

“Introducing the ‘youth independence camps’: How an innovative policy for socially excluded youth is re-defining the boundaries of social provision in Japan”

Tuukka Toivonen

Department of Social Policy and Social Work

University of Oxford /

Institute of Social Science, University of Tokyo

INTRODUCTION

Japanese social policy in the post-war period is well-known both for its strong reliance on private companies for a host of social benefits and on families for a lion’s share of social care.¹ Another recognised feature has comprised active labour market policies administered through subsidies to a range of companies, farmers, shopkeepers and the construction sector to protect employment and support in-house training. Thus, Japan has maintained its own, to some extent distinctive, configuration of public vis-à-vis private responsibility for social provision. It would not be far from the truth to suggest that Japan had a so-called ‘enabling state’ – that preferred to prompt and guide the *private* provision of social policy through various regulations and indirect funding – decades before such an approach began to gain clout in the Western ‘welfare states’.²

* I remain sincerely grateful to professor Genda Yuji without whose generous support this (as of yet unfinished) research project could not have been undertaken. I would also like to thank Martin Seeleib-Kaiser and Roger Goodman for conscientious and insightful supervision as well as David Willis, John Campbell and David Slater for their invaluable comments. Furthermore, I am indebted to all the youth support practitioners and administrators who have kindly lent their support to my field research.

¹ See e.g. Schoppa (2006) and Kasza (2006).

² See Gilbert, 2002 for more the ‘enabling state’ concept. Kasza (2006) challenges the view that Japan has been an outlier as a welfare state focusing on health care, education and pensions, but admits at the same time that the country’s employment policies have been a distinctive element of

However, what once seemed an exceptionally clear-cut division between public-private social provision in Japan has now become blurry and deeply contested due to various socio-economic changes. On the one side, companies have become much less willing to provide welfare to their employees and prefer to hire more and more ‘irregulars’ with scant entitlements to welfare benefits, and women’s increasing participation in employment outside the home (alongside value changes) has decreased their ability and willingness to engage in carework. On the other side, the government has responded by launching novel family policies such as the family leave scheme of 1992 and the Long-Term Care Insurance of 1997, signifying a shift in the responsibility for social care at least from ‘strictly private’ to partly public.

Although similarly a ‘partial’ shift, the government has now also adopted some responsibility for supporting young people – first and foremost their employment – through various special measures as made clear by the ‘Plan to Foster a Spirit of Independence and Challenge in Youth’ (*Wakamono Jiritsu Chōsen Plan*) of 2003.³ The key objective of this paper is to explore the nature of such a reallocation of responsibilities through investigating an analytically interesting component of the above policy package: a new scheme for socially excluded youth known as the Youth Independence Camp (*Wakamono Jiritsu Juku*).

This novel programme was arguably prompted by the increase in non-job-seeking jobless youth as expressed through the debate on the so-called ‘NEETs’. Borrowed from the UK and introduced into Japanese discourse in late 2003, this acronym refers to 15-34-year olds who are ‘not in education, employment or training’. ‘NEETs’

the system.

³ See the original outline of this plan by the *Wakamono Jiritsu Chōsen Senryaku Kaigi* (10 June 2003) at <http://www.keizai-shimon.go.jp/minutes/2003/0612/item3-2.pdf>.

subsequently attracted keen attention in the mainstream media as a formidable ‘social problem’. Spearheaded by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, but in practice carried out by a diverse melange of NPOs and other small organisations, the Youth Independence Camp saw the daylight in the summer of 2005. As of September 2007, altogether 30 camps across Japan were training roughly one thousand youth per year in basic life and work skills while requiring them to live in a communal setting. While this small programme is typically portrayed by the government as a labour market policy, as a deliverer of ‘comprehensive care’ to socially excluded youth, it is at least as appropriate to view it as a *social* policy.

Rather than analysing the debate on NEETs and the policy-making process, this paper delimits its focus to the specifics and implications of the Youth Independence Camp scheme itself. First, a short background section covering past youth policies, the Plan to Foster a Spirit of Independence and Challenge in Youth, and the designated target group for the Youth Independence Camp is given. The next section investigates the details of this scheme by outlining the relevant policy objectives, eligibility criteria, the issue of funding and fees as well as key challenges currently faced by the programme. This undertaking draws on semi-structured interviews of 13 experts interviews (including government bureaucrats in charge of the scheme; see Appendix for details), official meetings, published and unpublished documents provided by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) and the Japan Productivity Centre for Socio-Economic Development (*Shakai-Keizai Seisansei Honbu*; henceforth JPCSED), as well as short-term participant observation carried out at four youth independence camps.

The third and final section provides a brief discussion on the implications of the

Youth Independence Camp to the allocation of responsibility for youth support in the Japanese society. At issue here is how the boundaries for responsibility are moving between the spheres of family, state, (mainly not-for-profit) civil society organisations and private companies. Moreover, the Youth Independence Camp will tentatively be considered as an *intervention into the family*. On a deeper level, I will raise the issue of whether the scheme is a ‘coercive’ as opposed to ‘supportive or ‘soft’ intervention and whether it therefore implies the privatisation – or alternatively the (re-)socialisation – of the risks of unemployment and social exclusion.

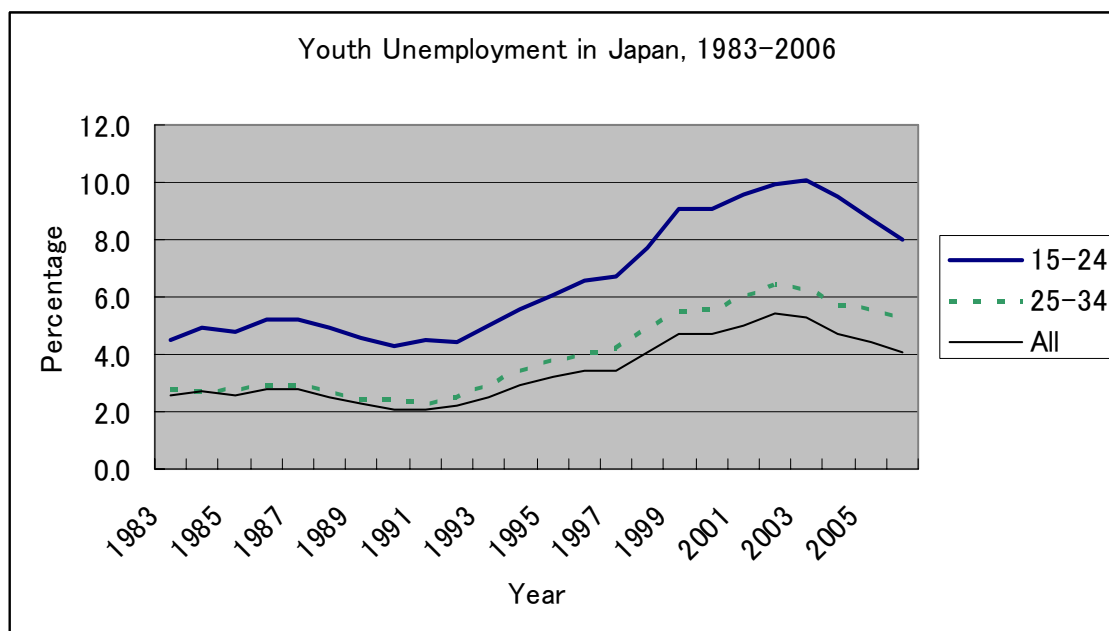
Pre-existing youth support measures, the ‘Plan to Foster a Spirit of Independence and Challenge in Youth’ and the target group for the Youth Independence Camp

The general conception is that Japan had *no* formal youth policies – at least no youth active labour market policies – in place before the early 2000s. This view is supported by comparatively low spending figures on youth labour market measures (Table 1) as well as by most scholarly accounts. Kosugi Reiko of the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training, for instance, states in her book on *freeters* and NEETs that there was little need for such government interventions until recently since the youth’s employment situation was highly favourable in Japan compared to other developed countries (Kosugi 2005:5). Miyamoto (2002) essentially agrees with this view while emphasising that even *after* the ‘standard pattern of transition’ from school to work in Japan had broken down in the 1990s, the strong safety net provided by parents significantly delayed the surfacing of youth’s employment and social problems (Miyamoto 2002:44). Going back further in time, a veteran youth supporter explained in

an interview that up to the 1980s, very few youth ‘fell through the gaps’ as it were, not only thanks to the tight integration between education and jobs but also the strength of *local communities*. These were usually able to incorporate unemployed youth, providing them with meaningful social roles even when they could not join the formal economy (E4).

