

**The Impact of Island Location on Students'  
Higher Education Choices and Subsequent  
Career Narratives: A Case Study of the Orkney  
and Shetland Islands**

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## **Preface**

The research presented in this thesis and the writing of this thesis are the student's own. The research was given ethical approval by the University of Derby.

## **Acknowledgements**

My deepest gratitude to the participants in this study for sharing their stories with me. I hope that I have done justice to our discussions and have been able to convey some of the experience of being a young student from Orkney and Shetland.

My sincerest thanks also to my supervisors, Professor Tristram Hooley and Dr Siobhan Neary for your insights, and for your patience and support with the PhD journey.

Finally, thank you to my family, particularly my partner and daughter, for their love and support throughout. And to all my friends, colleagues, past clients and others who have shared their own experiences and thoughts on the topic of place and career and have helped me to reflect on and develop the concepts within this thesis.

## **Abstract**

This thesis considers the relationship between geographical place and career development. Where it exists, theoretical work has typically considered how spatial location can impact on the destinations of school-leavers but supposes less of an impact on university students who are thought of as having global horizons. This thesis explores whether, and how, place remains important in career development even for relatively mobile higher education students.

The research focuses on the experiences of young students from two relatively distinctive places: the Scottish islands of Orkney and Shetland. Longitudinal qualitative interviews were undertaken with 22 students who were domiciled in the islands prior to entering higher education. Interviews were conducted at the point of graduation and one year later. These were transcribed and analysed using an approach drawn from critical realist grounded theory.

The findings show how participants adopt a common narrative of youth as a period of high mobility (in terms of work and location) but view this as a necessary stage to allow a later process of “settling down” in a particular location, career and (typically) relationship. For many this envisaged future location was back in the islands. Here, it is clear that place remains an important part of imagined futures, but that the relationship to place is changed - with location being something that is chosen, allowing a sense of being “settled” rather than “stuck”.

However, the lived career and mobility pathways of students and graduates demonstrate that pathways rarely follow the ideal of high mobility. Instead mobilities are found to take place within certain frameworks – comprising primarily of career structures and relational networks. These are experienced differently at different points of time, with familiarity being a key dynamic in entry to higher education, and resources becoming more important after graduation.

Drawing these findings together, this thesis presents a model of career development that draws from Hodkinson’s theory of careership and Bourdieusian theory, but which explicitly considers the intertwining dynamics of relationships, places and career development as they are lived through time. Finally, the conclusion draws out some key implications for policy makers and careers and education practitioners, particularly those working in small and island communities.

## **Chapter 1: Situating the Research**

This thesis concerns the relationship of geographical location to career development. In this first introductory chapter, the context of the research project is outlined. Three key areas are explored – how the choice of PhD topic connected to my own personal and professional background; the rationale for the project in terms of addressing existing gaps in the literature; and the relevance of the project to the policy context. The chapter ends with an outline of the thesis.

### **Personal Context**

The topic of this PhD has come from my own long-standing interest in how space and place are related to career development.

From a personal perspective, I grew up in a relatively remote and rural part of England – North Cornwall. My parents were graduates themselves, and I was academically a high achiever, so I had always assumed I would leave the area for university. However, by the point of entry to higher education I had very little experience of urban areas and I found the transition to university very difficult: I felt “out of place” and a long way from home. After graduation, while most of my contemporaries headed for London, I moved home. Back in Cornwall I was unemployed for six months before starting a sales job at a local sheet metal factory. For the local area, this was a great job, although I was aware that my university contemporaries may see it as a strange destination for a graduate with a first-class degree in English Literature. I stayed in the job for a year, gradually building up skills and experience that allowed me to move into a trainee position as a career adviser. Since that time, I have worked in different roles but I have always lived in relatively small communities and have often reflected on how space and place have been important to me, and how they have impacted on my career development. All of my siblings now live and work in London, and comparing myself to them I wonder, why did my pathway develop so differently? How would my experience of the workplace be different if I had moved to London? What would my life have been like?

In my professional work too, the theme of place and career development has been a defining feature for almost twenty years. As a career adviser I have worked in some of the most remote and rural communities in the UK - first in Cornwall, then

Orkney, and then latterly with university students and graduates based anywhere in the Scottish Highlands and Islands region. The notion of remoteness is contentious in my location – after all, whether or not you are remote depends on your perspective, from the island perspective London is remote (Rennie, 2020). I understand this argument, and I use the word carefully in this thesis. However, I have chosen to retain the word “remote” in this context because it represents the experience of young people in smaller communities, for whom many opportunities for employment and study are only available elsewhere. For young people I have worked with, the question of “should I stay, or should I go?” has been common, as it is in other rural locations (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; Corbett, 2013; Ferrario & Price, 2014; Friesen & Purc-Stephenson, 2016). As a career adviser I have tried my best to assist students with this dilemma. I have also been asked questions like: “what should I study at university that will allow me to come home?” or “what can I do at college or university that means I will not have to go away?” And from graduates I have been asked questions like: “what can I do in my community with my degree?”, “what distance learning options are available for me to complete my training without having to go away?” and “practically, how do I move away: do I get the job first or move first?”

In my professional life then, geographical location and mobility have always been front-and-centre. However, given that there is very limited consideration of geographical location and mobility in the existing literature relating to career development (Alexander & Hooley, 2018; Inkson & Thorn, 2010; Patton & McMahon, 2014) I have also wondered if, as a career adviser, I have really been fully equipped in the models, theories and approaches to practice to properly address issues of place and mobility. In the absence of a body of literature, I have relied on my own judgement and insights from my own personal experience. However, I have also been aware that my own perspectives are personal and partial – different people may have quite different experiences, and, of course, times have also changed and being a rural young person in 2020 will be different to my experience in the 1980s.

Undertaking this PhD then has been about exploring in-depth the experiences of a group of young people from two specific communities, in order to rigorously address the role of place in career development. Through this process I

have sought both to make a theoretical contribution to the existing academic literature and to extend my own knowledge relevant to the settings I work in. Ultimately I hope that the work I have done will assist not just myself, but other career advisers, educationalists and policy makers working with some of the issues I have faced over my own professional career, and through this also support individuals themselves, particularly those living and working in relatively small communities.

In the next two sections of this chapter, I consider the rationale for the project in relation to the academic literature, before considering the relation of the project to the policy literature.

### **Aims and Rationale**

The aim of this project was to identify how living in a remote island community (the Orkney or Shetland Islands) prior to entering higher education impacts on students' narratives of their higher education choices and subsequent career journeys. As such this thesis explores a topic that has not been widely considered in the existing literature: the role of geographical space and mobility in career pathways and career decision-making (Alexander & Hooley, 2018; Inkson & Thorn, 2010; Patton & McMahon, 2014). Further, and more broadly, this research contributes to a growing body of literature that has argued for place and mobility to have a greater focus in understanding young people's transitions (Cairns et al., 2012; Cuervo & Wyn, 2012; Farrugia, 2014; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Prince, 2014).

The thesis draws upon literature from the fields of career development, sociology, geography, youth studies, and rural and island studies. Such an interdisciplinary approach allows scope for connecting insights from different bodies of thought. One key contribution of this project is that it utilises a biographical approach to understanding migration (Findlay & Li, 1997; Findlay & Stockdale, 2003; Halfacree & Boyle, 1993; Ní Laoire, 2008) to explore how mobilities *for* higher education and mobilities *after* higher education may be interrelated. This is important because the existing literature typically considers *either* graduate mobilities (see for example Faggian et al., 2006, 2007a) *or* student mobilities (see for example Clayton et al., 2009; Donnelly & Gamsu, 2019; Trahar et al., 2020).

Given the evidence that previous mobility can impact on the likelihood of future mobility (Mosca & Wright, 2010) this appears an important avenue for research. Further, with longstanding evidence of inequalities both in access to higher education and in graduate outcomes after higher education (Waller et al., 2017), and evidence that student and graduate mobility is impacted upon by age, gender, ethnic background, social-class and other individual differences (Bond et al., 2008; Bridge Group, 2019; Donnelly & Gamsu, 2019; Faggian et al., 2006, 2007a), a focus on mobility is potentially important in terms of addressing wider issues of inequality and student or graduate outcomes, including how inequalities may persist over time.

A growing body of research has explored student and graduate mobilities in terms of elite practices of middle-classes (Brooks & Waters, 2010; Holdsworth, 2009; Holton & Finn, 2018) and has explored the intersections of social class, place and mobility in young people's trajectories (Allen & Hollingworth, 2013; Clayton et al., 2009; Donnelly & Gamsu, 2019). This current research project builds on this previous work, focusing on issues of place and space. However, although there has been a tendency in the literature to conceptualise mobility in opposition to place, this project seeks to overcome the divide, understanding mobility as a fundamentally spatial experience (Adey, 2017; Cresswell, 2006; Fallov et al., 2013). Further in some existing literature there can be a tendency to equate social class position with spatial position (Atkinson, 2016), and focus on place in terms of geographies of disadvantage or rural areas in decline (Bridge Group, 2019; Cuervo & Wyn, 2012; Farrugia, 2014) however, this research project takes place in two communities that cannot easily be thought of as economically disadvantaged (see Chapter 3). Therefore, this research project moves beyond any simple association of spatial position and social class, offering a more nuanced understanding of place and mobility in intersection with social background – something that has been noted as a gap in the existing literature (Bridge Group, 2019; Donnelly & Evans, 2016; Prince, 2014). With rural communities and island communities offering locations where the specificities of place, and issues of mobility and migration are highlighted (Cooke & Petersen, 2019; Farrugia, 2014; King, 2009), the specific research sites for this project offer significant advantages in progressing this research agenda.

The focus on remote and rural students is also important because this group has attracted a remarkable lack of attention in the recent literature on access to higher education (Trahar et al., 2020). In understanding that rural students can face more significant barriers in educational transition than urban students (Davies et al., 2021; Rosvall, 2020), focusing on the needs and experiences of rural and remote students becomes an issue of social justice (Alexander, 2018b; Lasselle & Johnson, 2020). Further, although there is a significant body of work considering the experiences of rural young people, this has typically focused on the aspirations of young people prior to leaving school (see for example Corbett, 2013; Pedersen & Gram, 2018; Rosvall et al., 2018; Turner, 2020) rather than considering actual experiences of transition, including how place may be relevant over their longer-term pathways. This is potentially problematic, because typically research has highlighted differences between stayers and leavers, as if these are binary choices that are made permanently at the end of school, rather than decisions that may be revisited over time (Stockdale & Haartsen, 2018). Further there is ample evidence that migration intentions do not always translate into actual destinations (Stockdale & Haartsen, 2018). In particular, although leaving rural areas is often associated with entry to higher education (Haartsen & Thissen, 2014; Stockdale, 2002a), the evidence shows that post-university trajectories can be relatively unstable both in terms of career development (Purcell & Elias, 2004) and mobility (Sage et al., 2013). Further, it is clear from the literature that some individuals may leave rural areas but aspire to a later return to these areas (Haartsen & Thissen, 2014; Hayfield, 2017; Ní Laoire, 2008; Pedersen, 2018). This raises questions about how the career and migration pathways of young rural leavers develop over time: how and why some people might return, or remain away, and how spatial and career trajectories may relate to each other. Addressing these areas is a significant contribution of this research project.

In considering the relationship of spatial and career trajectories this research develops a theoretical perspective based on the theory of careership (Hodkinson, 2008; Hodkinson et al., 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). The spatial potential in this theoretical approach has previously been identified (Ball et al., 2000; Hodkinson, 2008) but remains underdeveloped. Careership is a theoretical perspective with draws from the work of Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu &

Passeron, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), and this aligns with much previous research into educational transition and inequality which has often adopted an approach inspired by Bourdieu (Abrahams & Ingram, 2013; Lehmann, 2009, 2013; Reay et al., 2009). Although the spatial aspects of Bourdieusian sociology have received increasing attention (Atkinson, 2016; Savage, 2012), including in the literature relating to student mobility (Allen & Hollingworth, 2013; Clayton et al., 2009), this thesis explores in more depth the application of a Bourdieusian toolkit in relation to place and career decision-making. Ultimately the theoretical model developed in this project does not utilise Bourdieusian terminology, but the thesis contains a rationale for this decision, and therefore contributes to this growing area of scholarship.

In considering career development, another contribution of this research is that it directly addresses the importance of *specific* educational and career pathways. This is important because the evidence shows that graduate transition is too often thought about in terms which underestimate diversity of experiences between higher education courses, institutions and subsequent career routes (Purcell et al., 2008). In terms of rural places, the evidence for example shows that education and healthcare are routes that may lead back to rural areas (Bjarnason & Edvardsson, 2017; Cooke & Petersen, 2019; Corcoran et al., 2010; Rérat, 2014a), but that analysis of career routes and geographical mobilities which rely on aggregating statistical data sets may obscure these patterns (Rérat, 2014a). With this research gathering in-depth data from research participants, the spatial implications of *specific* career routes can therefore be highlighted. This potentially adds significantly to the literature, which has identified variance in graduate mobility by subject of study (Faggian et al., 2007a), and has identified the spatial variance of the graduate labour market (Ball, 2019b; Bridge Group, 2018), but which has not typically sought to understand the specific implications of career route in terms of student and graduate mobilities.

A final key contribution of this research is the exploration of the ethics of conducting qualitative research in a small community in which I, as the researcher, am also based. Although previous literature has considered the practicalities and ethics of research in small communities (Ellis, 2007; Whyte, 1993) and some literature has considered the experience of insider researchers in small

communities (Heslop et al., 2018), this research builds on this existing literature. In particular, the experience of researching career development as a practicing career adviser in a small community is explored.

### **Policy Context**

The topic of this research project is highly relevant to a number of current policy interests, most specifically around youth out-migration and regional development, higher education policy, and career guidance policy and practice. Although the research does not specifically concern policy issues, the research findings do offer a contribution to each of these areas.

One particularly important policy connection relates to economic development of rural and island areas, where youth out-migration and population sustainability have been longstanding concerns (Connell, 2018; Corbett & Forsey, 2017; King & Connell, 1999). Typically policy responses have focused on retention and attraction of young people, particularly graduates, as a way to boost the human capital of a region (Corcoran et al., 2010; Faggian et al., 2017; Faggian & McCann, 2008; Stockdale, 2006). A key mechanism through which to enable this has been to focus on increasing opportunity, specifically higher education and employment opportunities in rural areas (Bjarnason & Edvardsson, 2017; Cuervo & Wyn, 2012). In the UK for example the development of regional higher education provision has been supported, often delivered through networks of local further education colleges – for example in South West England the Combined Universities in Cornwall initiative, in Wales the Universities Heads of the Valleys Institute initiative, and in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) (Saunders et al., 2013). Higher education provision not only assists with attracting and retaining young people for the purposes of studying, but also acts as a source of employment, and through research and innovation stimulates regional growth (Charles, 2003; Harding et al., 2007). The current research project which explores migration decisions and trajectories of a group of young islanders clearly speaks to these areas of interest.

More specifically, the research directly addresses concerns around population sustainability and youth migration in the specific area of focus for this research – the islands of Orkney and Shetland. Youth out-migration from the

Highlands and Islands of Scotland, including Orkney and Shetland is a longstanding concern (Sewel et al., 1975), threatening the population and economic sustainability of communities (Skills Development Scotland, 2014a). Indeed, increasing population levels in the Scottish islands is a focus of the recent Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 and the associated *National Islands Plan* (Scottish Government, 2019b). The latter document notes specifically that the particular “demographic issue for sparsely populated areas is not an excess of older people, but the relatively small number of children and young people, which in the years to come will translate into a shrinking working-age population” (Scottish Government, 2019b, p. 18). As with other rural areas, development of employment and education opportunities is typically identified as important in addressing youth depopulation (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2009b, 2018c). The development of a university within the region (with campuses in Orkney and Shetland) is credited with having a positive impact on youth migration and regional development more broadly (Bridge Group, 2019; Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2018c; Saunders et al., 2013), with further expansion of higher education provision recommended in order to further reduce youth depopulation (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2009b, 2018c).

Despite the focus on youth retention in much of the literature, some research has challenged the idea that out-migration *per se* is problematic, highlighting that the true issue may be potentially the lack of in- or return- migration (Stockdale, 2006). Here it has been suggested that rather than just seeking to stem out-migration, a more effective strategy (in the Scottish islands and elsewhere) would also focus on encouraging return migration of young people (Crow, 2010; Stockdale, 2006). More widely other scholars have challenged simplistic notions of “brain drain” of migrants from rural (or other) geographical areas, suggesting alternative metaphors of “brain diffusion”, “brain rotation” and “brain circulation” as potentially more appropriate (Baldacchino, 2006b; Crescenzi et al., 2017; Gaillard et al., 2015). These concepts argue that rather than seeking to prevent migration, migration *flows* of individuals may actually be of benefit to both sending and receiving destinations, and therefore should be supported. By exploring the trajectories of young people from two island communities in depth, this research therefore provides further insight into questions of whether or not strategies that

seek to retain young people or attract returning young people are likely to be most effective.

Alongside regional development policy, this research also potentially has something to say about higher education policy. The expansion of higher education in the UK since the 1960s has been largely influenced by dominant notions of human capital theory – the idea that improving the supply of graduates with higher level qualifications (human capital) will improve economic functioning, particularly in terms of a move towards a “knowledge economy” (Brown et al., 2003; Tomlinson, 2017a; Yorke, 2006). Within this context, there has been a focus in higher education policy in the UK on improving rates of educational progression from underrepresented groups (“widening participation”) (Brown, 2012). Whereas in some countries in the world, most notably Australia, rural students have been the focus of widening participation initiatives (Cardack et al., 2017; Lasselle & Johnson, 2020; McIlveen et al., 2005), in the UK rural students have typically been overlooked in both research, policy literature and practical outreach activities (Bridge Group, 2019; Davies et al., 2021; Lasselle & Johnson, 2020; Trahar et al., 2020). This focus in this research on rural island students potentially contributes to the growing interest in this area.

Alongside increasing participation in higher education, higher education policy has also focused on improving choice, with the idea that individuals need full access to a complete range of options to enable them to reach their potential (Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 2001). The notion of choosing between universities however is based on assumptions of geographical mobility (Holdsworth, 2009). For young people in areas with limited education provision, increasing aspiration is often attached to encouraging spatial mobility, and is often seen as a solution to the problems of unemployment and underemployment. Green and White (2007) for example, suggest that:

A widening of horizons improves education, training and employment prospects by expanding the pool of opportunities available.... In particular, there is a need for some young people to expand their spatial horizons to take in a broader range of opportunities by looking beyond the immediate

neighbourhood and stereotypical educational, training and employment options. (p. ix)

The close interrelation of social mobility and spatial mobility in these discourses and in the literature more broadly is clear (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; Bjarnason & Edvardsson, 2017; Bridge Group, 2019).

The focus on mobility is also apparent in the literature relating to graduate transition – with evidence that those who are most mobile secure the “best” jobs (typically determined by salary) (Kazakis & Faggian, 2017). In a climate where graduate outcomes and employability is a significant concern of policy makers and universities (Artess et al., 2017; Tomlinson, 2012; Tomlinson & Holmes, 2017), graduates may be directly encouraged to be mobile in order to access the best jobs (Pennington et al., 2013). Alongside direct encouragement, mobile ideologies may also be implicit, pervading educational and career guidance discourses more generally (Alexander, 2018b; Corbett, 2007a, 2007b; Rosvall, 2020). Corbett (2007a), for example, suggests that young people, through engagement with the education system can “learn to leave” their rural communities. The pervasive discourse of human capital, individual progression and the privileging of mobility can be connected to neoliberal ideologies (Hooley et al., 2018a, 2019a). However, growing critical engagement with neoliberalism from educationalists, career advisers and researchers has suggested scope for different perspectives. So, for example, there has been some exploration of the potential for place-based educational approaches (Gruenewald, 2003, 2008; White & Reid, 2008).

In career guidance, research has drawn on notions of social justice to consider ways of challenging neoliberalism, developing for example, approaches to career provision with more of a collective (rather than individualistic) focus, which incorporate different values other than simply economic gain, and do not make assumptions about mobility (see for example, Hooley et al., 2018a, 2019a; Irving & Malik, 2005a). The development of approaches to policy and practice which are appropriate for different geographical territories and cultures has also been explored in a growing body of literature (Alexander et al., 2020; Arulmani, 2019; Kalyanram et al., 2014; Ribeiro & Fonçatti, 2018; Sultana, 2017). This research project draws from this tradition, seeking to move beyond neoliberal assumptions

that still influence much research and practice in career guidance. Here the project could be described as research for social justice (Atkins & Duckworth, 2019), as it seeks further illuminate the potential social justice implications around place. In order to do this, this project seeks to explore in-depth the lived career realities of individuals, which, as Sultana (2020) points out is important both for progressing knowledge in the field of career guidance, but also for addressing social justice – potentially opening up different ways of thinking about career development which are more appropriate for different contexts.

This research project therefore takes place in a lively policy context, marked by contradictions, tensions and debates. Further, the historical context of this research as it takes place at this particular moment in time is also highly relevant. In recent years issues of mobility have been highlighted in the migrant crisis and the rise of nationalism in many European countries (Goodhart, 2017). The building environmental crisis has also raised questions about globalisation, and mobility, particularly the damage caused by air travel (Sheller, 2018). And, at the time of writing, the Covid-19 pandemic has seen mobilities of individuals curtailed in regional and national lockdowns. None of these issues receive particular attention in this project, however, given this context, it is clear that the exploration of issues of place and mobility in this thesis is highly timely.

### **Outline of the Thesis**

This thesis is organised in eight chapters, as outlined below.

Following this introduction chapter, Chapter 2 presents the theoretical background to the research, summarising how place is understood in existing approaches to career development, before exploring expanded potential implications of place and space, drawing on the work of contemporary theorists of place and mobility. The chapter ends by exploring the development of a theoretical framework for thinking about career development that incorporates a spatial focus drawing on the theory of careership (Hodkinson, 2008; Hodkinson et al., 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997), and the tools of Bourdieusian sociology.

Chapter 3 introduces the case study areas of Orkney and Shetland, identifying the value of research conducted in island communities for addressing issues of place and mobility, and discussing the unique social, economic and

cultural context of these island groups. The economic and education context is explored in depth, and evidence surrounding young people's transitions into study and work from the islands is also covered.

Chapter 4 explores the existing literature relevant to this project in more depth and is presented in two parts. The first part explores the existing literature relating to young people's career and migration trajectories, with a particular focus on young people from rural and island areas. The second part explores the existing literature relating to graduate mobility and career development, again, focusing where possible (given the limited literature available) on graduates from rural and island areas.

Chapter 5 introduces the methodology and methods utilised in this project, exploring the critical realist research philosophy that guided this project, before outlining the research design in more detail. The phases of the research and key approaches to data collection are presented, with particular focus on the approach to longitudinal qualitative interviewing (LQI) utilised in this research. The chapter ends with reflections on some key quality and ethical issues posed by this research and how these were managed.

Chapter 6 presents the research findings, starting with an exploration of a data set (secured for this project) that presents statistical evidence on graduate trajectories of students from Orkney and Shetland, followed by an exploration of the sample characteristics of participants in this research. The chapter then moves on to presenting the three key themes identified from the interviews: the dynamics of belonging and becoming in developing career and mobility pathways, frameworks for mobility (provided through relationships and career pathways) and change over time.

Chapter 7 explores the findings of the research project and draws them together to present a theoretical model of career development that incorporates a spatial perspective. The key elements of this model are explored in more depth and discussed in relation to the previous literature. Throughout this section the intertwining dynamics of relationships, careers and places are explored, with these dynamics offering some explanatory potential for why different young people follow different routes through university and beyond.

Chapter 8 presents the conclusions of the research, starting with a summary of the key findings and moving into a discussion of the implications of the findings in terms of regional development policy as well as considering key implications for educational provision and career guidance in the case study areas. The section concludes by exploring the limitations of the research and identifies some potential areas for further research.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical Context**

This chapter presents the theoretical framework for the project, starting by outlining a definition of career and career development before exploring the primary ways that space and place have been considered in the existing literature on career development – as a choice, a constraint or a context. The chapter then moves on to presenting some alternative ways that place and space can be understood, drawing on different contemporary thinkers. Finally, the chapter presents a theoretical framework drawing on the work of Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), and the theory of careership (Hodkinson, 2008; Hodkinson et al., 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997).

### **Career Theory and Place**

In order to explore the influence of place on career development it is important to spend some time at the beginning of the thesis exploring what is meant by the terms “career” and “career development” used throughout this project.

Traditionally definitions of career have focused on career as a linear trajectory often involving “progression up an ordered hierarchy within an organisation or profession” (Watts, 2000, p. 261, see also McCash et al., 2021). However, recent theorists have considered much broader definitions, focusing on the difference between jobs and careers – recognising career as a more subjective concept, something that is lived over time, and that can incorporate a range of activities (not just paid activities, but also voluntary and unpaid work) (Haug et al., 2020; Patton & McMahon, 2014; Watts, 2000). This definition is holistic and democratic – everyone is considered to have a career, not just those in professional employment (Haug et al., 2020).

The terminology of career development has been utilised in this thesis, rather than career choice or career planning, in order to recognise how career pathways unfold over time and sometimes in an unpredictable or unplanned way. Here the thesis adopts an approach which recognises the importance of context in career development – particularly in terms of the opportunities that are available to us and the people that we know (see for example Hodkinson et al., 1996; Roberts, 1997) – and recognising the importance of chance events (see for example Krumboltz, 2009; Pryor & Bright, 2011). Career development is, therefore, not something that is

entirely driven by an individual, but is something that happens through time and in interaction with an individual's wider context.

Having established a basic conceptual underpinning for the notion of career the following sections of this chapter consider the role of place as it has been conceived in existing career theory.

### ***Place in Career Development***

The role of place in career development has not received a great deal of attention in the existing literature (Alexander & Hooley, 2018; Patton & McMahon, 2014). Where it does exist, consideration of place typically takes three forms:

- Place as a choice over career development, or vice versa
- Places as a constraint on career development
- Places as a context for interaction

These three perspectives are outlined below.

**Place as a Choice.** One way in which place is conceived as relevant to career development is that it may be chosen or prioritised over a career pathway. This idea relies on traditional rational ideas of decision-making that appear in both the migration and career decision-making literature, which up until at least the mid-twentieth century were heavily influenced by positivist assumptions (Boyle et al., 1998; Halfacree & Boyle, 1993; Massey et al., 1993; Yates, 2020). From a positivist perspective different places and careers are understood to have different objective features, for example, number of opportunities and average salaries. Accordingly, it may be suggested that decisions can be rationally made by weighing up the relative advantages or disadvantages of different options.

Rational decision-making models of both migration and career choice remain popular in public and policy discourse (Massey et al., 1993, Bimrose, 2006) partly because of the simplicity of these models (Bimrose, 2006). They also offer a clear narrative for explaining rural-urban out-migration – with neoclassical migration theory typically assuming that “individual rational actors decide to migrate because a cost-benefit calculation leads them to expect a positive net return, usually monetary, from movement” (Massey et al., 1993, p. 434). Here, there is an alignment with traditional theoretical approaches to career development which

focused on matching individuals to different occupations based on best “fit” (see for example Parsons, 1909), and which, logically speaking may therefore presuppose a level of geographical movement in order to access these opportunities (Alexander, 2018b).

However, rational models of decision-making may also be used to explain counter-urbanisation (movements of individuals from urban areas to rural areas), with individuals moving for improved “quality of life” (Halfacree, 2012). Here, the relative value of an urban location (typically conceptualised in terms of employment) can be balanced against the value of a rural location (typically conceptualised in terms of lifestyle) and decisions made on this basis. As a result, migrants from rural to urban areas are typically thought to be young people prioritising salary and career opportunities, and migrants from urban to rural areas are typically conceptualised as those with resources who do not need to prioritise employment – older people, retirees and middle-class migrants (Walford & Stockdale, 2015). In the career development literature, the notion that place may, at times, be chosen over career opportunities also appears, most notably in Schein’s (1990) notion that individuals may have different “career anchors”, with one such anchor being a “lifestyle” career anchor. This lifestyle anchor includes an “unwillingness” to move location typically “for reasons of integrating personal, family and career issues” (Schein, 1990, p. 32). Other theorists similarly recognise that individuals may choose places over career opportunities for the sake of other life roles such as parent or spouse (Super, 1980).

**Place as a Constraint.** In contrast to the notion of place as a choice, a second theoretical conceptualisation of place draws from sociological traditions and concerns how local conditions (particularly availability of work) structure career outcomes. An example of this is Roberts’ (1997, 2009) opportunity structure theory, in which he states: “young people’s opportunities are governed primarily by the interrelationships between their home backgrounds, educational attainments, *local* [emphasis added] job opportunities and employers’ recruitment practices” (Roberts, 1997, p. 345). Particularly significant here is the fact that opportunities are not equally distributed through space, and different locations at different times may offer quite different opportunities (Green & Shuttleworth, 2015). Further, although a contested concept, some research has explored how alongside labour market

opportunities there may be localised cultures of work, for example “cultures of worklessness” (Green & White, 2007, p. 14). The combination of available opportunities and local cultures is often understood to be particularly significant for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds living in deprived areas (Green & White, 2007; Reid & Westergaard, 2017; Shepherd & Hooley, 2016). In contrast, individuals who progress to higher education (and enact a level of mobility in order to do this) are often thought to “transcend” the constraints of their local labour markets, accessing a much wider global labour market through their mobility (Ball et al., 2000, p. 91; Green & White, 2007, p. 67).

**Place as a Context for Interaction.** A final important way that place has been considered in career theory is in terms of the social context of decision-making (Killeen, 1996). Here the focus has been on localised communities and how these support decision-making (Law, 1981, 2009; Rönnlund et al., 2018; Thomsen, 2012, 2017). Law’s (1981) community interaction theory, for example, suggests that:

The way in which who-does-what in society is decided is the product of a plurality of interpersonal transactions conducted in local settings, and on the basis of interaction within and between groups of which the individual is a member - the ‘community’. (p.145)

Although the focus on local communities is clear here, in later iterations of the theory Law included discussion of the ways that technological innovation (particularly the internet) also allows individuals to access different communities dispersed over space (Law, 2009). A focus on communities is also apparent in Thomsen’s (2012, 2017) research which focused on the situated nature of career decisions within two settings: a factory and a school.

A slightly different perspective is offered in the theory of careership developed by Hodkinson and colleagues (Hodkinson, 2008; Hodkinson et al., 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). This approach draws from Bourdieusian sociology to explore how an individual makes decisions in interaction with their social context. Importantly an individual’s context is, at least in part, internalised by an individual – shaping their “horizons for action” (Hodkinson, 2008; Hodkinson et al., 1996;

Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Further, interactions with others within an individual's context can be an important influence on career development.

### **A Wider Role for Place?**

Although place has typically been considered in the previous literature in terms of objective features (such as local labour markets), and the social (or community) context (Killeen, 1996), it is possible to ask whether place could have a wider role in career development. This next section of the chapter seeks to address some of the key debates and perspectives on place and mobility in the contemporary literature, exploring whether and how place remains important in an increasingly global world.

### ***The Relevance of Place in a Global World***

A common argument is that in the modern world, place is of decreasing relevance – modern communication technologies and transport infrastructure allow for greater mobility by which individuals can overcome the constraints of place (Massey, 2005). As a result, Giddens (1991) has suggested that individuals are increasingly “disembedded” from space, because in modernity “place becomes phantasmagoric ... [it] becomes thoroughly penetrated by disembedding mechanisms which recombine the local activities into time-space relations of ever widening scope” (Giddens, 1991, p. 146). The disembedding mechanisms that Giddens considers here include education, TV and social media and “expert systems” which act to dis-embed people from their direct lived environments. Increasingly, in “liquid modernity” (Bauman, 2007), the old fixities of geographical space, and social class, become less important (Bauman, 2001; Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991). Instead, individuals are engaged in constructing “reflexive projects of the self” (Giddens, 1991) or developing “self-reflexive” biographies (Beck, 1992, p. 135), which involve an ongoing process of defining and redefining themselves through the stories they tell and the activities they engage in. These lines of thought change the potential nature of place and space so that rather than being defined by them, they become things that we choose and consume as part of an ongoing process of identity construction.

These perspectives suggest that geographical place may be increasingly irrelevant in career development as individuals are increasingly mobile. Connected

to wider neoliberal ideologies, mobility, including free trade, and free movement of labour, is typically understood as positive – supporting the functioning of the labour market and wider economic development (Massey, 2005). Mobility is also increasingly understood to be part of successful modern career development, evident in ideas such as “boundaryless careers” (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) and of “global careerists” (Reichrath-Smith & Neault, 2013). The valuing of mobility in career development is also evident throughout the policy literature where social mobility and spatial mobility are often connected (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; Bjarnason & Edvardsson, 2017; Bridge Group, 2019). Here then the notion that some young people may be cosmopolitan in outlook or transcend geography (Ball et al., 2000; Green & White, 2007), can start to take on a moral tone – mobility becomes fundamentally a *good* thing, and stability or embeddedness in place is less positive. Further, perspectives such as Savickas’ life design approach in career development draw from notions of reflexive modernity to suggest that individuals should be engaged in the ongoing “design” of our lives, including potentially both our spatial and career locations (Savickas, 2013; Savickas et al., 2009).

However, in recent years, there has been some challenge to these ideas of modernity and place. Giddens’ work in particular has been challenged for suggesting that factors such as social class and geography are less important in modernity (Savage et al., 2005; Skeggs, 2003). Importantly it has been argued that geographical mobility is not something that everyone is equally able to access, requiring a certain level of resource (Bauman, 2001; Corbett, 2007b; Holdsworth, 2009; Skeggs, 2003). Bauman (2001) for example identifies that: “those who can afford it live solely in time. Those who cannot live in space” (p. 40). Further it has been argued that mobility practices are not just the preserve of the privileged but are themselves a means of reproducing social advantage (Brooks & Waters, 2010; Holdsworth, 2009; Skeggs, 2003). Here, the very ideology of “free movement” and valorisation of mobility potentially become the means by which power is maintained. So, as Massey (2005) has identified, where neoliberal forms of globalisation have promoted freedom of movement, they have simultaneously involved restricting mobilities for the least powerful, and the policing of borders – resulting in a “doubleness” that “works in favour of the already-powerful” (p. 86). These perspectives highlight how where some individuals may be able to choose career or

place (enacting agency), others may effectively be trapped by the structures they exist within.

The division between young people who are trapped and or transcend space is clear in much of the literature that considers aspiration and place (Ball et al., 2000; Green & White, 2007), and relates to a wider concern with stayers and leavers in the rural studies literature (Stockdale & Haartsen, 2018). However, these notions are problematic in the simple binary that they present (Stockdale & Haartsen, 2018). Recent research for example has demonstrated that there are different kinds of staying possible, depending on an individual's capability (for moving) and their aspirations (Schewel, 2020). Therefore, thinking simply in terms of place as a choice or a constraint on career development potentially overlooks the ways that mobility is not ideologically neutral, and individuals may exist in different relationships to mobility and place.

### ***Places and Lived Experiences***

A more fundamental challenge to the idea that place is of decreasing importance in modernity has come from scholars who have highlighted that place is a fundamental dimension of our lives (Massey, 2005; Simonsen, 2008). This suggests that the significance of place is not just in terms of access (to opportunities or social connections) but in terms of our physical lived experiences (Simonsen, 2008). The materiality of places, the ways we narrate places, their emotional impacts and the role of memory are all important in how places are meaningful (Simonsen, 2008)

Thinking about place and young people, a key contribution comes from Prince (2014) who has argued that place is a fundamental part of how young people come to understand themselves, and how they visualise their futures. She argues that "for young people, visioning one's self in the future is inextricably bound with place; place is an active contributor both in the present development of future self-concept and in enabling young people to envision different future possible places" (Prince, 2014, p. 697). Further, she also explores mobility, and how moving between places can influence self-concept, suggesting that there is a dynamic relationship between places and future identities. Prince therefore suggests potentially a much wider role for place and mobility, as it influences the

development of self-concept and imagined futures. Although Prince's work has been much referred to in the rural youth studies literature (see for example Cuzzocrea, 2018; Evans, 2016; Farrugia et al., 2014a; Pedersen, 2018; Pedersen & Gram, 2018), her work has not been explored by scholars interested in career development explicitly.

Again, thinking of youth experiences Furlong and Cartmel (2007) have also directly challenged the "epistemological fallacy" of late modernity and its over-emphasis on reflexive projects of the self (p.143). Instead they identify how structural conditions remain important to young people, and indeed using evidence of non-linear and fragmented working transitions and protracted housing transitions suggest that in modernity "establishment of adult identities has become more problematic" (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007, p. 141). Importantly, where Giddens argues for the decreasing role of place and space because of the impact of disembedding mechanisms Furlong and Cartmel (2007) argue that rather than disembedding, mediated experiences (e.g. through the media) act to "*distort* reality" (p. 143):

The television for example can open a window on a world which is remote from our lived experiences; programmes can help shape our opinions and may make us feel a part of broader community. At the same time, our opportunities and our life chances continue to be structured by our lived rather than our mediated experiences. The country we live in, and the neighbourhood where we reside powerfully shape life experiences. (p.143)

For Furlong and Cartmel then place remains a fundamental component of young people's experience. Further, and in line with much current thinking on social justice and career development (e.g. Hooley et al., 2018a; Hooley et al., 2019a; Sultana, 2014), they identify how the myth of modernity can be internalized by young people so "that crises are perceived as individual shortcomings rather than the outcome of processes which are largely outwith the control of individuals" (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007, p. 144).

The points made by Furlong and Cartmel (2007) and Prince (2014) accord with the recent "spatial turn" in the social sciences which has demonstrated the ongoing importance of space and place in sociological studies (Gieryn, 2000; Hastrup, 2005; Massey 2005; Soja, 2010). Massey (2005) for example has argued

that traditionally the dimensions of time and space have been divided in Western thought – and that typically time has been prioritised, with space relegated to a backdrop against which we conduct our lives (see also Simonsen, 2008). Arguably this is precisely what we can see when we consider existing career development scholarship – which focuses on career development as a process that happens over time but with almost no references to geographical space. One of the challenges in thinking about place and career development is that time is associated with the “progressive project of ‘becoming’” whereas place represents “stasis and reaction – a passive ‘being’” (Simonsen, 2008, p. 17). Arguably a focus on time and becoming is much more aligned to traditional ideas about career, with its focus on development, rather than place and being with its focus on stasis. Massey (2005) however argues that we should think in terms of “time-space” recognising that our experiences both exist within time and space – “it is, irretrievably, here *and* now. It won’t be the same ‘here’ when it is no longer now” (p.139).

An important implication of thinking about time-space is that movement and mobility become inextricably connected with place – places change through time and our experiences of place (including our movements) change through time. Mobility is not the opposite of place, it does not lead to a transcending of place, but it is an inherently spatial experience (Adey, 2017; Cresswell, 2006; Fallov et al., 2013). Massey argues that time-spaces are “constructed out of the articulation of trajectories” (Massey, 2005, p. 179). Here, the “spatial turn” in the literature connects with the “mobilities turn” – which has focused on the role of mobilities as part of every-day life (Hannam et al., 2006; Sheller, 2017; Urry, 2000). These perspectives radically unsettle traditional ontologies of migration, making it difficult to imagine migration in terms of single discrete mobilities “from” one place “to” another place (King, 2012, 2018); rather migration becomes connected to other forms of mobility (temporary and virtual mobilities for example), and all can be considered fundamentally spatial experiences. This fundamentally also unsettles the notion that processes of staying or leaving are diametrically opposed (Stockdale & Haartsen, 2018). So, for example, temporary and virtual mobilities may be important in allowing some people to stay (Stockdale & Haartsen, 2018). And for some individuals who move it may be possible to consider a kind of “stability within

movement” – with, for example, migrants often retaining connections to home communities (Halfacree, 2012, p. 211; see also King, 2012). In terms of spatialised identities and senses of belonging, these may also be experienced *over space* and in relation to multiple spaces. Halfacree (2012) for example has applied transnational scholarship to considering urban-rural migration dynamics, defining a process of “dynamic heterolocalism” which “is concerned with forging identity and lifestyle through multiple places that does not depend on the core sedentarist assumption of a single settled home place” (Halfacree, 2012, p. 214).

Just as individual lives are not imagined as bounded within fixed spaces in contemporary scholarship, so conceptualising geographical places as discrete, static, bounded entities has also become problematic. Instead, it has been argued that it is necessary to develop a “relational construction of place” which involves understanding how different places exist in relation to wider geospatial networks (Massey, 2005, p. 101; see also Urry, 2000). Importantly places are not just part of different spatialised networks but are also impacted upon by wider dynamics of power and social structures. In Massey’s (1991) words the “specificity of place... derives from the fact that each place is the focus of a distinct *mixture* of wider and more local social relations”, further places “can be imagined as articulated *moments* [emphasis added] in networks of social relations” (p. 29). Throughout Massey’s work an exploration of how geographies of production intersect with social structures to create quite different local experiences of class and gender in the workplace are evident (Massey, 1995; McDowell & Massey, 1984). Here, when thinking about mobilities it is not just that different individuals may have different capacity for mobility (as explored earlier), but that as places are constructed in relation to global flows and movements, individuals exist in different relations to these flows and movements depending on their social and spatial position (Massey, 1991).

