

# Growing Up in the 1990s – An exploration of the educational experiences of cohorts of Rising 16s in the BHPS

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## **Abstract**

In the closing decades of the twentieth century there were dramatic changes in the landscape against which British young people grew up. In the UK, in the decades immediately after World War II the majority of young people left education at the earliest opportunity. In more recent decades an increasing proportion of young people remained in education beyond the minimum school leaving age. In the early 1980s there was a radical restructuring of the youth labour market. There was a dramatic decline in the number of suitable jobs for those leaving education at the minimum school leaving age and a sharp fall in the number of apprenticeships available. This was partly a consequence of the decline in the manufacturing sector in Britain. Policy responses directed toward problems in youth employment led to the widespread introduction of training schemes. At the same time young people's entitlements to welfare benefits contracted. Provision in further education and later university education expanded.

Such changes in the economy and in education and training lead us to suspect that the umbrella of social and economic conditions under which young people grew up during the 1990s were sufficiently different from those a decade before to justify exploration. Historically there has been little survey data available on young people growing up in the 1990s in the UK (there was a gap in collecting birth cohort data and no new large-scale birth cohort data was collected between 1970 and the Millennium). In this paper we demonstrate that the BHPS has the potential to plug the gap in youth data resources.

In the paper we construct a series of synthetic cohorts of 'rising 16s'. These are young people in BHPS households that were interviewed in the adult BHPS survey in the year when they first became eligible to leave compulsory school (usually at age 16). We illustrate how these cohorts can usefully be used to explore educational and employment experiences. We attempt to exploit the structure of the BHPS data and link the young person's data with relevant parental data and wider family and household information. The synthetic 'rising 16s' cohorts are small samples and not necessarily nationally representative. Therefore we also use supplementary data from the Youth Cohort Study of England and Wales to compare and contrast results.

**Keywords:** BHPS Rising 16s; Youth Cohort Study: Education.

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## Introduction

In the decades following the war the vast majority of young people in the UK left education at the first opportunity. In more recent decades this situation has reversed. Official data illustrate that an increasing proportion of young people have remained in education longer (Department of Employment 1993; FEFC 2000; Social Trends 2006). Whereas historically only a minority of young people remained in education for long periods before entering the labour market, by the late 1980s only a minority made an early transition straight from school-to-work (Banks *et al.* 1992). This general shift has been commented upon by a number of authors (especially Paterson and Raffe 1995; Biggart and Furlong 1996; Cregan 2001).

Sociologists of youth are generally in agreement that the background against which young people grew up in the closing decades of the twentieth century was transformed, and is now radically different from earlier decades (MacDonald *et al.* 1993). It is now widely agreed that the 'normal' school-to-work transition that characterised the 'traditional' rite of passage from youth to adult status has been disrupted (Irwin 1995). We label this the 'changing times consensus'. Sociologists have deployed a series of adjectives such as 'long', 'broken', 'fractured' and 'uneasy', in order to describe the changing pattern of youth transitions (Craine 1997). Within the 'changing times consensus', authors agree that the transformation was driven by a series of interrelated social and economic changes.

The most dramatic of the economic changes was the virtual collapse of the youth labour market in the early 1980s. This key transformation received a great deal of sociological attention (see Ashton *et al.* 1982; Atkinson and Rees 1982; Raffe 1984, 1988; Roberts 1984, 1997; Brown and Ashton 1987; Furlong 1987; Bynner 1996; Maguire and Maguire 1997). The growing levels of youth unemployment in the 1970s and 1980s are well documented (Casson 1979; Jackson 1985; Gallie and Marsh 1994). Concurrently, there was a sharp decline in the number of apprenticeships during this period (Maguire and Maguire 1997). The overall economic environment was one in which there was a reduction in the number of jobs that were suitable for young people and offered long term career prospects, especially minimum aged school leavers.

This pattern of economic restructuring led to a number of policy responses, most notably the introduction of 'youth training' provisions (Raffe 1982, 1983; Chapman and Tooze 1987; Stoney and Lines 1987; Roberts 1984; Deakin 1996). The introduction of youth training was coupled with a number of reforms to the welfare system that changed (and generally reduced) young people's entitlement to state benefits (Irwin 1995; Dean 1997).

Conterminously, the provision of further and higher education for young people expanded. The number of learners in further education increased from 1.7 to 5.4 million between 1980 and 2000 (see White 2007: 54; Smithers and Robinson 2000; Hyland and Merrill 2003). The more recent expansion of higher education was concentrated in the 1990s and beyond (Daniel 1993; Dearing 1997; Archer *et al.* 2003). Over the course of the 1990's alone, the number of young people undertaking undergraduate and postgraduate education nearly doubled with a rise in the Age Participation Index from 19% to 35% (White 2007: 57). This latter increase, and its

continuation, has been likened to a 'revolution' in educational participation in the last decades.

### **Growing Up in the 1990s**

The transformations in the structural, social and economic conditions that are identified above largely took place in the 1980s. By contrast, the 1990s was a decade of employment growth in the UK (DfEE 2000), as well as one of expanding educational opportunities. Young people in the 1990s may have benefited from a more buoyant economy, and accordingly experienced more opportunities and choices than those of their counterparts a decade before.

The *Education Reform Act 1988*, is often regarded as the most important single piece of post-war education legislation. This legislation led to rapid changes in the curriculum, organisation, management and financing of schools (Spence 1993). An important change for pupils was the introduction of the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) (Department of Education 1985; Mobley *et al.* 1986; North 1987). These qualifications replaced the established qualifications; Ordinary Level General Certificates of Education (GCE O'Level) and Certificates of Secondary Education (CSE). The introduction of GCSEs was a radical change. A new grading scheme was established and nearly all school pupils were entered for this new common set of examinations. There were also changes in the nature and format of examinations and assessment by coursework was introduced (Ashford, Gray and Tranmer 1993).

In addition to the changes in academic education, a new apprenticeship initiative called 'Modern Apprenticeships' was established in order to enhance the technical and vocational skills of young workers (Saunders *et al.* 1997; Ainley and Rainbird 1999). Young people were now eligible for new, nationally recognised, vocational qualifications (Smithers 1999). These opportunities had the potential to influence the decisions that young people made as they approached the end of compulsory education, although they were not exclusively targeted at minimum age school leavers.

