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POLITICS
OF A NEW
GENERATION

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ABOUT IPPR@UNIVERSITIES

IPPR@universities involves the formation of partnerships between IPPR and student-led thinktank societies. The aim of the initiative is to extend our networks and draw students into the policymaking domain.

For the students participating in the IPPR@universities programme, we believe it offers an opportunity for them to enhance their understanding of policymaking and politics, to see their thinking reach a wider audience, and to build their enthusiasm and skills in policymaking, potentially equipping them for a future career in the area.

IPPR@universities

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FOREWORD

Katherine Bruce
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This year, which is the fifth year of the IPPR@universities partnership, the theme for *Metis* is the 'politics of a new generation'. It is an especially relevant theme as the vast majority of university students belong to this millennial generation, a generation which is struggling in the aftermath of the economic downturn and which is ever further disengaging from traditional politics.

The extent to which this new generation interact with political, economic and social processes has been considered by three of the writers. Skye Curtis argues that the trend of decreasing political participation by young people can be reversed by expanding social capital. A different focus is taken by Maddy Haughton-Boakes who views autonomy as the remedy for the 'generation without hope', while Catherine Scott delves into societal disillusionment. On the subject of European politics, Adam Ladley proposes that it is this younger cohort who can secure the UK's EU prospects, and Tobias Nowacki focusses on the European identity of this new generation. On a very different note, George Deacon and Arthur Baker question the charitable status of many independent schools, while Kiryl Zach considers the focus and purpose of universities. These seven articles together constitute a broad range of issues that these writers view as some of the new generation's most significant concerns and priorities.

As editor I would like to thank Glenn Gottfried, Tim Finch, Jenny Pennington and Ross Fulton, for their substantial work and support in producing this journal. As well as to Jonathan Clifton, Alex Glennie, Rick Muir, Amna Silim and Spencer Thompson for providing vital and valued feedback and comments to the writers.

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1.
DISENGAGED YOUTH
HOW SOCIAL CAPITAL CAN BE USED TO INCREASE LEVELS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AMONG THE YOUNGER GENERATION

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Social capital refers to 'the pattern and intensity of networks among people and the shared values which arise from those networks' (ONS 2014). The result of such interactions is seen to foster 'community spirit', citizenship and most importantly 'civic participation', all of which can increase the likelihood that citizens will engage in the decision-making process of the state (voting, protesting, joining local initiatives, and so on). In other words, higher and stronger levels of social capital are seen to increase levels of political participation (Hall 1999, Putnam 2002, Kumlin and Rothstein 2005).

Recently, however, levels of social capital among the young have decreased. This has been associated with an unprecedented decline in political participation. There is, therefore, a real danger that the youth of today will never be interested and engaged in the political bodies that govern their lives.

With the hope of providing initiatives that will increase youth engagement in politics, this article proposes two policy solutions:

1. **Improved citizenship classes in school,** to encourage network-building within schools, develop citizenship, increase trust and enhance political literacy. However, this option also carries with it issues of high costs, the need for large-scale resources, and the problem that the school environment is not necessarily effective in achieving an impact on long-term learning.

2. **Developing local meetings,** to directly engage young people in political issues while also ensuring that they are represented in politics. It is a cheaper option than the first policy solution, and it is proactive and local in nature with quick results. There are, nonetheless, costs associated with government-organised and funded promotion.

Youth disengagement

Social capital levels among the young have been decreasing since the 1960s. For example, Peter Hall finds that 'the willingness of those under the age of 30 to endorse opportunistic behaviour that provides private benefits at some to cost to the community … seems to be greater than it is among older generations' (Hall 1999: 457). In 1959, those under the age of 30 belonged to about 84 per cent as many associations as those older than 30; by the 1990s, Hall shows, this number had decreased to 75 per cent. These factors are particularly worrying because trust and association are often cited as key features of political participation (Putnam 2002). A high level of trust increases the likelihood that citizens will build relationships and networks which can in turn be used to collectively solve local and national issues or to stand up together against an unwanted policy or government. Associations and organisations are essential for bringing people together in networks where they can build the trust and communication needed to engage in politics.

Importantly, such decreases in social capital have taken place alongside disengagement with politics. For instance, Park et al (2004: 24) found that, in 1994, 53 per cent of respondents correctly answered three of four basic true or false questions about politics, but only 44 per cent did so in 2003, showing a decline in political literacy. Craig and Bennett (1997: 37) argue that citizens with little political literacy 'cannot perform their most basic duties – voting and holding politicians accountable for their actions – as they are largely ignorant about the individuals and institutions that constitute the public realm'. It is therefore no surprise that voting levels among the young are the lowest of all age-groups, with only 44 per cent of 18–24-year-olds voting in the last general election in 2010, compared to 69 per cent for those aged 45-54 (UK Political Info 2014).

What to do now?

Improve citizenship classes in schools

The first policy option is to improve and increase the number of classes in citizenship. This policy has already been enacted to some degree. The Youth Citizenship Commission saw citizenship education as a way to build youth citizenship (YCC 2009).

Citizenship education was made compulsory for those between the ages of 11 and 16 in 2002. The idea was that it would benefit pupils by 'empowering them to participate in society effectively as active, informed, critical and responsible citizens' (AGETDS 1998: 9). The curriculum has subsequently been based upon 'three mutually dependent strands': political literacy, social and moral responsibility, and community involvement (ibid: 12). In essence, citizenship studies can be used to increase social capital among young people by encouraging communication about politics, which can develop knowledge of politics, as well as levels of trust among peers and consequently a greater likelihood of engaging in political issues as a group.

However, studies have also revealed less positive results. For example, in 2009, the YCC found that 65 per cent of 11–13-year-olds and 45 per cent of 14–15-year-olds were unaware they had ever received citizenship education, suggesting there are major problems with its delivery (YCC: 18). A 2010 Ofsted report further found that in many schools citizenship studies is 'forced to share an inadequate curriculum slot with other subjects' and there is 'only partial coverage of the curriculum', causing 'important gaps in pupils' knowledge, especially their political understanding' (Ofsted 2010). Another problem, identified by the National Foundation for Education Research, is teachers' 'lack of confidence in the subject matter' as, in general, 'it is perceived to be dry and difficult to teach' (NFER 2007: 4). In this light it is perhaps not surprising that citizenship studies are not highly regarded by further education institutes at the moment, with the result that students can be reluctant to take the subject seriously.

All of the above means that one clear and obvious policy solution would be to improve citizenship studies. A first step would be to improve resources so that pupils really are engaged with the subject. As in any other subject, there should be funding for textbooks and school trips (for

instance, to parliament). Students should be encouraged to solve real policy problems, the results of which could be sent to local MPs or parliament. Another positive step would be to improve considerably teaching training on citizenship issues, although both this and the measures mentioned above would need increased funding at a time when funding is generally being cut.

Development of local community-based meetings

Many studies have shown that young people 'feel excluded from politics or marginalised within it … believing they would not be taken seriously even if they were to participate within decision-making bodies' (O'Toole et al 2003: 356). Supporting this, Henn and Foard (2012: 56) found that 51 per cent of survey respondents agreed that 'young people like me have no say in what the government does' and 61 per cent agreed that 'there aren't enough opportunities for young people like me to influence political parties'. In short, the youth of today do not feel engaged within the political process.

There is a strong argument, therefore, in favour of increasing community engagement in a way that encourages political participation, particularly among the young. One way of doing this would be to introduce community-led meetings to bring young and other disengaged citizens into local political processes.

Such meetings would not only be open to members of the public, but citizens would also be charged with the basic running and organisation of the meetings, so that they are as community-centred as possible. It would also be important, however, to make sure that local councillors and MPs attend such meetings when asked, so that conversations between politicians and citizens are more direct, decision-making is more representative, and trust is able to develop. This kind of meeting would be new to the UK, but could be modeled on community meetings which have taken place in the United States and Canada.

In order to help incentivise turnout, local employers, schools, sports teams and youth centres could be asked to vote for candidates to represent them in the first meetings. Such outlets could also be used to advertise the open nature of such community-focused meetings.

In my view, these meetings would help to increase political participation by opening new channels of communication and strengthening trust between citizens and politicians. As already mentioned, research has shown that these are essential factors in the development of the networks required for citizens to work collectively to solve local and national problems, and therefore in their engagement with the policymaking and political decision-making processes. Such meetings can also be influential in increasing levels of political participation, as they could be organised around political issues, ranging from local matters, such as summer fetes, to policy issues, such as recycling. They could also be used to encourage engagement with national issues, such as policy surrounding immigration. As they would require the participation of the young, the issue of youth disengagement itself could be addressed, and in general there would be a better chance of youth-related issues being discussed.