These concerns with how social structures and geographical spaces interrelate have been explored further in terms of the implications for social justice and the lived experience of individuals. Arguing for an approach to sociology that incorporates a focus on space and place, Gieryn (2000) suggests: “place is not merely a setting or backdrop, but an agentic player in the game – a force with detectable and independent effects on social life” (p. 466). He therefore argues that

processes such as inequality, difference, power, politics, community, identity, memory and history are all “emplaced” - they all have a geographical dimension (Gieryn, 2000). Issues of the inter-relation of social and spatial processes have also led to direct explorations of social justice in relation to space and mobility, through concepts of spatial justice (Soja, 2009, 2010) and mobility justice (Cook & Butz, 2020; Sheller, 2018).

A final important point to draw out of this discussion is that contemporary scholarship on place also highlights how places are not static, rather places are continually produced and reproduced (Halfacree, 2007; Lefebvre, 1991; Simonsen, 2008). This includes places being subject to different representations which may be multiple and potentially conflicting, produced by different individuals holding different positions and interests (Massey, 1991; Woods, 2010). Alongside representations of place, the material realities of place and spatial practices are also highly significant (Halfacree, 2007; Lefebvre, 1991; Simonsen, 2008). As a result, for individuals, experiences of place are inevitably layered, and although much research has focused on how rural areas are “constructed” by rural young people, the material experiences of space remain highly significant (Prince, 2014; Rye, 2011; Simonsen, 2008).

### **Theorising Career Development and Place**

The previous section discussed the importance of adopting an understanding of place that moves beyond simply seeing it as a backdrop to life or career decision-making. Existing career theory therefore can seem to be highly limited in its conceptualisation of place primarily in terms of structure (place as a constraint) and agency (place as a choice), and as a context for social relations. Considering a role for place which is neither wholly focused on agency or on structure, and which recognises the ways external environments may become internalised in the ways individuals perceive themselves and the world, a possible middle way is provided through the theoretical framework of Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), as applied to career decision-making by Hodkinson and colleagues (Hodkinson, 2008; Hodkinson et al., 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Bourdieu’s theoretical work is also potentially particularly relevant to this project because of its influence on a significant body of

research into higher education experiences of young people (Abrahams & Ingram, 2013; Lehmann, 2009, 2013; Reay et al., 2009), and transitions from higher education into the working world (Abrahams, 2017; Burke, 2016; Greenbank & Hepworth, 2008).

In this final section of the chapter, a possible theoretical framework for understanding the role of place in career decision-making is presented. The chapter starts by outlining Bourdieusan scholarship as applied in career decision-making by Hodkinson and colleagues (Hodkinson, 1998b, 2008; Hodkinson et al., 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). It then moves on to considering how the Bourdieusan toolkit and careership theory could be adapted to accommodate consideration of place more fully.

### ***Bourdieu and Careership***

Bourdieu's theory of practice primarily focuses on three main elements: field, capital and habitus. A field for Bourdieu (1977; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) is a "relatively autonomous" cultural context which operates according to certain logics and rules. Fields may include the family, educational and work fields. Further, each kind of occupation can be considered a separate field operating as it does with different kinds of logics. An individual's position in a field depends on their resources – in Bourdieusan terminology "capitals". An individual's capital may be social (e.g. networks), economic (e.g. financial), cultural (e.g. tastes and dispositions) or symbolic (e.g. prestige). In terms of understanding how different fields operate, Bourdieu compared a field to a "game" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), with an individual's ability to "play the game", dependent on their relative levels of resource (capital) as well as their habitus. Habitus is a form of "socialised subjectivity", it is the way that the logics of a field become internalised so that individuals develop a "feel for the game". When a person is in a field that aligns to their habitus, Bourdieu suggested, they feel like a "fish in water" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127).

Thinking about young people and transitions, an individual young person will be part of multiple fields – including school, family and employment (Atkinson, 2016). Depending on their background they will also hold different levels of capital and exist in different positions in the fields they inhabit. Importantly the "rules of the

game” vary between fields, and further “the hierarchy of the different species of capital ... varies across the various fields ... [and] their relative value ... is determined by each field” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 98). As a result individuals may find themselves in quite different positions in different fields depending on the structural similarities (or homologies) between fields. Although Bourdieu considered that there are many different fields, he viewed the field of power and class relations as the primary, or meta-field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Importantly, educational fields essentially embody middle-class values, and are central to the dynamics of social reproduction. Here, for middle-class children, their family habitus and the habitus of the schools that they attend are likely to correspond to each other. In comparison working-class young people can find school environments more problematic, as there is less alignment between their family background and school environments. This can also lead to challenges in the transition to higher education (Lehmann, 2009, 2013), and the transition into a graduate career after higher education (Abrahams, 2017; Burke, 2016).

Although Bourdieusian theory has more often been used to analyse field dynamics than individual decision-making (Atkinson, 2016), Hodkinson and colleagues (Hodkinson, 2008; Hodkinson et al., 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997) applied a Bourdieusian approach to develop a theory of career development, which they termed “careership”. This proposes that career decision-making is neither technically rational or irrational but is “pragmatically rational”:

Career decision-making and progression take place in the interactions between the person and the fields they inhabit. Thus, career decision-making and progression are bounded by a person’s ‘horizons for action’ (Hodkinson, 2008, p. 4)

An individual’s horizons for action are influenced by both their habitus and the opportunity structures of the labour market and the relationships between these (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). It is through the interactions between the field and an individual’s habitus that individuals come to understand what opportunities are “for” them. In this way objective possibilities can be internalised as subjective aspirations (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Although Hodkinson and colleagues apply Bourdieusian ideas to career development, they also suggest some extensions – most particularly to account for the way careers change over time (Hodkinson, 1998a). In the first iterations of the theory change over time was conceptualised in terms of “turning points” and “routines” (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997, p.32). Routines are understood as either confirming career pathways, contradicting career intentions, or socialising individuals into career pathways. In general, Hodkinson proposes that “significant transformations” in habitus are unusual, but possible (Hodkinson, 1998a, p. 103). This perspective can be aligned to a relatively traditional Bourdieusian perspective which identifies limited possibility for habitus change or transformation (Jenkins, 2002). However, subsequent iterations of careership moved to consider a more continuous process of learning (Hodkinson et al., 2006).

Alongside consideration of time, Hodkinson and colleagues also consider in depth the role of other people in career decision-making. This is conceptualised in Bourdieusian terms as: “the relations between forces acting in the field(s) within which decisions ... [are] made and careers progressed” (Hodkinson, 2008, p. 4). However, in their consideration of “interactions with others” (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997, p.29) they move beyond simply thinking about field dynamics, but also consider the role of individual relationships and the direct provision of information or support by significant others (including parents, teachers or friends) to direct individuals in terms of their career progression.

The importance of time, and the specific interactions between individuals in a field, lends an unpredictability to the ways that career pathways are developed – with the specific opportunities and pathways that emerge being a result, to a certain extent, of chance or happenstance (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; see also Krumboltz, 2009)

### ***Spatialising Bourdieu and Careership***

The work of Hodkinson and Bourdieu focuses heavily on the interactions of individuals with their environments, and therefore potentially lends itself to a consideration of the role of geographical place. However, despite the geographic motif of the field, Bourdieu’s sociology of space is surprisingly untheorized (Atkinson, 2016; Savage, 2012). It is also notable that in the early iterations of

careership theory, geographical location was also not considered explicitly. However, in recent years, there has been a growing interest in developing a Bourdieusian sociology of space (Atkinson, 2016; Bridge, 2011; Savage, 2012), and in the application of Bourdieusian ideas to experiences of rural young people, including experiences of migration (Allen & Hollingworth, 2013; Corbett, 2007a; Halfacree, 2004; Rye, 2011). In terms of careership, in a later publication *Careership revisited* Hodkinson (2008) outlines some important refinements to his theory, including an appreciation of geographical location.

In Hodkinson's assertion of the importance of space in later publication, he draws particularly from the work of Ball et al. (2000) who explored the career decision-making of young people in London during the 1990s. In contrast to Hodkinson et al.'s early work (1996) which focused on young people entering youth training schemes, Ball et al.'s (2000) work explored a cross section of young people and identified how their envisaged career pathways varied in terms of spatial horizons. A key finding for Ball et al. (2000) was that "for some of the young people... their footsteps are set within tightly defined spatial horizons and imaginary spaces (locals); others range more widely in both respects (cosmopolitans)" (p.105). The distinction between locals and cosmopolitans represents in some respect a classed distinction, with the authors suggesting that young people from different class backgrounds and with different educational histories are more able to overcome the "friction of distance" (Ball et al., 2000, p. 105). Further, in terms of educational trajectories, the authors note that individuals pursuing higher education have "opportunity structures' ... [which] transcend geography" and have a confidence and "relative fearlessness" about their futures (Ball et al., 2000, p. 91). Although the recognition of the importance of geographical location in Ball et al.'s (2000) work is significant then, it potentially does not move far beyond thinking about some individuals as trapped and others as transcending space. These limitations in the research are, to some extent, recognised by the authors themselves – who note the "subtleties and complexities" in the envisioned (spatial) futures of young people, and the importance of "time space biographies", noting that these areas merit further research (Ball et al., 2000, p. 149).

The rest of this chapter therefore aims to develop the work of Hodkinson (2008) and Ball et al. (2000) to establish a framework for understanding place in

career decision-making that engages with some of these “subtleties and complexities”. In order to do this, the chapter draws on recent theoretical work to consider the spatial dimensions of the Bourdieusian concepts of habitus and capital, as well as drawing out a third significant consideration relating to lived experience over time and space.

**Place-Based Habitus.** A key way in which Bourdieusian thought has been developed in terms of space and place in recent years, is in the notion of place-based habitus. Much of the literature on place-based habitus, stems from urban studies and planning, considering how places build an identity, and individuals choose to locate to places based on their “fit” with these places (Hillier & Rooksby, 2005; Savage, 2012). This can be connected with reflexive projects of the self and notions of choice discussed in an earlier section – whereby places can be chosen and deployed in relation to the construction of identity. Different constructions of rural places, and the choices of in-migrants in terms of rural locations have also been explored (Smith & Phillips, 2001).

Relatively less literature has considered how material experiences of living in places influences the development of habitus (Atkinson, 2016). However, some authors have discussed habitus in terms of national identities (Baker & Brown, 2008) and in terms of rural places (Corbett, 2007a, 2007b; Cuervo & Wyn, 2012; Turner, 2020). There is also a significant body of literature which has considered place-based belonging and place attachment (Antonsich, 2010; Cuervo & Wyn, 2014), which, although conceptually different from habitus, may in some respects be connected – with some scholars making a direct link between these terms (Thomas, 2015; Turner, 2020).

Considering the way that individuals exist in multiple fields, the existing research highlights the way that geographical habitus potentially overlaps with educational and family habitus. So, in Corbett’s work (2007a, 2007b) in Atlantic Canada for example, he considers a community habitus (which is connected to the primary industry in the area, the fishery), but thinks about this in terms of how it relates with other fields including the field of education. It is through the interactions between these fields that class dynamics are enacted, with the fishery being predominantly working-class and educational contexts being predominantly middle-

class. He also highlights how family backgrounds, and gender are important in constructing relationships to the community differently. This theme is also picked up in Turner's (2020) work where she explores the relationship between family and community habitus.

Allen and Hollingworth's (2013) work also explores how place-based habitus interrelates with social class to "shape young people's opportunities for social and geographical mobility" (p. 499). Importantly, and drawing on the mobilities scholarship identified earlier, their perspective highlights the importance of *mobilities* in creating the meanings of places: "flows and mobility were central to the production of a place-specific habitus across the three locales" (Allen & Hollingworth, 2013, p. 513). In this research, individuals are positioned within different "cultures of migration" and these interact with class position. Elsewhere in the literature the notion of habitus is also connected with cultures of migration (Halfacree, 2004). However, it is important to note that cultures of migration remains a contested concept with some scholars suggesting it provides a relatively "totalising and overly reified concept of culture" (Halfacree, 2004 p.242; Ni Laoire, 2000).

Care therefore needs to be taken both in the application of cultures of migration and the notion of place-based habitus that these concepts do not simply replicate notions of singular cultures. Indeed Atkinson (2016) notes that notions of place-based habitus, can at times tend towards simplification, focusing on "the homologies between physical space and the oppositions of the social world" (p.16). Here, the idea of singular cultures of migration, or of disadvantaged individuals living in disadvantaged areas, potentially represents a troubling simplification of place. Rather family background, gender and other individual differences will impact on individual positions in space (Corbett, 2007a, 2007b; Turner, 2020); individuals may also construct places, and their relationship to these places differently (Donnelly et al., 2020; Rye, 2006b). Evans (2016) for example has suggested that it is important to extend the work of Allen and Hollingworth (2013) and Ball et al. (2000) by highlighting "the complex social, economic and psychological contingencies which influence how local contexts frame spatial aspirations" (p. 502). In this case although she uses concepts of "cosmopolitan habitus" (p. 510) as opposed to local orientations, she also explores how in different locations the

different histories, landscapes and economic opportunities in specific places *and* the specific locations of individuals are important.

**Spatial and Mobility Capitals.** Moving beyond notions of habitus that risk reifying culture, it is important to remember that Bourdieusian scholarship consists of a conceptual triad of habitus, field and capital, and thinking about one without relation to the others is problematic (Bathmaker, 2015). Utilising this conceptual triad potentially helps to understand the importance of the different positions of individuals within a particular context and can avoid any risk of determinism in understanding spaces, aspirations and social class (Evans, 2016; Rye, 2011). Considering how different individuals may exist in different relationships to their geographical and social contexts then, an understanding of the spatial dimensions to capital is important. This includes both how capitals can enable mobility, and also how different capitals may have different geographical reach.

In terms of mobility and capital, there is evidence throughout the literature of a longstanding association between class position and mobility (see for example Halfacree & Boyle, 1993). One way of understanding this is that mobility requires a level of resource, and therefore may be associated with middle-class positions. This has led to the development of concepts such as “mobility capital” (Corbett, 2007a, 2007b; Murphy-Lejeune, 2017) “spatial capital” (Forsberg, 2019) and “motility” (Kaufmann et al., 2004, 2018) to explore the specific nature of the resources that support mobility. These ideas are broadly summarised below.

Mobility capital can be defined both in terms of the different capacities of individuals to move, and the way that previous mobilities may function as a form of capital – generating advantages in the workplace and elsewhere (Hu & Cairns, 2017; King, 2009; Moret, 2020; Murphy-Lejeune, 2017). The different capacities of individuals to move may include, practically, “whether ... [a person] is rich or poor, and on where in the world they were born, and hence what ‘mobility rights’ they have” (King, 2009, p. 63), but also may include a wider adoption of mobile outlooks with Corbett (2007b) identifying that “the acquisition of mobility capital is a process in which select young people learn to imagine the local community as an abstraction” (p.782).

A slightly different conceptualisation of mobility in terms of capital is considered by Kaufmann et al. (2004) who use the term “motility”. They state:

Motility can be defined as the capacity of entities (e.g. goods, information or persons) to be mobile in social and geographic space, or as the way in which entities access and appropriate the capacity for socio-spatial mobility according to their circumstances. (p.750)

Motility includes three dimensions of access, competence and appropriation. Access “refers to the range of possible mobilities according to place, time and other contextual constraints”; competence includes the skills and abilities needed to move, including physical abilities, acquired skills (e.g. licences and permits, as well as knowledge of the terrain and codes); and appropriation refers to how people “interpret and act upon perceived or real access and skills” and “is shaped by needs, plans, aspirations and understandings” of people as well as “strategies, motives, values and habits” (Kaufmann et al., 2004, p. 750). Here, then, the role of materialities in terms of transport connections (and access) is identified, but this is combined with having the resources (such as confidence and finance) to capitalise on these. Importantly the focus on “needs, plans and aspirations” connects with Corbett’s (2007b) notion of mobility being related to the ability to visualise oneself outside of the community and therefore also with ideas of career and of future selves (Prince, 2014).

A further related concept to mobility capital is “spatial capital” (Lévy, 1994, 2013, cited by Forsberg, 2019). This concept includes two dimensions: “position capital” which represents an individual’s position in space and their proximity to different activities, alongside “situation capital” which more broadly relates to a person’s “dispositions towards mobility” (Forsberg, 2019, p. 323). This concept potentially has had less reach in the English language literature, stemming as it does from academic literature written in French. However, the concept includes an important understanding of the role of *specific* spatial location alongside access to mobility more broadly.

Moving beyond mobility and capital, a final important consideration is how different capitals have different salience in different (geographical) fields. This includes notions of “location specific capitals” – that is capitals which may be

valuable only, or particularly, in certain locations (Corbett, 2007a; Crew, 2018; Moilanen, 2019; Waters, 2006). Corbett (2007a) for example identifies how certain capitals may be valuable in the context of a local industry (in his case, the fishery) but may have less salience elsewhere. Further, different spatial locations also provide different possibilities for accessing different forms of capital. Reay et al. (2009) discuss more limited access to “dominant cultural capital” for working-class students in “predominantly working-class localities” (p.1106). Savage et al. (2015) have also noted that across the UK different cities and regions will have quite different cultural “scenes” where rural and remote areas are characterised by a lack of access to some forms of cultural capital (see also Allen & Hollingworth, 2013). More significantly perhaps, some work has suggested that not only is capital differentially distributed, but that social class actually operates differently in different areas. Rye (2006a) for example suggests that the social structure is more polarized in urban communities and social reproduction more evident. He also suggests that cultural capital “seems to exert greater influence on class structure in urban areas, while in the countryside one’s economic capital plays a relatively stronger role” (Rye, 2006a, p. 62). This suggests a significant complexity in the ways that capitals function in different geographical locations, requiring a much closer analysis of geographical space than has been present in much Bourdieusian scholarship.

### **Lived Experience and Time-Space: Layered and Reflexive Habitus.**

Having considered the spatial aspects of habitus and capital, this next section of the chapter considers the role of time and the life-course in terms of place and space, particularly as it involves operating in and moving through multiple fields. This focus is particularly important when considering career development over time, and receives significant focus in careership theory (Hodkinson, 2008; Hodkinson et al., 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). However, drawing on Massey’s notion of time-space, to focus on change over time only potentially neglects how space is also important over the life course.

In Hodkinson’s (2008) later work career development is conceptualised as an ongoing process of learning over time: “careers are progressively constructed by positioned people, as part of their participation in various career-related fields” and our “on-going actions, reactions and interactions influence who we are, our positions, dispositions and identities” (p.11, see also Hodkinson et al., 2006). The

work of Colley et al. (2003) has also extended Hodgkinson's work to consider processes of learning in terms of socialisation into different career areas, specifically through considering how the development of a "vocational habitus" is facilitated by engagement in vocational education. This work draws on a longer tradition of literature that has considered socialisation including Willis' (1977) idea of working-class boys "learning to labour". Exploring three VET courses Colley et al. (2003) explore processes of "becoming" – focusing on how an individual needs to have a background "predisposition" (p. 488) to a vocational area, but that vocational identity is developed through interactions, experiences and relationships in the field of vocational education. A similar piece of work by Colley, Hodgkinson and others, has also explored the "becoming" of students studying at masters level (Hodkinson et al., 2006).

Despite this scholarship, theorising the process of learning or development through a traditional Bourdieusian lens can be problematic, because his theoretical framework can be viewed as "implicitly structurally deterministic" (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997, p. 34; Jenkins, 1982, 2002). Jenkins (1982) suggests that Bourdieusian theory is "essentially deterministic and circular – objective structures produce culture, which determines practice, which reproduces those objective structures" (p.270). Effectively, then, Bourdieusian theory can be criticised for a lack of consideration of the capacity for change or learning. Indeed, discussing the experience of individuals who come into contact with fields that do not align to habitus, Bourdieu's focus is on acute division, conflict and stress, resulting, potentially, in a "cleft habitus" (Abrahams & Ingram, 2013). The implicit determinism of Bourdieusian theory is one of the reasons why Holmes in his exploration of graduate employment rejects notions of the role of habitus in graduate employment (Brown et al., 2004; Burke, 2016; Holmes, 2013), in favour of an approach which emphasises how graduate identities develop in *interaction* with workplace environments (Holmes, 2015; 2001; 2013).

However, Hodgkinson and Colley point at specific potentials within the Bourdieusian toolkit for understanding how processes of becoming can be aligned to experiences of belonging. Specifically, "learning ... [can be] seen as a combination of belonging to a community and engaging in activities or practices" (Hodkinson et al., 2006 p.40). Transformation of habitus from this perspective, does

therefore not occur as a rift or a jump, but as more of a “process of orientation to (rather than adoption of) the vocational habitus” (Colley et al, 2003, p.488). This does not mean that people can move *freely* between contexts as, in Colley’s words, they still require a “predisposition” to certain areas, but it does point at the ways that experiences can develop over time.

Beyond the theory of careership, in Bourdieusian scholarship too, there have been significant developments in thinking about processes of change, learning and reflection. Recent theoretical developments have suggested that the concept of habitus does not preclude the importance of conscious thought and reflection, and notions of reflexivity (Adams, 2006; Burke, 2016; Sweetman, 2003). These approaches emphasise that habitus can change over time, and in interaction with the fields that individuals inhabit, potentially connecting with the work on vocational becoming discussed above (Atkinson, 2016; Reay et al., 2009). Further, the notion of traumatic “clefs” in habitus has also been challenged, with suggestions that discontinuities between habitus and field actually offer space for increased reflexivity. In terms of higher education progression for example, research has identified how for some working-class students coming into contact with middle-class university settings can lead to increased flexibility and adaptability (Abrahams & Ingram, 2013; Reay et al., 2009) something that Abrahams and Ingram (2013) have termed a “chameleon habitus”.

Another important contribution to contemporary scholarship has been a focus on how individuals themselves occupy multiple fields (Atkinson, 2016; Decoteau, 2016; Noble, 2013). Atkinson (2016) points out for example that most Bourdieusian scholarship has focused on *fields* rather than *individuals* and therefore has potentially overlooked the ways that, for an individual, experience in one field may impact or influence our experiences in another. Decoteau’s (2016) theoretical contribution suggests a reworking of Bourdieusian theory that is aligned to critical realist perspectives by suggesting that:

Social selves are always situated at the intersection of multiple and competing social locations (or field positions) and that the habitus itself is always layered. Reflexivity arises from horizontal disjunctures (between field positions) and vertical disjunctures (across temporal sedimentation). (p. 303)

In terms of how these contemporary discussions of Bourdieusian sociology relate to place and space, it is clear that it is possible to conceptualise how individuals are members of different fields in social space but these fields are *also* “differentiated geographically by the spatio-temporal flows of people, things ideas and resources extending out from players within the (inter)national and regional fields of power” (Atkinson, 2016, p. 98). Atkinson’s perspective here is relatively closely aligned to the work of Massey (2005), Lefebvre (1991) and others discussed earlier – different places are shaped by wider global power flows; this then impacts on social spaces (or fields) that individuals are in, so that, for example, the lived experience of the family, employment or educational fields will all have a *spatial* dimension. In practice, the specific ways that fields are realised in space and time will have an impact on the experiences of individuals, and the ways they construct or imagine their futures (Prince, 2014).

There are two particularly important points here. One is that if we think in terms of spatialised habitus, then as individuals move *through* spaces we have to recognise that these geographical mobilities will also potentially influence spatialised habitus. That is, where we feel we belong (geographically) may change over time in relation to our mobilities and our experiences in other fields. This enables a theoretical position that understands spatialised belonging as enacted over time, and potentially over multiple spaces (such as in Halfacree’s (2012) notion of heterolocal identities). Secondly, when considering multiple fields and their interaction, it is possible to imagine that, as individuals become socialised into different kinds of career pathways (Colley et al., 2003) this may have impacts on the spatial futures that they see for themselves. Here, engagement in education, work experience or other activities may impact on how individuals appropriate mobility through their plans and aspirations (Kaufmann et al., 2004, 2018), or how individuals come to visualise themselves outside of their communities (Corbett, 2007a, 2007b).

Considering how habitus may be layered, Colley et al’s (2003) suggestion that “vocational habitus... is relational and dynamic, co-constructed...” (p.488), that it “is not unitary or essentialising” (p. 489) is also important – different individuals may occupy quite different positions in one social field depending on the relations within that field, including potentially spatial relations. So, for example, young

people may become socialised into imagining a future as a chef or hairdresser but within that there will be different vocational identities and positions depending on spatial location, with working in a central London salon or restaurant quite a different position to working in a small-town salon or restaurant. Occupational fields therefore exist *over* space: potentially connecting people in similar roles across space, but also have specific spatial realisations, so for example working in rural or small communities may be quite different from working in larger communities (Sultana, 2006).

## **Summary**

This chapter has explored the conceptual context for this research project, identifying how it is important to think about place not just as a backdrop to decision-making (as has been perhaps the tendency in the career development literature), but to think about place as a more fundamental component of our lived experience. The chapter has explored the potential for expanding careership theory to more fully accommodate issues of place, by exploring the spatial potentials of the theoretical tools provided by Bourdieusian sociology in terms of habitus, capital and field. The chapter also focuses on individual experience especially as it is embedded in multiple fields and lived over time to more fully account for processes of change and development. The three areas of habitus, capital, and time-space are utilised throughout this thesis as ways of thinking about some of the themes present in the literature and some of the emergent themes from the research itself. As such the thesis does not rigidly apply Bourdieusian ideas, but recognises them as useful tools to “think with” (Bathmaker, 2015; Jenkins, 2002; Webb et al., 2017), an approach consistent with careership theory which uses “modified versions” of Bourdieusian concepts (Hodkinson, 2008, p. 4).

### **Chapter 3: Placing the Project**

This chapter introduces the specific context for the current research project – the islands of Orkney and Shetland. The chapter starts by identifying the value of islands as research sites for a project of this nature, and then moves on to exploring the specific context of Orkney and Shetland.

#### **Islands as Research Sites**

Migration, particularly youth out-migration, is a longstanding concern of rural and island communities across the globe (Connell, 2018; Cuzzocrea, 2018; King, 2009; King & Connell, 1999; Royle, 2001; Woods, 2010). Although migration is a concern in both rural and island rural areas, in island communities being surrounded by sea may result in particularly strong traditions of mobility (Alexander, 2015b; Cuzzocrea, 2018; Hayfield, 2017). At the same time, however, mobility is often logistically more challenging than in many mainland communities, meaning that the stay or leave dilemma for young people “can be exacerbated for those living on islands” (Cooke & Petersen, 2019, p. 102). Islands can therefore function as “a privileged laboratory for migration studies” (King, 2009, pp. 76–77).

Rural areas also provide strong potential for exploring spatial elements of young people’s experiences, especially as much research into youth transition has taken place in urban environments and in rural settings the “economies and resources” that structure transitions may be quite different (Farrugia, 2014, p. 298). In particular the small and often distinctive labour markets of islands (Baldacchino & Bertram, 2009; Cooke & Petersen, 2019), can provide a strong context for exploring the relationship of employment, career development and migration. Typically, research has shown that restricted employment and education opportunities in rural and island communities are a key reason for migration (Bæck & Paulgaard, 2019; Jamieson & Groves, 2008). However, there is also evidence of strong traditions of return to island communities (Crescenzi et al., 2017; Cuzzocrea, 2018; Hayfield, 2017). Therefore, thinking about career as a concept which encompasses lifelong movement through learning and work (see Chapter 2), island communities potentially raise some important questions about how career and migration trajectories may be related over the life course. Finally, thinking beyond place in

terms only of opportunities, islands are valuable sites because they are often relatively distinctive places - in terms of the social, cultural and labour market contexts they provide (Baldacchino, 2004, 2006a; King, 2009). This allows consideration of spatial elements of career decision-making beyond simply thinking about labour market opportunities.

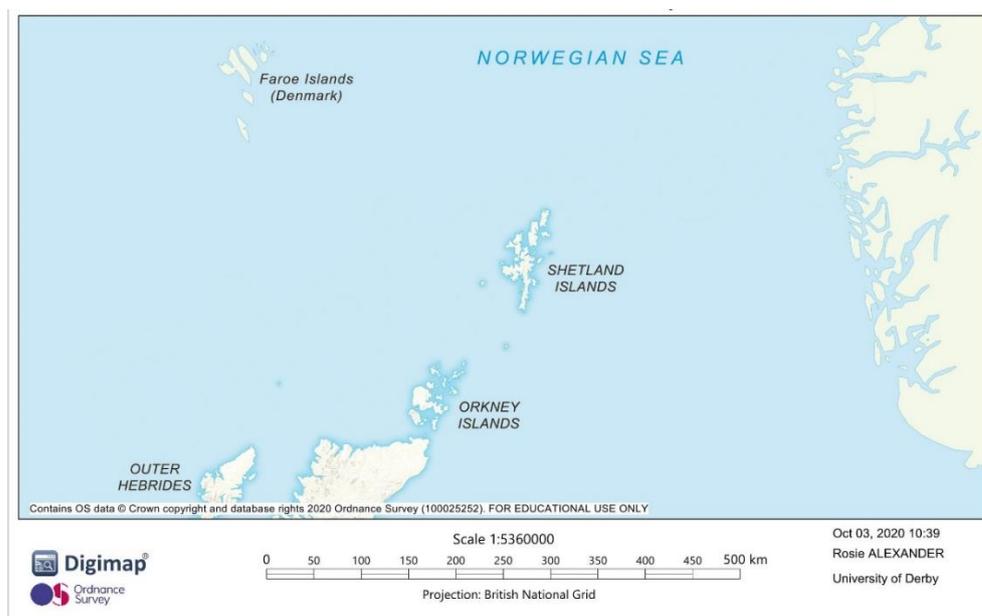
The following sections of this chapter explore in more detail the specific social, cultural, economic and education context provided by the island sites for this research project (Orkney and Shetland) as well as some of the existing evidence around youth migration from these islands.

### **Introduction to Orkney and Shetland**

Orkney and Shetland are island groups situated off the North coast of Scotland, with Orkney approximately 16km north (Scotland Info, 2019) and Shetland almost 200km north (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2018b). The islands are situated in the North Atlantic, between mainland Scotland, Norway and the Faroe Islands. Although administratively part of Scotland and the wider UK they are closer to the Arctic circle than London (Cooper et al., 2020) (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1.**

*Location of Orkney and Shetland*



## ***Population and Geography***

Both Shetland and Orkney are archipelagos, with Orkney consisting of approximately 70 islands, of which 20 are inhabited, and Shetland consisting of approximately 100 islands, of which fewer than 20 are inhabited (Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020a, 2020b). The main islands in both island groups are called “the mainland” – which should not be confused with the Scottish mainland.

The population of Orkney and Shetland are very similar – in Orkney the population was 22,190 in 2018 and 22,990 in Shetland – however, Shetland has a larger landmass than Orkney so the relative population density of Shetland is much lower than Orkney (12 people per sq. km compared to 22 people per sq. km.) (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2019a, 2019b). Patterns of population change show that since 2011, Shetland has seen a marginal decrease (1.1%), and Orkney an increase in population (3.6%) (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2019a, 2019b). Approximately half of the population of each of the island groups is based in, or within close proximity (within 10km), of the main towns – Kirkwall (Orkney) and Lerwick (Shetland) (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2018a; shetland.org, 2020). In contrast some of the outlying areas, including the smaller islands in the archipelagos, have very small and declining populations, and this combined with the difficulties of providing services in these areas threatens their long-term sustainability (Grydehøj 2008b; Hall Aitken, 2009; Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2018b).

The outer islands of the archipelagos are connected to the main islands by either air or ferry (or in some cases both) (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2018b, 2018a). From the main islands, transport onward to the Scottish mainland is available by both air and sea. Planes depart every day from the main island airports – Kirkwall and Sumburgh (in the south of the Shetland mainland) – to Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Inverness and Glasgow (Loganair, 2020). Flight routes to Manchester (in England) and Bergen (in Norway) have also opened in recent years, but with less frequent flights available. Flights to the Scottish mainland take approximately 45 minutes to 1.5 hours, although costs of return flights are very high, with last

minute flights from Shetland to the Scottish mainland being equivalent to flights from Scotland to Thailand (Merrit, 2015) and mile for mile these flights are some of the most expensive in Europe (Munro, 2015). A ferry service connects Aberdeen to Lerwick (Shetland) and departs on a daily basis, taking 12-14 hours and travelling overnight (Northlink Ferries, 2020). The ferry stops in Kirkwall approximately every other day, with travel from Kirkwall to Lerwick, or Kirkwall to Aberdeen possible in approximately 7 hours, either travelling in the evening or overnight depending on the route (Northlink Ferries, 2020). From Orkney there are also shorter ferry crossings to the North of Scotland (John O'Groats and Scrabster) that depart several times a day and take approximately 90 minutes (Pentland Ferries, 2020). Figure 2 presents a map showing the main ferry routes and airports in the islands.

Figure 2.

Map of Orkney and Shetland



## **Culture**

Orkney and Shetland have highly distinctive cultural contexts. The islands were part of the Norwegian state from 875AD until the mid-fifteenth century, but it was only in the late sixteenth century that Scottish administration of the islands was fully assumed (Grydehøj, 2013). The islands spoke a Norse dialect (Norn), remnants of which remain in Orcadian and Shetlandic dialect spoken in the islands today (Flaws & Lamb, 1996; Graham, 2009). The Norse inheritance is celebrated in Shetland in the annual fire festival *Up Helly Aa* and is also promoted through tourist literature and wider island branding (Grydehøj, 2008a). Nordic connections continue to the present day, including both islands having twinning arrangements with towns or regions in Norway (Shetland Islands Council, 2020a; The Orkney News, 2020). The University of the Highlands and Islands also has an Institute for Northern Studies which specialises in Nordic culture and is based in Orkney and Shetland (UHI, 2020b). Many of the historical and current connections between the islands and Nordic countries are identified in the Scottish Government's Arctic Policy Framework (Scottish Government, 2019a), this together with the Nordic-Baltic policy statement from the Scottish Government (2017) highlights the continuing connections to the Nordic region with Scotland more broadly. These connections are not just cultural or historic, but part of current social and economic policy, and initiatives in a number of areas (Scottish Government, 2017, 2019a).

## **Administration and Policy**

Orkney and Shetland can be considered subnational island jurisdictions (SNIJs), administratively they are part of Scotland, but each have their own local authority (Stuart, 2009). They are also part of the wider Highlands and Islands region which includes the local authority areas of Argyll and Bute; Eilean Siar (the Western Isles), Highland region (including the regional capital, Inverness) and Moray.

As with other SNIJs the islands have a complex relationship with the wider administrations of Scotland and the UK (Baldacchino & Hepburn, 2012). Where some SNIJs have pursued independence others have favoured pursuing advanced autonomy within a state (Baldacchino & Hepburn, 2012). Indeed, within the Scottish island context the councils of Orkney and Shetland together with the Western Isles

have been instrumental in arguing for greater consideration of island needs in national policy-making, resulting in the introduction of legislation: The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 (Scottish Government, 2019b). Following the Islands Act, a National Islands Plan has been developed which outlines a series of thirteen objectives of Scottish Ministers in order to improve outcomes for island communities (Scottish Government, 2019b).

## **Education and Employment Context**

So far this chapter has considered the population, culture and administrative context of the islands, in this section the education and employment context of the islands is explored in more depth.

### ***Education Context***

Education in Orkney and Shetland follows the Scottish education system. Compared to other parts of the UK, Scotland has a relatively distinct education system with a different philosophical basis (Raffe et al., 1999). The curriculum in Scotland for example is non-statutory and less prescriptive (Machin et al., 2013; Raffe et al., 1999). There is a strong commitment to comprehensive schooling and historically there has been opposition to selective education (Raffe et al., 1999). Transition to secondary school takes place at the age of 12 (Raffe et al., 1999), and, although recently the examination system has changed, at the time participants in this research went through schooling they would have taken Scottish Standard Grades in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> years of schooling at age 15 and 16 (Machin et al., 2013)

In post-compulsory education, students sit Scottish Highers at age 17 and can sit Highers and Advanced Highers at 18. Scottish higher education courses are typically four years in length and have multiple entry points (Machin et al., 2013; Scottish Government, 2018b). Academically able young people who gain five Highers at the age of 17 may be able to progress straight into year one of a degree programme. Others may remain at school for an additional year to allow them to build up sufficient Highers for entry to higher education, or to undertake Advanced Highers, which potentially allow for entry into year two of a degree course (Scottish Government, 2018b). Still others may progress onto higher education via further education courses such as National Certificates (NCs), Higher National Certificates

(HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs). Colleges delivering HNC and HND courses may also work with specific universities to establish “articulation” routes from these programmes into year two or three of specific degree courses (Scottish Government, 2018b). Here, there is a key difference with the English education system: the Further Education sector is more clearly distinct from school provision (there are no sixth form colleges for example), and traditionally has been much more significant in the delivery of higher education (Raffe et al., 1999).

Education in Orkney and Shetland is delivered in line with the national system. There are 17 primary schools in Orkney, and two senior secondary schools (in the towns of Kirkwall and Stromness) (Orkney Islands Council, 2020). Shetland has 22 primary schools and two High Schools (in the towns of Lerwick and Brae) (Shetland Islands Council, 2020c). A relatively distinctive part of the education system in Orkney and Shetland is that both island communities also have a number of Junior High Schools – these are schools where it is possible to study from nursery level up to the age of 16. They include Westray, Sanday and Stronsay in Orkney (all located in the smaller islands) (Orkney Islands Council, 2020), and Unst, Whalsay and Yell in Shetland (all again located on smaller islands) as well as Aith and Sandwick, which are in mainland communities (Shetland Islands Council, 2020b). Junior High Schools were introduced in remote highland and island communities in order to prevent young people having to leave their communities at the start of secondary education (Sewel et al., 1975). Young people in communities where there are Junior High Schools can typically choose to complete their national qualifications in these schools or move to the main secondary schools (in Kirkwall or Lerwick) where there is greater choice of courses and board in the school hostel. Young people from these communities then must move to the main schools to complete post-compulsory education (Highers and Advanced Highers). In other very small island communities with no secondary provision, young people may be required to attend the main secondary schools from S1 upwards. Typically, young people from out-lying communities will board in the school hostel during term time, returning to their home islands at the weekends.

Further education and higher education is provided in the islands via Orkney College UHI and Shetland College UHI – based in the towns of Kirkwall and Lerwick. These colleges provide a range of vocational education, HNC and HND

courses and degree provision through the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI). UHI is a relatively unique university, it is a tertiary institution delivering both further and higher education, and is a partnership of thirteen independent colleges and research institutions operating across the North of Scotland (UHI, 2020a). The nature of the institution has led to a curriculum which is both locally focused and international in reach (UHI, 2020a), and where a common structure for degree provision is an initial HNC or HND followed by articulation (within the university) to year two or three of a degree course (QAA, 2017). There are also articulation agreements allowing students to progress into degree courses at other universities. Alongside Orkney College and Shetland College, there is also a specialist maritime college in Shetland – NAFC Marine Centre, which is part of UHI and which offers a merchant navy cadet programme as well as specialising in maritime research (NAFC, 2020); and there is specialist provision in marine science, marine planning and renewables at postgraduate level through the International Centre for Island Technology (ICIT), which is an Orkney Campus of Heriot-Watt University (Heriot-Watt University, 2020).

### ***Employment Context***

According to Scottish Government classifications, approximately one third of the population in Orkney and Shetland are classified as living in “remote small towns” and the remainder in “remote rural” communities (Scottish Government, 2018a). The labour markets of the islands are therefore relatively rural and relatively small. However, unlike many rural areas that have been the focus of previous research on youth migration (see for example Bæck & Paulgaard, 2019; Paulgaard, 2019) these are not rural areas in decline. Instead, Orkney and Shetland are relatively economically vibrant communities, for example, the Gross Value Added (GVA) of Orkney is above the Scottish average, and the GVA for Shetland is higher still (Cooper et al., 2020). Further there has been strong employment growth in recent years in Orkney and Shetland, with a 13% and 15% growth respectively between 2008-2011 (Skills Development Scotland, 2014a). Statistics for Orkney and Shetland show that both communities have very high levels of employment (86.8% in Orkney, 87.3% in Shetland, compared to 73.1% nationally) (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2017b, 2017a), and very low unemployment rates (1.3% in 2019 in Orkney, and 1.5% in Shetland) (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2019b,

2019b). However, there can be a high level of volatility in the economic and employment contexts in the islands (Cooper et al., 2020).

