liberal 'political rationality' (Brown 2015) as dominant is perhaps the biggest continuity; there were sets of ideas which moralize the economic and place an injunction on the unemployed to behave as ideal liberal subjects. However in each period the state sought to create an ideal, desired labour market. In the inter war years 'de-casualisation' was a strategy for reshaping the labour market along liberal lines, the aim being to prevent 'relief in aid of wages' which had long been a principle of Poor Law administration. However, during the post 2008 period insecure labour markets have been institutionalised in policy as can be seen in in-work benefit receipt and in the encouragement of self-employment through the benefit system. Reductions in employer obligations provide incentives for employers to reduce permanent contracts and allow 'flexibility', while increased conditionality obliges workers to take them. Conditionality in this context enforces downward labour market mobility. It reduces the ability of labour to refuse undesirable work (Wiggan 2015). If there is a de-commodifying effect to state support (Offe 1985) then conditionality is an attempt to 'fix' this problem for capital.

There are similarities in the conduct of certain mechanisms of conditionality. In the modern period, enforcement of job search was the largest part of conditionality applied to 'jobseekers'. This significantly resembled the conduct of the 'genuinely seeking work' test. Enforced work was implemented in both eras: MWA for claimants on the Work Programme post 2010 and task work for claimants of Public Assistance in the 1930s. There were similarities in the justifications applied; the stress on the employability-boosting effects of subjection to a full working week and of learning associated working disciplines. The similarity between these conditions should lead to a questioning of the novel '21<sup>st</sup> century' image with which these ideas have been presented.

However, there were also significant differences between the two periods. The severity of conditionality stands out as a contrast. From the mid-1990s up until the time of writing there has been a “strong mainstream political agreement in favour of conditionality, whereby welfare entitlements are increasingly dependent on citizens agreeing to meet compulsory duties or approved behaviour” (Fletcher 2015 p330). The active job search imposed under JSA resembles the Genuinely Seeking Work Test of the 1920s. However in the 1930s the Genuinely Seeking Work Test had been abolished amid mass protest and the evidence presented shows that there was little appetite for its reintroduction. Instead the burden was placed on officials to demonstrate that a claimant had refused an offer of work, and the activation so ubiquitous in the post 2010 period was heavily contested during the interwar years. Class struggle had secured the working classes preferential forms of treatment and protections from the disciplinary schemes of officialdom. By contrast the system today functions to ‘punish the poor’ (Wacquant 2013), bringing back practices which by the 1930s were becoming increasingly marginal.

There have been different visions of the ideal labour market and ideas about what the role of government should be in shaping these labour markets. These have gone along with huge changes to work and the economy, as the UK has gone from an industrial economy in the 1930s to one mainly based on services in the 2010s. Thinking about what constitutes good work has changed. In the 1930s prevalent assumptions about unemployment were based on an understanding of labour markets which acknowledged some role for structural factors. By contrast neo-liberalism understands labour markets in individual behavioural terms. As with the problem of causal employment the ‘blind alley’ problem is no longer thought of in the same way. Instead of a generator of inefficiency, it becomes a source of ‘flexibility’. With regard to conditionality this view of insecure work as constructive leads to support for the ‘work first’ approach to conditionality over, for instance, longer term training or employment programmes. This stands opposed to the conditionality applied to the juvenile in the 1930s which preferred a regime of employability maintaining ‘instruction’. Since 2014 young people in England stay

within the education system until the age of 18. After this point they are not subject to a regime of instruction as unemployed but moved quickly to be 'activated'. Benefit rates and forms of treatment send signals about when adulthood was considered to have been reached. In this context the juvenile has an ambiguous status, detained in school like institutions but expected to work, moved away from the Poor Law but with uneven access to insurance.

One of the most important differences was the decline of the contributory basis for benefit receipt. In the 1930s the insured claimant enjoyed a status distinct from the Poor Law claimant and subject to fewer of the behavioural tests demanded of either them or the Jobseekers Allowance or Universal Credit claimant. Then, if one could demonstrate one's worth through one's contribution record, one could receive 6 months benefit as of a right. Since the shift to JSA the great majority of unemployment benefit claims have been means tested. In 2011 (before UC had been introduced), only 16% of the UK's unemployed claimants received benefit by virtue of their previous contributions (Bell and Gaffney 2012). Even those claimants receiving contribution-based benefit are not exempt from conditionality, receiving them not 'as of right' but through the satisfaction of the same detailed and intrusive conditions as the means tested version. The shift to JSA in 1996 marked a qualitative shift in the basis on which unemployment benefits were to be paid. Benefit rights moved from a largely contributory justification, to one where payment was seen a justified by the claimant's behaviour.