Costs would be minimal, and so the funding required to set up community meetings should not be a major issue. For example, schools, churches or local government buildings, which are already central to communities, could be used. In the circumstances, the rent for their use could be waived or reduced. For any building costs required the community members themselves could pay a small fee. While it could be argued that this will discourage participation, it is also the case that when someone has paid for a service they are more likely to use it.

Nonetheless, funding would be required in order to undertake national promotional campaigns. The aim would be to make these meetings local in setting but sometimes national in focus, and so advertising their existence would be essential.

In my view, this policy would actively engage the community in decision-making, problem-solving and in communication, so as to be able to increase levels of social capital and political participation. Significantly, it also fits into current government initiatives, it is local in nature, and it is cost-effective.

Conclusion

This article has addressed the issue of social capital among young people and has argued that decreasing levels of it have negatively impacted on levels of political participation. The

effects of low participation on democracy are substantial, and this is increased due to the fact that the biggest effects are among the young. In response, I have proposed two policy solutions that are potentially influential in increasing levels of social capital among young people.

The first policy option is to improve citizenship engagement lessons within schools. This programme is already in place and could easily be modified to improve results. However, issues over funding, resources and a lack of evidence that it would effectively engage pupils mean that it is a riskier option than the second proposal.

The second policy recommendation is to develop local engagement via community meetings. The policy is designed to engage the community generally and young people in particular in policy decision-making and problem-solving. The positives are that it is versatile, fairly self-sustaining and has the ability to impact a large number of people. While there are costs involved, such costs are minimal compared to other policies and there is some evidence that government-led policies with similar goals have had a positive impact. Therefore, in my view, policy option two has the best chance of effectively helping to improve social capital levels among the young and the whole population, and this will directly benefit democracy.

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2.
EUROPE AND THE NEXT GENERATION
WHY YOUTH EUROPEANISM COULD SAVE THE UK AND HOW IT COULD BE DONE

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The UK's relations with Europe, never strong, have fallen to a critically low point over the past few years. This essay sets out the potential dangers of this trend, and proposes a paradigm through which to view future decision-making: a focus on youth policy. It then explores a variety of policy options and assesses them according to feasibility.

The UK's European problem

The recent European parliamentary elections gave added credence to the prospect of the UK exiting from the European Union in any future referendum. However, in my view, the vision of the UK leaving the EU in favour of closer alliances with the US, the BRIC countries[1] and the Commonwealth is flawed.

The US is orienting its foreign policy towards Europe as a whole, rather than focusing on its 'special' relationship with the UK. BRIC countries take a similar approach, and in many cases have no strong ties with the UK. It is naive to imagine that even the members of the Commonwealth will open up their markets to the UK exclusively and ignore the EU. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that the UK, having exited from the Union, could then negotiate a Swiss or Norwegian-type relationship with the EU.

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1   Brazil, Russia, India and China

The EU is still the world's biggest trading area (Eurostat 2013) and most European nations overall have good standards of living (UNDP 2013: 16–19). To have advantageous trading arrangements with such a bloc is seen by most countries in the world as a huge benefit; so if the UK was to exit the EU, it would be adopting a very high-risk strategy.

The EU is also a powerful cultural entity. Despite the narratives around US cultural hegemony, the EU's vast cultural exports mean that many European nations punch far above their weight in the global arena. In addition, the diversity of Europe's cultural traditions is a definite qualitative benefit in terms of social and cultural wellbeing, especially in relation to 'Euro-mobility'.

The European inflection in security policy can also be seen as highly desirable. An alliance with the US is almost purely based on what is termed 'hard' power – that is, power focused on military capability, reach and dominance. The EU's common foreign and security policy on the other hand has been more about 'soft' power (McClory 2010). Taking a very diplomatic and sanctions-based approach, it can be credited with the reducing of tensions with Iran, for example.

Civic Europeanism: challenges and solutions

Despite the dangers of leaving and the benefits of staying in the EU, Euroscepticism has become increasingly mainstream in Westminster, as the major parties keep one wary eye on the growing popularity of Ukip. Realigning UK policy towards the EU in a positive way requires long-term commitment from several parties. However, only one of the major parties – the Liberal Democrats (2010: 66–67) – is openly enthusiastic about the European project, so developing a new approach to Europe is beginning to look impossible.

A particular obstacle to developing the UK's relationship with the EU is the fact that the British public imagination is not European to any significant extent. We are among the least likely in Europe to see ourselves as citizens of the EU, and what limited support there is for this notion is not evenly distributed across the population but instead is concentrated among the highly educated and the middle class (EC 2013: 23, 25). Britons see themselves as distinct from Europe, and

any move that threatens the sovereignty of the UK struggles to attract public backing.

There is a silver lining, however: the younger generation of Britons is the most European in its outlook (ibid). The solution to the problem of Euroscepticism therefore is pushing 'youth Europeanism'. This should start in our education system, which should be aiming to boost a sense of European solidarity in all pupils. Many may see the cultivation of a European mindset as sinister, but I would argue that it is no different than making citizenship part of the national curriculum, or ensuring that the history curriculum reflects 'British values', or even studying a predominantly British body of literature.

Most importantly, young people *want* policies that will make them more European, especially in relation to mobility. This is the generation that most wants to go abroad to work in Europe (EC 2010: 17); other generations tend to go to Europe only for holidays or to retire – if they wish to go at all. However, if these young peoples' aspirations are to be achieved then language skills will need to improve.

Policy considerations: class, ethnicity and education

Of course, there are obstacles beyond the usual cost constraints to pushing a stronger sense of European identity among young people. The first, mentioned above, is the current divide by socioeconomic status. Across European countries, including the UK, one of the strongest predictors of Europeanism is the level of education. Therefore, solely approaching this policy through colleges and universities will exclude many young people. Those who leave 'academic' education following GCSE-level need to be targeted too. In particular, any policy framework must take into account that language skills are key. This is especially true among people from more disadvantaged backgrounds.

Therefore, policies should be aimed at all levels: primary and secondary education, universities, apprenticeships and young workers. Otherwise, certain policies will be weighted towards a particular section of society. In order to avoid the pitfalls of the past, all young people must be targeted at once.

In the following sections I set out a range of policy options, from small-scale and low-cost to radical and potentially high-cost, covering the three education stages.

Curriculum changes in mainstream education

The Department for Education should change the requirements of the English baccalaureate (or 'Ebacc'). Competence in a modern European language should be necessary to pass the language component. By requiring that the language must be modern European – rather than ancient or non-European – it will give more young people a more European mindset. This is at odds with, for instance, David Cameron's emphasis on students taking Mandarin (Watt and Adams 2013). However, according to the British Council, five of the 10 most important languages to learn for the future are European (Tinsey and Board 2013).[2]

A more radical step would be to adopt the syllabuses of the International Baccalaureate (IB) at all ages.[3] Currently there are three stages – primary, middle years and diploma – with the latter being the best-known. With the spread of academies, more and more schools have the flexibility to choose this option. The IB diploma especially is a well-regarded qualification, and is accepted throughout the world. While the curriculum is not expressly European in nature, the world-mindedness that it encourages is good. The international curriculum would also help to avoid the alienation of black and minority ethnic young people. However, commissioning the programmes is expensive, due to the fees that the IB organisation charges. Such a strategy could not be widespread, but perhaps offered by just one set of schools in each local authority.

Curriculum changes in apprenticeships and vocational education

One important and low-cost step would be for educational institutions to include languages in vocational as well as 'academic' education. Across the country, many schools and colleges discourage pupils and students from taking language courses on the basis that they are too difficult or not useful.

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2   Spanish, French, German, Portuguese and Italian, alongside Arabic, Mandarin Chinese, Russian, Turkish and Japanese.

3   See http://www.ibo.org/

Knowing, for instance, German for engineering or French for business is something that the new range of university technical colleges emphasise, but this perspective must be pushed by other further education (FE) institutions as well. Students who have an interest in vocational education must not be discouraged from studying languages.

This can be done in two ways: by encouraging a range of pupils to study languages at GCSE level, and by incorporating languages into FE colleges and apprenticeships.

