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# How far have transitions to adulthood changed in the last decade? Evidence from the United Kingdom Labour Force Survey

Ann Berrington
Juliet Stone
Jane Falkingham

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## ABSTRACT

Using data from the UK Labour Force Survey from 1998 and 2008, this paper investigates the magnitude of recent changes in the transitions to adulthood. Four life course dimensions are examined: leaving education and the transition to work; leaving the parental home; entry into partnership and becoming a parent. Gender differences in the nature and speed of transitions are highlighted. In addition, the paper highlights the need to take account of the heterogeneity of the young adult population in the UK in terms of international migration status and the way migration status can impact on transitions.

## KEYWORDS

Transitions to adulthood; life course; NEET; economic activity; leaving home; migration.

## EDITORIAL NOTE

Ann Berrington is Reader in Demography at the University of Southampton and a senior member of the ESRC Centre for Population Change research team. Juliet Stone is a research fellow at the ESRC Centre for Population Change, where she is working within the "Household dynamics and living arrangements across the life course" strand of research. Jane Falkingham is Professor of Demography and International Social Policy at the University of Southampton and Director of the ESRC Centre for Population Change. The Labour Force Survey is conducted by the Office for National Statistics and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. Access to the data is provided by the UK Data Archive.

Corresponding author: Juliet Stone, J.Stone@soton.ac.uk

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# HOW FAR HAVE TRANSITIONS TO ADULTHOOD CHANGED IN THE LAST DECADE? EVIDENCE FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM LABOUR FORCE SURVEY

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 How does this paper add to our existing knowledge?

It is generally accepted that the transition to adulthood is increasingly being postponed and becoming less standardized (Corijn and Klijzing 2001; Côté and Bynner 2008; Furlong and Cartmel 2007). What is less well known is the extent to which these trends have persisted through the last decade, and to what extent the changes are mediated by gender and country of birth. Furthermore, much previous research has tended to a) focus only on a single domain e.g. in terms of leaving home, or on labour force participation and b) take an unquestioning approach to the way in which statistics on young adults e.g. on unemployment or economic activity are presented.

In this paper we rectify this, firstly by producing new evidence as to the magnitude of changes in young people's circumstances over the past decade, differentiating these trends by gender, ethnicity and country of birth. Secondly, we show how young people often occupy multiple roles (e.g. as students or workers, or as partners and parents). Different insights into their circumstances are found depending on how different researchers prioritise each role. Thirdly, we demonstrate the importance of taking account of the changing composition of young adults in the UK, particularly in relation to past and current migration trends.

This paper does not purport to be a comprehensive literature review on the changing nature of transitions to adulthood, nor a complete empirical description, which would require the use of more than one dataset. The paper is, however, intended as an empirically robust background piece to inform thinking about how data on transitions to adulthood should be analyses. The analyses are based solely on cross-sectional data and we should be aware at the outset that such data are not able to capture the non-linearity of the transition process. Many transitions e.g. leaving home will occur more than once for many different reasons, e.g. completion of a higher education course or when a partnership fails. However, the need to distinguish patterns by age, gender and migration status means that large scale survey data are required, which are not currently available longitudinally in the UK. In the meantime, the UK Labour Force Survey provides the best opportunity for consistent comparisons over a significant time period.

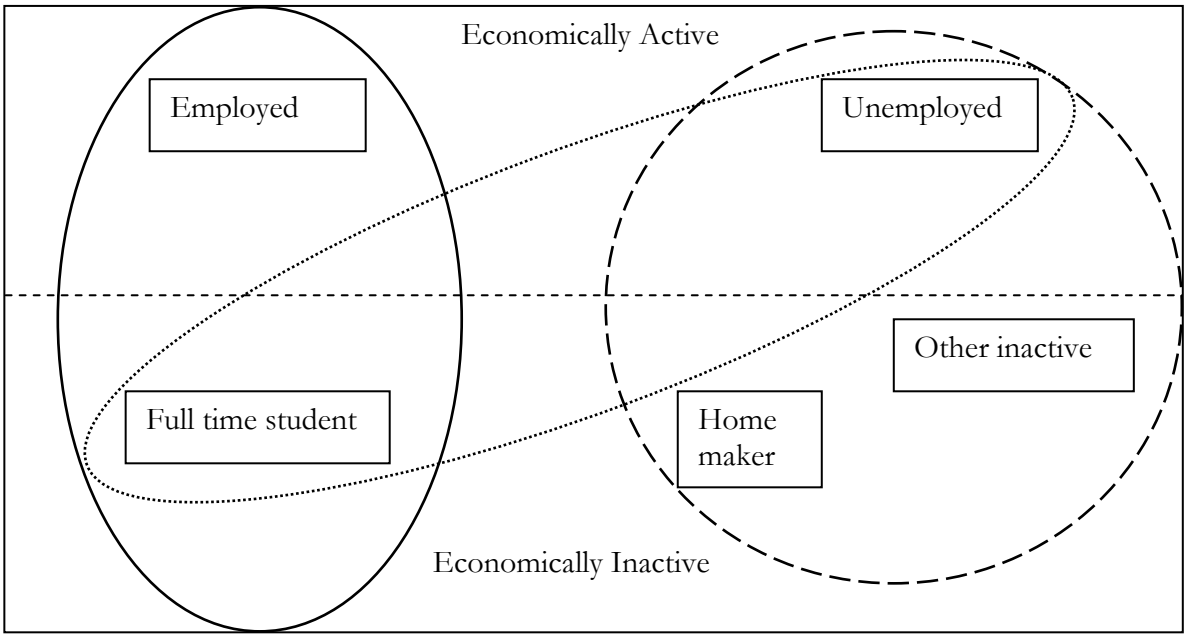
## 1.2 Conceptual framework

### 1.2.1. Young People in Education and Work: Multiple roles and multiple viewpoints

The past decades have witnessed significant changes in the nature of the British labour market with important implications for youth. These include the shift from manufacturing to a service economy, the decline in influence of the trade unions, the feminisation of skills and the decreased demand for unskilled workers (see for example: Bell and Blanchflower 2010; Nickell 2001; Schmelzer 2008). Much research has documented the more precarious nature of youth employment, with those with the lowest qualifications being more likely to be engaged in irregular, lower paid jobs with a significant risk of unemployment (Schmelzer 2008). Furlong and Cartmel (2007) comment that "*In these new contexts, labour market histories can sometimes be characterized by a constant, individualized, 'churn' between different forms of insecure employment*" (p.35). Whilst this is true, the following analysis demonstrates how the level of unemployment and insecure employment suggested by the headline statistics may be a little misleading. Young people, more than their older peers, are likely to be occupying more than one role. Indeed Government policies such as the New Deal, introduced in 1998, actively encourage those unemployed to return to education or to undertake subsidized work schemes. Figure 1 schematically presents the potential overlapping roles young people may occupy. Many full time students are also employed (solid-outline circle on the left), usually on a part time basis and many more may be seeking work and hence are unemployed (the central dotted-outline eclipse). Those who are economically inactive may be looking after children and other family members and hence not necessarily available for paid work. Different impressions e.g. concerning the level of "youth" unemployment will be gained according to a) which age group is examined and b) which populations are included in the numerator and denominator of the rate. Headline statistics on youth unemployment e.g. 'a million jobless aged between 16 and 24 ' (Channel 4 News, 16th December 2009 based on ONS (2009a)) often include full time students who are looking for work. Similarly, indicators of labour market uncertainty which not only include unemployment but also part time work and those on temporary contracts also include full time students in the analysis.

Recently, attention has focused on young adults not in education, employment or training – so called "NEETS". These individuals are represented by the dashed-outline circle to the right of in Figure 1. Sometimes part-time students are excluded from the NEET population but this is not consistent. Furthermore, it has been suggested that this classification may be unhelpful in that it focuses support away from young adults who are in insecure, low quality jobs (Furlong 2006). We would add that it also ignores the gender differences in reasons for inactivity. Young parents may perceive of themselves as homemakers foremost and hence labelling such individuals in this way is perhaps unhelpful. Below we explore these issues using Labour Force Survey data from 1998 and 2008.

**Figure 1: Multiple Economic and Educational Roles Occupied By Young Adults**




### 1.2.2 Young people's domestic transitions

The living arrangements of young adults encapsulate the three key dimensions of the transition to adulthood: 1. Independent living, 2. Partnership formation and 3. Parenthood. Independent living is defined as no longer living in the parental home. Immediately we are faced with a question as to how we should define the parental home. An increasing proportion of young adults in Britain are likely to have relationships with parents living at two separate addresses. For the subsequent analyses "parental home"

includes step, adoptive, and foster-parents but not parents-in-law. Those living independently of the parental home can be living alone, in a couple or sharing with others. They may or may not have children. Partnerships are defined in terms of co-residence. We identify those who are living as a married or cohabiting couple. Same-sex couples are defined as cohabitees, unless they are civil partners, in which case they are defined as married. Although it would be interesting to study these two groups independently, unfortunately the small numbers preclude such analyses in this quantitative context. We define parenthood by individuals being resident with their own children. Step-children and foster-children are included in this definition. As such, it could be argued that one disadvantage of this framework is that it fails to identify young adults who are parents but are not living with their child(ren) on a day-to-day basis, even if taking an active role in their upbringing.