This could be contrasted to the situation in the 1930s. In June 1930, in the aftermath of the crash 72.3% of claimants were relieved through insurance against 16.9% in the extended system. The portion relieved through the extended system hit a high of 40.5% in December 1933 (and the insured a corresponding low) against 36.9% in the insured (Burns 1941 p347).

A major difference is the treatment of women. In the 1930s women were subject to a great deal of direct discrimination within the system in the Genuinely Seeking Work Test, the Anomalies rules and the scope of insurance. This treatment was based on an idea that they were naturally peripheral to the labour market. This is no longer the case, and unemployment benefits no longer overtly discriminate in the way they did in the 1930s. Women are now part of the core work force (Lewis 2001) and are treated as such in relation to work search requirements.

We might say that the 'moral ordering' in use in the 1930s permitted a greater variety of statuses, from contributor to pauper. Under 'welfare reform' the field is being flattened: the long-term decline of contributory benefit receipt is now joined with the 'ubiquitous conditionality' referred to by Dwyer and Wright (2014). Erasing differences in treatment in favour of a universal escalation of disciplinary measures to push claimants toward the labour market.

Young people made their transitions from school into the labour market in very different circumstances in the 1930s than they have in the 2010s. This difference is not limited to the school leaving ages of 14 in the 1930s, and the 'participation age' (which requires that all be in education or training in one of a series of institutions) of 18 since 2014; it involves an entirely changed education infrastructure. Yet some continuing themes and trends can be discerned. One is the survival of 'youth' as a category designating an ambiguous position between childhood and adulthood. A position where young people were regarded as not yet fully formed and therefore an appropriate target for disciplinary interventions which were seen as able to provide forms of socialisation which might have been lacking in the family. In both periods the need for discipline was linked to a belief in the value of early interventions. Young people were the citizens of the future but were perceived as liable to drift into bad habits or even become a threat to society if left to fall into demoralised or dependent lifestyles. Perhaps because of these worries youth is a period of transitional rights within the system. Young claimants were not trusted to

make decisions about the utility of forms of training and instruction (for instance in the broad compulsion to attend the JIC) and were feared to be susceptible to be demoralised easily by 'doles for children'. Yet the juveniles of the 1930s were less likely to be labelled deviant and deserving of punishment.

In each period the question arose of young claimants' dependence on the family versus dependence on the state. Reduced entitlements have been seen as necessary to maintain less eligibility in light of the lower wages and assumed lower living costs, but also because of the psychological propensity to be easily influenced by the availability of allowances. This, however, was also based on an assumption that the young person should be supported, in part at least, by their parents. This can be seen in the justifications provided for Housing Benefit cuts (as discussed in Chapter 8) but also in the way low wages and benefits undermined the Transference scheme in the 1920s which attempted to relocate juveniles from the 'depressed areas' to ones where they might secure employment. However, the different model of conditionality applied to the juvenile reflected a status which has gone; the exemption of the juvenile from poor law treatment reflected a view of them as in need of support. Whilst the poor law as such no longer existed there was no evident desire to exempt the youngest claimants of JSA or UC from the harshest aspects of conditionality. Of course this is a difficult judgement to make. It could be objected that in the 1930s the thesis discussed children and in 2010-15 young adults. But youth itself is a historically and socially constructed and malleable concept and its changing definitions over time are of interest for this thesis. The new labour market entrant was always a category of its own. They entered a situation which was not of their own making and in the 1930s this was a major justification for their different treatment. Post 2010 however this fact has had little impact on policy.

A particular difference which merits attention is the trajectory of policy in the two periods. The punitive direction of present day policy contrasts with the increasing

generosity of the treatment of the unemployed as the 1930s went on; policy moved in opposite directions. Despite the desire to impose cuts which were seen as crucial to national revival; as was evidenced by the May Commission's report in 1931. Treatment of the unemployed improved as time went on; the Genuinely Seeking Work Test was abolished, contribution criteria were relaxed, and planned cuts were not implemented e.g. in the Standstill Act. This might be explained by the presence of strong dissenting social movements in the 1930s. The fear of unrest was a constant factor, the Hunger Marches and protest of the British unemployed occurred against the background of international crisis and the recent revolutions in Russia and Europe.

