

Vol.4 Professor Andy Furlong



Prof Andy Furlong in the centre with Prof Inui on his right and Prof Hiratsuka on his left.

He is an active educational sociologist whose research interest stretches to Japanese youth unemployment and underemployment. He has successfully been awarded JSPS funding for a couple of times and visiting Japan regularly. He tells about his long collaboration with Japanese research team and its outcomes.

Professor Andy Furlong

Professor of Social Inclusion and Education, Dean of Research, School of Education, University of Glasgow, UK

Biography

1986-1989 Research Fellow, Centre for Educational Sociology, University of Edinburgh
1990-1995 Lecturer/Senior Lecturer, Department of Government, University of Strathclyde
1995-2000 Senior Lecturer/Reader, Department of Sociology, University of Glasgow
2000-2005 Professor of Sociology, University of Glasgow
2005-2009 Professor of Sociology, Department of Management, University of Glasgow
2009- Professor of Social Inclusion and Education, School of Education, University of Glasgow
2014 - Dean for Research, University of Glasgow

JSPS Concerning

- 2006.3 JSPS Invitation Fellowship
- 2011.2-2011.3 JSPS FURUSATO Award

My first visit to Japan was extremely brief: less than 48 hours. On route back from Australia to the UK, at the suggestion of a Japanese colleague who had recently published a paper in a journal I edit, I broke my journey in Tokyo to deliver a seminar and hold some research focused discussions. My hosts, Professor Akio Inui from Tokyo Metropolitan University and Professor Maki Hiratsuka from Hosei University, provided a fantastic introduction to Tokyo, to their team who came from as far away as Hokkaido and Okinawa, and to their research agenda, leaving me keen to learn more about their work.

The opportunity arose the following year, 2006, when Akio and Maki made a successful application to JSPS for an Invitation

Fellowship. Based in Tokyo, this enabled me to spend time working with the local team and to travel to Osaka and Kyoto to present my work.

As a sociologist I have had a longstanding interest in young people's transitions from education to work and their early labour market experiences. In the UK, in Europe and in Australia I had used longitudinal surveys to focus on youth unemployment and underemployment and on those not in education, employment or training (NEETs). As these were hot issues in Japan, there were plenty of opportunities to collaborate and during my visit we wrote a number of comparative papers with Akio, Maki and colleagues as well as a book on labour market

¹ INUI, A., FURLONG, A., SATO, K., SANO, M., HIRASTUKA, M., FUKIT, H. and MIYAMOTO, M. (2006) Fuantei wo ikiru wakamono tachi (Young people and labour market precarity: Freeter, NEET, Unemployed in Japan and the UK), Ohtsuki-shoten, Tokyo.

precarity¹. We also worked together in translation of one of my books². (The photo in the previous page shows the book and people who I worked with.)

Having been introduced to a vibrant network of researchers in Japan working in an area with clear policy implications, I was subsequently invited by the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training to participate in a symposium on supporting young people with poor educational qualifications. This broadened my Japanese networks and also led to publication of the talk in their working paper series³.

With support from the GB Sasakawa Foundation my next visit to Japan was triggered by an interest in the Japanese hikikomori phenomenon – young people who withdraw from all social contact for protracted periods of time. While the focus in Japan was rooted in psychology, I wished to explore a sociological explanation and spent time interviewing psychiatrists, practitioners and journalists who had written about hikikomori. Arguing that acute social withdrawal was linked the breakdown in securities associated with changes in the labour market⁴, the research attracted a lot of attention including an interview on Laurie Taylor's Thinking Allowed programme on BBC Radio 4 as well as another visit to Japan at an event run by the Education ministry.

My work with my Japanese colleagues is on-going and has also been funded by a Furasato Award from JSPS. Recently colleagues have been working on a longitudinal study of young people in Japan and I have acted as international advisor. We have also

been writing collaborative papers in which we use UK and Japanese datasets and are planning to meet next year when they will work on a comparative analysis of young people's early labour market experiences in Japan and the UK using data from the Japanese Youth Cohort surveys and the UK Household Longitudinal Study. Through the use of longitudinal surveys the teams will explore some of the complexity of employment transitions highlighting vulnerabilities and protective factors.

While there are many academic rewards in this work, I have also had the privilege of being the recipient of generous Japanese hospitality and regard my Japanese colleagues as good friends who I always look forward to catching up with.



With my Japanese Colleagues at Japanese style tavern, 'Izakaya'.

² Furlong, A. and Cartmel, F. (2007) 'Young People and Social Change' Routledge, London

³ FURLONG, A. (2007) 'Supporting the transitions of vulnerable youth: UK perspectives', in Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training (eds) Transition support for young people with low educational background, Tokyo, Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training.

⁴ FURLONG, A. (2008) 'The Japanese hikikomori phenomenon: acute social withdrawal among young people', The Sociological Review, 56 (2).