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Youth employment in the context of hegemonic neoliberalism: a case study of the Illawarra Region

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**YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF HEGEMONIC
NEOLIBERALISM: A CASE STUDY OF THE ILLAWARRA
REGION**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Scott David Burrows, BA (Hons)

**SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL INQUIRY
FACULTY OF LAW, HUMANITIES AND THE ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG**

2014

CERTIFICATION

I, Scott David Burrows, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Scott David Burrows

27th June 2014

ABSTRACT

Youth employment is one of the most pressing social issues in the Australian economy. Youth generally have greater employment difficulties than other groups in the labour market. This is particularly striking in regional Australia. The focus of this thesis is the Illawarra region of New South Wales, Australia which has experienced one of the most disadvantaged labour markets for youth over the last few decades. There have been a number of important factors that have impacted on youth employment. One of the most significant has been neoliberalism, an ideology and practice that has become ubiquitous in the developed West. The theory of hegemony developed by Antonio Gramsci is used to understand how neoliberalism operates. Hegemony can be applied to both theory and ideology, and policy and structures. The thesis argues that neoliberalism can be seen as hegemonic, and contends that it can be seen as operating successfully in its own terms in the Australian context.

This thesis specifies the nature of the local youth labour market in the Illawarra's regional economy. The thesis poses a central research question to understand these dimensions: What are the challenges to youth employment in a neoliberal economy that operates successfully in its own terms? In order to explore this question a qualitative methodology is used that draws on youth employment experiences to understand, more specifically, how neoliberalism has impacted on youth. The findings indicate how significant neoliberal ideologies and practices impact on youth employment experiences, and youth understandings of them. In particular, the study demonstrates how precarious employment shapes the experiences and expectations of youth, contributing to new understandings of youth employment in regional Australia.

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Parts of chapter three have been published in these proceedings:

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Burrows, S. (2010a) '*Contesting the Social Impacts of Neoliberalism: Economic Recovery, Unemployment and Youth in the Illawarra Region*', proceedings of the 12th Path to Full Employment Conference/17th National Conference on Unemployment, Centre for Full Employment and Equity (COFFEE), University of Newcastle, Newcastle, December.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ISD	Illawarra Statistical District
ILO	International Labour Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
WSD	Wollongong Statistical District

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CHAPTER ONE: SCOPE OF THE THESIS

1.1: Introduction: From the Global to National

In both the developed and developing world, youth¹ have experienced significant employment disadvantages² over the last few decades. In most countries the levels of employment disadvantage amongst youth are higher than most other labour market groups. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that youth are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults. The current number of youth out of work is estimated to be over 75 million. Indeed, as the ILO notes, the mix of joblessness, increased inactivity and precarious work in developed countries, and the high levels of working poverty in the developing world, represents a great concern for youth and their well-being (O'Higgins 2001; Furlong 2012).

In developed countries, youth have experienced significant youth employment disadvantages. Current figures produced by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) indicate youth unemployment rates are as high as those experienced in the early 1990's (ILO 2012; Crowley et al. 2013). In 2011, the European Union youth unemployment rate was as high as 22 per cent (European Commission 2012) while the youth unemployment rate in the United States was 16 per cent in 2012 (ILO 2012). In developing countries, youth tend to be employed in the informal economy so under-employment, hidden unemployment and precarious employment are much higher than in developed countries (Godfrey 2003). The difficulties of integrating youth into the labour market suggests even greater challenges and more concerted policy responses are required than in developed countries such as Australia, the U.K. and the United States. Neoliberalism is generally most advanced in these countries

1 The United Nations defines youth as 15 to 24 years of age but how different countries consider youth as a group varies enormously (UN 2011). The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) defines youth as 15-24 years of age for the purposes of employment (ABS 2007). For the purposes of this thesis, youth will be defined as 15-24 years of age based on the international and national literature (see Wyn and White 1997; Ansell 2005; Woodman and Threadgold 2011; Crowley et al. 2013).

2 I refer to youth employment disadvantage throughout this thesis. I use the term interchangeably to refer to youth unemployment, underemployment, hidden unemployment and precarious employment.

(O'Higgins 2001; Ansell 2005). In the countries of Eastern Europe and those countries with transitional economies more generally, youth employment challenges are much the same as the developing world (Betcherman et al. 2004). In East Asia for example, a region of significant economic diversity and prospects, the youth unemployment rate in 2011 was three times higher than the adult rate. The ILO's recent Global Trends for Youth (2012) report indicates that in the medium term, upward pressure on youth unemployment rates is expected in a number of regions including the Middle East, East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific. Even with estimates adjusted for regional and national variations, 75 million youth are unemployed with a global youth unemployment rate of 12.7 per cent (ILO 2012). Given the incidences of under-employment and hidden unemployment and precarious work more generally, these estimates remain conservative. Despite the withdrawal of youth from the labour force globally, youth tend to be marginalised from many employment opportunities. The impacts of youth employment disadvantage discourage youth from looking for work. Some youth stay in education longer while some give up looking for work altogether. As the international literature indicates, regardless of the particular economic, political and social factors relevant to each respective country, youth experience significant employment disadvantages regardless of country of origin (Betcherman et al. 2004; Furlong and Cartmel 2007).

A range of theoretical approaches are useful in understanding youth employment. Orthodox economists' explanations of labour market trends stem from the static labour supply model. This involves the allocation of time between paid work and leisure for an individual, and is in turn derived from the general model of consumer demand. An individual seeks to maximise utility subject to their budget constraint. The model can also be expressed with reference to the individual's reservation wage, being the individual's implicit value of his/her time. If the individual places a greater value on his/her time (the reservation wage) than the prevailing wage rate offered in the labour market, then zero hours will be supplied to the labour market. This static model of labour force participation has been extended to incorporate non-linear budget constraints and restrictions on hours of work imposed by employers as well as endogenisation of the market wage profile with the incorporation of human capital theory (Mincer 1974). Human capital theory posits that individuals can influence

wages by investing in human capital and accumulating (labour) marketable skills. Individual choice and reaction to financial incentives are at the core of orthodox economics explanations. Given this, a number of relevant institutional issues remain exogenous in this model. Labour economists typically decompose unemployment rates into three components (Ehrenberg and Smith 2006). First, frictional unemployment is the result of the unavoidable time it takes for a successful job match. This includes search time for the job seeker and the time taken for the employer to fill a vacant position. Frictional unemployment should be short term in nature and can be influenced by factors influencing the job matching process. Second, structural unemployment is the result of a mismatch between the skills possessed by the unemployed and the job vacancies available. It is typically long term in nature, requiring training of the unemployed to equip them with the necessary skills to take up the type of employment available. Finally, we have cyclical unemployment which is associated with fluctuations in the business cycle. Orthodox economists contend that these fluctuations should be infrequent and short in duration, being quickly resolved by market forces.

In addition, orthodox macroeconomists refer to a “natural rate of unemployment” consisting of the sum of frictional and structural employment. Casting aside the notion of cyclical unemployment, the natural rate is viewed as a stable long run, equilibrium, or full employment rate of unemployment that an economy will naturally revert to. In contrast, heterodox economists such as post-Keynesians are skeptical of the concept of equilibrium and an economy’s reversion to full employment, instead emphasising the concept of hysteresis or path dependence in unemployment rates. That is, the tendency of unemployment rates to meander over time rather than reverting back to any steady state or equilibrium rate.

Segmented labour market theory suggests that the labour market is divided into sub-markets, whereby the rules governing the behaviour of labour market actors differ from one segment of the labour market to the other (Michon 1987). In contrast to orthodox theory, segmented labour market theory starts with the premise that the institutional framework overrides individual choice aspects of labour supply. Segmented labour market theory emphasises the heterogeneous nature of labour

supply and the role of the employer within the institutional framework, rather than individual maximising behaviour (Cain 1976; Taubman and Wachter 1986). The labour market is generally segmented by characteristics that an individual has no control over such as age, sex, race or region, rather than reflecting an individual's costs and productivity, or human capital generally, as a homogeneous labour market would.

Peck (1996) depicts the evolution of segmented labour market theory through three generations. First generation segmentation theorists developed the concept of the dual labour market, consisting of a primary segment offering stable high wage, permanent employment operating alongside a secondary segment characterised by low wages, limited scope for advancement, low levels of training, and high turnover and cyclical variability (Doeringer and Piore 1971; Gordon 1972). Dual labour markets may be evident across industry, or even within the firm's employment composition, if they adopt a core-periphery strategy consisting of a stable number of core workers employed under internal labour market arrangements, surrounded by a flexible number of periphery workers employed under external labour market arrangements (Atkinson 1987). A major proposition put forth by dual labour market theory is rigidity as regards to mobility between the two sectors. An implication of dual labour market theory is that youth, overrepresented in the secondary sector, are trapped in this periphery.

Second generation segmented labour market theorists adopted a more adversarial stance towards orthodox theory (Gordon 1972, Reich *et al.* 1973; Vietorisz and Harrison 1973, Peck 1996). Rather than reflecting technical requirements, these theorists used Marxist theoretical underpinnings to argue that monopoly capitalist firms sought to "divide and conquer" their workforce through the development of extended hierarchies and the exploitation of age, racial and gender differences.

Third generation segmented labour market theorists took a further step away from orthodox theoretical foundations, being firmly rooted in institutional economics, Marxist and post-Keynesian economic theory. Third generation segmented labour market theory more generally addresses the potential role of segregation, the

incorporation of the State, as well as aggregate labour market conditions. These latter developments are consistent with Marx's reserve army depiction.

Karl Marx discussed a surplus population, or the "reserve army of labour", whereby the capitalist system keeps workers disciplined with a permanent degree of unemployment that becomes a permanent feature associated with capitalism. This is due to the nature of technical progress, the ability of capital to place downward pressure on wages and the functionality of unemployment within capitalism (Marx 1976; Taylor 1986: 75-103; Jatan 1993: 69-70; Darity 1999: 492; Dunn 2009: 74).

This thesis however argues that the impacts of neoliberalism have been most significant in understanding youth employment. Indeed, the thesis contends that neoliberalism has become ubiquitous in the West³ (Martinez 1999; Gamble 2006; Plehwe et al. 2006). There are a number of reasons this is the case. Not only is neoliberalism an economic theory that argues labour markets should be free of coercion and intervention from the State. Neoliberalism also shapes the cultural and social context of youth employment more generally (Rutherford and Davison 2012). This thesis therefore seeks to examine the challenges to youth employment in the face of neoliberalism. As David Harvey argues, neoliberalism has emerged as one of the most pervasive ideologies in the last few decades,

“Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defence, police and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if

3 This thesis contends that neoliberalism has been an overwhelming factor in the transformation of the youth labour market in recent decades. I acknowledge however the importance of other approaches that has undoubtedly influenced youth employment such as orthodox labour market theories, segmented labour market theories and other approaches across the social capital literature (see Peck 1996; 2010; Ehrenberg and Smith 2003; Stone et al. 2004).

need be, the proper functioning of markets” (2005: 2).

The global impacts of economic crisis have impacted the Australian economy and labour market differently to other economies. The main reason this is the case is that the Australian economy can be seen as a neoliberal economy operating successfully in its own terms with generally low inflation and unemployment throughout the global financial crisis. In comparison, similar economies such as those in North America and Europe have experienced significant economic dislocation with youth experiencing a disproportionate burden. Focusing on youth employment questions how neoliberalism has become accepted rather than challenged. Since the early to mid-1980's, the Australian workplace has experienced substantial changes that have undoubtedly impacted upon youth in the labour market. Although youth have generally always experienced employment disadvantage, the labour market has changed dramatically over the last few decades and the employment structures that older generations experienced have disappeared. Neoliberalism has increasingly affected youth employment in Australia leading to high levels of unemployment, under-employment, hidden unemployment and precarious employment (Standing 2011). Youth appear as the most visible symbols of the social consequences of the ideology and practices of neoliberalism, with high levels of employment disadvantage compared to other groups.

This thesis contends youth employment is one of the most pressing social issues in the Australian economy and labour market. Youth generally have greater employment difficulties than other groups in the labour market. This is particularly significant in regional Australia. Neoliberal ideologies and practices have had and continue to have deleterious impacts. This, in turn, has exacerbated a range of pre-existing problems in regional areas including educational disadvantage, poor health, poverty and high rates of youth employment disadvantage (Beer et al. 2003; Cheshire and Lawrence 2005). Despite these challenges, successive Australian governments have shown to be increasingly unable, or perhaps unwilling, to deal with them. The basic premise is that despite these impacts, the ideologies of neoliberalism continue to inform the development of regional Australia to capture the benefits that a deregulated, global economy affords. Strategies to achieve this objective have

emerged in the form of policies to enhance competitiveness and self-reliance in regional areas rather than to protect the most vulnerable regions from the economic and social consequences of neoliberalism.⁴

1.2: The Illawarra Region: A Case Study

Recognizing the importance of understanding neoliberalism in the Australian economy and labour market, the Illawarra region of New South Wales, Australia will be used as a case study to understand youth employment more clearly. Taking a critical standpoint and position, the Illawarra region emerges as particularly striking in the Australian context. While other areas of Australia have also experienced major youth employability issues such as Adelaide, Tasmania, Western Sydney and Newcastle, the Illawarra region represents a critical case and becomes generalizable (Attaran 1986; Buultjens et al. 2003; Cheshire and Lawrence 2005; Mason and Howard 2010: 180-193).⁵

The region historically had a strong manufacturing economy with coal and steel as its main industries. In recent years, the region's economy has diversified significantly into areas such as education, health care and public administration. As the region transitions, the complexity and dynamism occurring in the area are important to an examination of how neoliberalism is changing and operating both at the industrial and post-industrial level. Given this complexity, the area is an important regional locality through which to understand the global impacts and hegemonic nature of

4 While I discuss the global, I recognise that the global is not homogenous and is made up of various national popular collective wills as expressions of hegemony and therefore have their own expression (Gramsci 1971). In this respect, Australia can be viewed through the global economic crisis as one of the few national collective popular wills that enjoys neoliberalism as a successful impost in our culture, economy and society.

5 Other areas across Australia are equally important but arguably would present comparable factors. The Illawarra region however can be generalised across the population. Neoliberal principles have impacted across the whole of Australia and an analysis of an area of more average youth employment might illustrate a different picture. The focus of this thesis is on the difficulties of employability including unemployment, under-employment and precarious employment (Ebert and Wilson 2013; Standing 2011; Kalleberg 2009; Vosko 2000).

neoliberalism. Youth are currently one of the most disadvantaged groups in the Illawarra region with respect to employment. The region's youth unemployment rate, for example, has been consistently greater than state and national averages over the last few decades. These dimensions are shown in the following table.

Table 1: Selected Australian Regional Youth Unemployment Rates, December 2013

Regional Locality	Unemployment Rate%	Youth Unemployment Rate %
Illawarra*	4.5%	16%
Wollongong*	6.1%	16%
Wide Bay-Burnett	7.7%	17.9%
Northern Adelaide	9.1%	19.9%
South Eastern Melbourne	6.4%	11.8%
Fairfield-Liverpool	10.5%	14.2%
Newcastle	4.2%	12.5%
NSW	5.8%	11.7%
Australia	5.8%	12.3%

Source: ABS Labour Force Survey, December 2013

** The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) measures the Illawarra and Wollongong as two distinct statistical areas*

This research aims to explore the challenges that youth in this area face as neoliberalism continues to restructure the labour market. A key focus of this research will be to unpack and better understand the nature and operation of what might be referred to as under-employment, hidden employment and precarious employment (Smith 1997; Kalleberg 2000; 2009; Masterman-Smith and Pocock 2008; Quinlan 2012: 19). In doing so, it will investigate the employment pathways youth make in a range of transitions from school, to tertiary education and training, as well as from job to job (Goodwin and O'Connor 2005; Furling, Woodman and Wyn 2011).

1.3: Research Question and Methodology

This thesis poses a specific question. What are the challenges to youth employment in a neoliberal economy that appears to operate successfully in its own terms? Generally, the youth labour market appears functional for neoliberalism itself but why is neoliberalism dysfunctional for a large proportion of youth in Australia? In order to explore this question a qualitative methodology will be used that draws on youth employment experiences to understand, more specifically, how neoliberalism has impacted youth. The basis for using a qualitative research methodology lies in the importance of understanding the meanings youth attach to their employment experiences. To investigate these experiences, the research methodology includes face to face semi-structured interviews (n=30), focus groups (n=2, participants n=20) and primary and secondary materials. The groups targeted included professionals and youth in the region. For the youth participants, the interviews and focus groups explored the meanings they gave to their different employment experiences. For professional participants, the focus was how they understood the restructuring of the labour market in the region and their notions of hegemonic neoliberalism. The research utilises a case study approach with the Illawarra region as the main focus (Walter 2009). As Yin (1994: 13) argues, case studies are useful to investigate a phenomenon in its real life context when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. The Illawarra region is an important locality to understand how neoliberalism shapes the contextual conditions of youth employment. Given the above research question, a case study approach is the most appropriate. Yin argues that part of the importance of choosing a case study is how it can answer research questions and more clearly capture the complexity of inter-connections in real life (Yin 2009).

1.4: Understanding Neoliberalism as Hegemonic

This thesis will examine how and if neoliberalism is operating as hegemonic. As implied in the passage by Harvey (see above) neoliberalism seeks to encompass and influence not just the markets and production but all aspects of political and civil life. In this context, to best understand the hegemonic nature of neoliberalism the work of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, and in particular his development of the theory of

hegemony, is presented as fundamental. Gramsci's theory of hegemony operates on the basis of consensus as much as coercion within and through the integration of political society and civil society. In other words, hegemony is about the legitimisation of a certain set of beliefs and practices. Hegemony must also always extend beyond economic-determinism but in doing so it must enable a common moral and intellectual awareness, a common culture. The importance of hegemony for Gramsci, was the attainment of a coherent economic, political and social conception of the world, and one's place in it (Gramsci 1978).

Neoliberalism today is understood as the set of beliefs and practices that promote the market as the best mechanism through which to organise life. As Treanor (2005: 5) argues,

“[a] project [that] involves the intensification and expansion of the market by increasing the number, frequency, repeatability and formalisation of transactions to produce a universe where every action of every being is a market transaction and conducted in competition with every other being that in turn, influences every other transaction. The market becomes a value in itself; an ethic in itself and capable of acting as a guide for all human action”

Embedded in this is the idea that the market should be given the authority to redefine culture in terms of an ongoing series of voluntary transactions between assumed equal and rational individuals (Harvey 2005; Gamble 2006; Robison 2006: 3). In other words neoliberalism, as a system of thought and action, has become so deeply embedded in the culture that it has a legitimacy that is beyond question. With this legitimacy neoliberal policies and programs have imposed major changes upon the labour market that now are having significant consequences for youth (Leitner et al. 2007: 2-3). This thesis will specify the nature of the local youth labour market that results from, and works within, hegemonic neoliberalism in the Illawarra's regional economy. In doing so, the thesis seeks to explore and expose the social conditions and consequences for youth and their employment.

1.5: Chapter Outline and Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organised in the following way and has eight chapters overall. This includes a chapter on understanding neoliberalism as hegemonic, a chapter on youth employment from the global to the national, a methodology chapter, a case study chapter on the Illawarra region of New South Wales, Australia while the remaining chapters include professional and youth perspectives on employment, a discussion and analysis chapter, and a conclusion and futures chapter.

Chapter Two examines how and if neoliberalism operates as hegemonic. In doing so, I explore its operation from the global to the national to present a sense of its operation. I then examine Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, to understand more specifically, how neoliberalism has become hegemonic. In order to do this, the chapter will examine key components of Gramsci's thought including the concepts of ethico-political and good sense to understand how the maintenance of hegemony is possible. The hypothesis is that neoliberalism has now expanded from a commonsense set of economic and political ideas and practices to have now become ubiquitous at the social level and thereby 'fully' hegemonic. The implications for youth employment therefore involve the intensification and expansion of the market in ways that inform and shape the youth employment experience that were, it is argued, less significant in recent decades. The importance of this argument is that neoliberalism, while crucial to economic and political process now has a fundamental role and function in the social world. In considering the importance of these factors, the chapter provides an analysis of how neoliberalism has shaped the labour market and youth employment at the global and national levels.

Chapter Three examines the youth employment situation in Australia and compares this to the global context. In particular Chapter two shows that the operation of neoliberalism in Australia can be seen as operating successfully in its own terms and how this differentiates it from its expressions globally. I develop more specifically, the impacts of neoliberalism by examining the challenges of youth employment in the contemporary labour market. This examination and analysis is important as it will

establish the justification for the Illawarra region case study that will follow in Chapter four of this thesis.

Chapter Four examines the methodology of the thesis. I utilise a case study approach of the Illawarra region collecting data from a range of different organisations through a mixed methods approach that includes interviews, focus groups and the collection of primary and secondary materials from international, national and regional perspectives. I collected data in the years of 2010-2012. The chapter examines the research methods and sample. In the later sections of the chapter, I examine the processes of data analysis, detail the ethical issues encountered, and delineate the limitations of the study.

Chapter Five presents the case study of the Illawarra region in detail and begins with a brief description of the region including its location and geography. Following this, an historical analysis is undertaken that pays particular attention to the economic crisis that the region experienced in the early 1980's and its various youth employment impacts. Following this, the chapter moves on to examine the transformations that followed the crisis and led to a movement from an industrial to post-industrial economy that in turn has led to the changing nature of youth employment in the region.

Chapter Six presents the data with professionals and youth in the region. This chapter draws from face to face semi-structured interviews and focus groups conducted in the region during 2011-2012. It commences with participants' views on education and training, socio-economic status and previous employment experience. The chapter provides a context to understand the dynamics of youth employment in the region and acts along with the previous chapters to develop an understanding of the consequences of hegemonic neoliberalism. There were a number of distinct patterns in the way youth experienced employment and the labour market. In providing perspectives on the research questions, the data is presented as a series of broad categories and associated themes. Youth discuss a wide range of experiences and stories as they negotiate their own pathways and life choices in the youth labour market.

Chapter Seven presents the views expressed in the research undertaken with professionals. It provides an analysis of how hegemonic neoliberalism has impacted the region, contextualising the nature and role of restructuring from the perspective of research participants. It explores professionals' views on what they understood by neoliberalism, and from that understanding the extent to which they thought how much industry and the labour market had been restructured. The interview schedule then proposed that as part of the restructure of industry that their own operations had been influenced by the priorities of these reforms. The interview schedule then asked professionals what they thought were the social impacts for youth as a consequence of this restructuring and how they saw their operations broadly effecting youth employment. The chapter concludes by positioning the various implications of these findings for chapter seven and eight of this thesis.

Chapter Eight provides an analysis of the data presented in chapter six and seven and in doing so, undertakes a thorough examination of the implications of the findings. Overall, the chapter highlights the diverse meanings and understandings from both professionals and youth concerning the youth employment experience. The chapter commences by assessing the youth employment experience from the perspective of professionals. The chapter then assesses the employment experiences of youth and examines the nature and dimensions of precarious youth employment – one of the most important aspects of the contemporary youth labour market before concluding.

Chapter Nine discusses the conclusion of the thesis. In this concluding chapter I consider the implications of the research in light of the findings presented in chapter six, seven and eight. The chapter then considers the implications for further study and the future of the region before concluding the thesis.

CHAPTER TWO: UNDERSTANDING NEOLIBERALISM AS HEGEMONIC

2.1: Introduction

In this chapter, I examine in greater detail how and if neoliberalism operates as hegemonic. In doing so, I explore its operation from the global to the national to present a sense of its operation. I then examine Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony to understand, more specifically, how neoliberalism has become hegemonic. In order to do this, the chapter will examine key components of Gramsci's thought, including the concepts of good sense and the ethico-political, to understand how the maintenance of hegemony is possible. The hypothesis is that neoliberalism has expanded from a commonsense set of economic and political ideas and practices to have now become ubiquitous at the social level and thereby 'fully' hegemonic. The implications for youth employment therefore involve the intensification and expansion of the market in ways that inform and shape the youth employment experience that have been, it is argued, more significant in recent decades. The importance of this argument is that neoliberalism, while crucial to the economic and political process, now has a fundamental role and function in the social world. In considering the importance of these factors, the chapter provides an analysis of how neoliberalism has shaped the labour market and youth employment at the global and national levels.

2.2: What is Neoliberalism? From the Global to the National

In the developed and developing world, neoliberalism has emerged as one of the most pervasive ideologies in the last few decades. As globalisation has increased and accelerated the need for countries to integrate into the world economy, neoliberalism has guided such accumulation strategies and goals. Since the mid 1970's, the world has experienced a revolution by reversing the gains made by working class organizations in the post war period of the Keynesian planned economy and the Welfare State. In the developed world, whether in the U.K., U.S.A or broader Europe, neoliberalism has become a major influence on the economic, political and social foundations of these countries. A number of major turning points occurred in

the mid 1970's and early 1980's that would consequently define the neoliberal era. In the U.K, the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 saw the enthusiastic embrace of neoliberalism by privatising public services, curbing union power, and deregulating public enterprises in an attempt to control the many years of economic stagnation that had gripped the country throughout the late 1970's (Quiggin 2012). Similarly in the U.S.A, the role of the Federal Reserve in guiding monetary policy was redefined under Treasury official Paul Volcker and, with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, constituted a significant turning point in the American political economic landscape to revitalise their economy. To this end, the Reagan administration sought to curb the power of organised labour, deregulate key industries and wind back social spending in education, health and welfare while increasing assistance in areas such as defence (Harvey 2005). In Australia during the 1980's, the nominally social democratic governments of Bob Hawke and Paul Keating sought to deregulate key industries in diverse areas such as airlines, agriculture, banks, finance and public services. More recently, the Howard government extended this deregulatory activity by implementing labour market reforms designed to reduce union negotiated wages using individual contracts and by privatising welfare assistance (Pusey 1991; Bell 1997; Quiggin 1996; 2012).

With the recent impact of the global financial crisis (GFC), there is evidence that in many parts of the developed West, neoliberalism is not operating successfully in its own terms. Countries such as Portugal, Ireland, Greece and Spain have experienced stagnant economic growth that has led to cuts in wages while living standards fall and unemployment continues to rise and remain very high. These negative impacts are now flowing through to countries such as France and even the United States where some of the core premises of neoliberal ideology are being challenged. Debates are now occurring on whether governments should fund failing banks and even the partial nationalisation of private assets. Given the state of neoliberal economies across most of the developed and developing world, Australia has apparently remained immune to these impacts. Indeed, Australia is one of the only countries where neoliberalism could be seen as operating successfully in its own terms with the Australian economy experiencing low interest rates, low unemployment and stable economic growth.

In the developing world, neoliberalism has also played a significant role in the political economic landscape. Since Deng Xiaoping in 1978, China has developed enormous economic growth turning a centrally planned communist economy into one of the fastest growing and most dynamic capitalist economies in the world. The emergence of China at the beginning of the 21st century has become one of the most important developments in recent history. As Chris Harman notes concerning the economic growth of China,

“It’s average growth rate for the period of 1978 to 2008 was about 8 per cent year, its economic output was about nine times greater at the end of the period than at the beginning, its share of world trade had risen from less than 1 per cent in 1979 to over 6 per cent in 2007, until it was just behind Germany, the world’s biggest single exporter, by 2005 it was the leading producer in terms of output in more than one hundred kinds of manufactured goods” (2009: 242-243)

At the same time however, China’s enormous economic growth has come with significant social consequences. Large sections of the Chinese population have not benefited from the decades of economic growth while poverty and unemployment, especially in rural areas of the country, have increased, leading to large economic and social disparities between rural and city populations (Harman 2009: 7). As in many countries in the West, neoliberalism has generally been dysfunctional in the developing world. High levels of poverty and unemployment, together with stagnant and falling economic growth and poor prospects for recovery, have occurred. Latin America, for example, has experienced real declines in economic growth for many years as well as high debt and unemployment as countries like Argentina and Mexico struggle with adjustments made to their economies to restructure debt and reduce spending (David Morton 2007: 184-185). Indeed many peripheral countries have experienced poorer economic growth in the last few decades. As Martinez notes in assessing world growth from the 1950’s to the late 1990’s,

“If between 1950 and 1973, the world product grew at a rate of nearly 5 per cent, between 1974 and 1980 it decreased to 3.5 per cent, between

1981 and 1990 it only grew 3.3 per cent, and in more recent years, between 1990 and 1996, that growth rate was low, only 2 per cent” (1999: 25)

Since the onset of economic crisis in 2007, developing countries such as Argentina, Indonesia and Mexico have all experienced relatively strong economic growth under the guise of neoliberal market reforms, but have since slumped as debt and inflation have crippled their respective economies. On the other hand, parts of sub-Saharan Africa such as Chad, Kenya and Rwanda have never been the beneficiaries of economic growth as famine, poverty and war spiral out of control while international capital attempts to control the resources of these countries (Harman 2009: 224).

2.3: Neoliberalism: An Overview of its Origins

While neoliberalism has appeared as a hegemonic ideology over the last few decades, the concept of liberalism has a much longer trajectory. Classical liberal thought or liberalism developed throughout England, Western Europe and America during the 19th century. These liberal traditions, usually associated with Adam Smith in economics and John Locke in political philosophy, emerged during the Enlightenment. They served as a method to understand two important and mutually associated economic and political objectives, bridging a public-private divide. In these accounts, human beings are guided by enlightened self-interest, rationality and free choice to pursue their interests. These interests are dependent on individual rights, particularly the acquisition of private property, coupled with freedom of association, religion and speech pursued free from incursions by the State. As Thorsen and Lie argue,

“Classical liberalism infers the belief that the State ought to be *minimal*, including practically everything except the armed forces, law enforcement and other ‘non-excludable goods’ administered by the free dealings of its citizens, and the organisations they freely choose to establish and take part in” (2009: 2)

The distinction between classical liberalism and modern liberalism is that contemporary ‘true’ liberalism is regularly equated with economic liberalism rather than social liberalism. In this respect, while thinkers such as Adam Smith and John Locke are important theorists in the classical tradition, they are also associated with modern liberalism on fundamental questions in political theory such as how much the State should be involved in the market and in the lives of its citizens (Ryan 1993: 293-296).

The modern Keynesian liberal tradition emphasises a much greater willingness to allow the State to become an active participant in the economy. The most obvious example is how the State regulates the economy and the supply of goods and services. In this respect, it represents a significant revision of its classical traditions. Whereas classical or economic liberals favour *laissez-faire* economic policies, because it is thought that they lead to more freedom and real democracy, modern liberals tend to claim that this analysis is inadequate and misleading, and that the State must play a significant role in the economy if the most basic liberal goals and purposes are to be made into reality (Thorsen and Lie 2009: 4-5). John Gray’s account of liberalism attempts to synthesize what he believes to be the basic elements all liberals believe in,

“Common to all variants of the liberal tradition is the definite conception, distinctively modern in character, of man and society. What are the elements of this conception? It is *individualist*, in that it asserts the moral primacy of the person against the claims of any social collectivity: *egalitarian*, in as much as it confers on all men the same moral status and denies the relevance to legal or political order of differences in moral worth among human beings; *universalist*, affirming the moral unity of the human species and according a secondary importance to specific historic associations and cultural forms; and *meliorist* in its affirmation of the corrigibility and improvability of all social institutions and political arrangements. It is this conception of man and society which gives liberalism a definite identity which transcends its vast internal variety and complexity” (1995: xii).

In the main, neoliberalism is a return to classical liberalism, with a strong attention for liberty of the individual, especially economic rather than social liberty. Specifically, set out by Hayek in the 1940's, it is a set of shared assumptions emphasising individualism, *laissez-faire* competition, private property rights and a belief that 'free' or unfettered capitalist expansion improves the prosperity and well-being of everyone, including the poorest (Hayek 1944). A key priority of neoliberalism is protecting the sacred rights and liberty of the individual by removing the supposed restrictions of government. The belief that markets are self-regulating mechanisms which, when freed from government 'interference', are the most efficient and the most moral form of organisation is the key to economic and social progress, and that the best outcomes for society will be realised when governments remove constraints from business activity and retreat from involvement in social and other programs that are viewed as both 'distorting' market signals and breeding dependency through welfare-style payments. These markets have the authority to redefine society in terms of an ongoing series of highly functional voluntary transactions between rational individuals (Hayek 1944; Gamble 2006; Robison 2006; Stilwell 2002). The notion of a spontaneous order and market rationality is perhaps one of the most important theoretical concepts in neoliberal theory. As a utopian idea, a free-market is, quite contrary to our instincts of a planned and rational based economy, a social order that emerges as the 'spontaneous outcome of the coordination of multiple and disparate actors' (Fisher 2009: 5). As Fisher argues,

“There is no directing hand designing the market, but order nevertheless comes about through the interaction of independent units. Each of these units follows its own selfish and narrow rationale, and adheres to its own interests. But in the aggregate, this multiplicity of selfish and disparate actions results in an overall order, which is socially rational and benevolent. Spontaneous order, and more specifically markets, is superior to any human-planned order. It is universally rational and beneficial; an a-political mechanism. It is also a self-regulating mechanism. In fact, attempts to regulate or plan parts of the market are likely to interfere with its self-regulating, spontaneous mechanisms and cause more damage than help. It is therefore strongly advised that

markets be insulated from the interference of planned and centralized orders, such as States or trade-unions” (2009: 4-5)

A key aspect of neoliberal ideology is protecting the rights and liberties of the individual by removing the supposed restrictions of government. The belief that markets are self-regulating mechanisms which, when freed from government ‘interference’, are the most efficient and the most moral form of organisation, is the key to economic and social progress. The best outcomes for society will be realised when governments remove constraints from business activity and retreat from involvement in social and other programs that are viewed as both ‘distorting’ market signals and breeding dependency through welfare-style payments. These markets have the authority to redefine society in terms of an ongoing series of highly functional voluntary transactions between rational individuals (Hayek 1944; Gamble 2006; Robison 2006; Stilwell 2002).

Guiding figures in the history of classical liberal thought, such as Friedrich Hayek, Robert Nozick and Milton Friedman, believed that by removing the coercive force of government, a utopian market order would form that constructed individual liberty in relation to the free-market (Hayek 1944; Nozick 1974; Friedman and Friedman 1980). Hayek’s account rests on the assumption that no single person, or group of people, can possibly know all there is to know about human desires, wants and actions. In this respect, his notion of a society is the combination and exchange of all of the disparate knowledge and social relations that form the social. In *The Road to Serfdom*, Hayek justifiably pilloried the totalitarian regimes of Nazi Germany and Soviet Stalinism as excessive State control. Centrally planned economies, he argued, were a ‘movement against competition’. The successful use of competition should be the principle of social organisation, precluding coercive interference with economic life (Hayek 1944: 27). Economic life as well as social relations rest on two important foundations. The first is economic. He argues,

“The State should confine itself to establishing rules applying to general types of situations, and should allow the individuals freedom in everything which depends on the circumstances of time and place,

because only the individuals concerned in each instance can fully know these circumstances and adapt their actions to them. If the individuals are to be able to use their knowledge effectively in making plans, they must be able to predict their knowledge effectively in making plans, they must be able to predict actions of the State are to be predictable, they must be determined by rules fixed independently of the concrete circumstances which can neither be foreseen nor taken into account beforehand: and the particular effects of such actions will unpredictable. If, on the other hand, the State were to direct the individual's actions so as to achieve particular ends, its action would have to be decided on the basis of the full circumstances of the movement and would therefore be unpredictable. Hence the familiar fact that the more the State "plans" the more difficult planning becomes for the individual" (1944: 56).

The second is moral and political. He argues,

"If the State is precisely to foresee the incidence of its actions, it means that it can leave those affected no choice. Wherever the State can exactly foresee the effects on particular people of alternative courses of action, it is also the State which chooses between the different ends. If we want to create new opportunities open to all, to offer chances of which people can make what use they like, the precise results cannot be foreseen" (1944: 57).

Hayek argued government intervention politicises the economy. The only role of the State was to act as a caretaker to provide the necessary legal and institutional structures to facilitate the market order. Other prominent neoliberal intellectuals such as philosopher Robert Nozick advocated a similar position to that of Hayek and Friedman but argued that individuals have a set of immutable natural rights that is conferred to all human beings, and that the State has no real legitimate role to play. Nozick declared that,

“The minimal State treats us as inviolate individuals, who may not be used in certain ways by others as means or tools or instruments or resources; it treats us as persons having individual rights with the dignity this constitutes. Treating us with respect by respecting our rights, it allows us, individually or with whom we choose, to choose our life and to realize our ends and our conception of ourselves, insofar as we can, aided by the voluntary cooperation of other individuals possessing the same dignity. How *dare* any State or group of individuals do more? Or less?” (1974: 333-43)

These arguments also recognise that social inequality experienced by the poor or unemployed is ‘normal’ and ‘desirable’. Regardless of the unequal distribution of income and resources, the poor get more out of a competitive market economy than they would get in a centrally directed system. Friedman regarded the lack of freedom in non-capitalist States as the main impediment to equality. In their book, *Free to Choose*, Milton and Rose Friedman assert,

“Life is not fair and it’s tempting to think that the government can rectify what nature has spawned. But it is also important to recognise how much we benefit from the unfairness we deplore” (1980: 168-9)

The role of the State is to maintain the supply-side of the economy leaving economic demand to free-market forces and individual choices. In this sense, social policy and program interventions should be kept to a minimum, including service delivery. When applied in a practical context such as employment policy, neoliberalism argues that any non-market institution is, in principal, incapable of producing an optimal economic outcome. The institution of the welfare state and its various social protections present a burden to an efficient free market. As Blomgren argues,

“Neoliberalism is commonly thought of as a political philosophy giving priority to individual freedom and the right to private property. It is not, however, the simple and homogeneous philosophy it might appear to be. It ranges over a wide expanse in regard to ethical foundations as well as

to normative conclusions. At the one end of the line is ‘anarcho-liberalism’, arguing for a complete *laissez-faire*, and the abolishment of all government. At the other end is ‘classical liberalism’, demanding a government with functions exceeding those of the so-called night-watchman State” (1997: 224).

As an ideology, the appeal of neoliberalism draws on its attraction of methodological individualism. For Hayek, classical liberalism rests on the assumption that no single person or group of people can possibly know all there is to know about human desires, wants and actions. In this respect, the notion of a society is the combination and exchange, of all of the disparate knowledge and social relations that from society, what he describes as the ‘catallaxy’. The catallaxy forms by bridging together these diverse exchanges occurring in the market, and as such nothing should come between the spontaneity of the market order (Hayek 1967: 164). In this a critical reassessment of the role of the State has emerged, questioning some of the values associated with classical liberalism and its associated social practices.

An important dimension in both Hayek’s and Friedman’s accounts is the different conceptions of liberalism. Given the influence of these figures as precursors to contemporary neoliberalism, there appears a hard and soft classical liberalism that has developed and taken hold within neoliberal ideology. The main difference is that hard neoliberalism utilises a higher degree of force and sanctions to ensure that citizens comply with this philosophy, while a soft neoliberal framework advocates incentives as the preferred route. At the political level, hard neoliberalism generally shows little sympathy towards the poor and unemployed, as they assume that any person can be successful if they try hard enough. Such neoliberals largely reject social assistance assuming it undermines self-responsibility.

In contrast to hard neoliberalism, soft neoliberalism admits that sometimes the poor remain poor, due to combination of individual failings, or failings in their wider social environment. Thus, interventions may be required to alleviate the symptoms of social and/or market failure. Competitive market mechanisms are usually not questioned very deeply, even if they exacerbate poverty and inequalities. Most soft

neoliberal social interventions emphasise a hand-up to ensure that ‘needy’ people become independent free-market citizens as quickly and cost-effectively as possible. Soft neoliberals still enthusiastically advocate the expansion of the free-market, but they acknowledge that there are exceptions where the State has a limited role to provide services that would be inappropriate in a market context (e.g. education, health and employment services). Overall, the differing forms of neoliberalism prescribe a particular economic role for the State, where the main priorities are attending to monetary concerns such as controlling inflation, creating optimal free-market conditions and reducing the costs of business operations.

The preference is for the State to only have a facilitative role to maintain the supply-side of the economy, while leaving economic demand to free-market forces and individual choices. From an idealised neoliberal position, social policy interventions ought to be kept to a minimum and, where possible, service delivery by the State should emulate market relations. In other words, any non-market institution cannot produce an optimal outcome. The institution of the welfare state and its various social protections present a burden to an efficient free market. According to both soft and hard neoliberals, supply-side economic policies are the best option for reducing unemployment because they make it easier (and cheaper) for employers to hire and fire staff as required (Stolte 2006: 40-41). Pierre Bourdieu argued that despite its continuation from classical liberalism, neoliberalism is,

“A new kind of conservative revolution [that] appeals to progress, reason and science (economics in this case) to justify the restoration and so tries to write off progressive thought and action as archaic. It sets up as the norm of all practices, and therefore as ideal rules, the real regularities of the economic world abandoned to its own logic, the so-called laws of the market. It reifies and glorifies the reign of what are called the financial markets, in other words the return to a kind of radical capitalism, with no other law than that of maximum profit, an unfettered capitalism without any disguise, but rationalised, pushed to the limit of its economic efficacy by the introduction of modern forms of domination, such as “business

administration”, and techniques of manipulation, such as market research and advertising” (1998: 35)

Stephanie Mudge contextualises the relationship in theory and practice of neoliberalism and argues it comprises three distinct worlds: intellectual, bureaucratic and political. These penetrate the State and civil society:

1. Neoliberalism’s intellectual face is distinguished by (a) its Anglo-American-anchored transnationality; (b) its historical gestation within the institutions of welfare capitalism and the Cold war divide and (c) an unadulterated emphasis on the (disembedded) market as the source and arbiter of human freedoms.
2. Its bureaucratic face is expressed in State policy: liberalisation, deregulation, privatisation, depoliticisation and monetarism. This family of reforms is targeted at promoting unfettered competition by getting the State out of the business of ownership and getting politicians out of the business of dirigiste-style economic management. Neoliberal policies also aim to ‘desacralize’ institutions that had formerly been protected from the forces of private market competition, such as education and health care.
3. Its political face is a new market-centric ‘politics’ – struggles over political authority that share a particular ideological centre, or in other words, are underpinned by an unquestioned common sense. On the elite level, neoliberal politics is bounded by certain notions about the State’s responsibilities (to unleash market force where possible) and the locus of State authority (to limit the reach of political decision-making). They also tend to be oriented towards certain constituencies (business, finance and white collar professionals) over others (trade unions, especially) (2008: 704-5).