Although the islands of Orkney and Shetland are similar in some respects, in terms of the make-up of their economies they are “remarkably” different (Cooper et al., 2020, p. 1). Thinking about salary, Shetland has significantly higher average salaries than nationally (at £592 median full time weekly gross earnings, compared to £527 nationally), whereas Orkney has lower average salaries (at £505 median full time weekly gross earnings) (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2017b, 2017a). Part-time employment is higher than the national average in Orkney (at 30%) but lower in Shetland (at 25%) (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2017b, 2017a). Self-employment rates are relatively high in Orkney, being above national averages; Shetland, in contrast, has below average rates (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2017b, 2017a, 2019b, 2019a).

Thinking about sectors of employment, the labour markets also show variation from national patterns, and between the islands. So, for example, levels of public sector employment are significantly higher than Scottish averages: compared to the 25% Scottish average there is 47% public sector employment in Shetland and 44% in Orkney (Skills Development Scotland, 2014a). Orkney and Shetland also have higher proportions of employment by industry in agriculture, forestry and fishing, and transport and storage than nationally (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2019a, 2019b). Marine industries are particularly important in both island groups: Shetland lands more seafood than England and Ireland combined (Skills Development Scotland, 2014a) with seafood industries contributing more than one-quarter of the total value of the Shetland economy in 2011 (Napier, 2020). A key difference between Orkney and Shetland is that rather than fishing, it is agriculture that is a key industry in Orkney (Cooper et al., 2020). There is therefore some truth in the old adage that “the Orcadian was a farmer with a boat, the Shetlander was a fisherman with a croft” (Irvine & Morrison, 1987, p. 43). However, compared to other locations in Scotland, Orkney has the second largest share of employment in fishing after Shetland, demonstrating that fishing is also important in the islands (FAI, 2020).

Since the discovery of North Sea oil in the 1970s, the oil and gas industry has been a significant presence in the islands of Orkney and Shetland. Oil is “often the principal industry associated with Shetland” (Napier, 2020, p. 21) and remains a significant contributor to the Shetland economy, despite declining production since the 1980s. Shetland is home to the Sullom Voe oil and gas terminal, which provides employment for local Shetland residents, as well as bringing in a large number of workers from elsewhere. The impact of oil and gas in the islands is therefore a combination of direct employment at the Sullom Voe terminal, and impacts on the wider economy, including the provision of accommodation for incoming workers, transport facilities (including not only the general travel hubs, but also through the specialist airport at Scatsta that handles oil and gas traffic), and engineering and construction and catering (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2015a). The oil industry is also significant in Orkney, with the Flotta oil terminal handling approximately 10% of the UK’s oil output, and alongside the terminal, the economy benefits significantly from the use of Scapa Flow (one of the world’s largest natural deep-water harbours) by oil tankers, including for ship to ship transfer of oil (Cooper et al., 2020).

In terms of other industries, tourism remains a growing industry in the islands – with Orkney being the most popular of all Scottish ports as a cruise ship destination in 2018, and Shetland also being a key destination (FAI, 2020). Tourism and the creative industries are also identified as two significant potential growth sectors for Shetland (Shetland Islands Council, 2018). In Orkney research and innovation is identified as a potential growth sector, with The University of the Highlands and Islands, Robert Gordon University and Heriot-Watt University all present in Orkney “in some capacity” (Cooper et al., 2020, p. 42). Another significant and growing economic sector for Orkney is renewable energy (Cooper et al., 2020; Watts, 2018). Orkney has approximately 9% of the UK’s onshore wind sites, is home to 13 of the UK’s 19 tidal installations (Cooper et al., 2020) and is home to the European Marine Energy Centre (EMEC), “the world’s first and foremost test site for real life deployment of marine energy devices” (Cooper et al., 2020, p. 30).

Thinking about labour market opportunities it is important to note that there are pronounced differences in labour market experiences between genders in both

islands. In Shetland for example, the average weekly gross earnings for men are £604, but for women are £490 (compared to £561 for men nationally and £474 for women), this demonstrates a significant gender gap, with women's earnings much closer to national levels (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2017b). Similarly in Orkney, average male salaries are above the Scottish average, and women's salaries are below (Cooper et al., 2020). Potentially these gendered differences have a relationship to the relative economic strengths of the islands, with men more likely to work offshore and in the oil industry, as well as in construction and manufacturing and transport, whereas women are more likely to work in care, education, health, retail and accommodation and food (Cooper et al., 2020; Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2017b, 2017a).

Island economies can be prone to high levels of economic fluctuation (Baldacchino & Bertram, 2009), and this is particularly a risk in Shetland, where the oil and gas and fishing sectors are relatively more important. Both of these sectors are highly lucrative but prone to flux, and vulnerable to impacts from Brexit (Shetland Islands Council, 2018). The downturn in the oil and gas industry in 2015 caused significant concern about the impact on the economies of the islands, and particularly Shetland (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2015a), resulting in redundancies in Shetland and in Aberdeen and further afield. Aberdeen as “the oil and gas capital of Europe” (University of Aberdeen, 2020, para. 1) was particularly badly hit with a report in 2016 suggesting that 67% of 16-35 year olds were thinking about moving from the city in the next five years (Braiden, 2016). This provides very important context for this research project given that the crash in oil and gas happened directly before the cohort of students in this research were about to leave higher education, and given the significance of the industry both to the islands as well as Aberdeen (a popular university destination for students from the islands – see Chapter 6).

### **Young People in the Islands**

This final section of the chapter explores some of the evidence surrounding young people's destinations after school from the islands and the evidence surrounding youth migration.

#### ***Destinations After School***

Related to the strong labour markets, generally employment prospects for young people in the islands are very positive (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2018b, 2018a), and school leavers from the islands are more likely to enter employment than nationally (Figure 3). However, the small numbers of young people leaving school each year, and fluctuations in economic activity in the islands, can result in high variations year on year. So for example, considering two recent reports, in one Orkney is highlighted as having substantially lower than average rates of economic inactivity for young people (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2018a) and in the other, Orkney is identified as having the highest youth unemployment rate in the region – 23.9% (Skills Development Scotland, 2014a).

Related to high levels of young people entering employment, young people in the islands are generally proportionally less likely to enter higher education or further education than nationally (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2018b, 2018a). However, again there are fluctuations in these rates, with the data in 2013/14 showing that young people in Orkney were actually more likely to enter higher education than nationally (Figure 3). Typically, a greater proportion of young people enter higher education from Orkney than Shetland. The figures overall show that the actual numbers of leavers every year is relatively small (Figure 3) with the numbers entering higher education straight from school for 2012/13 and 2013/14 varying between 75-90 from each island.

**Figure 3.**

*Destination of School Leavers from Orkney and Shetland 2012/13 and 2013/14*

	Total leavers	Higher Education	Further Education	Employment	Unemployed seeking
Orkney 2012/13	272	90 (33.1%)	66 (24.3%)	87 (32.0%)	13 (4.8%)
Orkney 2013/14	208	82 (39.4%)	42 (20.2%)	62 (29.8%)	6 (2.9%)
Shetland 2012/13	269	74 (27.5%)	53 (19.7%)	111 (41.3%)	7 (2.6%)

Shetland 2013/4	271	81 (29.9%)	49 (18.1%)	113 (41.7%)	12 (4.4%)
Scotland 2012/13	52,801	19,269 (36.5%)	14,658 (27.8%)	10,769 (20.4%)	3,735 (7.1%)
Scotland 2013/14	51,876	20,038 (38.6%)	13,665 (26.3%)	11,263 (21.7%)	3,256 (6.3%)

*Note:* Data shown is extracted from the School Leaver Destinations Data for 2012/13 and 2013/14 produced by Skills Development Scotland (2013, 2014b). Not all categories of leaver are included, those in training, voluntary work, activity agreements and unemployed not seeking are not included, which is why percentages do not sum to 100.

### ***Youth Migration***

Concerns about youth out-migration from the Highlands and Islands region including Orkney and Shetland are longstanding (see Chapter 1). In recent years a series of reports have been commissioned on the topic by the regional development agency, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) (Hall Aitken, 2007, 2009; Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2009a, 2009b, 2015b, 2018c). The evidence in these reports suggests that the population of 15-30 year olds in the Highlands and Islands declined between 2011-2016, and that projected population change between 2016-2041 for 15-30 year olds shows further declines, with some of the most acute declines in the region being in Orkney (-15%) and Shetland (-18%) (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2018c).

The commissioned reports typically identify the role of education and employment in out-migration of young people. Recent reports note that even though provision of further and higher education is increasing in the region (and perceptions of this provision are improving) a key challenge remains a lack of education options comparable to those available in other areas (Hall Aitken, 2009; Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2009b, 2018a, 2018b). Therefore, increasing the breadth of education options remains a key recommendation for the region (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2018c).

Regarding employment motivations for out-migration, the reports identify a challenge specifically around a lack of opportunities for career progression rather than a lack of jobs *per se* (Hall Aitken, 2009; Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2009b). Here, the research suggests there are significant limitations in terms of graduate level employment (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2018c), and there is some indication that young people feel they need to go away in order to progress their career before (potentially) returning to the region (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2009b). Expanding the available graduate roles in the region, and particularly the ScotGrad graduate placement scheme has therefore also been a key recommendation (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2018c).

Although the narrative of education and employment as key drivers of out-migration is strong, the evidence actually suggests a more complex picture. So, for example, out-migration is not evident equally among all age groups but is “particularly concentrated” in the 15-19 age group (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2018c, p. 5) and indeed in recent years, the 20-24 and 25-29 age categories have seen net *in*-migration (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2018c, p. 5). This is particularly important because where 15-19 is an age range associated with entering further and higher education, 20-29 could be associated with students completing further and higher education, and potentially returning to their home areas. Indeed, graduate migration data from 2016/17 shows that of the graduates in the Highlands and Islands region six months after graduation, 57.4% are returners (Alexander, 2020, p. 7).

Questions of why some people return and others do not, are touched upon in these reports but not given a huge amount of attention. Key findings suggest that young people feel a strong sense of belonging or affinity to the area (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2009b), and that this is even more marked in Orkney and Shetland than elsewhere in the region (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2018c). Young people in Orkney and Shetland are also the most likely to participate in their local communities than in any other part of the Highlands and Islands and have the strongest affinity with their local communities (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2018c, p. 46). For returners, as well as young people who stay in the region, key motivations for being in the islands include families and access to employment (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2009b). Wider lifestyle factors have also been

identified as important, especially for returners and young incomers to the region – and particularly the availability of housing (Hall Aitken, 2009; Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c).

## **Summary**

This chapter has identified some of the key features of the island communities which are the focus of this research project. Being relatively small communities at some distance from the Scottish mainland, and being distinctive socially, culturally and economically, these sites potentially provide an excellent context for researching the impact of geographical location on career development. Key details of the specific nature of the island contexts were outlined, along with evidence around young people's destinations and migration trajectories from the islands. Although the reports considered in this section provide a very useful context and identify the importance of education and employment in youth migration, what these reports do not consider is how specific educational and career trajectories may be an important component in whether or not young people stay, leave or return, and how returning (or staying) may impact on longer term career trajectories. These questions form a key part of the basis of this current study.

## **Chapter 4: Literature Review**

After the exploration of some of the theoretical and conceptual literature around place and career development in Chapter 2 and the introduction to the islands of Orkney and Shetland in Chapter 3, this chapter will present an overview of the relevant empirical literature as it relates to the mobility, educational trajectories and career development of young people with a specific focus on those from rural and island areas. The chapter is in two parts, firstly exploring migration from rural and island areas, and secondly exploring migration of graduates. The literature in these areas is relatively distinct, which is why the chapter has been split in this way. Each section is further split into three subsections relating to resources for mobility, belonging and career pathways. These topics are broadly aligned to the three core components of the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 2 – capital, habitus, and lived experience over time-space.

### **Youth Migration From Rural and Island Areas**

Thinking about youth migration from rural and island areas, it is important to start by addressing the question of who migrates and why. Consistent with the evidence from commissioned reports in Orkney and Shetland, there is strong evidence that out-migration from rural and island communities is heavily motivated by improved education and employment prospects elsewhere (Alston, 2004; Bæck & Paulgaard, 2019; Jamieson & Groves, 2008). However, more in-depth exploration reveals a much more complex picture of decision-making (Ní Laoire, 2000; Stockdale, 2002a). In particular the literature suggests that, as in the islands, movements of young people for education “dominates” out-migration flows from rural areas (Stockdale, 2002a, p. 355, see also Haartsen & Thissen, 2014), with the evidence for out-migration for employment reasons in rural Scotland much more opaque (Stockdale, 2002a). This suggests that any simple understanding of migration as motivated by education and employment opportunities may not be wholly appropriate.

Indeed, although a common line of argument is that out-migration is associated with higher and further education because of the paucity of options in rural and island areas (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2018b), the evidence suggests that migration is not just about the availability of different opportunities but

that moving away from rural areas may also be desired as part of establishing independence, and for self-development (Alexander, 2013; Cooke & Petersen, 2019; Crow, 2010; Hayfield, 2017; Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2018c; Holdsworth, 2009). The importance of new places as providing opportunities for “transformation... and identity reconstruction” is also identified as an important motivator of international student mobility (Tran, 2016, p. 1269). These ideas may be reinforced by traditions of higher education in the UK, which emphasise the value of mobility for university in terms of facilitating “rounded” education, self-development and independence (Holdsworth, 2009, p. 1857).

The associations of mobility with success and self-development are potentially partly related to the privileging of mobility in modern times (see Chapter 2) however the association of mobility with success is likely to be reinforced for rural young people because of the nature of urban and rural space. For rural young people, urban areas may allow greater anonymity and opportunities for experimentation (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; Hayfield, 2017). The “metrocentricity of youth culture” (Farrugia, 2014) or the “urban ethos” of youth (Bæck, 2004, p. 113) may also reinforce the appeal of urban places to young people (Crow, 2010; Griffiths & Maile, 2014; King, 2018; Walford & Stockdale, 2015). Here, potentially, young people moving to urban areas can be thought of as a form of “lifestyle migration” (Benson & O’Reilly, 2016; Walford & Stockdale, 2015). For rural young people, then, narratives of self development and growth can align with urban notions of modernity so that rural areas are “associated with the past and stability, [and] urban areas are associated with the future and change” (Wiborg, 2001, p. 33). Importantly, in rural areas, mobility itself can become a signifier of being a successful, independent person – so that individuals who consider opportunities outside of their local areas may be viewed as having a range of positive attributes, being more confident, more motivated and more open to change (Green et al., 2007; Jamieson & Groves, 2008).

The value of progression to higher education for rural students is therefore likely to be only *partly* related to the actual higher education course that they enter, and at least partly about the process of moving away. Indeed in Stockdale’s (2002a) typology of out-migrants from rural Scotland she identified two distinct categories of mover – those who are “education motivated career aspirers” and those who are

“escapees through education”: that is those for whom education is the *means* rather than the motivator for mobility. Nationally the evidence suggests the association of mobility with higher education can be problematic for those who do not move away for study (Holdsworth, 2009; Holton & Finn, 2018), and this may be particularly acute for island young people who may experience greater self-questioning, and perceptions of “failure” (Alexander, 2013; Hayfield, 2017). Notably, in Tasmania, Easthope and Gabriel (2008) identified that leaving for education could be viewed positively in island communities, even where a student does not complete their course and later returns to the island. Given the importance of mobility, the idea that increasing opportunities in island and rural communities is a way of addressing youth migration, is potentially problematic, as even where opportunities are available in a local area, young people may still choose to move (Haartsen & Thissen, 2014).

Having established the particular significance of higher education in youth out-migration from rural areas and having challenged the simple association of higher education opportunity with out-migration, the following sections of the chapter will consider the evidence surrounding the mobility trajectories of rural young people.

### ***Resources for Mobility***

Despite mobility being strongly valued by rural young people, the evidence in the literature shows that there are variations in the relative mobilities of individuals and the trajectories they follow. These can be considered in terms of the mobility capital of individuals, and the influence of spatial structures.

**Mobility Capital.** Corbett’s (2007a, 2007b) work in Atlantic Canada has explored the notion of mobility capital as it applies to the relative mobility of rural young people. Corbett (2007a) suggests that mobility capital is particularly engendered by the education system which, drawing on Giddens (1991), he describes as the “quintessential institution of disembedding” giving rural young people an “outsider’s perspective on their lifeworld” (pp.251-252). Further, the education system acts to sever student ties to their localities, presenting their communities as “peripheral places playing an ever diminishing role in an increasingly centralized and urban political economy” (p. 238). Here, the education

system potentially acts to convey a set of values whereby mobility and urban life are privileged, as well as conferring the qualifications necessary for mobility (Corbett, 2007a). Certainly, consistent with this perspective, across the literature high academic achievement is associated with visualising futures outside of local communities (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; Corbett, 2007a; Jamieson, 2000).

Alongside the education system, the development of mobility capital is also facilitated by background, with strong evidence that previous experiences of mobility impact on the likelihood of future mobilities (Findlay & Li, 1997; Findlay & Stockdale, 2003; Halfacree & Boyle, 1993; Ní Laoire, 2008). Corbett (2007b) also considers background more broadly, including identifying the role of “family educational conversations, travel, or extended family linkages outside the immediate locale” (p.782) in the development of mobility capital. Similar themes are identified elsewhere in the literature (Brooks & Waters, 2010; Murphy-Lejeune, 2017; Nugin, 2019). In the literature relating to international student mobility the experience of “the first experience of adaptation” to another culture is also identified as important (Murphy-Lejeune, 2017, p. 52).

A wide range of evidence from Scotland and further afield exists to support the contention that the family is particularly important in the process of acquisition of mobility capital. Young people who are the children of migrants, particularly incomers to an area, have been found to have a greater likelihood of mobility, compared to those who have grown up in an area (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; Jamieson & Groves, 2008; Stockdale et al., 2000). Alongside parental mobilities, the importance of *sibling* mobilities has also been identified – in coastal New South Wales Drozdowski (2008) identified young people with siblings who had already moved were more likely to intend to move themselves (see also Rosvall et al., 2018). Further, in terms of friends and wider family relationships, the spatial distribution of social capital has also been identified as important – with those who have networks primarily based in a local area less likely to move, than those who have more distributed networks (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; Green & White, 2007).

Although the literature identifies that previous experiences of mobility are important, research has shown that these previous experiences do not necessarily

have to be of residential migration – but daily and temporary mobilities such as holidays, can also support mobility by offering experiences of different spaces (Wierenga, 2009). Further, the social and other activities that young people engage in can facilitate an expansion of a young person’s spatial scope (Green & White, 2007). Experiences of schooling may also result in widening spatial horizons, including, for example, attending boarding school which embeds mobility into school experiences for the elite (Brooks & Waters, 2010). In very rural areas, including rural Scotland, young people in state education may also be required to board away on a weekly basis, and this can act as a “bridge” for moving away permanently (Crow, 2010).

The role of family background in the mobility of rural young people can be connected more broadly to the literature on social class and higher education. Corbett (2007a) suggests that where some young people will come from family backgrounds that support mobility, other young people from more rooted families are likely to “resist” the mobile discourses of education. There is some synergy in this argument with the idea that middle-class young people come from a background where their family habitus is more aligned with the educational habitus, feeling more “at home” in the educational system than children from working-class backgrounds (Lehmann, 2009, 2013; Reay et al., 2009). However, Corbett’s work effectively identifies how mobility can also be seen as a constituent part of both educational habitus and middle-class habitus (see also Forsey, 2015).

There is a wide range of research that has considered higher education mobilities in terms of social class (Brooks & Waters, 2010; Clayton et al., 2009; Donnelly & Evans, 2016; Donnelly & Gamsu, 2018; Holdsworth, 2009). This has generally shown that mobility for higher education is positioned as the norm for middle-class students, a “rite of passage” (Clayton et al., 2009, p. 165), and has also shown that mobility trajectories vary by class with regional mobility “clearly the preserve of those students from the highest NS-SEC groupings” (Donnelly & Gamsu, 2018, p. 967). Further, mobility for higher education has been identified as a way of *enacting* social class (Brooks & Waters, 2010), and in the context of rural areas, out-migration has been connected to social class (Rye, 2011). Migration for higher education has also been discussed in terms of enacting rural middle-class identities (Jamieson, 2000; Wierenga, 2009).

Although mobility, class and education potentially reinforce each other, they may also lead to complex cross-cutting themes; for example, not all young people with histories of mobility will be middle-class, and not all middle-class young people will have direct personal experience of mobility. How these themes intersect is likely to be important, so for example Jamieson's (2000) research identified the importance of "*both* [emphasis added] social class background and family history of migration or rootedness ... [in] young people's sense of social divisions, community and attachment or detachment to their community" (p. 211). Effectively, then, although there is some association of class and mobility, this is complicated by cross-cutting attachments to place and histories of mobility (the topic of "attachment" is considered in more depth in a later section of this review).

**Spatial Structures.** Spatial structures also have an important role in the relative mobilities of individuals, with different places providing different contexts for mobility (Forsberg, 2019; Kaufmann et al., 2004, 2018). So, for example, the relative accessibility of different activities or kinds of spaces, will vary between rural areas and according to transport infrastructures (Green & White, 2007). This may result in quite different experiences of space between young people in rural areas that are more proximate to urban areas, and those which are less proximate (Evans, 2016). Further, given the greater "friction of distance" for young people in rural areas, differences *between* young people in terms of how able they are to enact mobility may be more acute in rural areas, so that "variations in resources seem to be even more important for rural youths than they reportedly are for their urban peers" (Rosvall et al., 2018, p. 50). At an even more granular level Nugin (2019) has also identified the importance of local mobilities as they are structured by, for example, school transport systems, for impacting on the activities that young people can engage in.

Thinking about the spatial elements of mobility, a growing body of literature has emphasised how places are shaped by mobilities past and present, and how these mobilities influence the future mobility trajectories of young people (Allen & Hollingworth, 2013; Henderson et al., 2007; Nugin, 2019; Stockdale & Haartsen, 2018). This includes the locations that young people choose to move to for higher education (Donnelly & Gamsu, 2018; Gibbons & Vignoles, 2012). The background of individuals will impact on how they are positioned in terms of any localised

culture of migration (Allen & Hollingworth, 2013; Evans, 2016) with Donnelly and Gamsu (2019) for example discussing spatialised social, ethnic and economic “geometries of power” (p. 1) that influence student decisions. However, it remains the case that “even after holding constant social background and HE choices” there is evidence of an “enduring importance of regions themselves in predicting regional mobility” (Donnelly & Gamsu, 2018, p. 972). The importance of localities themselves in terms of the destinations of young migrants has also been observed in Scotland, with Aberdeen a favoured destination for many islanders, particularly from the Northern Isles (Alexander, 2015a; Cooke & Petersen, 2019), Glasgow being a popular destination for those from the Western Isles (Hall Aitken, 2007; Stockdale, 2002b), and Edinburgh relatively popular with students from the Northern Isles (Alexander, 2015a; Lasselle, Kirby, and Macpherson, n.d.).

Although the reasons why certain cultures develop are often indistinct, issues of relative distance are likely to be important, with proximity a common theme in the literature relating to university transition (Clayton et al., 2009; Donnelly & Evans, 2016; Gibbons & Vignoles, 2012). “Distance” is, however, a challenging concept, especially when it comes to island communities – indeed in Scotland modelling of the relative different accessibility of universities has highlighted the limitations of Euclidean (straight line) distance measures and the importance of measures of time and costs of travel (Lasselle et al., n.d.). Here, the structures of transportation are important (Kaufmann et al., 2004, 2018), and are particularly so in island communities, in constructing some destinations as more popular than others (Cuzzocrea, 2018). Historic patterns of connection between communities are also important (Donnelly & Gamsu, 2018). For islands, these connections can create established communities of islanders in specific mainland locations who are able to provide ready-made social networks for new migrants, as well as providing information and practical assistance for mobility (Cooke & Petersen, 2019; Hayfield, 2017).

Alongside the importance of localities in influencing mobility pathways, other spatial structures may create specific spatial horizons for young people. In particular pursuing some educational routes may limit geographical choice – so for example the UK training to be a doctor or a vet requires attendance at one of only a small number of higher education institutions (Donnelly & Gamsu, 2018; see also Faggian

et al., 2007b on the relatively high mobility of medical students). Specific educational courses (even where they are offered at a number of institutions), combined with a desire to remain in proximate locations may also create well-worn geographical trajectories – so for example in Stockdale’s (2002b) research she found that from North Lewis in the Western Isles “females traditionally embarking on nursing or hairdressing careers complete their training in Inverness (Highlands) following a period of study at Lews Castle College (Stornoway)” (p. 52).

### ***Mobility, Belonging and Attachment***

The previous section considered the relative mobility of young people in rural areas in terms of resources (or capitals in Bourdieusian terminology). In this section, relative mobilities are considered in terms of belonging and attachments to rural areas, with the notion of belonging more closely aligned to Bourdieusian habitus (see Chapter 2).

**Attachment to Place.** A strong theme in the literature, is that the likelihood of out-migration relates to relative levels of spatial attachment (Green & White, 2007), or spatial belonging (Cuervo & Wyn, 2017). Despite belonging typically being thought to relate to less expansive geographical horizons (Prince, 2014), the evidence in this area actually suggests a more complex picture – with some out-migrants experiencing a higher sense of belonging to their home locations than some stayers (Evans, 2016; Jamieson, 2000; Ramage, 2019). This has led to suggestions that attachment / detachment does not hold a straightforward relationship with mobility (Drozdowski, 2008; Evans, 2016; Gustafson, 2001). However, where individuals experience a strong sense of belonging to a local area, but still move away, mobility can be experienced as a dilemma, with choices to move also being marked by feelings of guilt (Glendinning et al., 2003; Ní Laoire, 2000).

In terms of relative levels of belonging, the literature shows an association between the length of time in a location and a stronger sense of belonging (Cuervo & Wyn, 2017; Fallov et al., 2013), as well as evidence that parental belonging impacts on young people’s sense of belonging (Abbott-Chapman et al., 2014). Relationships with people in a local area are also important, with Green and White (2007) suggesting that “strong attachment to the immediate locality may be

indicative of the strengths of ties to family and friends” (p.2). Importantly, the *capacity* for mobility is associated with local belonging in some cases – so those who feel they *cannot* move may feel they belong less than those who feel that they are able to move (Cuervo & Wyn, 2017; Henderson et al., 2007).

Feelings of belonging may also be connected with experiences of rural places, with divisions classically being identified between narratives of the “rural dull” and the “rural idyll” (Rye, 2006b, p. 409). In the literature there has been a tendency to consider these as mutually exclusive positions having a direct influence on migration intentions (Glendinning et al., 2003; Rye, 2006b). However, recent research has shown that for many rural young people the different narratives of rural life may co-exist, resulting in experiences of place marked by conflict and ambivalence (Haartsen & Thissen, 2014; Pedersen, 2018; Pedersen & Gram, 2018). Pedersen (2018) uses the term “multidimensionality” (p. 684) to describe the co-existing different meanings that different places can have for individuals. Further these meanings of rural places can change as a young person ages – with the aspects that were positive as young children becoming less positive as young people age, with “cosy” places becoming increasingly limiting (Glendinning et al., 2003; Pedersen & Gram, 2018).

There are, again, potentially spatial variations in experiences of attachment, and perceptions of communities. Importantly, young people in relatively more remote communities are potentially more likely to display patterns of high attachment alongside high youth migration (compared to lower anticipated mobility, but lower attachment in less remote communities) (Evans, 2016). Spatial belonging may also be stronger in tightly-knit communities and in communities with different economic and social histories (Donnelly & Evans, 2016). In Scotland positive evaluations of the natural environment and lifestyle in the most remote parts of the region have also been found, alongside evidence that these evaluations do not necessarily impact on young people’s decisions to out-migrate (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2009b). In island communities, experiences of belonging are potentially accentuated – with suggestions that islands are particularly close-knit communities which may engender stronger belonging than other areas (Hay, 2006; Randall et al., 2014; Simões et al., 2020).

**Out-migration, Belonging and Returning.** Considering that many rural and island leavers retain strong place attachments, it is perhaps unsurprising that the evidence shows many young people leave their communities but with a desire to return in the future (Cooke & Petersen, 2019; Crescenzi et al., 2017; Cuzzocrea, 2018; Eacott & Sonn, 2006; Haartsen & Thissen, 2014; Hayfield, 2017; Milbourne & Kitchen, 2014; Nilsson, 2003; Simões et al., 2020). The desire to return may be so strong, that in some island communities a culture of migration may include both out-migration *and* return migration (Hayfield, 2017).

The possibility of future returns demonstrates how migration is embedded in wider life-courses (Findlay & Li, 1997; Findlay & Stockdale, 2003; Halfacree & Boyle, 1993; Ní Laoire, 2008). Importantly, the evidence suggests that future returns are anticipated at certain points in life, particularly at the point of settling down and having children (Henderson et al., 2007; Ní Laoire, 2008; Saar & Saar, 2020; Tyrrell & Kraftl, 2015). Here, it is possible to see how the safety and security of a rural area may be positive in early childhood, be experienced as a restriction in young adulthood (Pedersen & Gram, 2018), but then become positive again at the point of raising children (Crow, 2010; Hayfield, 2017; Ní Laoire, 2008).

Again, it is important to note issues of difference and diversity here, with some individuals potentially having a stronger intention to return including those who feel more attached, who have more positive experiences of childhood, or have extended family in the area (Ní Laoire, 2008). The specific spatial location is also important to intentions to return with variations apparent across rural communities (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; Evans, 2016). The appeal of returning may relate at least in part to the strength of regional or national identities, and the strength of belonging engendered by a community (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; Hayfield, 2017; Ní Laoire, 2008). On this basis, it is possible that narratives of return may be particularly important for young people in island communities, given the evidence that island communities may engender stronger belonging than other areas (Hay, 2006; Randall et al., 2014; Simões et al., 2020).

Interestingly, some research has identified that although return to a rural area may be desirable, this is not *necessarily* always a leaver's home area. So, in Pedersen's (2018) study of Danish higher education students who had moved from

a rural to an urban area, she found that while many students wanted to return to the countryside later in life “quite a few did not wish to return to the exact place of their own childhood” (p.695). In a related argument Haartsen and Thissen (2014) suggested that understanding motivations for return migration should distinguish between attachments to general rural areas and to specific locations.

This discussion highlights that the assumption that leaving, staying and returning, are discrete processes which relate to relative attachment to a community is problematic. Further, simply distinguishing between stayers and leavers overlooks the ways that migration trajectories may be embedded in the life-course and include potential returns (Nugin, 2019; Stockdale & Haartsen, 2018).

### ***Anticipated Futures: Career Aspirations***

Given the evidence that some young leavers may intend to return to their communities, a question is raised about whether career decisions may be made on the basis of potential future returns. In particular in the Faroe islands Hayfield (2017) has suggested that young people may work at “remigration, sometimes before they even leave the islands” (p.9). Further, given that careers also develop over time, questions may also be raised about how far career and migration intentions may change over time. The literature which considers career choices and aspirations is discussed in more depth below.

**Local and Global Aspirations.** Where the belonging literature has typically considered how young people relate to their geographical spaces at the present time, some work has considered how attachments and ways of conceptualising spaces may impact on envisioned future selves, including an individual’s career aspirations (Lundqvist, 2019; Prince, 2014; Wierenga, 2009) Prince’s (2014) work for example considered how social representations of the places young people inhabit (as “ghettoes” or “slums” for example) impact on future aspirations. Here, the “rural dull” and the “rural idyll” (Rye, 2006b, p. 409) are important narratives that may influence the ways that young people see their futures. Other dominant narratives of rural places as “in decline” or “old fashioned” may have particular impacts on young people’s envisioned futures (Bæck, 2004; Corbett, 2007a). Island communities are also particularly prone to certain representations, for example as paradise or prison (Baldacchino, 2005; Hay, 2006). These representations have

impacts on how individuals construct and understand their careers (Stalker & Burnett, 2016). So, for example the tourist industry in particular relies on constructions of islands as good places for relaxation, rather than places of productivity or work (Stalker & Burnett, 2016).

Where the literature that suggests a lack of “good jobs” is a key driver of out-migration (Cooke & Petersen, 2019; Crow, 2010; Jamieson & Groves, 2008), a question therefore can be raised about whether it is *actually* a lack of jobs that drives out-migration, or whether it is the constructions of island or rural places and the position of work within these. Here, it is not just the constructions of local spaces that are important but also wider representations of other places as transmitted through the media and other technologies (Dunkley & Panelli, 2007; Pedersen, 2018; Wierenga, 2009). The intersection of local and global representations impacts on the ways young people may conceptualise themselves and their futures.

Despite the importance of constructions of places, a number of scholars argue that the material local environments (for example school, community and home settings) remain the primary sites of identity construction (Dunkley & Panelli, 2007; Fallov et al., 2013; Farrugia et al., 2014b). The role of the education system in embedding notions of local and global places has already been discussed (Corbett, 2007a), but importantly this may vary between school environments (Davies et al., 2021; Donnelly & Evans, 2016; Rosvall et al., 2018), and according to the staff (teachers and guidance staff) within them and how they potentially reinforce messages of mobility (Corbett, 2007a; Donnelly & Evans, 2016; Holt, 2012; Prince, 2014; Shepherd & Hooley, 2016). More widely, other social groups and individuals within a community provide a context for decision-making (Turner, 2020) but these different interests and people may experience and construct places differently (Lefebvre, 1991; Savage et al., 2005; Smith & Phillips, 2001) providing quite different contexts for young people.

The interrelation of working identities and spatialised identities has also been considered by some authors. So Bæck and Paulgaard (2019) for example suggest that in modernity work is increasingly “viewed as essential for gaining self-development and self-realisation” (p.13), but that some individuals do not ascribe to

these values. Instead, where work is valued in terms of earning, remaining within a rural region is seen as less problematic than for those who prioritise work as self-development (Bæck & Paulgaard, 2019). The importance of constructions of the value of work in orientations to mobility has also been discussed in a range of literature, including literature relating to Shetland and the Faroe Islands (Cooke & Petersen, 2019; Prince, 2014). In Wierenga's (2009) research in rural Tasmania, she identifies four orientations for young people, based on whether they have a local or global focus, and whether their stories of identity are more or less clear. Global young people with clear stories of identity (termed "exploring" students) all "expect work to be fulfilling in its own right, as a career and as a formal program in which they will engage" (Wierenga, 2009, p. 107). Further, in Wierenga's research all middle-class research participants were "exploring", which suggests that middle-class constructions of work may reinforce mobility intentions of rural young people.

Importantly, some research has identified that work is not always the primary focus for young people. Henderson et al. (2007), for example suggested that young people operate in four main fields: education, work, leisure and consumption, and domestic, and that independence, autonomy and competence *may* be expressed through the workplace, but equally these attributes may be expressed through other fields. Other research has also identified the importance of activities other than paid work (such as taking care of significant others) for development of identities and independence (Holdsworth, 2009; Holdsworth & Morgan, 2005).

The longer-term aspirations of young people may also include a focus that includes multiple areas of life. Lundqvist (2019) for example, has identified how rural young people mostly aspire to a "good life", consisting of "a comfortable and secure (family) life with sufficient steady income from an enjoyable job enabling professional and personal development" (p.9). Notably then for Lundqvist, career aspirations are relatively modest, and situated within wider aspirations in terms of lifestyle (see also Woodman & Wyn, 2018). Lundqvist's (2019) research also highlights the importance of timescale and longitudinal career development, recognising that although many young people seek to leave their rural areas initially, their long term aspirations for a good life are in "almost all" cases envisaged back in their "hometown" (p.9).

**Rural Career Choices.** Where individuals may construct future aspirations based on perceptions of place and work generally, a small amount of research has also considered the role of *specific* career choices. Indications of the importance of specific career pathways are often implicit in the existing literature, Wierenga (2009) for example suggests that “global” young people with clear identities have “plans anchored to occupation or area of interest”, and those with a local focus and clear identities have “specific and locally grounded” ideas (p.77). Similarly, Rönnlund et al. (2018) identify that young leavers can pursue more diverse occupations, including higher status and better paid work. In contrast, those who remain in their communities after school are found to have a much lower ability to choose their career direction – in line with Roberts’ (1997) opportunity structure theory, their choices are found to be highly restricted in limited local labour markets (Evans, 2016; Rönnlund et al., 2018).

Although rural leavers are often understood as having broader horizons, Evans’ (2016) research in Wales has identified the importance of local context on career choice even for those who leave an area – with working in health and education being popular aspirations in her study, reflecting the dominance of these sectors in the local area. Evans here notes a contradiction, with young people typically expressing career aspirations consistent with the local region, but *also* expressing the intention to move away. Speculating on the reasons for this she suggests that the dominance of the public sector in employment in the area has led to a “local culture ... in which private sector employment is considered marginal and public sector employment a culturally and socially acceptable norm, reaffirmed by the types of employment enjoyed by ... [the young peoples’] parents” (Evans, 2016, p. 512). Similar findings related to the importance of career and employment experiences of parents and siblings as a means of conveying information about the local labour market have also been identified elsewhere (Corbett & Bæck, 2016; Rosvall et al., 2018).

Although the labour market is often understood to be important in terms of school-leaver destinations (Roberts, 1997, 2009), the potential importance to leavers in terms of selecting routes that allow a “planned return” may be underestimated in the existing literature (Evans, 2016; Haartsen & Thissen, 2014). What is important here is that although rural areas may be thought of as having

restricted employment opportunities, this is not the case for *all* employment – particularly education (teachers) and healthcare (doctors and nurses) (Bjarnason & Edvardsson, 2017; Cooke & Petersen, 2019; Corcoran et al., 2010; Rérat, 2014a). However, in rural areas these kinds of opportunities often require young people to leave for a period of time to gain the appropriate qualifications for these roles (Cooke & Petersen, 2019). Suggestions that for some young people leaving the Highlands and Islands area of Scotland may also be following specific trajectories to allow planned return have also been made in the literature (Alexander, 2015a; Hall Aitken, 2009). However, there is a paucity of literature that explores whether such strategic choices *do* actually allow students to return home, and whether aspirations to return remain for students after they have left. Whether a young person is able to return will, to a certain extent depend on the local labour market, and as Cooke and Peterson summarise “there tend to be fewer of those sorts of jobs, ... [and] vacancies tend to occur infrequently” (2019, p. 106). Here the specificity of different labour markets is also likely to be relevant – both in terms of the size (and therefore likelihood of different jobs arising) and in terms of the nature of opportunities which are available (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; Cooke & Petersen, 2019; Evans, 2016; Paulgaard, 2019; Rönnlund et al., 2018).

**Career Pathways, Places and Gender.** One final important area raised in the literature surrounding rural career aspirations is the relationship with gender. Key to this is the potentially gendered nature of rural and island labour markets, where key sectors include primary extractive industries (which are predominantly coded as male) and the public sector, including healthcare and education (which is dominated by women) (Corcoran et al., 2010; Leibert, 2015; Rosvall, 2020). What is also significant in terms of mobility is that professions such as teaching and many medical professions require a degree qualification in the UK, but primary extractive industries (such as fishing and oil and gas in the North of Scotland) often do not require degree qualifications, but can be entered straight from school (Corbett, 2007a, makes a similar point in relation to Atlantic Canada). As work in the primary extractive industries, even for those in manual or semi-skilled jobs, can be relatively lucrative economic success in rural communities, for men at least, may not be associated with educational success and this could impact on the perceived value of higher education in these communities (Corbett, 2007a).

The gendered patterns of rural out-migration are apparent across the literature including that relating to Scotland: consistently young women are identified as more likely to move than men (Forsberg, 2019; Jamieson & Groves, 2008; Leibert, 2015; Ní Laoire, 2000; Stockdale, 2002b) and research in Iceland has suggested that these gender differences are “specifically associated with employment prospects” (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006, p. 295). In rural Canada, Cairns (2014) has suggested that girls tend to visualise themselves with urban lifestyles and occupations, compared to boys whose aspirations are more closely aligned to employment available in a rural community. Here, there is a relationship with the ways that places are constructed and experienced by women *and* envisaged futures. The challenge for young women is that rural areas may provide limited opportunities for high status or high salary work, as well as potentially being places where more traditional gendered expectations restrict freedoms and opportunities (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; Cairns, 2014; Glendinning et al., 2003; Jamieson & Groves, 2008). As a result, Cairns (2014) suggests that “cultural constructions of rurality can render girlhood discursively ‘out of place’ within the countryside” (p.480).

For women therefore, future visions, particularly as they relate to career opportunities and places, may be contradictory; it is possible to be quite attached to a place but find it difficult to imagine a successful future in the place (Cairns, 2014). The implication here is that young women who stay either reject notions of career “success” and follow traditional expectations around settling down and having a family (Wiborg, 2001) or reject expectations of femininity, embracing career pathways in more traditionally male routes and rejecting middle class ideals of femininity (Cairns, 2014). However, questions may also be raised about the role of the life course – it is notable for instance that in Wierenga’s (2009) study, women who left their rural areas with clear career aspirations also showed some differences to men, being less tied to one career area and potentially foreseeing times when their career may be less important, such as when they choose to start a family. Here, the strong narrative of returning home to raise children, raises questions about whether female career-motivated rural leavers are more likely to consider pathways of return to their rural communities, and how these pathways may intersect with career aspirations.