**Figure 2: Dimensions of the transition to adulthood in relation to living arrangements in young adults**

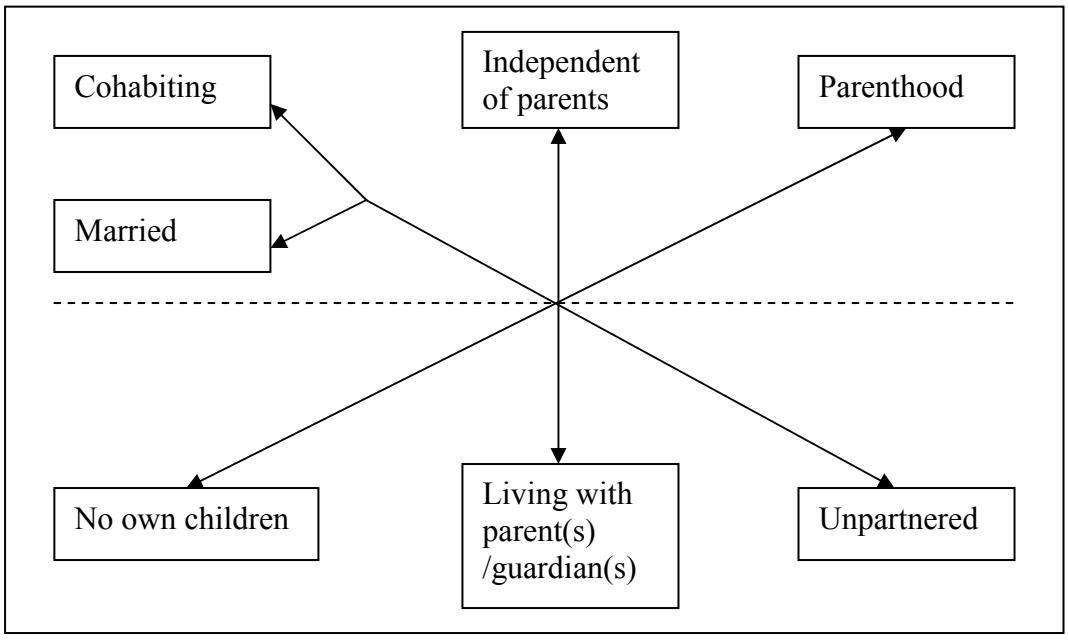



Figure 2 shows these different dimensions, with those having made a transition represented as having moved above the dotted line. It is important to chart empirically the extent to which these transitions are being made, and the extent to which they are being postponed. But it is also important to chart the extent to which these transitions are being made in sequence. For example, partnership formation may or may not precede

parenthood. The changing timing and sequencing of these transitions is likely to vary over time, between genders, ethnic groups and so forth.

First we examine, using data from the last decade, the extent to which young people's lives have continued to become more uncertain in terms of labour market participation, or enriched by higher education. Next we examine the changing patterns of residential independence, partnership formation and entry into parenthood. Finally, we investigate the impact of past and current international migration on the composition and characteristics of the young adult population.

# 2. Data and Methods

## 2.1 The UK Labour Force Survey

Analyses were carried out using the quarterly UK Labour Force Survey (LFS) household datasets for September-November 1998 and October-December 2008. The LFS comprises a nationally representative sample of households living at private addresses in the UK. It also includes National Health Service (NHS) hospital accommodation – primarily used by nurses - but excludes communal establishments such as halls of residence[1], prisons and hostels.

## 2.2 The Sample

The analyses are based on responses from 16,777 men and 18,032 women aged 16-34 years in 1998 and 11,815 men and 12,853 women in the same age group in 2008. Consistent definitions and questionnaire content means that we can derive the same variables from the two surveys. All the analyses are weighted to adjust for differential non-response and to make the sample representative of the UK household population.

## 2.3 Definitions

Educational attainment is based on respondents' (self-reported) highest qualification. This is classified using five categories: Degree or equivalent, 'A' levels or equivalent (such

[1] Although, since 1996, the LFS has included a question asking whether any household members are currently living in halls of residence, information relating to these individuals tends to be based on arguably unreliable 'proxy' responses. Given that these cases represent less then 1% of our target age group, they are excluded from the sample for the purposes of the present analysis. As a result, for one particular age group (18-19 years), the LFS will underestimate proportions living away from the parental home in university accommodation.

as HND), GCSEs grades A-C or equivalent, other qualifications and no qualifications. The 'other category' is partly comprised of GCSEs below grade C or CSEs below grade 1 but also includes foreign and undefined qualifications. National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) i.e. work based awards achieved through assessment and training are not formally defined in terms of equivalence to conventional academic qualifications. However, for the purposes of analysis NVQ1 is assumed to be equivalent to three to four GCSEs at grades D-E , NVQ2 = five GCSEs at grades A-C; NVQ 3 = two or more A levels, NVQ 4 = first degree, nursing or teaching qualification, HND.

Labour market uncertainty is operationalised using indicators of economic insecurity and unstable employment relations (Mills et al. 2005). This is closely related to globalization. Specifically, unemployment, a non-permanent employment contract and part-time employment are all taken to be indicators of uncertainty. These are incorporated into a detailed economic activity measure: 1. Full-time, permanent employment, 2. Other employment, 3. Unemployed, 4. Student, 5. Other Inactive. The categories are further disaggregated for women, among whom part-time employment is more common than in men and is often related to childcare responsibilities rather than economic instability. In addition, a substantial proportion of women who are economically inactive will be so due to looking after the home and family, with their economic inactivity more likely to be a result of choice than constraint. To take these circumstances into account, an additional two categories (italicised below) are added to the measure: 1. Full-time, permanent employment, 2. *Part-time, permanent employment*, 3. Other employment, 4. Unemployed, 5. Student, *6. Looking after home/family* and 7. Other inactive.

As discussed above, increasingly, young adults may occupy more than one role. For example, full time students may also be working part-time to help fund their studies. Often quantitative analyses simplify these multiple roles and assign a priority activity. For our purposes we have identified young people as being a student if they report themselves to be full time students irrespective of whatever else (e.g. paid employment) they are doing. Those who are economically inactive do not include students. Hence our estimates, e.g. of the numbers employed on temporary contracts will refer to the non-student employed population and hence we will estimate a lower prevalence of such contracts than say Barham et al. (2009).

# 3. Results

## 3.1 The expansion of higher education

The absolute number of full-time undergraduate students in the UK tripled between 1970/71 and 2006/07 (414,000 to 1,269,000), with females now outnumbering male undergraduates (Office for National Statistics 2009). These trends are reflected in the increasing educational attainment levels of more recent cohorts of young adults within the LFS (Table 1). Among those aged 30-34 in 1998 (who were aged 20 in the mid to late 1980s) 27% of men and 25% of women reported a higher level qualification. In 2008, among those in their early thirties (who were aged 20 in the mid to late 1990s), a higher proportion of the population have degree level qualifications, with the figure being now higher for women (43%) than for men (39%). Of particular interest is the gender difference in the changes over the past decade. For men, the proportion with GCSE or below level qualifications has remained fairly constant over the past decade, whilst the attainment of higher level qualifications appears to have replaced A level and equivalent qualifications (which will include some of the more advanced vocational qualifications such as NVQ3 in trades such as plumbing or electrical installation). Amongst women however, the change has been different, with an upwards shift in educational attainment such that the increase in higher level qualifications has been accompanied by declines in the proportion whose highest attainment level is GCSE or below.

In the last decade the increase in take-up of higher education has slowed, especially for men. If we compare those aged 22-24 in 1998 and 2008 we see that the percentage with higher level qualifications rises from 31% to 35% for women, but remains at 30% for men. The recent expansion of higher education would be expected to lead to increased 'early home leaving' to live in university halls of residence or other shared student accommodation. However, during the 1990s, the proportion of young degree entrants remaining in the parental home rose steadily from about 8% to 20% and has remained at about one in five students over the past few years (Higher Education Funding Council for England 2009). Certain groups are more likely to live at home whist attending higher education: these include women, students from Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic minorities and those attending institutions in Greater London (Higher Education Funding Council for England 2009). The increase in numbers of students from non-traditional backgrounds going to university is leading to greater diversity in students'

experiences of university life. According to Patiniotis and Holdsworth (2005), the decision whether or not to live at home is likely to reflect not only economic constraints, but *"reflects young people's access to legitimate cultural capital and family and peer endorsement of leaving home as an expected process and outcome of going to university"* p. 81.