Dunford contextualises neoliberalism as “a political, institutional, and moral strategy which is economically conditioned and relevant but whose domain is civil society as a whole and not just the economic sphere” (Dunford 1990: 308). Others view neoliberalism as defined by the “nature of the relationship between the political order

and economic institutions” (Boyer 2001: 82). Some contend that neoliberalism, “develops by penetrating civil society and profoundly restructuring it” (Aglietta 1979) while others argue that the form of the capitalist State is driven by accumulation strategies, hegemonic projects and associated alliance strategies because the State undertakes economic functions as well as securing social cohesion in a class-divided society (Jessop 1983: 89-111). As David Harvey argues,

“For any system of thought to become hegemonic requires the articulation of fundamental concepts that become so deeply embedded in common-sense understandings that they become taken for granted and beyond question. For this to occur not any old concepts will do. A conceptual apparatus has to be constructed that appeals almost ‘naturally’ to our intuitions and instincts, to our values and our desires, as well as to the possibilities that seem to inhere in the social world we inhabit” (2005: 146).

Neoliberalism translates into a variety of different shapes and forms when it is embedded in specific contexts (Massay 1995). At the global level, scholars have observed that in an international context, dominant political-economic frameworks tend to operate from a neoliberal core that advances a shift from welfare to workfare, alongside increasingly competitive labour markets and liberal individualism (Jessop 1990; Peck 1996; Cahill et al. 2012).

2.4: What makes Neoliberalism Hegemonic?

Understanding how neoliberalism operates and maintains hegemony requires engaging with the work of the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, in particular, his concepts of commonsense and good sense. These are crucial components within his theory of hegemony because they articulate how hegemony operates successfully (Robinson 2005: 471). The starting point for Gramsci and his ideas is outlined in his theory of hegemony. As a general concept, hegemony has a contested legacy⁶ that predates Gramsci by a number of years but was first acknowledged in the

⁶ For an overview of hegemony see (Bates 1975: 351-366; Anderson 1976: 6-7; Jackson-Lears 1985: 567-593; Simon 1982: 21-29).

revolutionary politics of the Russian Social-Democratic movement from the late 1890's to 1917. The term "hegemony" was introduced by Pavel Axelrod, Georgi Plekhanov and Vladimir Lenin into debates aimed at focusing the Russian working class movement on the importance of political struggle against the absolutism of Tsarism. The vague term of domination, as used by Axelrod and Plekhanov in their writings, moved from supporting the bourgeois-democratic revolution to eventually supporting the working class without challenging the power of capital in Russia (Anderson 1976: 15). The emphasis that both Axelrod and Plekhanov had pioneered, arguing for the working class to adopt a national approach, was adapted by Lenin in 1902 in *What is to be Done?* Lenin's conceptualisation defined the term to specify political leadership of the proletariat, and to instruct them against reformism (Anderson 1976: 15-17; Bates 1975: 352; Lenin 1988: 101). By 1903 the term had become a common feature of debates during the Second Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) by both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. They advocated the importance of the proletariat over the peasantry. In this view the party played a key role in organising and persuading the proletariat within a culturally backward environment (Bates 1975: 352). This meant a struggle for the hegemony of the Party over the proletariat, and the hegemony of the proletariat over the peasantry.

During the Third International in 1921, the term emerged again, and hegemony implied the need for the Russian proletariat to lead the peasantry in its struggle against capitalism. By becoming key actors in leading hegemony over other exploited groups, the proletariat and peasantry would unite in progressive struggle (Anderson 1976: 18; Bates 1975: 352; Simon 1982: 11). Implicit in this understanding was that hegemony was a tactical alliance between the proletariat and peasantry, to lead revolution against the absolutism of the Tsars and the socio-economic supremacy of the ruling classes (Fontana 2008: 84). Hegemony's meaning was elaborated further during the Third International in 1922, to mean domination by the proletariat over the bourgeoisie in economic and political struggles. Gramsci's own treatment of the idea of hegemony therefore descends directly from the definitions of the Third International (Gramsci 1978; Anderson 1976: 18). As Fontana argues,

“Gramsci’s thought is the product of three fundamental developments that came together in the first decades of the twentieth century: first, the debate within Marxism about the necessary and sufficient conditions for revolution; second, the victory of fascism and the defeat of the left in Italy and parts of Western Europe; and third, the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. All three compelled Gramsci to rethink the theoretical and conceptual bases of Marxist political thought, especially its understanding of power and the State” (2008: 81)

Gramsci understood better than many of his contemporary Marxists that class relations involved the dynamic relationship between culture, politics and economics, and that these were deeply implicated in each other. The concept of hegemony was developed within Gramsci’s *Notes on the Southern Question from 1926*:

“The Turin communists posed concretely the question of the ‘hegemony of the proletariat’: i.e. of the social basis of the proletarian dictatorship and the workers’ State. The proletariat can become the leading [*dirigente*] and the dominant class to the extent that it succeeds in creating a system of class alliances which allows it to mobilise the majority of the working population against capitalism and the bourgeois State. In Italy, in the real class relations which exist there, this means to the extent that it succeeds in gaining the consent of the broad peasant masses” (1978: 443).

Gramsci’s conception of hegemony based on the *Notes of the Southern Question* contains two definitions that are related. First, hegemony is positioned beyond an economic-determined class-positioned consciousness and as one that reaches to a common moral and intellectual awareness (that is, a common culture). The goal according to Gramsci was the attainment of an alternative hegemony that brought together a coherent class formation united behind a single economic, political and cultural conception of the world (Adamson 1980: 171). Second, it recognises the role of consensus within civil society particularly as it relates to the proletariat having to develop political strategies which undermine the consent of the masses to the ruling class. The foundation for such strategies is the attempt to build an alternative

proletarian hegemony within existing civil society upon which a post-revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat can be founded (Adamson 1980: 170-71). In the Prison Notebooks, Gramsci configures hegemony's operation as,

“The politico-historical criterion on which our own inquiries must be grounded is this: that a class is dominant in two ways, namely it is leading and dominant. It leads the allied classes, it dominates the opposing classes. Therefore, a class can (and must) lead even before assuming power; when it is power it becomes dominant but it also continues to lead” (1992: 136-37)

Poulantzas argues his conception of hegemony was never theoretical in its usage but was always practical in its operation. For example, its conceptual usefulness situates the concept of hegemony in a wide range of contexts and scenarios that borrow from Lenin's writings on the ideological organisation of the working class and the role of leadership. Further, it provides a theory of how a dominant class or dominant classes operate. According to Poulantzas, Gramsci's concept of hegemony developed in two distinct phases. The first phase occurred during Gramsci's youth with the influence of the historicism of Benedetto Croce and Antonio Labriola while the second phase occurred in Gramsci's mature writings on Niccolò Machiavelli (Althusser and Balibar 1968: 119-144; Poulantzas 1973: 138). Poulantzas argues that as Gramsci's writings shift from the earlier to the latter, the concept of hegemony also shifts. Its original interpretation borrowed from Lenin develops the concept from force or violence to domination as the function of leadership. The dominant classes as the subject of history and the class-subject of history become the totalising social formation in the world. In his writings, this class consciousness and class specific formation become the dominant class. This shift Poulantzas argues faces problems not just as the aforementioned earlier to latter writing occurs but as the writings (with their influence of G.W.F. Hegel and Gyorgy Lukacs) are transformed into Marxism (Poulantzas 1973: 138). Poulantzas positions Gramsci's concept of hegemony in a purified form which refers to its reference to the dominant classes. It is used in two senses:

1. It indicates how, in their relation to the capitalist State, the political interests of these classes are constituted as representatives of the 'general interest' of the body politic, i.e. the people/nation which is based on the effect of isolation on the economic; and
2. The concept of hegemony is also used in another sense, which is not actually pointed out by Gramsci. The capitalist State and the specific characteristics of the class struggle in a capitalist formation make it possible for a 'power bloc', composed of several political dominant classes or fractions to function. Amongst these dominant classes and fractions one of them holds a particular dominant role, which can be characterised as a hegemonic role. The concept of hegemony encompasses a particular domination of one of the dominant classes or fractions in a capitalist social formation. The concept of hegemony allows us to make out the relation between these two characteristic types of political class domination found in capitalist formations. The hegemonic class is the one which concentrates in itself, at the political level, the double function of representing the general interest of the people/nation and of maintaining a specific dominance among the dominant classes and fractions. It does this through its particular relation to the capitalist State (1973: 140-141).

These foundations also operate at an ethical level particularly to raise the mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level that corresponds to the needs of the productive forces for development, and hence to the interests of the ruling classes. The State therefore, also becomes a site from the crudest and most elementary czar-as-Father image in Russia, to the complex corporatist development of western capitalism. The question of "who will educate the educators?" is the basis for different types of transformations of State structures and the content of hegemony (Hawley 1980: 592). As Gramsci argued, hegemony is a set of relations that are constantly changing and evolving with society. The leading group must provide the intellectual and political leadership to accommodate the reactions that follow the changing conditions facing the proletariat (Simon 1982: 37-41).

Hegemony therefore, is positioned not only as a cultural or ideological influence but represents the economic power and the centre of economic activity of the dominant classes or fractions (Forgacs 1988: 423). This occurs at a particular historical period or conjecture within the struggle between civil society and political society. As Gramsci argues,

“This period is characterised by an unstable equilibrium between the classes, which is a result of the fact that certain categories (in the direct service of the State, especially the civil and military bureaucracy) are still too closely tied to the old dominant classes” (1971: 245)

For Gramsci, the modern capitalist industrial State’s balancing of political and civil society (and thus class interests) represented the reality that one particular social group had successfully achieved politico-economic and ideological hegemony over the entire nation. But he did not believe that the nature of the State could be fully understood without a thorough understanding of how the State influenced societal behaviour. What was also significant about Gramsci’s observations was that hegemonic order could only follow when the power a dominant class and its representatives exercised over subordinate classes balanced coercion with persuasion without domination coming about predominantly through an emphasis on coercion. The various ideologies of neoliberalism such as choice and consumption in a free market have become part of everyday life, the spontaneous philosophy of ‘common sense’, the uncritical and largely unconscious way in which people perceive the world (Simon 1982: 25). As Simon argues,

“It is through common sense that the workers, trying to live their lives under capitalism, have organised their experience. Common sense is the site on which the dominant ideology is constructed, but it is also the site of resistance and challenge to this ideology” (1982: 64).

This conception of hegemony is quite contrary to the logic of the dominant ideology thesis with its passive and static conceptualisation of hegemony. Rather, hegemony can be equally applied to either proletarian leadership as to bourgeois rule, as “being

structurally assimilable to one another or as containing a sort of interchangeable core” (Forgacs 1988: 424). Different forms of hegemony are positioned in different periods of history depending on the composition of class relations. Gramsci’s hegemonic arrangements require the dominant group to exercise its authority over the State’s economic processes. This rejects the implication that political and social order had come about entirely through coercive processes. For Gramsci, the preference was to judge a ruling class as hegemonic when it convinced the subordinate classes of its legitimacy. Benedetto Fontana’s definition of hegemony expresses this association with this world-view,

“A social group or class can be seen to have assumed a hegemonic role to the extent that it articulates and proliferates throughout society’s cultural and ideological belief systems...accepted as universally valid by the general population” (1993: 140).

Carl Boggs’ definition of hegemony also expresses a clear connection with this concept of a world-view that is diffused by agencies of ideological control and socialisation into every area of daily life,

“By hegemony, Gramsci meant the permeation throughout civil society – including a whole range of structures and activities like trade unions, schools, the churches, and the family – of an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs, morality, etc. that is in one way or another supportive of the established order and the class interests that dominate it” (1976: 39).

Although Gramsci offers the idea of hegemony in a variety of forms and contexts he most frequently uses the term to describe social and political control that combines physical force (coercion) with intellectual, moral, and cultural persuasion (consent) (Gramsci 1971: 57-8). The relationship of coercion and consent is the very essence of Gramsci’s hegemony and describes how a dominant group in modern society not only overcomes opposition forcefully but also how it gains the voluntary and consensual support of subordinate groups through such persuasive techniques as co-

operation, co-optation, and compromise. While hegemonic consent is arrived at largely peacefully, physical force can be used to support it against a dissident minority as long as the majority acquiesces. By complimenting *direzione* with an effectively disseminated rendering of ideology, a dominant class is able to claim the legitimacy of its ideological leadership. Acquiring societal support through such a schema implies that the dominant group has successfully persuaded subordinate groups to accept the ruling order's norms and values as legitimately dominant (Ransome 1992: 136).

The balancing of coercion with persuasion is the substance of Gramsci's hegemonic order, and the means by which the ruling class's representatives exercise control over subordinate classes, not only requires ongoing ideological refurbishment processes to sustain moral and intellectual legitimacy but these processes must respond to actual conditions existing at any particular time. Indeed, hegemony is not a static concept but a process of continuous creation, and because of its massive scale, is bound to be uneven in the degree of legitimacy it commands and to leave some room for antagonistic cultural expression to develop (Adamson 1980: 174).

A dominant order must react to new socio-political realities by constantly reaffirming its hegemony. As necessary, hegemony must update consent with *new and changing patterns of alliances* through active political and ideological leadership rather than simply dominate through force. As Femia argues, hegemony can only be sustained by constantly reaffirming the consensual arrangements of socio-political control that underwrite intellectual and moral leadership (Femia 1981: 26). While a genuine popular consciousness of ideological unity at the national level may exist there might be considerable variation between the amount of pervasiveness and systemization of the hegemonic State apparatuses and the degree of participation they are able to encourage and foster.

Therefore, the way hegemony develops, takes hold and reproduces itself is of primary importance. To understand the contours of neoliberal hegemony requires a cultural and superstructural analysis of the education system, the family, legal processes, the mass media, and working life to explicate bourgeois ideology. The

praxis of consent and coercion is decreed by key societal groupings, and Gramsci's conception of traditional and organic intellectuals (who are discussed in the following section) organise and lead within civil society. This is essential in understanding the maintenance of hegemony. For Gramsci, the function of hegemony is to transpose ideology into culture as a world-view that is regarded as normal and natural by everyone from the ruling class to the subordinate classes. In doing so, Gramsci's concept of hegemony possesses two related dimensions, the one identifying the consensual basis of social politics within civil society, and the other referring to the stage of political development where a dominant order's view of common culture or ideology has attained a collective intellectual and moral acceptance within the national consciousness (Adamson 1980: 170-71). These dimensions articulate and demand that society's subordinate ideologies transform themselves into the dominant group's own over-arching ideology with this transformed view accepted by sections of society as generally representing the type of meditated domination that is consensual and thus legitimate.

For Gramsci, ideology was a philosophy of *praxis* that identified norms of behaviour and socio-political ideology as they both organize the masses into collective action. Ideology then, was more than a means to simply justify power but, through its ability to collaborate in forming new sources of power, an instrument capable of creating a "new history". As Gramsci put it, ideologies have the "energies of a material force" and in the environment of the historic bloc "material forces become the content [of hegemony] and ideologies the form" (Gramsci 1971: 377). His conception of hegemonic order thus matured from the simple alliance of his earlier writings into a complete fusion of mutually inclusive economic, political, and intellectual factors that are drawn together by their ideological representation. The concept of hegemony, therefore undergoes a surprising transformation from its earlier usage to its later. Specifically, a double process of shift and enrichment:

1. From the hegemony of the proletariat to the hegemony of the bourgeoisie;
and

2. From the constitution of a class to the problematic of the State – we take as strategic points in a political-theoretical interpretation of the *Notebooks*, one that does not cut these writings off from Gramsci's former political practice (Buci-Glucksmann 1980: 47-8).

Hegemony ultimately and essentially, must be based on the consent of the subordinate classes (Gerratana 1975: 236-38). Not only must the ruling class co-opt elements from below but it must take care to absorb those issues that are potentially problematic for the achievement of prime socio-political and economic agendas (Germino 1990: 216-17). Only as long as a ruling class is able to co-opt and sustain subordinate consent to its agendas does a class remain hegemonic. Because it provides the right to extensive political authority, consensus reached through society's acknowledgement of a dominant order's moral and intellectual legitimacy becomes a solid foundation for hegemony but Gramsci's understandings of the concept does place a moral limit on that authority. Although morally and intellectually restraining, consensus must therefore give some attention to such issues as how benefits are to be allocated, the permissible range of societal disagreement, and the institutions through which these issues are to be negotiated. All must reflect the values, norms, perceptions, and beliefs that define the structures of central authority (Femia 1981: 36).

According to Gramsci, hegemony always conveys this important aspect of ideological accommodation so that a hegemonic class enjoys the self-satisfaction of knowing that the majority of the ruled have accepted its version of the "national popular" as best expressing their own, albeit subordinate, interests. Hegemonic preferences set by a ruling order through highly developed institutions of political socialization can therefore become difficult for the general mass consciousness to "demystify" and their ideological subordination difficult to question (Femia 1981: 25). This is where the role of intellectuals plays a central importance in the transmission and persuasiveness of ideologies. In the Prison Notebooks, Gramsci argues that intellectuals are characterised not by the singularity of their thinking but the role in which they play in society. Gramsci suggests that these intellectuals are integral in their role in society especially in relation to economics, politics and

culture. In this respect, thinkers, writers and artisans as well as civil servants and political leaders act not only within the State and civil society but in the different modes of production they are part of. They form and direct consciousness through the means of production. This denotes and goes beyond economic determinism in a strict manner but free political and ideological activity in what Femia (1975: 38) describes as a “diffusion of a new ethos”.

The State therefore exerts a moral, intellectual and cultural force as an ‘educator’. It exercises its power and presents itself as ‘ethico-political’, the purveyor of universal values, independent of narrow economic, social or class interests (Fontana 2002: 161). Gramsci distinguishes the problem of political leadership in the formation and development of the modern State in Italy, the Risorgimento. He denotes an important methodological criterion that the supremacy of a social group rests not only on its domination (*domino*) but also its ‘intellectual and moral leadership’ (*direzione*) (Forges 1988: 249). In this sense, a social group tends to dominate antagonistic groups, even in the literal sense of armed force. As Gramsci argues,

“A social group can, and indeed must, already exercise ‘leadership’ before winning governmental power (this indeed is one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power); it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to ‘lead’ as well” (1978: 57)

This social group can perform the ‘natural’ function within the State but can also and potentially align with other intellectuals in their attempt to initiate solidarity, and the corporate, jurisdictional, psychological and their technical expertise. There is a unity therefore with traditional intellectuals, from different institutional and financial pressures, that influence their material base. The propagation of ideas that may form part of their consciousness may develop irrespectively of their origin but will nevertheless represent a particularised economic position. In this sense, ideologies will also represent a social class that is dominant or ‘rising’. The transmission of these ideologies will be passed on by lesser intellectuals such as teachers, political activists, journalists and priests (Femia 1975: 39).

The emergent ideologies that metamorphosise and become hegemonic, form a common language, and ultimately a common sense (Hall 1988). Subordinate group views and their consciousness arise in opposition, independently of the dominant group/s. Their expression is in the practical manifestations of daily life, the material and social world (Fontana 2002: 161). This constitution of consciousness is the representation of the ethico-political, as these views not only become an integral expression of the State, but the envelope of hegemonic consciousness, the dialectical relationship between consensus and antagonism among subordinate groups.

The State positions itself as the formation, embodiment and practice of neoliberalism, and as the hegemonic operation of neoliberalism. This is evident in Gramsci's concept of a 'war of position'. The ruling class strive for moral legitimacy and through compromise, and the assimilation of subordinate groups' more acceptable ideas and values, negotiate the direction their leadership is taking. Hegemonic legitimacy demands that the leading social group not only influence the plethora of interests that inform mass consciousness but also constantly respond to them. Hegemony must not merely reflect elite interests but offer a construct of ideas that includes acknowledgement of its moral and intellectual leadership. Unless the dominant group continues to appear to represent the values of the national will, its hegemonic legitimacy will suffer obsolescence and decay. When considering the relations of force under neoliberalism, the insights of Gramsci play an important role in examining neoliberal ideology and practice. For neoliberalism to attain ethico-political hegemony requires the fundamental reshaping of neoliberal ideology as a social relation. In other words, choice and consumption (as two examples of neoliberal ideology) has to comprehensively displace existing socialism, liberalism and other political economic philosophies with market ideology. The market becomes the ethical synthesis of not just economic and political transactions but cultural and social relations more generally.

As a philosophy of praxis, hegemony must be a moment/s of unity when cultural and moral unity peaks with economic and political structures (super-structures) to operate as ethico-political. Gramsci's notes on common-sense and good sense inform the trajectory of neoliberalism, to become 'the way things are done', the 'common-sense

approach' to all aspects of not only economic and political aspects but cultural and social life more generally. For neoliberalism to become ethico-political and therefore hegemonic it must reject all narrow interests and operate as both a universalizing phenomenon while at same time incorporating difference. These two aspects come together and comprise the general make of the masses (difference) with universality (intellectual leadership). Therefore, hegemony can operate as ethico-political when it becomes 'aspirational hegemony' bringing together these two components in an unstable equilibrium (Howson 2008).

Gramsci develops his ideas on commonsense from the intellectual premise that all people are philosophers as anyone engaged in practical activity has a particular 'conception of the world'. Commonsense, he argues, is the incoherent and spontaneous beliefs and thinking of the mass of the people in a given society. Their spontaneous philosophy can contain practical empirical facts of the given social world, 'good sense'. This good sense acts as the basis of alternative world-views that often have contradictory fragments of an incomplete whole. These are often understood in a passive sense, and are generally unchallenged. These aspects or 'folklore' can be imposed and absorbed as 'natural' often leading to sites of oppression and inequality to appear as the 'order of things' (Gramsci 1971: 323-6). In Gramsci's critical notes on an attempt at popular sociology he argues,

"Commonsense is not a single unique conception, identical in time and space. It is the "folklore" of philosophy, and, like folklore, it takes countless different forms. Its most fundamental characteristic is that it is a conception which, even in the brain of one individual, is fragmentary, incoherent and inconsequential, in conformity with the social and cultural position of those masses whose philosophy it is. At those times in history when a homogenous social group is brought into being, there comes into being also, in opposition to commonsense, a homogenous – in other words coherent and systematic – philosophy" (Gramsci 1971: 419)

His notes on the Study of Philosophy, and in particular, his Preliminary Points of Reference develops a theory of commonsense in conjunction with language, religion

and philosophy (Gramsci 1971: 323). In reference to philosophy, he argues the connection between religion and commonsense do not coincide but rather religion acts “as an element of fragmented commonsense” (Gramsci 1971: 325). There are many forms of commonsense but as philosophy supersedes commonsense and religion, it coincides with good sense. Good sense supplants commonsense and religion as a superior intellectual order because as Gramsci argues, “they cannot be reduced to unity and coherence even within an individual consciousness, let alone collective consciousness” (Gramsci 1971: 326).

According to Gramsci, good sense is enacted by the ‘philosophy of praxis’ and this informs and advances the concept of hegemony both in a philosophical and practical way. Good sense “supposes an intellectual unity and an ethic in conformity with a conception of reality that has gone beyond commonsense and has become, if only within narrow limits, a critical conception (Gramsci 1971: 333-4). Unlike Marx, Gramsci sees commonsense not as a ‘negative false consciousness’ but rather the site of political struggles. In this process, commonsense absorbs ‘good sense’ and awareness to bring about thoughts, critical ideas that people may feel but do not know. Indeed, Gramsci argues that both commonsense and good sense are bound by historical and social factors in a particular epoch:

"Every social stratum has its own 'common sense' and its own 'good sense', which are basically the most widespread conception of life and of man" (Gramsci 1971: 326, footnote 5).

Hegemony, therefore can only be assured if that national will is sustained by the dominant groups’ ongoing willingness to re-negotiate its particular cultural and moral view into the national consciousness whenever necessary (Fontana 1993: 145). Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, however, is protected by what he describes as the veritable “armour of coercion” inherent in the institutions of the modern State (Gramsci 1992). Critical to ongoing consent is the use of ideology as a mechanism of re-negotiation. As well as being primarily responsible for morally and intellectually underpinning Gramscian hegemonic order, ideology not only possesses a material nature but also constitutes a series of practices that are quite compatible with the

institutions of the contemporary capitalist State. This enables ideology to legitimately bind the economic, political, intellectual and moral leadership within hegemonic relations (McLellan 1998: 202).

Gramsci's understanding of hegemony, wielded by the power of the State through an intricate interweaving of culture and politics offered a theoretical tool that could enable explaining and evaluating how a disparate, divided, social reality could be legitimately drawn together into a cohesive unity. In Gramsci's schema, the ideological component of hegemony implied that the majority of the people viewed the way hegemony was being wielded as a 'common sense' approach to going about modern politics, that is, their society's disparate array of interests had been organized and unified in a way that could be accepted by the majority of the people. For Gramsci, hegemony is therefore complete when one class had succeeded in persuading subordinate classes to accept the hegemonic order's moral, political, and cultural ideas as representing the best interests of society at large. Gramsci constantly pointed out that hegemony must never be taken for granted. The broad, diverse, and dynamic plurality of interests that are a feature of modern industrialising societies require hegemony's constant readjustment and only through ongoing renegotiation will the masses remain voluntarily assimilated into an organised world-view that has been imposed upon them by the dominant classes. Therefore, a coherent challenge to hegemony can nurture itself in a socio-political environment where the collective consciousness of a particular group has come to "demystify their ideological subordination" (Femia 1981: 56). The site of hegemonic contestation, the terrain in which an ascendant social group or alliance nurtures its hegemony by constructing dual coercive/consensual strategies, is the twin, overlapping, realms of civil society and political society (the State) (Gramsci 1971: 12). For Gramsci, civil society was the private world and where consensual hegemony was to be nurtured, while political society/the State was the public world of coercion and domination. Direct command takes place through the representations of "State and juridical government" while the ruled consensually perceive, evaluate, and manage everyday socio-political reality in a civil society potentially broadened by a vast assortment of associational institutions (Femia 1981: 24).

When the regime formalises agreement on an unpopular action or policy it first organises support from within the spheres of political and civil society and establishes a suitable or appropriate public stance. As Forgacs argues, it is amidst ongoing competitive activity within these two spheres that the prize (hegemonic order) becomes the right to regulate State power and “turn it in any particular direction and manipulate it at any time in accordance with the bloc’s economic and political agenda” (Forgacs 1988: 40). Given the inter-penetration and close collaboration of the two spheres, Gramsci’s distinction between civil and political society tends to be largely analytical. With both sets of institutions closely interwoven (and tending to overlap) separating them and locating where influences begin and end poses analytical difficulties. Force and consent occur within both State and civil society, and while the State does not necessarily hold a monopoly on coercion, neither do the institutions of civil society necessarily monopolize the means of ideological control but can “develop(s) by penetrating civil society and profoundly restructuring it” (Aglietta 1979; Ransome 1992: 144). A critical reassessment of the role of the State has emerged, questioning the values associated with liberalism and its associated social practices. The existing hegemony of Keynesian political economy nominally associated with the Left, has been dismantled by the Right. The tactics utilised see neoliberalism articulating with social processes that shift hegemonic structures, perceptions and feelings away from community and the public good towards individualism, self-responsibility and autonomy.

2.5: Why is Neoliberalism as a Hegemonic Reality Important in Australia?

The ideas of Gramsci and the development of neoliberalism as ethico-political and good sense can provide important insights into the Australian experience in the last few decades. In particular, the ideas give a sense of how the ascendancy and hegemony as not only economic and political but equally social plays out in the context of the Australian labour market and youth employment (Treanor 2005). Indeed, the ascendancy and hegemony of neoliberalism since the 1970’s has guided much of the State’s activities, making neoliberalism as a hegemonic reality important. Beginning in the late 1970’s, Australia formalised an economic and social transformation, to ‘liberalise the economy and State’ (Gramberg and Bassett 2005: 2;

Chester and Johnson 2007) with policy redirected to supply-side goals instead of general welfare. In the 1970's, the fiscal crisis of the State (when expenditures rose faster than revenues) promoted changes in the structure of employment, the labour market and welfare provision (O'Connor 1973).

Consequently, many neoliberal ideas gained significant ground during the 1980's as governments responded to these significant economic and social challenges. As these labour market policies developed, such as State subsidised job creation and income maintenance, these were seen as passive policies that reduced individuals' work capacity. For example, Australia's centralised system of industrial conciliation and arbitration was dismantled with the decentralisation of wage determination to the workplace with active promotion by the Australian State of individual contracts for the employment of labour and the serious weakening of trade union power (Jamrozik 1994; Ranald 1995; Chester and Johnson 2007). More explicitly, neoliberalism was implemented into economic and social policy frameworks. The conservative administrations of Ronald Reagan in the United States, Margaret Thatcher in Britain and the nominally social-democratic Labor governments of Bob Hawke and Paul Keating in Australia, all embarked on reforms that represented a sharp break with the interventionist and public-sector orientated approach of previous governments. As neoliberal ideologies were embraced, contracting out of government services commenced under the Keating government and pursued to their logical extreme under the Howard Government. This saw the use of markets replace those areas traditionally serviced by government. Employment policy for example, saw the emergence and dominance of supply side policies designed to ameliorate the effect of unemployed people feeling on the outside of the labour market. Subsequently, with further deregulation of the labour market, policies for the unemployed were designed to increase employability with less attention paid to training and education. The Federal government's *Working Nation* policies in 1994, for example, emphasised a much greater drive to create employment by implementing a much tighter delivery of employment services that tailored assistance to the needs of individual job seekers. At the same time, this encouraged greater involvement of employment agencies with a closer integration of such programs within regional development priorities (Australian Government 1994: 127; Chester and Johnson

2007). With the election of the Howard Government, a continuation rather than paradigmatic shift in employment policy occurred but importantly the incorporation of neoliberal policies were pursued to their logical extreme with the complete deregulation of the Commonwealth Employment Services (C.E.S) forming a new Job Network of employment agencies that provided employment services such as job search and training as well as competing alongside other agencies in a market-orientated environment. The regulatory regimes put in place around the Rudd governments Social Inclusion agenda featured strong aspects of neoliberalism with the extension of individual rights conditional on individuals changing their behaviour with individual obligations, work tests and job readiness. Neoliberal ideas were also incorporated into the Workplace Relations Act of 1996 and Work Choices legislation of 2007 embedding a number of important components. These include:

1. An emphasis on employer over employee offering employers greater flexibility in the terms and conditions on which they can employ workers, with workplace agreements underpinned by statutory minimum conditions rather than awards;
2. Reducing the role played by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) in determining employment conditions and resolving industrial disputes; and
3. Making it more difficult for unions to enter workplaces or organise industrial action; and reducing the exposure of employers to unfair dismissal claims (Wooden 2006: 100-101).

The election of successive governments since 2007 represents a clear continuation of neoliberalism particularly in areas such as employment and the labour market. Hegemonic neoliberalism has shifted in a limited sense with for example, the Fair Work Act placing a greater emphasis towards workers. However despite the political rhetoric the overall narrative of successive governments has been a continuation of neoliberalism rather than paradigmatic shift to an alternative. The hegemonic

consciousness of neoliberalism and the insight Gramsci provides is central for 'common-sense' to prevail.

2.6: Summary

This chapter examined neoliberalism as hegemonic and in doing so showed its trajectory from the global to national. Neoliberalism has become a transformative ideology shaping much of Australia's political economic landscape. The chapter examined through the theory of hegemony, how neoliberalism has become ethico-political and good sense. In particular, it showed how youth employment and the labour market more generally have been shaped by neoliberalism in the last few decades. The chapter argued that neoliberalism can be seen as hegemonic and that it is operating successfully in its own terms. Many youth however are being left behind in respect to employment experiencing such things as marginalisation and social exclusion. This is an important aspect because this theoretical approach provides a framework to understand how youth employment has been intensified and expanded by the market and is therefore fully hegemonic. The next chapter examines youth employment from the global to the national.

CHAPTER THREE: YOUTH EMPLOYMENT: FROM THE GLOBAL TO THE NATIONAL

3.1: Introduction

In the previous chapter I examined neoliberalism as hegemonic utilising Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony. I showed how hegemony functions, and is made possible, not only through the economic and political but also the cultural and social aspects of society. Key to this is Gramsci's concepts of ethico-political and good sense. I also showed that the transformations occurring in the Australian State have impacted youth employment and the labour market.

The aim of this chapter is to present a brief examination of the youth employment situation in Australia and compare this to the global context. In particular, the chapter aims to show that the operation of neoliberalism in Australia can be seen as operating successfully in its own terms and that this distinguishes from its expressions globally. I develop an analysis of the impacts of neoliberalism by examining, more specifically, the challenges of youth employment in the contemporary labour market. This examination and analysis is important as it will establish the justification for the case study of the Illawarra region that will follow in chapter four of this thesis.

3.2: Youth Employment: From the Global to National

The various challenges of youth employment are evident across the world with global, national and regional variations. These challenges are wide-spread with precarious employment being both one of the most significant disadvantages and most difficult problems. In the 21st century, youth experience difficulty in the labour market in both developing and developed countries; at the same time levels of youth employment disadvantage and wages are failing to keep up relative to those of adults. The contemporary impacts of neoliberalism illustrate a contradictory labour market for youth, highlighting how neoliberalism can improve some areas of the economy such as economic growth, but deteriorate wages. For example, despite improvements in macro-economic conditions during the late 1990's in many developed countries, the employment gap between adults and youth widened and the

levels of disadvantage in the United States and Western Europe rose. The United States, for example, saw very poor prospects with youth experiencing disproportionately higher unemployment rates and poorer wages compared to adults. In particular, real wages for poor educated youth fared worse in the 1990's than in the 1970's. Since the late 1970's, across most of the developed world, the economic position of youth has worsened with lower wages compared to adults and longer periods of employment disadvantage. For example, wages fell during the 1980's and 1990's amongst youth with lower levels of education not only in the United States but developed countries more generally (Blanchflower and Freeman 1999: 2). Since the onset of the economic crisis in 2007, developed countries have experienced significant employment difficulties such as high unemployment and falling participation rates. The numbers of youth unemployed have increased significantly, with estimates indicating an increase of over 26 per cent (ILO 2012). Current figures produced by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) indicate rates are as high as those experienced in the early 1990's (ILO 2012). In 2011, the European Union youth unemployment rate was as high as 22 per cent (European Commission 2012). As an example, the following figure shows youth unemployment rates from December 2007 to March 2012 across OECD countries. While the youth unemployment rates for countries such as Germany, Japan, Israel, Turkey, Chile and Belgium show some improvement since December 2007, youth unemployment rates in countries, such as Ireland, Slovak Republic, Italy and Portugal, have all increased. Ireland's youth unemployment rate moved from 9.4 per cent in December 2007 to 30.3 per cent in March 2012. Similar large increases were experienced in the Slovak Republic, Italy and Portugal with rates moving to 15.7 per cent, 16.5 per cent and 17.3 per cent respectively.

Certainly, the experiences in countries such as Spain and Greece have shown limited improvements in developing employment for youth. The rise of youth employment disadvantage amongst youth in Greece pre-dates the current crisis, but recent research from Greece has shown that 73.6 per cent of 5442 (22-35 years old) graduates reported they would leave the country given the opportunity while 42 per cent would take the chance to migrate to another country for employment opportunities (Kretsos 2011).

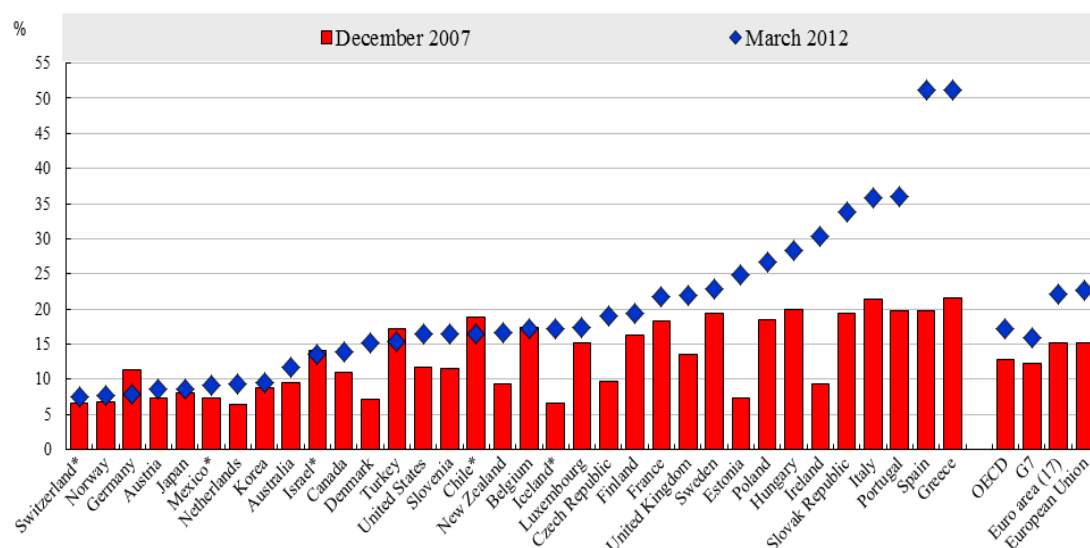


Figure 1: Youth Unemployment Rates in OECD countries, December 2007 to March 2012

Source: Adapted from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2012: 14-15)

Countries that have shown stronger resilience in the face of weak economic and labour market conditions have included Germany, Norway and Switzerland, where youth have done markedly better than most other OECD countries and the United States in terms of employment and wages, with improvements in youth employment and participation (Bell and Blanchflower 2011: 1). Prior to the economic crisis, and comparing both Germany and the United States, Blanchflower and Freeman note the relative position of less educated youth in both these countries.

“The contrast between how less skilled American and German youths fare in the job market is particularly striking. Young, less educated American men and women are less likely to be employed than their German counterparts, have much lower earnings relative to more highly educated youth than do comparable German youths, and earn less than less educated German youth in purchasing power parity terms” (2000: 2)

Given the significant global youth employment challenges, successive governments in developed countries have responded in a variety of ways. Many countries throughout Europe and the United States remain committed to neoliberal ideologies

that have contributed to poor youth employment prospects. The stronger economic performers, shown in figure three, have generally performed better than their equivalent counterparts for a number of reasons. In Germany, for example, a partial explanation for the better youth employment prospects has been Germany's larger public sector with its work subsidies and dual system of vocational education that has employed many low skilled youth (Bell and Blanchflower 2011: 1).

Developing countries also show large differences and variations in youth employment disadvantage. Developing countries are generally more susceptible to longer working hours, work with short-term and/or informal contracts, low pay, and little or no social protection. Indeed, wage rates in developing countries are substantially lower than developed countries. In some parts of Africa youth receive less than one dollar (U.S.) a day (Godfrey 2003). As the ILO notes,

“The share of paid employment in much of the developing world is often low. Wage and salaried workers account for 48.3 per cent of all employment at the global level but this proportion is as low as 20.9 per cent in South Asia and 22.9 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, even if paid work can be found, the risk of low-wage employment is substantially higher for young workers both in developed and developing economies. In part, this is due to the fact that entry-level jobs are more likely to be low-paid, reflecting limited experience of young workers. The question then focuses on how much time it takes for young workers to move to better paid jobs. So far, the limited availability of paid work or decent work clearly poses strong barriers in developing economies, particularly in low-income economies” (2012: 25).

With the high levels of paid youth employment being in the informal economy, precarious employment is much higher than in developed countries. In other circumstances, many youth are employed in unpaid family work generally working in family businesses or farms. The incidence of informal employment is higher in the agricultural and the service sector and, because the informal economy tends be unregulated in developing countries, benefits such as holiday, sick and other leave

entitlements are absent. Like developed countries, youth experience high levels of employment disadvantage and many are in and out of work for long periods of time, searching for work or experiencing periods of inactivity (Guarcello et al. 2005). In specific countries, the variations in youth employment are wide and diverse. The differences in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia when compared to Eastern Europe are large. In 2011, the Middle East and North Africa experienced very high levels of youth unemployment, with rates of 26.5 per cent and 27.9 per cent respectively. As the ILO notes,

“North Africa and the Middle East stand out in terms of their overall unemployment problem, and these are the only two regions where the unemployment rate exceeded 10 per cent in 2011 for the population aged 15 and above. Moreover, the ratios of youth-to-adult unemployment rates are exceptionally high, at 4.0 in the Middle East and at 3.9 in North Africa, and youth unemployment rates have been at very high levels for decades in these regions. North Africa was relatively resilient to the global economic crisis but following the Arab Spring economic growth decreased and the youth unemployment rate increased sharply by 4.9 per cent in 2011” (2012: 14)

Moving to South Asia, the youth unemployment rate was at 8.6 per cent in 2008. Particularly striking however was the sheer number of youth who have become unemployed: over 1.2 million since 2007. This was the greatest number outside the developing countries and the European Union more generally. The unemployment rate for youth throughout Eastern Europe jumped significantly with the onset of the economic crisis from 17 per cent in 2008 to 20.5 per cent in 2009. More recently, improvements have been made with rates decreasing between 2009 and 2011 to 17.6 per cent illustrating some macro-economic improvements (ILO 2012).

Youth employment, across both the developing and developed world, faces significant challenges, as the above discussion attests. One of the major factors remains the social consequences of neoliberalism. At the global level, neoliberalism can be seen as operating in a dysfunctional sense, with Greece and Spain as important examples. While Australia has not been immune from neoliberal

globalisation, the experiences of the national economy over the last few decades, first impressions suggests neoliberalism has had far less impact on youth employment than at the global level. The national scenario suggests neoliberalism can be seen as operationalized as successful in its own terms. In 2013, the national adult unemployment rate moved from 5.6 per cent to 5.5 per cent remaining historically low by global standards (ABS 2012). The wider employment challenges youth face, however, illustrates how neoliberalism is operating with particular localized dysfunctional aspects. Youth employment disadvantage in Australia has become structurally embedded in the processes of neoliberalism.