In 1997 New Labour came to power with a distinctive education policy agenda, driven by a wider interest in tackling social exclusion. Williamson (2005) comments that it is virtually impossible to present a full catalogue of the measures which have now been established to address the challenge of social exclusion. Hodgson and Spours (1999) argue that New Labour's education and training policies were largely dominated by responses to the Conservative legacy, and highlight a difference of approach towards compulsory and post-compulsory education. New Labour prioritised changes in compulsory education whereas changes in post-compulsory education were positioned lower in the policy hierarchy, due to the more complex interrelationship between post-compulsory education, training and the labour market. Nevertheless, Smithers (2001) notes that what is remarkable about all the apparent changes brought in by New Labour is how little they differed at root from the educational policies of the preceding Conservative administration.

Under the New Labour administration minimum age school leavers continued to be excluded from the unemployment benefits available to older workers (CPAG 1998; Mizen 2004). However, a notable example of an early New Labour policy initiative in the area of training was the New Deal for Young People (NDYP). Introduced in 1998, the NDYP aimed to provide opportunities to work, gain new skills, and get work experience for 18-24 year olds (Wilkinson 2003). Participation was mandatory for young people claiming unemployment benefits (i.e. Jobseekers Allowance) continuously for six months (IER 1999). The NDYP resonated within the wider 'welfare to work' agenda (Riley and Young 2001; Brewer *et al.* 2002; Fraser 2004).

In the same period New Labour also introduced the minimum wage. The Low Pay Commission was established as a result of the national minimum wage legislation in 1998. From 1<sup>st</sup> April 1999 workers aged 18-21 were entitled to a minimum wage at the development rate (i.e. a lower level than the adult rate). This legislation was introduced explicitly to target poverty and social exclusion and, more recently, has been extended to include workers aged 16 and 17.

There is a consensus within the sociological literature that in Britain the decline in the youth labour market and traditional employment and training opportunities radically altered the landscape against which young people grew up. We argue that these changes are important to understanding the youth experience in 1980s, however it is conceivable that the experiences of young people a decade later were more influenced by changes in the educational environment and related educational and training policies. Similarly, although we expect to a lesser extent, their experience may be affected by more buoyant employment conditions. Therefore, we argue that more detailed empirical exploration of growing up in Britain in the 1990s is sociologically worthwhile.

## Youth Data in the 1990s

The UK has been comparatively well resourced with birth cohort data. The National Survey of Health and Development (NSHD), the National Child Development Study (NCDS) and the British Cohort Study (BCS70), are birth cohorts of children born in 1946, 1958 and 1970 respectively, and respondents continue to be surveyed well into adult life. These data sources have historically provided a rich source for youth research. They are now rather dated however, and are of diminishing utility for youth research. There was no national birth cohort data collected between 1970 and the introduction of the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) in 2000/01.

The BHPS offers a potential resource for studying the lives of young people growing up in Britain in the 1990s (Gayle 2005). The Young Person's Survey within the BHPS, which is termed the British Youth Panel (BYP), is an obvious source of data on young people. There are a number of examples of robust empirical research based on these data (for example Brynin 1999; Bradshaw 2001; Scott 2002). However this dataset is not widely known within the British youth research community and may not yet have reached its full analytical potential.

The British Youth Panel is a variant of the standard rotating panel. A young person in a BHPS household enters the survey when they reach age 11, these new entrants are sometimes referred to as 'rising 11s'. They leave the survey when they are old enough to enter the adult survey (age 16). A young person remains in the youth panel for a maximum of five waves. Each year the oldest group leave and enter the adult survey and a new group of eleven year olds enter the panel.

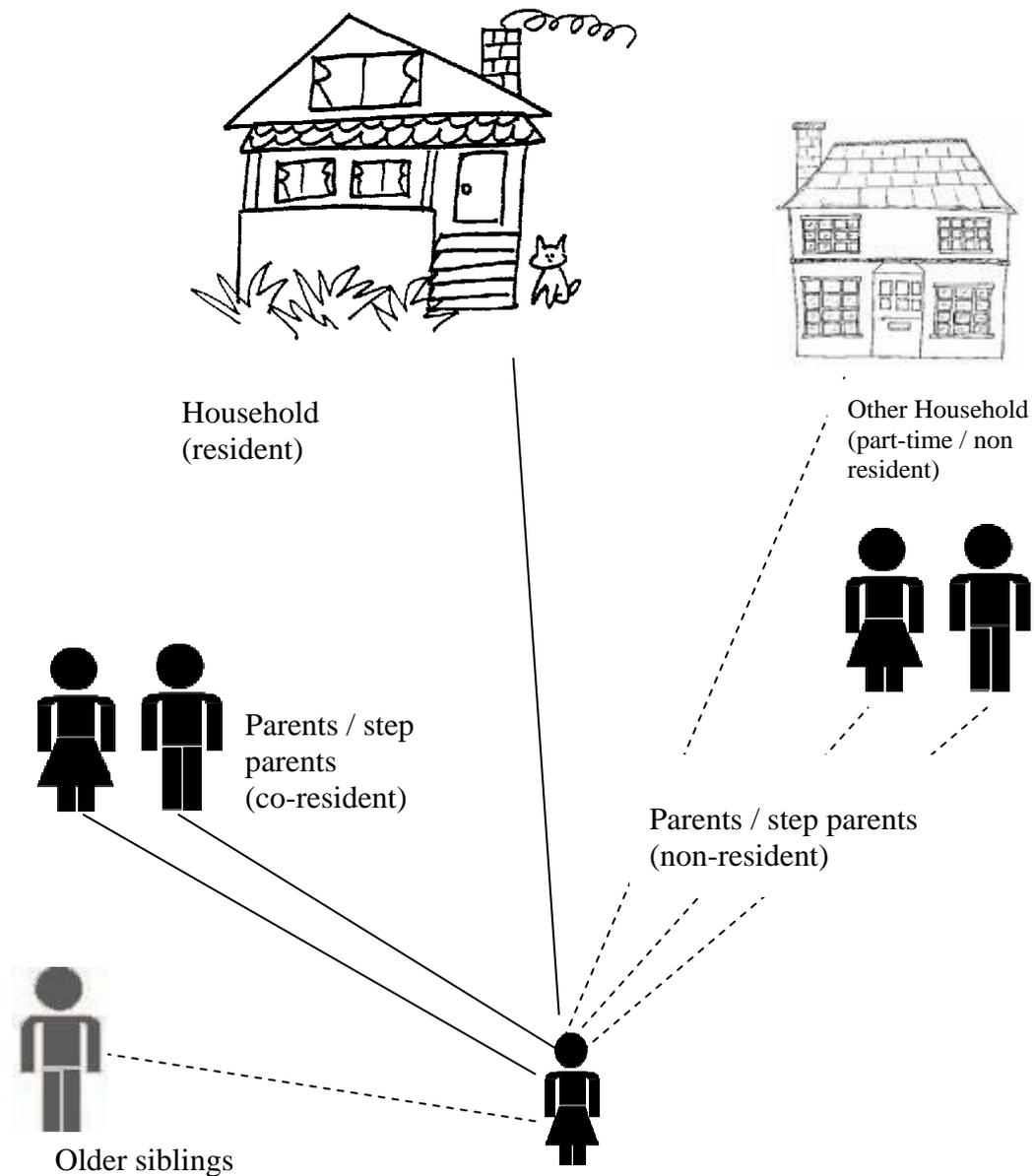
In this present paper we focus on 'rising 16s' in the BHPS. These are young people in BHPS households who have 'aged' into the scope of the adult survey. Our overall aim is to construct 'synthetic cohorts' of young people from BHPS households as they come to the end of compulsory education and either continue in education or move into the world of employment and other activities. The overall motivation is to explore whether or not data from the BHPS can be used to sensibly study aspects of growing up in Britain in the 1990s.

