In recent years, young people in the UK have experienced significant changes within the context of welfare, education, work and independent living. They also continue to face high levels of unemployment, limited job opportunities, and punitive conditions for claiming welfare benefits. Evidence shows that, as an alternative to low paying jobs with poor working conditions and stricter conditions for claiming benefits, some young people are opting to ‘work’ in the informal economy.

In this seminar, Dr Adamu will describe the experiences of a group of young people from Luton and Cambridge who engaged in begging, drug dealing and sex work as alternative forms of ‘work’ in their transitions to adulthood. She will explore the structural, cultural and biographical factors that influenced their informal career decision-making processes, by drawing on Bourdieu’s social field theory. A significant number of participants had challenging educational experiences, which could arguably be linked to their decisions to enter the ‘alternative economy’.