**Table 1: Changing levels of educational attainment among young men and women, 1998 and 2008**

| Educational attainment by age group | Men | | | Women | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1998 % | 2008 % | Absolute change 1998-2008 | 1998 % | 2008 % | Absolute change 1998-2008 |
| **16-19** | **(n=3,452)** | **(n=2,708)** | | **(n=3,228)** | **(n=2,677)** | |
| Degree or equiv. | 1.0 | 1.4 | 0.4 | 1.3 | 1.4 | 0.1 |
| 'A' levels or equiv. | 19.8 | 26.9 | **7.1** | 24.4 | 31.6 | **7.2** |
| GCSE grades A-C or equiv. | 52.8 | 48.1 | **-4.7** | 54.5 | 48.0 | **-6.5** |
| Other qualifications | 11.2 | 10.3 | -0.9 | 7.8 | 8.1 | 0.3 |
| No qualifications | 15.1 | 13.3 | -1.8 | 12.1 | 10.8 | -1.3 |
| **20-21** | **(n=1,335)** | **(n=1,160)** | | **(n=1,403)** | **(n=1,197)** | |
| Degree or equiv. | 11.0 | 8.5 | -2.5 | 11.3 | 13.8 | 2.5 |
| 'A' levels or equiv. | 44.5 | 50.3 | **5.8** | 42.0 | 47.2 | 5.2 |
| GCSE grades A-C or equiv. | 25.4 | 22.0 | -3.4 | 28.9 | 23.3 | **-5.6** |
| Other qualifications | 11.0 | 11.0 | 0 | 9.8 | 8.4 | -1.4 |
| No qualifications | 8.1 | 8.3 | 0.2 | 8.1 | 7.3 | -0.8 |
| **22-24** | **(n=2,074)** | **(n=1,680)** | | **(n=2,366)** | **(n=1,808)** | |
| Degree or equiv. | 28.9 | 30.3 | 1.4 | 30.6 | 34.7 | 4.1 |
| 'A' levels or equiv. | 28.5 | 27.9 | -0.6 | 22.9 | 25.0 | 2.1 |
| GCSE grades A-C or equiv. | 21.5 | 20.8 | -0.7 | 27.4 | 20.3 | **-7.1** |
| Other qualifications | 13.6 | 12.1 | -1.5 | 11.6 | 11.7 | 0.1 |
| No qualifications | 7.5 | 8.9 | 1.4 | 7.5 | 8.4 | 0.9 |
| **25-29** | **(n=4,414)** | **(n=3,040)** | | **(n=5,056)** | **(n=3,542)** | |
| Degree or equiv. | 30.3 | 36.9 | **6.6** | 26.9 | 40.4 | **13.5** |
| 'A' levels or equiv. | 26.0 | 22.1 | **-3.9** | 18.0 | 18.8 | 0.8 |
| GCSE grades A-C or equiv. | 20.3 | 18.0 | -2.3 | 31.1 | 20.0 | **-11.1** |
| Other qualifications | 14.4 | 15.3 | 0.9 | 15.0 | 13.5 | -1.5 |
| No qualifications | 9.0 | 7.7 | -1.3 | 9.1 | 7.4 | **-1.7** |
| **30-34** | **(n=5,310)** | **(n=3,092)** | | **(n=5,817)** | **(n=3,519)** | |
| Degree or equiv. | 27.1 | 38.6 | **11.5** | 24.8 | 43.2 | **18.4** |
| 'A' levels or equiv. | 27.9 | 21.8 | **-6.1** | 16.2 | 18.5 | **2.3** |
| GCSE grades A-C or equiv. | 19.8 | 17.9 | -1.9 | 32.1 | 19.0 | **-13.1** |
| Other qualifications | 16.0 | 14.1 | -1.9 | 15.4 | 12.4 | **-3** |
| No qualifications | 9.2 | 7.6 | -1.6 | 11.5 | 7.0 | **-4.5** |

Source: Authors' own analysis of LFS, Quarterly Sep-Nov 1998 & Oct-Dec 2008
NB: Emboldened absolute changes are statistically significant

At the same time as we have seen significant increases in the proportion of people in their twenties obtaining degree level qualifications, a persistent minority of teenagers (around 11-13%) have no educational qualifications. Entry into secure, rewarding employment will be hardest for these young adults.

## 3.2 The Transition to Work

First we examine the extent to which young adults occupy multiple roles in relation to the labour market. Then, using a consistent definition of economic activity status that prioritises the full-time student role, we review the extent to which there has been increasing economic uncertainty among young adults in the last decade.

### 3.2.1 Multiple role occupancy

Table 2 disaggregates young people's labour market activities in 2008 according to whether they are a full time student. The first part of the table looks at the employed population. The total percentage of young adults in employment rises from 43% among those aged 16-19, to 82% among those aged 30-34. The extent to which students contribute to this employed population differs considerably by age: among those aged 16-19, full time students make up just under half of all those employed, although by age 20-21 this falls to around one fifth and for the 22-24 age group, full-time students constitute only 8% of those employed.

Unemployment rates are highest for teenagers - at 13% - and decline with age. However, if we restrict the definition of unemployment to exclude full-time students looking for work, then the teenage unemployment rate is almost halved to around to 7%. It is therefore crucial, when making comparisons over time and space to use consistent definitions. As will be discussed in the next section, when students are removed from the unemployed population, trends over time can be quite different.

Young adults can be economically inactive for a number of different reasons and these reasons will differ by age and gender. As Table 2 shows, at the youngest ages most of those who are economically inactive are full time students, but by age 22-24, the majority (61%) are not. The number of young adults who are not in employment, full time education or training in 2008 (the so-called NEETS[2]) is fairly constant across the age groups at around a sixth of the population. Among teenagers these are likely to be respondents who are not looking for work, e.g. because they believe no jobs are available, whereas at older ages they are more likely to represent mothers caring for their children.

[2] Note that the final row in Table 2 shows the percentage who are NEETS if we exclude anyone who is working towards any form of qualification or apprenticeship. These values (i.e. NEET-2) are a little lower than the main definition we use.

Gender differences in economic inactivity should not be under-estimated – for example even among those aged 20-21, we calculate that one in five women is not in employment, education or training, compared with one in eight men. Of these women, two thirds report that they are caring for the home.

**Table 2. Education and employment status of young adults in the UK, 2008.**

| Education and employment status | Age Group | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **16-19** | **20-21** | **22-24** | **25-29** | **30-34** |
| In employment and in f/t education | 19.8 | 11.6 | 5.0 | 2.3 | 1.2 |
| In employment and not in f/t education | 23.4 | 46.9 | 69.0 | 77.3 | 80.7 |
| **Total in employment** | **43.2** | **58.5** | **74.0** | **79.6** | **81.9** |
| Unemployed and in f/t education | 5.5 | 1.6 | 0.5 | 0.3 | 0.0 |
| Unemployed and not in f/t education | 7.4 | 9.3 | 7.6 | 5.0 | 3.9 |
| **Total unemployed** | **13.0** | **10.9** | **8.1** | **5.3** | **3.9** |
| Inactive and in f/t education | 36.7 | 21.2 | 6.9 | 2.8 | 1.2 |
| Inactive and not in f/t education | 7.1 | 9.4 | 11.0 | 12.3 | 13.0 |
| **Total inactive** | **43.8** | **30.6** | **17.9** | **15.1** | **14.2** |
| Total in f/t education | 62.1 | 34.4 | 12.4 | 5.4 | 2.4 |
| Total not in employment, f/t education or training (NEET) [1] | **14.5** | **18.7** | **18.6** | **17.3** | **16.9** |
| NEET-2 (***excluding*** anybody currently working towards a qual & apprentices) cf. Barnham (2009) | 10.2 | 16.0 | 16.0 | 15.3 | 14.9 |

[1] Note, this is not strictly the same as the government definition of NEET as we only consider full-time education and thus someone in part-time education could be classed as NEET; the 'official' definition does not include those in part-term education as NEETs.
Source: Authors' own analysis of LFS, Quarterly Oct-Dec 2008

### 3.2.2 Increasing youth unemployment?

Next, in Tables 3a and 3b we examine, for men and women, changes in labour force status over the last decade. Full time students are coded as students even if they are in work or seeking work. For teenage men we can see a sharp decline in the percentage in full time employment between 1998 and 2008, with more 16-19 year olds being in part-time work or being economically inactive. Among older youth, say those in their late twenties, there has been a small fall in full-time employment – but this is related once again to an increase in the percentage remaining in full-time education. Among the older women, between 1998 and 2008, there has been a large increase in the level of full time employment. This is in part related to the delayed entry into parenthood among the cohorts born in the 1970s, as compared with women born in the 1960s.