The comparatively low youth unemployment rates until the 1990s as illustrated in Figure 1 lend credence to the above account (although this does of course not prove that many individual youth including ‘discouraged workers’ could not have benefited from various labour market support measures in this period). Hence, it is likely that until recently, such low youth unemployment rates combined with the safety nets provided by families and communities significantly reduced the pressure on the government to develop active youth labour market policies akin to those seen in Northern Europe.

Figure 1. Trends in youth unemployment in Japan, 1983-2006.



Source: Statistics Bureau (2007) *Labor force survey* (time series 2006; reference table 3.8), <http://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/roudou/lngindex.htm>.

Table 1. Public spending on youth labour market programmes in selected OECD countries, 1995-2002^a

	As a percentage of GDP		As a percentage of total expenditure on ALM programmes	
	1995	2002	1995	2002
Australia	0.06	0.08	7.5	16.9
Canada	0.02	0.02	3.3	4.4.
Denmark	0.14	0.10	7.7	6.2
Finland	0.15	0.17	9.9	17.2
France	0.27	0.40	20.8	32.2
Germany	0.06	0.10	4.2	8.6
Italy	0.16	0.20	45.3	35.4
Japan	---	0.01	---	1.8
Korea	0.02	0.02	45.9	6.3
Netherlands	0.10	0.04	7.0	2.4
Sweden	0.02	0.02	0.7	1.8
United Kingdom	0.12	0.13	25.9	35.8
United States	0.03	0.02	14.8	17.2

a) For Denmark, data refer to 2000 instead of 2002; for Italy, to 1996 instead of 1995.

Source: OECD database on Labour Market Programmes, as cited in Quintini, Glenda and Sebastien Martin (2006) Starting well or losing their way? *The position of youth in the labour market in OECD countries*. OECD social, employment and migration working papers Vol. 39 (table 6), <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/0/30/37805131.pdf>.

However, even if there were few European-style active labour market programmes for youth in Japan until the early 2000s, it is not accurate to claim institutional support measures or youth policies were absent altogether. Indeed, it can be argued that the school-to-work transition worked comparatively smoothly in Japan until the 1990s partly because it was facilitated by various institutionalised linkages between educational institutions and companies, as well as by the Public Employment Security Offices (*shokuan*).⁴ Also, some privately-run social support programmes for unemployed, socially excluded youth (including school-refusers and socially withdrawn *hikikomori* youth) did exist. Many of these were in fact provided by youth support organisations that currently host the Youth Independence Camp, such as *Peaceful House Hagurekumo* in Toyama Prefecture and *Seishōnen Jiritsu Enjo Sentā* in Fussa, Tokyo. Of course, such programmes were mostly private, small-scale initiatives that were relatively unknown and poorly coordinated, thus hardly forming a comprehensive social support ‘system’ for youth.

Intriguingly, although different in character from the new youth measures, the government did have one large-scale social policy in place for working-age youth since the 1970s. Based on the Law Regarding the Welfare of Young Workers (*Kinrō seishōnen fukushihō*) of 1970, several hundred facilities known as *Kinrō seishōnen no hōmu* (‘Homes for working youth’) have been operated by local governments across Japan with subsidies from the central government for the past thirty years. As of April 2002, 507 of such homes existed according to the 2002 White Paper on Youth (Cabinet

⁴ Yoshimoto (2002) provides a helpful review of Japanese youth employment policies in Japan prior to the wave of new activation policies that are a focus of this paper. He emphasises that the school-to-work transition has mainly been facilitated by career guidance offered by schools and Public Employment Security Offices (Yoshimoto, 2002:3). It is clear that also vocational schools and universities have been important suppliers of job placement services to youth in post-war Japan.

Office 2002:115). However, as the name of the programme suggests, these were intended primarily as cosy and friendly social spaces for youth who already had jobs (at companies typically far away from the youth's hometowns) and did not furnish any kind of training – let alone re-integration measures or social care – to *non-working* young people.

At present, with an exceeding percentage of the 15-24-year-old population in education and/or living in their parental homes, the *Kinrō seishōnen no hōmu* are quickly losing their relevance. A key contact at the MHLW explained to me that, at the time when the government was striving to reform its youth support measures in the early 2000s, he tried his utmost to convince the members of this pre-existing network to shift from catering to working youth to supporting and training non-working youth (E14). Ironically, his efforts were unsuccessful and only a couple of such working youth's homes later converted into *Youth Support Stations* (see below). Whatever the case, the existence of such an extensive scheme disproves the belief that the Japanese government had *no* social policies for youth before the 2000s even if it had few measures targeted at unemployed or out-of-labour force youth.

Following the burst of Japan's bubble economy, the employment situation deteriorated across the board in the late 1990s, becoming especially bad for youth. The unemployment rate for 15-24-year-olds leaped from 6.7 percent in 1997 to 10.1 in 2003, while for 25-34-year olds the jobless rate peaked a year earlier at 6.4 percent (Statistics Bureau 2007; see Figure 1). The number of so-called *freeters* – defined typically as 15-34-year-olds unmarried workers who frequently hop from one part-time job to another – hit two million also in 2002. In 2004, the increase in the number of youth who were neither in education, employment or training became a hot topic and was framed

by various experts as a serious ‘social problem’.

The term ‘NEET’ that is used to refer to such youth (and that has now become common parlance in Japan) was first introduced into the Japanese context by two reports released by the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training in March 2003.⁵ The point that these reports made was that, unlike in countries such as the UK and Sweden, in Japan young people outside the labour force and educational institutions (in the age group 15-34) had not been singled out as a target for government policy.⁶ They showed how this ‘outside-the-labour force NEET demographic’ of ‘youth with no motivation to work’ (*shūgyō iyoku wo misenai hirōdōryokuka shita NEET-sō*) had grown drastically in size and argued that policy measures would soon be necessary to tackle the problem (Kosugi and Hori 2003:4).

Although a few magazine and newspaper articles on NEETs appeared in early 2004, it was the publication of (the eventually best-selling) *Nīto: Furītā demo naku, shitsugyōsha demo naku* by Genda Yūji and Maganuma Mie in July of the same year that fully brought the issue into the public awareness in Japan. Pointing out a five-fold increase in those 15-24-year olds who expressed no wish to work (*shūshoku kibō ga nai*

⁵ Kosugi, Reiko et al. (2003) *Shogaikoku no wakamono shūgyō shien seisaku no tenkai: Igirisu to Suwēden wo chūshin ni*, Shiryō Shirīzu No. 131, Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training (URL for outline: <http://www.jil.go.jp/institute/chosa/documents/131g.pdf>); Kosugi, Reiko and Yukie Hori (2003) *Gakkō kara shokugyō he no ikō wo shien suru shokikan he no hiaringu chōsa kekka: Nihon ni okeru NEET mondai no shozai to taiō*, JIL Discussion Paper Series 03-001, Japan Institute of Labour Policy and Training (URL: http://www.jil.go.jp/institute/discussion/documetns/dps_03_001.pdf).