We also need to see a dramatic improvement in the uptake of Erasmus+ in vocational institutions.[4] Erasmus+ in the UK has largely been targeted at university students, but it is little known there has always been a vocational equivalent, called 'Leonardo da Vinci'. Recently, these have all been combined into a single Erasmus+ programme. The take-up rates for vocational Erasmus+ in the UK are shockingly low, and increasing it would have a variety of benefits. It would increase the European mindset of non-university-goers and give a real reason for those in vocational education to continue with languages. The issue of cost to the exchequer is not a factor, as Erasmus+ is an EU-funded programme.

Supporting the Europeanisation of higher education

A simple and low-cost policy would be to further push the existing Erasmus programme, which is already popular among university students. It provides opportunities for students to develop their language skills, travel across Europe and increase their employability. It also has the benefit of dramatically reducing tuition fees. At the University of Sheffield, for instance, fees for students going abroad for a year with Erasmus are reduced from £9,000 to £1,350. In addition, the non-means-tested Erasmus stipend usually meets the extra costs of living in another country.

An additional, important step would be to support languages departments in UK universities. Budget cuts mean many have had to close. A consequence of the recently introduced EBacc

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4   See http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/discover/index_en.htm

should help to halt the rapid decline, but more can be done. By making all degrees flexible enough to incorporate a 'minor' in a European language – as opposed to just business and the STEM subjects[5] – the language readiness of more students should increase. In the short term, funding is a problem; however, in the end this measure could be cost-beneficial. Currently, languages departments are being closed due to falling student numbers, but if student numbers were to rise as a result of more engaging modern foreign languages education, then this could be reversed. In addition, the economic benefits of language skills are attested to by employers'organisations.

A more radical policy option would be to open up student finance to those who wish to study their full degree in another European country. Currently, the number of British students who study abroad is quite low compared to other European countries, often because finance is an issue. By allowing students to take out tuition fee and maintenance loans for other European universities has many benefits. It may bring down fees in the UK, as a result of British universities having to compete with lower-priced universities on the continent, and it would give British students more choice over how they are taught and where. It would enable language students to better immerse themselves in another country's culture. Moreover, opportunities would be available to a wide variety of students, because many European universities, such as the University of Maastricht, offer courses conducted in English.

Conclusion

These policies could be implemented independently of each other. However, in order to incorporate these myriad proposals into a single cohesive policy package, overall reform to the structure of many levels of education is required.

First, reforms would be required to the qualifications framework in what are currently known as key stages 4 and 5. Kenneth Baker, among others, has called for a 14–18 approach in education policy (Baker et al 2013), and in the interests of Europeanisation I would back his call for a single 14–18 baccalaureate-style qualification, allowing for a scope of interests. As part of this, a

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5   Science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

European language could be compulsory and taught in all four years, including for those students whose interests are more vocational or technical in orientation.

But this approach has also to be continued into further and higher education. Those in higher education must be encouraged and given the opportunity to study a European language and to study in Europe, regardless of their area of specialism. This requires the liberalisation of student finance and the organisation of university degrees, which must become more flexible in order to accommodate modern languages.

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3.
THE CASE AGAINST INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS AS CHARITIES

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Independent schools currently qualify for charitable status, granting them around £100 million in tax relief each year (Bland 2013). We argue that, in general, the negative impacts of independent schools on wider society outweigh their public benefits, and that therefore most should not qualify for charitable status.

We take this stance as a point of principle, but also as a way of tackling Britain's poor record on intergenerational social mobility. We note that the general public are divided on the issue, with a small but significant majority opposing charitable status (YouGov 2009).

The thrust of our argument is that independent schools do not qualify for charitable status under the current guidelines. First, and most fundamentally, we argue that the public detriment of independent schools outweighs any public benefit which they provide. Second, people in poverty are, in the vast majority of cases, excluded from the benefits. Finally, the private benefit they confer on their pupils cannot be considered to be incidental to their purpose. In our view, the Charity Commission can remove charitable status from independent schools without the need for legislation, and therefore should do so. If they cannot, the legislature should amend the Charities Act to make this possible.

Background

Argument concerning the charitable status of independent schools has intensified in recent years, following the passage of the Charities Act 2006, but it still receives little media coverage. The debate centres on whether independent schools satisfactorily meet the Charity Commission's criteria for charitable status. The fundamental criterion for that status is that the institution must provide a public benefit which outweighs any public harm. On one hand, independent schools might benefit their particular students with a superior education, the benefits of which might 'trickle down' to the rest of society, and they might relieve pressure on state schools. On the other hand, independent schools might damage state schools by siphoning away teachers and pupils, they might inhibit social mobility, and the segregation of children on the basis of wealth may be damaging to social cohesion.

Around this sit further questions about what constitutes a public benefit. How large a proportion of the public must benefit in order for it to count? Is it relevant that some children are excluded from these benefits on the basis of their parents' wealth? The Charity Commission's guidance states that in order to qualify as charities, independent schools must not exclude 'the poor' from accessing their services. In practice, this usually means that a school provides bursaries for a limited number of children from poorer backgrounds. An Upper Tribunal ruling in October 2011 upheld this requirement not to exclude 'the poor' in the face of a challenge by the Independent Schools Council, but allowed a flexible interpretation, saying that it was up to school governors to decide how their school may provide public benefit, provided it is over a *de minimis* threshold (ISC v CC 2011).

Currently, 82 per cent of private schools have charitable status. These schools are exempt from corporation tax, and receive a discount of 80 per cent on business rates (see Butler 2013). In total, this amounts to around £100 million per year (Bland 2013), or £200 for every pupil in an independent school. This is, in essence, a government subsidy for private education.

The current legal justification for this status is based on guidance accompanying the Charities Act 2011, which defined a charity as an institution which is established for a 'charitable purpose' which provides a 'public benefit' (Charity Commission 2013).

The guidance states that 'advancing education' is a charitable purpose, and that money made as part of a charity's 'primary purpose', including school fees, would be exempt from tax. In order to qualify as providing 'public benefit' charities must, among other requirements, show that: 'any benefit is balanced against harm or detriment', 'people in poverty are not excluded from benefiting' and that 'any private benefit must be incidental' (ibid).

The negative impact of independent schools on the state system

An important harm is the loss of teachers from the state sector. Independent schools employ a disproportionately large share of teachers for the number of pupils they teach. Average class size in the independent sector is 10.5; in the state sector it is 26.5 (Francis and Wong 2013). Independent school teachers are more likely to possess postgraduate qualifications and are more likely to be specialists in subjects for which there is a shortage of teachers (Green et al 2008). This mirrors a national shortage in the public sector, which is such a concern that the government is offering ever-higher financial incentives, exemplified by the 'Get Into Teaching' programme.[6]

It is fair to assume that many independent school teachers would teach in the state sector if independent schools did not exist. Teachers are said to be attracted to the independent sector because of smaller class sizes and fewer behavioural issues (Paton 2009). So, as more and better-trained teachers are pulled into the private sector, it is the standard of teaching for children in the state sector that is detrimentally affected. And, perversely, as teachers leave the state sector, the factors which drove them from it are exacerbated.

Furthermore, the private sector makes no contribution to the funding of teacher training; this is done by the government. It is therefore a real loss to the public when, after years of training, a teacher moves to work in the private sector.

State schools are also negatively impacted by the loss of pupils and parents to the private sector. Wealthy parents are more likely to communicate regularly with the school about their child,

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6   See http://www.education.gov.uk/get-into-teaching/funding/postgraduate-funding

to hold teachers to account and to volunteer with the school (Francis and Hutchings 2013). They are also likely to utilise their financial, social and cultural capital for the benefit of the school (ibid). Furthermore, parents who are capable of paying school fees are likely to be materially comfortable and highly educated. This is more likely to give their children the developmental basis of a stable home, and to provide an informal education that helps them to be more interested, engaged and disciplined at school. The presence of disciplined and engaged students makes a class easier to teach. The presence of engaged parents helps provide accountability and support to schools. With the education system as it is, these families are disproportionately drawn into the private sector and their absence is acutely felt in the state sector.

The negative impact of independent schools on social mobility

The UK has the worst record for social mobility of any European country except Portugal (OECD 2010). The UK also has the second largest private education sector, in relative terms, in the world, behind Chile (Dorling 2012).

One way that independent schools contribute to social immobility is by providing their pupils with a competitive advantage in university applications. Competition for places at the prestigious universities is essentially zero-sum: the more pupils from independent schools who get into university, the fewer places there are for talented state school pupils. Now, an independent school pupil is more likely to get into a top-30 university than any other pupil (Sutton Trust 2013). If this is because – as the Independent Schools Council (ISC) argues – independent school pupils are simply better educated and therefore more deserving on a meritocratic basis, then independent schools would be producing public benefit, by providing students who were better educated and more valuable to society.