A final important point is that caution needs to be maintained when thinking about place, gender and career pathways, particularly in terms of the ways that different places may provide quite different *specific* cultural and economic contexts (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; Leibert, 2015), and how rural places are subject to change (Corbett & Forsey, 2017; Farrugia et al., 2014b). Corbett and Forsey (2017) for example have developed a categorisation of rural spaces according to whether they are productivist or post-productivist and whether they are “booming” or in decline and explore some of the implications in terms of mobilities. Migration flows themselves can also impact on rural areas, changing the economic and social context of places (Halfacree, 2008). Island communities may be particularly interesting contexts in terms of change, because of typically experiencing high levels of migration (Connell, 2018; King, 2009; King & Connell, 1999; Royle, 2001), as well as high levels of economic change (Baldacchino & Bertram, 2009). The ways that communities change both economically and socially can impact on the ways that young people perceive their futures and construct their identities (Kraack & Kenway, 2002; Prince, 2014). In research into masculinities in rural Australia, Kraack and Kenway (2002) for example develop the concept of “geometries of multiple differences” (p.145) (which explicitly draws on Massey’s work) to explain the “complex interplay” between spatial and temporal change and dimensions of identity.

### **Graduate Migration and Rural Graduates**

The first part of this chapter explored issues of mobility, belonging, resources and career aspirations in terms of young people in rural areas. This second part draws on these themes to explore the evidence for the migration experiences of young people *after* higher education. The first part of this section considers the evidence around graduate mobilities generally before moving on to think about issues of belonging, resources, and career pathways.

Considering the evidence around graduate migration there is a considerable literature that typically uses large data sets to explore trends and flows in migration and focuses on economic motivations and impacts of migration (Sage et al., 2013). This research generally demonstrates that moving away for university increases the likelihood of subsequent mobilities (Faggian et al., 2007a), and that higher levels of

human capital, (based on grades and institutional reputation) increases the chances of migration (Faggian et al., 2006, 2007a). Age, gender, social-class and ethnicity are also relevant in graduate migration (Bond et al., 2008; Faggian et al., 2006, 2007a). Importantly, the literature surrounding graduate employment destinations has typically also demonstrated variation in employment by similar categories – age, gender, institution and degree classification (Elias et al., 2021). This therefore raises questions about how far migration and employment trajectories may be interrelated.

Exploring the data, university students from both rural and other areas can typically be categorised in terms of five potential migration trajectories: repeat migrants (those who move for university, and then move again after university to a new area) university stayers (those who move to university and after university stay in the vicinity of their university), late migrants (those who stay in their area for university, but move away after university), return migrants (those who move away for university and then return to their home area), and finally non-migrants (those who neither move for university or after university) (Faggian et al., 2006, 2007a). The evidence shows that the proportion of graduates who are repeat migrants is relatively low, with research indicating that only about 18% of graduates are in new regions six months after graduation (Ball, 2015). Rather graduates show marked preferences for remaining in their home regions or regions of study (Ball, 2015). Therefore, despite suggestions that higher education entrants typically hold global aspirations (Ball et al., 2000), the evidence actually shows that graduate migration patterns are relatively constrained. This relates both to migration internal to a country, and international mobility, with research showing that international mobility is “popular as an idea but exceptional as an experience” (Cairns et al., 2012, p. 855).

However, a key limitation of much of the literature is that it analyses destinations as a snapshot in time and, given that both mobility and career pathways can show considerable instability in the first years after graduation (see for example, Purcell & Elias, 2004; Sage et al., 2012, 2013), there is a need for further research exploring how employment and migration trajectories develop over time (Faggian et al., 2017). Further, regional analysis of migration may overlook migrations *within* an area – so, for example, it is notable that in much analysis,

Scotland is categorised as a single region (see for example Ball, 2015). Thinking about graduate migration as a complex process happening at different geographical scales and over different time frames is important context for the following discussion.

### ***Student and Graduate Belonging***

One possible lens through which to explore graduate mobility is in terms of belonging, which can be linked conceptually to Bourdieusian notions of habitus. Graduate trajectories are potentially impacted upon by how far students feel they belong to the global narratives of higher education, and how far they retain a sense of belonging to their home communities. These issues are explored in this section.

**Socialisation Into Urban Environments.** Just as secondary education was previously discussed as disembedding young people from their local communities (Corbett, 2007a), higher education experiences can be thought of as continuing to disembed young people from their communities. Traditions of mobility for higher education (Holdsworth, 2009), the focus on providing qualifications for a national labour market, and the teaching of decontextualized knowledge (Rosvall et al., 2018; Wiborg, 2001) can all act to further disembed students. More broadly, higher education policy and provision can be seen to focus on the production of “global citizens” (Brooks, 2019, p. 27; Holt, 2009) who will enter global labour markets (Diamond et al., 2011). Rural students who progress into higher education typically, therefore, encounter learning environments that embed notions of mobility and global futures. For rural students, entering higher education *a/so* typically means moving into urban environments which differ both in terms of geographical environment and social environment (Bjarnason & Edvardsson, 2017; Wiborg, 2001). How far students are socialised into and come to identify with their new urban higher education environments can therefore potentially impact on their future spatial horizons.

Thinking about the process of entering higher education, the literature suggests that many students experience a big social and cultural change, particularly those from working-class backgrounds, although this may be exacerbated by geographical position (Clayton et al., 2009). In terms of the transition itself, students may mitigate this risk by pursuing safe or homely

environments and finding ways to stay in contact with the familiar (Clayton et al., 2009; Hinton, 2011). Physical proximity may be valued, and this may mean staying at home and commuting to university or attending university close enough to return home for frequent trips (Clayton et al., 2009). However, strategies such as retaining connections through “familial, social and cultural affiliations” (p. 170) may also be valued – and this can include selecting institutions which have a familiarity because they are popular with students’ peers, or where they have relatives, or locations where they have lived before.

In the limited literature relating specifically to rural student transition to university, the idea of transition as a risk that may be mitigated by strategies of retaining connections to home communities is also apparent. Pedersen (2018), for example, describes the value to rural students of retaining connections with “old relationships and rural identities ... [which can] provide significant stability within the young people’s lives” (p.684). In the literature relating to islands, it is noted that moving from island communities for higher education may also come with a higher level of “risk” than other communities (Cooke & Petersen, 2019; Simões et al., 2020). Therefore it is perhaps unsurprising that there is evidence of rural and island students adopting strategies similar to those noted by Clayton et al. (2009) – for example, moving with peers, or seeking out others who are from island or rural areas in a destination (Cuervo & Wyn, 2014; Hayfield, 2017; Wiborg, 2001; Wierenga, 2009). Stockdale (2002b) also specifically identifies how student migrants from the Western Isles may seek to hold on to familiarities, for example by joining Gaelic language groups in their destinations. Strategies for rural leavers of choosing relatively proximate locations, close enough to return home periodically, have also been noted (Carrico et al., 2019; Evans, 2016). In some cases, articulating a desire to return home after moving away may also be a strategy for making migration feel less risky (Hayfield, 2017; Constable, 1999).

Although strategies of familiarity are potentially important at the point of entering higher education, the importance of maintaining contact with home communities may diminish over time (Clayton et al., 2009). And for some students, as they engage with higher education and their new environments they can experience a growing orientation to a national or global focus rather than a local focus (Wiborg, 2001). Crescenzi’s (2017) work in Sardinia, for example, found that

graduates from the island who formed stronger networks, engaged in more work experiences, joined more clubs or associations and built social relationships in the environments that they moved to, were less likely to return to the island. For some students, the first destination away from rural areas may be a stepping stone, with evidence that some individuals move further away with each successive move (Stockdale, 2002b), sometimes termed “step-wise” migration (Conway, 1980). However, at the same time as some students may increasingly engage with urban environments and become socialised into these, for others the retention of strong links back to home communities, and intentions to return may mean that in effect, they never really leave their home communities at all (Haartsen & Thissen, 2014).

**Spatial Reflexivity.** Although moving away to university may impact on relative levels of attachment to home or urban communities, it is also important to recognise that these attachments are not mutually exclusive. Instead, although experiences may change, connections to home are likely to be retained over time (Pedersen, 2018; Wiborg, 2001). The experience of being “different” and feelings of ambivalence are common for rural students in higher education settings, and rather than necessarily leading students to identify *either* with an urban area *or* with a rural area some research has suggested that connections to urban and rural places may result in increased reflexivity (Pedersen, 2018; Wiborg, 2001). In the UK a similar theme is apparent in Abrahams and Ingram’s (2013) research with working-class students who live at home and commute to higher education, with students developing a “chameleon habitus” connected both to their home and university locations. Abrahams and Ingram (2013) view the chameleon habitus as connected to a heightened level of reflexivity and have suggested that this can become a resource for students.

Thinking about international student mobility, Cairns et al. (2012) has specifically argued for a greater focus on the development of “spatial reflexivity” through higher education, defining spatial reflexivity in terms of “the extent to which young people incorporate a geographical dimension into their transitions into adulthood” (Cairns, 2014, p. 6). As well as reflexivity in terms of space and place, the extent to which perceptions of *work* may change through engagement in urban (and global) higher education provision also potentially merits further exploration – Wiborg (2001) notes for example that *even* when rural out-migrants become

distanced from their home communities, they may hold “attitudes towards higher education and future jobs ... [which] are still coloured by their background” (p.36).

**Multiple Place Attachments.** Rather than thinking about spatial socialisation, a further possibility for rural movers is that students and graduates may deliberately seek to maintain heterolocal identities (Halfacree, 2012). That is, rather than preferring one location over another, they may demonstrate “multiple place attachment” covering both their home and university locations (Pedersen, 2018, p. 684). In island communities there are indeed suggestions in the literature that moving away may enable a different *form* of belonging – one which is less based on stasis and embeddedness and may instead be conducted over space and through mobility. Importantly in the island community of Sardinia, Cuzzocrea (2018) has developed the concept of “rooted mobilities” representing the ways that “imagining a future outside of Sardinia is tied to the ability to maintain ... [a] relationship with it throughout the years” (p.1113). In much the same way as students may mitigate risks of leaving places by maintaining contact with these places, Cuzzocrea identified these dynamics in terms of longer-term futures, with regular holidays and visits home important (Cuzzocrea, 2018). Crescenzi’s (2017) work in Sardinia also suggested that migration patterns of graduates from the islands may be considered as “circular”, characterised by repeated comings and goings. Considering the importance of frequent mobility back to the islands raises questions about the role of proximity and the ease of transport connections not just for students progressing to higher education but for graduates as they progress in their careers (Cuzzocrea, 2018)

Mobility may change the nature of the ways that individuals belong, and Jamieson (2000) (drawing on Bauman, 1992) has suggested that leavers may construct belonging in terms of “consumption” of rural places, while stayers may experience a level of entrapment. Similarly, Pedersen (2018) has suggested that moving away allows young people to move from “a somewhat passive attachment to a more active and reflected one” (p. 698). There are connections here to the literature relating to “elective belonging” a concept developed by Savage, Bagnall, & Longhurst (2005) to describe a form of belonging to place which is not based on being “born and bred” but rather where an individual has “an account of why they live in a place, and can relate their residence to their choices and circumstances,

are the most ‘at home’” (p.45). Here, the importance of being able to articulate choice aligns with wider narratives about modernity, and the valuing of “choice biographies” (Beck, 1992) or “reflexive projects of the self” (Giddens, 1991). For rural and island young people then, leaving may not be about rejecting a community but might actually be about expressing attachment to a community of a different form – it may be a form of “mobile belonging” (Fallov et al., 2013) and “actually express a way of negotiating contemporary local and “glocal” identities, thus to uphold a sense of belonging” (Gaini, 2016, p. 67).

### ***Resources and Relationships***

In terms of understanding the mobility pathways of graduates, alongside notions of belonging, issues of resources are important. In the graduate mobility literature, two key considerations are salaries and housing, and relationships.

**Salaries and Housing.** Research into graduate movements has demonstrated that the costs of living are particularly significant in structuring mobilities. The family home as a potentially relatively inexpensive source of accommodation may at least partly account for the “boomerang” generation where young people return home after graduation, and the “double boomerang” where individuals return to the family home on a number of occasions (Sage et al., 2013 see also Haartsen & Thissen, 2014).

There are potential interrelations here with employment, or more specifically salary, in terms of the relative costs of different locations. Ball, (2019a) for example has explored the best places (in economic terms) to start a graduate career by offsetting the average graduate wage in a location against costs of living. In rural areas, house prices may typically be lower, however they are also typically areas with lower salaries (Hoolachan et al., 2017). Rather than individuals always being motivated by salary therefore, evidence from Atlantic Canada indicates some young people may choose lower wages (or unemployment) in their home area over moving to the city because the perceived return from a higher wage is not enough to compensate for the perceived higher cost of living (Corbett, 2007a).

The interrelation of graduate career pathways and housing is potentially highly complex. So, for example, London is a key centre for graduate employment in the UK, and that attracts a high proportion of graduate migrants (Sage et al.,

2012, 2013). Because of the high number of opportunities, London can also function as an “escalator” region for graduate careers – enabling young people to progress in the workplace much more quickly than they would elsewhere (Gordon et al., 2015). To a lesser extent other regional centres including Edinburgh in Scotland have also been found to function as escalator regions (van Ham et al., 2012). However, at the same time the evidence shows that the appeal of the high wages in a location like London has been increasingly offset by the higher costs of living (Bond et al., 2008). This potentially opens particular issues of spatial inequality, so for example internships are often a key means of access to professional employment *but* as identified in the Milburn report “if a prospective intern does not live a commutable distance from London or does not have friends or relatives to stay with, then the cost of the internship can be very high” (Milburn, 2009, p. 103). Here it is clear that there can be immediate impacts of salaries and housing on spatial location, but there may also be significant longer-term impacts on career development.

**Relational Connections.** Although family and friends may offer useful resources in terms of accommodation for graduates, the importance of families may extend beyond accommodation (Finn, 2016; Sage et al., 2013). In Finn's (2016) work for example, she has described two potential modes of graduate relationalities: proximate relationalities and elastic relationalities. Graduates with proximate relationalities typically live close to family and tend to present home as a source of multiple forms of support including financial, emotional and social support. Importantly, this support is not just one-way, with Finn's graduates both providers and recipients of support. Those graduates who have more elastic relationalities and live away from home, are *also* often recipients of support, but this support is of a different nature – it is often financial, and normally explicitly transactional. Finn's work connects with wider exploration of the increasing role of family support more broadly for young adults as they negotiate housing and other transitions (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Holdsworth & Morgan, 2005)

Although the family home is important for many young graduates, the value of friends and social networks more broadly has also been identified as important in influencing graduate locations (Bond et al., 2008; Cairns, 2014). Where connections elsewhere may support mobility, extensive connections in home communities may

also be a resource – particularly in terms of facilitating entry into employment (Pavis et al., 2000). Crescenzi et al. (2017), in considering circular migration patterns of graduates from Sardinia, has argued that for some students, strong networks in other communities *and* in Sardinia facilitate these circular migration patterns.

Despite research which identifies the importance of friends and family in the location of graduates, there are some potential gaps in the research literature. One overlooked area is young people who are unable to move because of being resource providers in their families (Finn, 2016), including being in unpaid caring roles (Abrahams & Ingram, 2013). Some young people may also not feel able to move or seek to move because of mental health difficulties (Pavis et al., 2000). In addition, the role specifically of romantic relationships for young graduates in terms of their spatial trajectories is also widely overlooked (Finn, 2015). Notably partners may provide ties back home (Finn, 2015) or they may facilitate further mobilities (Brooks & Waters, 2010).

### ***Graduate Career Pathways and Migration***

The final section of this second part of the chapter considers issues of career choice and occupational area in terms of the location and migration pathways of graduates.

**Specificity of Career Pathways.** There is a long history of research into mobility and employment of graduates, which has typically shown that returners have generally relatively poor employment outcomes, being some of the least likely to be in professional employment (Ball, 2015 Bond et al., 2008; McGregor et al., 2002). In contrast, the most mobile graduates (those who move for university, and then move again to a new area after university) have some of the best outcomes, being the most likely to be in professional employment (Ball, 2015). Despite this research, the importance of *specific* graduate career pathways has potentially been underexplored in the research due to a tendency to consider “‘higher education’, ‘an undergraduate degree’ and ‘the graduate labour market’... as if they constitute unambiguously homogeneous phenomena” (Purcell et al., 2008, p. 1).

The issue of treating the graduate labour market as a single entity has been highlighted in the work of Ball (2019b), who argues that rather than a single market, it is potentially more appropriate to think of a series of intersecting occupational,

sectoral, local, regional and national labour markets. There is some indication in the literature of the importance of subject of study in migration trajectory, with, for example, science and social science graduates being more migratory than arts graduates (Faggian et al., 2007a). However, the use of large quantitative data sets can obscure the potential role of specific occupational pathways, as field of study and occupational field are not necessarily always aligned (Docherty & Fernandez, 2014), and aggregated data may also overlook differences between specific subject areas (e.g. Universities UK, 2010). This can have serious implications for research, Rérat (2014a) for example identifies how in his research, the significance of occupational pathway for returning graduates was only identified in his qualitative data not the quantitative data (because of the ways that the data was aggregated).

In Rérat's (2014a) research, the particular importance of teaching as a career pathway pursued by potential graduate returners to a rural area of Switzerland was identified, reflecting the fact that one third of graduates in the region worked as teachers compared to one tenth nationally. Similarly, Haartsen and Thissen (2014) have suggested that some returners to rural areas may have a strong "functional", work-related motivation for returning, and these individuals are typically in careers such as "teacher, lawyer, municipal officer and medical doctor" (p.98). Therefore the evidence suggests that rural labour markets do not just impact on young leaver's aspirations (as discussed earlier in this chapter) but may also be relevant in terms of graduate career pathways and graduate migration. Further, just as gender was identified as important in rural leaver aspirations, the interrelation of gender, migration and rural areas is also evident in graduate career development. Research in Australia for example has identified that women are more likely to move to a rural area after graduation, but if the findings are controlled for subject of study, then gender becomes insignificant, because "graduates in rural areas are working in sectors that traditionally have been more female dominated (such as education and health allied)" (Corcoran et al., 2010, p. 210).

Thinking about UK graduate migration more generally, the evidence shows that the most highly mobile graduates are often in management, engineering or business roles, and less mobile graduates are more often found in healthcare or education (Ball, 2015). One possible reason for these patterns is that graduates in primary teaching, social work, and nursing, may remain in the vicinity of their

university after they graduate in order to return to previous employers (Ball & Higgins, 2009). Here the structure of higher education provision is potentially important, particularly whether or not work placements are offered, and in what locations they are undertaken. In previous research, having undertaken work experience at university has been found to increase the chance of graduates living in urban areas (Corcoran et al., 2010), and to remain away from their home communities (Crescenzi et al., 2017). The role of work experience can be thought of as socialising or embedding individuals in certain areas (see previous discussion) but impacts can also be more direct – with employers sometimes recruiting students as a result of their placements for example (Pollard et al., 2015).

A further consideration in terms of career and mobility routes related to structures of education provision is that some qualifications may be internationally transferrable and others may not (Cairns et al., 2012; Manderscheid, 2009). Indeed, in the UK the differences between the Scottish and English legal systems, education systems and other systems results in some graduate qualifications being less transferrable than others and resulting in low levels of out-migration (to England or elsewhere) from graduates in these subjects (Bond et al., 2008).

**Returning: Space, Time and Career Dynamics.** Although returning to rural areas may be connected with specific career pathways, for other young people there is evidence that returning may be a result of struggling to find work elsewhere, or as a “stop gap” (Haartsen & Thissen, 2014; Pavis et al., 2000). It is important to note here that just as graduate migration patterns show considerable complexity, potentially characterised by a number of movements home and then away again (Haartsen & Thissen, 2014; Sage et al., 2013), transition into graduate careers is *also* often a complex process that happens over a period of time and may involve undertaking a number of different activities (e.g. short-term contracts, internships, further study and so on) (Faggian et al., 2007b; Holmes, 2013; Purcell & Elias, 2004). The implication is that there may be intersections between unstable migration and employment trajectories, in line with suggestions that young people’s transitions more generally have become increasingly unstable and complex as a result of changes in the labour market, housing markets and other factors (Cuervo & Wyn, 2014; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007).

Sage et al. (2013) has analysed graduate migration trajectories in the five years after graduation in terms of two potential pathways:

‘Complex upward’ trajectories tied predominantly to positive motivations/planned life events (such as new employment, better quality housing, partnership formation, and moving to London – i.e. the conventional notion of upwardly mobile graduates) or ‘complex unstable’ trajectories associated with negative motivations/unplanned events and experiences (such as inability to sustain independent living, unstable employment, debt, and partnership dissolution...) (p.750)

This quotation raises the important issue of how migration trajectories need to be considered within the wider scope of an individual’s life. Indeed, research has shown not just an interrelation of employment and migration, but also the importance of romantic relationships and family responsibilities (including partners, children and mortgages) in terms of graduate mobilities (Bjerke & Mellander, 2017; Bond et al., 2008; Clerge et al., 2017; Costa & Kahn, 2000).

The intersecting dynamics of career, relationships and migration also appear in the literature relating to return migration to rural areas. Haartsen and Thissen (2014) for example have identified a set of four motivations for return migration: the social, family, functional and partner orientation. This demonstrates that although some return migration may be functional and related to career area, for other people return may be for other primary reasons. A similar range of motivations (or “trajectories”) has been identified by Rérat (2014b), although he also highlights how these motivations may interweave: the socio familial trajectory (including gender, relationship status, partner’s characteristics, whether they are a parent, and family background), migration trajectory (including previous mobilities, region of origin, parental mobilities and location of higher education institution attended), and professional trajectory (field of study, field of work, kind of degree).

The different interweaving migration motivations are important because of the evidence that although employment is important in facilitating mobility to rural areas, its role may be significantly overestimated; rather than being a key motivator for migration, it may instead be an “enabler” of migration that is primarily motivated by other reasons (Clark & Maas, 2015; Crow, 2010; Morrison & Clark, 2011; Ní

Laoire, 2008). This literature particularly identifies the importance of relationships in much rural migration – moving to be with a partner, to settle down and the intention to raise a family, and also divorce and relationship breakdown (Ní Laoire, 2008;). Caring for elderly relatives may also be a stimulus for return (Ní Laoire, 2008; Stockdale, 2002b). Thinking about partners in particular, a key factor is whether a partner has the same home location as an individual (Haartsen & Thissen, 2014; Hayfield, 2017), or whether a partner is happy to move to a rural or island location (Stockdale, 2002b). Despite the evidence of the importance of relationships in graduate migration trajectories this is an area that is frequently overlooked in the literature (Finn, 2015). Reasons for a lack of literature considering relationships for younger graduates may be partly due to the tendency to use age as a proxy for life-course event which may mean that the role of families and children is overlooked for younger people (Holdsworth & Morgan, 2005; Ní Laoire, 2008; Tyrrell & Kraftl, 2015).

Implicit in the previous discussion is the evidence that returns may be experienced quite differently depending on personal and employment circumstances. In rural areas Haartsen and Thissen (2014) have suggested that there are two popular characterisations of returners, “successful” returnees, and as returners who have “failed”. However, they note these categories are not necessarily “clear-cut” (p. 99). Therefore, whether returns are experienced positively or negatively may depend on how individuals interpret or construct their choices in relation to their local communities. So, for example, some research has identified how constructions of urban areas as more “prestigious” than rural areas and constructions of return to rural areas as “failure” impact on decisions of potential returners, impeding return migration to rural areas (Pedersen, 2018; Stockdale, 2006). Further, for those who do return, evidence from Denmark and Orkney has suggested that graduates in rural areas may feel a need to downplay their graduate identities to “fit” in communities where egalitarianism is very important (Alexander, 2013; Pedersen, 2018). Here, it is important to recognise the importance of subjective understandings of migration (Simões et al., 2020), and subjective understandings of career (see Chapter 2) – how individuals understand their trajectories and feel able to articulate them in relation to their choices and spaces is important. Notably, understandings of subjective career are relatively

lacking in the graduate employment and career literature, which has often relied on statistical data sets (for example Ball, 2015; Faggian et al., 2007a; Faggian & McCann, 2008). The evidence here that the majority of graduates may not actually be motivated by salary, but by the ability to undertake rewarding work, is important (Bond et al., 2008), as is the evidence that greater graduate career satisfaction is associated with holding “social values” rather than values which focus on money or prestige (Elias et al., 2021, p. 4). Considering that rural areas are associated with strong communities and strong attachments a question is raised about whether, for some students, pursuing less lucrative careers in rural areas may be more rewarding than pursuing highly salaried careers elsewhere.

## **Summary**

This chapter has explored the existing literature relating to youth out-migration from rural areas and graduate migration after university. The literature has been presented under the three key themes of belonging, resources and career pathways, drawing on the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2. Throughout this chapter a number of key points have been highlighted that are relevant to this current research project.

Firstly, the literature shows that simplistic associations of youth migration with opportunities, either employment or education, are problematic. Migration from rural areas is strongly associated with entry to higher education, but the evidence surrounding career and employment is a lot less clear. Further there is evidence in the literature that in some cases higher education may be the *means* rather than the *motivator* for out-migration, with migration itself being a highly valued experience (potentially connected with wider mobile ideologies of neoliberalism and modernity). One of the challenges here has been traditions in youth research whereby young people are primarily viewed as rational economic actors, and a focus on transition has typically involved a focus on education to work, neglecting the importance of other aspects of life (including relationships) (Cuervo & Wyn, 2014; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Nikunen & Ikonen, 2021). There is potentially significant scope for additional research that considers career development and migration but explores this beyond the presumption of rational economic decisions, and in relation to wider life contexts.

Secondly this chapter has shown that individuals exist in different relationships to their places and potential mobilities, in terms of their backgrounds, gender and other individual differences. Their specific spatial locations are also important. Given the evidence of spatially distributed labour markets, and evidence of the impact of gender, social class and other individual differences on employment outcomes, a complex intersection of place, background and career pathway may apply but is under-researched. In particular, although there has been a focus on broad aspirations of rural young people, and on graduate outcomes in terms of salary or level of job, the role of *specific* career paths and how they may relate to migration trajectories is under-researched, although it is indicated throughout the literature as potentially relevant.

Thirdly this chapter has highlighted the importance of subjective understandings of career and place – how individuals reflect on and construct their own identities in relation to their spatial positions. However, these themes are much more apparent in the literature relating to rural youth mobility than to graduate mobilities, and there is a particular need for additional research into graduate career development that moves away from a narrow focus on employment and considers employability in terms of “graduates’ lived experiences through and beyond higher education” (Tomlinson, 2017, p. 13). Further it could be argued that the rural migration literature has typically focused on aspects of spatial positioning that consider a range of dimensions but have not given significant attention to the role specifically of *career* identities or positions within this – so for example Cuervo and Wyn (2014) consider three dimensions of belonging as people, place and time, and Fallov et al. (2013) consider people, place and mobility.

Fourthly this chapter has identified the significance of *time*. For individuals, future aspirations are important in framing both migration and career decisions, however the existing literature has tended to explore career and migration outcomes as a “snapshot” at a particular point in time. This is evidenced by the existence of two relatively separate bodies of literature relating to youth out-migration from rural areas for higher education, and migration after higher education – with a lack of literature that recognises and focuses on the connections between these trajectories, for example, in the case of planned return.

These four key points provide important insights into the limitations of the existing literature, and potentials for future research. By taking a holistic definition of career (see Chapter 2), exploring career and migration trajectories as they develop over time, and in relation to other areas of life, and by exploring graduates' own subjective perspectives on their career and migration trajectories, this research seeks to address some of the existing gaps in the literature.

## **Chapter 5: Methodology and Methods**

### **Introduction**

The aim of this research project was to identify how living in a remote island community (the Orkney or Shetland Islands) prior to entering higher education impacts on students' narratives of their higher education choices and subsequent career journeys. This aim was complemented by a series of objectives, which were to:

- Identify the role of place in the construction of self and the biographical narratives of higher education students from the Orkney and Shetland Islands.
- Identify the role of place in the way these students construct the decision to enter higher education and the associated migration choices.
- Identify the role of place in the way these students construct their career and migration choices in the period immediately after graduation.
- Track the development in the career-narratives of these students to identify changes in self and career construction in relation to place.
- Compare and contrast the narratives of students who make different migration decisions for higher education and for work.
- Develop a theoretical framework to explain the role of location in narratives of higher education and career development.

The nature of these aims and objectives outlines the exploratory and theoretical purposes of the research. These aims and objectives guided the development of the research philosophy and the research design and methodology utilised in this project. These topics are considered in more detail in the following sections of this chapter, a final section also covers additional research considerations and specifically explores ethical considerations and the importance of reflexivity.

### **Research Philosophy**

The conceptual and theoretical context for this project drew from Bourdieusian sociology and the theory of careership (see Chapter 2). The philosophy that guides this research was broadly aligned to a critical realist position as described in the work of Bhaskar (2008, 2010), although recognising that this

requires a certain reading of Bourdieusian sociology (Decoteau, 2016; Nash, 2003). Critical realism is particularly suitable for exploring the mechanisms and dynamics that influence career and migration decision-making as it is concerned with issues both of structure and agency and seeks to explore causal mechanisms behind observable patterns in the social world (Bakewell, 2010; Elder-Vass, 2012a; Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2018). The utilisation of a critical realist approach is also supported by previous literature that has considered the social and temporal embeddedness of migration decisions (Findlay & Stockdale, 2003), as emphasised in biographical traditions in migration research (Findlay & Li, 1997; Findlay & Stockdale, 2003; Halfacree & Boyle, 1993; Ní Laoire, 2008).

With regards to the ontological and epistemological position of this research, critical realism can be thought of in terms of “ontological realism and epistemological relativism” (Al-Amoudi & Willmott, 2011, p. 32). In terms of ontology, it is important to note that a critical realist perspective takes a different position than some traditional Bourdieusian research, recognising that there is an “ontological hiatus between the ‘parts and the people’”, rather than, in a Bourdieusian sense “ontological complicity” (Decoteau, 2016, p. 305). This recognises that there are external environments “out there” and that the individual exists in relation to these, with individual habitus therefore not always neatly matching field dynamics. Instead, and as outlined in the theoretical framework, individuals exist in multiple fields and habitus is inevitably “layered”; this position is such that there is not a clear unified alignment between habitus and field, between social structures and individual perceptions (Atkinson, 2016; Decoteau, 2016).

However, in terms of ontology it is important to understand that critical realism also proposes a stratified ontology, which considers three different levels – the empirical, the actual and the real (Bhaskar, 2008). These recognise that reality occurs at different levels and is a product of social relations. Here there is recognition of the importance of relationships and relationality in the development of emergent properties (Archer, 2010). A relational perspective is important because it aligns to a great deal of the literature explored in the literature review which considers relational understandings of space and place (Massey, 2005), people and place (Donnelly et al., 2020), mobility and immobility (Stockdale & Haartsen, 2018), belonging (Cuervo & Wyn, 2017) and graduate transitions (Finn, 2016).

Considering the stratified ontology of critical realist thought, a key issue is that the causal processes that structure reality are not directly observable. Here, critical realists' epistemological position is closer to constructivism or epistemological relativism. Social reality can only be accessed through the ways that individuals understand and construct their experience (Decoteau, 2016; Findlay & Stockdale, 2003). Indeed, rather than rejecting constructionism, Elder-Vass (2012b) has argued that a critical realist approach to constructionism offers significant potential as "the causal mechanisms that lie behind social construction can be analysed and understood" (p. 10). In this research project then, a key focus was on student understandings of their own career pathways and their relationship to place and mobility, however analysis was focused on understanding the causal mechanisms behind the experiences they share.

### **Research Design and Methods**

This next section of the chapter outlines the approach to research design and introduces the research methodology.

#### ***Considering Research Quality***

Quality in research is often discussed using the terminology of "reliability" and "validity", which are drawn from quantitative positivist traditions of research based on experimental methods (Bryman, 2004; Tracy, 2010). Reliability basically focuses on whether the results from a study are repeatable (over time or between researchers), and validity is concerned with whether the results measure what they are supposed to measure. In qualitative research this terminology can be problematic, however, issues of quality remain important to qualitative researchers (Bryman, 2004; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020; Lewis et al., 2014; Tracy, 2010).

One of the most widely cited approaches to quality in qualitative research is Guba and Lincoln's (1994) suggestion that research should be evaluated in terms of "trustworthiness" and "authenticity", with trustworthiness being a key concept in terms of quality of qualitative research, and comprising the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Guba and Lincoln's approach however has been critiqued by "subtle realist" and critical realist perspectives on the basis that although these perspectives would accord with constructivism that there are multiple potential realities or truths, they reject the notion that there cannot be a

preferred perspective or that there can be contradictory perspectives (Hammersley, 1992b; Porter, 2007; Ryan & Ruddy, 2019; Seale, 1999). In determining research quality, from a “subtle realist” position plausibility and credibility of findings are particularly important (Hammersley, 1992a). These concepts rely on how findings are presented and described and how they are situated within wider existing scholarship (Hammersley, 1992a, 1992b; Bryman, 2004). Critically, and deviating from Guba and Lincoln (1994), respondent validation is perceived as problematic in much realist research, in recognition that respondents do not necessarily occupy a privileged epistemological position in relation to the subject of study (Porter, 2007). Rather, in determining the trustworthiness of findings, perspectives of multiple individuals including participants but also potentially others including practitioners and scholars are important (Porter, 2007).

In this research project, trustworthiness has been a particularly important concept in research quality. Given the ethical decisions made to restrict the provision of some details about participants in the thesis (see “Ethical Considerations” section), there have been some limitations on the extent of information provided. This decision has been taken to protect the anonymity of participants, but potentially limits the ability of readers to track individual stories, or verify claims made. Thinking about quality, and considering issues of credibility and plausibility, the focus of this thesis then has been on providing a sufficiently credible account of the findings and providing a high level of transparency (in the rest of this section) on the research process, including the process of analysis (see also Porter, 2007; Ryan & Ruddy, 2019; Tracy, 2010). Exploration of my own position as a researcher, including exploring how researcher reflexivity was embedded in the research project, is also provided in order to allow for my own positionality and potential impact on the findings to be explored (Charmaz, 2014; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020; Tracy, 2010). The preliminary findings and conclusions from the research have also been presented in the form of conference papers and academic articles, and via social media feeds (including my blog) to enable feedback from various sources and ongoing revisions and reflection on the research findings as the project has progressed. The rest of this chapter is concerned with explicating the research design and process (including ethical considerations). The later chapters of this thesis, particularly Chapter 7 and Chapter 8, also explore some of

the implications of the research, and this recognises the significance of utility in realist and critical realist approaches to quality (Kempster & Parry, 2014).

### ***Research Design***

The research design deployed was primarily that of a case study – a case study of a particular cohort of graduates graduating at a particular point in time who were originally domiciled in the islands of either Orkney or Shetland. Case study designs are perhaps the most common form of critical realist research (Bryman, 2004; Vincent & O’Mahoney, 2018). The strength of case study designs is that they allow for a detailed and intensive analysis of a case, which assists with the exploration of causal mechanisms (Ackroyd & Karlsson, 2014; Vincent & O’Mahoney, 2018). Such an approach was ideally suited therefore to this project which sought to explore and understand some of the dynamics behind the interrelation of career and migration trajectories. Although case study designs have been criticised for lack of generalisability (Tsang, 2014), this potentially mistakes analytic and statistical generalisability (Yin, 2003). Rather than aiming to generalise from a small population to a larger population (statistical generalisability), the aim of this research was to develop theoretical understanding from close analysis of one case which may then have wider theoretical relevance – following Easton’s (2010) suggestion that where “a defensible causal explanation has been produced in one case then the constituents of that explanation provide a basis for developing theory beyond that case” (p. 127) (see also Tsang, 2014).

In terms of selecting a case study, the focus should vary according to research design and rationale (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Rather than selecting cases on the basis of representability, primarily cases should be selected to “maximise what we can learn” (Stake, 1995, p. 4). In this project, the case study could be thought of as an “extreme case” (Yin, 2003, p. 40) where issues of career development and mobility are likely to be highlighted because of the nature of island communities (Cooke & Petersen, 2019; King, 2009) and because as places they are highly distinctive socially, culturally and economically (see Chapter 3). Selecting two case study locations (Orkney and Shetland) was partly a practical decision, given the small numbers of higher education entrants from the islands each year

(see Chapter 3) and the need to generate a reasonable sample size. However, the approach was also potentially beneficial, with the strategy of selecting two different but relatively similar communities described by Evans (2016) as potentially helping to illuminate the role of “spatial nuances and specificities” in the experiences of young people in these spaces (p. 504).

In common with much case study and critical realist research, the methodological approach of this research was inclusive, drawing from and considering data of different kinds (Easton, 2010; Tsang, 2014; Vincent & O’Mahoney, 2018; Yin, 2003; Zachariadis et al., 2013). However, where contextual data about the islands and graduates more generally was important in this research, data analysis was focused on the interviews. This is because from a critical realist position, qualitative data gathered from participants can provide key insights into causal explanations (Lawani, 2020; Yeung, 1997). Interviews specifically allow participants to “articulate their tacit perceptions, feelings and understandings” and to explore these understandings and meanings “in depth” (Arksey & Knight, 1999, p. 32).

The specific methodological approach of longitudinal qualitative interviewing (LQI) whereby the same research participants are interviewed at different points in time, was chosen because it is well suited to critical realist research. Hermanowicz (2013) argues that LQI allows a researcher “to expose process, evaluate causality, and substantiate micro–macro linkage” (p. 190), and Thomson (2007) makes a similar point arguing that longitudinal qualitative approaches can expose the dynamics of structural and individual conditions; “the structured yet unique destiny of the individual” (p. 577). In studying career development, Hodkinson (2008) has also argued for the particular value of “detailed, longitudinal case studies” for helping “reveal career complexity” (p. 13). Further, Hermanowicz (2009) specifically identifies the value of the approach for researching subjective career development, focusing on the individual’s personal perspectives on their career as they shift and develop over time. Longitudinal qualitative interviewing also has a strong history of being used to explore the experiences of young people in transition, for example in the *Emerging Adulthoods* study (Henderson et al., 2007; Thomson, 2007). Some studies have used the approach to combine a focus on

youth and career – including Neilson’s (2016) work on career transition in early adulthood.

One of the challenges with solely relying on qualitative interview data however is that the exploration of the structures and contexts within which individuals create their narratives may not be fully considered (Brannen, 2013). Therefore, alongside interviews, a thorough exploration of secondary sources relating to the economic, cultural, and educational context of Orkney and Shetland was conducted alongside a review of existing literature relating to the destinations and migration trajectories of young people from the islands (summarised in Chapter 3). In addition, a statistical data set was secured from the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey (HESA, 2020) which provided statistical information on all graduates with a home addresses in Orkney and Shetland, who graduated from UK universities over a five-year period (2008/09-2012/13).

The research project was designed around six phases (Figure 4). The first phase concerned project planning, initiating and design. The second phase included a review of the relevant contextual information (including the data from the DLHE survey) and an initial survey of graduates from Orkney and Shetland. The third phase was the initial interviews of a sample of graduates who had taken part in the survey. The fourth phase was a survey of these graduates at approximately six months after graduation (the DLHE data collection point) and the fifth phase was interviews with these graduates approximately one year after graduation. The sixth phase was completing the analysis and writing up the project.