3.3: A Brief History of Youth Employment in Australia

In the mid 1970's, economic growth had slowed and unemployment rose. Government expenditure was criticised as being out of control leading to budget deficits and higher levels of taxation. The welfare state was seen as bloating government expenditure (Quiggin 1996). The Keynesian framework that guided the post war years was questioned, with proponents arguing these particular approaches were not going to solve the major structural problems found in the economy. Neoliberal proponents, such as those concentrated in the Chicago School of Economics and the Mont Pèlerin Society, argued that by deregulating the regulated aspects of the economy, significant reductions in unemployment and increased economic growth could be achieved (Hartwell 1995). These ideas became very influential in the arrangement and setting of employment policies, leading to policies such as unemployment relief being compromised. Key welfare services were also questioned and subsequently cut in the mid to late 1970's (Bell 1997). The once 'settled' problems of inflation and unemployment re-emerged, setting up the economic approaches that ushered in the era of neoliberalism (Woodward 2005)

The rise in general unemployment throughout the mid to late 1970's exacerbated youth employment disadvantage. This had strong follow-on impacts in the subsequent increases in the recessions of the early 1980's and early 1990's (Bell 1997). Between August 1974 and August 1975 for example, the overall rate of unemployment doubled to four percent. It continued to rise in 1977 to 5.5 per cent and by 1978 had reached 6.2 per cent. By mid-1979, unemployment had dropped

slightly but, by 1982-83, unemployment rose again because of adverse economic conditions. Participation rates also fell, suggesting many job seekers were either leaving the labour market, or had stopped looking for work altogether. As Mehmet argues,

“Between February 1974 and February 1983, the proportion of the labour force which was unemployed increased by a factor of more than five, and the absolute number of people recorded as being unemployed increased from 120, 400 to 750, 100” (1986: 5)

Youth were disproportionately affected by these increases, and bore a significant amount of this burden at the beginning of 1983. For example, of the three-quarters of a million people who were unemployed at this time, approximately 384 100 (over 50 per cent) were less than 25 years of age. The social effects of this figure are compounded when it's broken down in the context of the two cohorts of youth. While the overall rate of unemployment for 15-24 years of age was 20.3 per cent, for youth aged 20-24 years of age the unemployment rate was 16.2 per cent. For youth aged 15-19 years of age the unemployment rate was 25.8 per cent (ABS 1985). With the onset of recession in 1990-91, youth unemployment again rose, this time back to the recovery rates of the post 1982-83 recession, to a total of 17 per cent overall.

As the below figure highlights, the trend in the youth unemployment rate has a parallel trend with the adult unemployment rate. The context of the youth unemployment rate derives from the mid 1970's when inflation and unemployment increased. To understand such dimensions more clearly, the figure below highlights the differences between the adult and the youth unemployment rate in the period from January 1980 to January 2014. The figure clearly illustrates a consistent gap of both frictional and structural unemployment that has failed to dissipate over the long term, and in recent years has begun to again rise as economic conditions worsen.

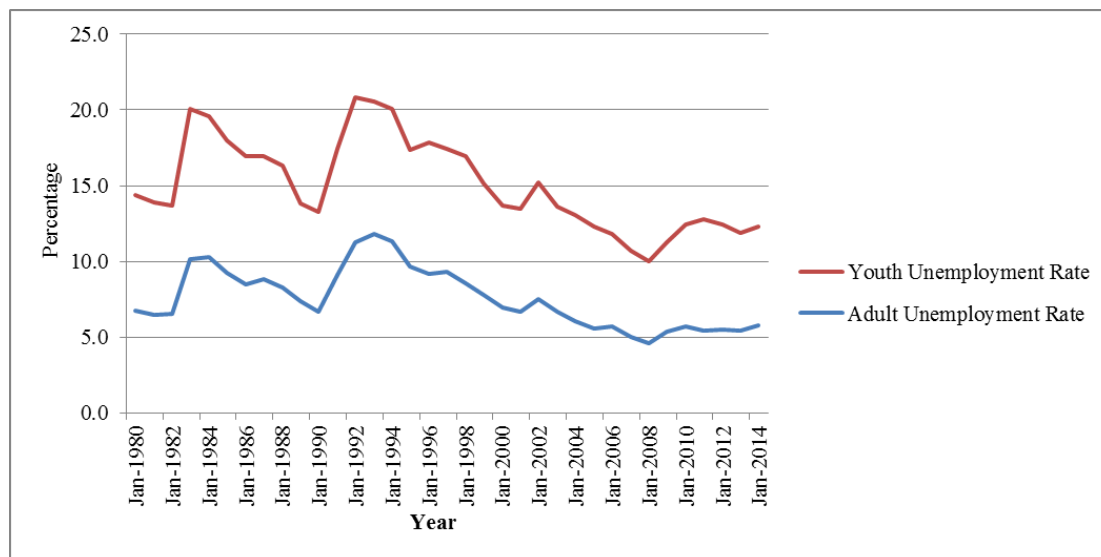


Figure 2: Adult and Youth Unemployment Rates Australia January 1980 to January 2014

Source: ABS Labour Force (2014)

One of the major factors in the context of high youth unemployment has been the fear of inflation, that has led successive governments since the 1970's to constrain spending. Commencing with the Fraser government, and continuing today, these policy responses have had mixed results, given the persistence of stubbornly high rates of unemployment in the last few decades. As Castle and Mangan argue,

“The revival of monetarism led many governments to believe that they could no longer stimulate economic activity to create employment because any stimulus would just increase inflation” (1984: 242)

Structural factors associated with economic change are also important to understand the challenges of employment disadvantage throughout Australia's post-war history. These include Australia's very large gap between labour force growth and employment levels. In periods of recession, significant job destruction occurs and continues to have a devastating impact on employment growth, with the prospects of driving up both adult and youth unemployment (Bell and Quiggin 2010: 147). The number of people who would like to work has also increased significantly since

1970. For example, from August 1970 and August 1984, the labour force increased in size at a rate of 2.1 per cent per annum while job availability grew at 1.4 per cent per annum (Committee of Inquiry into Labour Market Programs 1985: 29; Mehmet 1986: 7). Australia's increase in unemployment in this period was because of a number of factors. These stem from a drop in competitiveness, originating in the long boom⁷, and permeating particular sectors of the economy, such as manufacturing (Brezniak and Collins 1977). In the relevant period of 1970-1984, manufacturing employment dropped by 200 000, while the areas of clothing and textiles were hit hard with 44 per cent and 46 per cent declines respectively. The deregulation of economic activity during the 1980's, with domestic production having high levels of foreign ownership and corporations moving overseas, also contributed to higher levels of youth employment disadvantage. The incidences of factory closures were wide-spread across Australia, with diverse areas such as electronics, meat works, ship-building and timber industries, all being affected (Bureau of Industry Economics 1985: 93-124).

Technological change and innovation has also played a role in the challenges of youth employment. In many areas of manufacturing, labour saving technology has displaced workers. The specific segment of the workforce that has disproportionately been affected has been lower skilled blue collar workers in manufacturing and service based industries. The effects can lead to a net loss and multiplier in low employment growth compared to any increases in employment demand (Bell et al. 2000). Expanding industries such as I.T and telecommunications (when compared to manufacturing) require fewer new employees as new technologies are introduced. Coupled with the displacing effects of neoliberalism, and its various manifestations of economic rationalism, job loss can be significant. In areas such as government services and the public service more generally, ceilings placed on the number of workers has led to the crippling of employment growth because of the nature of its labour intensity and its flow-on impacts in the economy (Castle and Mangan 1984: 242; Mehmet 1986: 11). Technological change has been the major factor

7 Cf. Mandel 1976; 1978; 1980 on late capitalism and the various interpretations of the long boom. Further, for a contemporary account of the current economic crisis see Arrighi 2010, Harvey 2010; 2014; Piketty 2014.

contributing to the decline of employment for youth. Over the past fifteen years, the number of full-time jobs held by teenagers has declined by 60 percent. As Gittins (1998) argues,

“The main explanation for this is technological change. Many of the menial jobs once done by teenagers are now done by machines, and employers hire older and more highly educated youth to work with those machines. Another development, however, is that many menial jobs in retailing formerly done by full-time juniors have been split into several part-time jobs. Over the past 15 years, the number of part-time jobs held by teenagers has increased by almost 150 percent. For teenagers, there are almost twice as many part-time jobs as full-time. Nearly two-thirds of these part-time jobs are held by full-time students”

In the context of micro and macro-economic de-regulation during the 1980's, the Australian wage structure was reformed in conjunction with competition policy designed to improve productivity. The Prices and Income Accord was a scheme developed by the incoming Hawke government and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). The accord was based on the principle of wage restraint on the part of trade unions in order to contain inflation and a corresponding expansionary monetary and fiscal policy to be followed by the government so as to revive growth, reduce unemployment and improve the social wage (Mishra 1990: 80; Stilwell 1986). A major review in 1986 was also established. Entitled the 'Cass Review', the review's intentions were to examine a number of key areas in Australia's social security system regarding employment. More specifically, the review proposed directions for long-term reform of income support programs to identify more immediate priorities. The reforms subsequently undertaken by the Hawke government included a work test based around the Job Search Allowance and for youth to be 'job ready' (Cass et al. 1988: iii).

Employment growth improved from 1984, with youth employment conditions improving faster than adult growth. Macro-economic conditions, including inflation and gross domestic product (GDP), also improved. In 1985 the youth unemployment

rate for 15-19 years of age stood at just under 20 per cent while 20-24 years of age stood at 12 per cent. Overall, the youth unemployment rate stood at over 15 per cent, suggesting some evidence of partial recovery in the Australian economy. Research undertaken by Lewis and Shorten (1992) that examined trends throughout the 1980's, followed a cohort of youth for several years. Between 1985-1988, the youth unemployment rate fell from 17 per cent to 8.5 per cent. Changes in the structure of the labour market including increasing age and 'job readiness' has led to some improvements in employment prospects. The rise in the school retention rate (discussed later in this chapter) has also lowered actual labour force participation to focus on skills and education (Economic Planning Advisory Council 1992: 14). In 1994, 'Working Nation' by the Keating Government was released. Its intention was to further reform unemployment benefits and to attempt to remove presumed disincentives to employment from the income test. Its emphasis further highlighted the active employment strategies set out by the Cass Review, as well as ushering in the neoliberal ideology that has become part of employment policy since the Accord (Stilwell 1986).

In the early 1990's, leading up to the 1993 Federal election, neoliberal approaches to youth employment policy were argued to be central to overcoming very high unemployment rates since the recession of 1990-1991. The Leader of the Federal Liberal Party, Dr John Hewson, advocated downward pressure on youth wages to overcome supply side issues in the youth labour market. Similar policies were advocated during the Howard government years of 1996-2007, ushering in major reforms of youth employment policies including a new youth allowance of a single payment for full-time students and unemployed youth. Employment services were also transformed, with the former C.E.S. dismantled, and the introduction of a fully competitive market for employment services called the Job Network. Under the network, public sector organisations and government departments would compete on the same basis as their private sector counterparts (Kellie 1998: 287; Carney and Ramia 2002). Under the approach that continues today, beneficiaries are required to make an economic (and moral) contribution to society in return for their State-provided benefits, typically through involvement in (most often mandatory) training and labour market programs (Ramia 2002: 52).

With the onset of the global financial crisis in 2008, Australia has experienced compounding job losses. Nationally, the unemployment rate moved from 4.4 per cent to 5.7 per cent. Prior to the global financial crisis, the Australian unemployment rate for youth aged 15 to 24 years old was at its lowest since the early 1970's. Between 2008 and 2009, however, the rate of unemployment among teenagers who were not in full-time education rose from 12.2 per cent to 18.5 per cent - one of the largest annual increases in 20 years (ABS 2009). With the introduction of fiscal stimulus in 2008-09 by the Federal Rudd Government, employment rates did improve nationally, particularly macro-economic job creation for both adults and youth. The effects of such stimulus maintained relative aggregate demand across the Australian economy in 2010. The policies of the Rudd/Gillard Governments saw a continuation of neoliberal ideologies and policy positions similar to those of the previous Howard Coalition government, and indeed to those of the recently elected Abbott Coalition government. This includes maintaining both Centrelink and the Job Network. Aside from tackling Australia's long term employment problems, policies remain within the contractual welfare approaches that emphasise obligatory duties owed by recipients to 'give something back'. Some reform has occurred, however, at the institutional level. This includes the streamlining of assistance to job seekers, with improvements in targeting, together with streamlining programs and improvements in the compliance system to limit the occurrence of job seekers breaching the conditions of their obligations under the work for the dole scheme.⁸

3.4: Contemporary Challenges of Youth Employment

With the exception of people with disabilities, women and ethnic minorities, Australia's labour market appears to be a functional expression of neoliberalism in the 21st century. Youth, however, face a labour market undergoing significant structural changes, particularly for unskilled workers. This particular manifestation is the result of broader changes occurring in the wider Australian economy (Bell 1997). The impacts of neoliberalism in the labour market and the general processes of restructuring national and regional economies have transformed the structure and

⁸ I am arguing that active employment policies have generally coincided with neoliberal ideology and goals. Many countries such as those in Scandinavia have active approaches in a social democratic framework.

patterns of work for youth. The new economic drivers of higher skills and knowledge generally feature lower participation rates for youth compared to the rest of the labour force. Youth are more likely to be employed in traditional unskilled blue-collar jobs or the emerging services sectors of the economy. Both these sectors have become precarious in recent years with high levels of casualisation (both full-time and part-time) leading to continuing under-employment as well as significant job insecurity and low wages (Bell and Quiggin 2010: 146). Hidden unemployment has also become a major issue in the youth labour market in the last few decades. A range of factors are associated with youth employment that impact on their vulnerability in the labour market. These include the industrial and occupational concentration of employment, educational attainment, the availability and effectiveness of training, occupational and geographical mobility, the reasons for leaving a job, and the nature of the transition from school to work, and from unemployment to employment (Bureau of Labour Market Research 1985; O'Brien 2007).

3.4.1: Jobs

Some of the most salient characteristics of the youth labour market in Australia have been increasing rates of participation in education, falling rates of labour force participation, very cyclical unemployment and labour force participation rates, high rates of unemployment, increasing part-time and casual employment, falling full-time employment across all age groups and occupations and employment concentration in a few industries (Wooden 1996; Biddle and Burgess 1999). One of the primary drivers of youth experiences with employment has been a lack of jobs whether casual, part-time or full-time. While part-time and casual employment has increased in Australia, there has been a significant decline in full-time employment for 15-24 year olds over the last few decades. As Jamrozik argues,

“In 1966, youth accounted for 13.6 per cent of all employed persons, but by 1995 they accounted for only 6.9 per cent. They lost their share of employment in all sectors of industry, including those industries which over this period achieved a very high rate of employment growth” (2001: 76)

The changes occurring in the overall patterns of work have also affected youth participation and unemployment rates in Australia (Ross and Whitefield 1996). There is a growing trend for organisations to employ staff on a more casual or temporary basis. This means that many of today's jobs are insecure, and many people are not working the hours that they would like to work, or that they are capable of working. Research undertaken by Wooden (1996: 145) indicated a long-term trajectory of part-time employment for youth. Between 1966–1995, the incidence of part-time employment rose over 9 times from 6.5 per cent to 60.7 per cent for 15-19 year olds. For 20-24 year olds, part-time employment rose from 5.5 per cent in 1981 to 16 per cent in 1995 (Wooden 1996: 148). According to the Dusseldorp Skills Forum (2003), since 1995 there has been a 6.9 per cent decrease in the number of full-time jobs available to 15-19 year olds and a 15.2 per cent drop for 20-24 year olds. More recently, the impacts of the global financial crisis have increased the levels of youth joblessness. Prior to the current economic crisis, the Australian youth unemployment rate was at its lowest since the 1970's. Between 2008 and 2009, however, the national rate of unemployment among teenagers who were not in full-time education rose from 12.2% to 18.5% – one of the largest annual increases in 20 years (ABS 2009; 2012). More recently, youth joblessness has fallen but remains unacceptably high with a national rate of 13% in December 2014 (ABS 2014).

Between both 15-19 year olds and 20-24 year olds, there are clear differences, by age and gender, between those in full-time and part-time employment, between those in education and those not in education, and between those in high school and those in tertiary institutions. For 15-19 year olds and for those in full-time education⁹, unemployment appears to be of no concern, while part-time and/or casual employment is likely to constitute a transitional arrangement, placing 15-19 year olds in education longer, or engaging in both part-time work and study (Burgess and Biddle 1999).

9 The Education Amendment Act 2009 passed by the NSW Government raised the school leaving age. The legislation prescribes that, as a minimum, students must complete year 10 and, until they are 17 years old, continue to be engaged in some form of education, training or employment. Under the new provisions, the minimum school leaving age will be the age at which the child completes Year 10 or 17 years of age whichever comes first (see Education Amendment Act 2009 No. 25, Department of Education and Training, NSW Government).

The trend in Australia towards part-time and casual work has deeper implications for longer term career prospects. Some youth in part-time or casual work fail to learn additional skills or gain adequate experience, which in turn increases the risk that they will find it difficult to gain full-time employment in the future (Muir 2003: 4). Indeed, diminishing job opportunities for teenagers produce a ‘discouraged worker effect’ that sees some teenagers, who would like to leave school and get a full-time job, having to stay on at school in face of a weak labour market (Lewis and McLean 1998: 160). For those outside of education, unemployment is recurring and there is a greater likelihood of being trapped in involuntary part-time and/or casual employment, with little training, limited career prospects and low pay (Burgess and Biddle 1999).

This is coupled with a serious decline in available apprenticeships in Australia in metals, electrical and electronics, with training decreasing by 16 per cent in the decade of 1993-2003. Appropriate investment in apprenticeships has been one of the most important factors for youth finding work. Indeed, estimates indicate that if the training rate had not decreased over the period of 1993 – 2003, there would be 19,000 additional job opportunities (Muir et al. 2003: 4). With the onset of the global financial crisis (GFC), the Federal government initiated an Australian Apprentices Taskforce due to over 100,000 youth losing their jobs in the period leading to December 2009 (Australian Apprentices Taskforce 2009: 6). Apprenticeships were traditionally a very common passage into full-time work for early school leavers. However there has been a well-documented decline in the number of apprenticeships available for youth over the last decade. An analysis of the LSAY data by Marks (2006: 24) gave an indication of the strong positive impact apprenticeships can have on the labour markets outcomes of Australian youth. The survey revealed that those that had completed an apprenticeship or traineeship were more likely to be in full-time work at the age of 21 years. In fact, the incidence of full-time employment for such youth was 25 per cent points higher than the overall sample. Recognising the importance of apprenticeships, the Gillard Government established the New Apprenticeships program, now renamed Australian Apprenticeships. Its focus was to help youth into a paid pathway to full-time work, by providing training, experience

and guidance. The programs objective was to make taking on an apprentice more attractive to employers by offering financial incentives and flexible programs, such as Group Training, for small to medium enterprises. For youth experiencing significant disadvantage, a job placement, employment and training program (JPET) was also implemented. Its purpose was to target those youth who face barriers to work and community engagement. These barriers may include homelessness, mental illness, drug abuse and domestic violence. The program's aim is to help these youth participate in activities such as education, vocational training or work. It also assists in making connections with specialist social services and increasing the engagement of these youth in the community at large.

3.4.2: Education

Education is consistently referred to as a key factor influencing youth employment. The Smith Family Report on Youth Unemployment in Australia (2003) found that education is a major factor influencing employability (Muir et al. 2003). A World Bank Forum in 2003 cited barriers to education, a lack of appropriate education and the mismatch of skills learnt at school with those required for job opportunities, as contributing factors to youth unemployment. In a similar vein, the OECD maintains that the inflated rates of youth unemployment are largely the result of youth leaving school without adequate skills to enter employment.

According to the findings of the Dusseldorp Skills Forum in 2003, 28 per cent of those who leave school early were either unemployed, not studying, working part-time but not studying, or not in the labour force at all. By comparison, only 11 per cent of school completers fell within these classifications (Muir et al. 2003: 5). The results of the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY), managed by ACER and the DEST, also appear to support these arguments. Penman (2004: 45-58) found that completing year 12 and getting a degree reduced time spent in marginal activities. The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) also revealed some interesting results which raise questions about the appropriateness of 'forcing' youth to stay in schooling longer than they want to. While school completers are substantially more likely to find full-time work, Marks (2006: 30-33) found that non-completers who leave earlier (that is, prior to beginning year 11) experience lower

levels of unemployment than those who leave later. The non-completers, 56 per cent of surveyed late leavers, had full-time work in the first year compared to 61 per cent of early leavers, with those figures increasing to 67 per cent and 72 per cent respectively in the fourth year. The percentage of early leavers unemployed in both years was 3 per cent points lower than for late leavers.

It is undeniable that education does play an important role in increasing the employment prospects of the young. The National Board for Education, Employment and Training identified that for those outside of education, unemployment is reoccurring and there is a greater likelihood of being trapped in involuntary part time and/or casual employment, with little training, limited career prospects and low pay (Biddle and Burgess 1999: 87). However, it is important to consider what forms of education are most appropriate. Decisions about work and education are not made independently of each other, and are likely to be affected by perceptions about the likelihood of finding work (Wooden 1996: 144). Penman (2004: 24) found that amongst the LSAY cohort that were in year 9 in 1995, 80 per cent of early leavers and 76 per cent of late leavers said securing job or apprenticeship was an important consideration when deciding whether to leave school, with around half saying it was the most important. For those who may remain in school, only because of a lack of job opportunities, it may more beneficial to be engaged in vocational education or some forms of on-the-job training, that will better prepare them for their desired future careers, than to be pushed into completing secondary education.

With the issue of education, it appears that one's literacy and numeracy skills, regardless of whether secondary schooling is completed, has a significant impact on employability. The Smith Family Report on Youth Unemployment in Australia (2003) noted that an International Literacy Survey found 'employment and unemployment are strongly related to levels of literacy proficiency'. An analysis of the LSAY results by Penman (2004) revealed that low level performers are at greater risk of leaving before year 11, with literacy and numeracy skills having the strongest impact on the decision to leave school early. Low level performers are also more likely to be unemployed, to be unemployed for a longer duration, and to experience long term unemployment. In fact, respondents with the lowest levels of literacy and

numeracy achievement had highest levels of unemployment over all 5 years of the survey and spent more time in marginal activities. In line with this Boese and Scutela (2006: 16) emphasised the importance of ensuring that youth are able to develop adequate literacy and numeracy skills, as those that do not face severely limited opportunities. They are less likely to complete secondary school or move into further education, and are at a higher risk of experiencing unemployment later in life.

3.4.3: Socio-Economic Barriers

There is mixed evidence concerning the effects that socioeconomic status has on the labour market outcomes of youth. It is often cited as a major contributing factor to youth unemployment, limiting the opportunities open to youth. However, the LSAY only finds weak correlations between socioeconomic status and unemployment, when compared to other causal factors. Marks (2006: 36) found Indigenous status and ethnicity to be the only socioeconomic factors that have at least a moderate effect on labour market outcomes, though there is extensive literature to the contrary. His analysis of the LSAY data found that the unemployment rate for youth from language backgrounds other than English was 15 per cent in the first year after school, compared to 9 per cent for those from an English speaking background. Youth within this socioeconomic group also had a higher incidence of part-time work. The impacts of Indigenous status will be discussed later in this review. Despite Marks' findings, there is extensive literature to the contrary, arguing that many other elements of socioeconomic status impact the likelihood of experiencing unemployment.

Limited household income is believed to have a significant effect on labour market outcomes. According to Long (2006: 3) youth in low income households are less likely to be fully engaged in work or study than those in higher income households. The 2004 Household, income and labour dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey revealed that 60 per cent of youth in households that earn less than \$350 per week are not fully engaged in such activities, compared to just 9 per cent of youth whose weekly household income exceeds \$1565 (Muir et al. 2003, p. 6). There are numerous possible reasons for this. The Australian Council of Social Services indicated that there may be pressure on youth from low socioeconomic families to

leave school early in order to earn an income to help alleviate household financial stress (Muir et al. 2003: 6). Long (2006: 3), on the other hand, noted that those from lower income families have less access to private transport, which limits their mobility and therefore their ability to engage in work or study. Within the family unit and its members, British research by O'Neill and Sweetmen (1998) found that in families where the father was unemployed for a prolonged period their sons were more likely to experience unemployment. They found that this relationship was a result of factors relating to unemployment such as poverty and poor education.

Another consequence of low socio-economic status is that it influences the level of access that youth have to information and communication technology. Citing Zappala and McClaren (2003), the Smith Family Report on Youth Unemployment in Australia noted that the so called 'digital divide' between low and high income families encompasses access, basic training and content. Inability to access a computer at home or outside school can be disadvantageous to the education and labour market outcomes of youth (Boese and Scutela 2006: 30). Moreover, Long (2006) emphasised that this lack of access to information and communication technologies excludes these youth from a whole virtual commercial and social world, preventing them from developing or updating the skills required for employment in a wide range of occupations. A report by the Brotherhood of St Laurence (Boese and Scutela 2006) emphasised the impact that inadequate housing can have on the labour market outcomes of disadvantaged youth. The definition of inadequate housing includes homelessness, insecure tenure, and overcrowded, unsafe or unhygienic housing. Without a place to live in security, peace and dignity, Australian youth are more at risk of experiencing worsening health, poor educational outcomes, reduced employment opportunities, discrimination, and social exclusion, with some making the transition to homelessness.

3.4.4: Previous Unemployment

Penman's analysis of the HILDA study identified that once youth experience unemployment, it becomes the factor most likely to lead to further unemployment in the future (2004: 50). This supports the theory of the 'scarring effect' that many claim haunts those who have been unemployed. The LSAY data revealed that post-school

destinations are strongly associated with previous labour market experiences. Of young men unemployed in the first year after leaving school, 30 per cent were still looking for work at the time of the interview in the second year. In the second and third years, that figure rose to nearly 40 per cent. For females, it was 26 per cent, 19 per cent and 12 per cent respectively (Marks 2006: 22). Marks noted that even though the proportion of survey respondents that were looking for work each year amounted to less than 10 per cent of the sample, these youth in particular faced severe difficulties. The amount of time spent unemployed was excessively long, and Marks raised concern that long periods of unemployment are likely to have psychological repercussions that further hinder the prospects of future full-time employment. Hillman's analysis of the LSAY data found that youth who spend extended periods of time outside the labour force and full time education are at risk of missing out on employment experience, the development of work skills, and familiarity with new technologies. These place unemployed youth at a position of disadvantage compared to others in the labour market, reducing their chances of finding employment in the future. The longer the time spent not engaged in work or study, the more outdated any skills or qualifications become, and the further the chances of entering the labour force or full time education appear to decline (2005: 23). Boese and Scutela (2006: 18) add that extended unemployment can contribute to non-economic consequences such as psychological distress, family breakdown, and longer term poverty, which again increase the risk of further unemployment.

Marks (2006: 45) emphasises that obtaining a full-time job soon after leaving school is the best pathway to a successful and rapid transition to ongoing full-time work. This means that minimising the severity of further youth employment disadvantage requires a focus on helping youth secure part-time or full-time work as soon as possible, rather than further education and training unconnected to the workplace. Youth employment prospects are also connected to the experiences of family members. British research by O'Neill and Sweetmen (1998) found that in families where the father was unemployed for a prolonged period their sons were more likely to experience unemployment. They found that this relationship was a result of factors relating to unemployment such as poverty and poor education. The LSAY study also showed that part-time work while at school is associated with higher levels of full

time employment, and substantially lower unemployment in first year after leaving school. 58 per cent of teenagers engaged in part-time work while at school found full-time work in the first year out of school, while 3 per cent were unemployed, compared to 51 per cent and 13 per cent respectively for those that were not (Marks 2006: 33). Programs that assist youth, particularly those who leave school early and struggle to successfully navigate the transition from school to work, have been implemented with some success. A transition worker can sometimes provide early school leavers with intensive, individual support so as to assist them with the necessary information and preparation to improve their labour market outcomes. Based in schools, but involving a joint effort with local community groups, transition workers manage students at risk of leaving school early on a case-by-case basis, providing mentoring and assistance to help these students make positive and guided decisions. The Transition Worker Review found that transition workers have been very successful in guiding students into apprenticeships and TAFE courses. Support for these youth continues after they have left school.

The Smith Family report 'What do students know about work?' indicated that part-time work appears to provide students with a clearer or more accurate picture of the world of work than if they had not been engaged in part time work (Beavis et al. 2005: 10). The Smith Family report 'Australian youth: their stories, their families and their post school plans' (Bryce 2007) identified the importance of family support in overcoming other barriers to successful post-school pathways into the labour market. Whether providing advice and guidance, or just love and encouragement, families play an important role in providing youth with a 'safe and secure' net while they try to prepare for and navigate their way through their transition into work. The report, which analysed the post-school transition of a number of youth involved in the Smith Family Learning for Life program, found that parental support plays a significant role in adolescents' career development. The youth involved in the case study, many of whom came from disadvantaged backgrounds, said that family and friends are a key source of information and support, particularly when they are at a stage in their lives when they are establishing values and aspirations, and need to begin making decisions about life beyond school (Bryce 2007: 9). The report demonstrated that a safe and secure set of relationships helps to instil the confidence

in youth to freely explore post-school options. Citing Penick and Jepsen (1992) it was suggested that conflicting or disengaged families may have a detrimental impact on youth, as they attempt to make their way through school and work without support or encouragement.

3.4.5: Precarious Work

Another important dimension of contemporary youth employment in Australia is precarious work (Vosko 2000; Standing 2011). Specifically, the term is used to describe particular work arrangements and conditions associated with poor wages, temporary and fixed term contracts, and irregular hours (Kalleberg 2000; 2009; Masterman-Smith and Pocock 2008; Quinlan 2012). More generally it includes not only paid employment as such but also the interface of the economy and the welfare state (Vosko 2000). The difficulties in defining the nature and degree of precariousness in youth employment have been identified in the national and international literature. For example McKay et al. (2012) , identifies four dimensions of precarious work: (1) job insecurity, whether through short contract duration or through unpredictability of hours; (2) low pay or lack of opportunity to improve it; (3) ‘sub-ordinate’ employment, leading to exclusion from social, welfare or employment rights; and (4) absence of coverage by collective bargaining or union representation. Speaking of the “precariat” Guy Standing (2011: 13-14) explains the difficulties in defining precarious work:

“...however one defines it, the precariat is far from being homogeneous. The teenager who flits in and out of the internet café while surviving on fleeting jobs is not the same as the migrant who uses his wits to survive, networking feverishly while worrying about the police. Neither is similar to the single mother fretting where the money for next week’s food bill is coming from or the man in his 60’s who takes casual jobs to help pay medical bills. But they all share a sense that their labour is instrumental (to live), opportunistic (taking what comes) and precarious (insecure)”

For many youth aged 15-24 years, deliberately chosen part-time work may not be experienced as precarious, even if there is a desire for more hours of work, stable

employment arrangements and fixed or ongoing contracts. Horizons of choice cannot be separated from specific experiences of the labour market. Objectively precarious work may not be experienced as such. For example, part-time or full-time work can be uncertain and precarious for many youth but the flexibility of such jobs may make their acceptability unquestioned, if they are seen (accurately or not) as potentially improving future job prospects. On the other hand, many youth work on a part-time basis but the employment is not precarious if the conditions are appropriate or there are no other factors that would make the employment precarious. Table two below summaries the structure that emerges in a society in which work has become pervasively precarious.

Table 2: The Social Structures of a Precarious Work Society

Layers of Precarity	Types and Forms
Precarious employment relations (categories of labour)	Casual work; Short-term contracts; Seasonal; and Temporary work.
Precarious labour market and industry conditions	Recessed labour market conditions; Industries structured by high levels of casual, seasonal and temporary labour; Strategic and managerial use of precarious work; Policy gaps and regulative deficiencies; and Rationalisation of transaction costs.
Precarious social and political relations	Loss of agency/defective coping strategies; Blocks on social mobility; Life-course disruptions; mobilisation of norms of precarity; 'Co-institutions' of precarity; and Depoliticisation of work.

Source: Adapted from Wilson and Ebert (2013: 267)

Precarious employment amongst youth can be seen as consonant with neoliberal ideologies (Standing 2011). Precariousness is normalised as individual choice: insecurity is seen as an inevitable trade-off for the flexibility that workers need in deciding how, when and where they work. The benefits of such flexibility include greater worker control of day to day schedules, greater productivity, better work and family life balance and greater personal and family well-being (Pocock 2003). The distinction between precarious and 'standard' employment practices has blurred, as a result of 'spill-over' effects, whereby stable ongoing jobs are also increasingly

exposed to economic contractions or deliberate restructuring informed by competitive market ideologies (Cheshire and Lawrence 2005). Industry and occupational shifts mean that young people's vocational 'choices' include a further form of precarious work – self-employment in a wide range of blue and white collar occupations. The decline of heavy manufacturing and mining employment, together with the diversification of service industries, has meant the rise of a 'petty bourgeoisie' that includes artisans, shopkeepers and tradespeople as well as accountants, doctors and lawyers (Gramsci 1971). Small business and other self-employed proprietors can be considered part of the growing groups of working people whose relation to income and work is becoming precarious (Standing 2011). The very concept of security, it is now clear, is tied to a standard employment relationship that developed after world war two, and applied mainly to male workers in a narrow range of core industrial sectors (Vosko 2000).

The acceleration of precarious work has occurred in an era of globalisation, in which neoliberalism has become a hegemonic ideology within western societies and has exercised a major influence in the area of employment (Harvey 2005). This has involved the belief that, by allowing markets to operate with as few impediments as possible, the market will be able to reach its full potential. The State is still seen in this as playing an active role in creating and sustaining the institutions which can make that possible (Gamble 2006: 21-22; Robison 2006: 3). Some of the international and national economic reforms of the last few decades have undoubtedly accelerated precarious work. These include:

1. Large scale privatisation and restructuring projects;
2. Deregulation of the labour market leading to casualization;
3. The changing structure and organisation of work including outsourcing and subcontracting; and
4. Diminished union power (Kalleberg 2009; McKay et al. 2011).

In Australia, governments at all levels have endorsed these practices while attempting to alleviate chronic unemployment ¹⁰ (Stilwell 2002; Considine 2001; Carney and Ramia, 2002; Cook et al. 2008). The Australian economic restructuring experience of recent decades corresponds to what Peck and Tickell (2002) define as neoliberalism's first, 'roll-back' phase, characterised by the weakening of the Keynesian state and collectivist institutions such as unions. In the Illawarra region, for example, the decades of industry restructuring have been consonant with such ideologies, despite the strenuous efforts at community mobilisation and job creation by local unions and the broader community, historically an important focus of local solidarity (Rittau 2001).

As the thesis has discussed thus far, the dimensions of neoliberalism have shaped the contemporary youth labour market in Australia, as in regional areas more generally. The need for labour market flexibility is closely associated with precarious work. Labour market deregulation lowers labour costs in a bid to prevent capital from transferring production costs to areas and countries where costs are more competitive (Standing 2011: 6). Indeed, flexibility has become a central factor in the rise of precarious work, as social protection in the form of organised labour and the welfare state has effectively been weakened. At the same time, the precariousness of the labour market has increased significantly with 'over one in four Australian workers now in casual employment' (Masterman-Smith and Pocock 2008: 205). Evidence from a recent study on insecure work found that casual employment has become the norm for over two million Australians, with the greatest and most rapid growth occurring in casual full-time and part-time jobs (Rafferty and Yu 2010: 6).

Focusing on young people and their experiences of precarious work, Eardley (2000: 15) noted more than a decade ago the incidence of low pay. For example, in the decade from the mid 1980's to the mid 1990's, low pay was experienced by more than half of employees under 21 when compared to the rest of the labour force. The social impacts of such trends, including high levels of anxiety and uncertainty,

¹⁰ I am arguing neoliberalism has been the major factor responsible for the transformations occurring in the State, economy and labour market in Australia over recent decades. Whether the ALP or Coalition was in government is indifferent.

remain one of the key findings in this and other research that has explored precarious work (van Wanrooy 2009). The basic components of the post-war wage structure, including guaranteed sick and holiday leave, has slowly been eroded and the capacity of these workers to have time off for themselves and their families is disappearing. It also raises more serious questions concerning broader economic and social participation, such as adequate housing, income, job security, levels of superannuation and taxation (particularly on second and third jobs), and the interface between welfare and work (Watson et al. 2003).

3.5: Summary

This chapter has presented a brief examination of youth employment internationally. It has then examined youth employment in Australia, illustrating how neoliberalism has impacted and shaped contemporary youth employment since the economic crisis of the mid-1970s. The analysis showed that youth have experienced significant employment disadvantages over the last few decades, with barriers in finding jobs, including transitioning from education and training, socio-economic barriers, and previous unemployment. As the above issues make clear, the Illawarra region is an important locality for analysis aimed at understanding the experience and nature of youth employment. The next chapter outlines the methodology of the thesis.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

4.1: Introduction

In the previous chapter I introduced the various dimensions of youth employment from the international to the national. The chapter examined how neoliberalism has impacted and shaped contemporary youth employment over the last few decades. This chapter presents the methodology of the case study of the Illawarra region of New South Wales, Australia.

The methodological approach of the chapter (and indeed the thesis) has been to collect data that is rich and reflects the perspectives of youth who are experiencing the current neoliberal labour market. It was also used to understand the perspectives of those managers work and make decisions on a regular basis about youth employment. A case study method will be used that collects data from a range of different organisations through a mixed methods approach that includes interviews, focus groups and the collection of primary and secondary materials. Mixed methods allows for triangulation, and can generate greater reliability of data as well as providing a rich data source (Walter 2010).

Data was collected during the years of 2010-2012. The focus is on understanding how neoliberalism can be seen as operating successfully in its own terms at the same time as is a cohort of youth experiencing marginalisation in the labour market? As chapter One noted, the Illawarra region is particularly striking in the Australian context given the normalised operation of neoliberalism. In Section 4.2, the chapter discusses the standpoint of the research while Section 4.3 sets out the research framework utilising a case study approach. The processes of data analysis, and ethical issues encountered, are discussed in the later sections of the chapter.

4.2: Position of the Researcher

The position of this research is from a number of perspectives. In the first instance, the research comes from the personal experience of living and growing up in the Illawarra region as a long-term resident. I have worked and studied in the region and

saw the employment difficulties first-hand when the region experienced economic hardship. This has shaped my perceptions and understandings of the social world around me. My connections to the region are long-standing. As a white, Anglo-Saxon male the region has struck me as a unique locality nestled between the mountains and the sea on one hand, and shaped by a significant industrial history. The area is currently experiencing a transformation from one based on the industrial working class to a post-industrial knowledge economy. Second, from this position, the research reflects my own position including my class, ethnicity, income and family circumstances. This is a crucial point because the position of the researcher defines how he or she approaches and understands the research. The questions developed in this research, the answers sought and the process of answering these questions, have been and continue to be informed by the circumstances of my background. Drawing on Walter (2010: 14) this has been developed by my own epistemological, axiological and ontological frameworks.

4.3: A Case Study Approach

The thesis has argued thus far that youth employment in the Illawarra region is largely shaped by the impacts of neoliberalism. The theoretical framework employed seeks to understand youth employment through the thesis that its nature is determined by neoliberalism. Further, that this is in a situation where neoliberalism has itself become hegemonic and in the Australian context is expressed as successful in its own terms.

To understand youth employment in a neoliberal environment, the Illawarra region of New South Wales, Australia will be used as a case study. As chapter one argued, the Illawarra region is particularly striking in the Australian context given the operation of neoliberalism. In this respect, its selection as a case study is to maximise what we can learn about youth employment while recognizing that this region represents a locality of significant diversity with an economic and social structure not found elsewhere in Australia (Stake 1995: 4). The selection of this area as a case study also allows comparative analysis with other regions across Australia and internationally that are experiencing economic restructuring and the impacts of neoliberalism. Indeed, the findings of this research can inform and develop a greater understanding

of regions transitioning from an industrial to post-industrial economy across the world in countries such as the U.K., U.S.A and broader Europe (Logan and Swanstrom 1990; Peck and Ticknell 2002). As part of the case study methodology, the research will be primarily focused on the collection and analysis of qualitative data.

4.3.1: Research Methods

The thesis utilises a number of research methods to collect diverse forms of data. This gives the researcher greater flexibility when one approach may not be appropriate at particular times in the research process. The approach used is discussed below and uses four main research methods. These include interviews, focus groups and primary and secondary resources. Focus groups and interviews were both undertaken as a part of a case study methodology (Flyvbjerg 2006). This was to capture in a meaningful fashion the lived experiences of youth in a changing regional economy (Yin 2003: 2). It was also to capture the moment of interaction with neoliberalism and youth and using these two methods of data collection in a stepped fashion I felt was most appropriate.

While some approaches were used more than others, the intention was to use each resource when appropriate to build a narrative and story of youth employment. The benefit of a mixed method approach is that it strengthens the validity and reliability of the data analysis because of the multiple sources and perspectives and the quality of the data obtained. A mixed method approach has the capacity to compensate for the stand alone weaknesses within interviews and focus groups while fulfilling different purposes and providing different strengths (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). There is a danger that using mixed methods to build up different aspects of a story may lead to a narrative that, while apparently coherent, has no proof of its overall integrity. Triangulation, using mixed methods to examine the same object from several directions, can give stronger justification for the elements involved.

The use of mixed methods also highlights the value of ascertaining data results from one particular incident or problem (Kumar 1999). Choosing the right individuals to participate has the potential for rich cases of in-depth study. In this sense, deliberate

wide variation in purposeful sampling could include controversial and sensitive information. This information may be relevant to the study or may be worth discussing despite not being directly relevant to the topic. In this case study it was also important to sample appropriately so that data and findings can be built from and/or be related to the specific sample. The research also utilised snowball sampling to assist in access to interviewees when potential interview leads were given. The combination of methods allowed the research to triangulate data from the different interviewees. This captured the diversity of participants, and their views and experiences (Patton 1990: 169). Given the main purpose of the study is to understand the employment experiences of youth, a qualitative approach was the most appropriate. Qualitative research is used to study spoken and written representations of human experience. This can include using multiple methods and multiple sources of data (Punch 1998: 174). The importance of the approach was to capture the differences, conundrums and contradictions in the labour market and the processes of negotiation youth undertake. Qualitative research was also used because it can lead to a better understanding of a previously unexplored and unexamined area. It is widely acknowledged it is useful to gain insight into people's attitudes, values, behaviours, concerns, experiences, culture or lifestyles (Patton 2002). An important component in this argument is that a particular emphasis is placed on awareness of the researcher's role in interpreting phenomena and collecting and interpreting data (Sarantakos 1993: 269).

A significant proportion of primary data was derived from face to face semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for this research as they can provide a guide that is consistent with the theoretical and conceptual framework and allow flexibility when the need arises or in response to interviewees' interests (Minichello et al. 2008). Interviewees were chosen based on their employment experiences (youth) and their experiences relating to youth employment more generally (professionals). Many interviewees were either experiencing employment disadvantage or were individuals involved in assisting youth through their various organisations. Selected were participants from two cohorts.