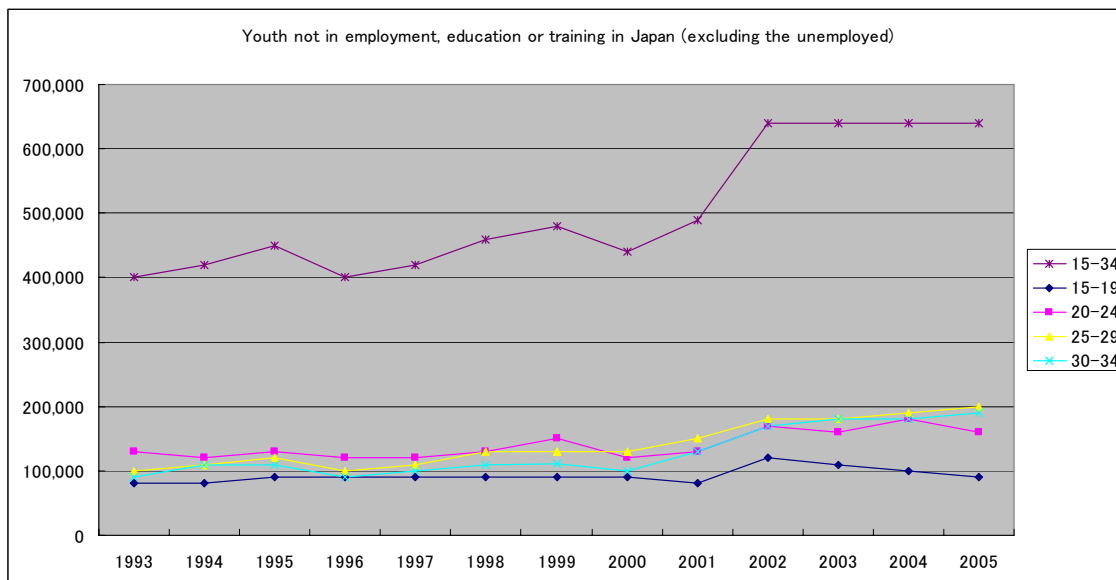
⁶ In the UK, where the social context is starkly different from Japan, this category is only applied to 16-18-year-olds and it includes both the unemployed as well as those outside the labour force and educational institutions (whereas the unemployed are not considered NEETs in Japan). It is not wholly clear why the relevant age range of NEETs is usually set at 15-34 in Japan. Kosugi Reiko (2005) hints that this age-group was chosen as it corresponds to that for *freeters*, thus making analyses and comparisons easier. The head of a prominent youth support organisation suggested in an interview that the high upper limit reflected the current cultural conceptions of ‘youth’ in Japan and the tolerance for letting children stay with their parents until relatively late (E4). Another possible reason is that, at the time this age-range became established (in 2003 and 2004), it included the youth who had faced harsh labour market conditions as fresh graduates in Japan’s post-bubble years during the ‘employment Ice Age’ (*koyō hyōgaki*).

nīto) and reporting on the thoughts and experiences of jobless youth through qualitative interviews, the book argued that it was not that NEETs did not *want* to work – they simply *could not*, for one reason or another. This statement provided a strong alternative to the predominant view (asserted especially by the older generations) of youth as lacking in work motivation and morale, but it hardly spurred a consensus of opinion on the issue. On the whole, due partly to the mainstream media’s influence, the term presently carries a negative connotation.

Without going into a comprehensive analysis of the media’s treatment of NEETs and the vast bibliography on the issue that emerged between 2003 and 2006, it is clear that as a result of this sudden surge of attention in 2004, jobless youth outside the labour force and educational institutions were successfully (re-)defined as a legitimate *target group* for social policy. While it is questionable that this process paid sufficient attention to the diverse realities facing young people now labelled as NEETs, that the issue was lifted on the media’s and eventually the policy-makers’ agenda can be seen as a strategic achievement on the part of the ‘youth support industry’ and its ‘sponsors’ (such as the pre-existing private youth support institutions and academics writing on the issue).⁷

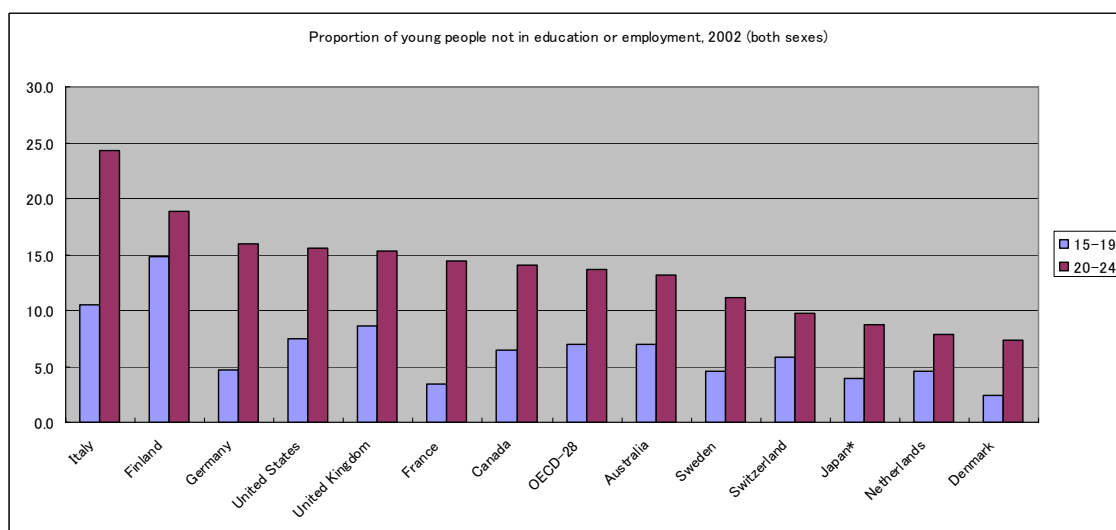
⁷ See Honda (2006) for a critical deconstruction of the NEET concept and debate. While her account contains many valuable insights, it does not sufficiently acknowledge the merits of framing out-of-labour force youth as a legitimate target for policy in Japan. Also, her criticism of the Youth Independence Camp is premature as it does not consider empirical evidence.

Figure 2. Trends in the number of youth not in employment, education or training in Japan (excluding those engaged in housework), 1993-2005.



Source: MHLW (2006b) *Rōdōhakusho* (Table 1-(1)-25, San.21).

Figure 3. The proportion of young people aged 15-19 and 20-24 not in education or employment (including the unemployed) in selected OECD countries in 2002.



Source: OECD (2004) *Education at a Glance* (table C4.2: Percentage of youth population in education and not in education), http://www.oecd.org/document/11/0,3343,en_2649_34515_33712011_1_1_1_1,00.html). Data for Japan compiled based on Statistics Bureau (2006) *Labor Force Survey* (Table 12), <http://www.stat.go.jp/data/roudou/report/2006/ft/zuhyou/a01200.xls>, and MHLW (2006) *Rōdōhakusho* (Table 1-(1)-25, Ref.21).

Predating the debate on NEETs by roughly a year and prompted mainly by growing youth unemployment and the increase in *freeters*, the government announced in July 2003 its most comprehensive youth support initiative to date, the *Wakamono Jiritsu Chōsen Puran*, or the Plan to Foster a Spirit of Independence and Challenge in Youth (WJCP). This policy package is remarkable not only in its comprehensiveness but in the way it has promoted inter-ministry cooperation.⁸ Another noteworthy aspect of this plan was the intention to recruit private organisations (including NPOs) to take care of programme delivery. The plan originally strived to build and utilise diverse partnerships between such private organisations, businesses and local administrations, relying on their local knowledge, flexibility and active initiative (Yokoi 2006:111).