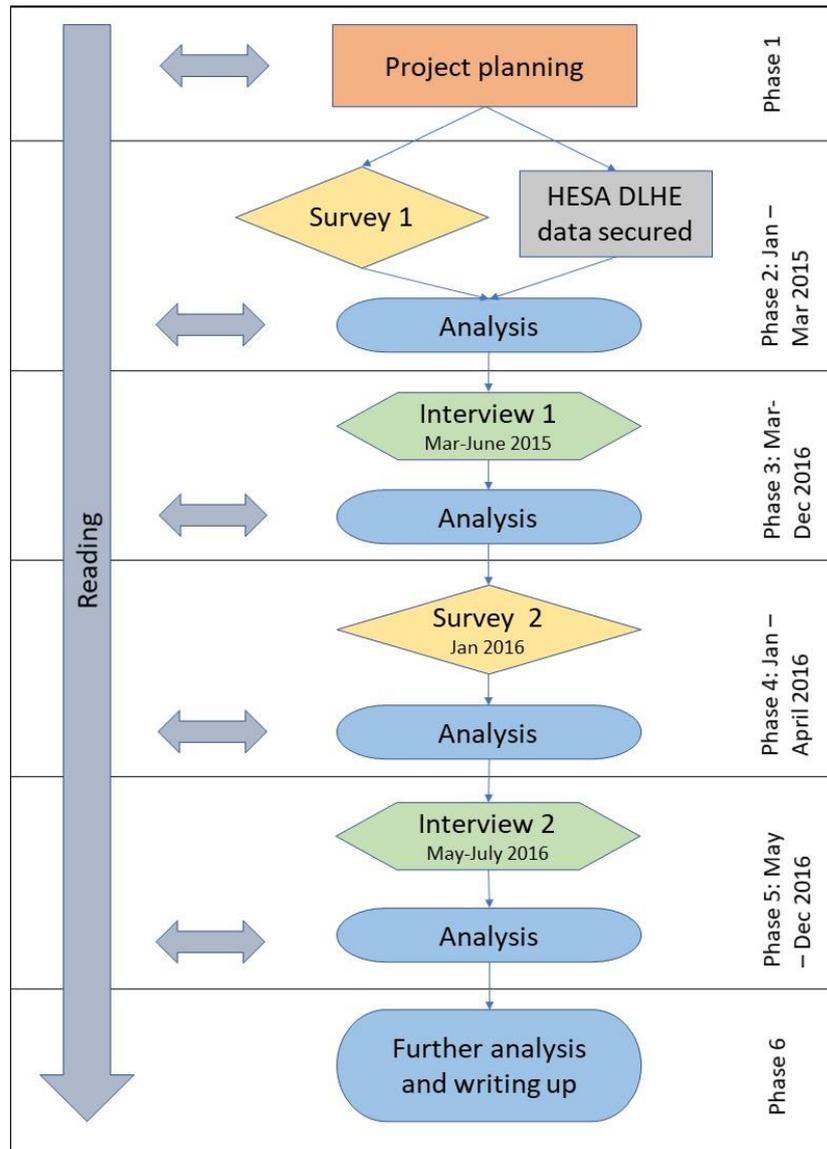
Figure 4 demonstrates the iterative nature of the theoretical approach taken – with cycles of data collection and analysis interspersed, and with the analysis informing future rounds of data collection and further reading. Such an iterative approach is appropriate for a project which seeks to develop a theoretical framework and is common to theoretical approaches inspired by critical realism (Zachariadis et al., 2013).

The subsequent sections of this chapter concern the details of the surveys and interviews used as part of this research project.



**Figure 4.**

*Phases of the Research Project*



***Recruitment and Sampling: The First Survey***

The primary form of data collection in this research project took the form of interviews with a group of graduates who were due to complete a full-time first degree course in Spring 2015, and who had been domiciled in Orkney or Shetland immediately prior to entering university.

Identifying the target population was challenging as there was no single source of data on students who were currently registered on higher education

courses by prior domicile and completion date. Therefore, the first stage in recruitment involved the use of a short survey (see Appendix 4) to recruit participants and generate a sampling frame from which participants could be purposively sampled (Brannen, 2005; Bryman, 2014). The survey was developed using free to access software ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)), and provided some information about the research project, as well as collecting some information from participants to determine eligibility (for example graduation date).

To support selection of participants, a series of eligibility criteria were identified. These were that students must:

- Be registered on a full-time first degree programme. Students may previously have started a degree programme but not completed.
- Be in their final year of their degree and due to graduate in spring 2015. “Final year” in this case means either honours year, *or* ordinary year (recognising that in Scotland some students choose to graduate before completing honours, and in some cases honours years are not available). Where a student is in their ordinary year, they should not be intending to progress to honours.
- Have been ordinarily resident in either Orkney or Shetland directly before entering their degree course. “Ordinarily resident” is not clearly defined but is a term used to determine eligibility for benefits including student finance (Scottish Government, 2019c). The term means that a person *normally* resides in a location apart from temporary or occasional absences including periods of travel or time away for study. In this study, eligible students could:
  - Have taken time out for travelling before entering higher education as long as they could be deemed ordinarily resident in Orkney or Shetland.
  - Have been on other education courses elsewhere prior to entering their current degree providing that their ordinary residence could be deemed to be Orkney or Shetland.
  - Be mature students living in Orkney or Shetland prior to entering higher education, even if their schooling had been completed elsewhere.

As well as collecting data sufficient to determine eligibility, the survey also collected data on age, gender, location of study, course of study, length of time living in the islands and intentions after graduation. This data was gathered to support the sampling of participants for interviews, and these items were included on the basis that the existing literature (see Chapter 4) identifies the potential importance of these factors in career and migration routes of young people from rural areas. Data on social class was not gathered at this point but based on the emerging themes from the first interview, data on parental education level was gathered in the second interview.

The survey also collected some free-text responses around graduates' intentions after graduation. These responses provided additional qualitative data that was reviewed prior to finalising the interview schedules. Here, the purpose of the survey moved beyond simple generation of a sampling frame but was designed to provide some initial insights into graduate experiences and intentions. During phase two of the research, data from the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) data set was also reviewed. This provided data for 745 individuals and was analysed using descriptive statistics to explore patterns and trends (see Chapter 6).

The analysis of initial survey data, review of DLHE data and initial reading for the project allowed for the generation of initial sensitising concepts (Bowen, 2006) that could inform the next stages of the research process. In particular, the aim was for this to guide theoretical sampling of participants for the interviews (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and to provide additional data on the socio-cultural contexts of the graduate participants in the interviews (Brannen, 2013). Such an approach is aligned to the retroductive methodology of critical realist research which typically uses "extensive methods to identify and establish demi-regularities with data patterns, which are then used to guide intensive research that will uncover the mechanisms, agencies, and social structures that produce the behavior [*sic*] observed" (Zachariadis et al., 2013, p. 864).

The survey was circulated via social media (including the researcher's blog, and social media feeds), articles in the local press and on the local radio stations,

and, where possible via university careers services.<sup>1</sup> The local offices of the national careers service (Skills Development Scotland) were also contacted for help with circulating the information. Although formal communications from Skills Development Scotland to potential participants were not possible to arrange, staff in both the Orkney and Shetland offices helped to disseminate information via social media.

86 valid responses were collected via the survey, and 39 participants volunteered for further interviews. It was originally intended that a sample would be drawn from the participants using theoretical sampling – on the basis of the emerging theoretical constructs (Bryman, 2004; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). A sample size of 20 had also been proposed on the basis that longitudinal qualitative interviewing approaches typically utilise “small-N analysis” (Hermanowicz, 2013, p. 193), but require sample sizes that allow for the exploration of theoretical dimensions across participants, and provide enough scope for reaching a point of “theoretical saturation” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). However, in practice due to the numbers volunteering and the likelihood that not all would be willing to be interviewed, all 39 were contacted. From this group, 23 students agreed to take part in interviews. This was slightly more than the proposed twenty, but all 23 were accepted on the basis that some may later withdraw. One student did indeed withdraw part way through the research, leaving a total sample of 22. Despite not being theoretically sampled, the sample showed reasonable coverage across the emerging theoretical dimensions including course studied and career intention and mobility experiences (for example length of time in location, and location of study) (the characteristics of the sample are presented in more detail in Chapter 6). The sample did, however, include an overrepresentation of women with 18 out of 22 (81%) being women, compared to 64% of graduates from the islands generally (see Chapter 6).

### ***Primary Data Collection: The Interviews and Second Survey***

Interviews were conducted at the point of graduation and approximately one year later. Initially three interview points had been proposed – at graduation, six

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<sup>1</sup> An email was sent to all Heads of Services at Scottish university careers services. Some services were happy to circulate the information, others were unable to circulate directly.

months later, and one year later. However, the interview at the six-month point was replaced by a survey due to the researcher's maternity leave. The points for the interviews and survey were decided as follows:

- Point of graduation: recognising that this is a key transition point.
- The six-month point: as this is the point at which the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey is conducted (HESA, 2020). Data collected at this point is therefore more directly comparable to the DLHE data gathered in this project, and to pre-existing literature that uses this data set (for example Ball, 2012, 2015; Ball & Higgins, 2009; Faggian et al., 2006, 2007a, 2007b).
- The point a year after graduation: chosen for utility (given the length of time of a PhD enrolment) and also in order to provide sufficient time to have elapsed to allow for some of the dynamics (of career and migration) to be apparent (Hermanowicz, 2013).

The next sections of this chapter consider the approach to interviewing in more depth, alongside a short section on the design of the second survey.

**Approach to Interviewing:** Approaches to interviewing vary, typically being either semi-structured or unstructured (Arksey & Knight, 1999). However, in practice rather than representing a binary choice, interviews will tend to vary in terms of the amount of structure imposed by an interviewer (Brinkmann, 2013; Bryman, 2004). In the case of this research project, the approach to interviewing was semi-structured – the interviews were accompanied by a schedule comprising of a number of questions (see Appendices 7 and 8), but the schedule remained flexible, with additional questions and prompts being used to stimulate further discussion (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Bryman, 2004).

The use of a flexible interviewing approach is aligned to critical realist thinking (Roberts, 2014; Smith & Elger, 2012; Tsang, 2014), and to research that focuses on developing theory (Charmaz, 2001). As Smith and Elger (2012) outline critical realists typically seek “to utilise interviews and other social research methods both to appreciate the interpretations of their informants and to analyse the social contexts, constraints and resources within which those informants act” (p. 6). Flexible interview schedules were therefore important to allow exploration *with*

participants of the particular ways that they were understanding their options, unpicking some of the unspoken and assumed knowledges. A particular challenge in this research was that the literature suggested that geographical space may typically not be recognised as important in career decision-making (Alexander & Hooley, 2018 and see also Chapter 2) or that spatial attachments may be a source of shame or discomfort (Finn, 2015). A further challenge was that elements of spatial context or influence may be assumed, given that I (as the researcher) was based in the islands. This could potentially exacerbate the tendency for participants not to discuss contextual information directly as it may be taken for granted (Hodkinson, 2008). Therefore, after each open question focusing on an individual's past, present or future, follow up questions were written into the interview schedules around the influence of place (see Appendix 7 and 8). This allowed for an exploration of spatial influences on decision-making that may go otherwise unspoken or assumed and often led to a more theoretical and reflective discussion with participants.

Given the focus in this research project on understanding the subjective experiences of participants in terms of their career and migration trajectories, the interviews particularly focused on eliciting participant narratives. Here the interviews with participants drew from biographical traditions of interviewing; the aim of the approach was to let participants speak for themselves as far as possible, constructing their own narratives in relation to their particular experiences and context (Henderson et al., 2007; Stockdale et al., 2013; Thomson & Holland, 2003). Typically, biographical approaches to interviewing may involve asking just one question, where individuals are asked to describe the story of their journey to this point in their life (Rosenthal, 2004; Scheibelhofer, 2008). Following this question individuals are asked to elaborate on the narrative provided and following this may be asked questions focused firstly on "internal" questions (covering topics already raised by the participant in their narrative) and then "external" questions (covering topics not already raised) (Rosenthal, 2004; Scheibelhofer, 2008).

A traditional biographical approach was modified in this research project however, in order to capture not just retrospective understandings of transitions and choices as has been done in previous studies into graduate transition (see Burke, 2016), but also to explore the experience of graduate transition *during* the transition

itself. The key modification made was that each interview contained three main questions focusing on the past, the present and the future, in order to track the development of participant understandings and experiences over time (see interview schedules in Appendix 7 and 8). Here, the longitudinal nature of this project was influential, as Hermanowicz (2013) has pointed out: “LQIs designed in advance lend themselves to protocols containing identical questions posed to respondents at different times in order to assess change” (p. 198). In this research project at each interview point participants were asked where they would see themselves in twenty years’ time and this helped to track changes in career ideas between the interviews. Longitudinal qualitative approaches also allow researchers to explore and capture participant’s reflections on processes of change. Asking about what has happened since the last data collection point, is a common approach (Henderson et al., 2007). As such the second interviews also included a focus on reflection, inviting participants to reflect on their experiences since the first interview.

**Practicalities of the Interviews:** Interviews were conducted over the telephone. Telephone interviews can be a practical solution where participants are geographically dispersed (as they were in this research project). Although telephone interviews have often been criticised for potentially limiting rapport between interviewer and interviewee and for being less natural (Irvine et al., 2013), they can also have some advantages over face-to-face interviewing: improving access to hard to reach participants, providing additional anonymity when discussing sensitive topics and in terms of the quality of attention to participant narratives among other things (Cachia & Millward, 2011; Holt, 2010; Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004; Trier-Bieniek, 2012; Ward et al., 2015).

Effective interviewing over the telephone does however come with some considerations, with previous research suggesting that interviewers require strong telephone skills and experience (Holt, 2010). In this project my experience as a careers adviser who has extensive experience of telephone career guidance was helpful, as it has given me experience both in terms of interviewing skills, and also in deploying these skills over the telephone. However, in this research the use of an open biographical approach to interviewing that asked students to “tell their own story” was challenging on the telephone. The dilemma I experienced is articulated

by Holt (2010) who discusses her own use of the telephone to conduct narrative interviews: "I wanted to avoid directing the narrative with my own interjections while at the same time I needed to let the participants know that I was still present and listening" (p. 118). In this research, I found that participants were often hesitant about the adequacy of their answers or sought clarification (see also Irvine et al., 2013), typically offering a short answer to the first very open question and then saying something like – "I don't know what else to say" or "Is this the kind of thing that you want?" In practice therefore participants found it challenging to launch straight into a narrative recounting of their experience, and by holding back responses I potentially risked damaging my ability to build rapport with a participant, and this could then risk the quality of the data generated in the interviews (Arksey & Knight, 1999). My approach to handling this situation was, like Holt (2010), to offer "acknowledgement tokens" (Irvine et al., 2013), small interjections to show I was listening: "mmm-hmmm", "ah ha" and so on. However, in practice I also found that a much more conversational style was necessary. Rather than there being a "long biographical narration... often lasting for hours" followed by internal narrative and external narrative questions (Rosenthal, 2004, p. 52), in practice, participants often provided shorter stories, which I responded to with prompts to ask students to "illustrate, expand and clarify their initial responses" (Arksey & Knight, 1999, p. 52). In this approach I drew on my previous training in guidance and counselling to avoid, as far as possible introducing my own agendas, focusing on internal questions based on the participant's narratives (Rosenthal, 2004; Scheibelhofer, 2008) and utilising participants' words where possible.

In practice, the interviews with participants lasted between 40 minutes and two hours and were recorded using a digital voice-recorder. Typically, interviews were shorter where participants had more clearly defined career pathways. Although the majority of interviews were conducted over the telephone, in two cases the interviews were held face-to-face (one in the first round and one in the second). These interviews took place at Orkney College, one with a student and one with a graduate of the college. At the time the college was also my workplace, so with both interviewer and interviewee based in the college, the approach was taken for ease.

**Second Survey:** Finally, in thinking about primary data collection it is important to consider the second survey. Initially three interview points had been proposed for this project; however, the second interview was replaced by a survey due to my (the researcher's) maternity leave. A copy of the survey is shown in Appendix 9. The survey collected some data on the destination of graduates (in terms of location and activity / employment) and these questions (questions 3-5) were asked using similar wording to the DLHE survey, to enable some basic comparisons to be drawn. The survey also asked four open questions (questions 6-9), which were based on the questions that would have been included in an interview. These collected qualitative responses about students' routes so far, and their anticipated routes in the future. It was understood that survey data responses would not be as rich as they would have been from interviews, but still provided some data, and stayed true to the initial research design, asking the same sorts of questions at different points in transition to track changing viewpoints.

### ***Data Analysis***

Data analysis was primarily focused on the interview data and qualitative data in the second survey. Analysis followed a critical realist inspired approach to grounded theory (Kempster & Parry, 2014; Oliver, 2011; Yeung, 1997). Grounded theory is an approach that utilises simultaneous data analysis and data collection, applying inductive reasoning with the aim of developing a theoretical understanding that is "grounded" in the data (Charmaz, 2001, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory is one of the most widely used approaches to data analysis in qualitative research, however, there are many different variants of grounded theory (Bryant, 2019; Charmaz, 2001; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020; Oliver, 2011).

Critical realist approaches to grounded theory differ from other approaches particularly because they (along with other critics of grounded theory) view the suggestion that theory can be fully grounded in the data as problematic, because it suggests a process of analysis which is neutral, bias-free, and independent of the researcher (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020; Kempster & Parry, 2014). There are two challenges here, firstly the idea that data from interviews is clean of researcher influence, which overlooks the way that data itself is potentially co-constructed between interviewer and interviewee (Charmaz, 2014); and secondly the idea that

researchers can (or should) approach data without any preconceptions. Critical realist positions differ, as they identify pre-existing theory as an important component of research design, data collection and analysis (Kempster & Parry, 2014; Zachariadis et al., 2013).

Key to critical realist approaches is the suggestion that rather than a logic of induction, analysis should follow a principle of retroduction (Kempster & Parry, 2014; Oliver, 2011; Yeung, 1997). Retroduction “involves suggesting a theory that seeks to provide causal explanation of what has not necessarily been empirically deduced or induced but has been synthesized and inferred from available empirical data and related concepts” (Kempster & Parry, 2014, p. 91). In terms of this research project then, understanding the dynamics *behind* the ways that migration and career decisions inter-relate involved drawing on various theoretical concepts, including Bourdieusian concepts of field, habitus and capital alongside other concepts such as “belonging” at an early stage in the analysis, exploring how these potentially aligned with the data and provided explanatory potential.

Importantly although avowedly theoretical from the start, the critical realist position emphasises that “all understanding is partial, tentative and temporary” (Oliver, 2011, p. 378), allowing the possibility for revision and re-revision of the analysis as it developed. Following grounded theory approaches, in this research analysis was embedded throughout the process of data collection (Charmaz, 2001, 2014; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Analytic memos were made throughout the process of data collection and analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These included notes made after each interview which contained details of theoretical reflections, potential codes and also operational notes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The emergent concepts in these notes were also used in further interviews, in particular guiding the content of some of the “external narrative questions” asked at the end of the interview (Rosenthal, 2004; Scheibelhofer, 2008).

As interviews with participants all needed to be conducted at specific times (graduation point, six months later and one year later) each round of interviewing was conducted within a tight time frame. Therefore, interviews were transcribed only after the completion of each round of interviewing. Through the transcription

process further analytic notes were made (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and after transcription, the complete set of interviews was then reviewed. In line with critical realist approaches data analysis began at the empirical level (Lawani, 2020), focusing on observable differences between participants on the basis of subject, university and migration choices. Analytic memos were reviewed and, through this process, a series of concepts were identified, and in some cases it was possible to group these into analytic categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In reviewing the first interview transcripts, for example the potential category of “familiarity” was identified. This then guided further reading and theoretical exploration, including more in-depth consideration of Bourdieusian ideas following the identification of a potential conceptual connection between “familiarity” and “habitus”. Following the analysis of the first round of interviews, a set of additional questions was developed for use at the end of the second interview based on these emergent theoretical interests, for example questions were added that directly gathered data about social class background and mobility capital (see Chapter 2) based on an increasing interest in Bourdieusian ideas (see Appendix 8). This allowed for emerging theory to be tested and explored with each participant (Kempster & Parry, 2014).

Once both rounds of interviews had been completed a more formal coding process was undertaken. An initial codebook was drawn up that combined structural elements of coding (based on the questions asked) (Saldaña, 2016) as well as codes related to emerging theoretical insights, concepts and categories (see Appendix 11). Transcripts were uploaded into NVIVO and transcripts were sequentially coded. Although coding proceeded in line with the initial codebook the coding strategy was highly flexible, utilising additional codes as they appeared relevant to the data, and often choosing a strategy of in-vivo and descriptive coding (at least initially) in order to remain close to participant experiences (Saldaña, 2016). Additional memos were created throughout the process of coding. After approximately the first quarter of interviews had been coded (five interviews) the codebook was refined, grouping together key codes and recoding where necessary (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020; Saldaña, 2016); further revisions took place after each further set of five interviews were coded. This prevented the codebook becoming unwieldy in terms of number of codes, which has been a challenge in previous research (Kempster & Parry, 2014). It also allowed for a process of

“constant comparison” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) between the codes and the data, and allowed an expediting of the analytic process through focused coding (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020). As coding progressed fewer revisions took place, demonstrating a move towards “theoretical saturation” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

One criticism of coding can be that it results in a “fragmentation” of data into constituent parts, especially where computer software is utilised in the coding process (Bryman, 2004, p. 602). This can be particularly problematic in research, like this current research, that focuses on participant narratives especially as they develop over time. In line with longitudinal qualitative approaches to analysis, then, it was important to keep in mind two dimensions: the “longitudinal dimension that privileges the individual case, and the cross-sectional dimension that privileges the social and the spatial context” (Thomson, 2007, p. 571). Therefore, short pen-portraits were constructed for each individual participant, which helped to maintain a focus on the longitudinal and developmental aspect of their narratives – an approach utilised in previous research (Finn, 2017; Thomson, 2007). These pen-portraits were formulated using a series of “through-lines”, or themes, tracking change and continuity (Thomson, 2007, p. 574, drawing on Saldaña, 2003). These through-lines focused on geographical transitions, current employment or area of engagement, and future career ideas.

These pen-portraits were reviewed alongside the codebook once all interviews had been fully coded as part of first cycle coding (Saldaña, 2016). Moving in to the second cycle, the focus was on exploring the coding to draw out and develop the theoretical findings (Saldaña, 2016). This included processes of diagramming in order to explore potential conceptual links (Saldaña, 2016; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These diagrams were particularly focused on drawing together a theoretical presentation of the causal mechanisms behind how career pathways and migration pathways are lived over time. As these different diagrammatic iterations were developed, they were reviewed against the participant pen-portraits, this allowed for emerging findings about the dynamics of career development and place to be “tested” against individual cases. In particular, by applying emergent theoretical models to quite different portraits (of graduates who had quite different career or migration experiences) the explanatory potential of these models to different trajectories was explored. In some respects, this took the form of a kind of

deviant case analysis, that is the exploration of “instances in data which contradict emerging hypotheses” (Seale & Silverman, 1997, p.380). In this research for example, the majority of participants had lived in the islands all their lives (see Chapter 6), with only three having lived elsewhere for some of their childhood. These three individuals could be conceptualised as “deviant cases” in many respects (in terms of their historic mobilities, family histories, and locations of family and friends). The application of the emerging theoretical model to these individuals allowed for ideas to be more thoroughly tested and explored. In particular, considering aspects of spatial belonging these cases highlighted the problematics of concepts of “home” (which were straightforward for many other participants) and resulted in the adoption of a focus on “belonging” which is more multifaceted. Further, these cases highlighted the importance of historic mobilities and impacted on the adoption of a theoretical approach which recognises the role of time and space across the life-course. Alongside these three “deviant cases” application of emerging theoretical ideas to individual case histories which showed other forms of variation were also useful – for example the two students who completed their degrees in the islands (as opposed to the majority who left the islands) and the two students with caring responsibilities (compared to the majority without), and more generally comparing participants who were following quite different career pathways. The findings of the analysis are explored in the next chapter.

### **Additional Research Considerations**

So far this methodology chapter has considered the research philosophy, design, and implementation of this project. This last section considers two particularly important considerations raised by this project which surround the researcher’s position, and ethical considerations, both of which have been particularly influenced by the site for the research being two relatively small communities, and communities in which I, as the researcher, also live and work.

### ***Reflexivity and Positionality***

Maintaining a reflexive position as a researcher is an important part of addressing potential issues of quality in qualitative research (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Tracy, 2010). Reflexivity supports both the development of insights and knowledge on the subject of study, as well as on the

process of research itself (Finlay, 2002; Watt, 2007), and is potentially particularly important in longitudinal qualitative research (Thomson & Holland, 2003).

Diaries can be a helpful tool to assist with researcher reflexivity (Engin, 2011; Jasper, 2005), and in this research project, I have kept a diary throughout documenting insights, questions and, importantly, tracking my own perspective on the research. I have also engaged in a much deeper and personal level of reflection about the connections between this research topic and my own experiences (outlined in Chapter 1). Here I recognise that my own experiences and values will impact on the research process (Greenbank, 2003). Importantly, I understand that these values, sensitivities and biases are not always apparent to myself (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020), and engaging in processes of reflective writing and self-reflection I have aimed to uncover these (Bolton et al., 2004). In this process I have been assisted in my own practice and background in therapeutic counselling, reflective journaling and creative writing (see Etherington, 2004).

Recognising my own perspectives is not to suggest that these can be “bracketed out” from the research, but it is to consider appropriateness of different research decisions (Jasper, 2005), and to consider *how* my perspectives may influence the processes of design, data collection and analysis (Greenbank, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Keeping an occasional blog, writing papers and articles, and discussing the project with academic colleagues (at conferences), other career advisers, and within the communities that I am researching has also provided additional insights, as well as providing opportunities to test emerging ideas and gain feedback on them, a crucial part of critical realist analytic approaches (Kempster & Parry, 2014).

Alongside recognising the importance of my own values and position another aspect of reflexivity has been considering how I may be seen by participants, and how these relationships with participants have developed (Finlay, 2002). This is important particularly in terms of qualitative interviewing, where meanings are likely to be negotiated, or co-constructed between researcher and participant (Brinkmann, 2013; Charmaz, 2014). In particular how a researcher is perceived may impact on access to research participants, as well as how participants respond to a researcher (Kennedy-Macfoy, 2013). The issue of researcher position is particularly important

in this research project because I live in the islands that I am studying, *and* because of my position as a career adviser within the communities. These two facts are likely to have been highly significant in terms of how participants might understand me, my interests, and the research project as a whole. So, for example, my embeddedness in Orkney may have been part of the reason that there was greater uptake from participants in Orkney than Shetland; here access to participants was potentially improved because of my “insider” status (Kennedy-Macfoy, 2013). However, my position also potentially impacted on the content of the interviews. So, for example I noticed that participants were reticent to criticise the islands (or those who chose to stay in the islands). This may, of course be due to participants’ own feelings, but equally it would not be a surprise if they felt uncomfortable about criticising a location that they knew I lived in. Other impacts may include things like participants’ feeling that my primary interest was in a relatively narrowly defined notion of career given my role as a career adviser – indeed one graduate who returned home for personal reasons questioned whether I would like to conduct a second interview with them, given that they had not really progressed their career (in their terms). This is a clear example of how participants’ understanding of me and my interests might impact on what they feel is valid to discuss in an interview.

However, to consider my roles in simplistic terms overlooks potential nuances in the ways I may be perceived. In simplistic terms, my position within the research could be considered an insider position – I live within Orkney, within the islands that I am studying. Further, although this part of my identity is more obscured to participants, I myself was a rural outmigrant for the purposes of higher education (see Chapter 1), which also gives me potentially an insider position in terms of the topic in question. These aspects of being firmly embedded in the field are potentially beneficial in terms of establishing rapport and building trust, as well as giving me an insight into some potentially important dynamics (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Kennedy-Macfoy, 2013). However, the concept of insider and outsider research, although widely referenced has been shown to be an oversimplification (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Katyal & King, 2011; Kerstetter, 2012; Sanghera & Thapar-Björkert, 2008). As discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4, our geographical positioning is not just a feature of absolute location, instead, we may situate ourselves differently in relation to our geographical space(s). Further our positions

are constructed through the perspectives of participants and others (Sanghera & Thapar-Björkert, 2008). And in island communities “where hybridity is the norm” the “insider/outsider distinction” may be particularly problematic (Baldacchino, 2008, p. 37). Especially relevant here, in terms of my participants, is that I speak with an English accent, this potentially positions me in a certain way in relation to Orkney, that is signalling it is likely that I do not have Orcadian parents, and did not grow up in the islands.

Following previous researchers then, my position in this research project is in some ways that of an insider, and some ways that of an outsider (Katyal & King, 2011; Sanghera & Thapar-Björkert, 2008). Recognising this “inbetweenness” is important to prevent an assumption that my position is objective and neutral, and also to prevent errors based on a perception of my own privileged “insights” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Notably in this research not only was my position somewhat inbetween, but so was that of my participants in that they were from the islands but typically not *in* the islands when we spoke. Understanding the ways that all of our experiences are layered (see Chapter 2), including my own and my participants’ helps to highlight how there will be multiple points of connection and disconnection with participants and their stories, and continuing to reflect on these as they emerged was a key part of my own reflexivity in the research process.

This section has discussed some key elements of my reflexive approach. However, it is important to note that relationships between participants and researcher also have a uniqueness and a specificity that comes from engagement between two people; relationships therefore are negotiated *through* encounters and *over* time. Care needs to be taken then, not to assume that I hold a singular position for my participants. As Skeggs (2002) has discussed, “doing” reflexivity involves “paying attention to practice, power and process” (p.368) *through* research rather than simply deploying a form of self-narration to demonstrate a reflexive stance. There are two particularly important dynamics here, firstly how relationships developed over time, and secondly how they varied between individuals.

In terms of time it was notable that my relationships with research participants developed over time and became deeper, more personal and with a greater sense of rapport (this is common experience in longitudinal qualitative

research, see Thomson & Holland, 2003). At the start of the project it is likely that the participants perceived me in terms of my professional roles – as a PhD student and as a career adviser. I chose not to obscure my professional background as a career adviser because I felt that it was likely that, given the small size of the communities, some or all of the participants may know (of) me in this professional role already. Indeed, three of the participants who came forward for the research had spoken to me in this role in the past. Issues of practitioner visibility and multiple roles are particularly acute in rural areas (Helbok, 2003), and therefore being relatively open about my background as a career adviser and my location in Orkney was appropriate both ethically (as discussed later) and practically. However, being clear about my role also raised some challenges, particularly in terms of participants' views about what I may want to hear. Reflecting on the process of the interviews, I observed that the initial answers of participants to my questions often related to relatively narrowly defined processes of choice, and narrowly defined notions of career. I often used prompts to encourage wider reflections, and as the conversations progressed, through the process of building rapport, the scope of the interviews tended to broaden.

Where relationships developed through time, it is also important to note that both researcher and participant positions developed. A particularly significant development was the birth of my first child during the research process. This disrupted data collection plans (with a survey replacing a planned interview) and informing participants of this change of plans I was explicit about why my plans had changed. For the participants this potentially changed the way I was perceived, especially given that many participants discussed wanting to return to the islands to have children. In most of the second interviews the participants asked about my child, and this brought different dynamics into the conversations. In some cases there was an explicit sharing of perspectives, for example one participant was training as a midwife, another participant was pregnant, another had very young nephews and nieces. Given the cultural understandings of the islands as good places to bring up children (see Chapter 4) it may be that participants viewed my position in Orkney differently too, as becoming more embedded. Further, given the cultural understandings of motherhood as a time when career concerns may

become less important, it may also be that participants viewed my interests more holistically than simply in terms of narrow definitions of career.

Alongside changes over time, it is highly likely that I was perceived differently by different participants. The small size of the communities meant that some participants may have known of me through mutual friends or from community activities for example. Reasonably it could be assumed that some participants knew I had lived in Orkney for some time and that my partner is Orcadian, and these facts may position me as more embedded in the community than others who might have known less about me may have assumed if they thought of me as a relatively new incomer.

Therefore, rather than being understood as absolute my position potentially varied across participants, and across time (Sanghera & Thapar-Björkert, 2008). Reflection about each specific participant, interaction and context was important and ongoing, it is also true to say that my understanding of these relational experiences is also partial and still ongoing.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

Qualitative approaches to research pose a number of ethical considerations for researchers. Ethical considerations may be more marked in longitudinal qualitative work where a significant depth of data about individuals may be collected (Thomson, 2007), and in qualitative research in small communities where individuals may be relatively easier to identify (Damianakis & Woodford, 2012; Ellis, 2007). Working in line with ethical procedures laid down by organisations or bodies (procedural ethics) is important (Tracy, 2010), and in this research, the design and implementation of the project was guided by the university's ethics policy, as well as the framework provided by the British Sociological Association (British Sociological Association, 2020). The application for ethical approval from the university is shown in Appendix 1. However, ethical frameworks provided by institutions or professional bodies are typically "grounded on the premise that research is being done on strangers with whom we have no prior relationships and plan no future interaction" (Ellis, 2007, p. 5). In contrast this research was undertaken in two small communities, and in communities that I live in and, as a result, there were significant additional ethical considerations.

One of the key challenges of working in small communities is how to provide confidentiality or anonymity to research participants (Damianakis & Woodford, 2012; Ellis, 2007). Perhaps the most common strategy for overcoming this challenge in the existing literature is to obscure the *location* of the research (Damianakis & Woodford, 2012). A great deal of research into higher education students has taken this approach, avoiding using the names of towns or universities, and giving them pseudonyms or descriptions instead (see for example Clayton et al., 2009; Finn, 2017; Henderson, 2020). However, in this research where place has a strong focus, particularly in terms of the specificity of different places (see Chapters 2 and 4), this was not a preferred strategy. Further, in purely practical terms, I felt that if I had obscured the specific locations, perhaps by designating “a Scottish island community”, it would not have protected the identity of the islands, as my own location (in Orkney) could lead readers to suppose (correctly) the location of the study (see also Clark, 2006; and Wiles, 2013 on how obscured locations may still be identifiable). A further consideration is that the participants themselves may choose to disclose to friends or family that they had taken part in the research, and therefore any attempt to disguise the location may become meaningless if the site for the research became common knowledge in Orkney or Shetland.

Although disguising the location of the research does not *necessarily* protect participants' anonymity (Clark, 2006), choosing not to obscure the location of this study potentially exacerbates the risks of identifying participants. Given the small population, if enough details of a participant's story are disclosed even using pseudonyms will not protect the individual from being identified within the community (Ellis, 2007; Neale, 2013; Wiles, 2013). Turns of phrase, details of workplaces, details of family members and key experiences also potentially make participants identifiable. These issues are exacerbated in small connected communities when participants may be known to each other (Damianakis & Woodford, 2012; Wiles, 2013). In this research for example, two couples took part (with each member of the couple speaking to me individually) and in another case two housemates. It is also likely given the low numbers of students progressing to university each year (see Chapter 3) that other participants also knew each other.

The challenges and potential limits of confidentiality were discussed with participants prior to the first interview, which is a common strategy when working with small communities (Damianakis & Woodford, 2012; Mifsud, 2017). In particular, I explained that although I would do everything I could to anonymise data (using pseudonyms, not revealing workplaces and so on) I could not guarantee anonymity (see consent form in Appendix 5). At this early point I also agreed with participants that I *may* need to disclose subject of study and university (given the topic of the research). However, subsequently my position has become even more cautious, and in this thesis I have chosen to avoid including *any* identifying participant information, including details of specific career pathways, employers and university subjects of study where this is possible.

The decision to opt for a more cautious approach developed during the project as I reflected on issues of confidentiality and anonymity. A particularly significant influence was the decision of one participant to withdraw from the research on the basis of risks to their anonymity. This participant had willingly participated in both the first and second interviews, and then at the end of the second interview engaged in a reflective discussion with me about the implications of being included in the research. Although the participant felt strongly motivated to contribute to the research (given the topic), and were happy, in theory, with the approach to confidentiality that I had proposed, they were thinking through the future implications of being potentially identifiable. These issues had particularly emerged as they were thinking about wanting to return to the islands in the future. For me, this prompted reflections on the nature of working with participants who were from small communities in terms of time and the ways that spatial locations, career trajectories and relationships with one another might change in quite unpredictable ways. Although consent for this participant (and potentially others) had felt okay at one point in time, it had not felt okay at a subsequent point (see also Wiles, 2013), and this change of heart reflected the ways that this participant's own views about their future, and likely career and spatial trajectories had also changed. For me this raised questions about other participants, and how they might feel in the future too. What if, for example, some participants returned home in the future (especially if they weren't anticipating moving home at the point of being interviewed)? What if they entered different relationships with each other, such as

employer and employee? Could their feelings about being potentially identifiable change? For the participant who withdrew, they recognised the risks of being identified were very small, but the fact that they did not feel that these risks were worth taking was highly influential to me, and particularly challenged me to think through the significance of time and consent in relation to working in small communities. I remain very grateful to the participant for engaging in an open and thought-provoking conversation with me.

My approach therefore has been to obscure as many details as possible to prevent participants being identified. As in other research (see, for example, Mifsud, 2017) I have paraphrased in places rather than quoting directly, and I have removed dialect and other phraseology that may indicate location or identity of participant. I have also avoided any form of naming, numbering or use of pseudonyms for participants, in recognition that pseudonyms may allow quotations to be linked together, and this may inadvertently identify participants (a similar strategy has been used in other research in small communities, including McGrath, 2006; Mifsud, 2017; Petrova et al., 2016).

These have not been easy decisions and the need for anonymity has had to be balanced against the need for research integrity and the potential value of the research (Damianakis & Woodford, 2012; Neale, 2013). The decisions I have made have potentially impeded my ability to offer complete transparency in my research methodology (for example I have not provided an example of a coded extract from an interview) or to fully demonstrate some findings (for example the impacts of specific career pathways on location could be discussed much more clearly if a greater level of detail could be provided). However, I believe these are necessary compromises and I have sought to address these issues by providing a clear and coherent narrative surrounding the findings from this research project and by providing relatively in-depth details of the research methods and ethical justification for the decisions made (see earlier section for further discussion on transparency in research quality).

In obscuring some details, a further consideration in this research project was balancing the need for confidentiality with being able to represent authentically the experiences of participants (Neale, 2013). Indeed, recent scholarship has

shown that in some cases participants may not wish to remain anonymous (Moore, 2012), which raises questions of the “ownership” of participant voices and participant stories (Wiles, 2013). In this research potentially some participants may have preferred to waive the right to anonymity in order for me (and them) to be able to “say” more in this thesis. However, in this case I decided to take a cautious approach, this was partly practical – recognising that going back to participants and negotiating this would take time, especially as it was not part of the original research design – and partly related to the issue of time and consent, recognising that how comfortable a participant feels about being identifiable may change over time, so including any identifying information could remain problematic in the future.

In practical terms, recognising that decisions around confidentiality may feel different at different points in time, means that consent in longitudinal research is more of a process than something that happens on a one-off basis (Neale, 2013; Petrova et al., 2016; Thomson, 2007). As in other longitudinal research, consent was discussed at both interview points to ensure participants were happy to continue (Thomson, 2007). Consent processes also included returning transcripts to participants after each interview so that they could review them, make any additional comments, and mark any sections that they did not want included in the thesis, again this is an approach recommended in the literature, especially where there are risks of identifying participants (Thomas, 2017; Wiles, 2013).

The issue of futures is an interesting consideration in terms of my professional boundaries as a researcher too. Here, it needs to be recognised that just as I knew three participants from previously working with them as a career adviser, I am likely to meet or hear about participants in the future, either through personal or professional activities in the islands. Indeed, in the case of one graduate I have already been in a workplace setting unrelated to this research project. These possibilities of dual (and multiple) relationships are not uncommon in small rural communities, although they are most commonly described in terms of professional practice in psychology, social work or other fields, rather than in terms of research practice (Helbok, 2003; Piché et al., 2015; Werth et al., 2010). My experience working in roles that require a very high standard of ethical practice, especially in terms of confidentiality (as careers adviser and counsellor) in the Orkney community equip me well for also working as a researcher in the

community. A particularly important consideration is that confidentiality does not end with the production of the thesis or other outputs from the research but will be an ongoing consideration over time as I come into contact with participants or their contacts. It also extends to managing ongoing risks of “small talk” and the accidental sharing of participant information that can happen in small communities where there are multiple relationships (Helbok, 2003; Werth et al., 2010).

A further consideration in this research is how the work that I have produced may be received within the communities themselves, given that I have chosen to make the communities identifiable. In terms of research quality, relevance and significance of research are important (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020; Tracy, 2010). Some critical realists also focus on potential *utility* of research findings (Kempster & Parry, 2014; Porter, 2007; Ryan & Ruddy, 2019). In this research project, although theoretical development was the focus, the research *also* aimed to produce practically significant findings (Tracy, 2010) that would help to inform future education, guidance or other interventions to support young students and graduates from the islands (see Chapter 1). However, it is possible that in this process I may produce findings that participants, or others within the communities, find difficult (Ellis, 2007; Whyte, 1993). Practically, for me again, this involves being rigorous in my analysis, and very careful about how I present the findings; even in informal settings I take care to present or discuss findings accurately (recognising where there are unanswered questions and scope for additional research for example) and am careful not to make inappropriate claims to universality.