The 'rising 16s' here refer specifically to those young adults, answering their first (and subsequent) full adult interview, who have also been enumerated (or given a youth interview) as members of BHPS households prior to their entry into the BHPS main adult sample. This property is attractive since it allows us to collect accurate retrospective (as well as prospective) data on these young people. Accordingly, our analyses below are limited to those BHPS respondents from the 'rising 16' cohort which, in practical terms, means that the analysis is limited to BHPS 'Original Sample Members' and to members of the original BHPS ('Essex') sample (for sample design terminologies, see Taylor *et al.*, 2009).

We anticipate that the design of the BHPS will allow us to link household level information with data on the young person. The structure of the BHPS also facilitates linking information from parents which is obtained from the parents' own adult interviews in the survey. In addition, it is plausible that the BHPS structure will also facilitate the linking of information from older siblings and from non-resident parents and step-parents. See Figure 1 below.

From the outset we are aware that the ‘synthetic cohorts’ have relatively small sample sizes. Between Wave A (1991) and Wave P (2006) 1,909 young people living in England and Wales grew up into the scope of the adult survey from Original (Essex) sample households. This represents about 120 young people each school year. In a first attempt to explore how reliable these data are we have restricted our focus to young people from England and Wales. This will enable us to compare results with nationally representative data.

Figure 1 Potential Data BHPS Data Sources



We have previously argued that the Youth Cohort Study of England and Wales (YCS) partially plugs the gap left by the missing British birth cohort datasets (see Gayle, Lambert and Murray 2009). The Youth Cohort Study of England and Wales (YCS) is a major programme of longitudinal data collection which began in the mid-1980s. The YCS is designed to monitor the behaviour of young people as they reach the minimum school leaving age and either stay on in education or enter the labour market. The main data collection instrument is a postal survey. The survey collects detailed data on experiences of education and qualifications, as well as data on employment and training. Some data is collected about the young person's personal characteristics and circumstances. A small amount of data is collected on their aspirations, and on their families.

The YCS provides a valuable source of data on young people growing up in the 1990s. The sample is designed to be representative of all Year 11 pupils in England and Wales (those reaching the end of compulsory education). The study contacts a sample from an academic year group (cohort) in the spring following completion of compulsory education. The sample size for each YCS cohort is large (see Table 1 below). There is a short panel within the data and young people are tracked and usually surveyed at three time points. These follow-up surveys normally take place at yearly intervals. The multiple cohorts of the YCS allow comparisons that facilitate analyses of trends over time.

The design, timing and structure of the YCS have all changed over its lifespan. Croxford (2006) provides an overview of YCS limitations. The style and content of the questionnaires have also changed, which is partially due to changes in substantive interests and alternative policy concerns. A diagram illustrating the structure and timing of sweeps of data collection in the YCS is provided in Appendix 1. The British birth cohorts have been successfully used in comparative analyse (e.g. Bynner 2002). A limitation of these earlier birth cohorts was that they were often too widely spaced to capture the details of trends. The YCS cohorts are closely spaced (sometimes a year later, and no more than three years after) to allow better resolution when analysing trends.

Recently, Croxford *et al.* (2007) have constructed a harmonised YCS time series dataset which comprises a number of cohorts. In the present analyses we concentrate on subset of the dataset developed by Croxford *et al.* (2007) [UK Data Archive Study SN5765]. We focus on five YCS cohorts which span the 1990s. The cohorts comprise young people who reached the minimum school leaving age in 1990, 1993, 1995, 1997 and 1999. We consider that these data sources can usefully provide a benchmark against which to compare data from young people in the BHPS.

In this paper however, we advocate analysis of the BHPS because we argue that the BHPS provides a far wider range of information on young adults and their families, and generally records data on those people to a much higher standard. A primary restriction to appreciate is that as the YCS is a postal survey of young people, only a limited amount of information on their parents and the household in which they live is collected, and the YCS does not collect any detailed information on siblings or other family members. In addition, the YCS collects no information on income and wealth. Many wider problems and challenges of harmonisation have been identified with the YCS in terms of the quality and documentation of the data recorded from its

respondents. The structure and content of the BHPS might overcome some of these restrictions.

### **Comparing BHPS Rising 16s Data with YCS Data**

We construct synthetic school year cohorts from the 'rising 16s' data. This is because waves of the BHPS generally contain two groups of 'rising 16s'. An older group are 16 year olds who have reached the minimum school leaving age. This group have completed Year 11 and have usually already sat GCSE exams. A younger group of 16 year olds also enter the BHPS adult survey but they have not reached minimum school leaving age at the time of interview, and have not usually sat GCSE exams. Therefore we have constructed 'synthetic cohorts' of school years which are directly comparable to cohorts of Year 11 pupils in the YCS.

We have also limited the data to young people from households in England and Wales from the original Essex sample. This is primarily because the education system in Scotland differs and pupils undertake different qualifications. Additionally, the Scottish school year and age cut-off points for pupils are different to England and Wales. Concomitantly, there no single source of national youth survey data against which to compare the BHPS data.

Despite the short length of the YCS panels, and the relatively short period between contacts, the YCS suffers high levels of attrition. For example in the 1984 cohort (YCS Cohort 1) there was 25% attrition between sweep 1 (when the respondents were aged 16-17) and sweep 2, which was a year later (see Table 1). Overall, the first ten YCS cohorts experienced at least 36% attrition two years after the survey began (when the young people were 18-19).