However, this claim is questionable. A 2008 report, based on a study of 130, 000 students, concluded that, for students with the same A-level results, state school students do better at university than students from independent schools (HEFCE 2014). This shows that independent schools are not providing a 'better education' in any meaningful sense – they are merely

conferring a competitive advantage when it comes to university applications. In this zero-sum competition, state schools lack the resources to compete for places by hothousing exam preparation or providing intensive interview coaching. This inequality deprives society of the benefit of having its brightest and best students university educated and prepared for top jobs, creating a significant economic cost. A study by the Boston Consulting Group (2010) found that the annual cost to the UK of social immobility will be 4 per cent of GDP by 2050. This is based on people getting top-flight jobs on the basis of advantages procured in their youth, rather than because they were the best person for the job. In order to ensure the best and brightest people get the best jobs, reducing educational inequality is vital.

Questioning the wider benefits of independent schools

One way independent schools defend their status is by pointing to the bursaries they provide for less well-off students. According to the ISC (2013), private schools 'provide more than £300 million annually in means-tested bursaries'. In purely numerical terms, this would appear to outweigh the £100 million tax relief they receive. However, it does not, for two reasons. First, just over 58 per cent of pupils on means-tested bursaries have less than half of their fees remitted (ISC 2013). With average fees of £14,295 a year – and 18,387 for sixth formers – the majority of those receiving means-tested benefits are paying at least £7,141 a year for school fees, or £9,193 in the sixth form.

The Greater London Assembly sets the living wage (the minimum wage required to meet basic living expenses) at £8.80 an hour, or £17,278 a year. Sending a child to independent school, even with a 50 per cent bursary, without falling below this basic minimum would therefore require a salary of at least £24,419, or roughly the national average wage. A further 26 per cent of bursaries cover less than 25 per cent of students' school fees, making them unaffordable for those not earning well above the national average wage. Overall, fewer than one in eight bursary students receive a full bursary, which would be necessary to enable the poorest to access private education. Indeed, of the 508,000 pupils in ISC member schools, only 4,954 – less than 1 per cent – receive a full bursary (ibid).

The majority of these bursaries are not for the poor but for the moderately well-off. In the vast majority of cases, those in poverty are excluded from private education. Moreover, this assumes that bursaries are targeted and rigorously means-tested. However, it may be that some of the students on bursaries could afford to pay more without falling below the accepted minimum, in which case the numbers of the least well-off students attending private schools would be even lower than these figures suggest.

To bolster their defence, the majority of independent schools also form partnerships with state schools or community groups. However, there is no research analysing the impact of either bursaries or these partnerships. So while the harms of private schools are evident, the benefits are uncertain at best. There is a very strong argument that a greater number of students would receive a greater benefit if this money was spent on state schools rather than a tax break for independent schools.

Finally, it is not necessarily the case that independent schools would stop providing bursaries if their charitable status was removed. It is likely that independent schools would continue to provide such services either benevolently or in order to morally justify their continued existence.

Conclusion

Overall, the private sector drains good teachers, good pupils and motivated parents from the state sector, which negatively impacts on the quality of education those in the state sector receive. Since students from state schools with similar grades outperform independent school students at university, it is clear they are not providing a better education, merely a competitive advantage. And while university places are finite in number, this competitive advantage deprives deserving state school students of those places, which in turn inhibits social mobility. It seems clear, therefore, that on balance private schools do not benefit society, and so should not have the label of 'charity' nor the tax break this entails.

Such a change would be simple. The government should instruct the Charity Commission to consider the ple. The government should ipendent schools provide their students to be central to their mission, thereby disqualifying them from

charitable status. Such a change would not prevent private schools from existing. However, it would provide an extra source of income for state schools, encourage parents, pupils, and teachers to rejoin the state sector and give the message that conferring privilege is not beneficial to the public.

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4.
A EUROPEAN IDENTITY AMONG BRITISH YOUTH

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Today a European citizen can travel from Lisbon to Warsaw, from Stockholm to Palermo, without encountering any border controls. 500 million Europeans share access to a common single market. They jointly elect their European parliament. 330 million people use the same currency. All these are recent, yet they are important influences on our daily lives.

This article assesses how policies of European integration, such as the common currency or Erasmus student exchange programme, have influenced the identity of the under-30s generation, the first to experience the full range of such policies. I argue that this generation is developing a stronger common European identity, and is therefore more open to further European integration. I also contend that this is a beneficial trend, and so governments should encourage its growth through appropriate policies.

Does a European identity exist?
The Eurobarometer and other such Europe-wide survey tools provide statistical evidence that proves a common European identity exists. The Eurobarometer 2011 found that 15 per cent of those surveyed can be classified as 'New Europeans' by ancestry, and another 20 per cent as 'New Europeans' by openness, signifying that such an individual affiliates themselves with Europe and shares a joint European identity (EC 2011: 4–5).[7]

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7   The Eurobarometer draws a distinction between a 'New European by ancestry', in whose family at least one parent or grandparent is from another country, and a 'New European by openness', who developed a strong link to another country either through having worked or studied there, or having a partner from that country, or owning property in this country (EC 2011: 24–37).

Furthermore, although individual links to other European countries can be found across all sectors of employment, age and education, a correlation between European identity, age and education exists. Among surveyed students, 30 per cent believe that they will move to another EU country within 10 years (ibid: 48). Support for the EU is noticeably higher in these groups, as they have had greater exposure to European policies and have benefited more from them.

Why, then, should policymakers focus on the new generation, whose European identity is already visibly stronger, rather than trying to strengthen that identity among older generations? Neil Fligstein (2008) argues that the 'old generation' is less familiar with foreign languages, more likely to think within national borders, and less interested in what is happening beyond them. In short, they are less 'adventurous' (ibid: 126). It would therefore be significantly harder for any policy to alter this conservative mindset. It is an easier task to influence those – that is to say, the young – who have never experienced the alternative.

However, this younger generation is also less likely to vote. This weakens its political influence, so that parties and movements opposed to the idea of European integration are over-represented. The concern of policymaking should therefore focus on increased engagement with the new generation, attempting to broaden their European identity, making European politics more visible and attractive to this group and, above all, encouraging them to take part in democratic processes.

Where does the European identity come from?

According to the Eurobarometer, the policies and issues that contribute to a European identity are the euro (36 per cent), democratic values (32 per cent), the geographic definition (22 per cent) and common culture (22 per cent) (EC 2011: 95). From this data it is evident that recent policies of European integration have been successful insofar as they have generated a common identity. The use of a common currency across 17 nations has undoubtedly created a feeling of common identity and economic interdependence. Previously, using a different currency and language in a foreign country was perhaps the most visible reminder that one is merely a visitor. In only a few years, the first eurozone generation to have never experienced

a separate national currency will leave secondary education and join wider society. Their commitment to the euro will therefore be stronger, and they will identify more common ground with other member states, precisely because they will have never had the experience of exchanging currencies when travelling abroad within the region.

Freedom of movement, called by some the holy grail of European politics (Jovanovic 2013: 265) is another important reason for the expanding European identity. The abolition of borders within the Schengen area greatly contributes to the feeling of unity, allowing individuals to cross national borders at will and promoting 'international' exchange. Particularly in border regions, the introduction of the euro combined with the single market and freedom of movement have torn down any visible barriers to cross-national identity, although societal ones may still exist.

Cross-border metropolitan regions have developed, greatly encouraged by institutionalised local cooperation, and commuting patterns have emerged that simply ignore national borders: in 2006/07, there were almost 800,000 cross-border commuting workers across the whole EU (AEBR 2012). A prime example of this development is the Øresund bridge linking Copenhagen in Denmark with the Swedish city of Malmö, which is used by 72,000 people daily, of whom around 20,000 are estimated to be daily commuters (with the overwhelming majority commuting into the Danish capital). This interdependence is reinforced through additional cooperation, such as a joint science cluster funded from both EU and local budgets (Yndigegn 2011).

Especially for students, programmes of cultural and linguistic exchange are important and an essential part of their identity formation. Despite current fiscal austerity, both national governments and the European Commission (EC) continue their funding for the Erasmus+ programme, which will provide an estimated 4 million young Europeans with opportunities to study and work abroad (EC 2014a). Arguably, this is another crucial factor in the formation of a European identity, as Erasmus participants experience life outside of their own country and are opened up to a European culture and identity. The programme specifies three main fields which it aims to support: mobility for

young people and workers, capacity-building, and the dialogue between young people (the new generation) and the decision-makers (EC 2014b).