Some overall themes emerge from this analysis in each period. The evidence from the thesis shows the importance of the devices and techniques designed to alter the subjectivities of welfare claimants. In a liberal 'political rationality' the ontological subject upon which policy acts is the claimants themselves. Disciplinary policies follow from this highly individualised view. The governmentality analysis shows that the study of governmental techniques can provide insights into the character of the time and into the wider mentality of rule.

## 9.2 Contributions of this thesis

Section 9.1 set out how the evidence from the thesis has provided answers to the Research Questions. This sub-section examines broader conclusions and what implications this evidence might have for the direction of policy in the 2010s. Where might evidence from the 1930s make a meaningful contribution to the critique of welfare reform and the development of policy alternatives?

This thesis has made an original contribution to knowledge in different fields. It has provided a historical perspective to help ground modern understanding of welfare reform in a longer historical context. Historical study has the benefit of enabling an

analysis which opens new perspectives on the present. The thesis has presented evidence which in many ways shows the extremity of present activation measures. It has applied governmentality theory in detail to a new case of Britain in the 1930s and is the first examination of Birmingham's Public Assistance practices. The thesis has linked changing techniques of governance to wider shifts in policy and changing labour markets.

### 9.2.1 To current debates on Conditionality

This evidence of the continuities between policy during the inter-war depression and in recent times may challenge aspects of a modern understanding of neo-liberalism. Welfare reform has been described by its advocates as bringing an antiquated system into the 21<sup>st</sup> century (DWP 2010). This new welfare system is supposed to be informed by the latest information technology, 'real-time information' and behavioural economics. At the same time reform is also billed as a return 'to first principles' (Freud 2011), as a restoration of the true intentions of Beveridge. To some extent critics reproduce this focus on the post-war period as the default comparison point for 'welfare reform' policy. Yet this thesis has demonstrated that the measures chosen to achieve these objectives have continuities with policy in the pre-welfare state era. This appears to have come about without the conscious intent of policy makers who make no reference to pre-Beveridge social policy in justifying their measures. Although considering the poor reputation of the 1930s, such comparisons would be of little use.

There are some signs of policy makers taking a long view of policy, but these are few. The Work and Pensions Sub-Committee in the House of Commons (House of Commons Work & Pensions Committee 2016-2017) has undertaken in 2013-2014 and 2016-2017 a wide-ranging review into the future of the 109-year-old service now called Jobcentre Plus. This has pointed out the difficulty in resolving the contradiction between 'help' i.e. the role of the service in helping claimants overcome their 'barriers to work' through supportive 'coaching' and 'hassle' i.e. the

issuing of punishments and sanctions for non-compliance. However even here there are references to the 1911 foundation of Insurance but no real examination of the period between that date and 1945. This 'hassle and help' contradiction goes back not to any single recent increase in conditionality, or even to the introduction of JSA in 1996 but to the foundation of the Exchanges. These unacknowledged histories of apparently new policies and problems should suggest that a reassessment of the scale of historical evidence could be included in debates on conditionality. There have been several proposals to refine, but essentially maintain, the present approach of activation-based conditionality but these are often based on only a partial history of its problems.

There are problems when examining the past in light of the present of which historians are very aware. But this thesis has demonstrated that historical evidence can make a positive contribution to understanding of today's society. Reviving the memory of past practices can break open closed understandings, and hegemonic 'common sense' ideas can be challenged. By looking at understandings and discourses before they become crystalized, settled and standardised (Grady 2010) divergent possibilities which have been closed off or rendered invisible can be made visible. As such it encourages reflexive thinking in policy. This longer view (compared to contrasts between the post-war welfare state and the present) questions the uniqueness of the apparent historical rupture in the nature of the British welfare state.

Then, as now, it can be argued that these technologies of enforced job-search and compulsory work for benefit, are fundamentally disempowering. "[T]he monitoring of jobseekers as part of activation policies, combined with a sanctions regime and time-limited entitlements, is a clumsy, costly and often demeaning regime" (Mulheirn and Masters 2014: 74). This sort of regime is incompatible with an ethos of solidarity and with benefit received as a right. Enforced job search of a kind comparable to modern conditionality requirements was, noted seen in Chapter 6,

by the beginning of the 1930s understood to be a failed and discredited policy. From this point the offer of work formed the main means by which the authorities could identify false claims. This understanding was later entrenched in Britain's welfare state by the Beveridge report which stated that "the only satisfactory test of unemployment is an offer of work" (Beveridge 1942 p163) and which regarded the means like the Genuinely Seeking Work tests as mistakes, not to be repeated. This reliance on offers of work persisted until the introduction of JSA in 1996.