The first cohort was comprised of youth aged 15-24 years old that lived in the region and were either unemployed, employed part-time or casually, or were employed but

wanted more hours of work. The sample of youth was not randomly selected but was drawn from a pool of candidates from a local service provider in the region. The focus for the youth suggested an approach that sought to understand how individuals understood their employment experiences. An underlying assumption of the research design was the view that understanding the employment experiences of youth wasn't divorced from its cultural, economic, political or social context but rather embedded in it while power structures and processes were sometimes unclear to participants.

The second cohort was comprised of professionals who were recruited from the executive levels of business, community development, education, manufacturing, local, state and federal government, private consultants and welfare sector. These professionals were recruited because of their experiences and expertise and an assumption that they would provide a level and depth of information that was suited to the project. This method was utilised because the sample size was small and limited while youth were generally difficult to recruit despite the help and assistance of case managers. Professionals were very willing to help on all occasions and even offered extra meetings to probe the issues further.

The interview process was lengthy but an enjoyable and rewarding experience. The interviews were conducted, in the main, when youth were available at their respective service providers. Interviews began in January 2011 and completed by August 2011. All interviewees participated with only four youth requesting the interview not be recorded on tape. In this interview, the researcher wrote down as much as possible and transcribed it. Participants were contacted by email (email script) and letter (see appendices) and followed up with phone calls and further email. Potential participants were initially approached via email and sample letter (see appendices for attached email and sample letters) and came from a range of different organisations in the region. Oliver suggests that an email or letter invitation, rather than a cold call invitation by telephone, offers participants the chance to reflect on the information they have about the research and make an informed decision about whether or not they want to participate. By contrast, if potential participants are approached in person, it may put them in a difficult position and they may even refuse to take part (Oliver 2003). Youth came from a number of different age groups

(between the ages of 15-24) and were selected with the assistance of service providers. The aim was to collect a cohort of views that represented the different youth employment experiences. The research included two stages of fieldwork.

Table 3: Stages of Fieldwork

Stage One	Date
Interviews – Professionals	January – August 2011
Interviews – Youth	January – August 2011
Stage Two	Date
Focus Group – Professionals	August 2012
Focus Group – Youth	September 2012

The interviewees were free to build a conversation within a particular subject, to word questions spontaneously and to establish a conversational style – but with a focus on a particular subject that had been predetermined (Patton 1990: 283). All interviews were conducted at the respective workplace for each professional while youth were interviewed in and around different locations and premises in Wollongong. Thirty face to face interviews with youth, businesses, employers, education and training organisations, government and service providers, politicians and unions were conducted. Each interview was recorded over a period of 30 minutes to 2 hours, and was transcribed into a full verbatim transcript for detailed analysis. The interviews were conducted according to the requirements set out by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at the University of Wollongong. A number of requirements were set by the committee particularly as it related to the welfare of youth and their privacy. Ten interviews with professionals in the region were completed while twenty interviews with youth were completed.

Table 4: Interview Structure for Youth

Name	Age	Sex	Ethnicity (Self-Identified)	Educational Attainment	Number of Interviews
Participant 1	23	Male	Aboriginal	Yr. 12	1
Participant 2	22	Male	Anglo-Greek	Yr. 12	1
Participant 3	19	Female	Anglo	Yr.12	1
Participant 4	18	Female	Anglo	Yr. 10	1
Participant 5	19	Male	Anglo	Yr. 12	1
Participant 6	20	Male	Anglo	Yr. 12	1
Participant 7	15	Female	Anglo	Yr. 10	1
Participant 8	16	Male	Anglo	Yr. 10	1
Participant 9	15	Male	Anglo	Yr. 10	1
Participant 10	21	Female	Anglo	Yr. 12	1
Participant 11	16	Male	Anglo	Yr. 10	1
Participant 12	15	Female	Anglo	Yr. 10	1
Participant 13	16	Male	Anglo	Yr. 10	1
Participant 14	15	Female	Anglo	Yr. 10	1
Participant 15	22	Male	Anglo	Yr. 12	1
Participant 16	24	Female	Anglo	Yr. 12	1
Participant 17	24	Male	Anglo	Yr. 12	1
Participant 18	17	Female	Anglo	Yr. 10	1
Participant 19	16	Male	Anglo	Yr. 10	1
Participant 20	17	Male	Aboriginal	Yr. 10	1
Total					20

Table 5: Interview Structure for Professionals

Organisation	Sex	Type of Participant	Number of Interviews
Access Community Group	Female	Professional	1
Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations	Female	Professional	1
Illawarra Business Chamber	Male	Professional	1
Politician	Female	Professional	1
Politician	Male	Professional	1
Regional Development Australia – Illawarra	Female	Professional	1
South Coast Labour Council	Male	Professional	1
TAFE Illawarra	Female	Professional	1
Wollongong City Council	Female	Professional	1
Wollongong City Council	Male	Professional	1
Total			10

* Job description has been removed to protect identity.

Open-ended questions were used to capture the scope of the research and that included the theoretical framework and the characteristics of each of the interviewees, all of whom were very different people with varying backgrounds and experiences. Interviews have the ability to engage and facilitate past experiences and approaches, and so this method was important for the research to capture not only the views of the professionals but also the vast experiences of the youth who participated. Due to the scope of the research, the interviews were necessarily restricted to key protagonists in the region, but the interview structure itself had a flexible approach when questioning each person about the topic areas. This reflected the nature of the different issues discussed and allowed the emergence of data that would otherwise have remained dormant.

The second method in the research process was the utilisation of focus groups, one with professionals and one with youth. Focus groups were used as a complementary method to interviews to obtain a fuller and more complete picture of the region, its youth labour market and youth employment experiences more generally (Krueger and Casey 2000). The focus groups provided participants with the opportunity to bring forward their own perspectives, opinions and stories of youth employment. Focus groups were a useful way of capturing the views in the region of youth employment and included between 8-10 participants in each. Focus groups can elucidate new information as well as introduce dynamism that can sometimes be restrained in the interview process (Weiss 1998). Focus groups also have the capacity to produce significant amounts of data in a relatively short period of time that may not arise out of an in-depth interview. On the other hand, focus groups have limitations compared to interviews. One such limitation is that fewer topics and ideas can be discussed while often being quite superficial (Neuman 2004).

The focus groups in this research aimed to draw out the key aspects of youth employment while allowing participants to pursue themes of their own making or that arose in the wider group discussion. No participant in the interviews, whether professional or youth, was a member of the focus groups: these were distinct and different collections of individuals. As with the interviews, potential participants were initially approached via email and sample letter (see appendices for email and sample letters). In the case of youth all correspondence was carried out through the case worker in line with ethics approval. Difficulty in providing motivation for involvement in many cases made it unrealistic to involve the same youth in both interviews and focus groups. Potential professional participants were identified, in part through snowballing techniques. Like the youth participants, no professional interviewee was also a member of the professional focus group. Members of the professional focus group came from a range of different organisations. These consisted of the organisations listed in Table six.

Table 6: Participants for Focus Groups: Professional

Identified Organisations	Sex	Type of Participant and Job Role in Organisation
Koorimunication	Female	Professional
NSW Department of Education and Communities	Female	Professional
Ringway Control and Automation	Male	Professional
Port Kembla Community Project Inc.	Female	Professional
Strategic Economics	Male	Professional
TAFE	Male	Professional
Wollongong City Council	Male	Professional
Wollongong City Council	Female	Professional
Workplace Learning Illawarra	Male	Professional

* Job description has been removed to protect identity.

The main intention of the focus groups was to have an open-ended discussion concerning the future of youth employment in the region. In terms of developing questions and an interview guide, it followed two main principles. First, the questions were ordered from the general to the specific. General questions that were unstructured were placed early while more specific questions were placed at the end. Second, the questions were ordered based on their relative importance, that is, the most significant questions were placed earlier on the guide (Stewart and Shamdasani 1990: 61).

The process of recruitment was very time consuming. Many emails were sent including reminders as well as follow up phone calls to identified participants. The focus groups commenced in August 2012 and they took until September 2012. The first focus group was for professionals and was held at the University of Wollongong. This group was facilitated by the researcher and followed a structured focus group format of introduction to the overall study, as well as an overview of issues and preliminary findings. The focus group then followed the discussion guide to understand the issues as well as the future of the region more generally.

Participants were very engaged in the topic and moderation and intervention in the discussion was minimal. A wide range of views were expressed and participants asked if further meetings could be held in a less formal setting over coffee to discuss further. The researcher agreed to meet, and to facilitate such offerings of good will.

The focus group with youth was difficult to recruit but after many emails and phone calls was conducted in September 2012 in the premises of a local service provider. I designed the research methods in anticipation of recruitment difficulties. Consequently, I experienced some difficulty in the recruitment of youth and some preferred to participate in a group setting. Other youth preferred a face to face in-depth interview (Stewart and Shamdasani 1990:58). Youth were accompanied by case managers and the discussion was led towards an understanding of their employment experiences that built upon the youth interviews conducted in 2011. This was, in the main, to identify any issues not covered in the first round and to capture the views of the case managers and youth on some of the main employment conundrums present in the region. Youth were pleased their stories were being told with the hope of not only finding work in the future but that their plight would be noticed. The focus groups members included:

Table 7: Participants for Focus Groups: Youth

Name	Age	Sex	Ethnicity
Participant 1	18	Male	Anglo
Participant 2	20	Female	Indigenous
Participant 3	20	Female	Anglo
Participant 4	19	Female	Anglo
Participant 5	24	Female	Anglo
Participant 6	19	Male	Anglo
Participant 7	15	Female	Indigenous

The interviews and focus groups were important in understanding both professional and youth experiences of the labour market. However, throughout the thesis, primary and secondary documents were also utilised. These included previous reports on

youth employment and other data produced by local, state and national and international organisations. The secondary data was useful in capturing the existing circumstances of youth employment as many of these documents were previous studies of youth in the labour market. It provided further analysis of existing data that could lead to alternative interpretations and conclusions.

At the international level, youth employment statistics from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) were utilised. Existing analysis of youth in Australia was mainly focused through quantitative studies that had broad generalisations and trends but did not capture the youth employment experiences in the labour market. Publications such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) regional employment data were very helpful. Equally important was the information from the Illawarra Regional Information Service (IRIS Research). This organisation provided important data and information for the research which had greater appreciation of regional disparities and complexity.

4.4: Transcriptions of Data

Interview and focus group material was analysed with NVivo software. This software allows the researcher to code qualitative datasets by theme (Walter 2010). The researcher also developed overarching categories for each research question. Categories were developed thematically and sometimes were reviewed because some themes did not draw a sufficient number of categories. NVivo was also used to analyse differences in the views of those of different age group, sex, ethnicity, education levels, skill levels of previous work, and the length of employment etc.

Where differences were apparent between different groups, further analysis was undertaken to investigate whether these differences appeared to hold regardless of variations in other characteristics. For example, men and women varied in their responses in a number of ways. In some cases this appeared to be due to the higher average education and skill level of the men in the sample relative to the women. When men and women of similar skill level were compared, the differences were much less marked. In other cases, the differences were not attributable to different

skill levels. When it came to the focus groups, data was grouped into patterns, categories, and themes and then interpreted into a schema (Bickman and Rog 1998: 27).

Aside from NVivo, a more ‘informal’ strategy to capture themes was incorporated. Many themes were developed to understand, organise and synthesise data. Themes and ideas were written down to understand what the information meant. The research made a list of all topics and put them together when they matched (Tesch 1990: 142-145). This process was to pick up incomplete sentences, half-finished thoughts, pieces of words, odd phrases, and other characteristics of the spoken word in a group discussion. An equally important consideration during the focus groups was capturing any gestures, non-verbal motions and behaviours that were not captured in the manuscript (Stewart and Shamdasani 1990: 103-104).

Analysis of focus group data involves many issues of interpretation as regards just what the discussion represents. Are focus groups the representation of particular individuals or the group as a whole? How does this change, or does it change, as the group progresses? This is a difficult question because participants talk in different ways and capacities depending on the specific context. Indeed, participants talk in many different ways that may represent a group, themselves or something else. They even may move between these positions (Silva and Wright 2005: 4-5). In the later chapters of this thesis, quotes are presented that highlight the key aspects of the research question.

4.5: Ethical Considerations and Issues

Ethics approval from the University of Wollongong to conduct the interviews and focus groups was sought from the University’s Research Office (Ethics Approval No: HE11/018). Participants were instructed that they could withdraw their consent and withdraw any quotations or other information provided. Confidentiality was guaranteed to all participants and they were made aware that the data collected would be used solely for the purpose of this research. Care and disclosure of personal and private information was assessed on a case by case basis so as not to reveal the identities of participants. It was clearly explained to participants that anonymity

would be ensured by the use, when appropriate, of pseudonyms. This led to some difficulty particularly when individuals could be identified or potentially identified by title and position. As part of the research, all individuals who participated were provided with participation and consent forms that detailed the purpose of the study. At any time, participants had the right to withdraw from the interviews. All notes and transcripts and any other identifying information were only handled by the principal researcher and were placed in a locked filing cabinet for confidentiality and security.

There were a number of foreseeable ethical issues during this research. The research had the potential to be distressful to participants during the interview. Anxiety, trauma or emotionally distressful memories could be expected to be amongst youth's employment experiences. The researcher set out the offer to withdraw the interview if the participant was feeling anxious and to offer assistance of professional counselling when appropriate. At the beginning of the research, the researcher explained clearly the possible impacts their views may have, particularly as it relates to their future employment status and their relationship to government and other service providers. The researcher clearly explained that any actions and/or behaviours that youth may/may not have done, in the past, present and the future would not impact on their lives in any way, as a result of the study. The researcher focused on making sure that, when asking the questions, participants understood what was asked. The researcher also consciously tried to make the supplementary material, such as consent and participation forms, as straight forward and easy to understand as possible.

For the professionals interviewed, ethical considerations were minimal because of their senior positions and roles. They spoke about their role in the process of their own organisation as well as their views on the impacts on youth employment. Their participation was voluntary and the researcher had no opportunity for coercion. They all signed a consent form (see appendices). The researcher explained to the respondents they had the option to cease the interview during which the tape would be stopped. Most participants were willing to be included in the research and/or further publications but to remain anonymous when required.

4.6 Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the methodology of this thesis. This is an appropriate and suitable research strategy to address the research question. A case study approach including interviews, focus groups and primary and secondary materials can provide a rich source of information. These approaches strengthen the validity and reliability of the data analysis because of the multiple sources and perspectives and the quality of the data obtained. It also allows the research project to be flexible, and if necessary altered and changed when necessary. This is to capture tensions and changes occurring in the research process. The next chapter examines the Illawarra region as a case study.

CHAPTER FIVE: A CASE STUDY OF THE ILLAWARRA REGION

5.1: Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented the methodology of the thesis. Specifically, chapter four is organised around a case study of the Illawarra region that utilised methods such as interviews, focus groups and the collection of primary and secondary materials. This chapter presents the case study of the Illawarra region in detail and begins with a brief description of the region including its location, geography and the size and distribution of youth. Following this, an historical analysis is undertaken that pays particular attention to the history of industry and its employment composition. This history is fundamental in understanding the unique characteristics of the region and to provide a greater appreciation of the economic crisis that befell the region in the early 1980's. Following this, the chapter moves on to examine the transformations experienced by the region as it transitions from an industrial to post-industrial economy. These factors underpin the changing nature of youth employment in the region.

5.2: The Illawarra Region: Its Location and Geography

The Illawarra region of New South Wales, comprising Wollongong, Shellharbour and Kiama, is an area that extends from Helensburgh in the north to Gerroa in the south and is administered by three distinct and separate local government authorities. These are Wollongong, Shellharbour and Kiama Councils. The area is located approximately 82 kilometres south of Sydney. With a population of approximately 413,000 and a workforce of 185,000 the Illawarra includes the city of Wollongong (the third largest city in NSW), the deep harbour of Port Kembla, the new growth area of Shellharbour, and a surrounding agricultural hinterland (IRIS Research 2013a). It is a region that has been characterised by a dominant manufacturing industry comprising coal mining, steel making and industrially driven port facilities. It also includes substantial industry development in sectors such as health care, retail, building and construction, education (particularly tertiary) and public administration.

The region has a distinct geography and lies on a narrow coastal plain between the Pacific Ocean to the east and the Illawarra escarpment to the west. This coastal plain is narrowest in the north while in the south it stretches out to its widest trajectory, taking in Lake Illawarra. Wollongong is located in a relatively narrow strip that is positioned about half way in relation to the north and south. The region was originally home to a number of Aboriginal tribes including the Wadi Wadi, Thurawal, Wandandian and Jerringa who lived, hunted and fished throughout the area. The traditional language of the tribes was Dharawal which was spoken not only in the Illawarra but as far as Eden on the South Coast over to the Blue Mountains and across to Sydney (Organ 1993). For Europeans, the region was once described as ‘the garden of New South Wales’ because of its beautiful and abundantly rich natural vegetation, beaches and headlands (Cousins 1948: 7-8).

The region can be characterised as having three distinct phases in its European settlement. The first phase commenced around the time of white settlement in 1815 and lasted until the 1880’s. The economic activity that dominated the region included agricultural and pastoral pursuits as well as the development of timber cutting and production. During the 1850’s, coal mining developed and by the 1860’s was viewed as the main contributor to economic activity and employment. The development of an appropriate site for a transport harbour, particularly for ocean vessels, was of paramount concern. A priority was also the transport of coal by train to improve economic connections with Sydney, and by 1888, the rail link was complete, providing Wollongong with access to the largest colonial city in New South Wales (Markey 1988: 3-4).

This enhanced the region’s economic development significantly and represented an historical shift to the second phase of the region’s development coinciding with an emphasis on the extension of coal mining. As coal mining expanded throughout the 1880’s it became a major industry and population growth was primarily concentrated around mining villages in and around Wollongong. When depression hit in the 1890’s, a decline in coal production was experienced by the region leading to declines in available work throughout the area.

The commencement of production by Australian Iron and Steel (AIS) came to be seen as the start of the third phase of the region’s development. This was the era of

heavy industry and manufacturing. In the first year, AIS produced 130,000 tons of pig iron and 59,000 tons of ingot steel. Two years later with the onset of the Great Depression, steel production had slumped to 18,000 tons, while by 1932, iron production had dropped to 37,000 tons (Lee 1997: 60). By the late 1930's, when BHP took over AIS, the Port Kembla steelworks remained highly profitable, employing more men than the local coal mines (Markey 1988: 3, 4-5).

As the population of the region developed, it became quite unique and was developed primarily through post war immigration in response to demand for a blue collar labour force in the steel industry. These immigrants were mainly drawn from the Mediterranean, especially from Italy. They also came from the former Yugoslavia in the 1950's and 1960's (Castles 1997: 72).

The importance of industry in the region developed a population base that featured a much higher proportion of NESB (Non-English Speaking Background) people when compared to state and national averages. The overseas born population throughout the 1970's came from many countries including Britain, Macedonia, Hungary, Portugal, Greece, Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia, Germany, Turkey and Chile. Throughout the 1980's, 1990's and into the 21st century, the population base expanded significantly to include Chinese, Vietnamese, Indians, Filipinos, Malays and Pacific Islanders (Castles 1997: 205-216). Throughout the 1960's and 1970's, the population grew rapidly from 91,000 in 1954 to 165,000 in 1976 (Wollongong Community Atlas 2012). Despite a large and diverse population, the region has a significant degree of cohesion with many self-identified suburbs seen as home by many migrant groups (Markey 1988: 3).

5.3: The Size and Distribution of the Youth Population and their Employment Impacts

Youth who come from disadvantaged localities are more likely to experience employment disadvantage and have lower levels of educational attainment (Hunter 1998). There are several explanations as to why this may be the case. One explanation is that residents of certain disadvantaged areas lack the skills and training necessary for the jobs present in the area. It could also be that there is a mismatch between the industries present within a certain neighbourhood and the human capital that the residents of that neighbourhood have (Kelly and Lewis 2002).

The effect of geography may arise because of neighbourhood effects, as some particular characteristics of a region can lower the chances of employment for a youth with a given set of characteristics. Coming from a regional or remote area can make a youth more likely to leave school early and more likely to be unemployed because of a lack of suitable jobs (Muir et al. 2003).

Across the Illawarra region, youth who come from lower socio-economic suburbs such as Bellambi, Berkeley, Cringila, Port Kembla, Warilla and Warrawong are more likely to experience employment disadvantage. These suburbs are the product of the urban sprawl that occurred across Australia during the 1960's and 1970's. Many of these suburbs, built and developed in the post war period, are predominantly working class with strong ethnic and migrant characteristics.

While many of these predominantly migrant adult workers had relatively moderate educational and employment credentials, youth who comprised a significant proportion of the increase in the post war period did not. In 1981, those youth aged 15 had already left school while many had already left before turning 15 or had not attended school at all. Throughout the 1980's, the highest concentrations of youth were found in the suburbs adjacent to industry. These included Cringila, Lake Heights, Warrawong and Port Kembla where youth, as a proportion, exceeded 45 per cent. It is argued that the levels of education youth achieve and their socio-economic status link directly to their overall youth employment experiences (Wilson 1984: 8).

The investment priorities and decisions of industry have played a key role in the structure and composition of the labour market (Hunter 1998; Hodgkinson and Nyland 2001). Like other areas of Australia the region's infrastructure was built around the hubs of industry. This serviced youth and their families relatively well. However, the onset of restructuring in the 1980's impacted youth location across the region significantly. The implications of such changes have affected the location of employment and, in particular, a range of associated issues for youth, that tend to exacerbate regional geographical disparities and employment patterns. Infrastructure problems throughout the region such as housing and transport have been the primary factors in the creation of spatial disadvantages as suburban development shifts away from direct transport routes. In the last few decades, both public and private transport has remained one of the most significant barriers to employment or further training

for youth. The relative costs associated with all transport types have placed significant financial pressure on youth, particularly those in the southern suburbs of the region (Steinke 1984; Wilson 1984; Stubbs 2000; Pomfret et al. 2008: 53). The size of the youth population has also changed significantly in recent decades. One of the largest outward migrations of youth people occurred in the years of 1981-1986 as one of the factors associated with the restructuring of industry. This is shown in the following table.

Table 8: Size of Youth Population Wollongong Statistical District (WSD) 1981 and 1986

Age	1981	1986	% Change
15-19	20,575	13,778	-33%
20-24	19,373	14,189	-26.8%
Total 15-24	39,948	27,967	-29.9%

Source: ABS (1986) Census of Population and Housing

As the table indicates, in 1981 the size of the region's total youth population was 39,948 while by 1986 this had decreased to 27,967. More specifically, for 15-19 year-olds this represented a drop of 33 per cent while for 20-24 year-olds it was just under 27 per cent. Where many young people lived in the 1980's also had significant importance. The distribution of young people across local suburbs is shown in table 9, which captures the 1986 Census data. The areas with the highest proportions of young people included Bulli, Berkeley, Cringila, Dapto and Wollongong.

Table 9: Distribution of Young People across Local Areas 1986

Local Urban Area	15-19	20-24	Total
Helensburgh Otford	302	370	672
	5.9%	7.2%	13.1%
Stanwell Park Coledale	183	182	365
	6.0%	6.0%	12%
Austinmer Thirroul	1403	1279	2682
	7.6%	6.9%	14.5%
Bulli Woonona	2947	2939	5886
	8.4%	8.3%	16.7%
Corrimal Fairy Meadow	1845	1915	3760
	8.8%	9.1%	17.9
Keiraville Wollongong	1228	2036	3264
	6.9%	11.5%	18.4%
Unanderra Mt Kembla	1100	972	3395
	7.7%	6.8%	23.8%
Dapto Koonawarra	2278	1883	4161
	9.6%	7.9%	17.5%
Berkeley	2322	2456	4778
	8.5%	9.0%	17.5%
Cringila Lake Heights	170	157	327
	8.9%	8.3%	17.2%
Wollongong Total	13778 100%	14189 100%	41713 100%

Source: ABS (1986) Census of Population and Housing

While unemployment rates can provide a comparison between postcode areas, they do not take into account the absolute numbers of people who are unemployed. These numbers can be large even though a relatively low unemployment rate is present. In 1986, an analysis of the various postcodes across the region indicated that Wollongong, Dapto and Unanderra accounted for most of the region's unemployment. These areas represented over 50 per cent of all recipients of

unemployment benefit across the region (IRIS Research 1986: 3). In the 1980's, the spatial nature of the population distribution also contributed to the regions relative economic disadvantage. With a lack of tributary population both west of the CBD and the narrowness of the coastal strip of the regions residential and commercial development, 'between the mountains and the sea', the region's chances of developing industries outside of the population hinterland have been extremely limited (Mehmet 1986: 30).

During the 1990's industry employment, including manufacturing, dropped significantly following national trends. In comparison to the recessions of the early and mid-1980's, the region fared reasonably well with lower rates of unemployment (IRIS Research 1992: 6). The recessionary pressure in the labour market however reversed these modest gains and by the early 1990's unemployment increased significantly. This included: (1) unemployment benefit recipients stood at 11,923 in August 1991, some 41 per cent above the level of 12 months earlier, although some way below the 14,596 of 1986; and (2) persons registered with the Commonwealth Employment Service (C.E.S.) awaiting placement, rose by 1,499 persons between September and December 1991, an increase of 8.4 per cent (IRIS Research 1992: 6).

In 1996, manufacturing was the second largest employer of youth (behind retail) representing 15 per cent of men and 4 per cent of women. The ongoing decline in manufacturing jobs throughout the 1990's have tended to increase geographical and spatial disparities as available work has developed locational disadvantages. The retail sector, despite being generally close to the most disadvantaged suburbs across the region, has nevertheless maintained relatively poor levels of employment. The precarious nature of work for youth increases already existing disparities, including high levels of inter-generational unemployment, throughout the southern suburbs. The compounding nature of unemployment acts as a barrier to suburban development by stymieing economic growth and job prospects. In 1996, suburbs such as Warilla, Bellambi, Warrawong, Cringila, Berkeley and Port Kembla had estimated unemployment rates between 40-50 per cent (Stubbs 2000: 136). More recently, there are five key suburb areas where a disproportionate number of the region's disadvantaged youth live:

1. Bellambi/East Corrimal;
2. Wollongong/Coniston/Gwynneville;
3. Warrawong/Lake Illawarra;
4. Berkeley/Koonawarra/Kanahooka/Dapto; and
5. Warilla/Lake Heights.

In 2001, 16.9 per cent of youth people aged 15 to 24 years were unemployed compared to a state unemployment rate of 13.3 per cent. While Wollongong had a relatively higher rate of unemployment amongst youth, its geographical and spatial dispersion varied across the region. For example, in Helensburgh the unemployment rate was 8.1 per cent while in Warrawong it was 35.5 per cent. The five areas with the highest rates of youth unemployment were:

1. Warrawong (35.5 per cent)
2. Port Kembla (29.6 per cent)
3. Bellambi (29.0 per cent)
4. Cringila (27.6 per cent)
5. Koonawarra (22.1 per cent)

By 2006, 15.2 per cent of youth aged 15 to 24 years were unemployed compared to a state unemployment rate of 11.5 per cent. The census data from 2006 indicated that the same suburbs above had comparable levels of youth unemployment. An analysis of all postcodes for example found that in terms of comparisons across New South Wales, Cringila, Lake Heights and Warrawong were ranked 11th, Berkeley 13th while Port Kembla was 22nd in terms of being socially disadvantaged (Vinson 2004). The advent of the global financial crisis in 2007 has tended to exacerbate existing employment disadvantage with the suburbs. The relationship of education, socio-economic status and previous employment experience shape the expectations of youth in these areas (Wollongong Community Atlas 2012).

5.4: History of Industry and its Employment Composition

During the 1870s, Sydney capitalists acquired thousands of acres of land to establish a mine at Coalcliff, and by 1889 eleven mines and over 2000 men produced over 700,000 tonnes of coal annually. At Port Kembla, mining manufacturing was also established, expanding the region's coal production. In 1908, the furnaces of the Electrolytic Refining and Smelting Company (ERS) commenced at Port Kembla. This led to a significant increase in production, particularly in the mining, coke making, metal manufacturing, and dairying industries which by 1911, totalled almost two million pounds, to which dairying contributed barely 5 per cent (Lee 2001: 13). Further coal mining settlements were established in the ensuing years in Helensburgh, Clifton and Bulli and by the 1920s more than half the Illawarra district's population resided in these areas. As the expansion and transportation of coal in the region increased, the northern districts became heavily dependent on the coal industry with over fifty per cent of workers employed both in and around the mines (Richardson 1984: 3-4).

During the First World War, coal-mining began to decline as demand decreased due to imports from countries such as South Africa, The East Indies, India and China. It also declined from inter-state trade with Victoria, who began to develop their own resources and industries. With the onset of World War One, Australia's trade with Britain and Europe was severed and, as the loss of coal markets became more serious, local mines had surplus coal output as well as surplus workers (Lee 2001: 18). As Richardson notes, the 1920s were lean years on the coal fields:

“Australia, like other coal-producing countries was drawn into a ‘world war in coal’. The difficulties stemmed directly from the loss of markets during the First World War and the failure to regain them. The Australian export trade which between 1900 and 1913 had accounted for approximately thirty per cent of total output, had by 1927 fallen to thirteen per cent” (1984: 4).

Had the presence of a viable proposal to establish steel making in the region not existed, the collapse of the coal industry would have been catastrophic for the region.

Luckily, manufacturing and electricity generation provided the life support the coal industry needed. This was enhanced when the initial construction of Port Kembla harbour was completed in 1903. This was viewed as a useful site, providing a coastal channel where industry could take advantage of reduced transport costs for its market in ore coming from within Australia or overseas. In 1926, the Hoskins steelworks relocated their company from Lithgow to Port Kembla. In 1927, Hoskins commenced construction of a blast furnace but ran into difficulty providing enough capital to complete its project. In 1928, an amalgamated company, Australian Iron and Steel Ltd. (AIS), was formed from Hoskins Ltd and Dorman Long and Baldwins Ltd, two English companies, and Howard Smith Ltd, an Australian shipping and coal mining company. As it continued operation, it employed some 1500 workers in 1928. With the depression only 500 workers were employed in 1932 (Rittau 2001: 73).

While unemployment had been part of the Illawarra economy many years before the onset of the Great Depression, declining iron and steel demand escalated job losses, and by the end of 1930, unemployment reached levels not experienced previously. Of the various companies, ERS's workforce dropped to 350 by 1929, Metal Manufactures dropped to 211, while AIS had dismissed over 1,000 men by 1932 (Lee 1997: 61). For the Illawarra, the implications of such job losses were the extreme conditions experienced by local workers, including inadequate housing, poverty and lack of food.

Table 10: Unemployment Males Aged 15-64 Years, Wollongong Region Local Government Areas 1933

Wollongong Region Local Government Areas	Unemployed No.	Labour Force %
Bulli Shire	1,778	34.2
North Illawarra	1,058	39.5
Wollongong	905	22.9
Central Illawarra	767	21.5
Shellharbour	160	24.1
Jamberoo	20	5.1
Total	4,688	28.5

Source: Adapted from the Census of the Commonwealth of Australia 1933 in Lee, H. and Clothier, C. (2001) 'Trade Unions and Workforce Community, 1880-1940' in Hagan and Wells (2001: 40)

By 1935, Australian Iron and Steel Ltd. (AIS) merged with Broken Hill Propriety Ltd. and the new company was named BHP/AIS. Under this arrangement, AIS became a whole-owned subsidiary of BHP, with the former acquiring a twenty per cent shareholding in BHP. It bought coal mines and expanded into shipping, employing 3700 workers in Port Kembla in 1936. In 1939, Port Kembla and its associated industries accounted for the employment of over 60 per cent of male employees in the region (Lee 1997: 59-62, 2001: 22-23; Markey and Wells 1997: 87-88; Rittau 2001: 73-74).

As the Illawarra economy expanded, it had a relatively narrow, industrial base and an almost exclusive dependence on the coal and steel industries for employment. These industries generated much of the region's employment growth through the 1960s and 1970s. The peak of manufacturing employment was in 1966 when 44 per cent of the Wollongong Statistical District's workforce was directly employed in manufacturing. During the 1960's, the Steelworks had expanded to become the largest in Australia (Mangan and Guest 1983: 12; Rittau 2001: 71).

The expansion of employment based programs centred on immigration also became central to the development and rapid growth of the region's economy, providing a pool of workers to supply labour shortages. By 1980, 62 per cent of wage employees were born overseas with 50 per cent being from a Non-English Speaking Background in the workforce. Of the countries, one-third of these were from southern Europe, Turkey and West Asia and one-fifth from the former Yugoslavia (Morrissey et al. 1992: 1-2). Between 1961-1975, the proportion of the migrant workforce employment at the Steelworks was one in four (Rittau 2001: 75).

Table 11: Total Workforce Growth 1954-1971 Wollongong Statistical District (WSD)

Year	Male	Female	Total
1954	32,931	7,356	40,287
1961	49,329	11,447	60,776
1966	55,715	16,417	72,132
1971	59,081	20,501	79,582

Source: Adapted from Steinke, J. (1977) 'Workforce Structure and Female Unemployment' in Robinson, R. 'Urban Illawarra' (1977: 177)

In the early 1970s, the steel industry faced a number of pressures arising from both real competitive threats (such as the flooding of cheap imports) internationally and deliberate cost and labour reductions such as production differentiation and the introduction of new technologies.

Steel production, for example, from the 1920s until the late 1970s relied principally on the open-hearth method of steel production. BHP viewed this method as out-dated, too costly and too labour intensive as the demand for specialised steels increased. Consequently, as new technology was introduced, fewer people were required, affecting the demand for labour, but also the skills and training necessary for the job (Morrissey et al. 1992: 33-36).

In 1974, international steel production had peaked as the emerging industrial economies of countries such as Brazil and Korea expanded rapidly. Other countries

such as Japan, Germany and the United States also experienced a competitive edge as they upgraded technology to meet customer demands. Australia's steel industry remained competitive as capacity increased and production costs were reduced. The drive for greater efficiencies necessitated quite dramatic rationalisations within the international steel industry and these drives were based on the assumption that an economic boom would occur in the future (Haughton 1990: 73).

The Industries Assistance Commission (IAC) commencing under the Whitlam government in 1973 and continuing under the Fraser government recommended BHP restructure their operations to be more internationally competitive and export orientated. This involved major technological change within production processes including capital works, new techniques in steel making and computerisation (Johnston and Rutnam 1981: 47-88). After lengthy negotiations, production costs were reduced with the introduction of new technology such as a third vessel in its Basic Oxygen Steel (BOS) to replace the open hearth system that became obsolete under the recommendations of the Commission. The Commission also recommended limitations for BHP on how much they could claim in tax allowances and adjustments in tariff protection (Wollongong Workers Research Centre 1982: 3).

In sheltering themselves from international pressures, BHP sold their steel exports at a lower price than the domestic market, reinforcing the rationale that export sales would hold down average production costs (Haughton 1990: 73-74). Rationalisation based on technological change resulted in job losses in both the United Kingdom and United States of America. In the U.K for example, employment was halved between 1979 and 1983 while the U.S. workforce was cut by one-third between 1980-1984. As Haughton argues,

“Part of the western nation's problem was the oversupply of new capacity based on optimistic market forecasts made in the early 1970's, plus the retention of older, inefficient plants. On top of this was the fact that the major steel markets were in fact developing away from the U.S.A and the European community, as industries such as shipbuilding shifted

focus towards Asia, and as construction activity increased in many developing countries” (1990: 73).

BHP’s position proved to be temporarily immune to the effects of the restructuring of the world steel industry for a number of reasons. These included its high vertical integration, its virtual monopoly position, its tariff protection and its hourly labour costs which were lower than their American and Japanese counterparts (Haughton 1990: 73; Donaldson 1985: 1).

In 1980, employment growth and output in BHP remained relatively strong and the anticipation of a resources boom fuelled such expectations. Investments in plant equipment to address customer demands such as producing higher quality steel in smaller batches, and moving away from older processes like steel making via ingot, not only increased productivity at Port Kembla but delivered greater quality steel. Two continuous casters for example, the first commissioned in 1978 and the second in 1980 had the ability to cast steel slabs much quicker than the traditional ingot pathway. These technologies also introduced greater computerisation, particularly data recording and analysis. Much of the new equipment and technology was conducive to greater levels of flexibility for international market conditions. They also required a more flexible workforce, one that over time became increasingly white collar. Indeed, the labour force changed significantly and between 1970 and 1980, the number of professional employees at AIS’s Port Kembla works rose 31 per cent, the number of sub-professionals employees by 87 per cent and unqualified staff by 16 per cent. The number of general labourers, however, remained almost static, declining by 2 per cent (Donaldson 1981: 43).

In response to growing uncertainty from falling demand and excess world steel capacity, BHP commenced restructuring its steel operations. With production falling from 7.8 million tonnes in 1980-81, to 7.1 million tonnes in 1981-82, workers were anxious over the future of the coal and steel industry including their jobs. During 1981, BHP ceased all new employment and a voluntary retirement scheme was implemented for the workforce (Donaldson and Donaldson 1983: 36; Rittau 2001: 76).

BHP's economic and political power, by virtue of the monopoly position it built since its interest in steel from 1915 onwards, served it in a contradictory fashion. When the resources boom failed to materialise and world steel prices fell sharply in late 1981, BHP lost some control of the domestic market. The company's response was to reduce capacity, output and employment and in 1981 the company decided it would stop further employment with the exception of a number of trade's people and introduce a voluntary retirement scheme. From November 1981 and June 1983, the workforce was reduced by 5000 (Rittau 2001: 76). These flow-on effects were felt in the recipient rates for unemployment benefits during the period of 1981-1982 shown in the following table.

Table 12: Recipients of Unemployed Benefits Wollongong Statistical District (WSD) 1981-1982

% Increase	1981 (June)	1982 (June)	1982 (November)
Wollongong: Unemployment % increase	4,289 -9.2	5,501 28.3	7,294 32.6
Shellharbour: Unemployment % increase	1,532 -1.0	1,772 15.7	2,460 38.8
Kiama: Unemployment % increase	222 15.0	252 13.5	352 39.7
Total W.S.D. Unemployment % increase	6,043 -7.2	7,525 24.5	10,106 34.3

Source: Adapted from Department of Social Security, Unemployment Benefit Recipients by Postcode in Mangan and Guest (1983: 10)

The region was hit hard and between March 1981 and December 1983, the number of unemployed people registered with the C.E.S. increased from 7,711 to 21,415. Employment in the steel industry for example fell from 20,350 in May 1981 to 14,400 by May 1983 (Mangan and Guest 1983: 12) while employment in the coal industry lost 1,200 jobs in the period of 1982-94 (Wilson 1984: 9).

The steel works had, directly and indirectly, accounted for over 70 per cent of the regions employment. The severity of the unemployment crisis had massive psychological and social cost on local suburbs with poverty, domestic violence and welfare payments and cash assistance cut (Donaldson 1985: 4-7). Local steel unions, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), and local politicians were deeply concerned over the level of workforce reduction, and called on the Fraser government to resolve the crisis, and provide support to BHP (Tonkin 2002: 65). As Shultz argues,

“By the middle of 1983, 30,000 people and their families were dependent on government support to survive, 19,001 people were registered as unemployed and the local Commonwealth Employment Offices listed only 108 vacancies. Businesses were closing each week. The number of people living in poverty increased fivefold, the crime rate escalated, the number of marriage break-downs soared and the number of alcoholics seeking help more than doubled” (1985: 4)

With significant job loss and retrenchments within the coal industry, many workers became unemployed. The following table, for example, illustrates the general length of time the working population was unemployed as of March 1985, from South Clifton Colliery. As the following table illustrates, all workers were hit hard with youth sharing a relative high level of unemployment burden.

Table 13: Length of Time Unemployed, March 1985

Length of Time Unemployed							
Duration		<3 months		3-9 months		9+ Months	
Age	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
15-19	138	117	132	181	54	97	
20-24	126	220	120	168	105	234	
25-44	122	291	75	222	70	368	
45+	28	88	16	111	34	321	

Source: Commonwealth Employment Service Data (C.E.S) March 1985; Retrenched Coalminers Study, Wollongong City Council (1985: 7).

BHP accounted for 71.6 per cent of the employment in the Wollongong Statistical District providing 27.6 per cent direct employment and 44 per cent indirect employment (Mangan and Guest 1983: 12).

While the steel industry had profound contractions, coal production and profitability also underwent strong economic contractions, leading to lower prices and the displacement of workers through labour-saving and output-increasing technology such as the continuous long-wall mining machinery (Morrissey et al. 1992: 45-46). The region also experienced mine closures that led to workers opposing attempts by Australian Iron and Steel to close mines. This resulted in a sixteen day sit-in by miners at the Kemira mine site at Mt Keira (Coyle and Miller 2007; Wollongong Workers Research Centre 1982). With significant job loss and retrenchments within the coal industry, many workers (including youth) became unemployed in the ensuing years, as manufacturing further declined.

5.5: Youth and their Employment Composition since 1985

The restructuring of the coal and steel industry dramatically influenced the structure and composition of employment in the Illawarra region. With the manufacturing sector declining and the services sector employing a greater percentage of the workforce since the mid 1970's, employment in traditional manufacturing began to decline. This is shown in figure 3 that illustrates the shifting industry base of the Illawarra region and the percentage of employed persons from 1976-2006.