The new generation will greatly benefit from this, and identify more with Europe as a result of their greater mobility and enhanced language skills. In 2010, roughly 570,000 European students chose to study in another EU member state (Eurostat 2013). Individuals of the new generation participating in such programmes will have come into more contact with other European cultures and languages because of these policies.

It should be clear that the European identity and support for European integration are strongly correlated in a positive, yet distinct, manner (Bruter 2005). Recent polls about a hypothetical EU referendum in the UK reflect this claim, showing a large discrepancy between the age-groups, with 49 per cent of those aged 24 and under in favour of remaining in the EU (versus 19 per cent voting for withdrawal), compared with those aged 60 and over, for instance, of whom only 39 per cent would vote in favour of the status quo (versus 50 per cent for withdrawal) (YouGov 2014).

As time passes, the new generation will find themselves more and more in favour of European integration while the share of those opposing it will diminish.

The benefits of the European identity

Individuals who acquire this identity feel more comfortable in other countries, and facilitate cross-cultural exchange and relations. A common identity emphasises common values, such as democracy, peace and human rights (Bennhold 2005). More-intensive contact with neighbouring countries and their populations reinforces tolerance and mutual understanding. Joint programmes and cultural projects can benefit from open borders and easier access, particularly in areas close to national borders.

Cross-border movement also encourages small businesses to expand into the single market, stimulating growth. The new generation, equipped with more European experiences and also more likely also able to speak more languages, will thrive in these new industries and help them grow. In general, the new European identity enables individuals to acquire far more

opportunities both in their personal and work life. The new generation, carrying the new European identity, has access to more opportunities through their better connections to other European countries, and will find it easier to establish personal relations and cultural ties with other Europeans, thus broadening their own social network.

Implications for future policy

In order to ensure that the growth of this beneficial identity among the new generation continues, it is vital that new policies with this objective are pursued at a local, national and and European level. National governments should have an interest in promoting the European identity, for, as discussed in the previous section, it encourages cross-cultural exchange, stimulates growth and provides new opportunities for both individuals and businesses.

The promotion of a European identity need not override the national one (Fligstein 2008: 137), and so national governments should seek to support the former. Any coherent policy approach must include three different levels of policy cooperation. First, there must be local cross-border cooperation, as demonstrated by the Øresund region. Second, national governments should provide sufficient funding and undertake their own efforts to promote the European identity through the education system. National governments carry significant influence in the European policy arena as well. They should improve intergovernmental cooperation and concentrate on a reform of the European framework in order to make it more democratic and accountable. Finally, the European institutions, above all the European parliament and commission, can affect the new generation through their own policy initiatives, as they did successfully with the Erasmus programme. They should also bring greater attention to the EU policy process so that more young people become aware of European politics and attach greater weight to their vote in European elections.

Local policy initiatives

At the local level, more municipalities located in the proximity of national borders should aspire to follow the Øresund example, and intensify their economic, infrastructural and educational cooperation – although in many places this is already

happening. Primary schools could make frequent trips across the border, and start teaching neighbouring foreign languages at a very early age. Local public transport systems could introduce cross-border lines, as is planned with the Strasbourg tramway on the France/Germany border. Twinned towns across Europe should seek to reinforce their ties through frequent exchanges and visits.

National policy initiatives

At the national level, governments should both introduce their own policies to promote the European identity and cooperate with other EU member states to that end. One of the most salient issues is knowledge about the EU and its institutional processes. To the outsider, the entanglement of offices in Brussels and Strasbourg seems alien and complex: indeed, 59 per cent of respondents in a Eurobarometer poll said they would like to know more about their rights as European citizens (EC 2013a). Policy should therefore target the educational system. So far, education at the tertiary level has received the most attention by European policymakers. To promote the European identity across the entire new generation, however, policies targeting schools and post-education life should be considered and implemented.

Common values should be taught and promoted. This can include the hosting of mock European parliaments at schools, meetings and talks with European representatives, and the promotion of the European Youth Parliament.[8] Furthermore, schools should include the history and institutional design of the EU in their teaching curriculum. Within the national equivalent of A-levels, for example, a half-year module on the history and politics of the EU should be made compulsory. National governments should also adapt their secondary school curricula so that the learning of at least one foreign language becomes mandatory. Even though such initiatives already exist in some member states, greater cooperation and coherency is required to ensure that all member states participate in a joint effort. Programmes can always increase their effectiveness through greater funding and an extended reach. The Erasmus programme, which already provides a valuable experience for students, should be extended to include apprenticeships, so

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8   See http://eyp.org/

that young engineers or technicians from countries with high youth unemployment could be offered a one-year placement in Germany or elsewhere.

European policy initiatives

At the European level, the depiction of Brussels as a bureaucratic, slow and inefficient administration that, despite its lack of democratic legitimation, interferes with our daily lives, is understandably the cause of frustration and dissatisfaction. Although national governments have an incentive to promote the European identity, it might become difficult to do so through 28 different administrations and approaches. Along with any national reforms of the educational system, the European parliament should achieve more direct exposure and communicate its policies and successes more directly. To take one example: from 1 July this year, roaming charges on mobile phones across the EU were lowered (again) – and yet the European origin of this consumer-friendly regulation was hardly promoted at all.

A survey taken before the 2014 European parliamentary elections found that, among 15–30-year-olds, 64 per cent of respondents said they would not vote because they believed that their vote would not change anything. Of those unwilling to vote, 61 per cent believed that they were not sufficiently informed to vote and 56 per cent believed that the European parliament did not sufficiently deal with problems that concern them (EC 2013b: 35).

To address these problems, pan-European public media needs to be developed. European elections are still too much concerned about national issues, and often seen as an opportunity to make a pure 'protest vote' with nothing at stake. A European public is essential to encourage pan-European debate and emphasise the importance of the issues that the European parliament deals with. The 2014 election saw the first candidates for the EC presidency brought forward by the blocs or 'families' of European parties. Significantly, turnout in Germany increased – against the trend – from 43.3 per cent to 47.9 per cent, and in France from 40.6 per cent to 43.5 per cent (European Parliament 2014). These two countries prominently featured debates between the two main contenders for office, Martin Schulz and Jean-Claude Juncker, whereas elsewhere

the electoral campaign was still dominated by national issues. In order to improve turnout further, and enhance the EU's democratic visibility, the next logical step would be to introduce direct election of the EC president. As was the case with the 'Eurovision' debate between the candidates of the party families in Maastricht, translated into all of the EU's official languages, pan-European debate about common issues such as education and youth unemployment should be encouraged and promoted by the media. The establishment of European media and a visible European electoral arena should incentivise young people to voice their opinion and turn out in European elections.

Conclusion

This article argued that a common European identity exists. It is strongly correlated with exposure to European policies. This identity is a cultural one, not confined to any borders or political entities, and is particularly widespread among young people. We can expect these policies to spread the European identity further across the new generation, which will be more open and tolerant towards other European countries, and more supportive of European integration. The new generation's perception of Europe and its politics will have changed. It has also been shown that this European identity is highly beneficial to them. The conclusion is that both national and European policymakers should implement further steps to extend this identity to the new generation.

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5.
THE 'GENERATION WITHOUT HOPE'
EDUCATION AS A WAY OF GIVING THE NEW GENERATION A SENSE OF AUTONOMY

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The young generation today is continually labeled by the media, activists and politicians as 'without hope' or 'lost', because of the economic burdens and difficulties they are expected to face for the rest of their lives (see for example Dodds 2014). Whether you blame it on government cuts or the general economic climate, it is hard to deny that the combination of higher university tuition fees, the difficulty of entering the housing market, low-paid jobs, unpaid internships, the rising cost of living and the shortage of jobs that match their qualifications, this paints a bleak picture for the future of the new generation.

However, today's younger generation is not the first to fall victim to an economic crisis, so this poses the question: why is there such a feeling of hopelessness this time around? I believe that the key difference is the lack of understanding and consequential powerlessness that comes with an ever more globalised and technological world, leaving young people feeling helpless in the face of changing, global economic forces. As a result, a big slice of the young generation has become disengaged from politics and lacks aspirations. This, I believe, is what constitutes a 'generation without hope'.