This thesis has identified what is new and what is old in conditionality policy, it has shown that enforced work has precedents in the administration of Public Assistance. It has shown that active job search had precedents in the GSW test yet this condition had been decisively rejected even before the 1930s depression began. Yet in the present day active job search is regarded by most mainstream politicians and policy influencers as a necessary or even natural feature of any benefit system. This is despite active job search in the modern period dating only from the 1990s. This might lead to questioning of the apparent consensus around the utility and justice of 'activation', or at least can put 'activation' in its proper historical context.

The evidence of this thesis that in many ways present day regimes of intervention are more intrusive and punitive than those present in the 1930s before the welfare state should be disturbing. This comparison does not flatter and shows the extremity of the current social policy regime. A particularly disturbing aspect of this is the trajectory of 'reform'. In the 1930s, despite the desire of liberals to return to 'normality', benefits were becoming more inclusive and conditionality less severe. Eventually these reforms were to contribute to the development of a new welfare regime in the UK. The opposite has been the case in the present day; the game of 'policy leapfrog' in conditionality has only gone in one direction, behavioural regulations becoming more and more intensive.

Since the crisis of 2008 the response of policy elites has been to deepen neoliberalism and to rapidly steepen the trajectory of escalating behavioural coercion. In the 1930s liberal reform influenced the later shift to the post-war welfare state which placed the abolition of unemployment at the core of a new policy agenda. The welfare system of the post-war period marked a shift away from the regimes of behavioural assessment associated with the poor-law. In 2018 it is not yet clear what the consequences of the increasing inadequacy of Britain's welfare regime will be. Alternative policy responses as offered by the mainstream of political debate, from opposition parties and thinktanks and charities from 2010-2015, were largely focussed around technocratic refinements of the agenda of deepening conditionality. Sometimes this tendency included expressions of concern and regret about the impact of this agenda, preferring a better targeted regime, but there has been little opposition to the central principles and logic behind disciplinary conditionality. Evidence from the 1930s cannot definitively prove the impossibility of a smooth functioning regime of behavioural regulation which 'personalises' in such a manner as to deliver constructive improvement and just punishment to the 'victims and villains' (Brown 1990) respectively. However the thesis has shown that there have been a long history of failures to achieve such a state of affairs, not least the failure of such a regime to respond to the mass unemployment of the great depression in a way that could be considered to be rational or just.

### 9.2.2 To current debates on youth transitions

This thesis has made a contribution to current debates on the nature of the youth unemployment problem by showing some of the ways youth transitions were handled in the 1930s.

Evidence from the thesis can problematise the way that present day policy attempts to regulate the transition from school to work. The assumptions underlining policy in each period were quite different. While in 2018 the unemployed young are pushed towards immediate job outcomes and expected to gain 'work experience' through performing insecure labour, evidence from the 1930s shows that ideal transitions were conceptualised differently. The problematisation of 'blind alley' work stands in sharp contrast to its idealisation in the 'flexicurity' era. It has also shown from the evidence of the Birmingham JIC that forms of training tightly linked to local labour markets were important for successful outcomes. The representation of local employers and trade unionists on committees and advisory bodies concerned with JIC curricula also contrasts to the current regime of fractured placement agencies placed on short term contracts themselves.

Some contribution can be made to debates on cuts to young people's benefits by the evidence found in this thesis on the problems caused by low benefit rates in the 1930s. Policy makers aimed for labour mobility, but this was undermined by the lower wages and benefits paid to young people. Government was convinced that the problem of the depressed areas could not be solved by a policy of regional aid, rather the solution was to encourage the most able workers to leave to 'get on their bikes' and move to where jobs were available. The Industrial Transference programme in particular aimed to rescue the most able young people from the 'demoralisation' of unemployed communities of the depressed areas. It was undermined by the structure in the labour market and many juveniles returned home. Similarly, whilst young people were supposed to undertake long term training in 'progressive' occupations, the low wages paid to apprentices made 'blind alley' work more desirable in the immediate term.