A final key ethical challenge in this research project has been managing the boundaries between my work as a career adviser and as a researcher during the interviews. In addressing this issue, I was explicit with participants about my different roles, and identified the boundaries between these roles explicitly, making clear that this research project did not entail any advice-giving, and providing information about where participants could go for career guidance if they felt they needed it (see for example the Participant Information Sheet in Appendix 5). However, I was aware that, as others have recognised, the process of qualitative interviewing may itself have a therapeutic impact on a participant (Dickson-Swift et al., 2006), and act as something of an “intervention” (Thomson, 2007, p. 580). Also, I was mindful that my previous training in counselling and guidance may provide me

with skills in opening up conversations, that may not always be appropriate or ethical in a research relationship (Etherington, 1996). In managing the conversations with participants then, I was conscious of relational ethics and ethics of care (Ellis, 2007). Relational ethics “recognizes and values mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between researcher and researched, and between researchers and the communities in which they live and work” (Ellis, 2007, p. 4). Here, remembering first and foremost that this research involves people, I was guided by the principle of benevolence (Thomson, 2007). Where participants disclosed upsetting experiences (two experienced bereavement during the research process), experiences of making “mistakes” (in their eyes), and disappointments and frustrations with their career pathways, recognising and responding sensitively to these disclosures was very important. Here I was careful to balance the desire (as a researcher) to explore these areas in more depth, with the importance of considering participant wellbeing (Etherington, 1996; Thomson, 2007). One key approach for me when participants were discussing sensitive subjects was to remind them that they did not have to say any more unless they wished. In the case of one student who had experienced a recent bereavement I also checked whether they felt okay to carry on, or if they wished to end the interview.

### **Summary**

This chapter has outlined the methodological approach and methods used within this research project. Particular focus has been given to explicating key aspects of research design with the aim of providing transparency to the reader. Considering my own position as a researcher and discussing some aspects of researcher reflexivity and ethical considerations, I have also sought to provide some insight into the process of the research including key dilemmas and my responses.

## Chapter 6: Findings

In this chapter, the key findings from the research are discussed. This chapter is split into four sections – the first section covers statistical contextual data relating to graduates from the islands, and details about the sample of participants who took part in the research. The next three sections contain details of the key themes identified from the interview data: the dynamic of becoming and belonging, frameworks for mobility, and change over time.

### **Statistical Data and Sample Information**

As part of this research project, data from the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey was secured from the Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA) (HESA, 2020). This data covered all responses from graduates with a home address in Orkney and Shetland, who graduated from UK universities over a five-year period (2008/09-2012/13). This provided data for 745 graduates, which was explored using a range of descriptive statistics. Some of this analysis is presented here alongside data about the participants for this study. Care has been taken in this section to present demographic details, subjects and locations of study and graduate outcomes separately. This limits the ability of readers to track individual pathways but is necessary to prevent students being identified.

### ***Demographic Details***

The evidence shows that entry to higher education from the islands is highly gendered. The DLHE statistics for the five year period of 2008/9 - 2012/13 showed that 36% of graduating students from Orkney and Shetland were male, and 64% were female.<sup>2</sup> This demonstrates a stronger gender division compared to national figures for 2013/14, which showed 54.7% of full-time first-degree graduates were female and 45.3% were male (HESA, 2015b) The sample of graduates interviewed

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<sup>2</sup> Source: HESA Destination of Leavers survey 2008/09-2012/13. Copyright Higher Education Statistics Agency Limited 2014. HESA cannot accept any responsibility for any inferences or conclusions derived from the data by third parties.

for this research project was also markedly gendered, with 18 of the 22 (81%) being female and four male.

Although the DLHE statistics for Orkney and Shetland graduates showed that the numbers graduating from each of the island locations over previous years is broadly comparable, the interview sample showed a clear bias towards students from Orkney, with eight having home addresses in Shetland prior to entering higher education and 14 in Orkney. Statistical data on length of residence in an area before progressing to higher education is not readily available, however it was notable that the majority of participants in this study had been born and brought up in the islands to parents who were also islanders (although some parents had spent time away from the islands for studying or work as younger adults). Only three of the sample reported that they had not lived in the islands “all their life”. Despite a lack of data in this area, the preliminary survey for this research project (from which the sample of interviewees was drawn) also indicated a similar pattern, with 75% of respondents having lived in the islands “all their life”.<sup>3</sup>

Social class was not formally measured during the survey collection or interviews, however, details of parental levels of education were gathered, and eight out of 22 had one or more parent who had completed a degree level qualification. This level is lower than the national statistics for 2013/14 which show that 50% of students had a parent with a higher education qualification (HESA, 2019a).

### ***Locations and Subjects of Study***

The evidence for university progression from the islands clearly identifies geographical preferences in terms of location of university. As shown in Figure 5, DLHE data demonstrates that the two universities in Aberdeen are disproportionately popular – with Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen ranking first (attracting 14% of students) and Aberdeen University ranking third (attracting 11% of students). The University of the Highlands and Islands (with campuses in Orkney and Shetland) shows a reasonable level of popularity (6%) – having a comparable

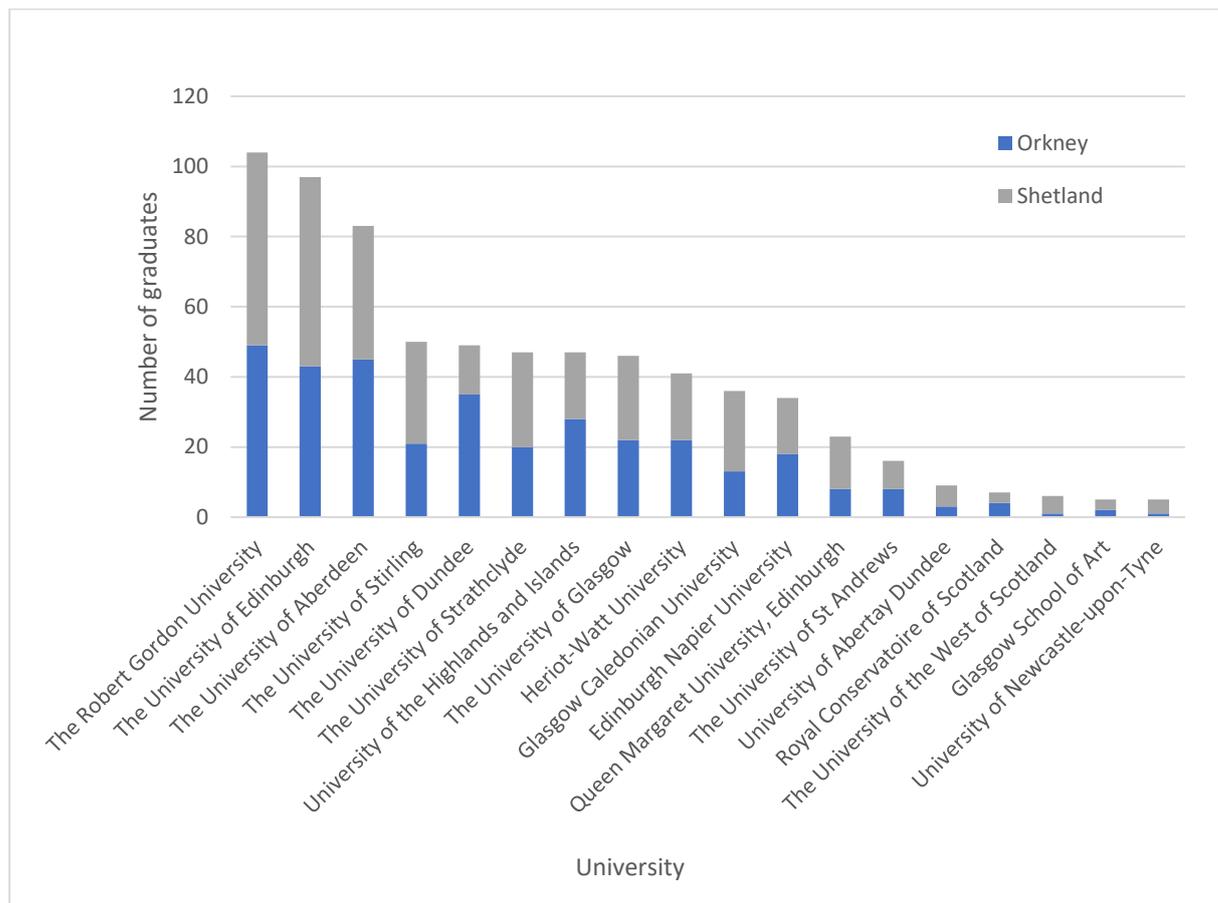
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<sup>3</sup> Calculated by all responses to the survey (including those participants from graduation years other than 2015)

popularity to the Universities of Glasgow and Strathclyde, which are over twice the size of the University of the Highlands and Islands.

**Figure 5.**

*Popularity of University by Domicile*



*Note:* Data shown excludes universities attended by less than five students. Source: HESA Destination of Leavers survey 2008/09-2012/13. Copyright Higher Education Statistics Agency Limited 2014. HESA cannot accept any responsibility for any inferences or conclusions derived from the data by third parties.

The interview sample showed similar patterns of university engagement with Aberdeen the most popular destination for study (chosen by nine, or 41% of, students) and Edinburgh the second most popular (chosen by six, or 27% of, students). Two students completed their degree in the islands.

However, the DLHE data potentially obscures details of student routes *through* higher education, showing only the institution students graduated from. Indeed, from the interview sample it is clear that many student pathways into and through higher education show a level of complexity. Seven students (31%) in this sample did not progress through a continuous period of education, but took one or more years out, typically working in the islands, sometimes combining work with study, or engaging in other activities (one student went on a learning exchange to Norway for example). Seven students engaged with the local college in one form or another – one engaged in a short course while still at school, one did a National Certificate (NC) straight after school, four undertook Higher National Certificates (HNCs), and two gained additional Highers via the local college.<sup>4</sup> However, even this list underestimates the complexity of routes – one student for example completed an HNC at the college, worked for a year or two and then returned to the college to undertake an additional Higher before moving away for university. Another student moved away for university, but left part way through their first year and returned to the islands; then undertook an HNC at the college, before moving away again for university. Even for the two students who graduated from the local college, neither planned to remain for their whole degree, initially just intending to complete an HNC or HND and then move away for the rest of their degree.

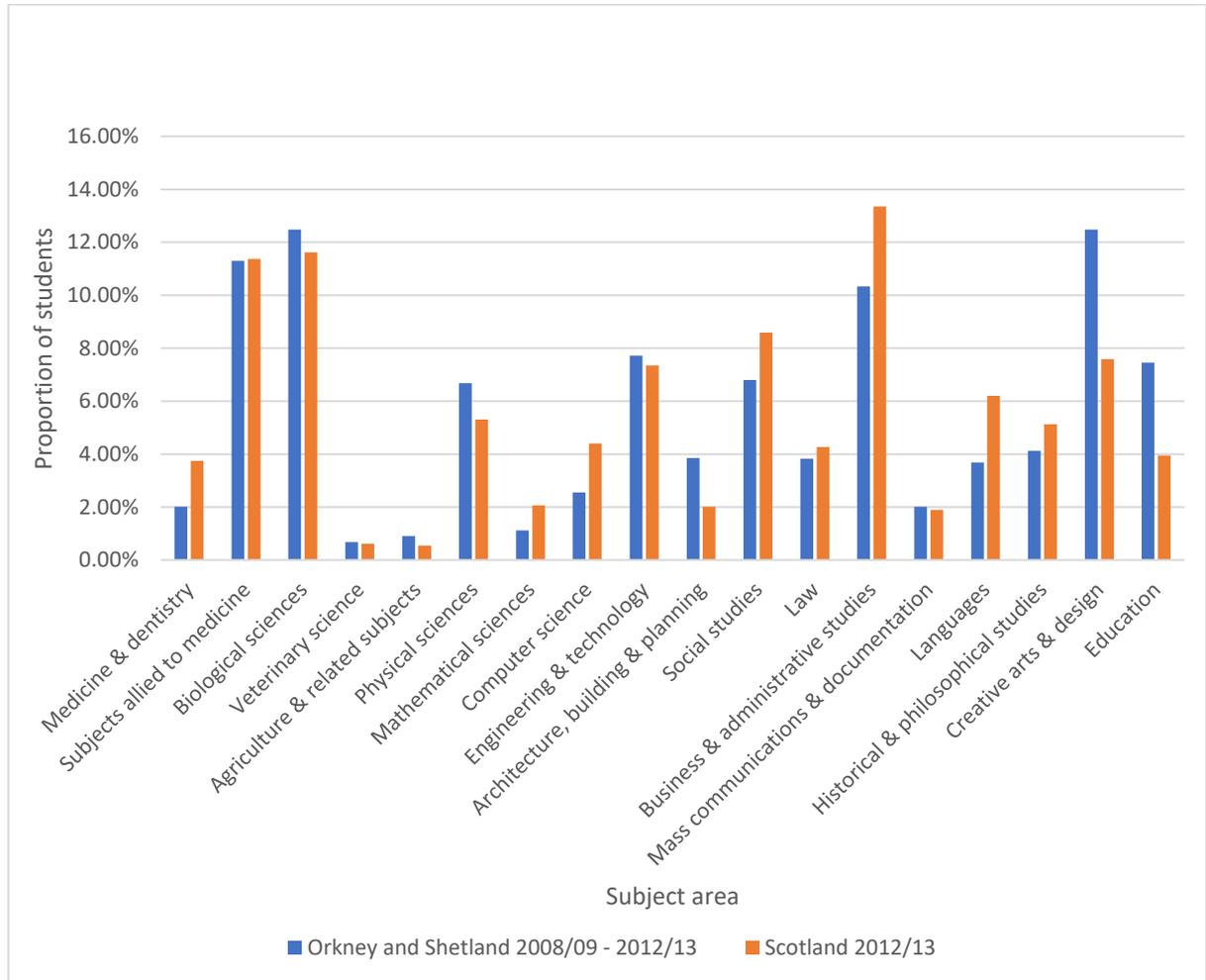
In terms of subject choice, the DLHE data presented in Figure 6, shows that for students from the islands of Orkney and Shetland choices appear to be broadly comparable to national patterns. However, some subjects show differences: for example education and creative arts and design appear to be more popular. Interview participants studied a range of subjects: six studied business-related courses (27%) including the two who chose to stay in the islands, and an additional two students chose pathways in accountancy. Four studied for professional degrees, three in healthcare and one in veterinary nursing. Two studied engineering and one studied law. Of the remaining students, two studied science, two studied social science, one studied English, one studied sound engineering and one studied languages.

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<sup>4</sup> One student is double counted in these figures, having both accessed the college for an HNC and then later undertaking an additional Higher.

**Figure 6.**

*Subject Choices of Orkney and Shetland Students Compared to Scottish Students*



*Note:* Data for Orkney and Shetland is sourced from the HESA Destination of Leavers survey 2008/09-2012/13. Copyright Higher Education Statistics Agency Limited 2014. HESA cannot accept any responsibility for any inferences or conclusions derived from the data by third parties. Data for Scotland is sourced from the HESA Destination of Leavers survey 2012/13, data table 3a (HESA, 2019b)

**Post-Graduation Locations**

The DLHE statistics for 2008/09-2012/13 show that six months after graduation 39% of students from Orkney or Shetland (whose location is known)

were living in Orkney or Shetland. Aberdeen also remained a popular destination after graduation (with Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire accounting for the location of 14% of graduates of known location). However, overall, graduates from the islands are more dispersed geographically, with 14% of graduates whose location is known living elsewhere in the UK (other than Scotland) or internationally. The statistics also suggest that where the gender difference in progression to university was marked, the gender difference is even more marked for graduates who chose to return or stay in the islands after graduation with 74% of those living in Orkney or Shetland six months after graduation being female.

The interview participants showed similar patterns in terms of destination. After one year, eight (or 36%) were back in the islands. However, generally the participants were also more dispersed – with a number having moved outside of Scotland. Where the DLHE statistics offer a snapshot of destinations after six months, in this research locations of interview participants were recorded at six months after graduation *and* at approximately one year after graduation; and this data shows that there was some movement between locations with six (or 27%) having different locations at six months after graduation and after a year, three of these moved from a city location to a small town or rural Scottish location<sup>5</sup>, two moved back to the islands after a period abroad, and one moved from the islands back to the mainland (see Figure 7).

In terms of living circumstances, by one year after graduation over half of the sample were living with partners (twelve students or 55%), and all five students based in rural Scotland were in this category. Interestingly of those in the islands only three were living with their parents, two were living independently and three with partners. It should be noted that one participant is counted in these islander figures, although they represent a slight anomaly as they were originally domiciled in one of the archipelagos but moved to the other island group after graduation. It also should be noted that there were two couples who took part in the research,

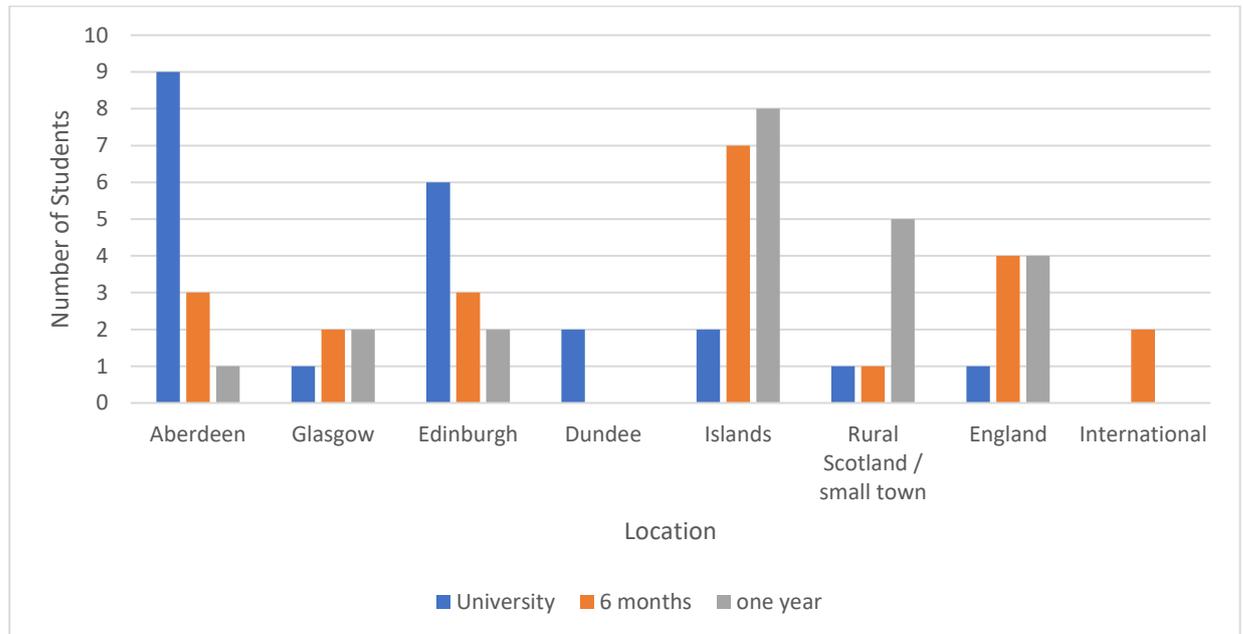
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<sup>5</sup> 'Small town or rural Scotland' is a categorisation utilised in this research only, to capture locations of graduates that are *outside* of the main city regions in the country. The categorisation does not follow the Scottish Government's (2018a) urban rural classification.

these participants were interviewed separately, and their relationships were only disclosed part-way through the research process.

**Figure 7.**

*Locations of Interview Participants Over Time*



### ***Post-Graduation Career Pathways***

The DLHE statistics suggest that graduates from Orkney and Shetland have comparable employment outcomes to other graduates. However, those who are based back in the islands six months after graduation appear to be more likely to be in non-professional work. In 2011/12 - 2012/13, 71% of students from the islands were in professional-level work compared to 69.2% of graduates from all Scottish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (HESA, 2015a). However, 65% of those living in the islands were in professional-level work, compared to 74% of those living elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> Salary levels for those living back in the islands also tend to be lower (as shown in Figure 8). There is some indication of differences between the islands

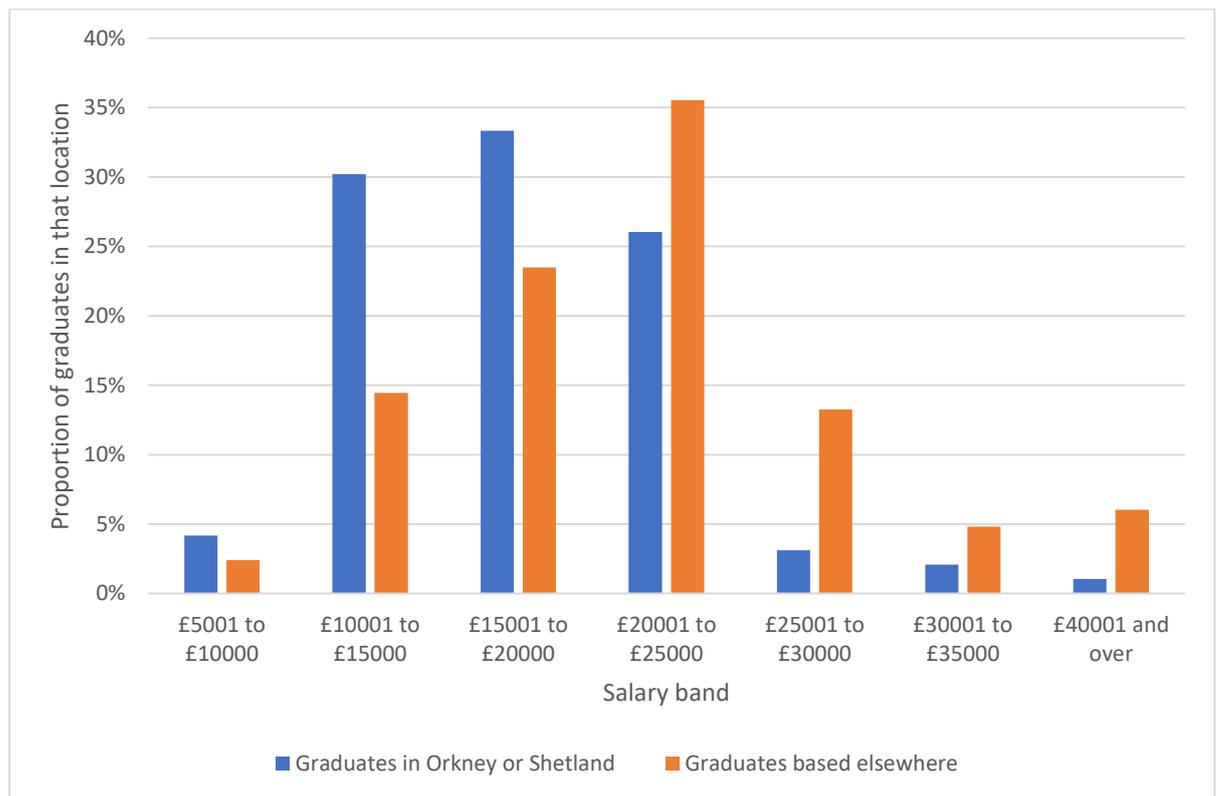
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<sup>6</sup> Calculations of “professional employment” are based on those in professions from Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes 1-3. Note that calculations exclude graduates where employment level was not known or not applicable.

too, with no graduates based in Orkney earning over £25,000, but six graduates based in Shetland in this category.

**Figure 8.**

Salary levels of Graduates from Orkney and Shetland by Residence



*Note:* Data drawn from HESA Destination of Leavers survey 2008/09-2012/13. Copyright Higher Education Statistics Agency Limited 2014. HESA cannot accept any responsibility for any inferences or conclusions derived from the data by third parties.

Although the numbers are small, there is evidence from the DLHE statistics that some courses or career routes may provide opportunities for an immediate return to the islands; for example, about half of those graduates from 2011/12 - 2012/13 who worked as teaching professionals were living in Orkney or Shetland six months after graduation (eight out of 16) and almost half of nursing and midwifery professionals (11 out of 24).

For the interview participants, after graduation two progressed immediately on to a masters course, and one progressed to a masters a year later. Five were on structured training programmes or placements: two of the four who had been studying for vocational degrees, the two students who had followed accountancy routes, and the student who had studied law. The two students who had studied engineering were in graduate schemes. Two were doing temporary and part-time work while trying to build up a freelance portfolio (in the creative industries). The remainder were in jobs that to different extents matched their skills and interests, these were a mix of jobs for which their degree may have been necessary, may have been beneficial, or were jobs that they considered provided useful experience (to differing extents).

Out of the eight graduates who were in the islands a year after graduation, one was in a professional healthcare role, two were in graduate trainee positions leading to a vocational qualification, and two were in trainee roles more broadly. The remaining three worked in a mix of administrative and temporary roles. Of the four graduates in trainee positions, one had secured the role shortly after graduation, the other three had taken a little longer, having different roles and / or employers at six months after graduation and one year.

### **Interview Data**

The data in the previous section presented some overall patterns of education engagement and graduate destinations for students from Orkney and Shetland generally, and for the interview sample specifically. Key themes emerging from this data include the importance of place (with the statistical evidence showing certain spatial patterns in university destinations and after graduation), the relative importance of partners in terms of living circumstances, and variations in employment outcome by career route and by location. The complexity of pathways, including into higher education and post-graduation is also clear.

The next part of the chapter will consider the data from the interviews. This data builds on the emerging themes of place, relationship and career routes, and the role of change or chance. Data is presented under three major themes: the first surrounds how individuals decide on, and navigate, their career development (titled pathways of belonging and becoming); the second surrounds the frameworks that

structure the spatial mobilities of individuals (focusing on impacts of people and career pathways); finally there is a section on the role of time in terms of the changing contexts within which participants make decisions.

### **Pathways of Becoming and Belonging**

The first theme considered is that of becoming and belonging. Four sub-themes are presented: the first, “where I fit”, considers processes of mobility and belonging; the second considers mobility and becoming; the third considers how the challenges of mobility are addressed through pursuing “familiar enough” pathways, and the final theme considers processes of settling, and settling down.

#### ***“Where I fit” – Mobility and Belonging***

The first theme surrounds the importance of a sense of belonging. Most participants in this research expressed a strong sense of belonging to the islands, which was commonly attached to identity (being an Orcadian or a Shetlander) and having extended families in the islands. Interestingly, however, this sense of belonging *does not* preclude mobility:

I suppose it's such a home and my roots are so firmly planted there that in a way that makes me feel completely fine about being away for a long time, because I don't really feel like I need to live there for it to be home.

However, this sense of belonging was not universal for students in this research, those who moved to the island as children, or who had parents who grew up elsewhere (or in many cases, both) often expressed a less strong sense of belonging.

Alongside place-belonging, other forms of belonging are apparent throughout participant narratives, most often articulated in the form of finding “people like me”, or “where I fit”. One participant who travelled to Norway for an exchange described multiple levels of belonging, including social belonging and career:

Being so involved in [specific subject / career area] in Norway just kind of confirmed that that was the environment for me, do you know what I mean? It was my kind of people, and my kind of environment.

Notably, the *spatial* location here was not the islands, and yet the participant still felt they belonged. This clearly demonstrates how alongside spatial belonging, social and career belonging are important. Importantly these forms of belonging can result in participants becoming mobile and leaving the islands.

Belonging to the educational context is particularly important in embedding expectations of mobility. Indeed, participants describe how the education system facilitates experiences of mobility from very early on. Participants who grew up in the countryside commonly described moving from primary schools in their local communities to larger secondary schools further away in the main towns. These experiences of transition are significant because they contain elements of challenge that to some extent mirror the challenges that students experience going away to university: navigating bus services on their own, meeting new people, and learning a new environment. Participants commonly reflect on the transition to higher education being eased by their earlier experiences of transition to secondary school:

I am glad I did have the transition up to [secondary school]... I was in my own comfortable little bubble in that little school and so I think moving up to [secondary school] even though in hindsight it wasn't that big a transition, at the time it really was and I think that that probably helped prepare me for moving away and going to uni.

For one participant, progress to secondary school involved moving from their small island community to board on a weekly basis at the school hostel and this provided a clear “stepping-stone”:

[Being in the hostel] you did kind of feel like you'd already almost moved out of home.... So rather than the shock of just completely leaving my family to come down here and not see them for months on end it did help that I had that stepping-stone in between that I didn't see them for sometimes two, three weeks at a time, so it was kind of more of a gradual thing.

Other participants described other experiences of spatial and educational stepping-stones; one attended secondary school in mainland Scotland, boarding on the mainland during term time, another engaged in an exchange programme in Norway offered for young people from the islands. In both cases participants gained

significant experiences of mobility, as well as engagement in a new educational setting.

The experience of participants was therefore of gradually extending their geographical reach through engagement in education, and by the time they completed secondary school, leaving the islands was perceived as the natural thing to do. This was especially the case for those students who felt they “belonged” in education, who enjoyed school or who were academically very able. The association of leaving the islands and academic success was so strong that participants frequently used the terms “going away” and “going to university” interchangeably: “I knew I'd like to go away and study something at university.” For many participants, the assumption that they would leave the islands after their schooling started very early, and again this assumption was particularly strong for participants who had parents or older family members who went to university. One participant describes how “there was a lot of people around us that went to university and from a young age I always remember them going away... I think I was about eight years old when I realised that I wanted to go to university.”

The association of mobility, higher education and academic achievement for participants was reinforced in one particular school, by an initiative to assist with the transition to higher education which was reserved for high achievers:

We had the university trip as well but you had to have a certain amount of grades to go on that... and I didn't have the grades to go on it so I couldn't go ... that probably would have been good to go on because I'd never even been to a university before.

This quotation is significant because of the participant's experience of compounded disadvantage: based on their location, their lower grades, and their restricted mobility. The existence of a trip that they could not access due to their grades reinforced an understanding that university was “not for them” and made the transition to university even more daunting.

Participants who did not perceive themselves as “academic achievers” or did not have a strong family history of higher education, did not typically make the same assumptions about entry to higher education as other students. Instead, these participants often described processes of realising that they “could do it”: normally

through the support of an encouraging teacher, or through initially progressing to a college course where they built confidence in their academic ability, or both. One participant said: “[I] wasn't very clever at school but... [I] went to [the] College for two years... and then one of the lecturers said, ‘how about going to university?’ I'd never considered that before because I was never academic.” Progressing to college for some students also assists with mobility by giving the opportunity for another educational transition which can build confidence with things like meeting new people and learning a new environment. As the college courses offer different kinds of courses from school provision, typically being more vocationally oriented, students can also potentially develop a different kind of “fit”, they may still see themselves as “not academic,” but they have found a vocational pathway where they feel more capable and can see futures in higher education aligned to this pathway.

Where participants who accessed college courses typically described developing a sense of belonging to specific vocational pathways, students progressing to university straight from school also described making choices about university pathways based on their “fit” with these pathways. In describing course choice, most typically students described making choices based on the logic of what they were good at and what they enjoyed. One participant stated: “when they ask you to pick your university subjects they say ‘well, think about what you like doing and what you're good at doing’ and you think back and then I was like ‘well I like those in particular’.” In this quotation it is clear that the school context embeds the logics of achievement and enjoyment as the ways that career choices “should” be made. For many students identifying what they are good at and what they enjoy comes from evidence of their achievement in certain subjects. For others, however, teachers or parents had a direct role in suggesting subjects that they felt students were “good at” or would enjoy. One student commented: “in fifth year at school I think, my physics teacher said, ‘oh you know you should think about engineering. I think the way you think you would probably enjoy it’.”

Where students pursued vocational subjects, a sense of “fit” was often reinforced by periods of work experience, creating a sense of vocational belonging. One student described a combination of academic experiences, teacher suggestion, and work experience as generating a clear vocational pathway:

I hadn't really ever given a career in [specific occupational area] any thought until I did that [work experience]... Because I also considered doing English, but then I tried Advanced Higher English for a day and backed out of that one pretty quickly.... I hadn't really given [specific occupational area] much thought and then my pupil support teachers were like 'oh well you have the grades for it so do some experience, see what you think' and I did some experience and enjoyed it.

The importance of work experience for reinforcing a sense of vocational belonging is particularly important because in some cases students reported challenges in securing appropriate work experience in the islands. One participant reported:

I did a bit of work experience at home before I came away, it was obviously difficult because of confidentiality issues with it being such a small place, I found that nobody in the hospital or the health centre would actually take [students].

For this student, the experience that they did manage to gain led them to pursuing a relevant subject at university, although it was not their original area of interest.

The restricted availability of work experience in the islands, especially in roles where confidentiality is an issue, was mentioned by several participants. However, the islands also have very specific economic strengths that, for one participant, led to the development of a relatively niche area of interest. This participant, alongside their school studies, also studied for a course at the local college:

One of the courses offered to us, it was like an additional course, was [focused on the] renewable energy sector so [a company has] taken us to all their sites... they've taken us on speedboats and we went up to those turbines between the islands... I think that was sort of the moment when I really got interested in renewables and the energy industry.

This demonstrates that the particular nature of the island labour markets can be both a constraint on, or a stimulus for, the development of certain career interests.

Alongside academic and subject or vocational belonging, social belonging is also important for young people in terms of where they see their future. For

academically able pupils the sense of belonging to an educational environment is reinforced by social belonging and being part of a cohort of young people all moving for higher education. For others, their social group can change their spatial horizons:

I was pretty sure I was going to stay in [the islands] but when I saw all my friends applying to go away and thinking they were all going to be leaving and everything, I thought 'hold on maybe I want to do this as well' so that's when I first thought about going away.

There is an important element of time here that is replicated in other narratives, the sense that students have to move away at the same time as everyone else, or they will miss their chance. Here elements of social belonging (what friends are doing) are tied in with much wider understandings of belonging in time-space: what is normal for someone like me at this time in my life. One student described:

Being in [the islands] as well, I think going to uni at eighteen is such a good chance because I think living in a small place, and living in [the islands], it's one of those things that if you don't go when everyone else is going, or when you're kind of meant to be going (for lack of a better word) then you never will.

The sense of social belonging and that there is a "right time" for leaving the islands, is so strong that in some cases, course or career choice are potentially subordinate to the desire to leave. One participant gave a vivid example:

I wanted to move away from [the islands]. Looking back on things I should have stayed in [the islands] for another year, got my Higher English, and Higher Maths and then reapplied, but at the time, because everyone is getting accepted into universities that are your friends, you're kind of thinking... 'what if I'm left on my own, I'll have no friends!'... and I just wanted to move away so badly I just chose any course that I got into really.

Although for academically able young people, their friends and social circles may reinforce a desire to go away, this is not a universal experience, and social reinforcement can also happen the other way around. One student described: "when I left school I didn't really know what I wanted to do, I... wasn't sure about

going to university because none of my friends did, and I suppose very few out of my year actually went to university.” The specific social connections young people had was therefore important, and here there may well have been a connection with the size and location of the schools young people attended. Smaller schools will have smaller year groups and could well experience high variation year on year in terms of numbers who progress to higher education. In the quotation above it may be significant that this student attended a smaller High School in the islands.

### ***“Becoming a Different Person” – Mobility and Becoming***

As discussed in the previous section, belonging to an educational environment embeds an expectation of mobility; however, mobility for university is also associated with becoming, it is the opportunity to try out new things and gather new experiences. Describing the appeal of university one student said:

I think it was just seeing things like, different sports clubs and stuff that were available and seeing about all the societies and stuff like that that you could do at university and just, the things you could do in a different city and things.

Participants also described the value of being able to try out things and meet new people outside of the scrutiny of a community in which participants are well known:

There's plenty of things to do in [the islands] I know, but the fact that everybody knows everybody and privacy... doesn't really exist, so... I prefer to be in a bigger place where there's a few more opportunities as well.

The experience of university is therefore valued for much more than academic achievement. One participant described how “it was such a great learning experience, the whole aspect of it: moving away, being kind of on your own, making new friends, just the whole life change really”. The structure of the education system provides interesting context here because of the ways that students typically moved to and from the islands and their university locations for holiday periods and periods of study. A number of participants described developing a sense of split identity, of being two people in two different places: “it is quite strange in a way because [it's] kind of like two lives that are very separate.” Another described:

I do different things when I'm in each place - like when I'm in [Scottish city] I have my routine and... I am a different kind of person... and then I come

home to my boyfriend and stuff and everything kind of goes back to the way it used to be. I go back to [Scottish city] and I have my life again, and it's both equally good so... yeah they both mean different things to me

Here it is not the case that participants necessarily identify with *either* their home or their university locations, but they can value both.

However, the experience of mobility is widely valued by participants because of the way that it provides perspective, and opportunities for personal development:

I'm really, really glad I did it because I mean it's obviously broadened my horizons a lot and also I've made a lot of good new friends and things and... it's definitely made me a better person, like not a 'better person' but who I am today.

The participant's self-correction from "better person" to "who I am today" is highly significant here as it demonstrates a common theme in the interviews that participants were very careful not to appear to judge others who do not progress to higher education or who stay in the islands. However, there remains a strong sense that participants themselves have benefitted from mobility. When probed about their personal development participants typically described an increase in confidence. This was expressed by one participant as follows:

I was a lot more timid I guess before I went to university and shy about speaking to people, and stuff like that doesn't bother me so much anymore. I think that would be the main thing I would see changed in me, just increased confidence.

The confidence that participants develop is therefore particularly related to meeting new people or entering unfamiliar situations; and this confidence is generated through having had the experience of moving to university, meeting new people and entering unfamiliar environments. Notably this confidence is particularly marked for participants who both leave the islands for university *and* undertake international mobility as part of their university provision. One participant at the end of their degree commented:

I feel that I could go anywhere now, anywhere in the world, because before you know I could hardly go to Aberdeen to stay but I went to America and again I was never homesick and I had a great time.

As in this quotation, by the time students graduated, not only did they present as having increased confidence to allow them to try more new things, but they also associated doing new things and challenging themselves with self-development. Therefore at graduation the theme of wanting to further extend horizons continued. Participants often described aspirations for further geographical mobility, which was understood to provide an ideal opportunity for gathering new experiences, meeting new people, and experiencing a new place:

Getting out of your comfort zone is such an amazing thing, and when I first moved to Aberdeen [and] I went to Uni, I was absolutely terrified but now I know that it was the best experience ever, so I just wonder if, almost doing the same kind of thing again, just trying a different city, would kind of, maybe have the same kind of benefits....

Interestingly, just as the education system created stepping-stones to leaving the islands, participants sometimes described attending university in a Scottish city as providing a stepping-stone to future mobilities:

I've lived in little islands, where everybody knows everyone and it's a tiny community, and then I've moved to uni, and then I've moved up to, well I would say a big city, but I know in the grand scheme of the world Glasgow and Edinburgh aren't big. And I'm still only in Scotland, so I'd just like to go that little bit further.

Just as with entry to higher education, the sense of the importance of continuing social and spatial mobility was again reinforced for many graduates by their social contexts. Once again belonging to a social group resulted in imagined future mobilities. One participant remarked: "If I stayed [in my university town] I think I'd get like a year or two in, or maybe less, than that and feel like 'oh everybody's gone I'm kind of left behind...'"

***"Familiar Enough" Pathways – Managing Becoming and Belonging***

Although new experiences were valued for self- and career development, participants in this research project identified that new experiences can be challenging. As such the appeal of new experiences was tempered, and participants typically balanced the desire for the new with desire for a certain level of comfort or familiarity.

The challenges of new experiences were particularly acute at the point of transition to university, with students frequently describing the experience as being “daunting” and a “big jump” or “leap”. For island students the leap involved both educational and spatial transition, described here by one participant:

For some people going to uni it's a jump [on] the educational side, but as they already live on the mainland then it's not a lifestyle change, where I feel like going from the island it's a lifestyle change as well as a big educational jump, so I felt I was quite uprooted to begin with.

The sense of being “uprooted” was common in this research, with moving away being relatively disorientating process, requiring students to learn how to be in a different space. This involved practical issues of familiarisation with a new location as well as much more profound issues of becoming familiar with ways of life in a city location. Transport systems were mentioned remarkably often, with fears of getting lost, managing urban bus services, and driving in city locations all mentioned. This is notable because of the way that day to day mobilities influence feelings of being settled: “even simple things like catching the bus down here was difficult, not difficult but it was just something I wasn't used to, so that even was daunting for me.” Another student commented:

Being from such a small community it does make it quite daunting to move to a big city because [it] is so close knit and everybody knows everybody so you never really have to worry about much, so moving to a big city from somewhere like [the islands] is quite a big step because even things like driving here is a, a lot more scary than driving in [the islands] [laughs] because there's no traffic lights or anything...

Other differences included the availability of shops and restaurants in urban spaces. This was particularly important in terms of the segregation of these spaces

in urban environments, allowing different consumption possibilities. One participant remarked:

All the nice cocktail bars and things [here] - they're for your young professionals... in my opinion there's not a terrible amount of young professionals in [the islands] and there's not the kind of cocktail bars or that's just not why you go there.

These different social spaces were also associated with different attributes or personal qualities; being “confident” and “assertive” were associated with urban environments, whereas being “quiet” or “shy” were associated with the islands, as described by this participant:

This might sound really silly but... if you're eating somewhere and say for example the food's cold from my experience most people at home would just not do anything about it whereas now I think I speak up a lot more.

The challenges of moving for university were often described in terms of relative confidence. One participant described how they did not move away immediately after school, but after “building confidence” felt more able to move:

I think that all kind of built on my confidence and made me more confident to go away... so I kind of started to be a bit more brave and think, even if I am slightly nervous I need to just do this.