The sample sizes of the 'synthetic' cohorts of 'rising 16s' are reported in Table 2. Retention rates within the adult survey are promising, for example 51% of the 'rising 16s', who had completed compulsory schooling, surveyed in 1991, also gave a full interview in 2008 (Wave Q) (see Table 2).

Official data reveals that an increasing proportion of young people remain in education after they reach the minimum school leaving age (Department of Employment 1993; FEFC 2000; Social Trends 2006). In the YCS data an increasing proportion of young people remain in education directly after they reach minimum school leaving age. The YCS data reflects that between age 16-17 and age 18-19 many young people move out of education and increasing proportions move into employment. Over the same period many of those engaged in training move into employment. Similar patterns of participation in education are evident in the BHPS 'synthetic' cohorts (see Table 4). The BHPS data reports increasing levels of participation in employment as the young people age, and decreasing participation in training.

An obvious benefit of the BHPS structure is that it tracks young people into their late teens and early twenties. This has much appeal because an emerging theme within the sociology is youth is that the transition to adulthood is being extended (see Hollands 1990). Numerous youth researchers have described how young people, differentiated

by structural features (especially education and social background), follow different paths during the teenage years after they leave school (MacDonald 1999). Empirical projects, for example Banks *et al.* (1992) and Bynner and Roberts (1991) provided useful statistical evidence and contributed to conceptual frameworks that centred around notions of 'career trajectories'.

The emerging argument is that historically these trajectories were based on broadly similar routes to employment and had their origins in education and family background, leading towards the predictability of ultimate destinations in the labour market (Bynner and Roberts 1991). Adjectives such as 'pathways', 'trajectories', 'navigations', and 'niches', have been deployed as metaphors to describe youth transitions (Evans and Furlong 1996). Within these conceptual frameworks the emphasis was on the importance of social class, gender and ethnicity and the influence of economic realities such as labour markets and unemployment rates (Evans and Rudd 1998).

More recently, youth researchers have been keen to argue that we have moved, or at least are moving towards, a postmodern era (Furlong and Cartmel 1997). The central argument being that social life has undergone a profound change, although without undergoing a complete epochal break with the modern period. The overarching claim is that contemporary societies are typified by greater opportunities for individual action and decision-making. Having micro-level data which can tease out possible trends and empirically evaluate such claims is necessary.

Table 1 YCS Cohorts: Original and subsequent sample sizes

YCS Cohorts	Year respondent reached minimum school leaving age	Number of respondents			Percentage of sweep 1 respondents remaining at sweep 2	Percentage of sweep 2 respondents remaining at sweep 3	Percentage of original respondents remaining at end of survey
		Age at survey					
		16-17	17-18	18-19			
1	1984	8,064	6,075	5,061	75	83	63
3	1986	16,208	12,319	9,328	76	76	58
4	1988	14,116	10,464	8,189	74	78	58
5	1990	14,511	10,951	8,396	75	77	58
7	1993	18,021		8,199			45
8	1995	15,899		10,130			64
9	1997	14,662	9,710	6,304	66	65	43
10	1999	13,698		7,238			53

Table 2 Synthetic Cohorts of BHPS Rising 16s (Waves A –P): Original sample sizes and subsequent percentages

	Year Completed Compulsory Schooling (Year 11)															
	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<i>n</i>	97	118	134	121	119	147	120	109	117	114	131	111	119	126	122	104
BHPS Wave																
A	100															
B	93	100														
C	81	90	100													
D	76	92	93	100												
E	76	82	86	94	100											
F	72	82	86	91	100	100										
G	75	83	86	90	90	94	100									
H	74	79	84	84	87	87	95	100								
I	68	74	80	78	84	81	86	93	100							
J	66	66	75	74	81	73	78	86	91	100						
K	65	64	69	74	71	71	74	83	79	89	100					
L	61	56	66	64	71	68	65	72	74	79	85	100				
M	59	58	63	59	65	62	69	67	69	79	74	85	100			
N	54	57	63	59	63	61	60	68	71	74	67	77	96	100		
O	54	53	61	59	61	56	59	58	66	72	67	77	84	90	100	
P	52	50	57	60	58	59	53	56	59	68	63	73	76	83	93	100
Q	51	48	55	55	54	56	56	50	56	67	56	65	65	79	83	89

Note: Respondents giving full adult interviews (BHPS Original Sample Members from the ‘Essex’ sample).

Table 3 YCS Cohorts: Young Person's Main Activity (%)

Cohort	Main Activity	16-17	17-18	18-19
1990	Education	62	58	40
	Training	14	14	5
	Employment	18	21	36
	Unemployment	4	4	12
	Other	1	3	7
1993	Education	77		51
	Training	10		6
	Employment	8		33
	Unemployment	4		9
	Other	2		0
1995	Education	77		45
	Training	10		7
	Employment	9		31
	Unemployment	3		5
	Other	1		11
1997	Education	74	63	43
	Training	10	10	9
	Employment	12	18	31
	Unemployment	4	4	6
	Other	1	6	11
1999	Education	76	66	34
	Training	9	9	6
	Employment	11	16	34
	Unemployment	3	4	5
	Other	2	6	21

Note: Weighted data; Standard YCS weights.

1999 Cohort (YCS 10) had an autumn sweep rather than a spring sweep.

Table 4 BHPS Synthetic Cohorts: Young Person's Main Activity (%)

School Year	Main Activity	Age of Rising 16s				
		16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21
1991	Education	60	49	29	27	19
	Training	4	7	5	1	1
	Employment	28	26	36	43	49
	Unemployment	8	10	8	5	5
	Other	0	1	3	3	2
1992	Education	74	57	39	30	32
	Training	10	6	3	0	1
	Employment	13	23	34	38	41
	Unemployment	3	7	12	12	7
	Other	1	1	2	5	3
1993	Education	76	61	40	37	30
	Training	5	8	4	1	1
	Employment	10	19	32	39	45
	Unemployment	7	4	5	6	4
	Other	1	1	4	3	5
1994	Education	66	56	43	33	27
	Training	7	7	1	0	0
	Employment	17	23	32	41	43
	Unemployment	10	7	11	10	9
	Other	0	2	5	2	7
1995	Education	83	66	38	32	34
	Training	2	4	3	1	0
	Employment	10	23	40	43	44
	Unemployment	3	3	6	8	3
	Other	1	3	4	3	5
1996	Education	69	54	33	27	28
	Training	5	1	1	2	0
	Employment	18	34	40	43	36
	Unemployment	8	4	10	5	7
	Other	1	2	5	5	5
1997	Education	77	62	33	35	35
	Training	5	2	3	0	0
	Employment	13	28	39	38	36
	Unemployment	5	5	6	6	4
	Other	0	0	7	2	4
1998	Education	70	56	32	26	21
	Training	3	1	4	1	1
	Employment	18	28	39	44	44
	Unemployment	8	8	12	8	7
	Other	0	5	2	6	6