The juvenile is a category of claimant that has lost a distinct identity. The juvenile was subject to distinct forms of disciplinary intervention in the JIC, and yet they

were also offered a number of protections; being 'credited in' to the insurance system, sanctioned rarely and kept away from PA 'test and task' work. Transitions from childhood to adulthood were handled in a different way; juveniles were integrated into a system which included child claimants as dependants but also potentially as acknowledged workers. In the present day, young workers have lower entitlements and are subject to some heightened forms of conditionality. The direction of travel is one where their treatment is becoming harsher but also one in which their status as adults is being questioned; cuts to housing benefit seeking to push this group toward the family, toward an extended dependent status. Post 2010 dependence has not meant exemptions but a greater scepticism of their claim to be seen as legitimately unemployed. The transition from childhood to adulthood takes place later. The status of youth within welfare systems has changed, however it remains a distinct subject meriting unique forms of treatment.

### 9.2.3 To the study of the 1930s

The main contribution of the thesis has been its use of evidence from the 1930s to inform current debates on 'welfare reform'. However in its selection of empirical sources it also makes a contribution to the historical study of the 1930s. The thesis has examined less studied aspects of unemployment in the 1930s: youth unemployment and the use of Birmingham as a case study. The files of Birmingham's PAC and JEWSC have not been examined for any similar purpose to those of this thesis. The thesis provides a different perspective on the 1930s than that often stressed in literature on the 'devils decade'. In examining the unemployment of young people and looking at Birmingham it has looked at the problem of unemployment, not where it was at its worst, but where it was more susceptible to techniques of liberal management.

The comparison with 2010-15 is challenging to present day policy but it also allows some reassessment of the 1930s. Section 2.2 said that histories of the 1930s written in the post-war period and in the 1980s reflected contemporary concerns,

and historical study was often motivated by the desire to find lessons from the past to inform practice in the present. The 1930s looks different from different vantage points. The fact that aspects of policy in the 1930s appear relatively benign and lenient by comparison with 'welfare reform' should perhaps disturb contemporary observers. The comparison makes the 1930s appear as a period in which the treatment of the unemployed steadily improved, as stigmatizing regimes of behavioural assessment and surveillance became unsustainable. This evidence allows one to reassess the image of the 1930s. Histories are often written to reflect current values and expectations about the direction of progress. In the post war period the experience of the depression established the necessity of developments in social reform. When mass unemployment and free-market economics returned in the 1980s it appeared more as a warning from history. After approximately 40 years of neo-liberal government in Britain the comparison is less a warning of what the present trajectory may lead toward than a sign of how far things have gone. At least in the field of conditionality, policy in the 1930s appears considerably more moderate and restrained than that of 2010-18. The comparison makes the 'devil's decade' appear as a period of relatively progressive legislation where understandings of unemployment which were not based upon individual deficiencies became increasingly embedded in legislation.

#### 9.3.4 Theory

The thesis has made a theoretical contribution to knowledge. It provides a new case in the application of governmentality analysis to the 1930s. Governmentality analysis has enabled a particular and distinctive understanding of liberal forms of government. It enables an analysis of the way that the individual is both subject and object of intervention (Walters 2000), the way that 'self-government' is employed to achieve objectives.

In examining the means by which the government of the unemployed was conducted in the 1930s, this analysis has reached findings unavailable to other

approaches. It provides an account of the way desirable subjectivities were constructed in policy discourse, for instance the problematic of the 'demoralisation' of the unemployed worker. The application of a Foucauldian understanding of discipline and the technologies used to instil and enforce correct behaviours has added value to the study of welfare regimes. By investigating their functions as disciplinary apparatuses it goes beyond debates about the appropriateness of a given conditionality regime (judged by the ability of claimants to comply) and connects welfare regimes to wider political rationalities of liberalism.

But by itself governmentality analysis struggles to understand the role of status in determining rights to benefit. The thesis makes a contribution to theory by supplementing governmentality analysis with the understanding of moral orders from Boltanski and Thévenot (2006). It provides an account of not only the ideals and schemes of policy makers but the social constraints they faced. Disciplinary interventions needed to be justified and this need for justification plays a role in explaining the variety of subject positions found in welfare systems.

### 9.3 Methods and possibilities for future research

Undertaking this research has presented some challenges. This section reflects on the challenges it has posed and possible limitations in its methods. The following section concludes with a consideration of where and how this research could be developed in the future.

