

Gown planning 02 Oct 2004



View from the top of the Parkinson clock tower, pointing south, towards the city. The Parkinson Tower is at the main entrance to Leeds University Campus.

Leeds city council is drawing up plans to deliberately change the population structure of some urban districts, in order to address the rising problems associated with a youthful student population.

A *youthful population* is defined as a population where the mean average age has fallen and a higher than average proportion consists of children or teenagers. With more than 60,000 students mostly aged 18-21 living in a city of 715,000 people, the population structure of Leeds is clearly very youthful, especially in those districts close to the universities where the majority of students live.

Youthful populations are commonly associated with LEDCs such as Kenya, rather than MEDCs like the UK.

This is because early industrial societies have falling crude death rates (CDR) but still retain high crude birth rates (CBR) from when they were agricultural societies. As a result, many children continue to be born but the majority now survive infancy. The percentage of the population who are under 15 in sub-Saharan Africa is currently between 45 and 50%, for instance. In contrast, MEDCs usually tend to have *ageing populations*. In the UK as a whole, 21% of the population are over 60 while only 20% are under 16! This is a result of improving health over the last two centuries combined with falling birth rates as more and more women have entered the workplace, amongst other reasons (see [Italy pays cash for babies](#) for a full story of falling births in Europe).

However, local variations in population structure can sometimes be observed which are very different from the national average. These are a result of migration processes, rather than variations in birth rates and death rates. In the case of Leeds, the expansion of its two large universities in recent years has resulted in three districts – Headingley, Burley and Hyde Park – having students forming more than half of their populations ([The Guardian, 02 October 2004](#)). Many of these students are only temporary residents of course, and not true migrants (a migrant is someone who makes a permanent change of address). However, some are permanent migrants who live and work in Leeds all year-round and may well remain living there after they finish university and graduate.

What are the consequences of this youthful population structure?

- *Positive economic consequences* include the financial benefits students bring to the city's shops, services and housing landlords. They have regenerated parts of the city by bringing a **multiplier effect** that centres on the spending of student grants and loans.
- *Negative economic consequences* include house price rises, viewed from the point of view of some local people. Commercial landlords and affluent parents of students can outbid many other potential buyers such as the grown-up children of long-term residents. This results in the disintegration of traditional urban communities in a process known as **gentrification**.
- *Positive social consequences* include the contributions that students have made to the creative life of the city – to its arts, media and music. Some may stay after graduation, stabilising an adult urban population that had previously suffered from out-migration linked with **deindustrialisation** during the 1970s and 1980s (Leeds' traditional industries included engineering, printing, chemicals, glass, woollens and clothing manufacturing – all of which have declined due to competition from overseas).
- *Negative social consequences* include difficulties for city planners in maintaining primary and secondary school numbers in districts where the majority of residents are now aged 18-21 as a

result of migration. As school numbers have fallen beneath their threshold numbers, some closures have become inevitable.

- *Negative environmental consequences* include the widespread neglect of the appearance of student housing and gardens. As a transient population, they do not always take pride in looking after the properties that they rent (*The Guardian*, 02 October 2004). In addition, the demand for new housing is high enough to put pressure on Leeds' Green Belt.

There are political consequences to add to the list too, as city planners are forced to devise new laws to help deal with the situation; but how best can they help the people of Leeds to continue enjoying the positive consequences of student in-migration while also trying to minimise the *negative externalities*? The proposed solution is a radical piece of social and geographical engineering: the student "takeover" of streets is to be curbed by making four square miles of Leeds an exclusion zone for any more new student hostels or the conversion of existing houses into student flats.

This policy is called ASHORE: *area of student housing restraint*.

Additional notes

1. The plans are only provisional at this stage, but the city council are keen to press ahead with these reforms.
2. This problem is shared by other university cities – notably Birmingham and Nottingham.
3. The changes observed in the housing market brought by student in-migration have been termed "studentification" by Dr Darren Smith and Dr Louise Holt of the University of Brighton – recognising that this is a variant form of gentrification. In their research, they have paid particular attention to the displacement of working-class households (see *Studentification*).
4. Migration brings different challenges to other types of settlement in the UK, and not just to university cities. Retirement towns that experience in-migration of the elderly can have as many as 40% aged over 60, such as Worthing on the Sussex coast. This imbalance is compounded by the out-migration of the young who, finding that facilities are often lacking for them, re-locate elsewhere.

Notes for GCSE and A-level students

Most GCSE and AS specifications require some knowledge of population structure and migration processes.

(1) The causes and consequences of changes in population structure in urban areas

Previous questions on this topic at AS level have included:

Describe and explain the consequences of a youthful population structure (Edexcel A, 2001)

How are urban decision-makers attempting to manage the provision of affordable housing? (Edexcel B, 2004)

(2) The causes and consequences of migration

Strictly speaking, the arrival of students is a form of circulatory movement rather than proper migration. If students return to their parents' homes elsewhere at the end of each term, then they are not true migrants. However, many students do make a permanent move, living in Leeds all-year-round and working there in the holidays. If this case study is used as an example of migration, you must make it clear that you understand this important distinction. Emphasise that you are discussing the experiences of *permanent* migrants to the city.