## BHPS Synthetic Cohorts: Young Person's Main Activities - *Continued*

School Year	Main Activity	Age of Rising 16s				
		16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21
1999	Education	67	57	28	24	41
	Training	3	3	1	0	1
	Employment	17	19	41	38	44
	Unemployment	9	9	9	9	2
	Other	4	6	4	6	5

### Example Analyses of GCSE Attainment

In this section we explore the 'rising 16s' data further in order to assess whether or not it would support more detailed analyses. A long running empirical research theme within the sociology of education and the sociology of youth has been the relationship between social background and educational attainment (e.g. Halsey *et al.* 1980). Historically the weight of evidence has indicated that attainment is stratified, typically, those from more advantaged social backgrounds generally achieve higher levels of attainment than their counterparts from less advantaged backgrounds (e.g. Breen and Jonsson, 2005).

The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) was introduced in the late 1980s (Department of Education 1985; Mobley *et al.* 1986; North 1987). They form a set of public examinations and usually mark the first major branching point in a young person's educational career. Poor GCSE attainment is a considerable obstacle which precludes young people from pursuing more advanced educational courses. Young people with low levels of GCSE attainment are usually more likely to leave education at the minimum school leaving age and their qualification level frequently disadvantages them in the labour market. Low levels of qualifications are also likely to have a longer term impact on experiences in the adult labour market.

GCSEs differed from the established Ordinary Level General Certificate of Education (GCE O'Level) and Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) examinations which they replaced. A new grading scheme was established and there were also changes in the nature and format of examinations and widespread assessment by coursework was introduced (Ashford, Gray and Tranmer 1993). GCSE's are now the standard qualification for pupils in England and Wales and are taken in the final year of compulsory schooling (Year 11) when the pupils are aged 16. It is usual for pupils to study for about nine subjects, which will include core subjects (e.g. English, Maths and Science) and non-core subjects. Generally each subject is assessed separately and a subject specific GCSE awarded. Usually each GCSE is a mixture of assessed coursework and examinations. GCSEs are graded in discrete ordered categories, the highest being A\*, followed by grades A through to G.

We concentrate on a single outcome. This is whether or not the young person attains five or more GCSEs at the level of grade A\*-C. This measure is an official benchmark (see Leckie and Goldstein 2009). It is also frequently used in educational research (e.g. Connelly 2006).

Figure 2 reports the percentage of BHPS rising 16s attaining five or more GCSEs at grades A\*-C. The 95% confidence intervals for these percentages contain the national proportions (from official data sources). Figure 3 reports the percentages compared with YCS respondents in the same school year (and national figures), and again 95% confidence intervals for the rising 16s include these percentages. We are therefore reassured that the data from the rising 16s is a suitable platform for analyses.