In managing the “jump” to university, students commonly described following a strategy of moving to “familiar enough” locations. These were locations which were familiar enough to feel comfortable, but not so familiar that the opportunities for learning from being in a new place were restricted:

Because it was my first time of moving away from [the isles] I thought maybe if I just went somewhere a bit closer to home, it's still going to be really different and be exciting, but also not be too far away.

For many students, Aberdeen was relatively the most familiar of the Scottish cities, as it is a main port for the islands, and a place that students had frequently visited for short trips, to visit family or friends, or had travelled through as part of going on holiday elsewhere: “being [an islander] Aberdeen's always the place that you have

to go through to get anywhere really be it by boat or by plane so it wasn't too bad moving to Aberdeen.”

However, Aberdeen was not always the most familiar city for students; for another participant school trips to Edinburgh and the physical characteristics of the city made this location feel more comfortable:

I'd had a couple of drama trips through the [school] to Edinburgh which were all really great, [and] I'd been there with my family, [and it's] just a really bonny city. I guess the impression of Glasgow coming from being a country bumpkin from [the islands] is that it's a bit of a concrete jungle, whereas Edinburgh's not so much.

Where drama trips through school were mentioned by this participant, other participants also mentioned familiarities being developed through other activities – for example one participant had experience of travel to specific locations to compete in sports.

Although familiarity was important, participants did not want to choose locations that felt *too* familiar, or, for some, where it would be *too* easy to return home:

Actually, I didn't apply to anywhere in Aberdeen because everyone always says when you're going away from [the islands] then you don't want to be in Aberdeen because then everybody always comes and visits you all the time, [laughs]... or everyone expects you to come home all the time.

In this quotation, the familiarity of Aberdeen is seen as problematic as it would limit the student's opportunities to be independent. It is instructive to note again the importance of social context here – “everyone says...”. Therefore, the sense of which locations are familiar enough is constructed partly by material factors (such as transport connections) as well as biographical experiences, and material connections (where friends and family are), as well as constructed by social context, in terms of what other people (friends and family) say.

Importantly those students who had significant experiences of mobility (and had lived in cities) in the past, experienced fewer barriers when moving away for university. One student who had previously lived in a city as well as the islands

said: “obviously having taken those steps before, you know moving away, having to leave friends behind and finding new ones, because I was used to that, coming to university was actually not a problem for me at all”. Here the student describes a level of confidence with the process of mobility, that other students (with limited experiences of mobility) described only gaining *after* university.

**Seeking familiarity during transition.** Alongside choosing familiar enough locations to move to, participants also described managing the challenges of mobility by seeking to connect with familiar people, activities, and settings in new environments. A number of students described the value of a “homely” set up (rather than halls of residence):

The whole halls experience - everybody was going out partying and stuff... and I was like ‘oh I’m not really like that’ so fitting in with them was a bit weird whereas the second time [of going to university] like living in a house with just two other girls is a lot better

Here, a sense of “not fitting” or “fitting” is related to the student’s immediate living environment. On their second transition to university, choosing a familiar environment helped them to manage some of the unfamiliarities and challenges of moving. For this student, the homely experience was further reinforced by the fact that one of the girls they lived with was also from the islands. Indeed, it is apparent across the interviews that living with, or connecting with, others from the islands was often helpful. Notably, as described in the following quotation, the other islanders that students connect with do not have to be close friends to be valuable:

I didn’t know her very well, but I know her to say hi to and whatnot... and then every time I [saw her] I was like ‘Hi!’ It was like family because it’s the only person from [the islands] I know here, ‘Hi!’

The use of the expression “like family” is perhaps notable here; participants often referred to the islands themselves as “home” (rather than a specific island or town within an archipelago), and there was a sense of other islanders being almost like an extended family network.

Having friends or family in a city provided some participants with practical support such as helping orientate them to a new place: “the girls in the year above

me who'd been there for a year, they were able to help me and tell me like what bus to get or like really simple things." Extended family members were also described by participants as valuable for providing connections home and some "home comforts" including family meals: "well actually it's my dad's brother that's in [name of city] as well, so I used to visit him quite a lot... well I used to go out for tea with him a few times during uni."

Finding ways of doing "familiar" activities was also helpful for participants, this could be sporting activities, or connecting with a local church for example. A number of students specifically also mentioned the value of getting out into green and outside spaces as a means of connecting with familiarities of home:

I would often find when I lived in the city and if it was a bonny day, I would want to be outside, but there's a limit to what you can do, so I would go a run or I would go to the park and then, you know, there's a limit, I would read a book in the park, but there's a limit to what you can do, I would find myself just going shopping just to do something outside. I always wanted to do stuff [outside]. It has been something I've done all my life - it is just on a weekend you go out and work, outside and even potter about or, well there's always jobs to be done [on the farm].

Notably, after graduation despite students describing greatly increased confidence with mobility, the theme of familiarity remains important. This is particularly the case because compared to student mobilities, graduate mobilities are typically enacted with less support, as described by one graduate: "when you don't have the crutch of uni where everybody's in the same boat to make friends and all that sort of stuff... it's hard moving to a brand-new city just to make friends and socialise." As a result, relatively few graduates moved to new locations after graduation, and for those who did, their descriptions of the "big leap" that was involved bears considerable similarity to descriptions of going away to university: "going that extra distance down the country is a big leap in itself and sort of throwing yourself into or throwing yourself out of your safe social circle and into something totally new."

Where participants did move to new places, they almost always moved with a partner, or to be with a partner, and just as for students, graduates reported that

these social connections were valuable to mitigate some of the risks of moving. Graduates on graduate schemes and training programmes also typically described benefitting from being with a cohort of other new graduates, which provided a ready-made pool of social contacts (similar to the experience of being at university with a cohort of “freshers”). Here, the sense of social belonging, and of life-course belonging (doing what is right for someone like me at this time in my life) is apparent, as expressed by this participant: “then I've got good pals at work like there's other trainees my age and perhaps a little older as well, so we're all in the same boat, you kind of get a spirit of camaraderie.”

Another form of the dynamic of familiarity for graduates is provided by “building on” previous experiences. The phraseology of “building on” arose frequently in this research and can be considered as a balance between the desire for new experiences, alongside a sense of continuity in experience. To stay in an entirely familiar environment limits the potential for self-development, but to do something completely new in this context would also be to go “back”. One participant commented:

I've come quite far in the year, and I'm quite interested to see like what else I can learn rather than going back to square one and a new job and learning like new systems and things and like I would rather build on the skills that I've got and take it a bit higher... a bit further.

The dynamic of familiarity is important in terms of becoming, but here it is specifically about building on existing experiences.

### ***“Settling” – Belonging and Movement***

The importance of balancing familiarities with new experiences can be thought of in terms of being “settled” in a life-course trajectory. In this research, students commonly compared being “settled” to being “stuck”; importantly where “stuck” precludes any sense of movement, “settled” incorporates a sense of movement. It could be summarised in terms of being at the right place (in terms of my career, my location, and my relationships) in my life, for now. One student for example described feeling settled in their career because of the new opportunities they have had:

I think I'm just quite lucky that they're giving me all these different opportunities and that's probably why I feel quite settled because [of] those things that I wasn't expecting to get asked to do... and it's just quite nice to be asked to kind of help out with different bits and pieces.

The sense of time is particularly important in being settled, and indeed elsewhere in the interviews participants often highlighted the need to do things “at the right time”.

The dynamics of settling or being settled were apparent throughout participant narratives, settling at university for example or settling into a career. Importantly, participants saw being settled as something that changes over time, typically viewing young adulthood as the “right time” to be relatively more mobile (to develop experiences and explore options) before they decided where they would like to settle down more permanently. One student said: “I think I'd like more stability later on in life, but right now, I don't know what I want, and you'll never know if you don't have a look around, so that's what I plan to do.” Another said:

I think I'd quite like to spend the next few years maybe gaining some experience working in these areas but in different countries so that I can get the travelling that I've always wanted to do and also gaining experience alongside that and then I would hope that through doing that I would maybe get an idea of where I'd like to actually live and work.

Here, then, mobility is understood as important for providing the experiences necessary to be able to enact choice at a later date, choosing career and spatial location.

Although students typically described valuing exploration and mobility in young adulthood, in terms of their future locations, many envisaged a possible return to the islands. The desire to return was particularly linked to the quality of life the islands could provide for raising children as described by this participant:

I mean growing up here myself it is a great place to grow up, it is safe and like I say all my family's around, they'd have their grandparents around or whatever like I always did when I was younger.

The appeal of replicating a positive childhood for participants' own children, the safety of the islands and being around grandparents and extended family were

commonly reported. However, whether such a return was feasible and when this return might be enacted was much more questionable, as for most graduates it depended on an appropriate job being available in the islands at an appropriate time.

That would be the ideal, to find something work wise that I wanted to do at the right time in [the islands] when I'd had enough experience of the outside world, and then move back and start a family.

The phrasing here of “finding something... that I wanted to do” is important, as it demonstrates that participants did not necessarily have in mind *specific* kinds of jobs to enable them to move home, but they did have a sense of a job needing to be something they “wanted to do”.

Not all participants desired to return home to the islands in the future, but participants did almost universally imagine more settled futures, in terms of place, career, and settling down with partners. This process of settling down was often imagined as taking place at some future point in time, when career stage and relationship stage potentially aligned. However, for some graduates the process of settling happened much sooner after graduation than they expected. One graduate in a vocational route one year after graduation reflected:

I've just grown up a bit, I've just matured a bit and I think I'm just realising that that's not really what I want any more I'm not interested in going out and I'm not really worried about the big city life, I think I've had my stint at that and I'm just over it now I think, like it was a great experience but I think that's not me and I'm more just wanting to settle down and like I think I always kind of pictured that later on in life I would move to somewhere a bit quieter but it's just happened a bit sooner than I thought.

However, for others there were challenges, especially where relationship stage, location and career pathway did not necessarily align. Graduates who moved back to the islands soon after graduation for example sometimes reported feeling that they had moved home too “early”, before they had had a chance to establish themselves in the working world. One year after graduation one participant who had returned home and had bought a house with their partner reflected:

I guess it's almost unfortunate in a way that everything's happened, that everything is slotting into place so early, in some respects cos I think if we weren't so settled doing what we're doing that's the time that we'd be more likely to do that stuff.

It is perhaps instructive to note here, that where buying a house for this graduate felt like it was happening too soon, participants who remained away may have been able to progress their careers more easily but found it difficult to imagine a settled future due to the challenges of home ownership. One graduate mentioned (almost as an aside): “we're hoping to buy at some point in the future, if that is feasible at all in this day and age.”

More acute feelings of being “out of place” in the islands were reported by a different participant who returned to the islands without a clear career path *and* without a partner:

Being up here I'm never going to get like where I want to be with my career, there's not the opportunities up here and I feel like, a lot of my friends as well are all married and having children and everything and I know that I'm definitely not going to be doing that any time soon [laughs] so I think everyone just seems a few years ahead of me, so I feel like moving back to [name of city], a lot of my friends that I was at uni with, they're all still there, erm which makes it extremely appealing because they're all kind of at the same level as what I am, just trying to get something with their degree and kind of get ahead with life, but...

Feeling settled therefore is not primarily about chronological age, but about the experience of having an established career route, relationship, and some sense of stability in place, and when then this happens varies for different individuals.

Conceptually being settled is contrasted by participants to being stuck, and throughout the interviews participants reported fears of becoming spatially “stuck”. For one participant, this fear related to being stuck in a career path that would not allow them to return home:

In some sort of way I'd say 'oh probably by the time I'm thirty or forty I'll be back home' but then ... if I'm still in a career with a big [kind of] company

doing [a specific role] I don't really see how I could be home ... I always sort of say 'oh I'll have kids I'll bring my kids up in [the islands]' but then like I say if my career just can't ... doesn't allow me to do that then ... I'm not sure.

Managing a pathway to potential settled futures then involves guarding against becoming stuck too early. Participants described fearing being stuck in career pathways: "I didn't want to get stuck too early and be too scared to leave and go to another job". And they also described an acute fear of becoming stuck in the islands: "I think my mum and dad would ideally have me move home and buy a house and things, but I don't want to have that, like feel stuck because I know that there's other places I want to go first."

Becoming stuck relates to limiting choices, and for participants the fear of becoming stuck in the islands is particularly related to confidence:

I don't want to get stuck in [the islands], it seems to happen to so many people.... [you] get into that way of life and you, you end up being too comfortable and too scared to move away again and I don't want that to happen to me.

Here, the risk of losing confidence of becoming "too comfortable" is very apparent and is a common theme in participants' narratives. In order to mitigate against this risk, participants commonly stressed the need to continue to enact mobility (for example visiting friends who live south), or to remain open to potential mobilities south in the future, particularly if they felt they were getting stuck in their jobs. One participant commented:

I would never say that that is me home forever now, because I have loved being away as well... if I just got a bit bored of [island life]... I would maybe decide to go away again or if I fancied like a change completely in career or something like that.

Here, the sense of managing ongoing dynamics of mobility in *career* and in *place* is clear. The ability to settle in a place or in a career is dependent on the ongoing potential for mobility, for not becoming stuck. Other graduates in the islands also described actively maintaining contacts with other friends elsewhere, with regularly taking trips away from the islands perceived as a positive thing to do. One graduate

living in the isles commented: “there's a lot of my friends that are home, although a lot of them have moved away, and they've all finished uni now [and] you're all in the same place now and you have more time, and everyone has more money now that we're not students and we can kind of take a weekend down and visit the girls in Glasgow and stuff.” Here, the experiences of social contacts (from the islands) being spread over space, and being able to continue to visit and connect with others across different places is key to the graduate's experience of feeling settled.

Positive experiences (or future visions) of returning and settling in the islands therefore involve mitigating against becoming stuck. Further, it is notable that the two students who stayed in the islands to complete their degree courses also adopted a relatively mobile outlook. Both initially only intended to complete part of their degree in the islands before moving away to finish their studies. Although neither did this, after graduation one did move away to undertake further study on the Scottish mainland. The other graduate remained in the islands but had explored opportunities elsewhere and regularly travelled to visit school and college friends who lived on the Scottish mainland.

### **Frameworks for Mobility**

The second major theme in this research identifies the importance of specific frameworks within which spatial mobilities are enacted. There are two key frameworks: relational frameworks and career frameworks.

#### ***Friends, Family and Partners***

The relationships students have provide key frameworks within which mobility decisions are made. In the previous section, it was noted that having friends and family in a location can assist a student to develop familiarity with a location, as well as providing a support for students after transition to university. This section particularly considers how the specific nature of relationships influenced the spatial potentials for individual students.

***Siblings and parents:*** Not all relationships are of equal importance in student mobilities. Family relationships, including parents and siblings are particularly important. Where participants had older siblings on the mainland this was often identified as a significant help with transition, with siblings not just

providing support for transition, but also often being associated with regular mobilities in childhood off the islands for visits, conveying both familiarity with mainland locations and comfort with mobility. One participant said:

Initially I wanted to go to [name of Scottish city] because my sister lives there and she's ten years older than me so we've been visiting her since I was maybe 7 or 8 when she moved so I was quite familiar with [the city].

Relative mobilities of parents were also important. This included historic mobilities of parents (often before participants were born), which had been recounted by parents, conveying mobility as a normal or desirable part of life, as observed by this candidate:

[My] Dad, oh my gosh every time we have like friends over or something he'll just start speaking about 'oh yeah that time that I was working in [international location]' and 'oh when I went to [other international location]'.

Notably, where parents had degree qualifications all had gained these elsewhere, meaning that parental stories of university and mobility were often intertwined. One participant described their relationship with their dad: "he went away and he did [name of subject] at [university in Edinburgh] when he was younger, and so I've also always really wanted to go to Edinburgh." More recent mobilities of parents were also important, potentially influencing how often participants had travelled, and how familiar they were with different places. One said: "[my dad] travels a lot for work and we've been very fortunate to get to explore parts of the world and I think it's just kind of been something that I've always wanted to do." After participants moved away, parental mobility remained important, and if they had parents who were highly mobile and regularly visited the mainland this could act as a source of support for them in their new locations. One participant described: "my dad comes down for work as well and takes me out for nice meals and things when he comes down."

The role of parental careers (including education and employment) in terms of mobility is noticeable in a good many of these quotations and this demonstrates how structures of employment are important in facilitating parental (and student) mobility. The influence of industry structures also had an impact on the locations of family and friends in some cases, for example one participant described how "my

cousins live in Aberdeen, they were originally from [the islands] but they moved down when they were in their primary school years, to do with oil and gas.”

**Accommodation and relationships.** Post-graduation, the location of friends, family and partners remains significant, however, the role of relationships changes. At entry to higher education relationships were primarily mentioned in terms of facilitating familiarity with different places, but after graduation practical issues such as finding accommodation and the costs of accommodation were mentioned more often. This led to clear preferences of participants for living with partners or families, and in some cases in existing house-shares: “I really want to live with [my partner]... it would be cheaper as well, it's so expensive to live by myself.” Another student commented: “if I wasn't in a relationship at the moment and thinking about going to [name of city] I'd probably after uni be thinking about going back to [the islands] for a bit and living there for a while.” Here it is clear that for those without a partner, returning home to stay with family can seem logical, offering a means to save money. Participants also described the role of house prices and availability of rental accommodation on spatial futures: “I don't want to stay around Aberdeen forever because it's so expensive”, and another: “[I want to] get started in the [name of specific] industry somewhere which isn't London and won't involve me paying extortionate housing prices.”

**Caring relationships:** Although the resources that others could offer in terms of accommodation were important to graduates, relationships were important not just as resources, but also as emotional connections.

Moving home to be close to family, or at least choosing not to be too far away, was a very common theme in the interviews. This was particularly apparent where graduates had multiple connections in the islands – individuals with lots of family in the islands felt a much stronger draw back to the islands than those with fewer family in the islands, or whose family was more dispersed. One participant articulated this by saying:

I have a very small family there's about seven people in my entire family. If I had more family I think I would move back. I don't [even] have any cousins, my parents are only children, it's a bit strange, I don't have any cousins, I think if I had a bigger family I would come back

Alongside quantity of relationships, the particular nature of relationships or needs of family members was also important. Being close to ageing grandparents, or young nephews and nieces was often mentioned, partly because of the importance of time, the sense that children grow up quickly and that grandparents would not be around for ever. However, these were also relationships where physical proximity was felt to be important for being able to provide care for a young child or grandparent. One student said:

I would always take my friends and family into consideration because I really love being close to them. And especially with my nieces and nephews growing up and things, I don't want to miss out on any of that.

For two participants an elderly family member with declining health was the primary reason for staying or returning in the islands: "I found out my grannie had [a terminal illness] so I moved back to [the islands] for a year to be her personal carer." Significantly even those participants who did not wish to return to the islands in the future typically identified that the health of their family may mean that they felt they needed to return, as one put it: "I wouldn't say no [to going home], like definitely not.... because if I felt I needed to go back then I would, like if someone needed me to be there then I would."

Alongside families, partners are another key relationship. Again the value of these relationships cannot be reduced to being a "resource" for mobility in a simple sense, because the dynamics of care are important. One candidate related:

I suppose moving to a new place and... having someone who actually knows you and cares and [having] a bit of a 'home' thing is really nice... I think if I was moving down here completely by myself and then it would be really hard.

Relationships with partners can be managed over a distance but are also typically relationships where proximity is important. Some students described managing distance-relationships but only as a short-term strategy. Describing why they would not move to undertake a postgraduate course one student said:

We've been waiting so long for this long distance to end and for me to just suddenly decide that I'm going to go and do a masters right away would be...

I think next year seems like a better idea and it would give us a chance to actually be a normal couple as well for a little while.

Moving in with a partner was also seen by many participants as an important step in a relationship: “the time was kind of right I was just fed up of seeing him on a weekly basis for one or two nights.” What is notable here is that where career progression may be one form of progression, moving in with a partner is another form of progression that is important in the lives of participants.

The significance of partners was a strong theme in the interviews, and importantly partners were not just significant after graduation but also influenced the decision-making of school leavers. However, especially in terms of school decisions, participants were often cautious or embarrassed about “admitting” this because of a sense that this is not how decisions “should” be made: “I know a lot of folk say ‘oh it doesn't affect your decision-making’ but it definitely did mine in school. Yep. But that's really bad to admit that.”

**Spatialities mediated through transport.** For students and graduates who move (or stay) away from family or from partners, the relative connectivity of different places in terms of transport connections becomes highly important. This has a strong influence on how able students are to return home and maintain connections to the islands, and friends and family within them, over time.

Compared to other university students, students from the islands feel that they are much less able to return home regularly because of the costs of transportation. One said:

I lived with an Irish girl for most of my uni time and she could fly home last minute for £50 for the weekend when for the same weekend for me to fly home short notice would be £300+.

The specific spatial location of individuals in the islands is also important, with those who live in outer isles of the archipelago experiencing acute difficulties with returning home:

I can't go back home to [name of island] for a weekend, which means if there's something like a wedding or something on over the weekend that I want to go to in [name of island] I have to take a long weekend off work or off

uni to go to that. Whereas if it's in [the main island town] you can get to it and fly back in one weekend, you don't have to take any time off even though it's very expensive...

Here the experience of living in the outer isles is that transportation home for a weekend from the mainland is *impossible*. Further, the social connections that this student had on the mainland of the islands (likely to have been partly facilitated by schooling on the mainland) meant that maintaining relationships *across* the archipelago was also challenging. They said:

This might sound silly but part of what I found when I was at uni... and I came up for a week or a weekend, I always felt bad if I was going in to the mainland to see my friends, because I felt like I wasn't spending enough time with my parents.

During university, travelling home for extended holiday periods was something that most students did. However, at the point of entry to the workplace after graduation the challenges of returning home for short breaks became acute for many, not only because of the financial pressure graduates typically felt but also the problem of limited holidays: "it's just I can't get home as much as I would like... because I can't afford it and I don't have holidays." These challenges of travelling home were exacerbated for those who lived at a greater distance from the islands. Although some students did move outside of Scotland, many wished to stay within Scotland in order to remain close enough to home to be able to return with reasonable regularity. For one student living in England, they described how "I knew it was far but I didn't really think of what that meant, it does feel quite far from home." It is notable here, as elsewhere, that challenges with travel post-graduation are not always anticipated. Suddenly getting home feels more difficult than it did during university. For this student the feeling of distance was exacerbated because of their social group, working with other young graduates who were able to go home much more frequently:

I can't nip home for the weekend and I guess it's partly to do with that I'm far away but also partly to do with most people around me live quite close to their homes, so they'll nip home at the weekend and I'm not really homesick,

I don't think really... no I haven't been homesick before but erm sort of jealous, if that's a form of homesickness...

The difficulty of travel is one area that participants themselves frequently identified as an issue and wished to highlight through the process of taking part in the research; talking about costs one said, “this is something which needs to be addressed” and another that “there should be a lot more help available for funding the travel of students from Orkney and Shetland.”

Although the costs of returning home were significant for those who were away, the costs of travelling to the mainland for those in the islands were also an acute issue. For some students, part of the appeal of living on the Scottish mainland was that travelling across Scotland and further afield is much easier from the Scottish mainland than it is from the islands which, given the importance of being able to continue to access new experiences after graduation, could be a significant draw:

I like being able to go anywhere and it doesn't cost you £300 [laughs] just being able to go to the city for the day.... it's just nice to know that if I got bored or if I wanted to go for a job interview in Edinburgh I could drive there myself.

### ***Education, Employment and Career Opportunities***

The data from this research project shows that alongside relationships, the spatial distribution of career opportunities is also important in the mobility decisions of graduates. Further, spatial location can influence career trajectory. This section considers space and career from three perspectives: firstly, the spatial distributions of education; secondly, the spatial and career implications of different post-graduation pathways, focusing on vocational and “graduate career” pathways; thirdly pathways that involve “working my way up”.

**Spatial distribution of education options:** In terms of entry to higher education, the structures of higher education mean that that participants typically look at options across the whole of Scotland but do not look any further. As one explained: “well I wanted to be in Scotland because of the fees.” However, the choice of a particular career pathway or degree can also lead to a very limited

choice of destination. One participant stated: “well I wanted to stay in Scotland, so while I was looking into where you could do [name of specialist course], [specific university] was the only actual university you could do it.” Another student said: “the reason I chose [specific university]... there wasn't a lot of choice in the matter, there were three [degree courses in Scotland].”

Limitations on spatial choice because of career route in these cases is notable. However, it can also happen the other way around; some individuals can experience restricted career choices because of the limited educational opportunities in their specific locations, and this can then influence future career and spatial pathways. This is apparent for one student who studied in a very small island Junior High School and described challenges in pursuing a career with animals: “because of being from [name of outer island] there were some subjects that you just couldn't do because we didn't have enough teachers... so like biology for one, which is a main subject for working with animals.”

Restricted course choices were also highly relevant for those who progressed to university through the local colleges (part of the University of the Highlands and Islands). One student who completed a degree in the islands described changing their subject interest:

I'd thought about looking at English at first ... maybe in Edinburgh or Glasgow... but I realised down there it's quite a high cost of living... [and] a few people I spoke to had recommended the Business course up here.

With college in the islands used as a stepping-stone to university for some students, the college courses they enrolled on and the articulation agreements that the colleges had with specific universities for NC/HNC/HND students, made specific pathways easier than others. One student reported:

When I was coming to the end of the NC you decide whether you want to do your HNC or [the island college] have a kind of like a partnership with [name of university], that people who complete their NC have an automatic interview for [name of university], so that was half of the battle... I didn't really think much about it, I just kind of went and did it.

Here the combination of limited course choice at the college, followed by a specific articulation agreement effectively structured *both* the geographical trajectory *and* (to a certain extent) the career trajectory for this student.

A further significant influence of place on higher education entry was that, for those who were most sure that they wanted to return to the islands in the future, course choice became a key consideration. This was in recognition that certain career routes might make it more possible to return to the islands than others. At school, two strategies of potential returners when making subject choices for university were apparent. One strategy was studying a vocational subject with a clear alignment to the needs of the local labour market (in this research all participants in this category chose a healthcare career). As one said:

[I planned to] go away and then I'd come back and... with the nursing programme you do placements, and if you are from [the islands] you are nearly guaranteed to have at least one placement per year at home, so that was a big pull towards doing nursing.

The other strategy was that students chose a subject they felt would at least be relevant in some form to future careers in the islands, and this was particularly an option selected by those who were unsure about their futures, but wanted to keep returning to the islands as “an option”:

I knew that [choosing] business you could do something with that in [the islands] whereas, for example, like pharmacology or something like that, that was just not an option because I wouldn't be able to come back.

Not all students at school consider a future return to the islands, and for these students a much broader potential range of options is possible.

Whether students progressed to higher or further education, and what courses they chose, were therefore interrelated with their anticipated spatial futures. It is also important to note that the gendered labour market of the islands was an important factor in the decisions of many young women. Typically, participants identified that there are more “good” career routes in the islands after school in male dominated industries, but for women there were fewer opportunities. One female participant voiced that “I didn't know of alternatives, or maybe there wasn't

many alternatives for... I mean I know there's apprenticeships and stuff, but for a girl I'm not really sure what opportunities there are." Opportunities in building trades, and oil and gas were typically identified as "good" jobs but coded as male, opportunities for women were identified as much more restricted. One participant explained why she decided to leave for a healthcare degree after three years in the workplace: "I was bored being perfectly honest and I needed to actually get on with my life, and to move away and do something different". Another participant, who did not perceive higher education as an option, summed up her experience of leaving school and the very limited options she faced:

It seems like all the really intelligent ones went [to university] and I've always been a middle of the road kind of person and I felt that we weren't really given that much advice, like you went to meet your careers adviser or whatever, and they just went...: 'okay you're a female, you're not sure if you want to go away – [go to the] college, do childcare'. That was the option.

Here then participants described very limited options for women in the local labour market and how this impacted on decision-making.

**Graduate Career Routes: Vocational and Graduate Routes.** At the point of graduation, the influence of degree subject and career pathway on spatial horizons was again notable.

For those students who pursued vocational routes (for example healthcare) choice of location after graduation was constrained by where they could secure appropriate placements, training or employment. The exact dynamics of how locations were selected varied according to the professional requirements: for some this involved applying to centralised portals of training opportunities, where they were asked to rank their choices of location. For others, there were no centralised portals, but securing appropriate training contracts was necessary, and here placement providers for whom students worked during their studies become a clear choice, as potentially these were organisations who were well set up to take on trainees, and where students had contacts.

Ironically, many of these vocational routes were routes which appealed to students because of the potential ability to return home, but directly after graduation

their experience was such that, if trainee positions were not available, then they had to remain away, as one participant described:

When I first came down here I always thought that I would move home and would get a job in a [specific vocational area] in [the islands], but then over the last couple of years I've kind of been a bit more realistic about it because there are only two [places in the islands] that I could have a job in and, they're both usually pretty fully staffed. So, I think staying in somewhere like [the central belt of Scotland] will give me a lot more career prospects and give me a lot more options than going home would because you know there's obviously like big [places to work in] down here... and you can kind of do more specialist stuff down here, rather than at home you know you don't have really many options.

Here, the dual challenges of being *unable* to return home if there is no job available and the absence of specialist pathways in the islands are clear. Indeed, it was relatively common that participants in vocational pathways described changing their aspirations from immediately returning home, to delaying a return home in order to undertake more specialist training. The value of remaining away to build up professional confidence was also apparent, as described by this participant:

I did a bit of work experience last summer in [the islands] and [I met clients] and I didn't know who they were... didn't recognise them, don't know their name and they'd be like: 'how's your course going? I go [to a social activity] with your grannie...' and I was like, do you know, I don't want that when I'm still quite young and unestablished, I kind of want to feel a bit more happy with everything before I go back into this really intense environment of everybody knows me... I'm actually almost quite glad that there's not a post because if there was then I would feel like I would have to... well I'd want to apply for it, but I wouldn't really want it, if you know what I mean [laughs].

Thinking about the importance of time identified earlier in this chapter, it is notable that in this quotation the sense of timing is again apparent, that a role will hopefully come up “at the right time” and not too soon.

One last notable feature of the spatial horizons of graduates from vocational degree programmes was that, *if* and *where* these qualifications were recognised

internationally could provide quite specific international horizons. So, for example, one graduate who was a nurse expressed an interest in going to Australia in the future, facilitated in part by the fact their qualification would be recognised in the country. However, in the case of another graduate, their vocational qualification was specifically designed for the Scottish system and even mobility to England could be challenging without further training.

Other graduates with very specific spatial horizons were graduates who applied for graduate schemes. Typically, these schemes require students to be mobile across the UK, as identified by participants themselves: “there are lots of graduate schemes down in England”. Indeed, in this research, one graduate in a graduate scheme did move to England. Participants in graduate schemes typically also identified that international mobility was a possibility for the future: “the job is a three-year graduate scheme... people have said even during that graduate scheme you can get secondments to Italy or France if you fancy it...” Here, the possibility for international mobility was primarily understood as facilitated by the employer (as opposed to those vocationally oriented graduates, where mobility is facilitated by the qualification they have and its recognition overseas).

For some participants, the ability to travel attracted them to looking for jobs in large multinational companies: “the potential for international travel is something that I'm really interested in...”. However, in other cases, the requirement for mobility could be off-putting for graduates. One participant discussed why they rejected a career in the police: “the fact that you don't get to choose where you live, and get moved around so much, it's just a bit unstable for me, although it's a good career.” Although individual preferences are likely to play a part in how far a job involving travel or relocation is viewed, the difference between a role where mobility can be enacted as a *choice* and where it is *required* is also likely to be significant.

**Graduate Career Routes: “Working My Way Up.”** Entry to graduate schemes and vocational pathways were typically (in this research) arranged in advance of leaving higher education. However, the spatial horizons of other graduates who left university without securing a role were quite different. These graduates typically felt that, in theory, they could start their career anywhere, although in reality their ability to afford to live independently, if they had not secured

a job or only had low-paid work, was diminished. For these graduates returning home to live with parents or living with partners was therefore often a common strategy enabling them to save costs. One graduate related the following:

Well my rent is up... so it gives me little option what to do, because if I don't have a job to go into or a place to move to, it kind of seems silly not to move home to work for a bit and save money... [and] a lot of people that I went to school with... they've already moved back to [the islands] to save some money, live with their parents, and apply for jobs... down south.

Here, again it is notable that what was “normal” for this student was measured in terms of their social circle, their sense of social belonging. This is interesting because the sense of what was normal for graduates, was at least partly related to the subjects studied at university; some graduates described being in cohorts where lots of people applied for graduate schemes, and others less so.

For graduates working their way up, living with partners or parents did not only provide support with living costs, but could also be valuable because they may be able to use networks to find suitable employment. In two cases graduates benefitted from their partner's networks, one revealed: “[my partner] took a copy of my CV and passed it on to his friend whose Dad is the CEO of the company I work for.” This demonstrates how student networks have certain spatial configurations, and how networks in home locations and in partners' locations may be particularly important.

For other graduates, who did not go straight into chosen employment, returning home was a short-term strategy; home was a place where they knew they could find casual employment (especially over the summer) and it was a good place to rest and recuperate as one graduate described:

I just got a job... labouring and fencing... and that was really nice, really nice to spend the summer home and work and everything and get a bit of money and [I] didn't really do much in the way of [area of career interest] or anything over the summer [I] just sort of relaxed.

Graduates who returned or stayed in the islands after graduation however could find that, as time passed, being in the islands could restrict their potential to

progress in their career. This was partly due to the lack of employment in some sectors in the islands but it was also related to limitations in the kinds of voluntary work that were available, and the kinds of training. As one graduate recounted:

Before I went on my year abroad and all these people were doing these TEFL courses and they were just coming in to Glasgow and going for a couple of hours a day and they'd have their TEFL certificate after a couple of weeks... and internships, a lot of my Glasgow friends have done internships because they can just still live at home as they usually do, come into Glasgow everyday, do their unpaid four week internship and that's really good experience but for me that would be like, right I've got to pay rent, find somewhere to live, potentially for just a month, it's going to be unpaid, so where does the money come from? Just little things like that... you can feel a little bit like 'oh', like sometimes you just wish that you were down here or that you had a like a family down here that you could stay with...

The lack of opportunities in the islands can have impact on future career routes in the islands, but significantly, for those students who want to move away again, it can also affect their ability to secure work elsewhere. One graduate related this experience:

After that interview... they were just saying that I had so much potential and I was really really good, the interview was good, I just lack experience in that area, and I was like 'Ahhh!' That's not what you want to hear! Everything else was positive, but the man was just like 'I'm not going to tell you to move away from [the islands], but there's not much opportunity to try and get experience in this particular area up there' and I was just like 'ugh' like I tried so hard and, and he's right, there isn't that much opportunity to get experience.

A further challenge described by one student is that applying for opportunities on the mainland (especially unpaid or low-paid opportunities) may not always be positively perceived by employers:

I felt that my location was maybe a barrier, if I was, say, to apply for an internship in Edinburgh and they'd get my CV, '[name of island]' [they] might see at the top... and think 'oh my god [they're] going to relocate all the way down here!'

The issue described by this student is that moving for unpaid experience or low-level jobs may be identified as problematic by employers. What is notable here is that access to and perceptions of mobility may vary according to role. Moving for a graduate scheme for example is perceived as normal and preferable, but moving for unpaid or low paid work may be viewed less positively. Further, participants described mobility as more of an option at different points in their careers, so for example, working remotely for an employer was not mentioned by any participants as a viable option in their short term futures, but was recognised as a potential later on in their careers: “unless I could be completely home-based and work for my company that I’m working for now, which is probably an option at some point but...”

In managing the challenges of access to opportunities in the islands participants employed different strategies. One common strategy was simply waiting for a job to come up and being flexible and opportunistic when an opportunity arose. This strategy required graduates not to focus too narrowly on occupational sector. One graduate described thinking broadly: “when I graduated... [I thought] something will likely come up and chances are that will be a job within the public sector.” Another, associated strategy, especially for those interested in undertaking further study, was delaying – staying at home in order to save money to allow a later return back to the mainland:

I've... made the decision to go home in May when I finish up, I want to do the masters but financially I'm not going to be able to do it this year, so I was speaking to my parents and we kind of made the decision that if I came home and saved up for a year then it might be more doable next year when I've got a bit more money behind me.

Another strategy was adjusting career direction. One graduate who unexpectedly returned to the islands discussed switching their focus to healthcare:

There's more jobs in healthcare in [the islands] than there is [specific sector] for obvious reasons and I just knew if I was going to be there long-term, doing something more than waitressing was going to be an advantage to me because I want to have a fulfilling career.

Notable here is that in the islands, the possibility of a “fulfilling career” is *not* tied to occupational sector but is about finding a role that is good enough; involving

enough challenge, enough possibilities for development, and enough opportunities to “build on” previous experience, but that may be in quite a different sector than a graduate’s ideal role.

Thinking in terms of strategies for island labour markets, it is also notable that participants based in other parts of Scotland who were working their way up but thought they may want to return to the islands in the future, displayed some similar elements of strategic thinking. Discussing a sibling who was working in renewable energy on the Scottish mainland one participant said:

That's very much a career that you could go back to in [the islands] very much so, so I think the idea for me would be to kind of get experience to then take back to [the islands] and do something with maybe, obviously the tourist industry in [the islands] is substantial, or the hospitality industry.

For graduates who decided that they may want to be in the islands in the longer term, one final strategy was that planning to train in an occupation that would allow them to work in the islands. Here, teaching was mentioned by a number of students, as a possible option, and one was quite direct about the potential value of teaching for facilitating a return home: “if I was going to go home I would probably have to go into... I'd maybe go into teaching... I don't know how much else there would be for me”. Some students discussed other forms of retraining including completing second full degree courses. However the costs of undertaking a second undergraduate degree were generally considered prohibitive, with postgraduate qualifications a much more realistic option. Here whether different occupations are possible to enter via shorter postgraduate training routes or whether they require second undergraduate degrees is likely to be very important. One participant discussed their particular challenge in seeking to enter a career in law:

But for all the masters I've looked up you need the undergrad in Law first, so I have been looking at other courses... you can do a fast track law degree which takes two years instead of four and I think after that there's like a six month thing that you have to [do]... so I'm contemplating that but it also, just money-wise I'm not sure about another two to three years of study how feasible that is.

Potentially therefore the point at which a student decides they want to return home interrelates with the structures of different training routes, to make some career routes more possible than others at different times.

### **Change Over Time**

The dynamics of becoming-belonging and the frameworks for mobility explored in the sections above represent the primary themes identified in the interview data that provide some explanatory potential for the ways that places, mobilities and careers intersect for students in this research. This last section considers some of these dynamics as they evolve over time. Rather than career and mobility pathways being possible to predict, participants in this research often discussed experiences of instability and unpredictability. This is the focus of this last section.

#### ***Instability in Mobility Frameworks***

The first sub theme in this section considers the impact of change over time on frameworks for mobility, both relational frameworks and career frameworks.

**Changing relational frameworks.** Where relational frameworks were an important influence on participants' mobility, it is important to note that these frameworks were not static. Significant changes in frameworks included the formation of new partnerships and the break-up of previous relationships. In several cases a relationship breakdown was a reason to move away from the islands as one participant recounted:

I'd broken up with my boyfriend who was also in [the islands] and that was making things very difficult, so that was another factor I can't really ignore. I just needed to get away from it and ... I just felt it was time because it was kind of like fate.

Here the nature of the islands, where "everyone knows everyone" can make experiences like a break-up difficult to manage, and directly prompt a move. On the other hand, a different participant described a break-up with a partner who is south, and how this prompted a desire to return home:

I had basically just split up with my boyfriend, was looking for an excuse to go home, [so I] jumped at the chance [of a work placement in the islands], and it was a great experience.... and it was just beneficial that I got to go home for two months as well.

Another participant described how initially they returned to the islands after graduation with the intention of building their career with a previous employer, but, as the employer was unable to provide a stable role, they moved to the mainland to be with their partner and pursue a different line of work: "it was quite a drastic move I know moving south for a boyfriend I suppose but I just kind of thought, well it was now or else it would be a difficult decision further down the line." Here again the sense of intersecting career and relationship needs and timelines is apparent, framing the "right time" to make decisions.

As well as the beginning and ending of relationships, another way that relational dynamics and frameworks could change was if partners became more mobile. This was often related to a partner's own (changing) desire to move and to the partner's own employment circumstances. One participant described:

We've spoken about if I decided to move away like next year or something to go and do my masters or if I got a job opportunity or something then he would like to move with me, because he's always wanted to move.

Alongside partners, family networks also showed a level of change. For a number of participants these changes took the form of younger siblings moving away for university, which was also often associated with greater frequency of parental visits to mainland Scotland. Relative parental mobilities also changed according to their employment, and in some cases changed when parents retired and had more time:

Mum and dad are getting more comfortable with having to travel south to go and see my sister and go and see family further south. Before, that was kind of a factor when I went to uni, because my dad was, well it was difficult to get him off this island, but now he's far more open to it.