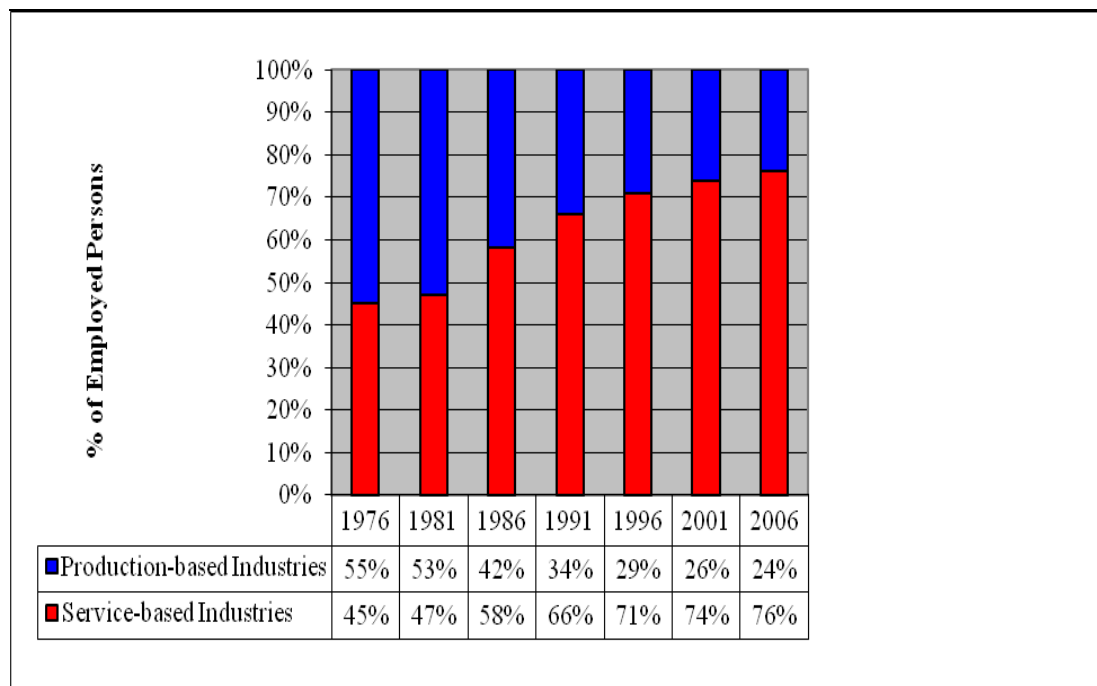


Figure 3: Shifting Industry Base of Employment in the Illawarra Region 1976-2006

Source: ABS (2007), Census of Population and Housing 2006

Figures on steel production align to the shifting industry base of employment with raw steel production falling heavily from 4,750,000 tonnes to 3,000,000 tonnes over the 1979-1983 period (Haughton 1990: 79). Small to medium-sized engineering companies for example, reduced their workforces, as the local engineering industry closely reflected the investment levels in coal and steel (Rittau 2001: 79). The flow-on effects to the broader economy were also felt as the building industry (that employed many youth), personal services, clubs, pubs and shops experienced declines in income, and reductions in their respective workforces (Haughton 1990: 82). As a result, youth experienced greater levels of employment disadvantage such as unemployment and the receipt of benefits. This is shown in tables 14 and 15.

Table 14: Total and Youth Unemployment in the Wollongong Statistical District (WSD) March 1983-1985

Registrants	1983	1984	1985
Total	17,724	20,155	18,635
Aged 15-24	9,640	10,303	9,391
15-24 year olds, % of Total	54.4	51.1	50.4

Source: Department of Employment and Industrial Relations, Commonwealth Employment Service Statistics, Canberra.

Unemployed youth aged 15-24 moved from 9640 in 1983 to 10303 in 1984 while the number of 15-24 year olds in receipt of unemployment benefits rose from February 1983 from 7724 persons to 8226 persons in February 1985.

Table 15: Department of Social Security Youth Registrants in the Wollongong Statistical District (WSD) February 1983-1985

Recipients of Unemployment Benefit	1983	1984	1985
Total	13,612	15,208	14,952
Aged 15-24	7,724	8,177	8,226
15-24 year olds, % of Total	56.7	53.8	55.0

Source: Department of Employment and Industrial Relations, Commonwealth Employment Service Statistics, Canberra.

Despite some improvements in the local economy and steel production increasing from 1983-1986 from 3,000,000 tons to 3,750,000 tons, youth bore much of the burden of the recession. Older workers generally were treated favorably over youth while those recently employed were usually the first to be laid off. BHP's decision

to also limit the expansion (and even maintenance) of apprenticeship levels also led to high levels of youth joblessness. As Haughton argues,

The low levels of recruitment within the local economy into apprenticeships and other forms of employment most disadvantaged those seeking to obtain jobs for the first time. At BHP the number of apprentices dropped from 39.1 per cent of the numbers of craft workers in August 1981 to just 14.3 per cent by April 1986, with seasonal factors probably slightly exaggerating this decline (1989: 239)

Across working class suburbs such as Berkeley, Lake Illawarra and Warilla the level of joblessness was double the national average of 5.9 per cent. As the 1981 Census data illustrates, the unemployment rate in Berkeley was 11.2 per cent, Lake Illawarra 11.9 per cent while Warilla contended with 12.5 per cent. As the recession hit nationally and the employment crisis deepened, the population's material deprivation increased with estimates indicating that 17 per cent of the population in the region was living below the poverty line (Wollongong Workers Research Centre 1984: 4). The Illawarra Regional Information Service estimated that between 1982-1984, 16000-18000 jobs were lost across the region (IRIS Research 1986: 7). As Haughton notes,

“There can be no doubt that the jobs lost have proven a devastating blow to an area with rapid natural expansion of the workforce, requiring the creation of 2500 new jobs annually simply to break even” (1990: 83)

In many of the regions suburbs, estimates indicate that close to one in three youth were suffering unemployment as the following table illustrates (Wilson and Lelli 1983: 5).

Table 16: Estimated Unemployment Rates 15-24 Year Olds across Illawarra Suburbs 1983-1986

Suburb	1983	1984	1985	1986
Austinmer	20.2	23.2	15.0	12.1
Berkeley	54.0	57.9	52.5	44.6
Bulli	40.4	40.6	34.9	32.9
Corrimal	31.9	34.8	30.6	28.6
Cringila	35.5	30.6	26.1	23.0
Dapto	29.1	27.4	26.9	22.6
Fairy Meadow	21.6	21.3	19.2	16.0
Figtree	19.8	22.1	21.2	15.8
Helensburgh	14.2	14.8	15.4	10.0
Port Kembla	29.5	30.9	28.1	22.9
Primbee	36.1	35.4	30.0	22.6
Stanwell Park to Coledale	31.3	36.6	25.4	26.7
Thirroul	26.6	30.5	23.7	20.9
Total	27.8	28.9	26.0	22.9
Unanderra	26.6	25.9	23.1	21.0
Warrawong	34.2	36.5	33.0	30.2
Windang	35.8	33.0	32.6	30.0
Wollongong	23.2	25.4	22.9	21.4
Woonona	25.1	28.3	24.2	23.0

Source: IRIS Research (1986: 7)

The crisis of youth employment disadvantage far from receded during the years of 1983-1986 across a number of Illawarra suburbs. Alongside real declines in the availability of existing blue-collar employment, youth were predominantly employed in service sector based industries throughout the 1980's and into the 1990's. This represented 16.8 per cent of the youth labour market in 1991 (ABS 1991). This sector also commenced the patterns of part-time and casualisation of the youth labour

market (Larcombe and Blakely 1983; Castle and Mangan 1984; Schultz 1985; Mehmet 1986; Munro 1988: 8). As Lee argues,

“By the 1990’s, Wollongong’s reputation as a centre of heavy industry was increasingly a thing of the past. In 1991, heavy industry employed only 22 per cent of the region’s workforce; it had employed more than double that proportion in 1966” (2001: 166).

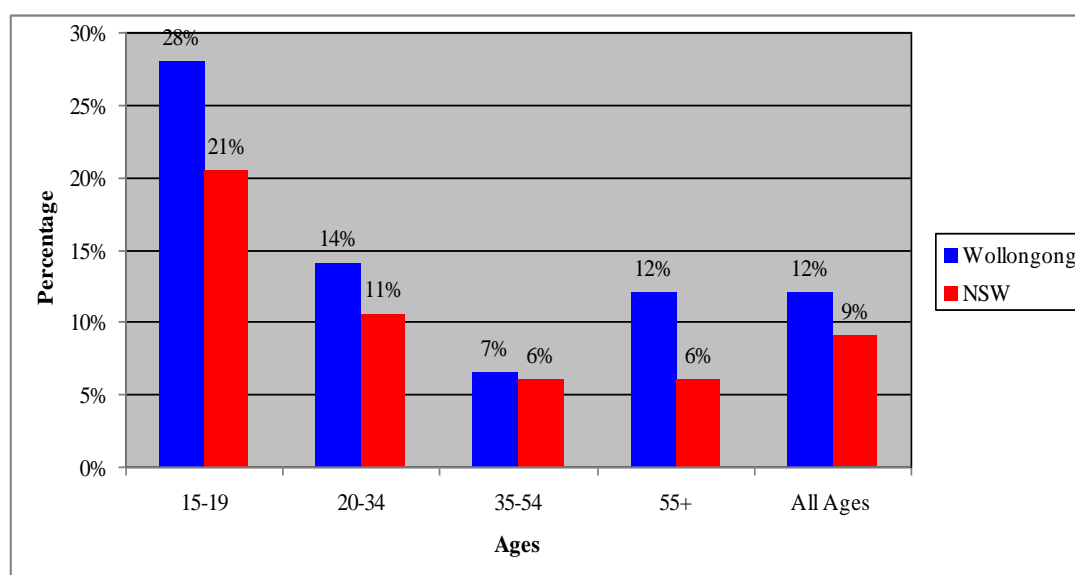


Figure 4: Unemployment Rate by Age, Wollongong Statistical District (WSD) and NSW 1986

Source: ABS (1986) Census of Population and Housing

Regardless, a substantial proportion of the workforce in the region remained in a manufacturing industry that was not expanding. Yet, it remained the most significant employer (Morrisey et al. 1992: 53-54). During the 1990s, the region’s employment structure was located in manufacturing, community services, wholesale and retail trades and the finance sector (Rittau 2001: 79). The Illawarra also experienced an expansion of other industries, including the public service (Morrisey et al. 1992: 53-54).

During the last decade and half, the region has experienced substantial economic readjustment. The closure of BHP in 1999, profoundly affected the composition of both adult and youth employment. Responding to these challenges, the region focused on diversification, towards a more service oriented economy, in which knowledge and information and communication technologies played an important role (Attaran 1986; Buultjens et al. 2003, Izraeli and Murphy 2003; Mason and Howard 2010: 180-193). This is illustrated in tables 17, 18, and 19 on the persons employed in steel manufacturing and coalfields.

Table 17: Persons Employed at BHP 1981-1996

Year	Persons
1981	20,305
1993	7,700
1996	6,000

Source: IRIS Research (Various Years) *Employment Profile*, IRIS Research, Wollongong.

Table 18: Persons Employed at BlueScope Steel 2009-2012

Year	Persons
2009	4,700
2010	5,500
2011	5,200
2012	3,500

Source: IRIS Research (Various Years) *Employment Profile*, IRIS Research, Wollongong

Table 19: Persons Employed in the Illawarra Coalfields 1981-1991

Year	Persons
1981	5,720
1991	2,953

Source: IRIS Research (Various Years) *Employment Profile*, IRIS Research, Wollongong.

Throughout the late 1990's and into the early 2000's, labour market conditions improved and generally stabilised with lower unemployment and higher participation rates. These conditions were formed in part from strong economic growth during this period. While national and state unemployment averages remained lower than the region's, some macro-economic improvements were made particularly in job creation, and expansion of infrastructure and services. These gains, whilst modest in their dimensions, were compromised significantly with the onset of the global financial crisis in 2008.

Table 20: Illawarra Unemployment Rate September 1999-September 2011

Year	Illawarra	NSW	Australia
1999	6.6	6.6	7
2000	7.4	5.2	6
2001	5.8	6.3	6.9
2002	10.2	6	6.4
2003	7.3	5.7	5.8
2004	5.2	5.1	5.4
2005	9	5.4	5
2006	10.8	5.3	4.7
2007	8.1	4.7	4.2
2008	5.1	4.9	4.3
2009	5.6	5.4	5.7
2010	6.7	5.1	5.1
2011	6	5.4	5.2

Source: DEEWR Small Area Labour Markets (2011)

With the onset of the global financial crisis, the Illawarra region has performed relatively poorly, with unemployment and participation rates rising above other regional centres. As part of the impact of economic restructuring, the unemployment rate has remained stubbornly high for youth, with the recent figures falling below previous years but still remaining high when compared to the national youth unemployment rate. This is shown in figure 5.

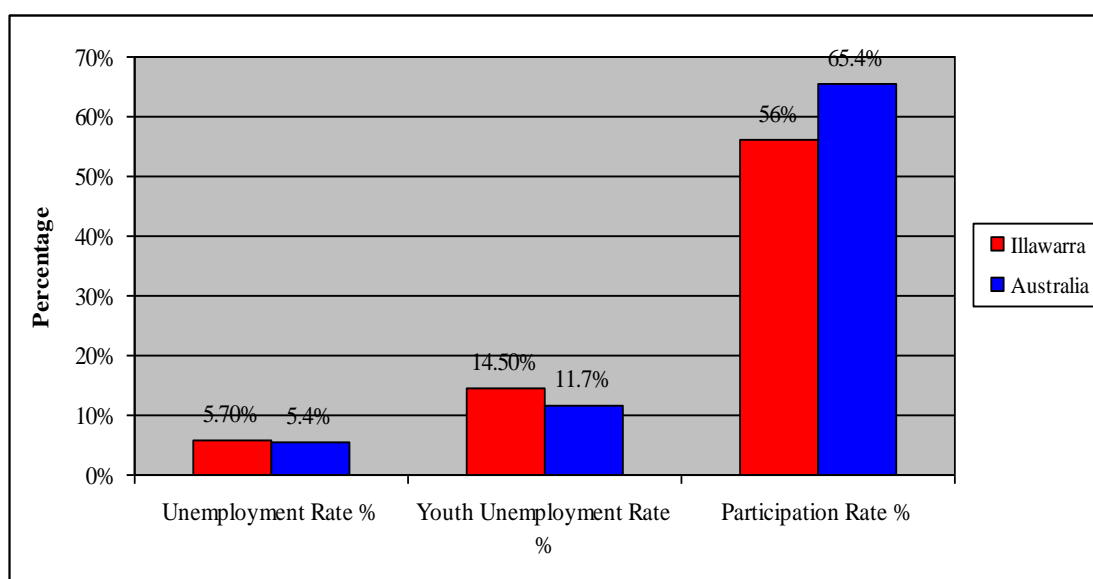


Figure 5: Unemployment and Participation Rates in the Illawarra Region, April 2010

Source: ABS (2010) Labour Force

In 2008-09, direct fiscal stimulus by the Federal government did improve macro-economic job creation lowering unemployment rates for both adults and youth. It also improved business hiring with an increase in job advertisements in the period (IRIS Research 2009). In 2013, the impacts of the global financial crisis have far from receded. The nature of ongoing world economic crises are immense and Australia is not immune from the movements in the United States nor the debt and crisis ridden economies of Europe. Figures indicating the continuing diversification of the economy are shown in Table 21, with employment by industry highlighting key industries that are experiencing substantial employment growth. Table 22 illustrates key industries in the region comparing employment growth/decline in the years 2010-2011.

Table 21: Employment by Industry 2010-2011 Illawarra Region and NSW

Industry	Illawarra %	NSW %
Health Care and Social Assistance	12.7	11.5
Manufacturing	11.1	8.2
Retail	11	10.7
Property and Business Services	8.4	13.8
Others Services/Arts	8.2	5.9
Building and Construction	8	8.1
Education	7.9	7.4
Public Administration and Safety	7.8	5.7
Accommodation and Food Services	7.7	7.3
Transport, Postal and Warehousing	4.6	5.6
Financial and Insurance Services	3.9	4.9
Mining	2.4	1.1
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	1.7	2.5
Wholesale	1.6	3.9
Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services	1.9	1.2
Communication Services	1.1	2.3

Source: DEEWR Small Area Labour Markets (2011)

Table 22: Employment Growth/Decline by Industry 2001-2011 Illawarra Region

Industry	2001	2011	Increase/Decline
Health Care and Social Assistance	15,365	24,569	+ 9,204 (60%)
Public Administration and Safety	6,638	15,139	+ 8,501 (128%)
Other Services/Arts and Recreation	8,934	15,867	+ 6,933 (78%)
Accommodation and Food Services	8,246	14,933	+ 6,687 (77%)
Building and Construction	12,196	15,541	+ 3,345 (27%)
Mining	1,523	4,740	+ 3,217 (311%)
Financial and Insurance Services	4,439	7,565	+ 3,126 (70%)
Transport, Postal and Warehousing	6,100	8,862	+ 2,762 (45%)
Education and Training	12,584	15,318	+ 2,734 (22%)
Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services	1,155	3,698	+ (220%)
Property and Business Services	13,730	16,272	+ 2,542 (18%)
Manufacturing	20,314	21,465	+ 1,151 (5%)
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	2,317	3,323	+ 1,006 (43%)
Information Media and Telecommunication	2,175	2,201	+ 26
Wholesale	5,670	3,163	-2,507 (-44%)
Retail	23,729	21,303	-2,426 (-10%)

Source: ABS (2003) Census of Population: Selected Education and Labour Force Characteristics for Statistical Local Areas (New South Wales); DEEWR Small Area Labour Markets (2011)

For youth, employment opportunities were particularly limited including entry level positions for the cohort of students leaving school. In 1996, youth unemployment stood at 11.6 per cent compared to a national rate of 9.2 per cent. In 2000, the

average unemployment rate for 20-24 year old males was 26 per cent. Comparatively, this was approximately four times higher than the Sydney metropolitan average for this age group. For youth 15-19 years old, the unemployment rate was 32 per cent whereas the Sydney statistical district was 13 per cent while NSW was 16 per cent. The geographical dispersion of unemployment, as discussed above, remained concentrated in suburbs such as Bellambi, Berkeley, Cringila, Port Kembla, Warilla and Warrawong with 40-50 per cent of young males unemployed (Stubbs 2000). The changes in the economy and the associated practices of privatisation, deregulation, the undermining of collective action and the principles of marketization all describe diversification. Neoliberal principles have led to many youth employment difficulties. Indeed, youth employability has hit some major hurdles and neoliberalism has become part of the structure of the economy. These factors are working in unison with other. Stubbs argues that specific strategies need developing to assist youth employment through economic diversification. These include:

- strategies to intensively assist youth and long-term unemployed people to get into the labour market;
- strategies to gain an equitable share of the jobs created;
- strategies, emphasising quality not quantity, that can move youth from the periphery of the labour market into 'core jobs; and
- compassionate and supportive policies for those who will continue to be left behind in the increasingly competitive work force (131-149).

With the advent of the global financial crisis, the Illawarra region has again performed relatively poorly, with unemployment rising and participation rates static compared to other regional centres. The unemployment rate has remained stubbornly high for youth, with the recent figures falling below previous years but still remaining unacceptably high when compared to the national youth unemployment rate. This is shown in figure 6.

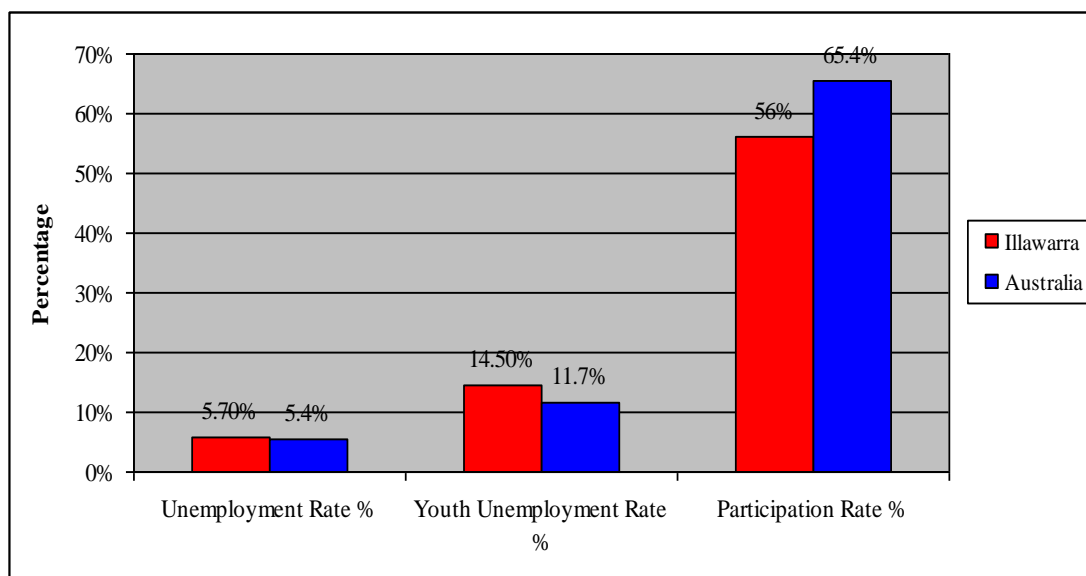


Figure 6: Unemployment and Participation Rates in the Illawarra Region, April 2010

Source: ABS (2010) Labour Force

Research completed by Pomfret et al. (2008) further examined the region's youth labour market, explaining the challenges facing youth job seekers and the policy and program responses undertaken. It argued for a much better alignment of services for youth that takes into account the region's employment disparities. While recognising the importance of economic growth coupled with high productivity, the study argued that this must be supported by the continued growth of high-employment generating industries and public expenditure in services that have a high public value (e.g. education, housing and welfare support).

As part of considered attempt to move beyond an over-reliance on heavy industry, a number of local initiatives commenced to diversify the economy towards the creation of new 'green' jobs in 2009-2010. A Green Jobs strategy and report was developed to respond to a number of significant challenges facing the region. This report and its practical strategies were an important development, as the report emphasises that existing industry can also play a part and in fact provide the foundations, for the region in the emerging 'green' economic landscape of the future (Green Jobs Illawarra Action Plan 2009).

For youth, investment in skills development and training in alternative, environmentally friendly initiatives such as green plumbers and electricians are the industry sectors of the future. Green skills have the capacity to build both traditional and emerging infrastructure such as housing, retrofitting, food production and distribution, environmental restoration, waste avoidance, resource recovery and water recycling (Green Jobs Illawarra Action Plan 2009: 6). Research undertaken by Bill et al. (2008) and Pearce and Stilwell (2008) suggests such approaches have an important economic and social benefit for youth in many regions in Australia.

5.6: Summary

This chapter presented the case study of the Illawarra region in detail. The region's history and contemporary economic landscape has a long association with manufacturing particularly in the coal and steel industries. During the 1980's, the region bore the brunt of steel, coal and manufacturing industry restructuring in Australia. With the rise of neoliberal policies in the 1970s, the local economy was opened to global market forces and in the period of 1980-1983, steel operations were rationalised and local coal mines closed. During the 1980s and early 1990s, a Steel Industry Plan and a Steel Industry Development Agreement prevented further wholesale retrenchments, in exchange for openness to the discipline of global markets. Employment in traditional manufacturing declined and became increasingly polarised between secure and insecure jobs, along sub-contracting supply chains (Mylett 2003). Most recently, in 2011, the region's BlueScope Steel (still the region's largest employer) announced yet another restructure involving the loss of 700 jobs. The flow-on effects included a further 100 retrenchments and approximately 350 job losses from regional suppliers and contractors. These transformations have meant that youth employment has developed and become historical embedded along these economic, political and social contours. The next chapter presents the findings of interviews and focus groups conducted with professionals and youth in the region.

CHAPTER SIX: YOUTH'S REFLECT ON THEIR EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCES

6.1: Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented a case study of the Illawarra region in detail. This chapter provided a context to understand the changing and dynamic nature of a region transitioning from an industrial to post-industrial economy under hegemonic neoliberalism. This chapter presents the data with regard to youth in the region. This chapter is drawn from face to face semi-structured interviews conducted in the region during 2011-2012. It commences with participants' views on education and training, socio-economic status and previous employment experience. The chapter provides a lens on the interconnections of everyday experience necessary understanding the dynamics of youth employment in the region, and acts along with the previous chapters, to develop an understanding of the consequences of hegemonic neoliberalism. There were a number of distinct patterns in the way youth experienced employment and the labour market. In providing perspectives on the research questions, the data is presented as a series of broad categories and associated themes. Youth discuss a wide range of experiences and stories as they negotiate their own pathways and life choices in the youth labour market.

6.2: Characteristics of Youth

As the introductory chapter discussed, there has been little academic research on the employment experiences of youth in the Illawarra region. The existing research on youth both in the region and across Australia indicates youth are generally motivated to work despite the local and regional variations in employment structures and economic conditions. The impacts of neoliberalism have generally not been understood clearly and this research brings to the forefront a better understanding of youth's employment experiences in a regional youth labour market (Wooden 1996; van Gellecum et al. 2008). In the last few decades, many of the jobs available for youth have become less secure, less important and less worthy compared to other job seekers. While the choices seem endless to youth, many participants felt that the jobs

available were relatively scarce. The Illawarra region also continues to be shaped by outside forces beyond immediate local, state and national policy frameworks. This includes the nature of globalisation and its 'hollowing out' of the State in the interests of capital. As the internationalisation of production and financial markets has occurred, the role of the State has become the site and focus of the attraction and retention of international capital. As part of the drive for flexible labour markets, the whole economy has been directed towards becoming competitive at the expense of balanced economic, environmental and social sustainability.

In relation to youth, the twenty interviewed individuals were quite diverse and their specific employment experiences ranged significantly with fifteen (n=15) youth looking for work while undertaking education or training, while five (n=5) youth were employed full-time. The interviews revealed the different motivations for youth. The immense diversity of youth who were interviewed reflects the nature of 21st century Australian society itself. Employment, under-employment and unemployment were also shapers in youth's experiences of work. A primary factor in the shaping of youth's employment experiences was what they undertook in terms of education and training and how this shaped and moulded their specific experiences and transitions.

6.3: Education and Training

The concept of 'youth transitions' has become a central component in youth research in the last few years. This research has developed an understanding of the complex, and often contradictory, positions and expectations youth hold compared to other groups in Australian society. In understanding the dimensions of youth employment, much of the existing theoretical and empirical research in Australia has focused on the changes in youth's transitions to adulthood and youth's sense and their understandings of their own cultural positions (Willis 1977; Furlong 2012: 358). Studies in the rise in youth employment disadvantage in the 1970's emphasised the structural components in understanding youth as a social group and their experiences in the labour market. More recently, a greater emphasis on the subjective experiences of youth has come into focus with attention to exploring youth cultures. The advent of the economic and social challenges that beset Australia throughout the 1980's and

1990's introduced gender more specifically into debates about youth. This arose in response to the entry of young women into tertiary education (Connell 1995). These debates have captured a specific orientation in youth studies. The concept of transition has emerged and involves understanding the changes youth experience while recognising that complex transitions are the norm for many youth (Wyn and White 1997: 95). The normative argument is that youth experience predictable pathways in their family lives, community, education and employment that lead to adulthood. The research evidence, on the other hand, suggests that the trajectories taken, and the transitions made, by youth are immensely varied (Woodman and Threadgold 2011). The research suggests a wide range of pathways in practice. The framework developed by Wyn and White (1997) is useful in this respect as the following table attests.

Table 23: Youth Transitions

Youth Transition	Experience of Growing Up
Linear process e.g. school to work	Cyclical process e.g. school to work
Uni-dimensional e.g. establishing work	Multidimensional e.g. establishing livelihood, sexuality, identity
Points of arrival e.g. first job	Always becoming e.g. changing jobs, valuing relationships
Circumscribed by biological age	Social meaning of age
Horizontal dimension with emphasis on contemporaries	Vertical and horizontal dimensions whereby age intersects with generation

Source: Adapted from Wyn and White (1997: 98).

The relationship of the economy and youth is intricately linked when examining the experiences of youth. The current economic crisis has adversely affected the region's economy with significant employment disadvantages amongst youth. The impacts of neoliberalism in the education and training system are well known particularly as they are articulate throughout the transitions youth make to the labour market (Giroux 2004: 81-105).

In the past, youth have left school and training with clear pathways to work, often without qualifications. However youth now experience transitions that correlate to the significant changes in the labour market (Ross and Whitfield 1996), changes in training programs to be 'job ready' (Lafer 2002), and changes in legislation such as increasing the school leaving age (NSW Education Amendment Act 2009). The implications are that youth experience transitions of increasing complexity as they navigate their own circumstances in a relatively uncertain environment. The experiences of each individual therefore become increasingly important and diversified as common experiences across processes and structures become less prevalent. As Evans and Furlong argue,

“Analysis of the contemporary situation of young adults highlights an increasing fragmentation of opportunities and experience; the processes of youth are highly differentiated, reflecting and constructing social divisions in society in complex ways... As possible pathways out of school have diversified, youth have to find their own ways forward and their own values in education, consumption, politics, work and family life” (1997: 33)

A strong theme throughout the interviews was to understand the types of work youth sought in the region. The vast majority of participants had job aspirations based on their level of education, with most seeking jobs that were suitable for year ten, eleven and twelve as well as a range of vocational training from certificates to diploma. The initial questions of the interview process involved asking participants a range of questions concerned with establishing their education and training, and understanding their experiences in the region. The first questions asked what level of education they had and whether they completed year ten, eleven, twelve, TAFE, or University.

Participants indicated with a range of responses concerning their education. Twelve participants (n=12) had completed year 10 of secondary education while ten (n=8) participants completed year 8 of secondary education. Other participants had commenced the first year of their TAFE training. Generally most youths' academic

experience was limited. This was owing to a range of reasons. Several youth had been removed from school because of behavioural issues, while another youth was removed from schooling because of serious health problems. However, while for many youth their schooling achievements were relatively poor, many of them developed stronger academic and practical skills when they attended TAFE. A young woman aged 24 noted,

Participant: “I was an average student at high school and didn’t go that well but I went better at TAFE and was awarded a credit level in my Certificate 4 in Community Services.”

One young woman aged 15, experienced on-going health problems during her schooling, including different schools in different locations, that impacted on her academic achievements,

Participant: “I didn’t go very well at school. I got kicked out of school because of serious health problems such as frequent hospitalisation and my family moved around a lot. School was always difficult and the teachers didn’t help very much either”

The principal motivation for many participants was to achieve mobility in their education and employment. Not content with unemployment or lower status employment in the labour market many youth desired to further their education to improve their employment prospects. In many cases, participants were undertaking some education and training while employed on a part-time basis. These patterns align with other evidence on the characteristics of the youth labour market (Wooden 1996). At this point, the interviewer also queried the participants on the reasons why better employment types were desirable and, if so, how they would achieve these goals. Many youth responded that there weren’t any jobs around. Other participants responded more specifically about the sorts of jobs available in the region. A young woman aged 24,

Participant: “When I completed my arts certificate I looked for work but there wasn’t anything around I could really do. I then was given a job at a stationary shop.”

Interviewer: “But this wasn’t really what you wanted to do?”

Participant: “That’s right. But I did the training not only for my own interest but to get the job I wanted”.

Other participants were instinctively aware of the lack of jobs in the region but made the choice of taking on further training and education for their future. A young woman aged 19,

Participant: “I took on more education and training because I didn’t know what to do next and didn’t think there were many jobs out there.”

6.4: Youth and their Employment Attitudes

A theme that emerged in the interviews was that all the youth interviewed wanted to work. An important factor, and perhaps unique to the Illawarra region, is that youth with minimal education found it difficult to navigate the job system and find employment. Much of the Australian research highlights comparable themes such as on the Job Network (Carney and Ramia 2002; Considine 2001; Paz-Fuchs 2008), and the impacts of welfare to work programs (Eardley 2002). More broadly however, it dismisses the ‘dole bludger’ myth. Research undertaken by Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business in 1999, examining the ‘work involvement’ of Work for the Dole participants, found that ‘the level of work involvement was so high that there was little room for improvement’ (Winefield 1999: 3). These findings were verified again by Carson and colleagues in 2003 (Carson et al. 2003). Research undertaken in the U.K. also found that youth were strongly committed to finding work with several studies undertaken on the views of participants in the New Deal for Youth (NDYP). It found that youth commonly had ‘positive attitudes to work’ and ‘flexible attitudes to pay and conditions they would be willing to accept’ (Finn 2003). In this research, youth saw the benefits of working and having a job. The interviewer probed participants on whether they wanted to work

and indeed should work. Many responded they would take just about any job available despite pay and conditions. Others believed the jobs they looked for should match their skills, experiences and abilities. For example, a young man aged 22, replied people should take jobs they wanted to do and enjoyed rather than doing a job that doesn't match their skills and abilities,

Participant: "Absolutely, it's very important. I'm not doing a job I will not enjoy. That's wasting my time and the employers' time. Friends of mine have taken different jobs and many of them have regretted taking them because they didn't enjoy them and they didn't last in the job. That got a lot of friends down and even upset if they lost their job."

Some youth were deliberately selective as regards the sorts of jobs they want. Further probing revealed that many jobseekers had a range of barriers that limited their ability to find work. The interviewer suggested that many youth have personal problems, with housing, health, education and training and welfare, were because they had been out of work for long periods. In other words, youth's personal dependencies developed because they were out of work rather than as a consequence of personal and family problems. When asked what participants thought about people looking for work being selective or picky about the jobs they will do, a young woman aged 15 responded that some of her friends were sometimes picky but some jobseekers felt themselves unsuited to the job. She commented that it wasn't really true with her friends,

Participant: "It's not being picky I reckon. I think it's deeper than that. A lot of my friends and people I was hanging out with didn't feel confident about getting a job."

A young man aged 17 with indigenous heritage had trouble with school, leaving in year 8, and struggling with a drug dependency for a number of years. He had high levels of anxiety and a feeling of alienation and isolation from the job system. He attended Centrelink on a regular basis but found them very unhelpful in his job searches. At the time of his interview in 2011, he had been looking for work for 11

months, and every job application he had put in had come back rejected. The following comments illustrate these themes,

Participant: “I really want to work, and I’m going for as many jobs as I can but they all come back rejected. I cannot do anything or do nothin’ in my life without work.”

Traditional job pathways and the processes of looking for work dismayed many job seekers. Despite their efforts at job-seeking, many participants felt that it was a path with limited hope of success. One young person interviewed, after submitting over thirty job applications and all coming back rejected, tried to look for work by door knocking around Wollongong. A young woman aged 18, who was out of work for 10 months at the time of interview, had tried many times to get a job,

Interviewer: “Ok, so you door-knocked. That’s quite interesting. So, what happened?”

Participant: “I just went around different shops such as fruit and vege markets, fish and chip shops, and petrol stations, anywhere really...and just said I was interested in work and have these skills.”

Interviewer: “Ok, so, you handed in your cv, how have you gone so far?”

Participant: “No luck yet but will keep trying. A lot of me mates got work that way”.

The same young woman, who lived in Wollongong, was clearly motivated to find the right job for herself. Despite the lack of choices for many youth, she was determined to find the job and use it to her own advantage. She was active in the job search process and was pro-active in CV preparation and employability skills such as interviewing techniques,

Interviewer: “So, it’s obviously very important to you for the job to work out so you can improve yourself and your future”

Participant: “Yeah, I really want it to work out and I’m going to try as hard as I can. I’ve heard that some bosses don’t give youth a chance but I want it to work out and I want to make it work, not lose it (the job). I need the money anyway!”

This sentiment emerged as a strong theme throughout the interviews with some participants suggesting that they should not, and would not, start a job they thought they would leave after a while. This sentiment was raised by professionals and is discussed in the next section of the chapter. For example, a young man aged 19, commented about this,

Participant: “I think it’s really important to take the job seriously because it’s your life, you need the money and wouldn’t work there for very long otherwise.”

A young woman aged 24, offered similar sentiments,

Participant: “I know a lot of youth have trouble finding work so I’m really conscious of giving it my best when I get a job after my training. On the other hand, you really don’t want to wake up in the morning and go to a job that sucks. It just wouldn’t work.”

At the same time however, many participants believed that people had the right to hold out for the job they wanted and were justified in doing so. Many participants believed it would lead to further problems in their career and future job prospects if they didn’t do so. A young man aged 20, believed that accepting the wrong job would lead to problems in the future,

Participant: “I think that’s just stupid actually – why accept a job just for the sake of it?” Some jobs are ok and you can stick it out sometimes but if it’s the wrong job, I don’t reckon you should accept at all.”

Some participants had contradictory positions in their labour market experiences. Some who had been unemployed for approximately one year felt they would take just about anything with reservations, while others had firmer views that the job they accept would be the right one and fitted into their own career trajectory. Regardless,

many participants found themselves looking for any job because many participants had been out of work for so long. A young woman aged 19, was prepared to accept any job available.

Participant: “I feel like doing anything at the moment because every job application I’ve put in has been rejected. I’m also really bored staying at home and I feel my parents are pressuring me to get a job as soon as possible.”

The determination and attitude to find work and commence a career was very strong for one participant. A young man aged 16, was prepared to take any job that arose in any area,

Participant: “I’ll work in Wollongong or Sydney, anywhere really. I just wanna get on the band wagon and start an apprenticeship.”

Youth who had completed or commenced higher levels of education such as TAFE or University were more selective when it came to accepting the right job. One young woman aged 24, was determined to get the right job for herself without any coercive influence from Centrelink or other service provider,

Participant: “I don’t care about Centrelink. I want to make sure I get the right job for myself. That’s really important.”

In comparison to the higher trained youth, the lower trained youth, who had generally been unemployed longer, were less inclined to be as selective in the job selection process. Overall, most interviewees didn’t feel obliged to take any available job despite the temptation of employment over unemployment. More specifically, the nature of the type of work available didn’t concern participants. Despite the casualisation and part-time nature of the region’s youth labour market, and precariousness more generally, participants did not discriminate whether available work was casual, part-time or full-time, temporary or permanent. Despite the research that views casual employment as either a path to temporary or permanent employment, or a path to a ‘dead end’, most participants indicated their feeling/view

that in the future the possibility of stable employment would become reality (Gaston and Titmcke 1999; Chalmers and Kalb 2001). In looking for work however, for many youth, the self-realisation that they were faced with a relatively uncertain future was paramount. Others, despite the awareness of uncertainty, were determined to be active in the job search process with the belief that they would eventually obtain the job they wanted.

6.5: Socio-economic Status

Most youth lived in the southern suburbs of the region including Albion Park, Barrack Heights, Dapto, Unanderra, and Warrawong, with only one participant located in central Wollongong and one located in Thirroul. This is consistent with youth and their geographical location across the region. This is shown in the following table.

Table 24: Suburb of Residence for Youth

Name	Age	Sex	Suburb of Residence
Participant 1	23	Male	Barrack Heights
Participant 2	22	Male	Wollongong
Participant 3	19	Female	Dapto
Participant 4	18	Female	Shellharbour
Participant 5	19	Male	Albion Park
Participant 6	20	Male	Barrack Heights
Participant 7	15	Female	Warrawong
Participant 8	16	Male	Unanderra
Participant 9	15	Male	Albion Park
Participant 10	21	Female	Primbee
Participant 11	16	Male	Warilla
Participant 12	15	Female	Dapto
Participant 13	16	Male	Dapto
Participant 14	15	Female	Shellharbour
Participant 15	22	Male	Warilla
Participant 16	24	Female	Albion Park
Participant 17	24	Male	Thirroul
Participant 18	17	Female	Port Kembla
Participant 19	16	Male	Warrawong
Participant 20	17	Male	Unanderra

As chapter three noted, youth who come from lower socio-economic areas in the southern suburbs are more likely to be unemployed, while location in these areas can lead to youth leaving school earlier and more likely to be unemployed. As the journey to work data indicates, youth travel into already established areas such as Wollongong or Shellharbour CBD's to work rather than gaining or expecting suburb based employment.

Table 25: Type of Travel to Work for Wollongong Statistical District (WSD) Employees

Type of Travel	WSD%	NSW%
Car	82.8	69.8
Walked only	3.5	5.0
Worked at home	3.0	5.5
Truck	2.3	1.8
Bicycle	1.6	0.7
Train	1.4	6.1
Motorbike/Scooter	1.4	0.6
Bus	0.8	3.9
Other	1.9	7.8

Source: IRIS Research (2008)

As is consistent with the previous research undertaken concerning journey to work in the region, youth who were interviewed generally felt that getting to training or work was difficult. A young woman aged 19, who is doing a Diploma in Community Services and living in Dapto, had transport problems,

“I think I’ll have to move because there are no jobs in Dapto or Koonawarra and the transport into Wollongong isn’t very good. I’m trying to get my driver’s licence.”

In a similar fashion, a young man aged 20, living in Barrack Heights noted his chances of finding work were going to be difficult in his respective area,

Participant: “I don’t reckon I’ll find work because I live in area that has no jobs.”

Interviewer: “Why is that so?”

Participant: “I’ve applied for so many jobs and there’s no work around here. I know this because my mates are out of work too.”

The challenges associated with transport have also impacted youths' employment options. This is an important factor in how the Illawarra's transport hubs have been developed over time. Many youth who live in lower socio-economic suburbs couldn't afford a car and relied significantly on public transport.

One of the main challenges facing some youth with these conditions was the difficulty of even getting to their case conference meetings at their various service providers. Those participants in the southern suburbs, particularly Berkeley and Warilla, found public transport very inadequate, and sometimes operating on irregular timetabling. A young man aged 23, who was struggling with drugs, and trying to get his driver's licence, found that transport was a major problem,

Participant: "I have to catch two buses to my case conference but it's a real problem because the second bus I usually miss because the first bus runs late."

Interviewer: "So, ok what about getting your driver's licence?"

Participant: "I've tried a few times but didn't get through. I found it hard and every time it costs me money and I don't have much at the moment."

6.6: Previous Employment Experience

The next section of the interview focused on job availability. As the previous chapters indicated, job availability in the region has been generally poor. Youth's perceptions of available jobs also indicated that jobs were scarce in the region. The first question in this section asked whether there were any full time jobs available for someone of their skill level? Most participants responded with no, or they weren't aware of any jobs. One participant responded they knew of no jobs available of any sort. The second question probed whether there were any part time or casual jobs available for someone of their skill level. Most participants responded no or didn't actively look. A number of participants indicated once their education was finished they were optimistic in finding the right job. A young woman aged 19, responded,

Participant: "I wasn't sure if there was for my skill level. I didn't really look for a job but I suppose there was Woolworths or McDonald's or something like that."

The third question asked if participants were currently employed and whether they considered it just a job or saw it as part of a broader future career. Almost three quarters of interviewees expressed the desire to learn new and further skills towards their chosen career. Excerpts from the interviews show some participant's indicating this was the case. For example a young woman aged 24,

Interviewer: "Are you currently employed? Do you consider it a career job?"

Participant: "Yes, after my TAFE was completed I applied for as many jobs that I could that matched my skills."

Interviewer: But do you have a desire to learn new and further skills for your career?

Participant: Yes, but I would first like to get a job and then build my skills through further training.