Figure 2

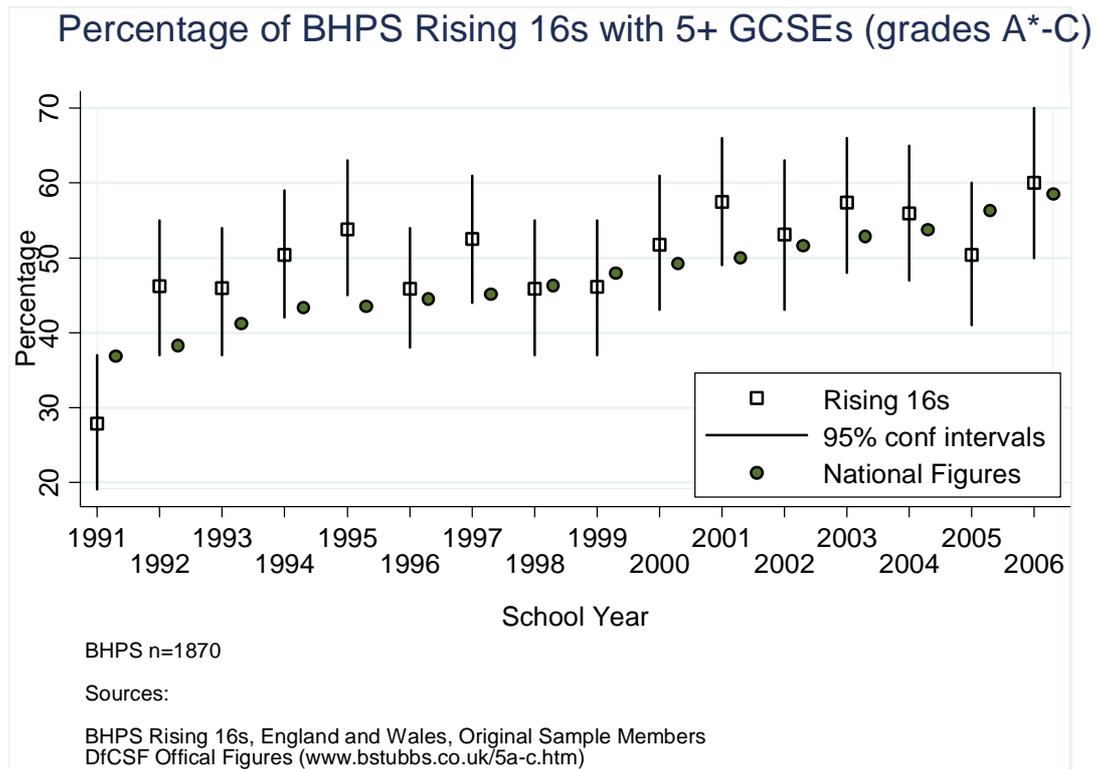


Figure 3

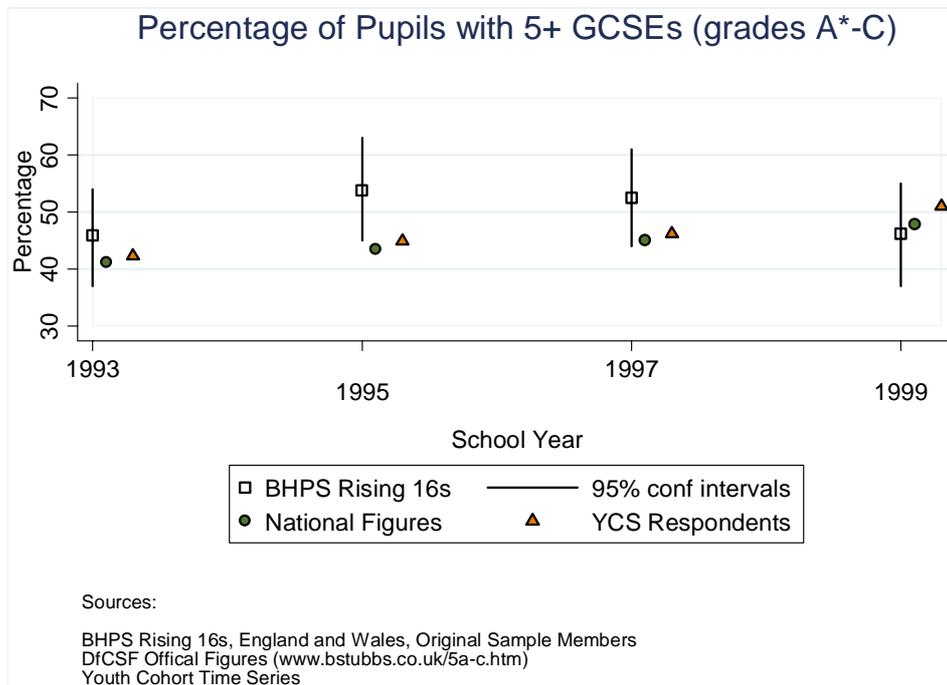


Table 5 Descriptive Characteristics: Young People Attaining 5+GCSEs (A\*-C)

X variable	BHPS (n)	YCS (n)	BHPS (%)	YCS (%)
<b>Gender</b>				
Boys	227	15088	40.90	39.55
Girls	267	17877	52.27	48.06
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
White	473	29918	46.83	44.67
Black	4	370	40.00	27.56
Indian	12	946	66.67	48.63
Pakistani	6	399	54.55	24.86
Bangladeshi	1	167	16.67	2.55
Other Asian	1	490	100.00	59.13
Other ethnicity	10	344	62.50	44.89
<b>Tenure</b>				
Rented	65	2794	25.29	19.20
Owned	438	29362	53.48	50.53
<b>School year(BHPS)/Cohorts(YCS)</b>				
1991	27	-	27.84	-
1992	55	-	46.22	-
1993	62	18021	45.93	23.47
1994	61	-	50.41	-
1995	64	15899	53.78	20.70
1996	67	-	45.89	-
1997	63	14662	52.50	19.09
1998	50	-	45.87	-
1999	54	13698	46.15	17.84
<b>Household type</b>				
Mum and Dad	420	35904	48.00	57.89
Mum only	68	3649	42.77	35.98
Dad only	13	730	33.33	33.78
Other household	2	349	15.38	17.73
<b>Parental education</b>				
Non graduates	394	29370	41.39	48.72
Graduate parents	109	9979	83.21	68.96
<b>Family Camsis score</b>				
Mean with >5	-	-	46.45	43.75
Mean with <5			40.26	56.25
<b>School type</b>				
Comprehensive	227	25189	42.35	77.48
Grammar	54	2210	70.13	91.12
Secondary Modern	51	681	32.28	24.71
Independent	35	4808	76.09	84.56

BHPS Rising 16s Essex Sample, England and Wales, 1991-1999 (n=1083);  
YCS Cohorts 1990-1999 (n=76791).

Table 6 Logistic Regression Models: Attaining 5+ GCSEs (grades A\*-C)

	<i>beta &amp; Z statistics</i>			
	Model 1 YCS		Model 2 BHPS	
1990 cohort	-		-	
1993 cohort	0.36	***	0.75	**
	13.13		2.41	
1995 cohort	0.60	***	1.00	***
	21.28		3.18	
1997 cohort	0.60	***	1.08	***
	20.97		3.39	
1999 cohort	0.93	***	1.08	***
	30.79		3.27	
Girls	-		-	
Boys	-0.36	***	-0.63	***
	-20.06		-3.90	
Family Camsis score (dominance approach)	0.04	***	0.03	***
	54.33		5.47	
Young person attended comprehensive school	-		-	
Young person attended grammar school	2.52	***	0.78	**
	28.51		2.28	
Young person attended secondary modern	-0.66	***	-0.47	**
	-13.86		-2.02	
Young person attended independent school	1.94	***	1.04	**
	37.13		2.20	
Housing tenure: Owners	-		-	
Renters	-0.76	***	-0.63	***
	-29.14		-2.80	
Lives in a Mum & Dad household	-		-	
Lives in a Mum only household	-0.11	***	0.36	
	-3.90		1.35	
Lives in a Dad only household	-0.29	***	-0.71	
	-5.31		-1.44	
Lives in another household type	-0.68	***	-0.75	
	-9.13		-0.61	

Logistic Regression Models: Attaining 5+ GCSEs (grades A\*-C) – *Continued*

	Model 1 YCS	Model 2 BHPS
Neither parent is a graduate	-	-
Either parent is a graduate	0.43 ***	1.03 ***
	16.97	3.25
Constant	-2.48 ***	-2.25 ***
	-50.19	-4.96

Note:

*Model 1* (YCS): n=66478; Log Likelihood= -36897 (Pseudo R<sup>2</sup>=0.18)

Source: YCS Time Series for England and Wales, 1990-1999

*Model 2* (BHPS): n=784; Log Likelihood= -460 (Pseudo R<sup>2</sup>= 0.14)

Source: BHPS Rising 16s, England and Wales, Essex Sample Households, 1991-1999

We proceed by concentrating on explanatory variables that have been identified in previous studies of YCS data (e.g. Drew *et al.* 1992; Gayle *et al.* 2003; Connolly 2006). A summary of descriptive statistics for the BHPS rising 16s and the YCS data are provided in Appendix 2.

Table 5 provides a summary of the characteristics of the young people attaining 5+ GCSEs at grades (A\*-C). An increasing percentage in the more recent ‘synthetic cohorts’ attain 5+ GCSEs at grades A\*-C, which is consistent with the national trend. As we would expect from earlier analyses of YCS data, GCSE attainment is stratified by gender, ethnicity, housing tenure, household type, parental education, school type, family Camsis score and parental education (see Gayle *et al.* 2003).