It appears that a general characteristic of the government's approach to youth policy is now to centrally fund a particular programme for its initial few years and then ideally transfer fiscal and administrative responsibility onto the locality in question or the concerned institutions themselves. The two early 'fruits' of the WJCP for *freeters* and jobless youth comprised the abovementioned *Job Café* as well as the *Young Job Spot* (the latter of which has recently been superseded by the *Wakamono Support Station* that is more clearly differentiated from the *Job Café* and has a networking dimension). The *Wakamono Jiritsu Juku* was incorporated into the WJCP framework as the first initiative designed explicitly for the NEET demographic in 2005. The yearly expenditures for the WJCP have been on the order of 76 billion yen for fiscal 2005 and 2006, amounting to a

⁸ The Ministry of Economics, Trade and Industry was to furnish job matching services to youth through the 'Job Café' scheme as well skill development programmes; the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology was expected to enhance career education in schools and provide supplementary schooling to *freeters*; and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare was to oversee measures targeting those struggling between the realms of formal education and work, focusing its efforts on career development, job search support, and the setting up of 'trial employment' to improve the youth labour market (Yokoi 2006; see the white papers of the respective ministries for details).

bit under 0.4 percent of the MHLW's total social security expenditures (with the expenditures on all employment- related programmes adding up to slightly over two percent).⁹

A word is in place regarding the portrayal of the target group for the *Wakamono Jiritsu Juku* in official MHLW publications. The ministry's white paper for fiscal 2005 mentions for the first time both the term 'NEET' as well as the establishment of the *Wakamono Jiritsu Juku*. The short section on this new policy states that the increase in young people who are neither working nor studying and who have 'inadequate living habits and work motivation (*shūrō iyoku*)' and remain dependent on their parents – a description that closely corresponds to the image of 'NEETs' in the mainstream media and public debate – has become a serious problem (MHLW 2005:274). It is stated furthermore that the Youth Independence Camp is expected to guide youth to suitable careers or training through teaching them the basic skills required of each regular 'member of society' (*shakaijin*) and worker (*shokugyōnin*), and through cultivating confidence (*jishin*) and motivation (*iyoku*) in relation to work. This implies that the target group for this policy is *lacking* not only in professional skills but in the very essential capabilities required of each (Japanese) citizen. Therefore, one role of the Youth Independence Camp is to provide appropriate 'corrective' training, or in other words, re-socialisation.

The 2006 white paper adopts a similar but more open-ended view on NEETs, speaking of 'youth who have for various reasons *lost* their confidence to work' (my italics; MHLW 2006:234). Such youth are therefore not necessarily inherently low on

⁹ MHLW 2006 *Wakamono no Jiritsu Chōsen no tame no akushon puran* (<http://www.mhlw.go.jp/topics/2006/bukyoku/syokuan/04.html>); MHLW 2005 *Yosanan no shuyō jikō* (<http://www.mhlw.go.jp/shingi/2005/02/s0209-8a.html>).

work morale or confidence, but have simply lost their pre-existing, desirable attitudes towards work. Still, these youth are to be led to suitable jobs through cultivating confidence and motivation via the *Wakamono Jiritsu Juku*. In the following short section that discusses the construction of comprehensive independence support measures on the level of localities, the essential capabilities and attributes that NEETs are seen as lacking are elaborated further. These consist firstly of so-called *ningenryoku* or ‘human skills’ (referring to the ‘comprehensive abilities necessary for interacting and cooperating with other people and living vigorously as an independent individual in society’), high work consciousness and social adaptability (MHLW 2006:234). The subtext is hence that NEETs have insufficient social aptitudes and do not necessarily possess the skills expected of a ‘normal’ and ‘independent’ human being in the society.

The same references to ‘basic skills expected of every member of society’ as well as ‘work confidence and motivation’ feature also on the website of *Wakamono Jiritsu Shien Sentā* of the Japan Productivity Centre for Socio-Economic Development (JPCSED), the organisation tasked by MHLW to oversee the Youth Independence Camp’s delivery and public relations.¹⁰ In other publications by this centre, portrayals that are much more tolerant and sympathetic towards youth – and that rarely mention the term ‘NEET’ explicitly – are put forth. For example, the *Wakamono Jiritsu Juku Handbook* published in 2007 for the host organisations and their staff suggests non-working youth in actuality ‘want to work and connect with their peers while doing so’, and they ‘wish to find purpose in life through working’ (JPCSED 2007:i). According to this handbook, jobless and socially withdrawn youth are simply ‘unable to

¹⁰ Wakamono Jiritsu Shien Sentā, Japan Productivity Centre for Socio-Economic Development (2007) *Wakamono Jiritsu Juku pōtaru saito*, <http://www.jiritsu-juku.jp/> (accessed on 1 September 2007).

seize the opportunity to do so' and are 'waiting for new chances in life' to come about. This is broadly consistent with the abovementioned account by Genda and Maganuma (2004) that portrays 'NEETs' as basically willing but simply *unable* to search for jobs and engage in work due to various circumstances, and illustrates well how contrasting views are present and mixed even in official documents.

In an interview with three MHLW bureaucrats (E7, E8, E9) currently in charge of running the Youth Independence Camp, similarly diverse perceptions of NEETs came to the fore. First, there was an understanding that many youth had given up on looking for work, and/or on work itself, amid the harsh employment conditions of the post-bubble recession (referred to frequently as the *koyō hyōgaki*, or the employment 'ice age') and had since become socially withdrawn 'NEETs'. Many of such youth had irregular day rhythms – typically staying awake the nights and sleeping through the days – and as a consequence, rarely left their rooms to communicate with other people. It was precisely such withdrawn youth who needed to be supported through policy to bring them closer to working opportunities once again (E9).

Very aware of the fact that there were many socially withdrawn youth whom even their parents did not want to bring within the public view and were thus extremely hard to reach, the bureaucrats I interviewed were quick to emphasise that the foremost group targeted by the MHLW and the Youth Independence Camps were those NEETs who 'want to work but *cannot*' (*hatarakitainda keredo hatarakenai*). Such youth are thus basically motivated to make efforts to improve their situation if provided with some support (E7). At the same time, although the bureaucrats viewed Japan's youth employment problems to have much in common with those in other industrialised countries, it was suggested that in Japan's case, many young people did not feel

compelled to work to the best of their abilities and could stay at home until their 30s due to income and support from parents.

The Youth Independence Camp: Programme features, key objectives and central challenges

Having reviewed the relevant background and discussed portrayals of the target group above, this section will provide an outline of the Youth Independence Camp scheme itself. At the outset it must be reminded that this is a portrait of a new, emerging policy that was put to practice only in July 2005; hence, many aspects described below are likely to undergo significant changes in the near-term future. Upon introducing the core programmatic features of the Youth Independence Camp, the account here centres on the key policy objectives, enrollee eligibility criteria and the most salient challenges the programme currently faces.¹¹

Essentially, the Youth Independence Camp is a three-month-long training programme during which participants are required to live on-site while taking part in various types of ‘basic’ training activities. Although the specific contents vary between the 30 camps currently in operation, the three basic components of the programme are ‘life training’ (*seikatsu kunren*), practical work trials (*shūrō taiken*) and work training (*shūgyō kunren*). The assumption underlying ‘life training’ is that the targeted youth usually have highly irregular day rhythms and are hardly able to handle daily routines such as cleaning and cooking by themselves due to living at their parental homes. Therefore, it is vital to first help the participants restore a regular day rhythm before any

¹¹ I draw here on expert interviews, written sources and short-term visits to Youth Independence Camps (see Appendix).

actual work training is begun (E2, E3). Practical work experiences may comprise agricultural work, nursing care, or work at small restaurants or bakeries owned by the delivering organisation. Work training may consist of similar activities in addition to class room-based training in basic IT skills and English. Since there is wide consensus on the lack of communication skills among the targeted youth, practical communication training is also an important part of the programme. Camp staff come from many generations but apart from the leaders and managers of the organisations, the majority of those directly involved with the participants appear to be in their 20s and 30s.