These female participants were overwhelming focused in obtaining the right skills for the job. The focus on education and training and the capacity to upgrade and improve skills when required was central.

A young women aged 15, was also a good example of a young person trying to improve her job prospects and the skills required to take the next steps,

Interviewer: "Do you have the adequate skill and education to attain this career?"

Participant: "I have a Certificate III in Child Care and I expect to get further qualifications once I've found the right job."

Many young female participants were expected to remain active in the job search process despite having different abilities and skills for their respective job searches. It suggests that the structure of the employment system assumes youth (female) are a homogenous group but a 24 year old woman is very different to a very young woman of 15. This is highlighted in the research findings. A young women aged 15, was

representative of young female participants of this age who were attempting to navigate their way through the labour market. By improving their training, and the skills they perceive to be important, they position themselves in a way that enhances their job prospects in the labour market more generally,

Interviewer: “Do you have the adequate skill and education to attain this career?”

Participant: “Not yet but will after TAFE and I expect to gain further qualifications once I’ve got the job I’d like.”

On the other hand, some male participants felt the labour market was structured to offer as many choices as possible, leading to an eventual smoother transition to regular employment. These choices were sometimes irregular with new jobs taken up quickly when required. A young man aged 22, worked in a number of jobs casually before eventually accepting the job that he thought was right for his needs and career aspirations. For this young man, previous employment (despite its casualisation) was important in transitioning from job to job,

Participant: “Yes, I’m currently employed and I’m enjoying my job. I don’t think it’s a career job really, I mean, I’ve had a few casual jobs in retail and stuff before, for like three months and before that I was a Barista for two years in three different cafés.”

Much of the research evidence indicates that youth tend to experience some form of precarious employment regardless of whether they eventually find a job. This precariousness can lead to further employment disadvantage in the future (Penman 2004: 50). In general, if youth spend longer out of the labour force, they can become ‘at risk’ of losing important employment and on the job work skills and the familiarity with technology necessary in order to undertake their job (Hillman 2005: 23).

Many participants expressed some naivety in their respective interviews when it came to finding a job. Many thought they would simply walk into a job. The

interviewer probed this more carefully and found the following with one participant, a young man aged 22,

Interviewer: “What sort of job did you think you would find after school?”

Participant: “I just thought I would find an okay job like a cleaner or something low skilled while I did my TAFE training. I found that there wasn’t jobs around and had to wait until I finished my training. This was hard because I had to support myself!”

The driving force of some youth, then, is the strong desire to find work as soon as possible. The sooner a young person finds a job the better the transition they will make to stable employment in the future (Marks 2006: 45). The disadvantages associated with employment among youth require a focus at both the policy and program level on securing work as soon as possible. This is so not only as a response to their own well-being but also in terms of concerns with education and training that may have no relevance to their future job prospects. In conjunction with the individual capacities of youth, the following table shows job growth has been slower in the Wollongong Statistical District (WSD) in comparison to New South Wales and Australia.

Table 26: Total Employment Growth in Wollongong, NSW and Australia (1997, 2002, 2007, 2012)

Year	Jobs in WSD	Jobs in NSW	Jobs in Australia
1997	80.9	2160.0	6314.5
2002	79.8	2301.4	6746.3
2007	84.6	2448.5	7616.9
2012	98.1	2611.6	8216.8

Source: ABS (2012) Labour Force Survey

Overall, despite the poor job prospects for many youth, most participants displayed a strong determination as regards finding work regardless of both their individual

capacities and the available jobs present in the region. The next section examines participants' previous work experience. The first question asked is whether they had a job while at high school. Generally, the vast majority of participants did not have jobs. Some participants however indicated they had worked in family businesses, McDonald's or other fast food restaurant, or in various retail sectors. In the Illawarra region, the 15-19 year old age group makes up 6.5 per cent of the workforce across all industries while the 20-24 year old age group comprises 10.9 per cent of the total workforce. On the other hand the 15-19 year old age group account for 16.9 per cent of people employed in the retail industry and the 20-24 year old group account for 17.4 per cent. Youth are also over-represented in the accommodation and food services industry, with 15-19 year olds accounting for 26.0 per cent and 20-24 year olds accounting for 20.8 per cent of people employed in that industry (ABS 2006). Youth's accounts in the interviews demonstrated these dimensions. For example, a young woman aged 15, who worked in the retail sector,

Interviewer: "So you had a job while at high school?"

Participant: "Yes, but the shop closed down."

Interviewer: "In what industry was the job located?"

Participant: "I had a job in the retail industry it was a clothes and latest fashions type shop in Wollongong."

Participants also noted other dimensions concerning previous employment such as the acquisition of skills, not only by working in a family business but undertaking volunteer work as well. A young woman aged 17,

Interviewer: "Did you have a job while at high school?"

Participant: "Yes, my Grandma owned a farm and I worked there. I also did occasional maintenance volunteering with the PCYC."

Interview: Wasn't that a lot to take on while still at high school?

Participant: Yes, it was stressful at times but I really wanted to get the skills and experience to get a good job because I hated school."

For some youth, getting a job after school was challenging. Only eight participants found some kind of employment after leaving school while the vast majority had greater difficulty. The remaining participants stayed on in education and training as a response to poor job prospects, with a young woman aged 19 responding,

Interviewer: "Did you get a job immediately (within the next year) after leaving high school?"

Participant: "No, I continued my studies because there wasn't any work around."

Youth generally found some difficulty in making the first step but several got jobs that were located in the fast food industry. For some participants, these jobs were the only industries where they could find employment given their current levels of education. A young man aged 16, who worked at McDonald's for six months, found it a difficult experience,

Participant: "I worked at McDonald's when I finished school. I looked for jobs for ages but there was nothing around. No one's interested in employing youth because they think we'll just leave. I left McDonald's because it was just back breaking work and the pay was really bad. Now, I'm worried about what to do next and I'm not sure where to go"

Many youth had difficult employment experiences, and many became unemployed after working in service based industries, because of mistreatment and precarious conditions and low pay. This is discussed later in this chapter.

The next section of the interview explored youth's current experiences in finding employment. Generally most participants found it difficult finding work despite the

help and assistance of case managers and service providers. For some youth, professional assistance was helpful in job searches. For others it was more problematic due to individual circumstances. One young woman felt pressured to find work despite trying to focus on her training at TAFE. A young woman aged 19, discussed her experiences of finding employment,

Participant: “No, I’m in training and further education but I still feel pressured to find a job as soon as possible.”

Interviewer: “Why do you feel pressured?”

Participant: “I feel pressured from my case manager, service provider and my parents but I’m doing as much as I can and working as hard as I can. I think they are just as anxious about me finding work as I am.”

Many participants discussed problems with motivation and other personal issues that they felt impeded their progress in getting a job. A young man aged 16, felt unsure about his future because of a bad employment experience,

Participant: “(Service provider) really makes me feel like I’m not trying hard enough with my job searches. I’m now trying to get a placement for an apprenticeship to do something, I’m not quite sure how it will work out”

Regardless, the length of time in or out of work experienced by participants reflects the general trends of youth employment across the region. As the following table illustrates, participants were employed for different lengths of time. Some experienced continuing unemployment while others had their employment experiences broken into different periods of time. These ranged from three to twelve months. This is shown in the following table.

Table 27: Length of Time Unemployed for Youth

Name	Age	Sex	Length of Time Unemployed
Participant 1	23	Male	8 months
Participant 2	22	Male	3 months*
Participant 3	19	Female	5 months
Participant 4	18	Female	10 months
Participant 5	19	Male	7 months
Participant 6	20	Male	12 months
Participant 7	15	Female	4 months
Participant 8	16	Male	12 months
Participant 9	15	Male	7 months
Participant 10	21	Female	6 months
Participant 11	16	Male	4 months
Participant 12	15	Female	6 months
Participant 13	16	Male	7 months
Participant 14	15	Female	1 month
Participant 15	22	Male	6 months*
Participant 16	24	Female	6 months
Participant 17	24	Male	7 months
Participant 18	17	Female	4 months
Participant 19	16	Male	1 month
Participant 20	17	Male	11 months

* Broken unemployment experienced by participant.

The next question queried whether youth were undertaking any study while unemployed. Participants were split evenly across the sample with 50 per cent indicating yes while 50 per cent indicated no. Of those undertaking study, most were attending TAFE or other supported training provided by their service provider. Of those not undertaking any study, most participants indicated they would like to in the future and were aiming to start some training with the assistance of their case

manager and service providers. Many participants felt they should be working whilst studying. When asked what their preferred career was they responded quite widely with choices in areas such as childcare, community service work, or other professional or trade occupations. This is shown in the following table.

Table 28: Preferred Career Options for Participants

Name	Age	Preferred Career Option
Participant 1	23	Electrician
Participant 2	22	Modelling/Acting
Participant 3	19	Youth worker
Participant 4	18	N/A*
Participant 5	19	Teacher
Participant 6	20	N/A*
Participant 7	15	Childcare
Participant 8	16	Apprenticeship panel beater
Participant 9	15	Carpenter
Participant 10	21	Hairdresser
Participant 11	16	N/A*
Participant 12	15	Midwife
Participant 13	16	Carpentry/Construction
Participant 14	15	N/A*
Participant 15	22	Plumber
Participant 16	24	Community service work
Participant 17	24	Mining
Participant 18	17	N/A*
Participant 19	16	N/A*
Participant 20	17	Australian Army Cadets

* Participant wasn't sure when interviewed.

One young woman however, had clear career goals. A young woman aged 24, she responded more specifically with a clear job role and focus,

Interviewer: “What is your preferred career? Is it professional, trade etc.?”

Participant: “My preferred career is professional like in community service work with youth as a case manager. I’m doing my Diploma of Community Services in order to get a job in that industry.”

The next section of the interview focused on youth’s commitment in finding work and any barriers in finding work. All participants (n=20) responded they were committed to finding work despite some not actively looking for work because of education and training commitments. A young man aged 24, noted his views,

Participant: “Why wouldn’t I be committed in finding work? I’m sick of people saying youth, youth and that, are bludgers. Sure, there’s a few of them around but everyone I know that is out of work, wants to work so bad, you know?”

It became clearer when the number of job applications submitted was tabulated. The interview asked how many job applications they had submitted in the last twelve months. This is illustrated in the following table.

Table 29: Job Applications Submitted

Name	Age	Job Applications Submitted
Participant 1	23	50
Participant 2	22	N/A*
Participant 3	19	25
Participant 4	18	30
Participant 5	19	12
Participant 6	20	14
Participant 7	15	N/A*
Participant 8	16	N/A*
Participant 9	15	N/A*
Participant 10	21	35
Participant 11	16	13
Participant 12	15	17
Participant 13	16	N/A*
Participant 14	15	12
Participant 15	22	24
Participant 16	24	N/A*
Participant 17	24	17
Participant 18	17	12
Participant 19	16	18
Participant 20	17	20

* Participant not looking for a job.

The next question of the interview asked participants whether they were shortlisted for any positions they applied for and whether they were successful in getting a job. This is shown in the following table.

Table 30: Shortlisted for Job and Obtaining Job

Name	Age	Shortlisted for Job	Obtaining Job
Participant 1	23	Yes	Yes
Participant 2	22	Yes	Yes
Participant 3	19	Yes	Yes
Participant 4	18	Yes	No
Participant 5	19	No	No
Participant 6	20	Yes	Yes
Participant 7	15	N/A*	N/A*
Participant 8	16	N/A*	N/A*
Participant 9	15	N/A*	N/A*
Participant 10	21	Yes	Yes
Participant 11	16	No	No
Participant 12	15	Yes	No
Participant 13	16	No	N/A*
Participant 14	15	Yes	No
Participant 15	22	Yes	No
Participant 16	24	N/A*	N/A*
Participant 17	24	Yes	No
Participant 18	17	Yes	No
Participant 19	16	Yes	No
Participant 20	17	Yes	No

* Participant not looking for a job.

Despite most youth being unsuccessful in getting a job, many participants noted they were really close in the interview process. A young man aged 23, had some success but ultimately no employment,

Participant: “I got shortlisted and an interview but no job. It was frustrating because all the help my service provider gives me with interviewing skills and stuff. I thought my interview went well.”

Interviewer: “What industry was that in? Did you ask for some feedback from the interview?”

Participant: “A local plumbing company here in Wollongong. Yeah, I did, they just said someone else got it with more experience.”

6.7: Perceptions of Precarious Employment

The last section of the interview explored notions of precariousness experienced by youth throughout the region. Understanding of the notion of precarious work was evident throughout the interviews: young people were generally aware that many of the jobs they were doing and searching for were insecure. While finding the right job that suited their particular personal and career aspirations was paramount, a number indicated that they would take just about any job available, regardless of pay and conditions.

6.7.1: ‘Choosing’ the Job

Although many young people were aware that many of the jobs they were undertaking were fraught with precarious conditions and pay, these conditions were accepted, because of a realisation of the overall lack of jobs and poor employment prospects. Others believed the jobs they were seeking matched their skills, experiences and abilities. Despite the precariousness of the labour market, young people tended to be quite deliberately selective of the sorts of jobs they wanted. A young woman aged 15, expressed the view that some of her friends were ‘picky’, rejecting jobs with poor conditions and wages,

Participant: “I’ve been looking for work for ages and everything around Wollongong has crappy pay and I’ve heard from me mates that some employers are nasty.”

Interviewer: “Can I ask you though what conditions you’re expecting in your job search?”

Participant: “I’m not too concerned about that at the moment. I guess I’d like to get a job first (laughs) and then I don’t mind if I’m casual to start but eventually I’d like a contract or be permanent. That’s what I aspire to.”

A young man aged 22, reflected this belief in the jobseeker as making a free and deliberate choice,

Interviewer: Is it important for young people to pick and choose the sorts of jobs they want, particularly the right conditions?

Participant: “Absolutely, it’s very important. I’m not doing a job I will not enjoy without reasonable conditions and pay. That’s wasting my time and the employer’s time. Friends of mine have taken different jobs and many of them have regretted taking them because they didn’t enjoy them, the conditions weren’t good and they didn’t last in the job. That got a lot of my friends down and even upset if they lost their job”.

Thus, while young people were aware of the reality of precarious work as a significant aspect of their job search experiences, a number held a simultaneous belief in the individual’s right to accept only a desirable job and to reject any job whose conditions were not to their satisfaction or needs. A young man aged 20, commented,

Participant: “I think that’s just stupid actually – why accept a job just for the sake of it? Some jobs are ok and you can stick it out sometimes but if it’s the wrong job, I don’t reckon you should accept at all especially if the conditions are bad”.

With strong understandings of precarious work, a number of young people decided not to look for jobs in Wollongong but to travel 85 kilometres to Sydney for work. They believed that Sydney had a larger labour market, offering more choice and

generally much better conditions than Wollongong. Young people with less training, who had generally been unemployed longer, were less inclined to be selective. However, a young man aged 16, was also prepared to accept any job that arose in the Illawarra or Sydney whilst undertaking his apprenticeship,

Participant: “I’ll work in Wollongong or Sydney. I just wanna get on the band wagon and start work while I do my apprenticeship.”

Interviewer: Are you happy with the conditions of your apprenticeship?

Participant: Yeah, I guess so, I mean I’ll earn good money in the future once I get a good job.

Young people who had completed or commenced higher levels of education, such as Technical and Further Education (TAFE) or University, were even more selective. A young woman, aged 24, was determined to get a job that would suit her individual requirements. She believed that because she had completed a diploma she could avoid work that had precarious conditions,

Participant: “I just want to make sure I get the right job for myself, with good pay and leave entitlements. That’s really important to me.”

Overall, the majority of interviewees did not see themselves as obliged to take any available job despite the temptation to move from unemployment into employment. Whilst recognising the nature and prevalence of precarious work, they still felt that somehow they were immune, and that it was their responsibility, and within their individual power, to improve on the apparent labour market by finding the good job that must be there, if only they could locate it. Despite awareness of the casualised and part-time nature of the region’s youth labour market, some participants did not take account of whether available work was casual, part-time or full-time, temporary or permanent, as a key job search consideration. They did not factor into their job search strategy a consideration of whether a particular casual job was either a path to permanent employment, or a path to a ‘dead end’: most participants simply accepted

as an article of faith that in the future the possibility of stable employment would become a reality.¹¹

This belief in the relation of current casual work to future permanent work has been found in other research on youth employment (Gaston and Timcke 1999). Whilst some of the young people had confronted the paramount self-realisation that they were faced with a relatively uncertain future, others, despite the awareness of job uncertainty, were simply fixed in the determination (probably unrealistic) that by an act of individual will, they would eventually obtain the job they wanted. In this group, each lone individual, embarking into a sea of opportunity or uncertainty, was piloted by an inner sense of the ideal job.

Young people amongst this cohort appeared motivated to actively shape their particular circumstances. Female participants appeared strongly focused on obtaining the right skills for the job, and expected to continue upgrading their qualifications, as a strategy for navigating the labour market, once employed. In answer to the question, “Do you have the adequate skill and education to attain this career?”, typical comments were,

Participant: “Not yet but will after TAFE and I expect to gain further qualifications once I’ve got the job I’d like.”

Participant: “I have a Certificate III in Child Care and I expect to get further qualifications once I’ve found the right job.”

On the other hand, some male participants felt comfortable about making choices as the opportunity arose taking each new job without hesitation. A young man aged 22, had worked in a number of jobs casually before eventually accepting the job that he thought was right for his needs and career aspirations,

¹¹ It appears here that a group of people have internalised a range of beliefs that are mutually contradictory. There is a nuanced ambiguity amongst youth.

Participant: "...I'm currently employed and I'm enjoying my job. I don't think it's a career job really, I mean, I've had a few casual jobs in retail and stuff before, for like three months And before that I was a barista for two years in three different cafés".

Much of the research evidence indicates, however, that young people tended to experience some form of unemployment regardless of the prospects of finding a job. This is likely to correlate with further unemployment in the future (Penman 2004: 50). If young people spend a long period out of the labour force, they can become 'at risk' of losing important work skills and the familiarity with technology necessary in order to undertake their job (Hillman 2005: 23).

Many participants naively thought they would simply walk into a job, but found the reality to be otherwise,

Participant: "I just thought I would find an okay job like a cleaner or something low skilled while I did my TAFE training. I found that there wasn't jobs around and had to wait until I finished my training. This was hard because I had to support myself."

Some young people then, expressed a strong desire to find work as soon as possible. Marks (2006: 45) argues that the sooner a young person finds a job the better the transition they will make to stable employment in the future. The hazards of unemployment among young people require a focus at the policy and program level, in helping secure employment as soon as possible, for their own well-being and also to avoid being 'becalmed' in education and training that may have no use in terms of their future job prospects. Overall, despite the poor job prospects, most young people had a strong sense that they personally would secure a job that would meet their individual requirements. Such high motivation suggests that young people are driven by a neoliberal ideology of the labour market, with little conceptualisation of limited employment prospects. They are left wondering why this leads to undesirable employment outcomes, whereas a more nuanced understanding might result in better strategies or less internalisation of disappointment and self-blaming.

6.7.2: Getting the Job and Understanding its Precariousness

Despite the length of time that many young people were out of work in the region, it was surprising that many interview participants found a job relatively quickly. Often, however, this was only to lose it a short time later. Some lost their jobs through under-performance but others were bullied or discriminated against. Recounting these experiences was emotional for some participants and many felt unable and unwilling to discuss them at any length. The nature of the work they experienced, however, was less controversial and many were willing to discuss the sorts of jobs they had held and their various conditions. A young woman, aged 21, had worked in a local bakery as an assistant, and experienced poor conditions at work,

Participant: “I get up really early to go to work like 5am and it’s flat-out until about 10am. My pay isn’t great and the owners are nice people but they’re constantly under pressure to get the goods out. Overall, it’s hard work but at the end of the day I don’t feel rewarded very well either financially or in my personal career aspirations.”

Interviewer: “So, this job is a stepping stone for your future career. Is that right?”

Participant: “Yes, but I hope my pay increases.”

Interviewer: OK, if you don’t mind me asking, does your job have holiday and sick leave and regular hours of work?

Participant: “At this stage no because I’m casual but hopefully I will get those conditions soon.”

Like several other young people, she found the job bearable because of a belief that the prospects of better pay and leave entitlements were achievable. This belief is reflected in the youth transitions literature (Goodwin and O’Connor 2005; Wyn and Woodman 2006; Furling, Woodman and Wyn 2011), along with the notion that ‘bad jobs’ may be ‘stepping stones’ to better job prospects. As Masterman-Smith and Pocock argue, however,

“The stepping stone thesis is deeply embedded in our notions of Australia as a meritocratic society and the idea that we ‘make’ ourselves by moving up robust ladders of opportunity. The ‘ladder of opportunity’ out of low pay is a central rationalisation for the existence of low pay in a prosperous society, especially one that values fairness, like Australia. Few Australians would like to think that they inhabit a nation in which an individual’s best efforts are insufficient to protect them from poverty or hardship. Those social conditions tend to be equated with poorer, less democratic nations” (2008: 85)

The notion that their own job is different from others and will somehow provide a stepping stone can be seen in the words of a young woman, a 19 year old child care worker,

Participant: “Basically, I work 8am-6pm five days a week. I’m happy to be working but it’s hard after a while because childcare is a demanding job. The pay is average and the industry itself still needs accreditation and improvements in education and training. Other workers I speak to tell me they have it much harder with less pay and longer hours at other child care centres. They also have less opportunity for promotion and other benefits and they tend to burn out after a while.”

A 20 year old male law student working casually in a supermarket to support his university degree commented on the lack of prospects for co-workers,

Interviewer: “How would you describe the conditions of work in your current job?”

Participant: “Generally ok although the pay is pretty bad. I started around \$10 an hour and now receive \$12.50. I like the hours overall though – they’re flexible while I study and that’s really helpful. I like being casual because they call me when they need me”

Interviewer: “So, the conditions are fine while you study. What about when you finish your studies, what pay and other entitlements are you expecting?”

Participant: “Well when I finish I expect to get a good job because I’m doing a law degree.”

Even with the prospects of a promising career in law and the sense of identity that poor conditions is just a phase in his career, he was aware of how difficult it would be as one got older and wanted to start a family,

Participant: “I wouldn’t like this job forever. I mean there’s really no progression (maybe to store manager) but outside of that you wouldn’t be able to buy a house or have decent pay to have a good life I reckon”.

The feeling of going nowhere for many youth and the sense that the jobs are dead-ends rather than having promising futures has become the way in which many jobs in the contemporary labour market are now viewed. Despite this, young people persist in jobs that require long hours and provide poor conditions and pay, in the hope that the conditions will improve, or that the work will lead to better employment in the future. This reinforces an important point about the nature of precarious work in Australia in the 21st century. For many youth, financial circumstances drive their motivation to work. Many participants felt that there was no alternative and unemployment and receiving benefits was not an option even when there was no evident financial pressure. A young man aged 23,

Participant: “I still live with Mum and Dad but I’m expected to work and contribute to my family even though I don’t have to pay rent and things like that”.

6.8: Summary

This chapter presented data regarding youth in the region and drew from face to face semi-structured interviews conducted in the region during 2011-2012. The chapter provided a context to understand the dynamics of youth employment in the region. In particular, to illustrate how neoliberalism shapes contemporary youth employment by the ideology of individual choice and personal responsibility. This is consonant with prevailing neoliberal norms, as expressed in the employment attitudes of young people. The next chapter presents data from interviews with professionals and focus

groups with professionals and youth to understand their perspectives on neoliberalism.

CHAPTER SEVEN: PROFESSIONAL'S REFLECT ON YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

7.1: Introduction

While the last chapter examined youth experiences of employment in the region, this chapter presents data from the interviews with professionals. As chapter four outlined these professionals were drawn from a range of areas including business, community development, education, manufacturing, local, state and federal government, private consultants, unions and welfare sector. It provides an analysis of how hegemonic neoliberalism has impacted the region, contextualising the nature and role of restructuring from the perspective of research participants. It explores professionals' views on what they understood by neoliberalism, and from that understanding the extent to which they thought industry and the labour market had been restructured. The interview schedule then proposed that, as part of the restructure of industry, their own operations had been influenced by the priorities of these reforms. The interview schedule then asked professionals what they thought were the social impacts for youth as a consequence of this restructuring and how they saw their operations broadly effecting youth employment. The latter section of the chapter discusses the findings of focus groups conducted with both professionals and youth. The chapter concludes by discussing the various implications of these findings for chapter eight and nine of this thesis.

The first professional interviewed was associated with the union movement in the region and expressed very clear and articulate views on how neoliberalism was understood, and the challenges concerning the transformation of employment under a neoliberal paradigm,

Interviewer: "What do you understand by neoliberalism?"

Participant: "Neoliberalism is an extension of liberalism such as the rights of the individual as opposed to collective rights and other things. It is historically, and particularly in the neoliberal form directly relating to economic rights rather than any

of what we know now as civil liberties. I think if there's one aspect where perhaps if you were differentiating from classic liberalism with neoliberalism is perhaps an even greater divergence from non-economic rights of the individual that was captured in classic principles and traditional principles."

An executive from the NSW TAFE system also expressed similar perspectives and views concerning neoliberalism and discussed the transformation of educational services under such philosophies and practices,

Participant: "I guess it has a couple of facets. There's a fundamental underpinning that influences the belief in a market economy. Free market forces will bring about the best outcomes for individuals. There's a second component to it, and that's the economic component, that you want to structure things, then there's the social component that has a benefit to individuals. There's an economic underpinning (the Margaret Thatcher thing) there's no such thing as a society only individuals and so what's good for individuals is good for society. The assumption is that it's better for the whole. Privatisation is part of it, privatisation comes out of it. I cannot decide whether privatisation is a tool to bring out the market or just the ideology. I think it's an ideology. In my area, both state and federal governments argue it increases competition by creating a market by moving public funds into the private sector and that will make somehow the public sector more competitive by market forces. So, it's very much a tool to drive market changes."

Similar sentiments were offered by an executive in regional development who was involved in different forms of business attraction, economic development and job creation,

Participant: "I would understand this philosophy as something that opens new markets to competitive forces. These markets were formally dormant. I think it's a general relaxation of the rules to compete and it features much more international ownership of previously existing national industries and markets."

Interviewer: "Is it just an economic phenomenon or does it reach out and have broader implications?"

Participant: “I think it probably does but I don’t think its critics see all its benefits. It opens up markets, I guess it’s not just market forces, the government has to play a role in this so-called liberalisation. In fact, the social inclusion approaches of the government are a response to some of the difficult problems associated in regional Australia.”

A former executive in local government expressed the view that neoliberalism was a mainstream part of the economic political transformation that has occurred in Australia during the last two decades. Throughout local government, and within its administration and policy development, the primacy of markets and deregulation was a core component in the delivery of services,

Participant: “I’d understand it as the sort of thinking that been going on since the early 1980’s. It started before the Hawke/Keating governments, it started with Whitlam who had some ideas about Australia being a less dependent economy, less tied to its tariffs, instead of being fortress Australia it would be more open to the world. It’s certainly a philosophy that came into the Hawke and Keating government, prior to Hawke, Fraser started introducing tariff reduction with the Industries Assistance Commission.”

These perspectives were queried further with probing concerning free and deregulated markets with the interviewees.

Interviewer: “Do you think it’s about free and deregulated markets. Is it something the government does?”

Participant: “The Hawke/Keating approach was the tripartite approach with industry, unions and government making decisions in consultation. That seemed like a pretty smart move. Take that through the Hawke/Keating and then Howard period, he introduced all the productivity based reforms that were the period of being part of Asia, Keating has said we are part of the Asian region, we had to start building relations with China which we avoided in the older period. Howard comes along particularly with his workplace relations considerations, the battles that they fought

on the Waterfront, to get all the supply chain areas and get them deregulated and get rid of all the barriers that had been put up. Neoliberalism is an attitude that all politicians have about the future of Australia. Governments don't have to be the provider of services as they had in the past. They can be the enabler of services, they can contract everything out, prisons - we have nearly everything privatised. Welfare is a very privatised arrangement and the private sector has come on board because they can do things more efficiently supposedly, make money if they provide those services."

Alternatively, a local politician saw no relationship with the economic reforms undertaken in Australia with the broader philosophies and practices of neoliberalism. This was despite the clear continuity of the reforms under both major political parties in Australia,

Participant: "Neoliberalism is something that goes on internationally but I don't think it has a particular relevance to the political experience here (in Australia). I don't see the reforms undertaken by Bob Hawke and Paul Keating as neoliberal. I think the reforms were essentially transformative and part of the challenge for governments all the time is changes in technology that will drive new industries but at the same time address old industries, many of them declining."

Interviewer: "So, ok, is it something the government does?"

Participant: "Yes, I think so. The other side of that is that government policies are used to block or slow the process. My view is that what Hawke and Keating did right was to say look that's just giving false hope over the long term because you're propping up unsustainable industries, so you're better off making a transition. The other side of that is that you don't always get that right and in our region we've got a whole lot of young people who were looking to do what their fathers did. To have trades and technical expertise and to look for those sorts of jobs. We haven't managed that well that is why we have persistent high teen unemployment in the area."

Interviewer: “Ok, so how do you see it work or the way is operationalises?”

Participant: “I guess it’s also about a broader social agenda. It’s more about a structure that’s about individual freedoms and seeing people within that construct as consumer and producer. It is more than just the market but how you see a society being constructed based around the primacy of the market.”

The first participant to consider neoliberalism to have possible deleterious impacts for young people was a participant working in local employment generation in the region,

Participant: “I guess I understand that it’s something that governments generally have undertaken in the last couple of decades. I certainly think it’s about free and deregulated markets. Also about privatisation, a lot of services provided by government or owned by government, possibly also about individual choice and consumption. Certainly in regards to employment and unemployment, neoliberalism has had impacts on that, possibly positive as well as negative. Privatisation has clearly had some negative impacts on the number of entry level positions for young people. In a freed up labour market, business and organisations have more flexibility of employment of people, and can create opportunities for young people.”

Another local politician saw neoliberalism as the general transformation that’s been occurring since the 1970’s but was critical of its ideological assumptions,

Participant: “It’s all the approaches since 1970’s that has freed up markets. Neoliberalism assumes everyone has an equal footing when this dismisses the anthropological basis of our differences.”

Interviewer: “That’s interesting. Can you elaborate on those thoughts?”

Participant: “It’s about freeing up markets and marketising existing services but its premise assumes everyone is on equal footing to compete in such markets, and usually the most marginalised people are the victims.”

While many participants saw neoliberalism as part of the underlying approach of contemporary policies and programs, they imbued the term with positive qualities. Despite some participants having reservations of its claims, such as greater efficiency and productivity, the vast majority of participants positioned neoliberalism as something of a break through from the old and tired approaches of the past. In this sense, they positioned its ideology as new and modern, and results oriented. Neoliberalism was, according to this rationale, viewed as progressive in a way likely to be embraced.

7.2: Economic and Labour Market Restructuring

Participants generally were forthcoming with their views concerning what they understood by neoliberalism. When asked the second question of the interview schedule they expressed some interesting and insightful perspectives into the specific reasons why industry and the labour market had been restructured. The reasoning behind question one was the lead-in to question two. The responses focused on, firstly, how the regions industrial and labour market landscape had changed while, secondly, focusing on the specific impacts of their operations. From the union perspective, for example, a general concern was the tensions present between capital and labour, and the contradictions in the capitalist system,

Interviewer: “From your understanding, do you agree that industry and the labour market have been restructured?”

Participant: “Yes, of course. There are core tensions however between capital and labour with three different accumulation processes:

1. The boom/bust cycle (in other words cumulative market failure).
2. Industry based – import/export – industry policy change.
3. Regional dynamics – uneven economic development. “

Interviewer: “Ok but focusing more specifically on the transformations of the economy, how do you think this reform agenda impacts workers especially young people?”

Participant: “What we have in the region is a form of Keynesian economic management with neoliberal delivery. This presents the union movement with a challenge and this is how local interventions/investments are undertaken. On the one hand, this is purely ideological but I guess the union movement must work with business and government in order to secure appropriate conditions for our workers and their families”.

From the perspective of the local employment coordinator, recollections of past industry restructuring arose before specifically focusing on young people,

Participant: “Yes it has significantly. Unemployment in the region during the 1980’s was very high both in the coal and steel industries. For men in their 40’s at the time, they were never re-employed and now their children are unemployed compounding the problem twenty five years later. Moving forward to today, young people suffer from high levels of unemployment and a whole range of associated problems such as literacy and numeracy, and there has been a real reduction in apprenticeships/trades, the competition is so great. Some young people have a poor work ethic and are disengaged. There needs to be greater built in incentives for young people”.

The education system for example, was noted as being the beneficiary of neoliberalism, with one participant noting the positive aspects of its reform agenda,

Participant: “In the area of education, I think there are some outcomes of it that are positive. The drive for these changes means we have to operate in a business-like manner. We’ve really had to make business based decisions, we’ve worked very hard with our staff to get them to understand we are business, multi-million dollar business operating in an environment providing products and services, we have the same driving forces, costs as any other operation. The challenge particularly for the politicians is our role in the public sphere. We are a large institution that covers a

large area. We are the public provider across a broad range of skills, education and community requirements.”

Other participants noted the real challenges young people face in the Job Network. A participant from the job services industry, for example, noted the difficulties in the employment system and the challenges young people face in navigating it,

Participant: “I don’t think there’s been very many changes, maybe small and incremental changes under such ideology. The Job Network has changed very little. It’s still the same processes, they talk about it differently but it’s still the same. Youth connections is a newer program (2009) under the current government replacing the older youth pathways which was a group based program, lots of focus on schools, not necessarily intense case management support – one on one, so we’ve had youth connections since 2010. As I’ve said, it’s a really great program and it really meets the needs of our clients but we’re not catering to the amount of young people as youth pathways previously. We are really conscious of the employment gaps especially in Shellharbour and the area is piloting one of ten programs where a lot of Centrelink recipients are located. The southern suburbs are being supported by community services but very little is coming from the Federal government apart from those people who work in the welfare sector. It’s really hard to get local businesses on board and I don’t think we are employing enough local people”.

Similar sentiments were offered by another participant employed in the job services industry,

Participant: “Youth unemployment is not on the government or social radar. It became an issue with demand and supply factors but some of the barriers were just crazy stuff, many of us weren’t even aware of the barriers until it was identified in various research. Unless you fall into them you don’t run into them. Young people don’t seem to have a voice, like ‘here are the barriers, can you give us a hand?’”

Interviewer: “Do you think young people can identify those barriers, they may not be able to see them? I mean what I’m trying to understand is how neoliberalism has

shaped youth employment, and things like choice and freedom are used ideologically, it's just rhetoric, there seems very little choice and when young people experience barriers they're expected to overcome them by individual choices when many of the barriers are out of their control."

Participant: "You're probably right. Maybe young people are in a world where they cannot make the right choices sometimes".

7.3: Organisation and Social Impacts for Youth

The next section of the interview process proposed how and in what way do participants' organisations have a social impact for young people. The responses again were diverse and many participants expressed an understanding of neoliberalism as an economic ideology that had social consequences for young people and the type of labour market they experience.

Interviewer: "Do you see your operations having a social impact on young people and more broadly affecting young people?"

Participant: "Many of the organisations lost their contracts to provide job services because of poor results and outcomes. Private providers would target employment and young people, make a lot of money and even do it then into the government whereas we tried to help the long term unemployed and give them the help they need. Help them out of hole. The government has a social inclusion agenda and many young people need better targeting with such approaches before eighteen. I don't notice youth unemployment on the political agendas at all. I don't see it as a highlighted area except maybe around education".

Another participant, a local union official, noted that unions generally help young people as much as they can with the full knowledge that many experience employment disadvantage,

Participant: "The unions always try to reach out and give young people a shot despite their casualization and under-training. The union movement has always, as best as

we can, helped young people. We did this both in the 1980's when the brunt of the restructuring was taking place and today.”

Another participant, a former executive in local government in the 1980's, noted some improvements in the regional job market, particularly as regards those young people who attend university and work part-time,

Participant: “I think youth unemployment has dropped because the overall economy has improved for young people. Many young people attend university (UOW), a high percentage work part-time in cafes, supermarkets etc. I think many young people are ‘work ready’ which both sides of politics have pushed significantly in the last two decades but in our region so many kids are still getting left behind because of family background, experiences when they were young and at school, drugs, deviance, marginalisation etc.”

Another participant from a local service provider disagreed with the success of education and skills-training, and noted the various mismatches between programs and participants as having a serious social impact for youth throughout the region,

Participant: “There are different jobs out there carpenters, plumbers, hands on labour jobs but we are not necessarily pointing people in the right direction and the training isn't there because the focus is on higher education and many of these young people end up unemployed which is a really bad problem for our region. From a social point of view, you want to provide as many opportunities as possible for our young people and if they fall into the cycle those learnt behaviours are so hard to break and unless they want to change there's not a lot anyone can do. The thing that's really valid is that there are services and activities in the community service sector that are meeting the needs of some young people who are in this gap of not fitting into education but others are falling through the cracks”.

Interviewer: “So how does your organisation overcome these difficulties? What are the organisational responses?”

Participant: “The way our organisation works is we have core programs in education, training and employment for young people. These programs include case management for those young people referred from school who need support and assistance. Where we get lots of referrals from schools because there is a really big issue with the school leaving age been raised to 17 years old. So there are lots of young people who are forced to be at school when that’s not their skill set, their career ambition and what they want to be doing. So one of the most frustrating things with our young people we see is if school isn’t necessarily their option, TAFE aren’t taking anyone under the age of 16 years old. So if young people leave they are in this void of not meeting their requirements from a government point of view because they’re not at school but not meeting the needs of the registered training organisations particularly TAFE. With TAFE, it’s really unfortunate because they only have two intake times so we find a lot of our clients are just waiting for those intake times.”

Interviewer: “What about the younger people aged say 15 who are disenfranchised from education system. What are their prospects?”

Participant: “Well, if young people are disengaged from school from an earlier age particularly under 15 they’re too young for links to learning, too young for TAFE, there’s just aren’t any options for young people, particularly those who are aren’t academically inclined. I don’t think there’s enough balance with the focus on education and on practical skills for our region as well as nationally as well.”

Interviewer: “That’s really important but how do you think the region can overcome such issues?”

Participant: “I think a lot of the unemployment is to do with the cycle of poverty, and the cycle of social disadvantage, so I think what we need to be doing is getting in these communities and looking at people’s strengths, assets and what they can contribute, motivate people before we say “right you’ve been unemployed for thirty years, go out and get yourself a job”. That’s not going to work. We need to connect with these people and try and figure out why that cycle happens and not necessarily

infiltrate but take little steps to try and change that approach. And then go, “so you’re ready now, let’s put you in a course, let’s try and find you a job, if people are connected, and talking and wanting to work, people need to want to work which is half the problem. So we need to teach people the positive role of a work ethic and to support your region, support your family, you have a place in society.”

A similar view was expressed by a manager, in a leading organisation that represents businesses in the region, who attempted to develop greater awareness concerning youth employment,

Participant: “I did a concentrated marketing campaign towards businesses who may not have employed apprentices for some time because what you can do is obtain lists of employers who have employed apprentices and/or trainees. So, that makes it easier to identify where the possible options for employment may be. So then, I’d send them out a survey. Have you recently employed? Are you planning on employing? If not, why? So that, we could get the information to address the reasons why people weren’t employing and a big, big, big thing that came out of that research was the fact that, in 25 years, incentives had not changed at all for employers; and in fact, I mean, as recently as a few months ago, the current Government has actually reduced incentives to employers.”

Interviewer: “Ok, so what are the incentives?”

Participant: “Depending on the apprenticeship or traineeship, there is usually a commencement incentive and that can be anywhere from \$1250 to \$4000. For some internships, not traineeships, there is, like, a mid-point incentive of about \$2500 so potentially a business can employ a single apprentice or trainee. The idea was that that payment was to go towards assisting the apprentice or trainee”.

Further probing with a number of participants showed the contradictory expectations of the business community in response to youth employment. One participant, a professional in business, suggested very generally that businesses were quite conservative and had quite unrealistic expectations of youth.

Interviewer: “What do you think about the attitude of business to youth employment? Are businesses generally forthcoming and helpful in employing young people?”

Participant: “The first word that comes to mind is definitely conservative. Businesses operate (especially medium and large enterprises) in a very competitive environment that is shaped by those transformations we discussed earlier (neoliberalism). The evidence I think is that they are not employing young people because of all the usual reasons such as cost, risk etc. but they also expect too much from young people and expect to shape young people’s careers in their own image rather than focusing on developing young people’s particular talents. In the end, young people leave because they are denied the choices they’d like to make”.

Interviewer: “That’s fascinating, given the ideology of neoliberalism that decrees choice, freedom etc.

Participant: “I don’t think it’s fair. The young people I’ve met over the years are so energetic, intelligent and ready to work.

Interviewer: “A strong view from young people is they think some businesses or business people condemn them as being lazy, self-absorbed, you know all the stereotypes.”

Participant: “Maybe that’s true for some but most young people I’ve dealt with are job ready.

Interviewer: “But what sorts of young people are you referring to? Blue-collar, white collar, skilled etc. and what other factors such as age, gender, ethnicity etc.?”

Participant: “I don’t know about gender and ethnicity but both men and women across the age cohorts are ready to work. Perhaps the blue collar workers are more willing to try different things and take greater risks than white collar workers.”

Another participant from business suggested there are real contradictions in businesses attitudes to young people.

Participant: “There's a real contradiction in what businesses are actually saying and then what they're actually doing now which, to me, it's just fascinated me. The whole time I've been [in my current role], more and more businesses, particularly in the Illawarra are looking at going offshore and that's not a, that's nothing new. But what surprised me was the numbers of businesses that are looking at doing that.”

Interviewer: “So, this doesn't improve the levels of youth employment disadvantage in the region.”

Participant: “No, it probably makes it worse.”

7.4: Focus Group Findings: Perspectives of Professionals and Youth

This section of the chapter discusses the findings of focus groups conducted with professionals and youth. It commences with the views of professionals and explores professional understandings of the complexities and challenges facing youth in terms of employment in the region. These include, on the one hand, the contradictions and conundrums present in the economy and, on the other, the processes and transitions young people undertake in finding work and their experiences of the labour market. This section also explores what young people viewed as their major barriers to employment, with the intention of understanding how many of these barriers could be overcome with appropriate policy responses. These issues were explored in the context of both focus groups, illustrating how many of the difficulties young people face in the region can be appropriately addressed from a range of perspectives by both professionals and young people. The chapter concludes by exploring what the future holds for the region, including the forces that will shape and drive these possible futures in the context of youth employment.