With economic activity coded giving priority to full-time student status, unemployment rates in all the age groups have not risen significantly in the last decade, with an absolute

percentage point change of just 0.3% for those men aged 16-19, 2.6% 20-21, 0% 22-24, 0.1% 25-29 and a fall of 0.7% for those aged 30-34 (table 3a) and similar changes for changes for women (table 3b). This is a very different message to that portrayed in much of the youth literature which has emphasized rising unemployment (Furlong & Cartmel 2007). Whilst we do not under-estimate the importance of paid work for students struggling to support themselves financially, the types of jobs sought by full time students are likely to be different e.g. in terms of hours available for work, temporary versus permanent, than for non students.

**Table 3a. Changing labour market activity of young men 1998 and 2008, UK**

| Economic activity by age group | 1998 % | 2008 % | Absolute change 1998-2008 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **16-19** | **(n=3,496)** | **(n=2,754)** | |
| Permanent, F/T | 25.1 | 16.1 | **-9.0** |
| Permanent, P/T | 2.4 | 4.6 | **2.2** |
| Temporary | 8.5 | 5.1 | **-3.4** |
| Unemployed | 9.1 | 9.4 | 0.3 |
| Student | 53.0 | 61.2 | **8.2** |
| Other Inactive | 2.0 | 3.7 | **1.7** |
| **20-21** | **(n=1,345)** | **(n=1,167)** | |
| Permanent, F/T | 46.7 | 40.3 | **-6.4** |
| Permanent, P/T | 3.2 | 3.8 | 0.6 |
| Temporary | 6.5 | 4.9 | -1.6 |
| Unemployed | 9.4 | 12.0 | 2.6 |
| Student | 30.6 | 36.0 | **5.4** |
| Other Inactive | 3.7 | 2.9 | -0.8 |
| **22-24** | **(n=2,098)** | **(n=1,695)** | |
| Permanent, F/T | 64.9 | 62.3 | -2.6 |
| Permanent, P/T | 3.2 | 4.8 | 1.6 |
| Temporary | 6.9 | 5.6 | -1.3 |
| Unemployed | 9.4 | 9.4 | 0.0 |
| Student | 12.0 | 14.3 | 2.3 |
| Other Inactive | 3.5 | 3.6 | 0.1 |
| **25-29** | **(n=4,463)** | **(n=3,077)** | |
| Permanent, F/T | 78.0 | 75.8 | -2.2 |
| Permanent, P/T | 1.8 | 2.7 | **0.9** |
| Temporary | 5.3 | 4.5 | -0.8 |
| Unemployed | 6.2 | 6.3 | 0.1 |
| Student | 3.7 | 6.1 | **2.4** |
| Other Inactive | 5.0 | 4.7 | -0.3 |
| **30-34** | **(n=5,375)** | **(n=3,122)** | |
| Permanent, F/T | 83.9 | 82.7 | -1.2 |
| Permanent, P/T | 1.3 | 2.3 | **1.0** |
| Temporary | 3.4 | 2.8 | -0.6 |
| Unemployed | 4.9 | 4.2 | -0.7 |
| Student | 1.7 | 2.1 | 0.4 |
| Other Inactive | 4.8 | 5.8 | 1.0 |

Source: Authors' own analysis of LFS, Quarterly Sep-Nov 1998 & Oct-Dec 2008

**Table 3b. Changing labour market activity of young women 1998 and 2008, UK.**

| Economic activity by age group | 1998 % | 2008 % | Absolute change 1998-2008 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **16-19** | **(n=3,271)** | **(n=2,721)** | |
| Permanent, F/T | 18.2 | 10.6 | **-7.6** |
| Permanent, P/T | 4.3 | 6.6 | **2.3** |
| Temporary | 6.6 | 3.7 | **-2.9** |
| Unemployed | 5.4 | 5.4 | 0 |
| Student | 59.3 | 67.5 | **8.2** |
| Looking after home/family | 3.6 | 2.7 | -0.9 |
| Other Inactive | 2.6 | 3.5 | 0.9 |
| **20-21** | **(n=1,410)** | **(n=1,206)** | |
| Permanent, F/T | 37.9 | 31.1 | **-6.8** |
| Permanent, P/T | 6.6 | 8.8 | 2.2 |
| Temporary | 5.8 | 4.8 | -1 |
| Unemployed | 5.9 | 6.6 | 0.7 |
| Student | 30.3 | 35.0 | 4.7 |
| Looking after home/family | 10.9 | 9.1 | -1.8 |
| Other Inactive | 2.5 | 4.7 | **2.2** |
| **22-24** | **(n=2,385)** | **(n=1,824)** | |
| Permanent, F/T | 49.4 | 48.7 | -0.7 |
| Permanent, P/T | 10.6 | 11.9 | 1.3 |
| Temporary | 7.6 | 4.8 | **-2.8** |
| Unemployed | 5.4 | 5.8 | 0.4 |
| Student | 9.5 | 12.9 | **3.4** |
| Looking after home/family | 14.3 | 11.6 | -2.7 |
| Other Inactive | 3.2 | 4.3 | 1.1 |
| **25-29** | **(n=5,100)** | **(n=3,562)** | |
| Permanent, F/T | 51.0 | 53.1 | 2.1 |
| Permanent, P/T | 15.7 | 14.1 | -1.6 |
| Temporary | 5.2 | 4.8 | -0.4 |
| Unemployed | 4.2 | 3.7 | -0.5 |
| Student | 3.3 | 5.8 | **2.5** |
| Looking after home/family | 16.1 | 14.5 | -1.6 |
| Other Inactive | 4.4 | 4.0 | -0.4 |
| **30-34** | **(n=5,866)** | **(n=3,540)** | |
| Permanent, F/T | 40.8 | 50.3 | **9.5** |
| Permanent, P/T | 24.2 | 20.4 | **-3.8** |
| Temporary | 4.6 | 3.2 | **-1.4** |
| Unemployed | 3.8 | 3.5 | -0.3 |
| Student | 2.0 | 3.3 | **1.3** |
| Looking after home/family | 20.0 | 15.1 | **-4.9** |
| Other Inactive | 4.6 | 4.1 | -0.5 |

Source: Authors' own analysis of LFS, Quarterly Sep-Nov 1998 & Oct-Dec 2008

### 3.2.3 Increased part-time and temporary jobs?

Next we look to see if there is any evidence of decreased job security among those in work but who are not students. Much attention has been placed on increasing levels of part time and temporary contracts (for example Kalleberg, 2000) However, as can be seen from Tables 3a and 3b, if we exclude students, the proportion of young people employed in temporary jobs has actually decreased. It could therefore be argued that the much discussed increase in temporary work has been driven by the increasing necessity of students to seek work to help fund their studies with increases in tuition fees and reduced access to grants. There is some evidence that the level of part time work may have increased slightly, particularly among women.

### 3.2.4. Increased economic inactivity?

Over the past decade there has been a concern that the number of young adults not in employment, education or training has increased. In order to shed further light on this the data for women in Table 3b are disaggregated into those who are looking after family and those who are economically inactive for other reasons. For young teenage men and women not in full-time education, there has been a slight increase in the percentage who are economically inactive between 1998 and 2009 (up from 2% to 3.7% for men aged 16-19 and 2.6% to 3.5% for women of the same age). Among teenagers, a number of different reasons for inactivity are given including "waiting to hear the result of a job application", "don't need or want a job", and "don't believe there are any jobs", whereas for older respondents (25-29, 30-34) " ill health" was commonly cited as a reason for inactivity.

For older young adults, there has been little change in the proportions who are not in employment or training, once those who are looking after family are taken separately. The delay in family formation among recent cohorts, reflected in the lower percentage of women looking after family, has meant that overall economic inactivity has actually reduced among women, declining from 24.6% of women aged 30-34 in 1998 to 19.2% in 2008.

## 3.3 Independence from the Parental Home

This section looks at changes in leaving the parental home. First we examine changes in the composition of the parental home for cohorts of teenagers born in the early 1980s and those born in the early 1990s. Then we examine the age pattern of living at home at the two time points by gender.

### 3.3.1. What do we mean by the parental home?

An increasing proportion of children do not live with both of their natural parents. Table 4 shows for 16-17 year olds, that the proportion who live with two natural parents has continued to decline, reduced from 66% in 1998 to 57% in 2008. Most of this decline has been offset by the increase in those living with only one natural parent (increasing from 23% to 30%). One in ten 16-17 year olds now lives in a reconstituted family with one natural parent and one other (usually a step) parent. This heterogeneity in living arrangements means that young adults may have different experiences in terms of their ability to remain living at home and the support they may receive when living away from home (although support from non-resident parents can be very important).