Although similar youth training is provided in many other developed countries such as Finland and Germany, the residency requirement appears a unique aspect of the Youth Independence Camp. The rationale for this arrangement derives from the fact that most of the targeted youth – even those in their late 20s or early 30s – still reside with their parents. Hence, participation in a camp may be the first time for such youth to live away from home for an extended period of time and to mingle with non-family members on a daily basis. Accordingly, although the explicit priority of the Youth Independence Camp (that is framed as a labour policy and administered by the labour side of the MHLW) is on guiding youth to appropriate jobs so as to support economic independence, in practice the policy may also promote independence from parents. This is a sociologically noteworthy dimension of the programme that may reveal a great deal about family relationships in present-day Japan.¹² Somewhat paradoxically, however, in the majority of cases it is the parents who must shoulder the enrolment fees that average

¹² It is not uncommon to hear of parents who are desperate to ‘send their adult children away’ to a third party and then refuse to take them back after the training period lapses. Also, the Youth Independence Camp is sometimes viewed by parents as a solution to all the problems their children face from alcoholism and narcotics dependency to the tendency to withdraw socially and mental illnesses (Wakamono Jiritsu Juku Renraku Kaigi, Tokyo, 28 September 2007).

280,000 yen for families that earn over four million yen per annum and around 210,000 yen for those households whose earnings fall below this line.¹³ Therefore, enrolment at a camp depends largely on the ability and willingness of a youth's parents to sponsor his or her participation. It thus makes sense for the hosting organisations to actively liaise with parents and seek to ensure their understanding regarding the contents and merits of the programme.

Table 2 summarises key data on enrolment at the Youth Independence Camps as well as on government subsidies allocated towards the execution of this programme. It is evident that, at least for the time being, we are dealing with a very small programme in terms of enrolment figures. Furthermore, a crucial point is that over the past two years, the Youth Independence Camps have attracted less than half as many participants than had originally been intended, with many individual camps running far short of the designated 20 participants at any one time. Directly related to this outcome is the fact that in 2005 and 2006, a mere third of the government subsidies allocated for the camps could actually be claimed by the delivering organisations. Hence, the total amount of subsidies planned by the MHLW for fiscal 2008 is being reduced by 40 percent compared to the previous year (Wakamono Jiritsu Juku Renraku Kaigi, 28 September 2007).

¹³ The fees that the 30 camps charge vary to a surprisingly large extent: the maximum regular fee charged is 444,000 yen in contrast to a minimum fee of 180,000 yen. Lowered fees applicable to enrollees from poorer households range from 315,000 yen to 105,000 yen. As a rule, the government pays a subsidy that equals the regular participation fee and a higher subsidy per each enrollee from a household earning less than four million yen per annum (although not all of the camps have a lowered fee system in place; Wakamono Jiritsu Shien Sentā, Japan Productivity Centre for Socio-Economic Development (2007) *Wakamono Jiritsu Juku pōtaru saito (Zenkoku no wakamono jiritsu juku ichiran)* <http://www.jiritsu-juku.jp/modules/tinyd1>).

Table 2. Youth Independence Camp enrolment and subsidy data.

Year	Enrolment capacity	Number of enrollees	Enrolees/ capacity	Government subsidies (yen)	Subsidy utilisation rate
2005	1200	506	42 %	900 million	30 %
2006	1720	698	41%	970 million	33.5 %
2007	1584	-	-	1 billion	-
2008	1200	-	-	600 million (budget draft)	-

Source: MHLW (2007) *Wakamono Jiritsu Juku sōshutsu suishin jigyo no shōreihi nado no jōkyō* (The situation regarding the establishment of the Youth Independence Camp and subsidy expenses etc. A handout distributed to participants at the Wakamono Jiritsu Juku Renraku Kaigi, Tokyo, 28 September 2007).

The previous section already reviewed the explicit, stated objectives set for the Youth Independence Camp as a policy, consisting essentially of guiding enrolees to suitable jobs through training and through improving their work motivation and confidence. In other words, a key objective of the programme is to activate currently dormant (and possibly socially excluded) youth and make them part of the labour force so that they may exit the NEET category. A quantitative policy goal that is explicit among the concerned parties (but not reported in government white papers) is that 70 percent of the enrolees attach themselves to employment within half a year of completing the programme (E2, E3). This is arguably the dominant objective that thoroughly shapes the execution of the Youth Independence Camp and acts as the main yardstick by which its performance is measured.

Typically, social policies also come vested with implicit, oftentimes normative objectives, and the Youth Independence Camp is certainly rife with these. However, considering that the actors involved in the policy-making process and in the actual delivery of the programme hardly form a homogeneous group, assessing the relative

weight of such objectives and their consistency across policy levels becomes vital. Underlying the apparent diversity in objectives assigned to the Youth Independence Camp is the highly divisive and contested nature of the debate on NEETs: No consensus has been reached regarding who should be ‘blamed’ for this problem (i.e. youth who are seen in need of ‘discipline’ or various social institutions that should be improved, or both) or regarding who should take responsibility for alleviating it. Hence, operating against a backdrop of fundamental disagreement over the causes of the NEET problem, the policy-makers developing the Youth Independence Camp are likely to have held diverging paradigms regarding appropriate policy measures.

To be sure, one implicit goal on the part of the government – and plausibly its most powerful intra-government justification for the Youth Independence Camp – is to pre-empt an increase in future livelihood assistance recipients by reducing the number of current NEETs. The bureaucrats I interviewed at the MHLW believed that, without intervention, many of such youth would inevitably become reliant on welfare benefits and thus a burden on tax payers in the future.¹⁴ Hence, it is wiser to guide them to the labour markets at the earliest instance (E7, E8, E9). Although not directly mentioned by any of my interviewees, the feared labour shortages and continuing low fertility in Japan are likely to have added to the persuasiveness of such argumentation within the government.

The ‘disciplining of morally deficient youth’ – i.e. re-socialisation by way of various ‘corrective’ and disciplinary, potentially harsh measures – may be seen as another implicit objective of the Youth Independence Camp. According to a key informant at the

¹⁴ “...Nīto no kata ga sono manma oiteoku to, seikatsu hogo no taishō ni narikanenai. Shōraiteki na futan ga mikomareru” (If NEETs are left as they are, they will inevitable become targets for livelihood assistance. Thus, a future burden is anticipated) (E7, E8, E9).

MHLW who oversaw the making of the policy (the former chief of the *Career Keisei Shienshitsu*), suggestions regarding the enactment of a ‘disciplinary’ programme for jobless youth were first made to him in the Autumn of 2003 by a prominent politician from the House of Councillors who at the time acted as the head of a House of Councillors Health, Labour and Welfare Committee (E11). At the same time, voices calling for re-introducing a draft system or a military-style training programme resurfaced in political circles.¹⁵ However, the bureaucrat in charge rejected such suggestions and argued that as a fully voluntary scheme, an emphasis on ‘Spartan’ discipline would not be feasible (as it would deter most prospective enrollees). Therefore, it seems likely that while the early proposals that eventually led to the Youth Independence Camp bore ‘disciplinary’ overtones, these features did not survive to the subsequent phases of the policy-making process. Based on field visits to camp sites, the actual programmes that I have observed so far do not emphasise discipline beyond waking up at a set time in the morning and partaking promptly in group activities.¹⁶

Although born as a response to the ‘NEET crisis’, it is evident that the Youth Independence Camp actually targets a small, finely-defined subset of this demographic. The portal site of the *Wakamono Jiritsu Juku Shien Sentā* states that as a rule, eligible applicants are those who have completed compulsory education, been outside of employment, schooling and work training continuously for over a year without (formally) seeking for jobs in this period. Moreover, they must have sought for jobs in

¹⁵ According to some of my contacts, such remarks have provoked public opposition and criticism towards the Youth Independence Camp although this scheme arguably bears little resemblance to military training in its plans or practice. Also, any talk of ‘Spartan training’ risks evoking memories of the so-called Totsuka Yacht School incident of the 1980s where a young participant drowned while taking part in what appeared to many an excessively disciplinary and punitive rehabilitation programme for school refusers.