7.4.1: Focus Group One: Professional Perspectives

The first focus group undertaken in this research centred on the perspectives of professionals. As chapter four noted, these professionals were drawn from a wide range of industrial and occupational groups and included individuals from business, community development, education, manufacturing, local, state and federal government, private consultants, unions and welfare sector. This focus group was conducted in August 2012 and discussed a range of questions concerning youth employment. Given the scenarios that the research outlined in the previous section, the aim of the focus groups was to understand more clearly the views of professionals and their engagement with young people. Many professionals had direct and indirect engagement with young people in wide range of areas and the nature of this engagement is reported in this section. Professionals were generally forthcoming with their views and demonstrated a strong engagement with the issues and problems associated with youth employment in the region.

7.4.2: Professional Understandings of the Youth Labour Market

The focus group session commenced with questions pertaining to what participants knew about the Illawarra's youth employment situation. Participants were offered the opportunity to offer their views either in their own professional roles or as regards their general understanding of youth employment in the region. The moderator provided a context that combined the previous interview findings and existing research. Participants were generally well informed about the employment situation and expressed a range of views. One participant, an economics consultant, provided a clear context of the youth employment situation,

Moderator: "Can you tell me what you know about the difficulties youth experience in the region's labour market?"

Participant: "I think you've got in two fundamental problems. One is the problem of unemployment that relates to the structure of the economy. The second is the dynamics of the labour market that's lived over a dramatic increase in what we can call precarious employment where - and young people particularly prone to this

when they're in and out of low-skilled jobs or on temporary basis on occasional jobs. And this doesn't, of course, give them a good foundation to get employment stability, income security; and so, that makes it much more difficult. And, to me, it's economic problem but it's also a sociological problem. And, I think that's - well, I don't have the skills in that area but I think the demoralization effect of second generation, of third generation unemployment or not being lead into networks where there are growing employment opportunities. Indeed, many young people don't have the confidence or the support of the education system. Some of those young people cannot then get into tertiary education, university in particular.”

Another participant, a local manager who assists young people into training and employment, noted the structural changes that have occurred in the Australian labour market over the last few decades,

Participant: “There has been a significant ‘stripping out’ of the labour market of the bulk recruitment full time entry level jobs that once existed. Often good quality jobs that didn’t necessarily require a high skill level and in which people could stay long term or perhaps move just a rung or two up the ladder during their working lives. For examples: BHP, the banks, state and federal governments. In saying this, there has been a significant shift away from the “leave full time school start full time work model” – in part linked to these changes. Most young people left at School Certificate level and sought a full time job sometimes linked with training (e.g. apprenticeships). Fewer students left at HSC level and again a high proportion of these were seeking to enter full time employment. A minority entered full-time post school education (TAFE/University) and then entered full-time work.”

Another participant, a community development professional, noted the great economic and social challenge in the region,

Participant: “I’ve worked in this sector for over ten years and unemployment is so profound particularly in the southern suburbs, inter-generational unemployment and all the associated issues like homelessness, poverty etc.”

Moderator: “So, given these real challenges what are your respective organisations doing to overcome such youth employment difficulties?”

One participant, a manufacturing manager, noted they had been quite pro-active in employing young people,

Participant: “We’ve put on apprentices every year for probably the last six or seven years. I mean, we’ve got seven or eight apprentices at the moment and we’ll put one on again next year.”

Another participant, who works in local government, noted the decline in entry positions for young people. They also discussed how their organisation tries to employ young people in a range of professional occupations,

Participant: “We offer trade apprenticeships, traineeships, and cadetships in a whole range of areas. We’ve found these are very successful.”

Another participant, involved in community development, discussed their approach in response to youth employment,

Participant: “Our model of dealing with the unemployment issue is evolving and we’re piloting an after-school program. We’re going to employ young people in after-school jobs for ten weeks so that we can work with them to get them job ready. In this period they will learn the importance of work and what that means in their lives.”

Other participants discussed what they understood to be attempts to address an existing problem rather than creating jobs. One participant, a training manager, noted the success of the various programs she administers in training for young people but admitted too many young people are being left behind,

Participant: “We’ve assisted many young people, and many of them have gone on to respectable careers but training only works if young people are ready to do it. Part of

the real difficulty in the region is overcoming so many of the personal and social difficulties young people have in their lives.”

Many participants at this point in the discussion spoke to express their views. Some noted the difficulties of employment based around a lack of jobs and the choice of jobs. Other participants noted the difficult choices young people have to make with some noting the individual failings of young people and the consequences some of them face. This was particularly strong in the views of an indigenous consultant, a member of a group that works with the employment of Aboriginal people. She discussed how her organisation assists government and employment service providers.

Participant: “The indigenous young people require specific interventions in their lives. It’s not as simple as just going to training and getting a job. There are real problems and difficulties both real and imagined that many young people face.”

Moderator: “Having discussed the youth labour market, has anyone had any experience where they’ve found young people rejecting work in favour of other jobs.”

One participant, in regional development, discussed some of the expectations of young people,

Participant: “I think some young people have high expectations. We've had opportunities where we've offered people jobs in some of the community-based organisations I worked with and people would say no to us in preference for other jobs. It’s sort of like, it's not good enough for them, you know. And I've wondered...”

Another participant, a local manager who assists young people into training and employment suggested organisations cannot set expectations but only young people.

Participant: “But isn't that then the role of organisations. I guess you call them career advisers. Isn't that their role to set their expectations, you know, what is expected for a role, that's expected of them? Isn't that their role?”

Another participant agreed in support of this view,

Participant: “Over the last couple of years, we've taken kids out of year 10 and not year 12 because the expectations aren't so high and we've found them to be a lot better fit in trades and apprenticeships. I think those extra couple of years at high school seems to raise their expectations so much higher now and they get a shock when the jobs they want aren't there.”

In these comments, there appears an argument to suggest that individual mobility is constrained by the opportunities available. There is also an argument of limited aspiration prescribed by structural constraints. The current approach, even when it's ‘education for business needs’ rather than ‘education for education's sake’, cannot avoid producing a lack of fit between the ideology or consciousness and the structural requirements.

7.4.3: Lack of Social Networks for Youth

A number of participants expressed vocal opinions, and even frustration, with the real difficulties they face in assisting young people. This was noted in the lack of support at the organisational level. This view was expressed by two participants,

Participant: “The lack of resources we have in our organisation, the funding problems, and the difficulty of tracking young people when they fall off the edge is a real problem.”

Moderator: “Could you elaborate on the difficulty of tracking young people?”

Participant: “So many young people leave school either in year 10, 11 or 12 and many just disappear. They are not engaged in the education, training or job search process”.

Another participant agreed with this view and its sentiments,

Participant: “I agree. And it’s really difficult in picking up where their last engagement was in the education, training or looking for work process. So even when we catch up with them, it’s difficult to work out the next step or the way forward. In the end, it’s just interventions because of problems rather than offering continuity.”

Moderator: “That’s a really important point. Across the youth studies literature, transitions are not clear for young people as they were say, thirty years ago.”

At this point in the discussion, the lack of social networks for young people emerged as another important theme that emerged in the focus group discussion. For some participants this is a crucial and salient factor in the employability of young people. When social networks, such as personal and social connections, are weak young people experience greater vulnerability. One participant, an economics consultant, made this clear in the discussion highlighting how a young person in the northern suburbs of Sydney has very different experiences and life choices compared to a young person growing up in the Illawarra region,

Participant: “If you're brought up in an area around Cringila (working class area south of Wollongong) and mum and dad have, you know, worked really hard to give you something in the area and those jobs go. Often, the social networks don't exist. There tends to be less mobility for people who come from those traditional areas and they stay there. They may not have permanent or secure employment but this is where their social life is more secure, their families or their communities.”

An additional factor in the discussion of social networks was the introduction of the concept of risk. A manager in a local training organisation explicitly linked the concept of risk to broader social networks,

Participant: “The lack of social networks in defining what the risk is. I think we need to refine and perhaps broaden what we understand as “success”. Historically in our

organisation, and in other organisations in which I have worked, success has been defined as getting this job or attaining that qualification. Whilst these are admiral goals in their own right, we have looked more to equipping young people with the qualifications, employability skills and personal qualities that enable them to make decisions and be successful in meeting their personal aspirations”

Moderator: Can you elaborate on how your organisation assists young people in coping with this lack of social networks and the associated risks?

Participant: “In Australia today we have more, better paid, high quality jobs than ever before in our history. What we need to understand is where the entry point is? I would suggest from various reports I have read over recent years that it is a combination of three things:

1. A certificate III qualification;
2. A good mix of the eight “Employability Skills” – those identified by industry as being key ingredients in today’s workforce. These are: team work, communication, planning and organising, problem solving, initiative and enterprise, self-management, managing your ongoing learning and utilising technology; and
3. A good set of personal qualities: honesty, integrity, reliability, etc.

My experience is that if you don’t attain these three things you can end up locked into lower paid less secure employment”.

Moderator: “These are very important factors for the employability of young people but you can see my point when social networks are weak. Participants were asked further what they thought were other contributory factors. One participant, a manager in the manufacturing industry elaborated further about the labour market.”

Participant: “Changes in the labour market almost inevitably exacerbate risk. The challenge for individuals and for families supporting young people and for intermediaries assisting young people is to understand what they need to do to best position themselves not to be impacted negatively by changes. In fact, to position yourself to be able to take advantage of the changes”.

Moderator: “So, how do your respective organisations assist young people do overcome some of these risks? What strategies do you have?”

One participant, a manager of a local training organisation, suggested that since the introduction of the independent employment advisor services in schools, there is greater support for young people, particularly making the transition from school to training and work,

Participant: “I think the independent employment advisor service is a great program and provides ongoing support of students “at risk” in years 9 – 11. In practice, we work mainly with Year 10 students with the main purpose being to link their current and future learning pathways with their post school job aspirations. The program doesn’t target those students who are disconnected from learning but those that have not necessarily made the link between what they are doing at school and what their post schools jobs might be”.

This participant also mentioned the role of part-time work in assisting young people.

Participant: “Part-time work is playing a substantially more important role in providing education and training (both structured and unstructured) in the transition of young people from school education to career focussed job. The retail industry (including fast food) is the major provider of these jobs.”

Another participant, a community development professional, suggested that social media can assist traditional networks of friends, family and peers for young people,

Participant: “Social media can assist those networks when young people need assistance. I know of a couple of young people who got jobs through social media that built upon their own connections with friends and personal networks”.

7.5: Focus Group Two: Young People’s Perspectives

The second focus group undertaken in this research centred on the perspectives of young people. Again, as chapter four noted, these young people were recruited by a local service provider and conducted in September 2012. The focus group discussed young people’s views on the assistance needed to overcome employment disadvantage. It also discussed questions concerning the transition from school to work and government and service provider assistance. It also discussed whether they would leave the region if they could not find work. This last issue is included in the next section of the findings with professional views of the future of the region. The first question of the focus group asked participants what they thought could be done in terms of assistance and help in overcoming employment disadvantage. Many participants were quiet and were not engaging in the discussion at this early stage and only three responded.

One participant for example suggested better awareness of courses was required,

Participant: “Short courses and traineeships to be brought to client’s attention more often. Groups could do a session on reaching and achieving goals”

Moderator: “Don’t service providers already do this quite regularly?”

A young woman aged 20,

Participant: “I don’t reckon enough. More support and information given out on a regular basis is needed.”

Moderator: “What do other participants think?”

A young man aged 18 suggested having a specific agency for youth employment,

Participant: “I reckon more youth friendly and a specific Job Network agency that helps young people.”

A young woman aged 24,

Participant: “More free access to develop skills. Business and job agencies need more of a connection/networking to achieve outcomes. E.g. more businesses taking employees on”

It appeared from the facial expressions of some participants that they didn’t feel comfortable in answering the question. The moderator therefore moved to the next question of the discussion guide.

7.5.1: Transition from School to Work

The second question of the focus group discussed young people’s transition from school to work. Participants discussed generally positive experiences with some participants noting the difficulties they’ve experienced.

Moderator: “Ok, what about the transition from school to work. How have you guys experienced this transition? What have been your experiences and stories? Have you been employed yet, have you lost your jobs?”

Participants offered a range of perspective after moderator prompting,

Participant: “I found it easy. I found year 10 was very focused on the transition from school to work.”

Participant: “School to training was an easier transition as it was similar to school. I didn’t feel school prepared me enough for working life.”

Participant: “Really great, I thought school helped me with the transition from school to work.”

Participant: “I found it easy to go from school to TAFE. Been looking for work over 14 months and just recently has two job interviews.”

Participant: “I found the transition from school easy. I found the transition from school to training easy as well.”

Moderator: “Ok, did anyone experience any difficult with the transition?”

Participant: “I did but it was really because I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do next. I guess it’s easy when you have no pressure to be up to date with everyone else.”

Another participant noted their difficult experiences with the transition from school to work,

Participant: “I found the transition extremely hard. I left school in year 11 and went straight to TAFE in hope of a more relevant education to what I wanted to do as a job.”

7.5.2: Government and Service Provider Assistance

The next section of the focus group asked participants who are responsible for assisting young people in finding employment. The over-whelming majority responded that the government is obligated to assist and help young people. The moderator provided a scenario of the Illawarra region’s youth employment situation and noted the difficulties in job creation as one of the main problems youth face. Participants agreed but noted the strong expectations on youth trying to find work.

Moderator: “Does that mean you have to look like you’re looking for work?”

Participant: “Of course, but it’s not real.

Moderator: “What do you mean, ‘not real’?”

Participant: “I look for jobs but in the end just fill out the forms because that’s what I have to do. It not really a system of employment.”

Moderator: “That’s fascinating. So, what is the system?”

Participant: “Absolute crap, they just put us through the hoops, there’s no work, and it looks good for the case managers and all the others” (service providers).

Moderator: “What about if the government just gave you a job (say cleaning or labouring) would you take it?”

Participant: “Of course, it’s better than filling out all the forms and shit”.

Another participants offered similar sentiments,

Participant: “Centrelink are completely useless in finding employment. I left the system because they weren’t happy with me studying instead of job seeking.”

Participant: “They didn’t offer much support they basically just say if you don’t get a job then you don’t get paid.”

Other participant’s referred to ‘the system’ with an indifference that suggested strong alienation and withdrawal is experienced by young people,

Participant: “Centrelink didn’t help me find work. The system was fairly easy to navigate but I found when I wanted to speak to someone face to face there wasn’t enough support. They didn’t blame me for my predicament, I just felt unsupported.”

Other participants noted, however, that while Centrelink were generally poor in its assistance for young people, service providers were generally much better and offered much more targeted help,

Participant: “Job Networks like MBC and Access Community Group are a good help and offer a lot of support.”

Participant: “I had really good help with Barnardo’s and Care South. They gave me heaps of help with stuff on jobs.”

Some participants noted other agencies that assisted well and were well connected to services that offered further assistance to young people,

Participant: “Teachers at TAFE were helpful. Youth connections helped with finding a job agency.”

Participant: “The only service I have used is Seek, My Career (websites) for jobs and the TAFE (website) for training.”

These participants’ insights are a product of the current employment system. At the program and policy level, employment is moderated by the tensions between government enforced obligations and young people’s personal responsibilities. The language of mutual obligation suggests that young people and the government each have obligations in regard to employment assistance and help. Some of these obligations involve the search for work by young people while the government is responsible in providing job search assistance. Participants were asked whether they thought that the government was responsible for assisting youth in finding employment and whether they thought any other individuals or organisations were also responsible. Participants overwhelmingly responded that the government was primarily responsible but also suggested organisations play an important role. One participant, a young man aged 19, had a negative experience of an employer who had hired him as an apprentice. However he was subsequently dismissed,

Participant: “I was hired as a 1st year apprentice locksmith in Unanderra which I was not taught anything while I was working there. I was fired because of lack of knowledge even though I received no training.”

Some participants accepted the expectations of government and service providers, which many of them fulfilled, but found employers had very unrealistic expectations that didn’t necessarily align with the training (or the expectations whilst receiving

benefits) they had experienced. More generally, young people's ideas of day to day work schedules contained conflicts between the processes of on the job training and productivity on the job.

Moderator: "One of the major problems identified by employers is the expectations of young people on the job. Some young people want higher pay that doesn't match skills or young people are 'seen' as too easy going and not willing to take risks in asking questions and 'seeking' opportunities."

Those participants who had worked or were working expressed strong emotions regarding work. They experienced uncertainty as to what employers thought of them, and sometimes were unable to communicate their ideas or concerns to employees.

Moderator: "What do you think of the expectations from some employers?"

Participant: "Challenging. My expectations of myself are high but sometimes I feel my employers expect even more from me, as they don't know me."

Alternatively, one participant had positive experiences from her employment experiences.

Participant: "I enjoyed work and felt the staff were very friendly and supportive and didn't have overwhelming expectations."

These contradictory expectations would merit significant inquiry in future research concerning youth employment and the relationship between the organisation/employer and individual/employee.

7.6: Perspectives on the Youth Employment Future

The final exercise in the focus groups was a joint forum/discussion with both professionals and youth. This was an exercise about the future of the region. Participants were asked to engage in a mind mapping exercise to think about how the region's employment prospects might change, and to imagine what the region will

like look in ten to twenty years' time. Participants were given butcher's paper and in groups of two (professional/youth) brainstormed about how the region will be shaped through the economy, labour market and the position of youth both now and into the future. This exercise was designed to not only stimulate participants' thinking about the region but to allow both professionals and youth the opportunity to shape and project possible future trajectories. In their various reporting, professionals and youth offered many interesting points of view that generally started from their own position but then moved to a wider perspective to take in what they thought the future might hold. Participants also started with contemporary problems and moved to solutions that provided appropriate responses to such problems. The moderator commenced the focus group discussion by again summarising some of the main points of the previous interviews. This gave participants a context to work with and to think about some of the main issues in the region. The moderator assisted each group as they deliberated their ideas. After each group had completed their ideas, they were given the opportunity to discuss their views. As they detailed their views, the moderator asked participants to note or fill any gaps that arose in the various discussions. The moderator also jotted down some of the most important points. Through the matrix of the economy, labour market and the position of youth both now and into the future, professionals presented a range of views.

Participant groups generally noted the economy as the first major issue in the Illawarra region that needed addressing. One professional focus group member argued,

Participant: "We're an economy with very substantial structural imbalances. If we lose some of the major industries, those structural imbalances will widen and there's no reason why the market thing will adjust to bring in new opportunities into a city that's going backwards, you know, which would mean lower incomes and higher social tension, poorer infrastructure etc."

Participant: "Yeah and that takes a long time to configure and structurally change the economy. I mean, it still looks it's been here for a long time and it's going to take a long time for it to eventually transition to something else. I guess the point here is

there hasn't really been appropriate policy, an appropriate policy framework for a very long time. There hasn't been an appropriate industry policy, you know, in the Illawarra to develop some form of steel manufacturing and coal manufacturing for the 21st century. We seem to be stuck in a rut or we're stuck in the past.”

Moderator: “That’s very important. What do other participants think?”

Participants: “The main issue for us looking into the future is what will replace the steelworks. What are going to be the industries that will replace it? We've got the university. That’s good. But what other industries will take its place or will it be emerging industries which may come about because of some whiz bang technology or something like that.”

Participant: “Ok, what we have is a region suffering a sort of economic hangover for a really long time. So much was promised but so little was delivered. It’s not just jobs but our city itself. Everything’s so run down, tired, out of date etc. Cities have to be enjoyable places to live especially for young people.”

Moderator: “Having one employer and nothing else in the region for so long was a one dimensional economy.”

Another participant group, with an education executive and young person, suggested the region had gone through massive changes with significant social dislocation and this was a huge price to pay,

Participant: “Yes, I agree. Crazy and now the region is paying the price. Look at all the poverty and people who are dislocated from not only services but everything in their lives, they are totally dysfunctional”.

Another focus group participant, focusing on indigenous issues, also commented passionately about some of the major difficulties in the region for Aboriginal people,

Participant: “Do you know what's happening now, in terms of employment for Aboriginal people? In excess of 50 per cent of the juvenile justice population is indigenous. How do you curtail that, in the first place? That means that the education system has to sit up and take a bit of a notice, they have to take a more hands on approach. How can you bring them into meaningful jobs? Jobs are needed that are going to give them a livelihood. Set them up as a role model in their future families. You know, have them turn the tables. These are some of the challenges you know.”

Moderator: “This is also a partial explanation for the increases in the health care and social assistance sectors of the local economy. While employing many local people, much of this assistance is servicing those people who are left behind socially.”

Participant: “Yes, I agree.”

Moderator: “Another important point here is that as the region transitions from industrial to post-industrial, we need to move with the transition. This is not only an economic expectation but going back to the social expectations etc. that certain jobs don't exist anymore. What do people think?”

Participant: “A lot of people (including young people) still think they will do the jobs their fathers did in the 1970's and 1980's. That is simply not realistic anymore.”

Moderator: “And now that we are making the transition, young people need the right information. It doesn't help that so many of the entry levels jobs that once existed are now gone but that's an Australia wide although disproportionately impacted the region more. This is an important aspect, a defining one if you like... This is directly linked to the economic problems in the region. What are the main issues here?”

Participant: “Like you said before [referring to the moderator] there are not enough jobs being created not only for youth but adults as well.”

Moderator: “What do other people think?”

Participant: “We had a long debate in the region when the crisis in the steel industry hit in the early 1980's. We had to re-train workers displaced from the steel industry and they would go and take courses and re-train for the hospitality industry or something. More broadly, the industries that were suggested as our future such as tourism have not been as successful as what people think. The conventional, conservative view if you like was our future was linked up with a great boom around tourism. The opportunity of tourism has been over exaggerated for 30 years, you know. So, the thing is if we could just get that five-star hotel, you could just fix up, the economy, we could just get those young people off the streets you know.”

Moderator: “Yes, I agree and so many young people had these expectations. What about more recently? Young people are predominantly employed in the service sector of the economy today and experience generally poor conditions and wages.

Another group of participants offered similar sentiments about the reasons the labour market is so weak,

Participant: “We think young people are receiving information that is inaccurate almost misleading and then blamed for their problems when they don't find the right jobs.”

A young person agreed and suggested that careers advisors, together with government and service providers, need to be realistic about the sorts of jobs available in the region.

Participant: “When I was at school the careers advisors gave me all these options and I thought great, I've got lots of jobs to choose from. After school, I began looking for work but found there was hardly anything in this area. And I'm still looking for work. If I cannot find work in Wollongong, I'm going to leave for Sydney or somewhere else for work.”

A number of young people offered similar views with some degree of frustration,

Participant: “I agree. Hopefully, I’ll find a job in the next year but I’m willing to leave the area for a good job.”

Participant: “Hopefully will get a job in the next couple of weeks after a good interview. If I had to leave town I would if I really had to.”

Others disagreed and stated they would stay with the hope they would find work,

Participant: “No, I wouldn’t leave the region but I hope that more jobs start opening up.”

Another participant, who was employed part-time, moved to the area recently and was positive about future job prospects,

Participant: “By doing more training I feel my employment prospects are higher. I moved to the region recently for training and work.”

Moderator: “Ok that’s interesting, let focus again on some of the barriers young people experience at the interface of the education, training and labour market.”

One participant, a manager of a local training organisation, suggested jobs and skills are still mismatched with significant disruption to young people’s aspirations and hopes,

Participant: “There’s no political will whatsoever, on either side of politics – the onus is on young people to find work. Now that we have gone through these massive changes we still have this belief we are still a ‘steel town’. The jobs that are being created while few are not matching the requirements of young people. Or vice versa, young people are training in areas where those sorts of jobs are not present or there is simply not enough to meet demand. I think the issue we have in the Illawarra can be more accurately described as a skills mismatch. The jobs that are being created are at a higher skill level than ever before and the onus on individuals to both understand this and take the necessary action is a key to where we need to be.”

Moderator: “What do other participants think about this, do you agree or disagree?”

One participant suggested much better alignment with economy and youth needs is required,

Participant: “I think that’s right as far as I’m concerned. The economic dimensions related to our growth. Some industries are growing pretty good we just need to align those emerging industries with occupations for young people and to the school base. That would help so much.”

Another participant, an education executive, said it was already happening but needed to be done even better,

Participant: “It’s being done much better these days, with government authorities sharing information and linking that information with education, schools, training and the workplace. I think some of the expectations of young people are unrealistic but I accept responsibility that authorities set many of these expectations”.

Moderator: “That’s an important point. What do the young participants think? Does that sound right?”

Participant: “Yes, like I said before with the careers advisors, you know.”

Moderator: “This a serious conundrum in the youth labour market because education and training organisations are offering courses to young people but those sorts of jobs are not available on the region. They therefore may move out”.

One young participant agreed with these sentiments,

Participant: “A couple of my mates have left the region because what they got trained in, there was no work in the region”.

Moderator: “Ok, let’s discuss the future of the region. What needs to be done to overcome these economic and labour market problems to address these very real social consequences for young people?”

Participants were eager to respond to this question with a number requesting to contribute to the discussion,

Participant: “I think my point is a good starting point. The future of the region cannot be made by empty slogans but with sober analysis. The analysis will be based around what are the things we're good at and that includes what our infrastructure, what's our existing industry base is, and what are the new opportunities that may come from diversifying an existing industry rather than diversifying from steel into tourism. You might go from steel into advance material”.

Moderator: “These are major factors for the future of the region, what do other participants think?”

One participant, a manager in a local training organisation, built upon previous comments discussed earlier in the focus group and suggested there have been significant changes in where the jobs are,

Participant: “Can I outline what I think where the jobs will be in the future?”

Moderator: “Yes, of course”.

Participant: “I think manufacturing is declining significantly but it still provides a lot of money for the region. Education such as the university and schools, health care and community services are all major employers and will continue to grow. Transport and logistics – a seemingly hidden industry, but one which is entrenched in all industries plus in the region’s port infrastructure – has great growth potential. The other industries that are declining include the public Service at both State and Federal levels have been in decline in the region for some years.”

Other participants noted that the original industries, that were supported in the region's restructure in the 1980s', will continue to play a role and become more prominent in the years ahead, but disliked the overall narrative,

Participant: "I don't like the overall framework of the industrial economy to the post-industrial economy. To me, that's actually a very weak framework and we have to think about it a little more carefully. That requires thinking about policies. We haven't had a policy framework at a national or state level for many years. I believe in manufacturing and in designing things, producing things or distributing things that we make is something where we have a competitive advantage. So, as an economy that's developed around the raw material input, you know, those manufacturing processes and those big manufacturing industries themselves particularly steel, as they get rationalized, they're not replaced by others. So, yes, that is fundamental to the future of the region".

Another participant suggested the region needs much more lateral and problem solving thinking and offered some insightful views,

Participant: "There's 17, 000 small businesses in the Greater Illawarra area. If every one of those businesses could put on just one person, unemployment would drop by 3 per cent overnight. If those mechanisms were put into place with government for each business just to employ one person. Of course, your larger businesses could employ more than one but that's what needs to be done".

Another participant noted there are still real difficulties in the region for youth employment,

Participant: "The economy of the region has performed relatively ok in certain sectors like health care and even mining has gone pretty well in recent years. We still need to build new economic activities and drivers for the future and particular for young people. Tourism is a good one but it's really suffering with the high Australian dollar."

Another participant noted the similarities of the Illawarra with Newcastle, a region that had gone through similar changes throughout the 1990's,

Participant: "I think the transition Newcastle made could be the model for this region. Newcastle had more options like a bigger coal sector, more tourism and a very significant wine industry. This region needs to keep expanding on its new industries like I.T, education services, health care, and the arts more generally. It then will have a real chance in overcoming so many of its difficulties with youth employment."

7.7: Summary

This chapter has discussed the views of professionals and youth concerning employment in the region. Professional understandings of neoliberalism positioned its ideology as one that liberates existing markets while young people were positioned as active and engaged in the labour market. These ideological positions informed many of their policy positions in regards to youth employment. The difficulty professionals experienced was what they understood by neoliberalism and how this was operationalized in their organisations. This became problematic when the ideology that they understood would lead to particular circumstances for youth had deleterious impacts when operationalized in their own organisation. The relationship of enabling choice and individualism and constraining the social consequences led many professionals to understand the region's labour market as characterised by various conundrums. These issues, however, were only briefly discussed in the interviews and later elaborated in the focus group discussions. The findings with young people indicate major employment disadvantages and significant service gaps by both government and service providers. Precarious work, a significant and emerging issue in the findings, was experienced by a majority of young people. This shaped their experiences of employment in different ways. Some youth thought these employment conditions were temporary rather than permanent fixtures of the labour market. Others, however, believed such conditions were embedded in the youth labour market and they would experience such conditions until they reached better conditions and pay. The next chapter discusses the

implications of this chapter in detail, linking hegemonic neoliberalism to the broader findings concerning youth employment in the Illawarra region.

CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

8.1: Introduction

The previous chapters presented the views of professionals and youth. These were drawn from face to face semi-structured interviews and focus groups conducted in the region. This chapter provides an analysis of the data presented in chapter six and seven and, in doing so, undertakes an examination of the implications of the findings. Overall, the chapter highlights the diverse meanings and understandings, held by both professionals and youth, concerning the youth employment experience. The chapter commences by assessing the youth employment experience from the perspective of professionals. The chapter then assesses the employment experiences of youth themselves and examines the nature and dimensions of precarious youth employment – one of the most important aspects of the contemporary youth labour market. This is followed by the conclusion.

8.2: Assessing the Youth Employment Experience

8.2.1: Professional Understandings of Neoliberalism

Professionals were generally aware of the ideological underpinnings of neoliberalism. They referred to both the role of individuals and collective conceptions of freedom in the data but placed individual freedom as the overarching social value of neoliberalism. This influenced the various ways in which professionals framed neoliberalism. In all discussions, the most fundamental aspect was the belief in a market economy that included the idea of free markets with minimal state intervention. The drive for competition and productivity formed an important part of these assumptions. Professional understandings of neoliberalism generally lacked consistency in their definitions, yet aroused intense and strong discussion with the interviewer. Professionals were generally sympathetic to its goals and did not necessarily view its conceptions and understandings as negative. Participants saw its terminology, that the market was ‘normalised’, in this sense, a popular morality in order to position the economy as a hegemonic formation. Professionals generally positioned the current neoliberal paradigm as consisting of

positive assumptions about how markets operate; in this sense, often seen as closely related to neoclassical theory (Boas and Gans-Morse 2009).

Some participants saw neoliberalism in a critical sense, having reservations about some of its claims, such as greater efficiency and productivity. Many participants, however, positioned neoliberalism as a 'break through' from the approaches of the past. In this sense, they positioned its ideology as new and modern, and results oriented. Neoliberalism was, according to this rationale, viewed as progressive in a way likely to be embraced. They saw it as an ideology of great importance, a positive economic rationality that is the best way to organise society. While they did not see the concept sociologically, they positioned the economy at the centre of all the reforms of the last few decades. Indeed, they saw neoliberalism as a set of assumptions that make the Australian economy function effectively.

Understanding neoliberalism was conceptually difficult for many professionals. Many had difficulty in distinguishing between neoliberalism as an ideology or theory and neoliberalism as structures and practice. For example, a number of participants wondered if privatisation was part of the ideology or a neutral practice to get the processes of marketization going. Some thought it required both a set of ideologies and a set of practices to activate the process of neoliberalisation. Overall, professionals denoted neoliberalism as a set of economic reform policies to liberalise the economy. They were aware of the ways in which these economic reforms might be undertaken. Indeed, for some participants, deregulation, which reduces the role of the State in the economy, most notably via privatisation, was a common understanding of the benefits of neoliberalism.

This was associated with a range of policies such as the tightening of the money supply, surplus budgets and the retraction of government services and subsidies. In this sense, professionals characterized neoliberalism as a strategy aimed to develop not only the economy but the broader political and social environment. Many professionals noted the expectations they have in undertaking their particular business activities, and that their relationship to the economy and the State, had changed dramatically over the last few decades. This has impacted their own

organisations and the frameworks that shape and guide their organisations. For example, many professionals were required to be 'pro-active' in their organisations: to be active and engaged agents of change. This corresponds to the notion of 'entrepreneurialism' that characterises so much of the activity in both the public and private sector. Unsurprisingly, many professionals' attitudes towards youth followed this rationale. Within the boundaries of such arguments, professionals positioned youth as active agents capable of seeking out opportunities, but also noted that such ideologies can lead to unfortunate circumstances for youth, such as employment disadvantage. For some professionals, neoliberalism is worth the effort because, despite the social consequences, it mobilises youth towards being actively engaged within the system itself.

Professionals and youth are part of, and are the product of, this social-cultural hegemony. This is an important factor because professionals are just as much part of these processes as are youth. The differences lie, however, in the way that professionals seek to build and enhance their own position in their organisation to the benefit of themselves, their organisational objectives, and the various professional allies in their particular area of work. While this benefits the various networks in their socio-cultural world, it can sometimes leave youth out of these networks that professionals are part of, and possess the power to influence.

For some professionals this was a point of view that exposed problems because of the proposition that youth who fall through the cracks, either by individual choice (incompetence either real or perceived) or structural constraints (noncompliance either real or perceived), becoming either beneficiaries or missing out on opportunities offered in the labour market. The findings suggest that professionals had difficulty seeing how neoliberalism had social consequences for youth. This was apparent when probed about the ideology of neoliberalism purporting to embody choice while in practice there was little choice for youth in regional employment. In many respects, the ideology of choice as a well-intentioned social value of neoliberalism can sometimes be experienced by youth as monitoring and controlling their choices. Some professionals misunderstood such consequences, and many acknowledged youth have many choices yet were concerned that so many youth tend

to make the wrong choices. This is despite the right choices being present on many occasions for youth (as they saw and understood it). Professionals also discussed the way social networks and family background play an important role in the 'employability' of youth, suggesting these processes may play a crucial role in addressing some of the social consequences of neoliberalism.

The views of professionals included specific grievances concerning how restructuring, as a particular economic rationality, shaped their organisations and operating environments. In the first instance, professionals noted the need to drive regional development with the expansion of economic activity at all levels. This they argued was important to keep the economy diversifying. They were generally conservative in their arguments concerning how much restructuring was required because, as they understood it, too much change of a particular kind can lead to unfortunate social consequences such as putting youth at risk. This point was important because many argued that economic restructuring came at a significant cost to the community. Key government participants were generally sympathetic to the necessity to drive regional development within a broad neoliberal framework characterized by de-regulated markets. The importance of competition in markets was central in all discussions concerning youth employment.

According to participants, youth were regarded as active and capable agents who determined their own destiny in the system and by neoliberal ideology. Professionals generally credited neoliberalism with a liberating reform agenda and denoted its association with a set of economic reform policies that had been undertaken over the last two decades. More specifically, they positioned neoliberalism as principally an economic ideology rather than a political or social philosophy, even though many participants admitted there were social consequences associated with neoliberalism. Overall, professionals consistently positioned their understandings of neoliberalism in conjunction with its analytical framework. Professional understandings of the term were consistent with the ways in which neoliberalism is generally understood as an ideology and the various perspectives regarding it (Harvey 2005; Gamble 2006; Robison 2006; Rutherford and Davison 2012).

A greater appreciation of the issues surrounding youth employment arose in the focus group research undertaken with professionals. An interesting shift in the professional narrative of the findings was the way in which professionals became more sympathetic (in the focus groups compared to interviews) to youth needs after the moderator examined the many barriers youth face in the region. Many professionals, however, maintained their views on neoliberalism despite being able to see that some of the social consequences attached to it diverged from ideology in practice.

Professionals had mixed views concerning the many decades of restructuring the region has undertaken. At the same time, they noted it has been important to remain competitive and productive economically. Once given the time to explore and examine the region in a group setting, they acknowledged the importance of youth employment and began to see, in a general sense, the trajectory of neoliberalism and its social consequences. In this respect, they regarded a fourth generation of employment disadvantage in some families, particularly in the southern suburbs of the region, as unacceptable. They also felt that the region always experiences competitive disadvantages as a by-product of the constant restructuring, as they saw it, generally in the interests of the larger sections of capital. For many participants, the constant restructuring was a burden to their operations as they were constantly required to change and update their operations and organisational practices. This was a particularly strong view among those professionals associated with manufacturing in small to medium enterprises. While the last major steel industry restructure was as recent as 2011, many had experienced previous restructuring efforts throughout the 1980's and 1990's. In this respect, they were aware and prepared for such changes and were well networked and connectivity was well established between organisations and people. Finally, most participants expressed concern over the future of manufacturing in the Illawarra region. They discussed the difficulties already present in the region and the need to continue diversifying the economy to meet the challenges of the future.

8.2.2: Precarious Youth Employment

As a researcher who had completed earlier work on youth employment in the region, it struck me as surprising that many youth were generally engaged in the job search process and were confident in obtaining future employment. In findings from earlier research (see Stubbs 2000; Pomfret et al. 2008), youth were struggling to cope with their circumstances and were disempowered by being active job seekers. Much of this research had shaped many of my assumptions and beliefs about youth employment. The first, completed nearly a decade ago by Stubbs et al. (2000), explored how youth were concentrated in jobs that were generally low paid, part-time or casual rather than full-time, with poor access to education and training. It argued that economic growth alone would not address the needs of severely disadvantaged youth and that specific strategies were needed, including:

- strategies to intensively assist young and long-term unemployed people to get into the labour market;
- strategies to gain an equitable share of the jobs created;
- strategies, emphasising quality not quantity, that can move young people from the periphery of the labour market into ‘core’ jobs; and
- compassionate and supportive policies for those who will continue to be left behind in the increasingly competitive work force.

The second study, completed by Pomfret et al. (2008), further examined the region’s youth labour market, explaining the challenges facing young job seekers and the policy and program responses undertaken. It argued for a much better coordination of services for young people, one that takes into account the region’s employment disparities. While recognising the importance of economic growth coupled with high productivity, the study argued that this by itself was not enough. This must be supported by the continued growth of high-employment generating industries and

public expenditure in services that have a high public value (e.g. education, housing and welfare support).

The earlier research, completed over the 2000-2008 period, makes it possible to add a longitudinal aspect to the current research. The data from this various research can be positioned in a variety of contexts and scenarios that warrant analysis. Overall the findings from this thesis were unsurprising given the state of the labour market in the region. The findings of the interviews and focus groups presented in chapter six with youth were self-evident in many respects. There were, however, a number of important implications worth considering. The first was the way in which neoliberalism has shaped and informed youth employment experiences. The second was the way in which such ideologies shape forms of employment itself: in this case, precarious employment.

Consonant with neoliberal ideology was that youth had a strong positive orientation towards work, and many had substantial experience of employment. Many viewed work as necessary to fulfil human capacities and needs and often believed that they should work for their own wellbeing, as much as to contribute to society. Far from expressing any distinctive values of a 'dependency culture', participants shared many of the work values of the wider community. This translated uniformly with their experiences of employment disadvantage particularly with precarious employment. For many participants, these were frustrating experiences given the internalised motivations of choice and social mobility. Indeed, for many youth their labour market status defined their employment experiences. An equally important factor were the dominant expectations in their lives, whether those of parents, friends or service providers.

8.2.2.1: Experiences of Precariousness

Many youth experienced different forms of precariousness in their employment. Of those youth who were employed, or had been employed previously, very few experienced contract or permanent employment, with most experiencing casual or temporary employment. Overwhelmingly, these youth experienced less control over daily work schedules than their contract and permanent counterparts. This is self-

evident across the main industries of youth employment in the region, with service industries affording a good representation of such employment patterns (IRIS Research 2013b). Once employed, many youth, despite experiencing precariousness, tended to internalise the workplace as an important site of self-improvement and gratification. This was so despite some difficulties along the way. It was here that both the objective and subjective qualities of their employment were experienced. Youth employed in the child care and retail food industries, as well as other smaller businesses, all experienced some form of precariousness. The examples discussed in the previous chapter appear to vindicate this position. An interesting point here is that the precariousness experienced by youth is also experienced by adults in the same industries. The example of the young woman aged 21 years, who worked in the local bakery, highlighted in her remarks how hard and difficult it is working in a small business. By implication, she understood that the owners of the business, while friendly and good people to work for, were also under a lot of pressure in their working lives. These experiences (as she saw them) are discussed in a different way to youth, often seen as simply working hard when self-employment is just as precarious. These conditions, it seems, remain uncontested and unchallenged in their working lives.

Generally youth did not necessarily feel obliged to take any available jobs. This was despite participants choosing employment over unemployment. Youth accepted employment if it aligned to career choice rather than taking any job simply to overcome unemployment. These job choices were antithetical to neoliberal ideology as many youth made choices in terms of career direction rather than jobs in the market. For youth, there appeared an internalised notion of self-improvement; as they saw it taking a job was part of their own choices. These choices (as they saw it) were not part of neoliberal ideology. While many professionals held a strong adherence to neoliberal ideology, youth didn't necessarily accept it. Where professionals saw this as being picky, youth regarded it from the perspective of making the right decisions for their career. This suggests youth negotiate 'spaces of autonomy' and have 'subjectivities of work' in the choices they make.

Nevertheless, precarious employment remains influential in the structure of the youth labour market because many youth take jobs that will provide an income, experience and satisfaction.

For other youth, waiting for the ‘right job’ can be seen as ‘right or rational’ but may disadvantage them (according to professionals) in the future. For youth, this possible disadvantage is not a conscious aspect of their decision making processes in their respective job searches, applications and employment experiences. This highlights two interesting perspectives in neoliberal ideology. On the one hand, the market decides on which workers are replaceable either as natural or as a financial burden to greater efficiencies and productivity. On the other hand, the ideology of choice and flexibility allows greater subjective experiences for youth as a form of ethical value. Again, by implication this position can be stretched to its logical limits for youth can have many part-time jobs at the same time. This can be seen as a good and open market and there is no reason why a job as such should be defined arbitrarily and dogmatically as 40 hours, or including sick pay, or anything other than just what is needed by a particular moment of capital.

In this respect, professionals have accepted neoliberalism’s economic ideology more dogmatically than youth (‘youth should accept any job’) rather than seeing ‘horizons of opportunity’ as embedded in neoliberal notions of choice and flexibility. Other youth, however, accepted neoliberal ideology and took any job. Some youth were less willing to challenge parents, friends (peer pressure) and service providers. This illustrates that processes of hegemony are operating successfully in some youths’ lives. This also suggests the sheer diversity of youth and the lack of homogeneity in their lives. It illustrates the complexity of the choices in their intentions of ‘self-betterment’ that are central to social mobility amongst youth.