Focussing on a key variable of sociological interest, we note that in the both datasets girls out perform boys and a higher percentage attain 5+ GCSEs at grades A\*-C. During the 1970s and 1980s the primary focus of research on gender in the field of education was on girls (Warrington and Younger 2000). The overall message was that expectations, aspirations and choices were structured along traditional gender lines to the disadvantage of young women (see for example Sharpe 1976; Deem 1980; Griffin 1985). In recent years the situation is reversed and there is now growing concern about the lack of participation, and the under-achievement of boys (Younger and Warrington 2005).

It is well observed that there are differing levels of attainment across ethnic groups (see Drew *et al.* 1992; Drew 1995; Bhattacharyyal *et al.* 2003; Gillborn and Gripps 1996). At the current time there is emerging concern regarding the educational participation of white boys from poorer families (see Cassen and Kingdon 2007). Ethnic differences in the proportions of young people attaining 5+ GCSEs at grades A\*-C are reflected in the YCS data (see Table 5). The BHPS is a nationally representative sample of British households with an appropriate level of coverage of minority ethnic groups. Therefore sub-sample sizes of households with minority ethnic respondents are necessarily small. The small numbers of ethnic minority rising 16s are reported in Appendix 2 and the correspondingly small numbers attaining 5+ GCSEs at grades A\*-C are reported in Table 5. Therefore in the remainder of this analysis we do not include any ethnicity measures.

Table 6 reports the results of a logistic regression model estimating attaining 5+ GCSEs grades A\*-C for the YCS data and the BHPS rising 16s. We have constructed a measure of school year grouping (cohort) in the BHPS rising 16s dataset to compare these young people more readily with counterparts in the YCS cohorts. Overall the results of these two models are similar and, it is encouraging, that these two models lead to broadly identical substantive conclusions. With the exception of household type, which is not significant in the BHPS data, the direction of the effects of the other explanatory variables are identical.

The YCS is based on postal questionnaire surveys and young people are only asked a limited number of questions about their parents and their household. Therefore there is no important additional information that can be added to Model 1. The aim of this next stage of the analysis is to explore an extended set of explanatory variables in the BHPS in order to establish if they could sensibly be used to improve the analysis of GCSE attainment. Table 7 reports the exploratory results for a number of household level and parental explanatory variables that have been intimated in the wider youth and education literature.

Table 8 reports the results of a logistic regression model of GCSE attainment for the rising 16s, which include additional explanatory variables. For ease of comparison Model 3 includes only those individuals that have full information and on all of the additional explanatory variables and therefore Model 3 is nested within Model 4. We consider that Model 4 provides some additional insight into GCSE attainment. Model 4 improves upon Model 3 (the  $R^2$  increases from .16 to .23). In particular parental education and mother's age chime with current political and social interests.

We are positive that constructing synthetic cohorts of 'rising 16s' data is a fruitful activity for undertaking youth research. Whilst this present analysis serves mainly as an illustration, it is encouraging. It has shown that results similar to those estimated using a larger sample of nationally representative data can be obtained. It has begun to illustrate that additional insight into education might be achieved through the inclusion of more detailed parental and household measures.

Table 7 Exploratory Analysis: Additional explanatory variables added to BHPS model

Explanatory Variables	p value	z scores
<i>Household Information</i>		
Number of rooms	0.00	3.09
Number of bedrooms	0.21	1.25
Number of employed people in household	0.00	-3.15
Number of married persons in household	0.56	-0.58
Number of unemployed people in household	0.83	-0.22
Number of people of working age in household	0.00	-3.54
Terraced house	0.01	-2.82
<i>Parental Information</i>		
Mum attended grammar school	0.00	3.28
Mum attended secondary modern	0.03	-2.23
Mum attended independent school	0.12	1.56
Mum has FE/HE qualification	0.02	2.30
Whether Mum works	0.23	1.20
Number of hours Mum works	0.56	-0.58
Mum's age when individual is 16	0.05	1.99
Maternal grandfather's Cambridge Scale Male	0.04	2.09
Maternal grandmother's Cambridge Scale Male	0.00	3.19
Dad attended grammar school	0.00	3.89
Dad attended secondary modern	0.01	-2.70
Dad attended independent school	0.35	0.93
Dad has FE/HE qualification	0.03	2.17
Dad's age when individual is 16	0.14	1.49
Number of hours Dad works	0.45	-0.76
Paternal grandfather's Cambridge Scale Male	0.00	3.09
Paternal grandmother's Cambridge Scale Male	0.45	0.75

Note: Additional variables added to logistic regression model which includes cohort; boys; family Camsis score; school type; tenure; graduate parents

Table 8 Logistic Regression Models: BHPS Rising 16s Achieving 5+ GCSEs (A\*-C)

	Model 3			Model 4		
	beta	z scores	p value	beta	z scores	p value
1990 cohort	-	-	-	-	-	-
1993 cohort	0.64	1.83	0.07	0.56	1.50	0.13
1995 cohort	0.80	2.28	0.02	0.73	1.94	0.05
1997 cohort	0.82	2.29	0.02	0.66	1.71	0.09
1999 cohort	1.00	2.61	0.01	1.05	2.53	0.01
Girls	-	-	-	-	-	-
Boys	-0.88	-4.44	0.00	-1.15	-5.30	0.00
Family Camsis score	0.04	4.87	0.00	0.02	1.63	0.10
Comprehensive school	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rising 16 at a grammar school	0.64	1.68	0.09	0.72	1.78	0.08
Rising 16 at a secondary modern	-0.88	-3.23	0.00	-0.82	-2.78	0.01
Rising 16 at an indep. school	1.59	2.00	0.05	1.23	1.52	0.13
Owner						
Renters	-0.90	-3.11	0.00	-0.73	-2.36	0.02
Neither parent is a graduate						
Either parent is a graduate	0.30	0.83	0.41	0.03	0.07	0.95
Mum attended other school						
Mum attended grammar school				0.43	1.57	0.12
Dad attended other school						
Dad attended grammar school				0.76	2.24	0.03
Number of rooms in household				0.23	2.54	0.01
Number employed in household				-0.48	-4.12	0.00
Lives in non-terraced housing						
Lives in terraced housing				-0.66	-2.51	0.01
Mum's age when resp. aged 16				0.06	2.61	0.01
Mum does not work over 40 hours						
Mum works over 40 hours				0.79	1.83	0.07
Constant	-1.98	-3.63	0.00	-3.35	-2.87	0.00

Source: BHPS Rising 16s, England and Wales, Essex Sample Household, 1991-1999;

Model 3 Log Likelihood= -314.47; Pseudo R<sup>2</sup>=.16

Model 4 Log Likelihood= -287.20; Pseudo R<sup>2</sup>=.23

## Conclusions

Our overall aim was to construct ‘synthetic cohorts’ of young people from BHPS households as they come to the end of compulsory education and either continue in education or move into employment or other activities. We have demonstrated that this is possible and the BHPS data can reasonably be used to study aspects of growing up in Britain in the 1990s. We have demonstrated that the data can be used to analyse GCSE attainment and sensible substantive results were obtained. We envisage that the data will also support the analysis of a number of educational and employment based outcomes that are relevant to understanding the ‘youth phase’ and transitions to adulthood.