¹⁶ However, I intend to evaluate finer aspects of how discipline operates at the camp sites through repeated participant observation visits to several camps.

the past and should be unmarried and under 35 years old.¹⁷ The intended purpose seems therefore to be to target mainly those ‘long-term NEETs’ (whose problems are likely to compound with time in the absence of support) with the best prospects of attaching themselves to jobs at the end of the training period.¹⁸

JPCSED officials in charge of the scheme confirmed in an interview that being at a risk of social exclusion is indeed a main criterion for admittance to the programme. In the Japanese context, this means generally that married individuals are not targeted (as marriage is equated with ‘social inclusion’, especially for women; E2, E3). Those who have looked for work in the past are prioritised as they are more likely to succeed in finding employment following the camp programme, but there are exceptions to this rule. Ultimately, the organisations hosting the Youth Independence Camps decide independently who to admit although they may consult the JPCSED in ambiguous cases. While in principle only healthy youth are allowed to enrol, these consultations exceedingly concern applicants with a background of mental illnesses and/or disorders.

The MHLW officials presently in charge of the Youth Independent Camp emphasised that, while the scheme was indeed intended as a ‘NEET response’ (*Nīto taisaku*), it was not created to target those presently living as *hikikomori*, i.e. youth who

¹⁷ Wakamono Jiritsu Shien Sentā, Japan Productivity Centre for Socio-Economic Development (2007) *Wakamono Jiritsu Juku pōtaru saito (Nyūjuku kibō no minasama; Nyūjukusha no jōken)*, <http://www.jiritsu-juku.jp/> (accessed on 1 September 2007). However, a recent survey report released by the JPCSED that reached 409 independence camp participants between January and September 2006 showed that in actuality one fifth of the respondents had been NEETs for less than a year at the time of entering a camp programme (JPCSED 2007:Appendix).

¹⁸ It is fair to assume that it is the long-term unemployed or ‘inactive’ youth who are at highest risk of exclusion in Japan too. Seen from the perspective of an individual’s life-cycle, it may not be a problem at all for a young person to be unemployed or outside formal education for a limited period of time if he/she subsequently finds employment or educational opportunities. However, such a linear view is problematic when many young people alternate between bouts of temporary/part-time work and unemployment, thus frequently jumping between the categories of *freeter* and NEET (although in many statistics, some subsets of NEETs are considered *freeters*, further contributing to conceptual confusion). To shed more light on the long-term implications of being a *freeter* or a NEET in Japan, longitudinal panel studies are urgently needed.

withdraw into their rooms or apartments for extended periods of time. Instead, the camps were designed to serve youth who possess the will to work but for one reason or another are unable to seek jobs or feel insecure about their communication abilities (E7, E8, E9). This could include youth who have previously experienced periods of social withdrawal but have since made efforts to change their circumstances (by themselves or prompted by their parents). The officials admitted that this circumscribing is partly dictated by the impossibility of reaching most withdrawn youth who do not take initiative themselves: even if accurate survey data on the prevalence of the *hikikomori* existed, there would be no appropriate institutional means to reach them, and developing new ones would risk human rights violations.¹⁹

The Youth Independence Camp has been criticised by some as a policy for ‘elite NEETs’ due to its targeting of youth with previous job-seeking experience and those that appear likely to attach themselves to jobs quickly (‘elite’ here does not necessarily refer to youth from affluent families). A veteran youth supporter whose organisation currently runs a Youth Independence Camp disapproved of such approach that in practice furnishes support based on the ‘needs’ of the programme, not the needs of socially excluded youth themselves (E4). Furthermore, all practitioners I have talked to as well as the officials at the JPCSED and MHLW acknowledge that the enrolment fees are a barrier to participation especially for youth from low-income families (and for youth unable to persuade their parents to support their enrolment).

¹⁹ Herein lies a key dilemma of not only for the Youth Independence Camp but all active labour market measures for youth in Japan. Since there is no pre-existing system in place for delivering unemployment benefits to youth where such benefits could be linked to education or training, fewer incentives exist for utilising activation measures. In the case of the Youth Independence Camp these incentives are diminished by the fact that, in the absence of benefits, attending a camp programme becomes a considerable net cost to the participant (or his/her parents). Miyamoto Michiko finds that this state of affairs may serve to further expose the limits of youth support in a non-comprehensive, liberal style welfare state that Japan resembles (personal communication, 28 September 2007).

There are at least four reasons that led to the imposition of participation fees for the Youth Independence Camp. First, it is evident that the prospective participants – who are generally equated with ‘NEETs’ – have not been viewed as a group deserving of government support or tax money. The JPCSED officials as well as a key analyst of jobless youth at the University of Tokyo emphasised in interviews that, around the time when the NEET debate emerged and the Youth Independence Camp was originally designed, it was assumed that most jobless youth who were not in education came from affluent middle-class families and were merely ‘playing around’ (E2, E3, E5). Therefore, as long as this conception of the target group remains dominant among the general public as well as parts of the government, a decision to provide feeless support to the Youth Independence Camp participants would be likely to draw heavy criticism. It has in fact recently been shown statistically that more youth definable as NEETs in Japan now come from low-earning households, but it is doubtful whether this finding has significantly transformed the persistently negative social image of such youth (Genda 2007). (Indeed, it may be very difficult to change this image now that the peak of the ‘NEET crisis’ has passed and the media pays the issue less attention)

The second reason for fees has to do with the nature of the programme itself. The MHLW officials I interviewed stressed that the charges exist mainly because of the live-in requirement and should be seen as ‘hotel fees’ rather than training costs. The third reason communicated by the same officials in interviews and official meetings has to do with the reluctance of the Ministry of Finance to allocate more funds to the programme for various reasons (including possibly the general view of NEETs as ‘undeserving’ of generous public support). The structure and orientation of the Japanese social security system suggests a fourth reason: employment-related benefits are

typically paid only for those who have made contributions in the past continuously for several years, and as the employment insurance account is operated separately from the general account for social expenditures, securing funds for a new employment training programme for socially excluded youth with no predecessors is difficult.

It is clear that the Youth Independence Camp currently faces serious complex challenges on several fronts. These can be roughly divided into practical issues that occur at the camp sites, problems regarding promotion and recruitment of participants, and issues of programme survival and continuity.

In terms of practical issues, perhaps the greatest unanticipated finding since the launch of the Youth Independence Camp in 2005 has been the discovery that around half of the participants so far have had a prior record of mental health treatment.²⁰ This is problematic first of all because the programme was not originally designed to provide care for such youth and therefore the delivering organisations are not equipped with the capacity or resources to respond adequately to enrollees with serious mental illnesses and/or disorders. However, it is oftentimes difficult to ascertain the mental health of an applicant at entrance as many hide such facts from the camp staff at this stage. This issue was one of the key points raised at a recent national meeting of practitioners and policy-makers, and many called for the drafting of unambiguous standards regarding how to handle mental health-related difficulties (Wakamono Jiritsu Juku renraku kaigi, 28 September 2007). The approach taken by most delivering organisations seems to be to dismiss a participant in the event she/he is found to have had serious mental condition

²⁰ According to a recent report by the Japan Productivity Centre for Socio-Economic Development, 49.5 percent out of 418 enrollees surveyed had received psychiatric treatment in the past (JPCSED 2007:7;Appendix). This figure is consistent with the accounts provided by several practitioners and camp managers in interviews and informal discussions. However, I am not aware of any studies that have analysed the prevalence of specific mental illnesses and disorders among the participants.

requiring professional treatment.

Many Youth Independence Camp staff and managers see a significant portion of camp enrollees occupying a 'grey zone' as they tend to have disabilities or illnesses that are grave enough to prevent them from working regular jobs but not serious enough to make them eligible for public support. Not surprisingly then, practitioners feel that to characterise such enrollees as work-shy or unmotivated 'NEETs' is hardly appropriate, and that the NEET-concept is unhelpfully broad and vague. Indeed, it is at this practical level – rather than through aggregate statistics that most analysts of the phenomenon have relied on – that the actual circumstances surrounding jobless youth may be ascertained. It is plausible that the Youth Independence Camps (alongside the non-residential one-stop centres known as Wakamono Support Stations) – despite being unable to reach the majority of socially withdrawn youth – may come to play an important 'sensor function' by grasping the manifold challenges faced by present-day Japanese youth and by communicating their experiences and knowledge to the wider society via the media.