#### 9.3.1 Methodology

As was discussed in Section 3.2.3 there are limitations to what can be learned from archive sources. Important parts of discussions may well be missing from files, which in any case are written records of discussions, not the discussions themselves. Omissions and partial descriptions posed a challenge, as did the language of policy in the 1930s. In discussions what is taken for granted 'common

knowledge' or 'common sense', will be left unstated, although justifications for action will be articulated. It was necessary to read widely to be immersed in the linguistic context of the time. There were occasions where partial description made the meaning of statements unclear. For instance a statement of Birmingham's PAC that men interred in the 'able-bodied' wing of the workhouse were not truly capable of work<sup>168</sup> could not be definitively interpreted. This could have meant that these people had disabilities unrecognised by the system but evident to the workhouse administrators, or a harsh moral judgement, or a mixture of the two. One significant omission from files is unemployed women. They often disappear from discussions, and where they do appear in files they are regarded as a peculiar 'anomalous' group of claimants. Patriarchal norms structure not only policy itself but also the records it has left behind.

Governmentality analysis has contributed well to this research, as seen above. However there were moments in conducting this research where its focus on elite discourses became a limitation. The perspective of dissenting workers has only been glimpsed here. To some extent this is a limitation coming from a reliance on official documentation wherein dissent is recorded as a problem or an obstacle to policy success. It should not be assumed that the problems which dominated official discussions were the only or the biggest problems in any objective sense.

Another limitation of a method based on the study of policy discourses and official documentation is that it is not definitively possible to know whether officials on the ground really followed policy as set out in the documents. An example of this can be seen in Fletcher's 2014 article on enforced work, where he finds evidence of claimants of UA being mandated to attend residential work centres by officials at Employment Exchanges, in apparent contradiction of the insistence by the Board

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<sup>168</sup> BCC/1/CD/1/1/6 1935-6 Minutes of the PAC, Report on correspondence with the UAB, December 1935 27-28.

that the schemes were voluntary. This thesis cannot rule out informal drives to disallow benefits on the part of street level bureaucrats (Lipsky 2010), nor say to what extent this was condoned by the centre. Governmentality analysis as was set out in Chapter 3, is focussed on policy discourse and mentalities of rule more than the ontological reality of what this discourse describes.

### 9.3.2 Possibilities for further research

The 1930s provides a wealth of information relevant to policy in the present day. The context of austerity policy in both eras means the resemblances are not restricted to the welfare system. Nevertheless, the study of the welfare/social security system of the 1930s can be developed further. As this research project has been carried out it has also highlighted some possibilities for further research. Some of these follow from the limitations identified in the previous section (9.3). But some also follow from aspects of policy in the 1930s which appeared to have a great deal of relevance to modern day issues but which could not be fully explored, given the research questions of the thesis. These modern issues for example include the government of homelessness, migration and rights to benefit and the treatment of disability in the benefit system.

The decision to study Birmingham has been explained in Chapter 3. As a case study Birmingham has offered a different image of the 1930s than that found in studies of the depressed areas. The choice of case study has been justified in Chapters 1 and 4. The thesis has found that assessments of local labour markets played a role in determining whether the subject was seen as responsible for their unemployment. An additional study of Public Assistance administration and the administration of JICs in an authority one of the depressed areas could provide an interesting contrast. This would present the opportunity to develop a stronger understanding of the contrasts between depressed and prosperous areas, and also to explore the relationships between these areas through an examination of migration (and emigration) policy.

Following on from this, this research has uncovered questions in policy debates in the 1930s on how to handle migration. These issues appear highly relevant today. The thesis has undertaken some analysis of the operation of the Industrial Transference scheme as well as Settlement and Irremovability, and travel as a component of enforced job search. Similar issues appear in the 2010s, in particular the rights to support of EU nationals have been the subject of intense recent debate, their access to state support depending upon a set period of residence and a strengthened conditionality regime. Local Authorities continue to employ residency criteria to deny assistance to homeless people seeking support (Dobie et al 2014). The relations between migration, residency and conditionality in this new international context, analysed from the Governmentality perspective, from an important avenue for future research.

One area which has not been explored to any real extent in this thesis is the treatment of sick or disabled people who sought state support in the 1930s. This was justified by the need to limit the scope of the investigation. Yet the files examined occasionally brought up pieces of interesting information which contrast with the present-day treatment of disability in the benefit system. The discussion of the Capable and Available for work criteria in Chapter 6 focussed on availability. However, the assessment of Capability is also of interest; unemployment benefits were higher than support for disability (although disability benefits were easier to access) so claimants were forced to argue they were capable of work. Assessment criteria were focussed on their employment record and on the preferences of employers rather than the quasi-medical Work Capability Assessments in ESA and UC since 2012.

To conclude, comparison with the 1930s provides a great deal of insight into the welfare system and the regulation of unemployment today and, in a number of respects, this comparison has the potential to be explored further.

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