Our preliminary analyses of GCSE attainment provided results that are comparable to nationally representative data. The analysis was extended by the inclusion of more detailed parental and household measures. We expect that the inclusion of BHPS information on income and wealth will provide a rich source to extend this work further. We also speculate that the investigation of relationships with, and the role of, siblings (especially older siblings) will lead to a more comprehensive understanding of growing up and the youth phase. The household structure of the BHPS provides the potential for developing work in this area.

The structure of the BHPS allows data on individual young people to be linked with parental and household data. This provides extended opportunities that are not available in existing data resources such as the YCS. A higher level of data quality can also be expected in the BHPS than the YCS, because data are collected directly from parents within the adult survey data, rather than by asking young people about their parents. In addition, standardised measurement instruments are used and well documented in the BHPS.

The YCS is at present the largest data resource on growing up in the 1990s. The high levels of sample attrition within this data resource sets limitations. By contrast there is comparatively low sample attrition in the BHPS ‘synthetic cohorts’. The young people in the BHPS are tracked into adult life and this opens an interesting source of data. As we have asserted, an emerging theme within the sociology of youth is the extension of the ‘youth phase’, and therefore data resources that allow empirical tests of theoretical claims are highly appealing.

The Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) will provide detailed empirical data on growing up in the 21st Century. We are also aware of the plan to establish a new British birth cohort in 2012 (colloquially referred to as the ‘Olympic Cohort’). The twelve year data collection aperture will be appropriate for many analyses. However it will be too wide for other analyses, for example when the motivation is to examine details of trends over time. Some of the restrictions relating to the YCS have been addressed in the design and data collection of the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) which began in the 2004 (see Appendix 1 for timing details). This data resource is innovative because it contacted young people at a younger age, interviews both them and their parents and it will be linked with administrative and official educational data. The LSYPE data resources will support detailed analyses of the youth phase and youth transitions in the early part of the 21st Century, though at present it only tracks a single age cohort of young people.

We therefore argue that the construction of ‘synthetic cohorts’ of data has more general appeal. The large overall sample size of the BHPS ensures that the number of ‘rising 16s’ is adequate at present. With the development of UKHLS, the number of suitable cohort members will increase substantially, which may better support more detailed analyses. The UKHLS is planning to add information collected for administrative purposes by education departments in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The information may include, for instance, national tests and formal assessments and examinations. The inclusion of high quality data from official sources would be highly beneficial for youth and educational research.

The UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS- Understanding Society) contains a youth questionnaire component for 10-15 year olds before they enter the adult part of the survey. This is an important development which will provide data on younger children. In the longer term, early estimates suggest that there will be around 1,000 new births each wave in the UKHLS panel. These children will ultimately mature into synthetic cohorts which will be tracked through the youth phase and into adulthood.

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Appendix 1: Youth Cohort Study of England & Wales. Cohorts and Sweeps of Data Collection

	Year of Survey										
	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95
<b>COHORT</b>											
1	1	2	3								
2		1	2	3							
3			1	2	3					4	
4					1	2	3				
5							1	2	3		
6								1	2	3/4(A)	

	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04
<b>COHORT</b>											
7	1		2								
8			1		2		3(A)				
9					1	2	3/4(A)				
10							1/2(A)		3		
11									1	2	3

	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14
<b>COHORT</b>											
12	1	2	3								
13				1	2	3	4				
14						1	2	3	4		
<b>LSYPE</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11

(A) Autumn sweeps; Black = Harmonised Cohort; Pink = Not Harmonised (i.e. YCS Cohort not included in the dataset SN5765)  
Blue = Recent Cohorts

Appendix 2:  
 Descriptive Characteristics:  
 BHPS Rising 16s Essex Sample, England and Wales, 1991-1999 (n=1083);  
 YCS Cohorts 1990-1999 (n=76791)

X variable	BHPS (n)	YCS (n)	BHPS (%)	YCS (%)
<b>Gender</b>				
Boys	555	37771	51.25	49.00
Girls	528	39019	48.75	51.00
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
White	1010	68127	93.26	90.36
Black	10	1368	0.92	1.81
Indian	18	1964	1.66	2.60
Pakistani	11	1643	1.02	2.18
Bangladeshi	6	666	0.55	0.88
Other Asian	1	845	0.09	1.12
Other ethnicity	16	784	1.48	1.04
<b>Tenure</b>				
Rented	257	58807	23.73	78.15
Owned	819	15112	75.62	20.08
<b>School year</b>				
1991	97	-	8.96	-
1992	119	-	10.99	-
1993	135	-	12.47	-
1994	121	-	11.17	-
1995	119	-	10.99	-
1996	146	-	13.48	-
1997	120	-	11.08	-
1998	109	-	10.06	-
1999	117	-	10.80	-
<b>Household type</b>				
Mum and Dad	872	62017	80.52	80.76
Mum only	159	10394	14.68	13.74
Dad only	39	2229	3.60	2.95
Other household	13	2060	1.20	2.72
<b>Parental education</b>				
Non graduates	952	62192	87.90	80.09
Graduate parents	131	14599	12.10	19.01

Descriptive Characteristics - *Continued*

X variable	BHPS (n)	YCS (n)	BHPS (%)	YCS (%)
<b>Family Camsis score</b>				
Mean	-	-	54.86	56.94
<b>School type</b>				
Comprehensive	536	65536	49.49	85.62
Grammar	77	2435	7.11	3.18
Secondary modern	158	2798	14.59	3.66
Independent	46	5772	4.25	7.54
<b>BHPS cohorts</b>				
92-93	254	-	23.45	-
94-95	240	-	22.16	-
96-97	266	-	24.56	-
98-99	226	-	20.87	-
<b>YCS cohorts</b>				
1990	-	14511	-	18.90
1993	-	18021	-	23.47
1995	-	15899	-	20.70
1997	-	14662	-	19.09
1999	-	13698	-	17.84

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