It follows, then, that to shake off this fatalistic label we need to re-engage young people with politics so that once again they can feel an element of control over their lives. There have

been recent attempts at improving the economic position and burdens on young people, such as the extension of apprenticeships, workforce grant schemes, tax reliefs and the First Buy housing schemes. However, although these policies may improve some people's lives in some ways, they fail to address the underlying need to instill young people with a sense of autonomy (Castella 2013). Governments need to adopt a more creative policy approach if they are to improve the outlook of this generation in a more fundamental way.

Educational reforms: knowledge is power

My proposal is that this can best be achieved through two reforms to the education system. First, social science subjects should receive an enhanced place on the secondary school curriculum. This would ensure that pupils have a basic comprehension of how the world they live in works. I am suggesting that the British government should introduce economics as a compulsory subject for children in secondary schools, and that compulsory citizenship classes should include more current political issues. Second, political bodies and schools should increase the level of interaction between politicians and young people. This could take the shape of politicians visiting secondary schools in their constituencies, where they could not only give an assembly to the students but also take questions from them. This would ensure that children become not just aware of current issues but also directly engaged with them.

These proposals may seem radical in that they suggest a certain amount of politicisation of education, which some may argue would make education a 'vehicle for imposing political fads'. However, elements of these three changes already exist (see for example Shepherd 2011), as I will show while outlining the practical implementation and importance of these ideas.

Adapting the current curriculum

First, let us focus on the policy proposal of introducing the teaching of economics in secondary schools. George Stigler, a Nobel laureate in economics, summed up the importance of economic literacy perfectly when he stated 'the public has chosen to speak and vote on economic problems, so the

only open question is how intelligently it speaks and votes' (Walstad 1998). Economic decisions at the personal level and the societal level determine so much of our lives, and so we require a certain amount of economic knowledge in order to fully comprehend issues and make educated choices. Currently in the UK, economics as a subject prior to sixth form is only offered as a part of mathematics, never as its own discipline. In the United States, by comparison, it is offered much more widely and is even compulsory in some states (ibid).

Young people at secondary level in the UK should learn basic economics so that they can understand both personal and national issues. For instance, the decision of whether or not to go to university and pay £9,000 a year in tuition fees should not be made without an understanding of interest rates and debt management. Economic literacy would also enable the new generation to understand the economic climate that they are growing up in and what it means for them. Former education minister Michael Gove expressed a concern over the gap between taught knowledge and required knowledge when he said:

> *'The pace of economic and technological change is accelerating and our children are being left behind … the previous curriculum failed to prepare us for the future. We must change course.'*
> Quoted in Paton 2011

However, his actions suggest this may have provided only false hope for positive educational reforms, as his policies seemed to show he was against using education as a tool for societal and world awareness.

At present, the main subject addressing current national issues is citizenship, the compulsory subject that focuses on providing children with an understanding of what it means to be a UK citizen. While the aim of equipping students 'with the skills to think critically and debate political questions, to enable them to manage their money on a day-to-day basis, and plan for future financial needs' implies an inclusion of national economic crises, the actual content of the subject says otherwise (DfE 2013). To fill this information gap, as well as the teaching of economics, I feel there needs to be a shift in the content of the citizenship curriculum so that it shows more directly both the effect that

political decisions have on young people's lives and the impact they can have on politics.

Citizenship currently includes an overview of 'democracy' but only touches on the very basics, such as the electoral system. These facts are important, but children need a better understanding of their power as citizens in a democracy. In other words, it should be compulsory for them to learn about pressure groups, thinktanks and other political organisations that work to get people's voices heard. Being educated on how to get your voice across, I believe, would show children and teenagers that they can have aspirations and opinions and would stop them feeling like pawns on society's chessboard.

Recent debates over Gove's suggestion to abolish this subject have brought up some strong opinions on the importance of inspiring political engagement in children. MP David Blunkett said that children understanding the world around them and their roles was vital for a 'well informed and participatory government', while Andy Thornton, chief executive of the Citizenship Foundation, expressed the need for children to be taught about 'the way that politics, democracy, the law and economy works, and how they can ... [participate in] society' (quoted in Shepherd 2011). Gove's argument for stopping the teaching of citizenship was that a 'particular subject on the national curriculum ... [cannot] address these deep and long standing challenges', yet he offered no alternative way for young people to become autonomous actors in society (Paton 2011). Schools and their curricula, along with parents and guardians, form the basis of socialisation for children. If part of being socialised is understanding the world you live in, then it makes perfect sense to teach children from a young age about the economic influences on their lives and the political power they have to control it.

Finally, I propose that politicians should visit secondary schools in their constituencies to build up a two-way, interactive relationship with local pupils. The idea behind this is that children would use what they have learned in economics and citizenship, as suggested above, and apply it to current issues that politicians would inform them about in assemblies. From this, they would be able to create their own opinions and ideas, which they would then have the opportunity to express either

directly to the visiting politician or in smaller discussion groups. By forming an opinion and having a politician really listen to them, children would feel empowered. Not only would this help to prevent the 'democratic deficit' that MP Tim Loughton, among others, has warned of, but it would also open up the opportunity to once again have a generation that actively participates in the formation of society (Murray 2011).

There already exist in many schools across the country a variety of activities initiated by teachers to try to politically engage their pupils. One example of this is London Academy's 'A day in politics', where year-8 students take on the roles of politicians from different countries and debate global issues as representatives of their given country (see Hill 2014). There is also Parliament's Education Service, which supports the development of political knowledge. I suggest that we take these kinds of initiatives one step further, and make it a universal policy – whether by requiring all MPs to spend two days a year visiting schools in their constituencies, or by making compulsory activities like those at London Academy, or perhaps even a combination of these, so that MPs visit schools when these 'A day in politics' activities are taking place. This would hopefully mean that all children, from a wide variety of backgrounds, would have the opportunity to feel not only that they understand society better but also that they are involved in the making of society and that their needs are being represented.

Conclusion

These adjustments to education may spark a fear of political indoctrination. But with the right teacher training, curriculum materials and structure, I believe they will do just the opposite, by opening up a world of understanding in which young people can have a sense of self-determination. Through the communication and education changes I am suggesting, children and young adults would once again feel that their voices mattered and that somebody was listening to their concerns.

We need the young generation to feel that they can change the world in the way that their grandparents did during the civil rights and student protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The only way to do this is if they understand the economic determinants in their lives and how to get their voices heard in

order to protect themselves against these constraints (Carroll 2013). The ability for children to understand and question the information they are given is often underestimated, and I believe that with this educational shift and increased level of political interaction, the new generation will feel they have a say in the outcome of their lives and will be inspired to make change.

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6.
SOCIETAL DISILLUSIONMENT OF THE NEW GENERATION
HOW DO WE REVERSE THE TIDE, BOTH POLITICALLY AND ECONOMICALLY?

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The 2008 financial crisis has had a profound effect on the lives of today's youth. There have been direct impacts, such as government cuts and constrained borrowing affecting their ability to find work and secure housing. There have also been indirect impacts, such as an increasing sentiment of political disengagement and efficacy, which in turn is negatively influencing young people's political and economic aspirations (Stolyarov 2010).

This article outlines the economic and political situation that faces the young today, and suggests key areas where change is required in order to help solve this developing problem of societal disillusionment among the new generation. I argue that the actions needed are:

- an increase in engagement and communication between politicians and young people
- an increase in alternative routes into work, such as vocational study.

The current economic situation of young people

In the UK, unemployment rates for those under the age of 25 are significantly higher than for those aged over 25: 16–17-years-olds have the highest rate of unemployment at

35.9 per cent, while 18–24-year-olds come in second at 18 per cent (ONS 2014). When these rates are compared with those aged 35–49 and 50–64 (4.7 per cent and 4.4 per cent respectively), we see that young people have 'borne the brunt of the financial crisis' (Monaghan 2014). Therefore, policies aimed at increasing opportunities for work and the employability of those affected are essential.

Widespread unemployment among young people doesn't just lead to economic disadvantage and damage their future employability, but has a significant impact on their mental wellbeing as well: 40 per cent of unemployed young people experience symptoms of mental illness as a direct result of being unemployed, and 21 per cent of those who are unemployed say 'they have nothing to live for' (Prince's Trust 2014). It is clear that we should do more for those who are 'lacking all hope for the future' (Siddique 2014).

Unsurprisingly, the impact of the financial crisis has also made a mark on young people's expectations for the future. Only 45 per cent now believe they will be able to obtain a job in the area they desire, down from 60 per cent before the recession. The 2012 Global Risks report states that 'when ambitious and industrious young people start to feel that, no matter how hard they work, their prospects are constrained, then feelings of powerless-ness, disconnectedness and disengagement can take root' (WEF 2012).

