

Youth unemployment must be tackled now

We must act now to stop more young people becoming trapped in long-term unemployment, says Danny Dorling [guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk), Tuesday 14 September 2010

I have undertaken new analysis of UK unemployment figures for the youth charity, the Prince's Trust. Alarming, it shows that the number of [young people](#) trapped in long-term unemployment has almost doubled in the past two years. This is despite the fact that the rate of youth unemployment overall appears to be stabilising – at least for now.

It can be explained by the process of "creaming and parking", where young people with the most qualifications and skills are being "creamed" off by employers, keeping unemployment as a whole relatively stable. Meanwhile, those who are the least employable and most vulnerable are being "parked" in the dole queue.

Sadly, the vast majority of young people up and down the country are being forced to scale down their aspirations as a result of the [recession](#). Our overcrowded job market is forcing thousands of graduates into unemployment or less-skilled jobs. In turn, young people with fewer skills and qualifications are stepping down into unskilled work, and unskilled workers are left facing unemployment. It's like a game of musical chairs, where there are far too few places to sit down when the music stops.

However, it is the young people on the bottom of the pile that we need to be most concerned about. They may have struggled at school or grown up thinking that no one cares. They worry they will never find work or be able to support themselves, let alone a family of their own. Many of them are branded as "unemployable" before they are even given a chance. And all too often they face a long and downward spiral towards poverty, homelessness, drug addiction or worse.

Take Paul from Liverpool. He grew up in a poor neighbourhood and struggled at school. He got involved with gangs at a young age and left school at 15 without any qualifications. He ended up taking a well-trodden path to underachievement and long-term unemployment. For a while, he believed there would be no second chances for him.

But then he approached the Prince's Trust and, with its help, decided to run a football tournament in his area, bringing together hundreds of young people from different communities and giving them something to do in the evenings. The tournament was a huge success, inspiring him to help other vulnerable young people through sport. As a result, Paul now has his ideal job as a football coach and, for the first time, feels he has a real future.

Paul's determination, not only to turn his life around but to improve the lives of other young people, is living proof that, where opportunities are made available, it is possible to give young people the skills and self-esteem they need to get past the dole queue and make a future for themselves.

It is hugely important to tackle youth unemployment now. According to a joint report by RBS and the Prince's Trust, *The Cost of Exclusion*, it is already costing a staggering £10m a day in lost productivity, while youth crime costs £1bn every year.

Only by stopping a generation of vulnerable young people falling out of the system can we rescue this lost potential and save the economy billions each year.

- Danny Dorling is professor of human geography at the University of Sheffield