It will be analytically interesting to investigate the extent to which the predominant image of NEETs and the assumptions that underlay the design of policies for this target group were at odds with empirical reality, and whether this has hampered the establishment of effective, meaningful responses. The opposite is also possible: Even if the conceptualisation of the target group is found to have been 'distorted' or only remotely based on reality, the end-results may turn out favourable (from an enlarged perspective) due to the abovementioned 'sensor function' and the ability to later adjust and re-focus target group considerations. Also, it can be considered a merit of the Youth Independence Camp (regardless of how misguided its original design may have been) if

a previously unrecognised strata of youth with serious mental illnesses or disorders is highlighted as a result and provided with appropriate care.

As demonstrated by Table 2, recruiting enough participants is a fundamental challenge for the Youth Independence Camp. Without a rise in enrollee figures, the utility of the programme will no doubt come into question and its funding may be cut further in the future. Unsurprisingly for a new programme, it appears that the Youth Independence Camp is not yet well-known to the general public, although it has enjoyed reasonably frequent coverage in national and local newspapers. While the fees may act to deter prospective enrollees especially from low-earning households, it may simply be that the majority of Japanese youth – especially those with a background of social withdrawal – may find communal living an unattractive if not a frightening idea. Furthermore, the camps may be perceived as mainly ‘disciplinary institutions’ while some potential participants may be worried about being stigmatised due to being recognised as a ‘NEETs’.

That only 23 percent of enrollees surveyed in 2006 were women may be related to the fact that parents are less likely to view the joblessness or inactivity of their daughters as a problem due to cultural reasons and may thus be less willing to ‘invest’ in their training at a Youth Independence Camps. Moreover, the paucity of female staff members at the delivering organisations may make them less approachable to women and less suited to catering to their needs. Alongside communal living, the particular training activities carried out at individual camps (farm work, waste collection, cleaning etc.) may seem too ‘masculine’ to women, although there are now some organisations that provide ‘female-friendly’ work sites such as bakeries and restaurants. The camps themselves may be more hesitant to actively recruit women as it is generally harder to

find work for them upon programme completion in the Japanese labour markets (E1).

The long-term survival of the Youth Independence Camp as a government-supported programme is a key concern for all the practitioners I have interviewed and talked to. Many fear that the subsidies will be withdrawn as the media's attention on 'NEETs' fades and turns to newer issues such as the working poor and the 'Net café refugees'. Indeed, most camp managers express a strong wish to become independent from government support not only to make their activities sustainable in the long term but to free them from government-imposed rules and achievement targets (such as the goal that 70 percent of enrolees must subsequently find paid work). While the more established of the delivering organisations (that have been in the field for years or decades before the introduction of the scheme) are likely to survive even if the Youth Independence Camp policy is abolished, the newer ones would face grave difficulties in continuing their activities. The MHLW is unambiguous about how long it will support the programme, but emphasises that it was originally intended as a five-year project. After this period, its future will be decided based on an evaluation of its performance and fiscal responsibility for the programme may be transferred onto local governments or the hosting institutions.

In addition to recruitment challenges and the charging of fees per se, the fact that the government subsidies are tied to the actual number of participants each year risks throwing the Youth Independence Camp into a vicious cycle. This arrangement means that, any camp that experiences significant fluctuation in the numbers of enrolees will also have to cope with considerable fluctuation in basic financing. As a consequence, it becomes hard to attract and keep committed staff members, pay them reasonable salaries and provide them with employment security. Indeed, some of my interviewees

therefore stress the importance of ‘supporting the supporters’ – i.e. ensuring the livelihood of staff running programmes such as the Youth Independence Camp so that they may remain in the field long enough to become professionals (E2, E5). The extent to which such problems can be solved and whether the Youth Independence Camp will survive (in its current or reformed shape) will depend partially on whether the delivering organisations are able to cooperate and protect their interests e.g. through forming a well-functioning national association.

Discussion: The Youth Independence Camp and shifting boundaries of social provision for youth

So far this paper has reviewed key changes in the realm of Japanese youth policy as well as the salient features of the Youth Independence Camp. This scheme is of significant interest to the students of Japanese policy because it is the country’s first policy explicitly targeted at non-working, socially excluded youth; because it has been directly influenced by the highly normative public debate on ‘NEETs’; because of its attempts to re-socialise youth; and finally because it is contributing to the re-allocating responsibilities for youth support. Although by no means a full analysis, this section will consider how we should gauge such shifts in the boundaries for social support.

First, it is clear that where it once were (extended) families, local communities, schools and companies under life-time or long-term employment that socialised and integrated youth in Japan, this pattern has been severely fractured since the 1990s by various socio-economic changes. The share of multi-generational families has decreased, communities have weakened, and companies have switched to hiring more temporary

workers in an effort to cut costs. As the average age at first marriage has risen, more youth continue to cohabit with their parents until their late 20s and early 30s, enjoying the financial safety nets they provide. It is possible that this has in fact made it easier for companies to pay young worker lower salaries and hire them as temporary employees. However, this state of affairs is putting great strain on families and many of them are struggling with internal conflicts and economic difficulties while pushing their children to move on to start their own families.

The Youth Independent Camp may be viewed not only as a response to the increase in 'NEETs' per se, but as a recognition of the fact that the core social institutions listed above are no longer able to sufficiently socialise and integrate a subset of young people who consequently are put at a high risk of social exclusion. The policy acknowledges that in the changed circumstances, some responsibility for youth support must now be shouldered by the public sector together with civil society organisations, if only to avoid an increase in unskilled labourers and socially alienated welfare recipients in the future.

In quantitative terms, this shift in responsibility has been very slight and partial, especially if we consider that the number of so-called 'NEETs' is typically put at over 640,000 (see Figure 2) whereas the Youth Independence Camps can collectively accommodate less than 2,000 participants a year at maximum capacity. However, taken together with the Wakamono Support Station – a one-stop counselling, training and career planning facility for socially excluded youth – that was introduced in 2006, the total number of youth benefiting from the government's new support policies could climb to well over 100,000 in a few years' time.²¹ If this service institution takes root

²¹ As of September 2007, the Yokohama Wakamono Support Stations alone receives around 800 visits per month, and there are plans to have 100 such support stations in operation by the end of 2008.

and operates as the policy-makers intended, it is conceivable that a comprehensive youth support ‘system’ – of which the Youth Independence Camp is but one component – may emerge in Japan over the near-term future (E11, E14).

Still, despite the low number of enrollees, the Youth Independence Camp remains an extraordinary policy in the Japanese context, not merely because it provides basic training in work and life skills, but because it functions as an intervention into the *family*. In effect, this measure removes adult children (the average age of participants being 25) from their parental homes for several months, providing them with a new social environment, comprehensive care and daily guidance by previously unknown non-family members. While the explicit goal of the Independence Camps is to aid youth on their way to *economic* independence, in practice the enrollees are also taught independence from their *parents* as well as elementary communication and group work skills necessary for participation in the wider society. This, if anything, is a clear recognition of the fact that families and other core social institutions are no longer seen as able (or sufficient) to teach some youth how to function in society at a very basic level.

However, this is not the same as saying that the state has adopted full responsibility for preventing youth joblessness and/or social exclusion in Japan. No formal ‘guarantees’ have been issued and the Youth Independence Camp has been introduced as a fee-charging scheme (although the Youth Support Station is feeless). The imposition of a fee has led to a situation where parents as the main funders are in a position to determine whether to allow their child to participate in a camp or not, in worst cases preventing prospective participants from enrolling. Of course, in actuality it is the parents in more than half the cases who prompt their child to enter an

Independence Camp in the first place, which may be inevitable when the child is experiencing a serious spell of social withdrawal and cannot take initiative himself/herself. Even if the camp was offered free of charge, liaising with the parents would most likely remain the best way to reach such withdrawn youth.