In addition, as the population ages, today's youth are going to have to bear the brunt of the increasing needs of their elders. UK chancellor George Osborne's remarks that £25 billion in spending cuts will need to be made before 2015 (Chakrabortty 2013) underpinned the belief that the state of Britain's economy isn't going to recover any time soon. This continuous negative commentary on things to come is having an impact on those growing up in the middle of it.

One recent report suggests that attitudes and values towards work in the young generation are in line with the 'conventional, mainstream attitudes' (JRF 2012). Despite this, researchers have found that, while high youth unemployment rates might serve to motivate those with well-educated and employed parents to work harder in school, those with less well-educated parents were subject to reduced educational aspirations (Taylor and Rampino 2013). As cuts continue, and young people begin

to realise the likelihood that they will have 'lower overall living standards than their parents' (McAteer nd), it is likely that these limited aspirations will become more common. As David Blanchflower comments, 'the young are being told they have no value' which is 'an ideological and wilful abandonment of any investment in the future' (cited in Savage 2014). This highlights why it is so important for a change in approach. The policies I propose – increasing the number of opportunities available to those feeling the force of the financial crash, as well as empowering them by increasing their knowledge of how they can change things through education – will help to enable this.

The current political situation of young people

As we come to realise the effects of this financial crisis and the probability of ongoing hardship, it seems that another consequence is a change to the way people view politics generally. This is perhaps due to a sense that involvement in politics no longer results in positive change. It certainly appears to be the case for young people.

Although politicians have promised change and support to those suffering the most – for example, in claiming that the new universal credit benefit will help to lift people out of poverty (BBC 2012) – the situation for young people appears to be becoming more precarious. There have been cuts to housing benefits, and suggestions of removing mainstream benefits altogether for the under-25s. The general secretary of the Trades Union Congress (TUC), Frances O'Grady, went as far as to claim that 'young people suffered most in the recession. Today the prime minister has pledged that they will suffer most during the recovery too' (BBC 2013).

The recent Audit of Political Engagement shows that 18–25-year-olds have declining engagement in a wide number of areas, with only 12 per cent stating they would vote, and just 20 per cent perceiving issues debated by parliament as relevant to them. Of all the data gathered, perhaps the most worrying result is that those aged 18–25 were 'the most likely to say that they would not be prepared to do any [political] activities in the future, even if they felt strongly about an issue' (Hansard Society 2012).

Such political apathy seem to result from a sense that neither institutions nor politicians are the answer (Mason 2013). Similar

views were expressed by one of the London 2011 rioters, who stated that 'not the politicians, not the cops, no one' are doing anything to help or change the situation some young people are facing (quoted in Selva 2011). Russell Brand has also voiced this sense of disillusionment, claiming we are collectively disenchanted by politics. Such apathy, he said, 'is a rational reaction to a system that no longer represents, hears or addresses the vast majority of people' (Brand 2013). For Brand, the riots of 2011 are an example of this disenchantment, commenting that 'people riot when dialogue fails, when they don't feel represented' (quoted in Ahmed 2013).

What can be done in the economic sphere?

In terms of dealing with the impact of the economic crisis on young people's employment and future aspirations, there needs to be a shift in attitudes towards certain career paths, along with increased opportunities within these areas. Vocational education has long been seen as inferior to academia – this needs to change. We need to return to the attitudes of the past, when more-practical career paths were properly valued and there was an appropriate appreciation of the specialist skills that such careers require. Ideally, we should adopt the changes in policy that Finland has implemented, such as increasing funding to institutions providing technical and vocational education and training so that they receive the same amount as general educational institutions (Subrahmanyah 2014). Along with this, a change to the national curriculum to include more vocational aspects would help to increase the recognition of the importance of work in more technical and vocational areas, and thus stimulate interest to choose such career paths.

Perhaps a more feasible option would be to get those who are currently unemployed to partake in other opportunities that will increase their employability, such as voluntary work or internships. However, for such experience to be taken seriously by employers, the nature of the work needs to be refined. Legislation has a role to play here, and we must introduce a policy that stipulates such placements must include the development of skills and experience needed in a variety of careers and areas of work, while businesses themselves would need to be financially incentivised to offer these schemes.

Employment schemes such as those already offered by the government, in line with the jobseekers' allowance, can also play a large part in increasing the employability of the unemployed and getting them into work. However, more community- based schemes, such as the 'Communities Taking Control' scheme, have a higher success rate than many of the government alternatives, while restoring a sense of community at the same time (Allen 2013). Engagement in these kinds of community projects is something that national and local government needs to promote. The government therefore has a role to play in supporting local groups and ensuring such opportunities are better advertised and taken advantage of where possible, as well as encouraging further creation of such initiatives.

What can be done in the political sphere?

To deal with the increase in political apathy, policy that addresses political literacy is needed. The best way to increase education and understanding of politics would be to make citizenship education compulsory earlier in the curriculum. If young people can understand both local and national politics, and how they themselves can play a role in shaping their society, the problem of limited aspirations and rising attitudes of future failure will cease. Through education, young people will feel empowered and understand how they can influence and change what affects them.

Another possible solution would be to increase the community engagement of local politicians. If they and those responsible for national policymaking were to get out and about among the community, becoming more involved, young people would feel more connected to the political scene. Parties and politicians should be pressured into running surgeries at schools and universities so that young people feel connected to politics and have an opportunity to interact with politicians.

There also needs to be an improvement in how politicians communicate to young people. There needs to be more awareness of the significance that politics has on everyone's lives, as well as a better platform for informing the public, and young people specifically, on how new policies and systems, such as those being introduced as a result of the Welfare Reform Act 2012, will actually affect people in reality. This could

be done through advertisements on social media, television, radio and billboards.

By introducing these new policies, highlighting the importance of education and communication, people within the community will become more educated and aware of where these changes that are so deeply influencing their lives are coming from, and how they can go about getting their opinions heard.

However, this alone won't help to regenerate the trust lost in politics that has developed due to the ongoing financial impact of the recession. For this to happen, I believe that, along with an increase in communication and education about the practical work that politics plays, there need to be new initiatives launched to help people understand how they can alter their lives in a positive way as a result of these changes. This may involve increasing community projects to encourage living more sustainably, as well as greater visibility of the available opportunities that will help the unemployed get into work, and the benefits that these hold. For young people to really feel engaged with politics they need to take the initiative themselves, and the funding of local youth-led organisations that serve to inform their peers could be the solution.

Without addressing both the political and economic realities that young people face today, societal disillusionment among the young will continue to increase. Although these suggestions may require initial investment from the government, and therefore seem an unattractive option in the current climate, in the long term enabling the younger generations is essential for the future of our society, and the return of optimism in economic, political and social attitudes and expectations.

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7.
IT IS NOT AS MUSTAPHA MOND SAYS – OR WHY UNIVERSITIES SHOULD BE MORE ABOUT KNOWLEDGE THAN EMPLOYABILITY

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'The mind is not a vessel that needs filling, but wood that needs igniting.' So said Plutarch in *De Auditu* almost 2,000 years ago. Today, however, the formula of the UK's higher education system has shifted from the pursuit of independent, critical and creative thinking, towards the passing of tests and the submission of orthodox essays. It is no longer knowledge for its own sake but rather labour market employability that has become the central purpose of university courses. This trend, I will argue, represents a profound displacement of the prime purpose of universities.

Moreover, using the concept of Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, universities are also increasingly creating *cultural barbarians*: specialists limited to the academic field covered by their curricula and judged by their excellence in their field only, with little appreciation of other arts and sciences, or culture at large (Nowak 1998).

In this essay, I draw parallels between the current state of UK universities and the suppression of knowledge in Aldous Huxley's dystopian novel, *Brave New World.* In the novel, it is Mustapha Mond, the World Controller of Western Europe, who explains how the World State society came to make the pragmatic choice for a comfortable life over free pursuit of knowledge:

'Knowledge was the highest good, truth the supreme value ... True, ideas were beginning to change even then. Our Ford himself did a great deal to shift the emphasis from truth and beauty to comfort and happiness … That was when science first began to be controlled … Anything for a quiet life.'

This article sets out the problems that this tension between, crudely speaking, employability and knowledge causes and reinforces in the field of economics, where it is particularly striking. As I discuss, these problems are related to the intellectual development of students and society at large. I then present some possible policy solutions to the existing issues and discuss their viability.