**Table 4. Family type of young adults aged 16-17 years in 1998 and 2008, UK**

| Family type | 1998 (n=3,695) | 2008 (n=3,060) | Absolute change 1998-2008 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | % | % | |
| No parents | 3.2 | 2.9 | -0.3 |
| Two natural parents | 65.8 | 57.4 | **-8.4** |
| One natural parent, one other[1] parent | 7.8 | 9.4 | 1.6 |
| One natural parent | 22.7 | 29.7 | **7.0** |
| Two other parents | 0.2 | 0.4 | 0.2 |
| One other parent | 0.2 | 0.3 | 0.1 |

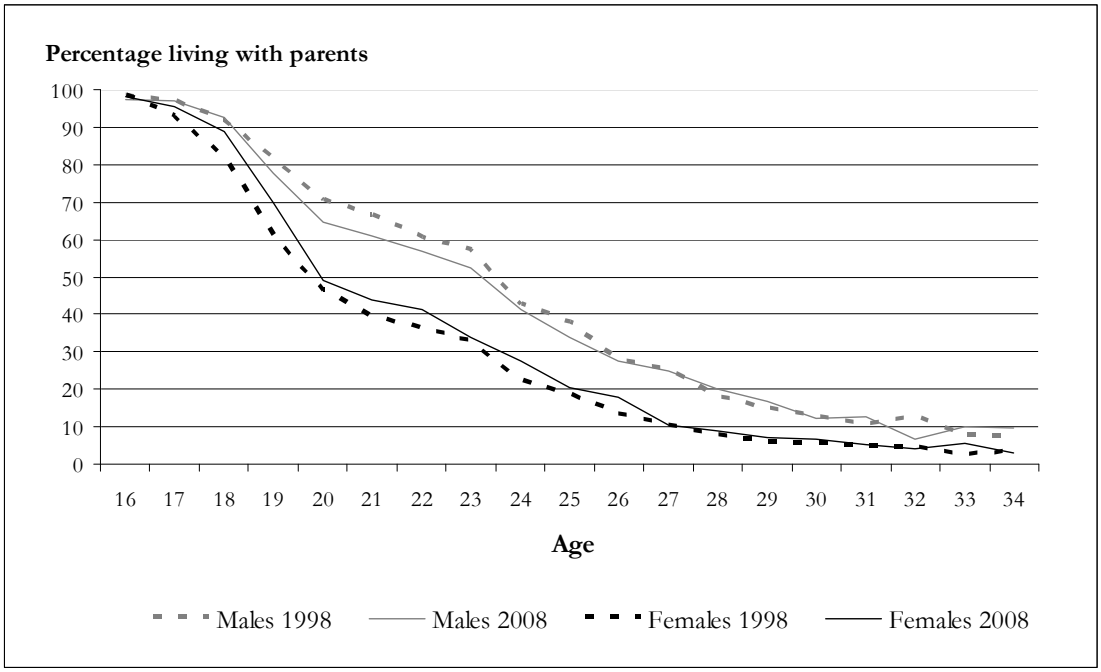
[1] other parent refers to a step-parent or foster parent.
Source: Authors' own analysis of LFS, Quarterly Sep-Nov 1998 & Oct-Dec 2008

### 3.3.2. Living away from the parental home

Figure 3 shows, for males and females in both 1998 (dotted lines) and 2008 (solid lines) the percentage living in the parental home at each age. At all ages, females (the lower two lines) are more likely to be living away from their parents. The proportion living in the parental home declines rapidly from the late teens to the late twenties before levelling off.

Over the past decade, a slightly different change has occurred for men and women. For males, there has been a slight decline in the proportions living with their parents among the late teen and early twenties, but little change at older ages. For women, we see a slight increase in the proportions living with their parents, especially among those in their early twenties. These changes have to be seen in the context of trends in the previous decade which saw a rapid increase in early leaving, particularly among women, likely to be associated with the expansion in higher education (Berrington *et al.* 2009). We cannot tell from these data whether more women are living at home in their early twenties as a result of fewer women leaving, or more women returning home e.g. after higher education (or a mixture of the two). Future work being undertaken by the present authors using longitudinal data from the British Household Panel Survey aims to answer this question.

**Figure 3. The proportion of young adults living in the parental home by age in 1998 and 2008, UK.**




Source: Authors' own analysis of LFS, Quarterly Sep-Nov 1998 & Oct-Dec 2008

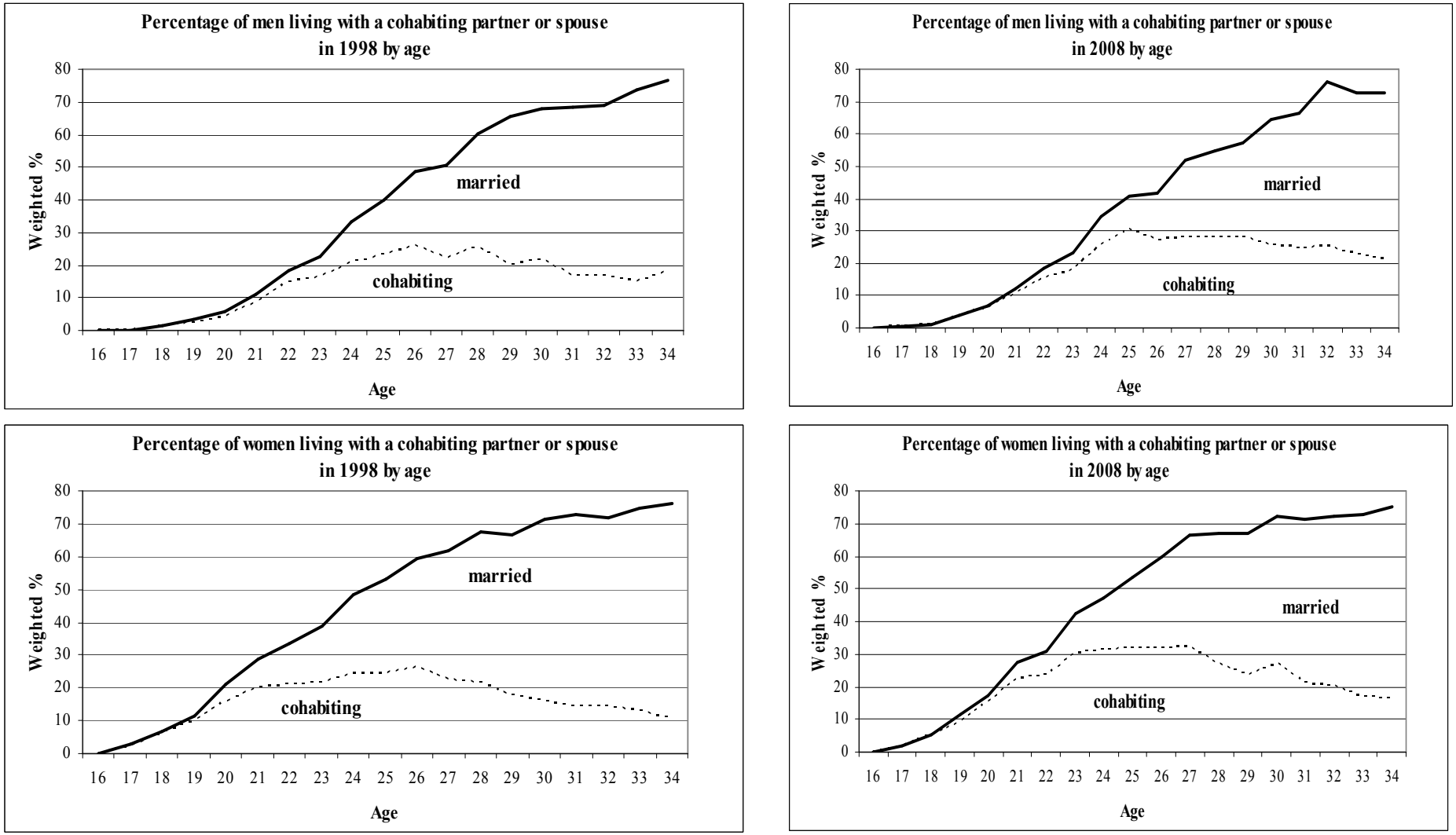
## 3.4 Partnership and Family formation

In comparison with the modest changes in the overall percentages of young adults living in the parental home, the changes in the household living arrangements upon leaving home are more marked. First we investigate the propensity to be living with a partner. Then we examine changes in parenthood status.

