

## Housing and employment problems for young people in the countryside

Young people find it very difficult to find both a job and somewhere to live in the countryside, and many leave even when they might prefer to stay. Anwen Jones and Julie Rugg of the Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York explored the experiences of sixty young people growing up in rural parts of North Yorkshire. The research was based on a random selection of young people, all aged 22, located through the electoral register. The research findings indicated that:

- f** Many of the young people wanted to stay in the countryside, and many viewed this as an ideal location to bring up a family. Young people in their late teens and early twenties were happier now about living in the countryside than they had been as younger teenagers when they were still reliant on their parents and public transport for mobility.
- f** The young people were not a uniform group: the experiences of men, women, those who had moved to the countryside and those who had grown up there, students, and single people all differed substantially. However, all faced problems relating to employment and housing. Most resolved their difficulties by staying in the parental home for longer than they might have liked or by leaving the countryside altogether.
- f** The costs of running a car often prevented young people from getting their own home. Most of the young people needed their own transport in order to hold down work; public transport was seen as unreliable and timetables often did not match up with work schedules.
- f** Almost all the young people also said that the limited availability of affordable housing was a major factor preventing their move out of the parental home. Young people who wanted to find housing with their partners faced particularly acute difficulties; almost all ended up living in urban areas.
- f** Although not many of the sample were unemployed, most felt that the work available in the countryside was low paid and offered limited prospects for career development. The young people who went into higher education considered it unlikely that they would find graduate-status work in the countryside.

### The young people

The young people included: young farmers still living and working on the family farm; student nurses working in big city hospitals; students studying in all parts of Britain; skilled engineers and technicians working in small firms close to their home; assembly-line workers employed in medium-sized factories but still in the countryside; lone parents; and graduates who had moved to find work in Leeds (the nearest big city), London and even abroad.

Leaving aside the students, who comprised a roughly equal split between men and women, the largest group was living in the parental home (see Table 1). The majority of these were young men, many of whom were in work that could best be described as low paid and with limited prospects for career advancement. By contrast, all the young people in owner-occupation were women: in all cases the women were married or in relationships, or had had assistance from their parents to buy a home. There were no non-student men renting privately. Six women were in this category; five of these were either single mothers or were living with a partner. The one young man not a student but living outside the parental home was technically homeless.

### Choosing to settle in the countryside

This research on young people in their early twenties indicates that many wanted to stay in the countryside, and considered that life offered many benefits.

Young people characterised the countryside in terms of a strong sense of community, a particular pace of life and geographic isolation. For most, the

main reason for staying was to remain near to family and friends: the location itself was to some degree irrelevant.

Many young people saw the countryside as an ideal place to bring up a family, and many recalled happy childhood experiences. Most young people said they would like to leave the countryside as a single person, but come back to raise a family.

### The range of experiences

The young people were not a uniform group. Some interviewees had not yet left the parental home, and others were living independently as part of young families. The group included students and some young people who had started work at 16. Those who had recently moved to the countryside (generally within the last ten years) had different experiences from those who had grown up there, particularly with respect to using local networks to get employment (which was the way in which many 'locals' had found jobs).

However, it was clear that all groups were having difficulties getting housing and employment. In response to these problems, the young people generally had two options: they could continue living with their parents or move out of the countryside altogether.

### Getting a job

Few of the young people had been unemployed; almost all those who were not ill or had childcare commitments were in work.

However, many of the young people saw work in rural areas as being low paid and with limited

Table 1: Housing and employment circumstances of young people

	Parental home		Owner-occupation		Renting		Student accommodation		Homeless		Total	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
Students	2	3	1	1			9	9			12	13
Well-paid work, good prospects	5	1		1		1			1		6	3
Low-paid work, limited prospects	9	4				2					9	6
Family business	3			1							3	1
Not working	1	1		2		3					1	6
Total	20	9	1	5		6	9	9	1		31	29

prospects. Those who had originally been pleased to leave school early and get semi-skilled manual work now found that they had become tied into employment that in the long term proved unrewarding and without any option of advancement. Those young people who had acquired well-paid, good quality work considered themselves lucky: once such places were filled, job turnover was regarded as being low. Few of the young people in this sort of work said that they would consider changing jobs.

Some of the young people who had gone into full-time higher education had done so to 'escape' limited rural prospects. Most only realised later that it would be impossible to get graduate-status work in the area in which they had grown up, and that the step up the career ladder was inevitably a step out of the countryside. Most students anticipated looking for work nationally rather than locally.

### Finding a home

In the countryside, securing work and a home brought with it the need to maintain independent transport. As one young woman noted:

Before you can even look for a job ... you've got to know which areas you can get to easily so that you can be reliable. Before you get a house, you've got to get a job. So you've got to have money before you start, to get a car, to get a job, or whatever.

For those who had found jobs locally, holding down work often meant having to own a car, since public transport was often deemed expensive and unreliable. Indeed, some interviewees commented that some job offers were conditional on candidates having a car to get them to work. Many young people had to make a choice between owning a car and living independently: many saw living in the parental home as the only financially viable housing option. Only one of the single young people was living independently and working in the countryside; to some degree this was only possible because she lived in a market town and was able to walk to work.

The majority of respondents noted the limited availability of affordable housing to buy or rent. The poor quality of available properties was also an issue: a couple of young people had found that fuel costs had been too high in properties that were cheap to rent because they had no central heating, and they

had to return to the parental home. Vermin were also a problem. For some young people, demand for holiday homes had pushed up house prices and reduced the number of properties available to rent. None of the young single people viewed social housing as a viable option, because they thought that supply was limited, with priority given to families.

Continuing to live in the parental home was a short-term solution, but could not always be relied on in the longer term. The young man who was homeless had left the parental home to rent privately once he had found work. His employment was affected by a long period of illness, and he lost his accommodation. He had tried to return to his mother's house but she had remarried and it was no longer convenient for her to house her adult child.

Reliance on the parental home also became unfeasible when young people wanted to form couples and start a family. Even with a dual income, young people still found it difficult to afford a place of their own. Only two couples had managed to find a place to live in the countryside by the end of the research period: one of these was in a tied cottage owned by her partner's parents; the other couple - both in good jobs - had returned to the local market town after living in a city for a while and bought a house.

Young families still did not consider social housing to be an option; the experience of the lone parents in the interview sample indicated some reasons why that was the case. Two had found trying to secure accommodation from the council highly problematic. One had been told that she had insufficient priority points and so would have to continue living with her toddler in an unheated, private rented flat. The other said that she now felt trapped in the housing association property she had been given; the rent was so high that she felt that she would be unable to get work that would cover childcare costs and pay the rent. In both these cases, the young women had had limited access to advice and advocacy services.

### Conclusion

At the age of 22, only one or two young people in an interview sample of 60 had actually succeeded in achieving any level of independence whilst staying in a rural location. For the great majority, the only long-term solution to their housing and employment problems was to leave the countryside.

### About the study

The study explored the housing and employment histories of 60 young people from Richmond and Hambleton districts who were indicated as 'rising 18' in the 1994/5 electoral register. At the time of the interview they were all aged 22. Sixty interviews were completed; these collected information on employment, housing and household formation histories. Further contact was made with the interview sample a year after the first interview, and housing and employment details in the intervening period were collected for 53 young people. The interview sample included young people who had moved out of North Yorkshire.

### How to get further information

The full report, **Getting a job, finding a home: Rural youth transitions** by Julie Rugg and Anwen Jones, is published for the Foundation by The Policy Press (ISBN 1 86134 212 8, price £10.95).