To what extent, then, can the Youth Independence Camp be viewed as a ‘coercive’ versus a ‘soft’ social intervention? It could indeed be held to be ‘coercive’ in a direct sense if participation was (at least under some circumstances) mandatory or if it was made into a requirement for receiving unemployment or labour market benefits, but we have seen that this is indeed not the case. Furthermore, my observations so far suggest that the nature of actual training at the camps is hardly ‘disciplinary’ in nature and that continued participation is completely voluntary.

Yet, to the extent that the Youth Independence Camp programme aims at ‘changing’ the behaviour and orientation of the participating individuals to match the needs of ‘mainstream’ labour markets instead of creating alternative (work) opportunities that might be preferred by them, we may legitimately characterise this programme as coercive at its core. As long as the government is not seriously striving to increase such diverse alternative work opportunities that would enable individual economic independence, the Youth Independence Camp is ultimately consistent with the *privatisation* of the risks of social exclusion and joblessness. It sends a message that, in the last instance, it is the individual’s responsibility to adjust to whatever opportunities or conditions the current labour markets may offer, and that the government is not responsible for ensuring there is a sufficient variety of jobs (that might be government-subsidised) to suit the needs of those who are not accommodated by the mainstream labour markets.

In conclusion, our tentative findings imply that the shift in the boundaries of social provision for socially excluded youth in Japan appears to have been both partial and highly ambiguous. Substantial further research is needed to test many of the suggestions made here, not least regarding whether alternative ‘social’ labour markets – even if not directly promoted by the government – may already be emerging and absorbing youth such as those who attend a Youth Independence Camp. Furthermore, a fuller appraisal of the developments in Japanese youth policy in general since the early 2000s is called for. This should include a review of the recent evolution of the Wakamono Support Station as this is designed to act not only as a direct provider of support to youth but also as the central hub in a network uniting a diverse menu of youth initiatives on both the local and national levels (the Job Café youth employment offices must also feature in such an account). Finally, well-chosen international comparisons will be indispensable for determining which aspects of the Japanese policies for jobless and/or socially excluded youth are truly distinctive and for teasing out otherwise invisible dimensions of these policies.

Bibliography

- CABINET OFFICE (2002) *Seishonen hakusho*. Tokyo, the Government of Japan.
- CAMPBELL, J. C. (1992) *How policies change: the Japanese government and the aging society*, Princeton ; Oxford, Princeton University Press.
- GENDA, Y. (2005) *A nagging sense of job insecurity: the new reality facing Japanese youth*, Tokyo, Japan, International House of Japan.
- GENDA, Y. (2007) Jobless youths and the NEET problem in Japan. *Social Science Japan Journal*, 10, 23-40.
- GENDA, Y. & MAGANUMA, M. (2004) *NEET: Furitā demo naku, shitsugyōsha demo naku*. Tokyo, Gentousha.
- GILBERT, N. (2002) *Transformation of the welfare state: the silent surrender of public responsibility*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- GOODMAN, R. (2000) *Children of the Japanese state: The changing role of child protection institutions in contemporary Japan*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- GOODMAN, R. (2002) *Family and social policy in Japan: anthropological approaches*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- HONDA, Y. (2006) *Niito te iu na*. Tokyo, Koubunsha.
- JAPAN PRODUCTIVITY CENTRE FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
(2007a) *Wakamono Jiritsu Juku pōtaru saito*. Tokyo, Japan Productivity Centre for Socio-Economic Development, <http://www.jiritsu-juku.jp/modules/tinyd1>.
- JAPAN PRODUCTIVITY CENTRE FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
(2007b) *Niito no joukyou ni aru jyakunensha no jittai oyobi shiensaku ni kan suru chousa kenkyuu houkokusho*. Tokyo, Japan Productivity Centre for

Socio-Economic Development.

JAPAN PRODUCTIVITY CENTRE FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

(2007c) *Wakamono jiritsu juku handobukku*. Tokyo, Japan Productivity Centre for Socio-Economic Development.

KASZA, G. J. (2006) *One world of welfare: Japan in comparative perspective*, Ithaca, N.Y. ; London, Cornell University Press.

KOSUGI, R. (2005) *Furiitaa to niito*. Tokyo, Keisoushobou.

KOSUGI, R. E. A. (2003) Shogaikoku no wakamono shūgyō shien seisaku no tenkai: Igirisu to Suwēden wo chūshin ni. *Shiryō Shirizu* No. 131, Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training.

KOSUGI, R. & HORI, Y. (2003) Gakkō kara shokugyō he no ikō wo shien suru shokikan he no hiaringu chōsa kekka: Nihon ni okeru NEET mondai no shozai to taiō. *JIL Discussion Paper Series* 03-001, Japan Institute of Labour Policy and Training.

LUNSING, W. (2007) The creation of the social category of NEET (not in education, employment or training): Do NEET need this? *Social Science Japan Journal*, 10, 105-110.

MHLW (2003) *Kōseirōdōhakusho* (White paper on health, labour and welfare). Tokyo, the Government of Japan.

MHLW (2004) *Kōseirōdōhakusho* (White paper on health, labour and welfare). Tokyo, the Government of Japan.

MHLW (2005) *Kōseirōdōhakusho* (White paper on health, labour and welfare). Tokyo, the Government of Japan.

MHLW (2006a) *Kōseirōdōhakusho* (White paper on health, labour and welfare). Tokyo,

- the Government of Japan.
- MHLW (2006b) *Rōdōhakusho* (White paper on labour). Tokyo, the Government of Japan.
- MHLW (2007) *Kōseirōdōhakusho* (White paper on health, labour and welfare). Tokyo, The Government of Japan.
- MIYAMOTO, M. (2002) *Wakamono ga shakaiteki jyakusha ni tenraku suru*. Tokyo, Yousensha.
- OECD (2004) *Education at a glance*. Paris, OECD.
- QUINTINI, G. & MARTIN, S. (2006) Starting well or losing their way? The position of youth in the labour market in OECD countries. *OECD social, employment and migration working papers Vol. 39*.
- SCHOPPA, L. J. (2006) *Race for the exits: the unraveling of Japan's system of social protection*, Ithaca, N.Y. ; London, Cornell University Press.
- STATISTICS BUREAU (2006) *Labor Force Survey*. Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, the Government of Japan,
<http://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/roudou/lngindex.htm>.
- YOKOI, T. (2006) *Wakamono jiritsu shien seisaku kara fuhenteki shitizunshippu he*. *Kyouikugaku Kenkyuu*, 73, 432-443.
- YOSHIMOTO, K. (2002) *Youth employment and labour market policies in Japan*, Working paper prepared for ILO/Japan Tripartite Regional Meeting on Youth Employment in Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, 27 February.

Appendix.

Identifier	Position and affiliation	Date
E1	Director, Sodate-age Netto, member of the Youth Independence Camp Expert Committee	16 April
E2 E3	Officials in charge of running of the Youth Independence Camp, Wakamono Jiritsu Juku Shien Sentā, Japan Productivity Centre for Socio-Economic Development	17 April
E4	Director, Seishōnen Jiritsu Enjo Sentā (runs a Youth Independent Camp)	22 April
E5	Professor, University of Tokyo, Member of the Youth Independence Camp Expert Committee	Several occasions (April-September 2007)
E6	Chief researcher, The Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training, member of the Youth Independence Expert Committee	17 May
E7 E8 E9	Section chief Assistant chief Sub-section chief, Career Keisei Shienshitsu, Shokugyō Nōryoku Kaihatsukyoku, MHLW	30 May
E10	Section chief, Wakamono Koyō Taisaku Shitsu, MHLW	30 May
E11	Chief, Career Keisei, Shienshitsu, Shokugyō Nōryoku Kaihatsukyoku, MHLW (until 1 September 2006)	4 July
E12	Representative, K2 International (runs a Youth Independent Camp)	11 May
E13	Director, Peaceful House Hagurekumo (runs a Youth Independent Camp)	15 June
E14	Chief, Career Keisei, Shienshitsu, Shokugyō Nōryoku Kaihatsukyoku, MHLW (until 1 September 2006)	27 September