### 3.4.1 Changing forms of partnership formation

Figure 4 shows for males and females and for 1998 and 2008, the proportion currently living in a couple according to whether they are cohabiting or married. The top solid line thus refers to the overall proportion in a co-residential partnership. There has not been a great deal of change in the last decade in terms of the overall proportion living in a co-residential partnership by age. We can see some evidence of postponement among young women, such that the proportion living in a couple at age 20 has declined from 20% to 17%. However, by age 30 a similar proportion of women are coupled in 1998 and 2008 (around three quarters). What has changed however is the *type* of partnership, with cohabitation now being the dominant form of partnership until young adults reach their mid twenties. In fact the age when a higher proportion are married than are cohabiting has increased by about three years over the past decade – from 27 to 23 years of age for men and from 24 to 27 years for women. Whilst many cohabiters will ultimately marry, an increasing number of cohabitation unions will dissolve prior to being translated into marriage.

Figure 4: Proportion of young adults living in a cohabiting or married couple by age, 1998 and 2008




Source: Authors' own analysis of LFS, Quarterly Sep-Nov 1998 & Oct-Dec 2008

### 3.4.2 Postponement of parenthood

The average age of entry into parenthood in the UK has been increasing since the early 1970s. It is not surprising therefore that the proportion of young men and women in their early thirties who are living as parents has declined over the past decade (from 48% to 43% for men and from 71% to 62% for women). However, as shown in Table 5, a similar proportion are parents by age 20-24 in 1998 and 2008 (around 6% of men and 23-24% of women). This reflects the increased polarisation of timing of entry into parenthood in the UK with one section of the population continuing to have births as teenagers or in their early twenties, whilst another section increasingly delaying parenthood in the context of an increased uptake of higher education and job aspirations (Rendall et al. 2009).

As would be expected, very few young men are lone parents, whilst the proportion of mothers who are lone parents decreases with age – from over half of teenager mothers, to only one fifth of those in their early thirties. Over the last decade, the proportion of all women who are lone parents has declined slightly – but as a proportion of mothers, their prevalence has remained roughly constant.

**Table 5: Proportion of Young Adults Living With a Child by Sex and Age, 1998 and 2008**

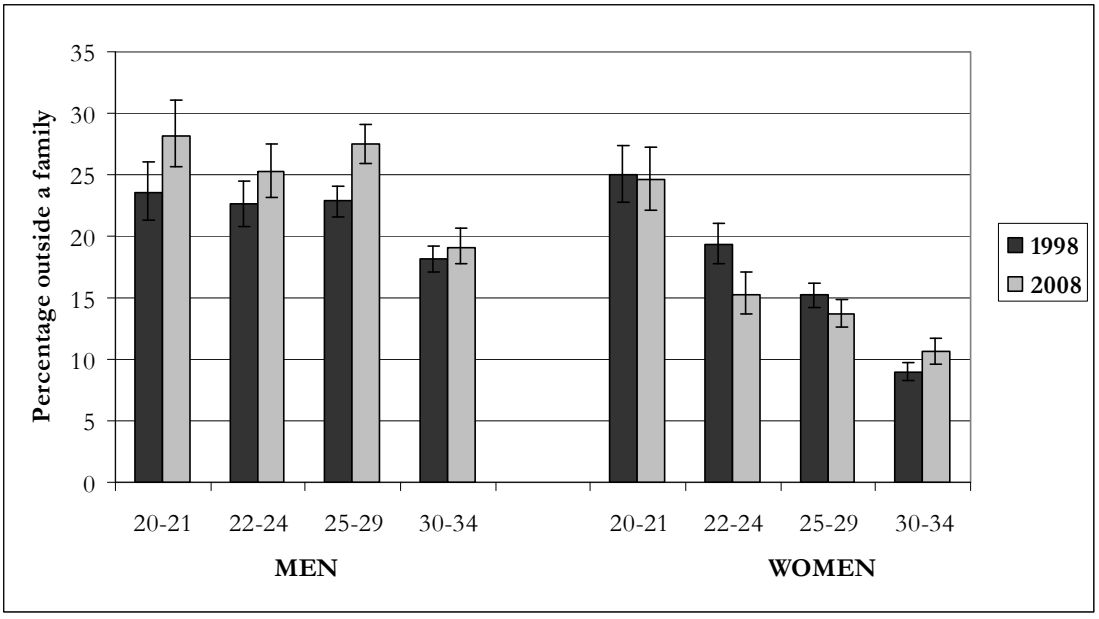
| | % who are a parent[1] and living in a couple | % who are living as a lone parent | Total % who are a parent | % who are a parent and living in a couple | % who are living as a lone parent | Total % who are a parent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***MEN*** | **1998** | | | **2008** | | |
| **16-19** | 0.5 | 0.1 | 0.5 | 0.3 | 0.0 | 0.4 |
| **20-24** | 5.8 | 0.2 | 6.0 | 6.5 | 0.2 | 6.7 |
| **25-29** | 24.6 | 0.3 | 24.9 | 19.8 | 0.4 | 20.3 |
| **30-34** | 47.2 | 0.9 | 48.1 | 42.1 | 0.8 | 43.0 |
| | | | | | | |
| ***WOMEN*** | **1998** | | | **2008** | | |
| **16-19** | 1.8 | 3.2 | 5.0 | 1.7 | 2.4 | 4.2 |
| **20-24** | 13.1 | 10.8 | 23.9 | 12.5 | 11.1 | 23.6 |
| **25-29** | 32.8 | 13.2 | 46.0 | 30.9 | 11.8 | 42.6 |
| **30-34** | 56.1 | 14.4 | 70.5 | 49.5 | 12.3 | 61.8 |

[1] Note parent refers to living with their children (including step & fostered children)
Source: Authors' own analysis of LFS, Quarterly Sep-Nov 1998 & Oct-Dec 2008

### 3.4.3 Increased non-family living (among young men)

In the previous two sections we have seen a trend over the last decade for more young men to be living away from the parental home and to be less likely to be living in a partnership by age. The combination of these two forces results in more young men living outside of a family, that is away from the parental home, with no co-residential partner or dependent children (Berrington, Stone, & Falkingham 2009). As can be seen in Figure 5, non-family living has increased among all age groups for men, and among women in their early thirties. Among women, it seems that the postponement of family formation may have resulted not so much in increased non-family living, but increased living in the parental home.

**Figure 5: Proportion living outside of a family by sex and age, 1998 and 2008 UK**




Source: Authors' own analysis of LFS, Quarterly Sep-Nov 1998 & Oct-Dec 2008

Of those living outside a family, the vast majority of young people are either living alone or sharing with non-relatives. Living alone is more common among those in their thirties, whilst sharing is more common at younger ages. In contrast to earlier decades where the increase in solo living was highlighted (Murphy and Berrington, 1993), the last decade has seen an increase in shared households. In particular, there has been a trend towards living with non-relatives. The trend over the past decade is most pronounced for those in their early thirties, where the proportion of those not in a family who were living alone declined from 73% to 62% and the proportion sharing with non-relatives increased from

20% to 31%. Moreover, although a minority are living outside a family at a given point in time, many more are likely to have experienced this type of living arrangement *at some point* during young adulthood (Heath and Cleaver 2003).

It remains unclear how many of those who are sharing with unrelated adults are doing so out of choice or necessity. The decreased affordability of buying a home, together with changes to housing benefits for those aged under 25 limiting the amount of housing benefit to a 'single room rent' will have encouraged sharing. Furthermore, the affordability of privately rented accommodation has actually improved over this period as the private rented sector has expanded (Wilcox 2008). As shown in Figures 6a and 6b, owner occupation and social renting remain more common among those living alone as compared with those who are sharing. However, over the past decade reliance on the private rented sector has increased among both groups. Comparison of Figures 6a and 6b shows that this increase in private renting has occurred among young adults born in the UK and among migrants, although the overall level of owner-occupation is higher in the UK-born. The importance of considering migration status when analysing youth transitions is explored in more detail below.