Youth were generally aware of the poor labour market conditions in the region. They sought, as part of their choice in the labour market, to look for work in Sydney. This shows the prevalence of the individualistic notion that we are all ‘captains of our own destiny’ – a notion that predates neoliberalism but is fundamental to it. While a way of coming to terms with the limitations of present jobs, it is also a practice that

is likely to result in the disappointment of unrealistic expectations. Many youth believed as an article of faith that the right job would emerge in the future. It seems that youth take ownership of their job, once they have one, because of the internalised notion that they will eventually get a better job. They accept different forms of precarious work, such as casual and temporary employment, as a matter of course. This is despite the difference on whether it is part of a move to something better or an acceptance of a lifelong 'treading water' to get the 'right job'. Many youth sensed the feeling of going nowhere in their employment. For some participants the experience of high quality education, such as university and doing a degree, developed a disconnection between education and work. Some participants saw a combination of study and poor quality jobs as simply a phase in life. It highlights the importance of education to provide a 'stepping stone' to better jobs in the future, and to justify poor jobs in the present.

Youth compete in labour markets that offer a complex mix of opportunities and expectations. Their expectations around work lead youth to either internalising disappointment that conditions that are exploitative. For many youth there appears a subjective quality associated with precarious work. By implication, precarious work can be seen as being typically 'youthful', as an expression of agency that is illustrated by the motivation to work in changing and unpredictable situations. However, there are limitations imposed on such agency leading to negative experiences. As a result youth question why work is disappointing when structural factors appear to generate a wide range of choices and opportunities. In this respect, youth understood managerial strategies of flexibility and choice and overwhelming accepted such ideologies as a necessary precondition of the structure of their employment. Youth, however, were less certain of how such practices impacted on them. Youth enjoyed working when they wanted to as part of life choice expectations but often were disappointed when flexibility was used to either limit their choices or place flexibility in the hands of their employers. This meant for many youth to have expectations that were unrealistic. Indeed, it is now clear that both employers and employees had unrealistic expectations. This stemmed from their advocacy of how (as they saw it) the nature of work should operate (in their own interest and to benefit them).

The fragmentation of 'regular time' for youth appears a strong factor in many participants lives. While this was accepted unconditionally by many, the sense of looking for work or being at work was generally experienced in a 'non-standard employment structure'. These add significant challenges for youth to spend time with family and friends or the pursuit of individual interests. Youth appeared to enjoy employment in the evening and outside of normal hours (9am-5pm), both during the working week and on weekends, but expected free time during the week for leisure activities. This was problematic for many participants especially those engaged in education and other training. Education schedules tend to be structured on standard employment days (Monday-Friday) and times (9am-5pm) with some exceptions where evening classes were held. For many participants, this encroached on free time. By implication, two contradictory factors emerge. Youth who are studying have little time for employment during the Monday-Friday working week while those students working have limited capacity (time) to engage in education and training pursuits because of irregular employment patterns. However, despite these challenging schedules, youth either displayed resilience in being able to pursue education and training or managed to have adequate 'time-off' from studying and attending work commitments. The findings here suggest that there are 'spaces of autonomy' for students and workers (and those combining both) for free time. This free time however is constrained by fragmented working schedules that, in turn, result from fragmented standard employment structures. Those youth, who are outside of the labour force (or education and training) altogether, face an increasingly precarious life in attempting to engage these avenues while trying to overcome a lack of jobs or personal difficulties. In their case insecure work is seen not as abnormal, but rather accepted.

8.2.2.2: Consequences of Precariousness

Precarious employment leads to high levels of vulnerability, and for many youth, negative experiences in the labour market. These impact not only on themselves but their broader families, friends and communities. Despite the ideology of choice and flexibility that is central to the neoliberal era, the existence of precarious employment has fostered a labour market that does not allow for social mobility. This places pressures on youth to negotiate pathways for self-improvement despite a lack of

opportunity either to move into standard employment conditions or make better career choices. Despite embracing neoliberal values of ‘choice’ and ‘flexibility’, youth had limited ability to follow their interests due to a lack of income, with many youth struggling to survive. The consequences of these conditions are evident throughout the developing and developed world, with youth expressing their discontent on the streets of Greece, France and the U.K. In Australia, this has been less pronounced but the evidence is mounting throughout areas of Australia that when youth experience disconnection from the benefits of work, the social consequences are dire. The recent report produced by the Brotherhood of St. Lawrence (2014) argues clearly that the level of unemployment (and therefore precariousness) amongst youth is growing and becoming more pronounced as economic conditions worsen and many youth no longer seek to participate in the labour market.

The growing levels of precariousness experienced by youth has created high levels of anxiety and insecurity, leading to, a lack of confidence in the value of remaining engaged in the labour market. As Guy Standing argues,

“A labour market based on precarious labour produces high transaction costs for those on the margins. These costs include the time it takes to apply for benefits if they become unemployed, the lack of income in that period, the time and costs associated with searching for jobs, the time and cost in learning new labour routines, and the time and cost involved in adjusting activities outside jobs to accommodate the demands of new temporary jobs” (Standing 2011:48)

More broadly, precarious work has created a sense of insecurity and fear for youth that has led, and continues to lead, to social stratification and inequality that the regulation of employment conditions would improve. The importance of youths’ welfare depends on a predictable labour market, one that is regulated in the interests of youth in conjunction with employers, unions and the State, not one marked by high levels of precariousness. Further, these regulations are essential for youth to overcome the issues raised in this research. Precarious employment limits the

capacity of youth to remain engaged in the labour market and to make the choices required for individual and social mobility. As a consequence a wide range of issues are experienced by youth that impede their individual and social progress. One of the most important of these is the inability for youth to be able to develop their future plans such as obtaining a bank loan or starting a family because their employment is temporary or casual.

Youth have complex lives because of the very fragmented schedules they have (either by the choices they make and/or the constraints around them) and have little control as to the types of employment they can choose in the labour market. Many youth interviewed sought more hours of work, but did not have a sufficient degree of choice to be able to engage in full-time employment, because only part-time employment was available. They experience the limited work structures of actually-existing neoliberalism for youth through the 'choice' values and ideology of neoliberalism, which they continue to hold.

8.3: Concluding Discussion

When I set out to undertake this research, I expected youth to have less chance in achieving their particular ambitions and goals. This was a perception from the previous research undertaken on youth employment in regional Australia. I thought that youth would be less optimistic about the future and their job prospects. While there were significant differences in class and socio-economic background amongst youth, the sense of upward mobility, together with the sense of achieving their own personal goals was a deeply held belief. This corresponds to the individualistic ideology of neoliberalism. Youth strongly held the belief that if they worked and tried harder they would eventually achieve anything they wanted. This was a strong view across the cohort of youth interviewed. While youth were part of neoliberalism, and the structures and processes attached to it, they still queried and even challenged the expectations and perspectives of employers, parents and service providers. Neoliberalism, which has been argued here to be the most pervasive of hegemonic ideologies, shaped and moulded their experiences of the labour market despite the challenges and difficulties present. For youth, these ideologies formed the lenses they saw through and that structured their experiences.

This is a salient point. In this research, youth were not necessarily overwhelmed with structural barriers as they saw it, or were consciously aware of, but were rather concerned with how they would change themselves to be job ready. This I believe is not an example of false consciousness or passivity but rather the belief in the value of hard work and resilience that is expected, as part of, and in consequence of, neoliberalism.

Further, because of the differences in expectations amongst youth, they were subtle variations in their understandings of employment that led to a range of views that shaped their experiences. This was a strong factor for youth and their geographical locality. For some youth, growing up in the southern suburbs as opposed to more affluent parts of the region shaped their employment experiences. For many of these youth, there seemed to be a strong internalisation of individual empowerment as a form of overcoming their class status. Again, consonant with neoliberal ideology, the belief that anyone can ‘make it’ was a very important finding. Indeed, using the theory of hegemony, and its emphasis on consensus and coercion, the findings indicate youth can enact their own capacities and strengths, some better than others, to both conform and challenge hegemonic neoliberalism.

The ideology of individual choice and personal responsibility, consonant with prevailing neoliberal norms, are experienced in the employment attitudes of youth. There is nothing out of the ordinary about the experiences reported in this thesis. Their very familiarity is precisely the point. Youth in the Illawarra region seek and accept precarious forms of employment as a matter of course. Yet, the notion of precariousness remains elusive to them: this type of employment is accepted as a normal condition of life, preferable to unemployment. The ideology of individual choice and responsibility disguises the poor quality of employment for youth. In circumstances where ‘...the virtues of free trade, flexible labour and active individualism [have] become so commonplace in contemporary politics...that they hardly even warrant a comment in many quarters’ (Peck and Tickell 2002: 381), it is hard for youth to imagine any alternative but the ongoing individual search for the better job or stepping stone to greater security.

This raises a number of important aspects of the research that explicitly links the theoretical framework and methodology. From the findings it is clear that youth don't necessarily conform to the expectations of hegemonic neoliberalism but they are shaped by it. The ideology of choice informs their consciousness leading them to believe they can achieve better than being unemployed. For many youth, once employed the ideology of neoliberalism suggests further social mobility in the labour market to better paid positions and purposeful career aspirations. This argument suggests the choices they make as individuals play a large role in their employment prospects. For youth, the processes of negotiation are never separate from the structural economic and social cultural world in which they live. The role of the employers and the system that supports youth frames their experiences. The operation of neoliberalism occurs, as chapter two argued, when the intellectual and moral foundations for the successful operation of hegemony occur. Youth's transitions across the life course including their labour market experiences are developed by the successful operation of these ideologies and practices. The processes of negotiation undertaken by youth both successfully enable and constrain their choices and hopes. While youth struggle under structures and processes such as the labour market they can also see the possibilities of their choices despite the lack of opportunity offered structurally. Many of these contradictory processes that youth highlighted in the interviews form part of the many difficulties they experience in the region.

This forms deeper meanings than simply their economic relations but their specific cultural and social understandings of the world around them. Youth are therefore constrained by the economic structures. Economic relations remain contested between capital and labour but cultural and social relations are configured in subordinate positions sometimes challenging neoliberal ideology, sometimes remaining subordinate. An important insight from the empirical data is that consent is not an immediate given among youth. In much of the findings, the filtering down of economic hegemony, of power from employers and the State, is contested by youth. Consent becomes political, a 'space' for youth to negotiate their own pathways and lives. While many youth have the power to decide their futures, many interviewed felt powerless. In these cases, consent was easily achieved, while the

process of coercion both enabled and constrained youth. The choices for youth relied on cultural understandings around them. Looking for employment is very much part of the dominant social-cultural order.

8.4: Summary

This chapter has discussed and analysed the findings of the research. As the chapter has shown, professionals had wide ranging views of neoliberalism. While professionals felt they understood neoliberalism and its impacts on the labour market, they were less certain about how it impacted youth. They were unclear whether its social consequences were an ideology to encourage ‘entrepreneurialism’ or as a factor that impinged on structural mobility for youth. For professionals, neoliberalism has shaped so much of their activity and organisational frameworks over the last few decades that they couldn’t see how other approaches could address the same existing problems. This is vindicated by the failures of past policy approaches in the region (whether well intentioned or not) to address youth employment disadvantage. The constant restructuring was a real concern and professionals found great difficulty adjusting to constant changes in their own operating environment. For youth, the notion of neoliberalism was less important although choice was important in the transitions youth make from education, training and work. Precarious employment is a major issue in the youth labour market and one that shapes much of the youth employment experience in the region. The next chapter concludes the thesis.

CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSIONS AND THE FUTURE

9.1: Introduction

In this thesis, I set out to understand neoliberalism as hegemonic, and argued that such ideologies are operating successfully in their own terms in the Australian context. This includes a youth labour market that, while functional for neoliberalism itself, is dysfunctional for a large proportion of youth. I sought to specify the nature of the local youth labour market that results from, and works within, hegemonic neoliberalism in the Illawarra's regional economy. The thesis posed a central research question to understand these dimensions: What are the challenges to youth employment in a neoliberal economy that operates successfully in its own terms? In order to explore this question a qualitative methodology was used that draws on youth employment experiences to understand how neoliberalism has impacted youth. I argued that much of youth employment from the international to the local is shaped by hegemonic neoliberalism, both as ideology/theory and as structures/policies. I sought to understand how neoliberalism is changing and operating both at the industrial and post-industrial level and focused on youth because they are one of the most disadvantaged groups in the Illawarra region with respect to employment. I examined this through a case study of the region to both highlight the importance of this region and to understand youth employment under neoliberalism. In this concluding chapter I start by reviewing the limitation of the study. I then consider the implications of the research in light of the findings presented in chapter eight. The chapter then discusses the future in respect to youth employment, before concluding the thesis with a range of policy proposals.

9.2: Limitations of the Study

While trying to develop robust theoretical approach and methodology, all research has some limitations and weaknesses, and even problems. I acknowledge some limitations in the present study. While I tried to ensure the research stayed within the purview of the theoretical and methodological framework, there were many possible avenues the research could have developed significantly. There were a number of possible trajectories.

Firstly, I acknowledge there could have been greater analysis of the gendered differences amongst youth or other structural factors associated with the region such as inequality. An interlinking theme would have been social class. Many of the views expressed by participants illustrated their own particular background and job expectations and what they hoped to achieve in the future. These areas will be important to pursue in further research.

A second important avenue of research would be to explore precarious work in much greater detail. I contributed to this research with the recent publication of an article in the *Economic and Labour Relations Review* in 2013. This is a key labour market issue now, and one which will continue into the future. Greater research is required to understand precarious work more specifically. How much of the labour market now experiences precarious employment? What are the experiences of precarious employment across the labour market, particularly in regional Australia? How can economic political and sociological theories enhance our understandings of the nature of contemporary precarious work? The findings of the research would be enhanced with comparative research looking at all these factors with regard to other regional centres across Australia and internationally.

Finally, an under-researched area is youth's perceptions of the future and their employment prospects. While the perceptions of youth presented here provide a valuable snapshot of employment disadvantage, longitudinal work would greatly enhance the understanding of the medium term trajectories of many youth as they negotiate the education, training and labour markets. The above research projects add urgency to the development of more appropriate youth policies which could improve their employment prospects at crucial times in their life course.

9.3: Implications of the Research and Further Study

My aim in writing this thesis was to explore neoliberalism and youth employment in a regional area of Australia undertaking major transformations of its economy. The choice of this region was primarily based on my connections to the region as a long-time resident. I also wrote this thesis and engaged in the research from a personal and intellectual passion to understand the plight of youth who are experiencing

significant employment disadvantage through the lenses of an engaged and critical sociologist. As the research has shown, much of youth employment (and the wider labour market) has been shaped by hegemonic neoliberalism. As chapters one to three discussed, Australia has experienced two decades of uninterrupted economic growth under the aegis of neoliberalism. In these chapters, I argued neoliberalism can be seen as operating successfully in its own terms, and that this differentiates it from its expressions found in other parts of both the developed and developing world. I posed the question as to why youth employment disadvantage is so profound when the rest of the economy remains generally buoyant with low inflation and unemployment.

A number of significant implications can be drawn from this research. This thesis has used the theory of hegemony to understand contemporary youth employment disadvantage. At the onset, greater research can highlight the experiences of other 'subaltern' groups internationally and in Australia to understand how such groups negotiate their life pathways. The added advantage of such proposals is that the theory of hegemony, as developed by Gramsci, has the sophistication to account for complex cultural and social systems. The approaches of critical economic geography, that examine spatiality and uneven economic development under neoliberalism, have added theoretical sophisticated understandings that provide fascinating insights into the restructuring undertaken in the neoliberal era (Massay 1995; Peck 1996; Harvey 2005; Jessop 2005). Combining this approach with Gramsci has the added advantage of understanding areas of both the developing and developed world that are experiencing political economic transformation under neoliberalism, as is the case with parts of the U.K., U.S.A and Europe. This approach can also open pathways for research into regional disparities and inequalities.

Focusing on the Illawarra region, more research is needed to ascertain the on-going local impacts of economic crisis. The thesis has pointed out a number of areas of research that can be undertaken in the future. First, political economic and sociological analysis is needed of regions undertaking restructuring projects under the aegis of neoliberal ideology. Second, regional studies are also important. For youth growing up and entering a regional labour market overshadowed by decades of

employment disadvantage, the broader individual and social impacts of such work is an important focus for a research agenda. This is to understand youth cultures and broader youth transitions in education, training and work. These perspectives can be enhanced by the theoretical approaches discussed above. The research also reinforced an understanding of the many pre-existing problems and difficulties present in the Illawarra region that have been discussed and analysed before in a number of studies (Stubbs 2000; Pomfet et al. 2008; Burrows 2010a; 2010b, 2011/2012, 2013). These problems are well known amongst local stakeholders and previous studies have highlighted the difficulties in implementing policies to address them. The research undertaken here has more particularly highlighted some of the insights and perspectives of professionals and youth that can inform appropriate policies to be implemented into the future.

9.4: The Future: Responses to Precarious Youth Employment

This research has illustrated a number of important issues pertaining to precarious youth employment that need attention for the future. A range of actions and approaches are required for youth to make better transitions from education and training, and from job to job. The first of these is to recognize the importance of ‘listening’ to youth and their needs. Given the social consequences of neoliberalism in the region, youth generally experience non-linear and fragmented education, training and employment pathways. Therefore a number of approaches need development to address such concerns:

- Policies are required that seek to engage youth in a way that promotes their empowerment. This is to ensure they are valued, listened to and involved in finding solutions to local challenges such as employment disadvantage and its associated social consequences: alienation, boredom, depression etc.

A major issue in the region is job creation particularly at the lower end of the labour market, for youth. Appropriate policies will include:

- A local economic strategy focused on emerging jobs, occupations in new markets and training and educational opportunities for youth (Benner 2002);

- The creation of entry level jobs to provide greater leverage to future job prospects and improve the pathways to employment; and
- The creation of a youth jobs agency, which will prepare students for work, act as a job brokerage for youth and create contacts between schools and businesses.

In response to precarious employment, youth require industrial conditions that are clear and transparent, preferably through collective bargaining. This would stem the prevalence of low waged work and develop smoother transitions into permanent jobs. The region also needs much better funded public employment services. This would not only regulate providers more effectively but build better expectations and trust amongst service providers and youth. These approaches, once implemented, could lead to better understandings of precarious employment. Therefore greater emphasis is needed in building these connections into the future by:

- Improving and strengthening local partnerships and connections with local Councils, business, unions, education and training providers, in conjunction with youth, teachers, case managers, parents, police etc.; and
- Developing policies that support youth at risk with a priority to engage and encourage youth to develop communication skills and self-esteem (Sharone 2014).

Currently there is no measurement of what happens to youth once they leave high school. There is a need to intervene to help youth no longer undertaking productive activity, youth who have given up. There is also a need to identify how schools can better prepare youth for work and to better understand youth's transition into the workforce in the region (Smith 2001; Smith and Neuwirth 2008). Therefore it is important to:

- Develop policies that track students from school, training and work to overcome youth falling off the radar of support services; and
- Strengthen the existing support for disadvantaged job seekers through improving amenities and services in community centres.

Overall, the region needs an over-arching economic strategy to overcome many of its employment disadvantages. Policies to address these concerns include:

- Developing partnerships with local industry, unions, education and training providers and the community to prepare a people-centred economic strategy for Wollongong. The focus would be on upgrading skills, supporting business start-ups, facilitating networks of firms in new growth industries (e.g. sustainability, creative industries, advanced technologies and manufacturing, knowledge spinoffs from university);
- Seek community engagement in establishing capital works priorities to revitalise the CBD, including attracting quality office space for business services, highlighting heritage and civic assets, a dynamic cultural life, improved amenities and infrastructure;
- Focus on strengthening town centre economies through strategic plans that encourage work and living opportunities close to public transport, including growing the home-based business sector;
- Identifying surplus employment lands that could be utilised to encourage investment in clean technologies in old industrial areas including cogeneration;
- Developing partnerships with business, employment service and education and training providers to undertake sophisticated economic and labour market planning;
- Encourage investment in affordable housing including social housing that is located to public transport hubs; and
- Greater emphasis on public transport to address geographical and spatial disadvantages.

These policies, once implemented, would assist youth significantly. They would help take pressure of education, training and job search requirements, while developing sustainable connections between communities in the Illawarra region (IRIS Research 2013b).

9.5: Summary

When undertaking this research, my intention and hope was that it would develop a greater appreciation of the factors associated with youth employment, informed by a focus on the role played by hegemonic neoliberalism. The continuing world economic crisis makes essential the understanding of youth employment experiences. In understanding these youth experiences, further research has the potential to broaden and enhance the old research with the new. Furthermore while the Illawarra region, and Australia more generally, experiences very significant youth employment disadvantage, the level of uncertainty experienced by youth within this remains unacceptable. Despite the rhetoric of Australia's miracle economy supported by sections of business, the media and politicians, a large proportion of youth have known little about the dignity of employment. Therefore, it is essential that appropriate policy responses, that are economically and socially responsible, are developed. These policies, developed in conjunction with youth, need to be sensitive to youth and their needs.

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APPENDIX A: DEFINITION AND LABOUR FORCE STATUS

Youth

When considering the employment position of youth in the labour market, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) considers youth in terms of unemployment levels and youth needs. However, as the needs and experiences within this broad age group can vary significantly, wherever appropriate, the data and experiences of teenagers (15-19 years) are separated from those of young adults (20-24 years).

Labour Force Status

There are a number of definitions used to define youth as a distinct group both in Australia and internationally. In Australia, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) defines youth as persons aged 15-24 years old as classified by unemployment levels and youth needs. When this group is broken down by unemployment levels and youth needs, the classification changes slightly as the needs and experiences of youth are different and indeed change periodically. Hence, when appropriate youth aged 15-19 years are separated from those who are 20-24 years (ABS 2007).

Internationally, the benchmark definition as set out by the United Nations (UN) refers to youth as the age group between 15 and 24 years. As with Australia, various countries employ different classifications but usually the definition begins at 15 years as set out by statutory school-leaving age policies and ends at 24 when a young person is then considered part of the broader adult labour market. The ABS defines the labour force as those people aged 15 and over who are either employed or actively seeking employment. The structure of the labour force, as defined by the ABS, is shown in Figure 1. According to the ABS definition used for both the Census and the monthly Labour Force Survey, there are specific criteria for those considered to be employed or unemployed. A person is considered employed if they are aged 15 and over and match the following criteria during the reference week:

1. Worked for one hour or more for pay, profit, commission or payment in kind, in a job or business or on a farm (comprising employees, employers and own account workers);
2. Worked for one hour or more without pay in a family business or on a farm (ie. contributing family workers); or
3. Were employees who had a job but were not at work and were:

away from work for less than four weeks up to the end of the reference week; or

away from work for more than four weeks up to the end of the reference week and received pay for some or all of the four week period to the end of the reference week; or

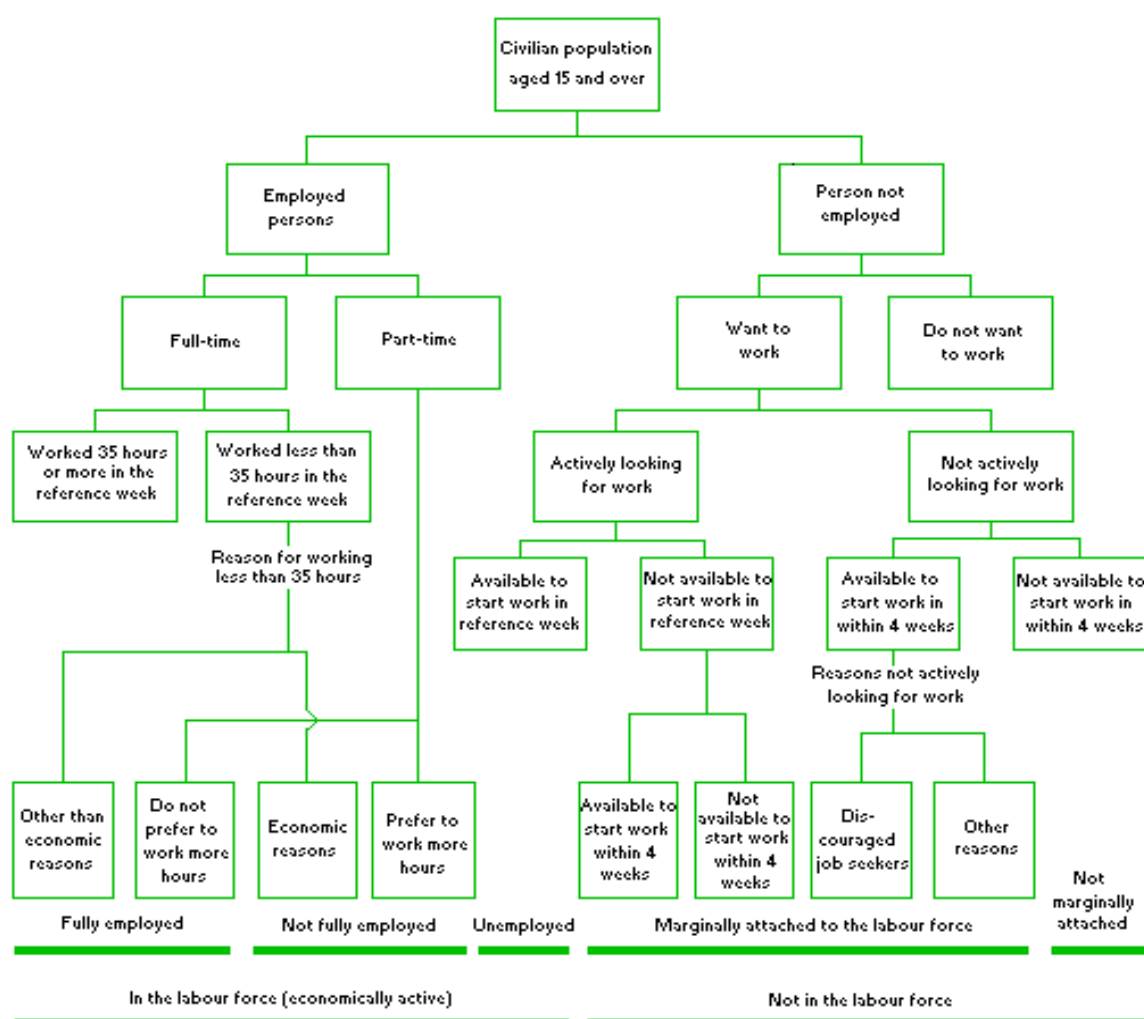
away from work as a standard work or shift arrangement; or

on strike or locked out; or

on workers' compensation and expected to return to their job; or

were employers or own account workers, who had a job, business or farm, but were not at work.

Structure of the Labour Force in Australia



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)

Importantly, people are considered unemployed if they match the following criteria:

1. Had actively looked for full-time or part-time work at any time in the four weeks up to the end of the reference week and;
2. Were available for work in the reference week; or
3. Were waiting to start a new job within four weeks from the end of the reference week, and could have started in the reference week had the job been available then.

Issues with Methodology and Youth

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) methodology has a number of limitations in its official definition of employment and unemployment for youth. Perhaps the most significant limitation relates to the fact that the youth labour force has fundamentally different needs and experiences when compared to the adult (25-64 years old) labour force. Youth are in a complex period of transition – at any given point in time they can be potentially studying, job searching, unemployed, travelling or simply taking time out for leisure. Rigid measures such as those used by the government cannot accurately reflect the transient situation of youth. For example, often youth try to combine study with the search for part-time, casual or, in some cases full-time work. Whilst these young adults are technically unemployed because they are searching for work, they also have a different capacity for work than most people not in study. Given their substantially different situation, it is perhaps unfair to compare their status with that of the adult labour force.

However, counterbalancing this, there are also two other definitional limitations that potentially artificially reduce official unemployment rates. Firstly, the official definition of employment is very broad, with those people obtaining just one hour of work considered to be employed. However, it may be the case that they were seeking more work than that which was available. So, whilst officially people in this situation are employed, because they desire more work they are actually underemployed. Secondly, the official definition of unemployment does not account for the phenomenon of ‘hidden unemployment’. For instance, many youth who have either been forced through lack of choice to stay in full-time education or who have given up on looking for work due to the disillusionment that comes with ongoing rejection are not considered part of the labour force and therefore not counted in the official unemployment statistics (ABS 2007; Pomfret et. al 2008: 3-5).

Further, measures of youth employment are complicated by the fact that in Australia today there is no clear-cut pathway from full-time student to full-time worker. Youth combine education and employment in all sorts of ways. Many teenage school students and a majority of full-time tertiary education students also have part-time jobs. Only a minority of teenagers look for full-time employment. One reason is that such jobs are scarce, particularly in the Illawarra region.

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET FOR PROFESSIONALS



University of Wollongong

PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET FOR *BUSINESSES*

TITLE:

Youth Employment in the Context of Hegemonic Neoliberalism: A Case Study of the Illawarra Region

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

This is an invitation to participate in a study conducted by researchers at the University of Wollongong. The purpose of the research is to investigate the employment experiences of youth in the Illawarra region. It is also to investigate the views of businesses, employers, education and training organisations, government and service providers, politicians and unions about youth employment.

INVESTIGATORS

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METHOD AND DEMANDS ON PARTICIPANTS

If you choose to be included, you will be asked to participate in a face-to-face interview with the researcher, Scott Burrows. This interview will be audio-taped for record keeping purposes. I alone will have access to this information. The interview will last between 30 minutes and one hour. Typical questions in the interview

include: What do you understand by neoliberalism? From your understanding, do you agree that industry and the labour market have been restructured? Can you explain how your operations have been restructured as part of the new neoliberal approach? What have been the social impacts particularly for youth as a consequence of this restructuring? Do you see your operations having a social impact on youth and more broadly affecting youth?

RISKS, INCONVENIENCES AND DISCOMFORTS

Apart from 30 minutes to 1 hour of your time for the interview, we can foresee no risks for you. Your involvement in the study is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation from the study at any time and withdraw any data that you have provided to that point. Refusal to participate in the study will not affect your relationship with the University of Wollongong.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH

Findings from the study will be published in a thesis, conference papers and journal articles. Confidentiality is assured, and you will not be identified in any part of the research.

ETHICS REVIEW AND COMPLAINTS

This study has been reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Social Science, Humanities and Behavioural Science) of the University of Wollongong. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the way this research has been conducted, you can contact the UOW Ethics Officer on (02) 4221 4457 or eves@uow.edu.au

Thank you for your interest in this study.



University of Wollongong

PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET FOR *EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROVIDERS*

TITLE:

Youth Employment in the Context of Hegemonic Neoliberalism: A Case Study of the Illawarra Region

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

This is an invitation to participate in a study conducted by researchers at the University of Wollongong. The purpose of the research is to investigate the employment experiences of youth in the Illawarra. It is also to investigate the views of businesses, employers, education and training organisations, government and service providers, politicians and unions about youth employment.

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Thank you for your interest in this study.



PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET FOR *EMPLOYERS*

TITLE:

Youth Employment in the Context of Hegemonic Neoliberalism: A Case Study of the Illawarra Region

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

This is an invitation to participate in a study conducted by researchers at the University of Wollongong. The purpose of the research is to investigate the employment experiences of youth in the Illawarra. It is also to investigate the views of businesses, employers, education and training organisations, government and service providers, politicians and unions about youth employment.

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of this restructuring? Do you see your operations having a social impact on youth and more broadly affecting youth?

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Apart from 30 minutes to 1 hour of your time for the interview, we can foresee no risks for you. Your involvement in the study is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation from the study at any time and withdraw any data that you have provided to that point. Refusal to participate in the study will not affect your relationship with the University of Wollongong.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH

Findings from the study will be published in a thesis, conference papers and journal articles. Confidentiality is assured, and you will not be identified in any part of the research.

ETHICS REVIEW AND COMPLAINTS

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Thank you for your interest in this study.



PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET FOR GOVERNMENT AND SERVICE PROVIDERS

TITLE:

Youth Employment in the Context of Hegemonic Neoliberalism: A Case Study of the Illawarra Region

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

This is an invitation to participate in a study conducted by researchers at the University of Wollongong. The purpose of the research is to investigate the employment experiences of youth in the Illawarra. It is also to investigate the views of businesses, employers, education and training organisations, government and service providers, politicians and unions about youth employment.

INVESTIGATORS

Dr Richard Howson

Phone: (02) 42214926

rhowson@uow.edu.au

Mr Scott Burrows

Phone: (02) 42213226

sdb03@uowmail.edu.au

METHOD AND DEMANDS ON PARTICIPANTS

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of this restructuring? Do you see your operations having a social impact on youth and more broadly affecting youth?

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University of Wollongong

PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET FOR *POLITICANS*

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University of Wollongong

PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET FOR *UNIONS*

TITLE:

Youth Employment in the Context of Hegemonic Neoliberalism: A Case Study of the Illawarra Region

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

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of this restructuring? Do you see your operations having a social impact on youth and more broadly affecting youth?

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APPENDIX C: PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET FOR YOUTH



University of Wollongong

PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET FOR *YOUTH*

TITLE:

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remain confidential and you will not be identified in any publications, unless you (explicitly) provide consent to have your name included.

RISKS, INCONVENIENCES AND DISCOMFORTS

Apart from 30 minutes to 1 hour of your time for the interview, we can foresee no risks for you. Your involvement in the study is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation from the study at any time and withdraw any data that you have provided to that point. Refusal to participate in the study will not affect your relationship with the University of Wollongong. If you are distressed, you can stop the interview and if you continue feeling distressed, you can contact the following counselling service providers:

Anglicare Counselling

Wollongong

Phone: (02) 4228 9612

Headspace Illawarra

Counselling Service

Wollongong

Phone: (02) 42207660

Salvation Army

Salvo Care Line

Wollongong

24-Hour Telephone Counselling

Phone: 1300 363 622

University of Wollongong

Counselling Service

Wollongong

Phone: 4221 3445

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APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM FOR PROFESSIONALS



University of Wollongong

CONSENT FORM FOR *BUSINESSES*

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF HEGEMONIC NEOLIBERALISM: A CASE STUDY OF THE ILLAWARRA REGION

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I have been advised of the potential risks and burdens associated with this research and have had an opportunity to ask *Scott Burrows* any questions I may have about the research and my participation.

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary, I am free to refuse to participate and I am free to withdraw from the research at any time. My refusal to participate or withdrawal of consent will not affect *my treatment in any way or my relationship with the University of Wollongong*.

If I have any enquiries about the research, I can contact Scott Burrows (02) 42213226 or Richard Howson (02) 42214926 or if I have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research is or has been conducted, I can contact the Ethics Officer, Human Research Ethics Committee, Office of Research, University of Wollongong on 4221 4457 or eves@uow.edu.au.

By signing below I am indicating my consent to

- *A 30 minute to 1 hour interview comprising open-ended questions where you freely discuss your reflections on youth employment in the Illawarra;*
- *Having your experiences recorded during the interview.*

I understand that the data collected from my participation will be used for thesis and conference and journal publication and I consent for it to be used in that manner.

Signed

Date

.....

...../...../.....

Name (please print)

.....



CONSENT FORM FOR *EDUCATION AND TRAINING ORGANISATIONS*

**YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF HEGEMONIC
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Date

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Name (please print)

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CONSENT FORM FOR EMPLOYERS

**YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF HEGEMONIC
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Signed

Date

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Name (please print)

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CONSENT FORM FOR GOVERNMENT AND SERVICE PROVIDERS

**YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF HEGEMONIC
NEOLIBERALISM: A CASE STUDY OF THE ILLAWARRA REGION**

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Date

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Name (please print)

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CONSENT FORM FOR *POLITICANS*

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NEOLIBERALISM: A CASE STUDY OF THE ILLAWARRA REGION**

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Signed

Date

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Name (please print)

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CONSENT FORM FOR *UNIONS*

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF HEGEMONIC NEOLIBERALISM: A CASE STUDY OF THE ILLAWARRA REGION

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- *A 30 minute to 1 hour interview comprising open-ended questions where you freely discuss your reflections on youth employment in the Illawarra;*

- *Having your experiences recorded during the interview.*

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Signed

Date

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Name (please print)

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APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM FOR YOUTH



University of Wollongong

CONSENT FORM FOR *YOUTH*

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF HEGEMONIC NEOLIBERALISM: A CASE STUDY OF THE ILLAWARRA REGION

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I am able to freely discuss my reflections concerning employment with:

- *A 30 minute to 1 hour interview comprising open-ended questions;*
- *Having your experiences recorded during the interview.*

I understand that the data collected from my participation will be used for thesis and conference and journal publication.

Signed

Date

.....

...../...../.....

Name (please print)

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PROFESSIONALS

Research Questions for Businesses, Employers, Education and Training Organisations, Government and Service Providers, Politicians and Unions

1. What do you understand by neoliberalism?

[Possible Prompts]

- *Is it about free and deregulated markets?*
- *Is it about privatisation?*
- *Is about individual choice and consumption?*
- *Is it about freedom from the incursion of the State?*
- *Is neoliberalism more about the individual than the collective?*
- *Is it something the government does?*
- *Is it an economic thing?*

2. From your understanding, do you agree that industry and the labour market have been ‘restructured’?

[Possible Prompts]

- *For example, from your perspective what were the main objectives (as you saw them) of the ‘restructure’? What conditions enabled ‘restructuring’?*

3. Can you explain how your operations have been ‘restructured’ as part of the new neoliberal approach?

[Possible Prompts]

- *The deregulation of industry and the drive to free up markets has become a dominant paradigm in policy making in all levels of government. Do you think that this has become embedded in your practices as a ...?*
- 4. What have been the social impacts particularly for youth as a consequence of this ‘restructuring’?**

[Possible Prompts]

- *How have these things affecting the region over the last 25 years? (Ask for examples)*
- 5. Do you see your operations having a social impact on youth and more broadly affecting youth?**

[Possible Prompts]

- *Do you think there are tensions between the motivations and objectives of youth, employers and the state when it comes to youth employment?*
- *Do you ever consider alternative options in the way you do business with youth?*
- *Do you ever consider that alternative policies might help the local youth labour market?*
- *What has been some of the social consequences for youth as you see it?*

APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR YOUTH

Research Questions for Youth

Background

1. What suburb are they from?
2. What income level are they from?

Education and Training

3. What level of education do they have? Did they complete year 10, year 12, TAFE, University etc?
4. Why did they leave high school, TAFE, University when they did?
5. How did they perform at high school, TAFE, University?
6. Was the reason because they wanted a job that required further education? Or was it because there weren't any of the jobs available that they wanted?

Job Availability

7. Were there any full time jobs available for someone of their skill level?
8. Were there any part time or casual jobs available for someone of their skill level?
9. Are they currently employed? Do they consider it a career job?

Previous Work Experience

10. Did they have a job while at high school?
11. Did they get a job immediately (within the next year) after leaving high school?

Current experiences in finding Employment

12. Are they currently unemployed?
13. How long have they been unemployed?
14. Were they undertaking any study while being unemployed?
15. What is their preferred career? Is it professional, trade etc.
16. Do they have the adequate skill and education to attain this career?
17. Are they committed to finding work? Do they want to find work?
18. Are there any other barriers to finding work?
19. How many job applications have they put in?
20. Were they shortlisted for any positions they applied for?
21. Were they successful in getting a job?
22. How long were they in the job (or still employed)?
23. What are their understandings and experiences of precarious employment (explain)?

APPENDIX H: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR PROFESSIONALS

Focus Group Research Questions

Research Questions for Professionals

Thank you for participating in this focus group. The purpose of this focus group is twofold. First, I like to understand how professionals understand, develop and/or implement approaches that generate employment for youth. This includes key challenges and obstacles as well as things that each organisation does well and could improve on in these processes. Second, I'd like to evaluate current policies with the intention to develop and improve existing approaches that would benefit youth.

Instructions:

Outline the findings from the interviews with the group. Commence the following questions with the intention of developing extended responses and group discussion.

1. What do you know about the Illawarra's youth employment situation?

Each participant to elaborate

2. Why do you think it is so high across the region?

Each participant to elaborate

3. What do you understand about the employment system overall, does it help youth?

Each participant to elaborate

4. How much help do you think youth need in finding work? Are they motivated to find work?

Each participant to elaborate

5. Given the poor state of the region's employment prospects, what are some of the risks youth experience and if relevant, how do you deal with them in your own operations? Or what would be your understanding?

Each participant to elaborate

6. What policies are you aware of or you have in place to navigate risk pertaining to the effects of economic reform, the labour market cycle, and youth?

Each participant to elaborate

7. Does neoliberalism exacerbate risks in regional labour markets?

Each participant to elaborate

8. Yes, it exacerbates risk by...No, what causes these risks...

Each participant to elaborate

9. If neoliberalism does dislocate social needs/goals, does individual choice/responsibility provide youth with the motivation/chance of finding work?

Each participant to elaborate

10. If neoliberalism gives greater choice for youth with greater opportunities, why does the region have such entrenched employment difficulties?

Each participant to elaborate

11. What policies does your organisation use to assist youth through the labour market, particularly as it relates to the risks youth experience?

Each participant to elaborate

12. Given the current state of the region and its employment prospects, what does the future hold for youth (various scenario's – map on board).

Each participant to elaborate

APPENDIX I: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUTH

Research Questions for Youth

Thank you for participating in this focus group. The purpose of this focus group is twofold. First, I like to understand how youth navigate the employment system and how relationships with professionals could be better developed and integrated. This includes shortfalls in service delivery, risks youth experience and attitudes of professionals. Second, I'd like to evaluate current policies with the intention to develop and improve existing approaches that would benefit youth. This includes how education and training could be better developed, integrated with the labour market, and how youth think they will fare in the future given the current state of the region and its employment profile.

Instructions:

Outline the findings from the interviews with the group. Commence the following questions with the intention of developing extended responses and group discussion.

1. Given the immense difficulty that many of you face finding work in the region, what can be done in terms of assistance and help?
2. Many of you have been at school, how did you find the transition from school to training, school to work etc.?
3. Generally speaking, how did you find Centrelink in helping you find work, how did you navigate the system when times were tough? Did they blame you for your predicament? Give examples.
4. How did you find the services in the region, did they provide a satisfactory transition when looking for work, training and/or education?

5. How do see your future and your employment prospects? Will you leave the region in order to find work?