'Science is dangerous; we have to keep it most carefully chained and muzzled' – or Why and how the economics curriculum was narrowed down

The first effect of an increased focus on 'employability' on the study of economics is a narrowing of the curriculum. Independent research is restrained, there's a growing deficiency of critical work, mathematics and statistics are overly dominant, and students are constrained within only one school of economic thought, namely neoclassical economics.

Mathematics and statistics are certainly helpful to understand complex economic models. However, when models and formulas are presented as positive truths on which theory is based, then the study of economics strays into the domain of epistemological zealotry. This trend discourages students from doing independent research, or thinking critically, meaning they are unlikely to develop these extremely significant academic skills – indeed, it is the last thing universities should be doing to students if they truly wish to develop their knowledge.

'All our science is just a cookery book, with an orthodox theory of cooking that nobody is allowed to question' – or The domination of the neoclassical economic approach

The growing importance of employability supports another dangerous trend: the marginalisation of a wide variety of

important economic schools of thought, while the neoclassical school is granted a practically exclusive and unchallenged position. The wider impact this can have was shown during the financial crash of 2008 (Patomäki 2010). As Joseph Stiglitz (2010) put it, 'bad models lead to bad policy'. The generally accepted models and policies – that is, neoclassical models – failed utterly during the crisis, and yet inside economics departments the assumptions of neoclassical economics have been virtually uncontested.

From the perspective of academia, this problem directly touches the existential basis of universities. The word 'university' is derived from the Latin phrase meaning 'community of teachers and scholars'; just what kind of community is that if disagreement is resolved by a systemically enforced silence?

'A gramme is better than a damn' – or How economics is not detached and value-free

The last problem of economics schooling I want to discuss here is its alienation from other social sciences as result of its focus on the technical skills needed by employers. If one of the features of social sciences is Hegelian synthesis – that is, the process in which conflicting theses advance the whole theory – then with this intellectual isolation economics is voluntarily abandoning its own capacity to develop. The neoclassical approach conceptualises economics to be necessarily detached from other social sciences, by presenting it as objective and de facto value-free. Utility equals happiness, free markets always clear, and when labour markets cannot that is because there is a rate of unemployment that is necessarily *natural*.

This is just one example of how this particular school of economics presents value statements as scientifically objective paradigms (or maybe even axioms), claiming scientific objectivity for itself and political subjectivity for alternatives. Other approaches (like behavioural economics) are introduced on masters or PhD courses, but are neglected earlier in undergraduate study. Yet economics, via theories, corresponding policies and their direct consequences, impacts upon almost every aspect of human life, from the private to the public sphere, from the individual to society. It affects professional work, relations between people, life chances,

environment and development. Given this profound power, to argue that economics is a value-free objective science is worse than ignorance.

Thus, unengaged in interdisciplinary debate, economics students are shaped into Ortega's 'cultural barbarians', measuring the worth of their education by how well they can supply technical skills to meet the demand of the labour market. It is hard to argue that any person is an island unto themselves, and it is even harder to argue against the idea that an academic discipline – especially one that is essentially contested – can be taught and understood without considering its connections to other social sciences.

The three problems I have discussed are examples of ways in which refocusing from knowledge to employability has affected the teaching of economics. There is evidence, however, that the change is not restricted to economics. It is arguable that university education across a variety of courses has started to focus less on 'how to think' and more on 'how to pass tests', so that university schooling increasingly resembles 'marine corps' training (Chomsky 2012).

The next section will discuss the possible actions which relevant actors (such as students, academics and governments) can take to resolve this problem, from both micro and macro perspectives.

'All conditioning aims at that: making people like their inescapable social destiny' – or A policy course for university departments

'The world has changed, the syllabus hasn't – is it time to do something about it?' This is the slogan of the Manchester Post Crash Economics Society (PCES 2013), which convenes a policy course that is perhaps the most important to resolving the problem in question. Its starting point is that if education is to become meaningful in serving the intellectual development of students, then syllabuses need to be reinvented.

In order to design a syllabus that will contribute towards moving the focus of universities back towards knowledge, it is necessary to consider exactly what such changes would be aiming to achieve.

- First, the approach to delivered knowledge should change to encourage students to think independently, and critically engage with material. In the case of economics, this could be achieved through seminars discussing the lecture topic using various schools of thought and in relation to real economic issues, while challenging assumptions, and discussing what their consequences are.

- Second, the inclusion of various approaches would provide fertile ground for understanding various perspectives and debates. In economic studies, this could be achieved by adding non-mainstream schools and branches (such as Keynesian, behavioural or development) and discussing influential thinkers (such as Minsky, Keynes, Hayek, Marx and Schumpeter).

- Third, to encourage holistic understanding of the field of study it may be necessary to reach beyond it. As with the example of economic science, economics departments can cooperate with departments like politics, sociology, psychology, anthropology or history, creating a broad education resembling *Artes Liberales*.

Pushing for such a change will certainly be difficult. It will require engagement of students and economists alike. The main obstacles in updating syllabus could be the departments. The intellectual capture of economics by neoclassicism is certainly very strong: most of the professors were educated in the neoclassical spirit, and some of the external structures, like the research excellence framework (REF) strengthen their position.

In such a situation, the group most likely to bring about change are concerned students. The prime case study of student activism aimed at this goal is the PCES, mentioned above. In order to push for a change in economics teaching, students have engaged in activities such as self-educating and sharing relevant literature, organising debates with plural economists, cooperating with research institutes, and initiating dialogue with their departments. There are other similar societies and activist groups in universities around the UK, including the University of Cambridge, University College London, the London School of Economics, SOAS, and the University of Sheffield. Rethinking Economics is an international network with similar aims.[9]

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9   See http://www.rethinkeconomics.org/

The movement is also supported by a range of heterodox economists, some of whom showed their support for the 'reformist' movement in an open letter to the *Guardian* newspaper (Inman 2013). These academics can provide crucial support for the movement by working inside economics departments to convince them to embrace change. They are also crucial to the process of nurturing alternative approaches to economics. One such development is the establishment of the Institute of New Economic Thinking by George Soros.[10]

'Community, Identity, Stability' – or Available state policies

Clearly, the state also has a role in effecting change. Some argue that the reduction of the canon of economics teaching was induced by state politics. According to Noam Chomsky, a policy intended to restrict a lot of freedom of thought, especially in the social sciences (like economics), came about because of the 'excessive' (in the state's view) participation of student movements in political protests against the government. This, in his opinion, led to the privatisation of university services, the introduction of high tuition fees and the inhibiting of student participation in political activism and learning. Instead, universities have focused students' minds on professional careers, while narrowing the formula of university teaching (Chomsky 2011).

The reduction or abolishment of tuition fees and the full funding of universities from government expenditure seems improbable, given current economic and political realities. However, there are examples of university systems which are either free or much cheaper in comparison with most of the countries in the world. One example of a successful U-turn in government policy towards student fees can be seen in Quebec (see Michael 2013). In the UK, financing to universities could come from an increase in corporate tax, on the basis that various corporations (pharmaceutical, for instance) are the main beneficiaries of the pool of highly skilled graduates that universities produce.

Financing education is probably the best type of investment, not only for ethical reasons, but also because of the nature

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10   See http://ineteconomics.org/

of the UK economy. In an 'innovation-driven' economy, to be competitive against others means innovating faster (Weiss 2005). There is, therefore, a strong economic case for the government not to restrict the scope of education, not to scrimp on it, and not to undermine the financial security of students.

Conclusion

I have argued that higher education today is overly focused on employability – particularly in the economics discipline. It suffers from such issues as a restricted, technical curriculum, a homogeneity in approach, and a self-imposed isolation from other social sciences. This leads to highly problematic consequences, including the inhibition of students' academic development, the curbing of the development of the discipline of economics, and a restriction of academic debate. Beyond the academy, the consequences of this trend were felt in the 2008 economic crisis.

The possible solutions to current problems lie on various levels. One of those is student activism of various kinds putting pressure for systemic change on academics, ultimately aimed at dialogue with departments to revise existing curricula. On the macro level, looking from the perspective of possible top-down state policies, the issues arguably could be resolved if the state would review its perception of the university system. If it is understood that universities are centres of research, innovation and technological and societal transformation then it is in the interests of society, but also of the state, to help that innovation by financing universities with state expenditure, while taking funds, for example, from an increase in corporate tax.

Despite those considerations it seems that in the current situation there is little chance for either state policies to change, or intellectual capture to loosen. However, witnessing things like the growth of student-led 'post-crash' economics societies is what gives me hope that change is attainable. And thus the choice of our brave new world for tomorrow does not seem as grave as Mustapha Mond says.

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