**Figure 6a. Distribution of housing tenures among young adults (22-34 years) living outside a family in 1998 and 2008, by type of non-family living**

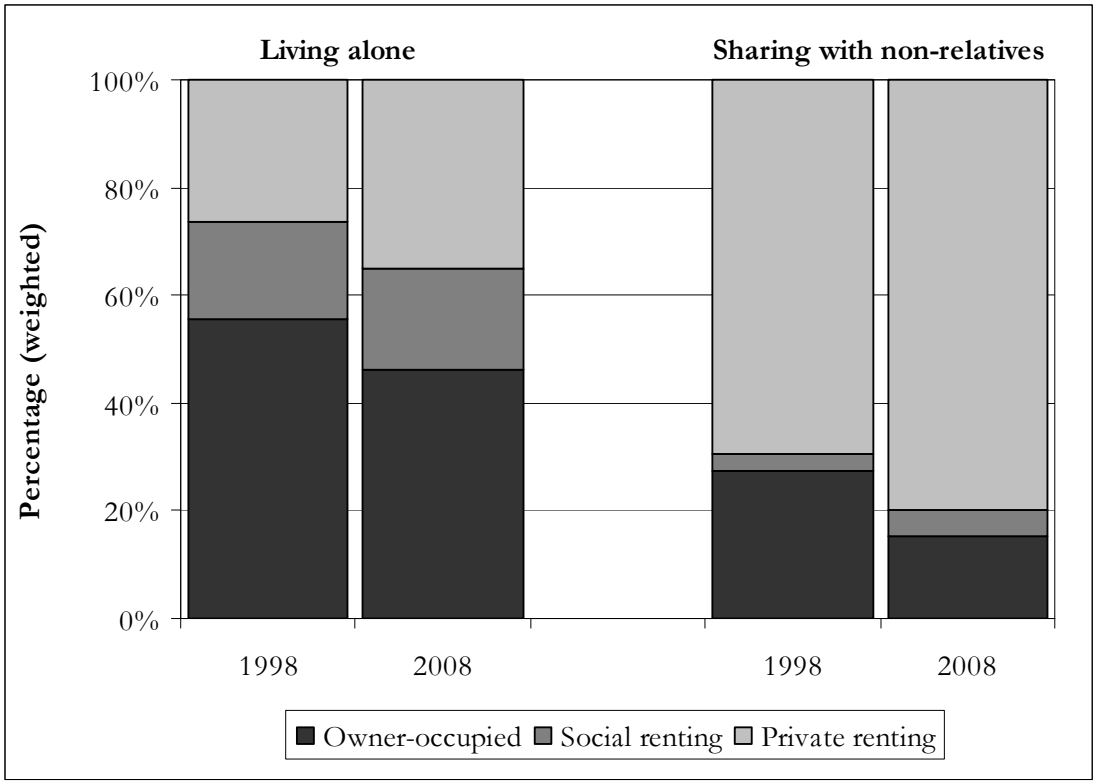
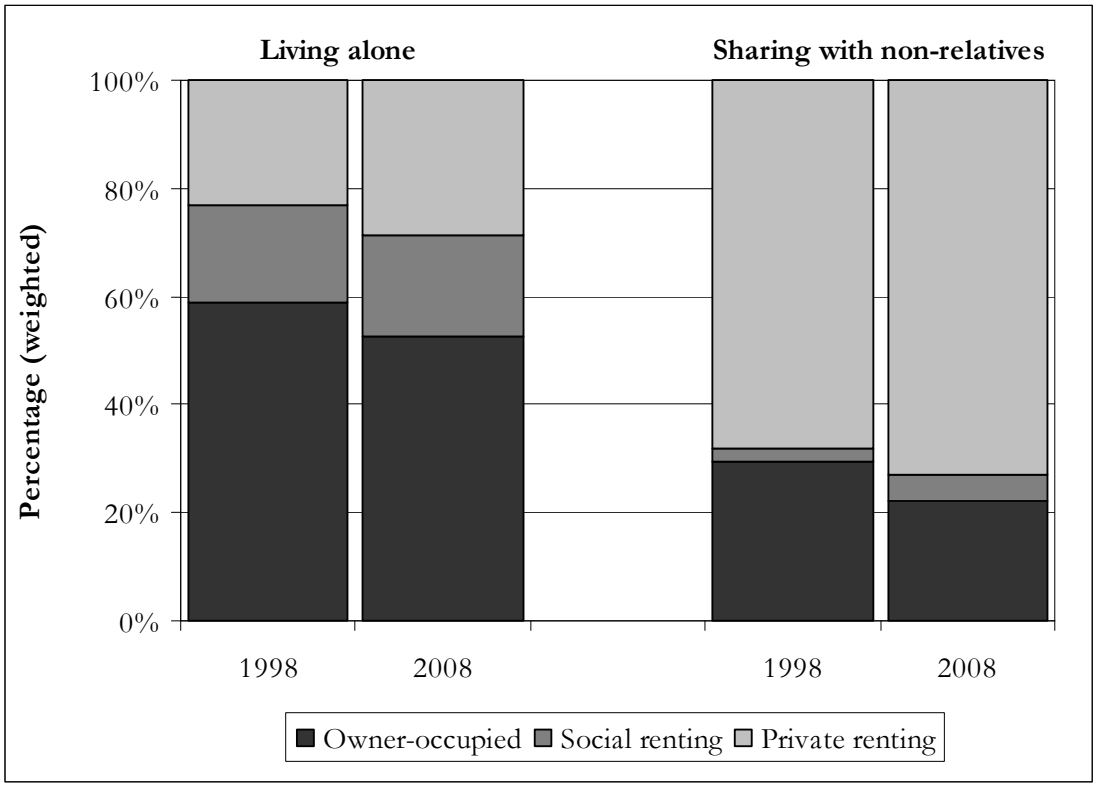


**Figure 6b. Distribution of housing tenures among young adults (22-34 years) living outside a family in 1998 & 2008, by type of non-family living (UK-born only)**




Source: Authors' own analysis of LFS, Quarterly Sep-Nov 1998 & Oct-Dec 2008.

## 3.6 The Impact of International Migration on Transitions to Young Adulthood

Previous research on the changing nature of transitions to adulthood in the UK has paid very little attention to international migration, both in terms of the increasing number of foreign born youth, but also the impact these migrants might have on the overall composition and characteristics of today's youth. In the following two sections we document the increasing proportion of the young adult population who were born outside of the UK. Then we demonstrate, using as a case study changes in living arrangements, the importance of controlling for country of birth in analyses of youth transitions.

### 3.6.1 International migrants as an increasing proportion of the young adult population

In 1998, around 7% of men and women aged 16-34 were born in the UK. There was little variation by age group. However, ten years later, the overall percentage of the young adult population born outside the UK had more than doubled to 17%. This is the case for both males and females. This change was concentrated primarily among those in their mid-twenties to early thirties. Part of this change is the result of the increase in migration to the UK from eight EU Accession countries (the Czech Republic; Estonia; Hungary; Latvia; Lithuania; Poland; Slovakia; and Slovenia – the A8 countries). In 1998, young adults born in the 'A8' countries represented only a minority of those born outside the UK – less than 1%. The biggest sources of immigrants aged 16-34 years were other European countries, South Asia and Africa. By 2008, immigrants from A8 countries had grown to represent around a fifth of all immigrants in this age group. However, as Table 6 highlights, migration from the A8 countries is only part of the picture, with migrants from *all* regions of the globe constituting a rising share of the 16-34 year old population. For example, migrants from Africa comprised just 1.5% of all women aged 16-34 in 1998; by 2008 this had doubled to 3%.

**Table 6: Percentage of UK-resident young adults (16-34 years) not born in the UK, by country of birth, 1998 and 2008**

| **Country of birth** | **% of UK resident men** | | **% of UK resident women** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **1998** | **2008** | **1998** | **2008** |
| Europe: A8 | <0.1 | 3.1 | 0.2 | 3.6 |
| Other Europe | 2.2 | 3.2 | 2.5 | 3.2 |
| South Asia | 1.5 | 3.2 | 1.6 | 3.1 |
| Other Asia & Middle East | 0.1 | 2.4 | 1.0 | 2.2 |
| Africa | 1.6 | 2.8 | 1.5 | 3.0 |
| Other | 1.0 | 1.6 | 1.3 | 1.8 |
| **Total % born outside of the UK** | **7.2** | **16.5** | **8.1** | **17.0** |
| **Total UK resident sample (unweighted)** | ***16, 777*** | ***11,810*** | ***18, 032*** | ***12,847*** |

Source: Authors' own analysis of LFS, Quarterly Sep-Nov 1998 & Oct-Dec 2008.

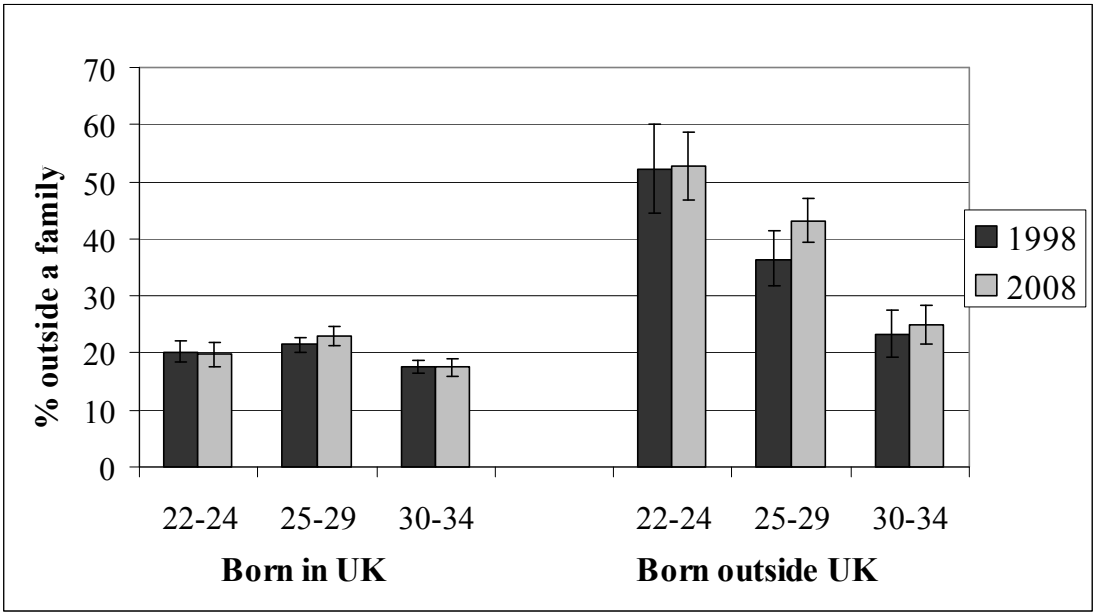
### 3.6.2 Impact of international migrants on living arrangements of young adults

Section 3.4.3 above highlighted that non-family living increased amongst all young men and amongst women in their early thirties between 1998 and 2008. However, this picture may be confounded by changes in the composition of the young adult population over time as a result of the increase in the number of migrants in this age group. Figures 7a and 7b show, for men and women, the proportion living outside a family in 1998 and 2008 by country of birth. The first point to note is that young people born outside the UK are more likely than those born in the UK to be living outside a family, particularly those in their early twenties. Secondly, the *change* in the prevalence of living outside a family appears to be more pronounced for non-UK-born young adults – at least for men. In particular, the greatest proportional increase in the prevalence of non-family living occurred among men aged 25-29 years who were born outside the UK. Interestingly, there has been very little change in the percentage of UK born men living outside a family over the past decade – thus most of the change illustrated in section 3.4.3 previously reflects both the increasing propensity of non-UK born men to live outside a family *and* the rise in the share of this group in the overall youth population.

Women are also more likely to be living outside a family if they were not born in the UK, although the difference between UK and foreign born women is reduced in 2008 as compared with ten years earlier. Contrary to stereotypical views, young migrants are just as likely to be female as male and they are more likely to be living away from their parents.

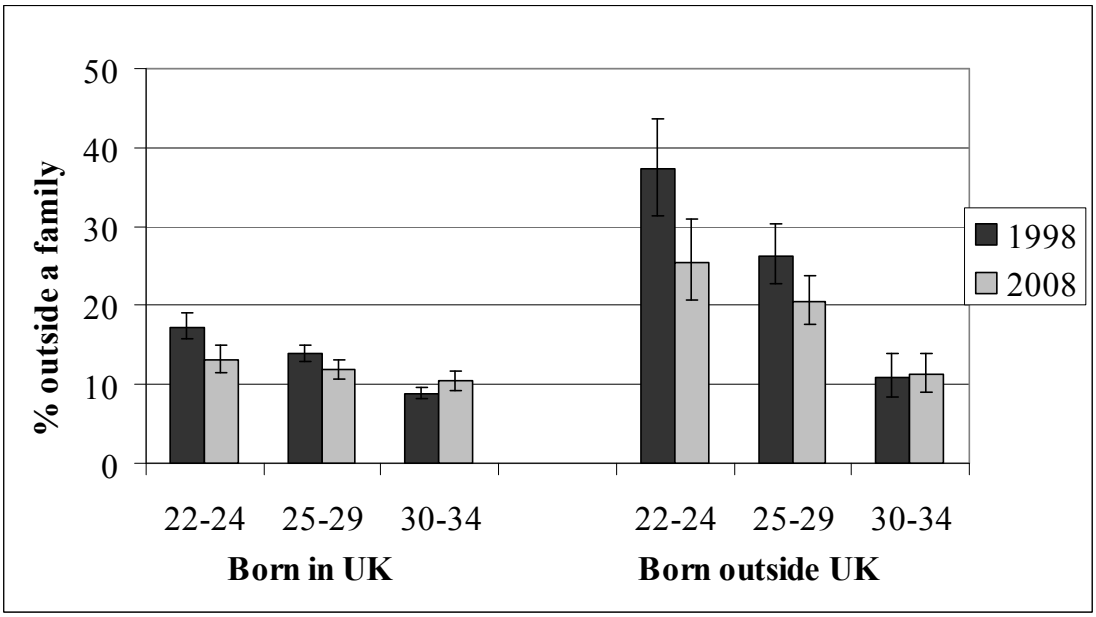
This exemplar demonstrates the importance of immigration in driving recent patterns of household change among young adults. Failure to take the changing composition of the population into account may result in erroneous conclusions being made concerning the extent and nature of changes in transitions to adulthood.

**Figure 7.1. Percentage of men living outside a family by age group country of birth, UK, 1998 and 2008**




Source: Authors' own analysis of LFS, Quarterly Sep-Nov 1998 & Oct-Dec 2008.

**Figure 7.2. Percentage of women living outside a family by age group and country of birth, UK, 1998 and 2008**




Source: Authors' own analysis of LFS, Quarterly Sep-Nov 1998 & Oct-Dec 2008

# 4. Summary and conclusions

This paper has provided new insights into the changing socio-economic and demographic circumstances of young adults in the UK. We have documented the changing educational experiences of recent cohorts of young adults as compared with their older peers. The expansion and feminisation of higher education over the past decade has resulted in clear cohort differences in educational experience. At the same time we demonstrate the persistence of a minority of young adults with no qualifications. We have found conflicting evidence as to increased labour market uncertainty among young adults. The situation for teenagers is markedly different from those in their early twenties such that it may be misleading to talk about a "youth" labour market. For 16-19 year olds, we find some evidence of increasing unemployment and labour market uncertainty (as evidenced by increased temporary and part time jobs) over the past decade. For older youth however, little change is observed.

What is also clear, however, is that young adults are often occupying multiple roles – combining, for example, work and study. Once full time students are excluded, levels of unemployment are much lower and have *not* risen significantly over the past decade. Moreover, if we exclude students, the proportion of people aged 21 and under in temporary employment has actually *fallen*. The proportion of young adults 'not in employment, full-time education or training' (NEETs) is around one sixth and is remarkably constant across age groups. Furthermore, previous research on youth employment has insufficiently considered the importance of gender, and specifically the parenting role of women. The delay in family formation amongst recent cohorts means that economic inactivity amongst women has reduced.

The paper also highlights changes in the timing of leaving the parental home. Over the past decade a growing proportion of children do not live with both of their natural parents, which may impact upon their experience of both leaving and returning home. In fact over the past ten years, there have only been modest changes in the overall proportion of young people living in the parental home; what has changed are the living arrangements of those who do leave. Cohabitation is now the dominant form of partnership until young adults reach their mid-late twenties, and fewer young men and women are living as parents in their early thirties. There has, however, been no decline in parenthood by age 20-24, reflecting the continuing polarisation of timing of entry into

parenthood, with a sub-section of the population becoming parents as teenagers. There has also been a trend for more young men to live outside of a family. However, this trend may in part reflect the changing composition of the young adult population, with a rising share of non-UK born immigrants in the population aged 16-34.

This paper has only skimmed the surface in its analysis of the impact of international migration on transitions to adulthood. Our analysis has been limited to investigation of living arrangements. However, in the context of increasing globalization, competition from migrant workers for employment is also a particularly important issue for young people. In the UK, sales/customers service occupations and 'elementary' occupations – including jobs such as labourers, waiting staff and cleaners – tend to have a higher proportion of employees aged 16-34 years than other industries (Begum 2003). In turn, migrant workers are also commonly employed in these industries, with kitchen and catering assistants, building labourers, cleaners and sales assistants all featuring in the top ten occupations in which registered migrant workers from 'A8' countries were employed in 2004-2009 (Department for Work and Pensions, HM Revenue and Customs & Communities and Local Government 2009). These occupations are also those which feature temporary or part-time contracts. Thus any future research that aims to shed light on the role that increasing economic uncertainty may play in postponing or extending the transition to adulthood will need to take international immigration and the increasing share of migrants in the young adult population into account.

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ESRC Centre for Population Change
Building 58, Room 2001
Faculty of Social and Human Sciences
University of Southampton
SO17 1BJ

T: +44 (0)2380 592579
E: cpc@soton.ac.uk
www.cpc.ac.uk

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