In the case of one participant, their family moved from the islands after they had graduated, and another participant's parents had active plans to move. Others reflected on how their parents *might* move in the future:

Well my dad definitely would [move].... it's more my mum that probably wouldn't move, but she's spent a lot of time caring for elderly relatives...so I can imagine maybe in like ten or fifteen years' time if there was less of that responsibility on her she might consider it, if the kids were all south.

Here the intersecting nature of family needs and responsibilities, and how these could result in specific spatial outcomes at different points in time is apparent. The intersecting and intergenerational patterns of care and responsibility were also apparent in the stories of the two participants who assumed significant caring responsibilities for their grandparents during the course of this research. These caring responsibilities arose unexpectedly and had a significant impact on participant decisions. Further, the subsequent bereavement for one participant significantly impacted on their perceptions about the importance of family and where they may want to live in the future:

I think when you're getting older as well, you see your parents getting older and I've just lost my grannie and.... [it's]... made me realise a bit that I would want to have them more in my life.

**Economic instability.** Alongside instability in relational networks, instability in employment and career contexts was also highlighted in this research. Changes to availability of roles or training routes was reported on a number of occasions by participants: “when I first moved away they were taking on trainees at home, but unfortunately they're not doing that anymore.” Another participant reported the closure of a training route in Scotland, which meant they had to travel to England instead: “well they stopped doing all the 18-month courses in Scotland I think, the year that I actually started here so it was kind of my only option.”

Alongside specific changes in career and mobility options, much broader implications of economic instability are apparent. Indeed, a particular feature of the second interviews for this research, was the discussion of the impacts of the Brexit vote and the crash in the North Sea oil industry in late 2015 (see Chapter 3). As a result of this instability, one participant who secured a graduate role described being asked to take on a different kind of role to the one they expected (and as it was not in oil and gas, it had quite different spatial horizons):

They didn't have any jobs in oil and gas which seems to be the situation for everybody in my year - there's no jobs in oil and gas ... At first they'd said 'oh we would like to offer you a job but we're not sure what it's going to be yet, and we're not sure where we're going to have space', and then that kind of lasted a few weeks and then they said, 'oh I just think we're not going to have any jobs in oil and gas at all, but would you consider [something different]?'

Another graduate with a role in a large company described how "there is a chance I will not be at the Aberdeen office due to the downturn in the oil and gas industry and as a result I may be relocated to one of [the company's] other Scottish offices." Brexit similarly impacted on the spatial and career horizons for some participants:

It depends how Brexit works out, but it might be there might be less jobs here, depending on which companies stay here and which companies move their work abroad, there may be less jobs for people like me, in which case my best job option would be to go abroad where there's still jobs.

### ***Embedding in Time and Space***

Alongside instability in frameworks for mobility, the dynamics of time were also evident in processes of becoming "embedded" in certain careers and locations. This was particularly clear when students described how work experience in a particular place could influence the ultimate career pathways of graduates. Positive work-placements in the islands could encourage students to come back home, and negative experiences have the opposite effect. A similar pattern is evident in work experiences on the mainland. One participant described their work experience on the Scottish mainland:

When I finished third year I had a placement here in [name of Scottish city], and I think just doing that placement and seeing [the city] from a working point of view, I think that was one of the tipping points I was like 'yeah I could work in this firm here, I could work in one of the big companies it wouldn't be so scary it wouldn't be so bad'.

Here it is notable that work experience in a city location not only led to the student being able to imagine a future in the city, but also opened up opportunities for different kinds of careers – specifically careers in "big companies".

Students have ideas about what work “is” on the mainland and in the islands, that may be reinforced or challenged through work experience. As in the case of the student quoted above, typically participants described feeling unfamiliar or uncomfortable with looking for work in large corporate companies. Larger companies were perceived to require different work-place attributes and skills such as requiring people to be more outgoing and confident (this is connected to perceptions of urban spaces more generally requiring more confidence). This was particularly problematic for participants who described themselves as “quieter” or more “shy”, and in these cases there was perhaps more of a tendency to consider working at home rather than elsewhere, as described by this graduate:

I'd applied to the bigger companies but I was never really sure, because I'm very quiet, I'm not... I don't know what the words are, I'm very shy and I don't speak up and a lot of the very corporate environments everybody does whereas in a smaller [...] firm, I'm not going to say the people are quieter but it's less of a corporate atmosphere.

Here, it is possible to consider how elements of spatial belonging, that is feeling comfortable in the islands and knowing how to be in a small island community, influence the career trajectories that individuals envisage.

Considering the importance of work experience, it is notable that participants commonly felt that securing work experience in the islands relied on their own research and connections, whereas work experience elsewhere was more likely to be supported by their university. One student described the challenge of securing a placement through their university:

I was approaching [potential placement providers in the islands] and asking them for a job...I could have stayed on the mainland and applied for jobs that were coming up for placements, but I didn't want to, so it did make it harder for me to find something at home.

The challenge for this participant was not just the geographical location of placements, but also that the placements on the mainland were typically in a particular career area:

Because it's in Aberdeen I think [oil and gas] is a big thing, almost every module that we take there's a mention of oil and gas and then when we had the opportunity to do the placement in third year all of my friends who stayed in Aberdeen, the majority of them [went into] an oil and gas firm and I feel as though if you weren't looking to go into oil and gas your options were very limited

Here then, for this participant, seeking a different opportunity, in a different location relied on them sourcing this opportunity for themselves.

One notable characteristic of some participant journeys is the securing of multiple placements. In particular, some participants described initially securing a placement in the islands, followed by a subsequent placement on the mainland. Here, there is a connection with the notion of familiar enough pathways – securing a first professional experience of the workplace can prompt a level of stress or anxiety for students, and this can be mitigated by choosing a highly familiar spatial environment. One participant said:

I suppose I just sort of decided 'oh well it's probably something environmental I fancy doing and probably if I'm nervous about starting somewhere it's quite good if I'm at home and also I kind of fancy being home for summer', and then I think just looked up the companies in [the islands] that I knew about and thought that [name of company] sounded like a good... had a lot of interesting things going on and I kind of looked on the page and thought 'oh I recognise a few of the faces that work there'...

Again, in this quotation, the importance of social connections is clear in helping build familiarity and comfort. However, through this experience, the participant described building up their confidence, and subsequently taking on a placement in a more specialist role on the Scottish mainland.

Placements had a role in this research not just in terms of where students were able to visualise themselves in the future, but also practical impacts in supporting transition to the workplace after graduation. The importance of networks was particularly clear:

I'm working at the NHS [island name] which is where I did my placement in my third year of uni. When I graduated I got in contact with a lady in the [name of] department, because that was kind of the area that I wanted to go into.

Here then, spatial, social and career elements are important in choosing work placements, but the process of work placement itself also acts to potentially embed people into certain spatial and career locations, which are reinforced by the social connections developed during placement.

### ***Overlapping Priorities and Relational Decisions.***

The previous section considered the ways that different forms of belonging (spatial, career, and social) may overlap and embed participants in certain spaces. This theme of overlapping demands, priorities and forms of belonging is apparent in other forms throughout the interviews too.

In purely practical terms one form of overlapping is the overlapping of job contracts and tenancies which can make mobility more difficult than anticipated as described by this participant:

One of the other issues is that my rent obviously is like a six-month lease, that's not very long but I have to give two months' notice so... I can't really start looking for jobs until my lease can be cancelled basically.

Similarly in the case of the two graduates who graduated from one of the island colleges, decisions to complete their degree courses in the islands were a result of overlapping priorities or needs. One participant described not being "quite ready just to go and live on my own in [a city]" at the point of leaving school, but also described having:

Concerns over financial issues with going south and also... [that] it may be harder to find part-time employment as well since I already had quite a stable part-time post that would be really helpful to save money at the same time.

Although both students who studied at the local college started off planning to maybe complete their degrees south, in both cases developing working experiences led them to stay. One said:

And when I got to third-year I got actually another job that was a really good job with good experience and... I couldn't afford to decline it because it could lead on to a lot of really good experience for my CV... so, that was kind of the main reason otherwise I probably would have considered going.

The ways that working, studying, tenancies, and feelings of belonging may overlap to create (in most cases) a level of geographical stability was also apparent for students with partners. Here, decisions about mobility were made within the context of relationships, and the circumstances of *both* individuals in the partnership was relevant. So, for example, in the case of one couple this led to relative spatial stability, *despite* both partners having experienced high levels of career instability:

With [my partner] being offered his job back [in the islands] then it was kind of decided that I would come home and we were both happy to do that because he was in a good job, so I would say he was a big influence but then when he lost his job, then I got my job and I didn't want to leave that because I was just starting in it and I was really enjoying it, so then I would say that my job was quite a big influence there as well, you know because we could have technically, once he got made redundant... we could have gone away and lived down south, but I was the one saying 'no, can we stay?'

Therefore the overlapping priorities of partners, and their developmental trajectories can lead to a level of geographical stability.

Understanding the overlapping importance of people (particularly partners) and places, also helps to elucidate how it is not just the participant's home location or university location that is important, but also their *partner's* home location. Where partners were not originally from the islands, participants typically considered moving to rural Scotland as a viable possibility, recognising that rural Scotland may offer some similar benefits as living in the islands, but more easily accommodate the needs (including career needs) of both partners:

We had kind of discussed moving to the outskirts of [the city] if he got placed [there] rather than living in the city so, regardless of where he got placed we were going to kind of look to move more towards the countryside, to be a bit more home-like, yeah I think I just, I just needed a bit more green around and a bit of sea and just yeah a bit more of a relaxed place.

Moving towards a partner's family home (especially if this home was in rural Scotland) was a viable option for some, and some participants even moved in with their partner's family in order to save money. Interestingly the decision to move to a partner rather than the other way around was typically made on the basis of the relative experiences of previous mobilities. One participant said:

While we were looking to live together, and I thought 'do you know I'm not in [the islands], I'm not home, so it doesn't matter where I live, I'm not bothered whether it's Aberdeen or [small rural town], Inverness' Does that make sense? It was easier for me to move towards him than it was for him to move my way because his friends, his job his family everyone's here, so it made more sense for me to go, which was fine, I don't mind. And all his family and friends were like 'oh it must be so hard moving away' and I was like 'no because it wasn't from home that I moved, I'd already done the hard part!' [laughs].

Here the overlapping and intersecting mobilities / mobility intentions of partners is again apparent.

The importance of where partners are from in terms of the destinations of graduates also highlights the potential significance of *when* people meet their partners. If participants met their partners at university then these partners were more likely to be from mainland Scotland than if they met them at school. Experiences of living on the mainland for university and of visiting a partner's home and building up social connections on the mainland, for some students meant that despite originally intending to return to the islands straight after university they started to imagine potential futures on the mainland. One stated: "I never thought I'd actually like to live anywhere except for [the islands] I thought that would just have been horrible but now I actually could see myself living on mainland Scotland, in [rural Scottish location] so..."

In some cases, participants were in relationships with partners who were from the islands but not located in the islands, instead both living together on the mainland. These relationships potentially have some advantages: allowing individuals to remain on the mainland to build up career and other experiences, but

with a sense that *because* both partners have connections to the islands, there will always be a very strong relationship with the islands. One participant said:

I don't think I could move back to [the islands] and be totally satisfied with a job or whatever... and because me and my boyfriend are both from [the islands], our children would still be [islanders] [laughs].

Where participants were in relationships with other islanders, even the practicalities of visiting family became less challenging, as visiting the islands at holiday times was something that both partners valued. Further, for some of these couples the chance of returning home was potentially stronger than if they were in relationships with people who weren't from the islands. One related: "we're both from [the islands] so yeah... it'll always be in the back of my mind to come back home but we're not ready yet."

### ***Fate and Chance***

The multiple influences and complex space-time pathways for career development result in one last theme evident in the interviews, that of fate or chance.

Graduate experiences of intersecting dimensions of belonging (career, place and people) and the intersecting mobilities of family and friends, alongside change over time, could result in emergent pathways that were unpredictable and yet "common sense". For example, one graduate talked about a move to Aberdeen in terms of intersecting mobility pathways: "[my friend] was just thinking of moving to Aberdeen, so we ended up getting a flat together and then obviously my boyfriend is down here, so the stars kind of aligned in all aspects."

In line with ideas of chance or fate, participants commonly recognised that they could have taken quite different routes. One participant related that: "I'm just so aware that I could have taken totally different paths and maybe ended up in different circumstances maybe in a completely different location geographically." By the point of one year after graduation, the participants in this study had already experienced multiple challenges and changes. Straightforward pathways to clear destinations were generally not envisaged, partly due to issues of chance and change, and partly because students wanted to allow enough time to explore their

options before settling down. Therefore, for many *not* planning but “going with the flow” was an adaptive strategy. One participant described:

Well, there's just absolutely no point in planning that kind of stuff is there really? Because who knows what will happen tomorrow and the day after, so, people plan to have this kind of ideal adulthood where they buy a house, have a nice car, have x number of kids, be married until they're like 50, their golden wedding anniversary, and all this kind of stuff, but there's absolutely no point in planning that kind of thing I guess when you still don't, like you've still got things to tick off your bucket list.

Another described their reaction to a failure in an application process for an opportunity elsewhere:

It's not really the exact plan but then I'm never one for having a set plan, I always am quite open to the idea of it changing, but yeah, I was ideally expecting to be in [specific opportunity] right now, but as I say, things don't always turn out that way and actually I'm quite content and quite happy so, it's fine [laughs].

The intersecting career, spatial and relational pathways meant that graduates typically understood that there is rarely an “ideal” outcome. Rather graduates described trying to balance their competing relational, spatial and career positions:

I'm quite happy in this job so hopefully I'll stay there for a few years, see where that takes me, and as I say [my partner's] just started [their] job... as well so, [they're] just starting out in a new career as well so it's all quite new and exciting for the both of us, so I think we'll just see where our careers take us and kind of take it from there.

## **Summary**

This chapter has presented the key findings from this study. The themes identified from the interviews highlight the importance of the intersecting areas of career, relationships and places. These can be thought of in terms of spheres of belonging (as identified in the first theme of belonging and becoming), with the ways these overlap and interrelate creating conditions not just for stability but also for change and becoming. Relationships and career pathways also provide clear

frameworks for mobilities of students and graduates as they move through their lives, while spatial location can also impact on the ways that relationships develop (for example partnerships are commonly formed in home locations or in university locations) and on the ways that career pathways develop. Overall, the interweaving of the dynamics of career, people and places especially as these are lived over time and in the context of high levels of economic change and instability, can lead to unpredictable outcomes, and can impact on an individual's perceived ability to plan for or manage their pathways, resulting in a strong sense of fate or chance in graduate outcomes.

## Chapter 7: Discussion

In this chapter the findings from the project are explored in more depth. The chapter starts by summarising the findings of the project and presenting the main theoretical contribution, a model of career development that includes consideration of issues of place and mobility. The subsequent sections explore the specific components of this model. The chapter finishes by exploring how the model connects with the theoretical perspective of careership (Hodkinson, 2008; Hodkinson et al., 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997) and Bourdieusian scholarship.

### A Spatialised Model of Career Development

Summarising the findings of this research project, four key contributions to the existing literature can be identified. These are summarised below and are then expanded upon in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

The first important contribution of this research is that it shows that not only is place an important consideration for school-leavers entering the workforce (Roberts, 1997, 2009), but also for higher education students and graduates. As such it challenges notions that higher education entrants and graduates transcend the limitations of place and are global in outlook (Ball et al., 2000; Green & White, 2007). Supporting previous statistical evidence (for example Sage et al., 2012, 2013), the migration trajectories of graduates are found to be relatively constrained. Moving beyond interpretations of graduate mobilities in terms of human capital (for example Faggian et al., 2007b; Faggian & McCann, 2008), this research highlights how place is a fundamental component of graduates' experiences, resulting in a complex intertwining of relational, spatial and career pathways.

The second important contribution of this research is that the role of place in career development is identified in much broader terms than simply in terms of labour markets that constrain choices (Roberts, 1997, 2009), or "lifestyles" that can be chosen (Schein, 1990). It also moves beyond thinking about place as a context for interaction and shaping of career ideas (Law, 1981, 2009; Rönnlund et al., 2018; Thomsen, 2012), most importantly by considering how place is of ongoing relevance *over time* in the development of career trajectories as well as highlighting

the spatial implications of different career pathways. Here, career pathways can be thought of as happening over time *and space*, or in Massey's (2005) construction time-space.

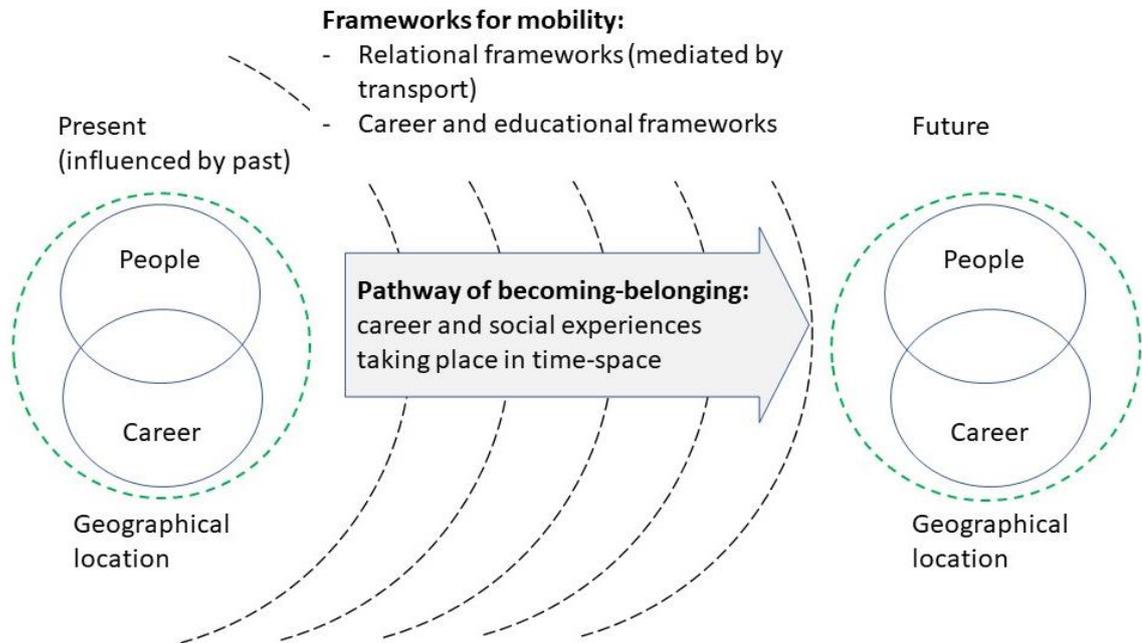
A third contribution of the research is that dynamics of mobility and stability are apparent throughout graduate narratives, especially as they relate to development over the life course and the ongoing importance of people, place and career. Participants typically view young adulthood as a time of relatively high mobility, but this mobility is imagined as providing the conditions for becoming, for self-development and exploration, and these processes are imagined as then creating the conditions to allow for a later settling down based on *choice*, being able to choose a career and a place to settle down in. Mobility therefore is not necessarily embraced as a positive *in itself* but as part the ability to achieve a process of settling. Further, although mobility is valued in early adulthood, the dynamics of stability remain important in the ways that participants seek to follow familiar enough routes and to build on experiences. This problematises notions of mobile modernity (see Chapter 2), highlighting how stability remains important to young people.

The fourth contribution of this research is that it calls attention to issues of inequality and individual differences in how career development and mobility happen over time. At the point of entry to higher education, dynamics of familiarity are important in framing the locational choices of participants with these familiarities at least partly related to social background and to the specific career or education pathways followed (for example subject choice and whether progression is via further education). After graduation the same themes of relational networks and educational / career structures are apparent in the geographical movements of individuals; however, at this point, the nature of these themes changes with practical issues of finance and accommodation becoming particularly important. Equalities issues are also raised by the stresses participants feel in managing the demands of relationships and careers in relation to place and mobility, especially in the context of high levels of instability, raising questions pertinent to social justice about how individuals from rural places especially manage competing priorities and demands.

Considering these key contributions, a model of career development that incorporates place and mobility has been developed (Figure 9). This represents an important contribution of this research, given that in the existing career development literature the role of place and geographical mobility has received little focus (Alexander & Hooley, 2018; Inkson & Thorn, 2010; Patton & McMahon, 2014). This model identifies that at any point in time an individual exists in relationship to place (both present location and previous locations) and that these locations provide an individual with certain spatialised career experiences and relational networks. An individual's imagined future also incorporates spatial, career and relational elements. However, between a person's present and future locations is their trajectory as it actually develops. How this develops depends on two things, a pathway of becoming and belonging, and a person's frameworks for mobility. The terminology of a "pathway of becoming-belonging" recognises that (young) people seek opportunities for becoming through mobility (in terms of career and place) but that this process of becoming is intimately intertwined with processes of belonging (who I am and where I came from, and who and where I might be in the future). Further, decisions are made within certain frameworks for mobility which include relational networks and career structures, with these frameworks providing certain spatialised potentials.

**Figure 9.**

*Model of Career Development Incorporating Place and Mobility*



The rest of this chapter explores this framework in more depth, drawing out particularly important points as they relate to the existing literature.

### **Pathways of Becoming-Belonging**

The concept of a pathway of becoming-belonging is a core component of the theoretical model. The concept explains both processes of continuity and change, recognising that the dynamics of belonging (where I fit) and becoming (what I might become) are not necessarily opposed but may be complementary (what I might become and where I might fit in the future). In this section the dynamics of becoming-belonging are explored in more depth.

### ***Dynamics of Becoming - Mobility and Choice***

The dynamic of becoming in participant narratives is most apparent at the point of moving away from home. Moving away for university, as in other research, is understood to be an opportunity for self-development associated with entry into adulthood and independence (Holdsworth, 2009). It is also heavily associated with moving to an urban environment (Bjarnason & Edvardsson, 2017; Wiborg, 2001),

and for most students this holds significant appeal (Crow, 2010; Griffiths & Maile, 2014; King, 2018; Walford & Stockdale, 2015). Cities are understood as offering a much greater number and variety of new opportunities with the added advantage of being more anonymous, and therefore being places where it is easier to take risks (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; Hayfield, 2017). Importantly where previous research has identified the appeal of moving from a rural location to a city in terms of opportunities for education and employment (Alston, 2004; Bæck & Paulgaard, 2019; Jamieson & Groves, 2008), in this research the appeal of mobility is not just about opportunities themselves, but because of the way these opportunities create the conditions for personal *change*, trying new things allows young people to explore where they feel they “fit” in the world. Here, the notion of mobility for self-development in participant narratives aligns to narratives of modernity and “reflexive projects of the self” (Giddens, 1991), with mobility and urban environments providing a wider range of consumption possibilities and enhanced ability to enact *choice*. By highlighting these dynamics, this research adds to the literature that has explored the privileging of urban spaces by young people in modernity (Bæck, 2004; Farrugia, 2014).

The value of moving to the city in this research bears striking resemblance to the way international mobility is viewed in other research, that is providing new experiences that allow for self-transformation (Nikunen & Ikonen, 2021; Tran, 2016). Further, it is evident that experiences of cultural unfamiliarity and adaptation are common for participants in this research moving from rural to urban environments just as these processes have been highlighted in international student migration (Murphy-Lejeune, 2017). Where previous scholarship has suggested the need to break down the divide between research into international and internal migration more generally (King et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2015), this finding suggests that there may be further scope to consider student mobility at *both* international and internal scales, exploring how these dynamics potentially intersect. For example, a question might be raised about how the experience of adaptation to an urban environment (for a rural student) may provide support with future international mobilities. Further, given that on a practical level, participants reported greater difficulties in terms of cost and time in travelling home than some international

students, focusing on mobility in relation to *distance* only may obscure the challenges that some domestic students face when accessing higher education.

The value placed on mobility to urban areas as a means of self-development supports the findings of previous research in rural places, that although there *is* “an association between [out] migration and the desire for higher education” (Jamieson & Groves, 2008, p. 3), this is not just related to spatial availability of higher education opportunities. Instead, higher education can be important because it *facilitates* mobility. Indeed the evidence in this research of one student who “wanted to move away so badly” that they chose any course aligns in part to Stockdale’s (2002a) idea of “escapees through education”. However, to think of this student as “escaping” perhaps does not convey the true emotional tenor of this experience, which was more about not wanting to be “left behind”. The distinction is subtle, but important, as it is not a rejection of place as such but about being part of a social group where mobility is the norm. This conveys the socially situated nature of mobility. Here there is some synergy with the idea of a culture of migration, however, the ways that different individuals may experience different cultures is also clear in this research (some participants for example report being in social groups where moving away was not a common experience), as well as how these cultures may be layered, especially where family background and friendship groups may have different norms surrounding expectations of migration. This is to argue in line with Halfacree (2004) and Ní Laoire (2000) that notions of cultures of migration risk over reifying culture. Instead, and drawing on the literature that has explored cultures of migration in terms of place-based habitus (Allen & Hollingworth, 2013), it might be more appropriate to draw on contemporary understandings of layered and reflexive habitus (Adams, 2006; Atkinson, 2016; Decoteau, 2016) to understand how individuals in the same (geographical) place may occupy different positions in overlapping fields (for example school and home) and which can then influence migration decisions.

This research further demonstrates how the desire for new experiences gathered through mobility extends into the early years after graduation. In effect, progression to university (typically in more familiar locations) may act as a stepping-stone to (imagined) future mobilities both geographically and in terms of career experience, and by the end of university students imagine that they could go

anywhere. The sense of global horizons (Ball et al., 2000) therefore, which has often been applied to those progressing to higher education, does not appear so clearly at the point of leaving school, but appears much more clearly *after* university for this cohort. This could be related to the relative lack of experience of mobility or of living in a city for most of the participants in this study, meaning that transition to a familiar Scottish city is perceived as the first step in wider mobility. Here, the importance of highlighting and exploring *rural* student experiences rather than assuming urban experiences are the norm is highlighted (Bæck, 2004; Cuervo & Wyn, 2012; Farrugia, 2014).

Thinking about how and why mobility is valued by participants, the sense that young people “should” be mobile is evident throughout this research. Notably those who made decisions based on relationships (partners and caring for relatives) felt that this was a source of shame, or that it would put them “outside” of the focus of this research. Here, the dominance of neoliberal narratives which position individuals as primarily economically motivated and self-serving (Hooley et al., 2018b; Irving, 2018; Sultana, 2014) is potentially apparent in participants’ own internalised perceptions, in their subjectivity (see also Hooley et al., 2018b). These values may be particularly conveyed through the education system, which, as in previous research, is found to have a key role in supporting mobilities (Corbett, 2007a; Forsey, 2015). Just as in the work of Corbett (2007a), young people who had positive experiences of school and achieved high grades tended to have a clear sense that it was “normal” or “natural” for them to leave to access university education. However, this research also highlights the importance of the *specific* school context (Rosvall et al., 2018). In this research there are indications that the proportion of higher education entrants in any one year-group may be relevant for example, and the availability of different kinds of school activities to support with higher education entry (see also Donnelly & Evans, 2016). The role of individual teachers in encouraging pupils to apply for university is also very marked in some cases mirroring evidence in previous research (Corbett, 2007a; Donnelly & Evans, 2016; Holt, 2012; Prince, 2014). However in this research teachers are not just important for encouraging higher education entry but for encouraging students along *specific* career pathways (which also have certain geographic implications).

These aspects of school context all help young people decide whether university is “for” them or not (Holt, 2012; Rosvall et al., 2018).

An important additional contribution of this research is that it identifies that the education system does not just support mobility through helping young people imagine mobile futures, but *also* in the ways that material mobilities are facilitated by the education system. So, for rural young people entering primary education and then transition to secondary school requires a progressive extension of geographical reach as well as increasing competence with previously unfamiliar transportation (for example school buses or boats). Depending on an individual, their experiences, and the schools they attend, different levels of mobility may be facilitated; for example, some students from the outer islands described effectively leaving home (to board in the school hostel) in order to access upper secondary provision. In addition, some pupils described having access to school trips to the mainland of Scotland depending on their subjects of study, or whether they fitted the criteria for a university trip. Where other research has demonstrated the importance of school activities generally in framing geographies of higher education mobility (Donnelly & Evans, 2016), this research highlights how the material mobilities facilitated through school activities are also highly significant in terms of providing confidence with subsequent university mobility.

Notably, the ways the education system creates material experiences of mobility extends through university too. In this research participants described the impact of regular movements to and from university and their home locations (for holiday periods), as resulting in a sense of having “two lives”. Here, although Corbett describes a process of “learning to leave” (2007a) through engaging in secondary education in rural areas, this research suggests that it might be more accurate to describe the process as it continues into higher education as a process of “learning to be mobile”. Through university, individuals’ experience of space is redefined, creating the conditions for “mobile forms of belonging” (Fallov et al., 2013), and for “heterolocal identities” (Halfacree, 2012), whereby individuals are expected, and (in many cases) come to expect, not to be defined by, or stuck in, any particular space.

### ***Becoming, Belonging and Settling***

Although progressing to university potentially supports mobile ways of being, throughout this research participants clearly articulate a desire (in later life) for greater stability, commonly imagining a later return to the islands, or moving to a rural area like the islands. The association of returning with settling down and having children was strong, and consistent with previous research (Crow, 2010; Hayfield, 2017; Henderson et al., 2007; Ní Laoire, 2008; Saar & Saar, 2020; Tyrrell & Kraftl, 2015). Understanding how leavers even at the point of leaving identify the potential for future returns (see also Hayfield, 2017) is important because it highlights how leaving a rural area does not necessarily mean that young people do not value that area (Cuervo & Wyn, 2012; Evans, 2016; Jamieson, 2000; Ramage, 2019). Here, the value of island or rural life potentially changes across the life-course, becoming particularly positive at the point of settling down to have children. Further, the different meanings or dimensions of a relationship to place (Pedersen, 2018) means that the quiet, familiar, safety of island life may appeal at other points in life too, such as graduates returning to the islands to rest and recuperate after stressful experiences (at the end of term, after a relationship break up and so on). It is also clear from this research that *some* young people may feel better suited to smaller rural or island environments because of the ways that they see themselves, as quieter, less corporate, less extraverted individuals. Again, this finding warns against any hegemonic notion of what rural life means to young people, highlighting the variations between individuals and over the life-course.

The focus of participants on a period of high mobility *followed* by a period of settling highlights that, thinking of young people as simply “learning to leave” (Corbett, 2007a) overlooks the significance of potential returns. Further, it also raises questions about whether thinking about young school-leavers in terms of global and local identities (Ball et al., 2000; Wierenga, 2009) is appropriate, given that the relationships to places may change over the life-course. This research suggests that rather than rejecting a local community in favour of a global community, students instead maybe involved in attempting a re-casting of the relationship with local community (Gaini, 2016). Students are able to view space as more abstracted (Corbett, 2007b), but rather than this resulting necessarily in a permanent leaving, it means understanding place as a choice, with the islands

being a place that students might move from but also one which they may move back to.

Importantly, where individuals return, they anticipate enacting a different form of belonging to the islands, typically contrasting being “settled” to being “stuck”. The critical difference here surrounds *choice*, it is through mobility, and enacting choice, that young people can articulate staying in terms of stillness rather than “stuckness” (Cresswell, 2012; Stockdale & Haartsen, 2018). Potentially these findings help to elucidate the evidence elsewhere in the literature that leavers may sometimes experience *stronger* place attachment than stayers (Jamieson, 2000). It is through mobility that a different relationship to place can be established, one which is more in line with dominant neoliberal discourses of modernity, whereby places (as with other aspects of life) need to be chosen (or consumed) as part of identity construction, or the “reflexive project of the self” (Giddens, 1991). There is a connection here to Savage et al’s (2005) notion of “elective belonging” whereby individuals potentially experience a greater sense of belonging where they are able to narrate their choice to live in a place which is in line with their biographies. Although Savage et al’s (2005) work focused on people who moved into an area, in this research a similar dynamic is apparent for returners. Here, then, it is not the case that for rural leavers the rural idyll is necessarily subservient to the drive for career progression, mobility and independence as has been suggested in previous research (Rosvall et al., 2018), but that moving away can help to *facilitate* the achievement of the rural idyll, allowing individuals to achieve the potential to describe their location as a *choice*.

With elective belonging and narrating locational choice in relation to biographies, the relationship between spatial belonging and career belonging is clear, as being able to articulate place as a choice also relies on being able to articulate the activity that one is engaged in as a choice too. The word “activity” is carefully chosen here to incorporate a blend of career activity as well as parenting and raising a family, because of the strong association in this research of return with parenthood. Rather than career opportunities being the most important driver of potential return migration, as much literature tends to assume (Massey et al., 1993), similar to the findings of Lundqvist’s (2019) research, participants have relatively modest hopes for future returns, combining ideas of settling down with a

family and with a good enough career pathway. Indeed for participants in this research imagining future potential returns it may be more accurate to think of employment as a potential enabler rather than a motivator of return (Crow, 2010; Ní Laoire, 2008), and indeed good enough employment is also a critical part of being able to stay in a community.

The notion of settling as opposed to becoming stuck relies on individuals being able to continue engagement in mobility (or potential mobility) both in terms of career and place. Geographically, moving on and off the islands for holidays and travel remains important for example. This finding aligns with previous research that has identified how continuing to work at remaining (potentially) mobile is an important part of being able to continue to articulate living in a place as a *choice* (Fallov et al., 2013; Cuervo & Wyn, 2017). It is also aligned to findings from other islands about the importance of “rooted mobilities” involving potentially multiple departures and returns to island communities (Cuzzocrea, 2018). However, significantly in this research, aspiring to mobile forms of belonging is not *just* associated with leavers. But the two students who stayed in their communities to complete their degrees both also showed a high level of motility (Kaufmann et al., 2004, 2018); they imagined mobile futures, visited friends at other universities, and (in one case) subsequently left the islands for a masters course. This demonstrates the distinction between motility and mobility (Kaufmann et al., 2018), and how it is possible to stay in a community but still seek to adopt a mobile outlook, potentially accruing some of the benefits that come with this, such as being able to articulate staying as a choice.

The discussion here, then, highlights how processes of mobility and becoming do not undermine processes of spatial belonging. Rather it would be more accurate to consider how relationships to place are changed through engaging in mobility, and potentially how young people themselves seek to shift their relationship to place. There is a possible relationship to social class here, with ideas of work as self-development associated with middle-class values (e.g. Blustein et al., 2002; Wierenga, 2009) and mobility associated with performing social class (Brooks & Waters, 2010; Forsey, 2015). It is also valuable to note that previous scholars have argued that the “reflexive project of the self” (Giddens 1991) is an inherently classed concept (Skeggs, 2003). So it would be possible to argue

that for participants in this research out-migration is not just part of performing rural middle-class (Jamieson, 2000; Rye, 2011; Wierenga, 2009), but in some cases that *return migration* may also be part of these classed narratives, allowing individuals to achieve a position within their rural or island communities which is more aligned with middle-class ways of being. Indeed it is notable that Haukanes (2013) has suggested that where young people envision a future “rural idyll”, this is often inherently classed, representing a middle class way of being in a rural area.

### **Frameworks for Mobility**

Although the previous section has explored the importance of mobility in the trajectories of the research participants, ultimately this research also demonstrates how all young people are not equally mobile. This section of the thesis explores these issues in more depth, offering a critical commentary on the notion of mobility capital, and exploring how the limitations on mobility at entry to higher education and post-graduation are experienced quite differently.

#### ***Mobility Capitals or Frameworks?***

Previous research has identified how access to mobility varies across the population with the development of concepts of mobility capital (Brooks & Waters, 2010; Corbett, 2007b; King, 2009; Murphy-Lejeune, 2017), spatial capital (Lévy, 1994, 2013, cited by Forsberg, 2019) and motility (Kaufmann et al., 2004, 2018). In line with these ideas, in this research, inequalities between individuals in terms of resources for mobility were also identified. However, rather than thinking in terms of “capital” the preferred terminology in this thesis is “framework”. There are three main reasons for this decision explored below.

The first reason for using language of frameworks rather than capitals is that the language of capital does not adequately capture the role of place. The existence of mobility capital, in terms of relative levels of student confidence with mobility *generally* is apparent within the research, and consistent with previous literature, this is at least partially generated by previous experiences of residential migration and family stories and histories of mobility (Brooks & Waters, 2010; Corbett, 2007b, 2007a; Murphy-Lejeune, 2017). However, in the ways that spatial pathways develop for graduates in this research, mobility capital does not adequately reflect the importance of the *specific* distribution of spatial connections (friends, family, course

or career opportunities) across space, which often create very specific frameworks for potential mobilities.

Secondly, arguably the focus on capital also normalises mobility as preferable, a resource that individuals need to have in order to progress in the world. As Bathmaker (2015) has argued: “Bourdieu’s tools direct attention onto competitive strategy” (p. 73), and this is problematic ideologically because it does not necessarily recognise issues of *difference* (for example the specific distributions of connections people have across space) and in the case of mobility capital, it continues to position mobility as “good”, something that individuals need to have (see Chapter 2). However, the evidence in this research provides a more complex picture, where it is clear that individuals do not prioritise career development (in terms of economic success and competition), exchanging capitals to achieve this, but rather seek to establish more modest futures of settling with partners, in a suitable place, and with a good enough career (see also Lundqvist, 2019; Woodman & Wyn, 2018). Here, although the ability to move may be valuable, the ability to return and settle is also important, and the kinds of dynamics and networks that would allow for an ultimate settling are potentially quite different to those that enable mobility away from the islands.

Finally, and relatedly, concepts of mobility capital potentially privilege individuals (and the differences between individuals) and overlook the significance of spatial location in mobilities (Hayfield, 2017; Stockdale & Catney, 2014). Importantly, different locations provide specific potentials for mobility, structured by the available transportation possibilities (Lasselle et al., n.d.). In this research the very significant challenges of the availability of transport connections and the costs of these connections (in terms of both time and money) are clearly apparent. Indeed the way the students emphasise transport as an issue, raises questions about whether thinking about differences *between* students on the basis of mobility capital obscures what is the most significant issue for many students themselves: the inequalities students face in terms of potential mobility home compared to other students from both UK, and in some cases, international locations.

Having explored some of the rationale behind the use of the terminology of frameworks for mobility, the next sections will explore what these frameworks look like in practice at the point of entry to, and graduation from, higher education.

### ***Entry to Higher Education***

At the point of entering higher education, some of the practicalities of moving are supported by the education system: students typically have access to funding, they join university with a cohort of freshers with whom to socialise, and the process of finding accommodation is often supported (for example through providing halls of residence). However, although mobility is supported through the university system (Holdsworth, 2009), in line with previous research participants are not found to move freely to any university but show distinct spatial preferences (Donnelly & Gamsu, 2018, 2019). Participants in this study typically describe choosing familiar enough locations, those which are not so familiar that they do not include enough novelty or difference, but also those which are not so unfamiliar as to be overwhelming. The concept of “familiar enough” connects with the earlier discussion on becoming and belonging, representing how students seek mobility and new opportunities to offer conditions to allow becoming, but also how they seek destinations that are familiar enough based on their previous experiences (and allowing for a sense of belonging). Here the findings are reminiscent of Hinton’s (2011) suggestion that in entering higher education young people may seek to “simultaneously retain and escape the familiarity of ‘home’” (p.31). However in this research, the notion of “familiar enough” pathways is connected more widely to dynamics of stability-within-movement (Forsberg, 2019; Halfacree, 2012), continuity and change, and the position of mobilities as embedded within wider individual life-courses (Findlay & Li, 1997; Findlay & Stockdale, 2003; Halfacree & Boyle, 1993; Ní Laoire, 2008).

The logics of familiarity in university transition are important because although they are clearly present in student narratives, participants more typically describe their choices in terms of relative “confidence” (see also Green & White, 2007). This confidence relates both to mobility itself but *also* to living in urban environments (here again, limitations in notions of mobility capital are evident, given that confidence is associated with a place rather than necessarily with mobility

itself). The notion of confidence is significant because it represents an internalised attribute and lack of confidence can be something individuals feel is a personal issue they need to address. However, the significance of the concept of familiarity helps to demonstrate how confidence is actually embedded in past experiences rather than necessarily being an innate quality for these students. This raises the question of social justice and how individuals may be internalising socio-spatial barriers as a personal deficit (Alexander, 2018b; Hooley et al., 2018a; Sultana, 2014).

The tendency to pursue strategies of familiarity as a way of managing risk has been discussed elsewhere (Clayton et al., 2009; Donnelly & Gamsu, 2019). The ways that risks are higher for some students (including working-class and rural students) has also been discussed (Clayton et al., 2009; Farrugia et al., 2014b). This current research highlights that participants from the islands may experience heightened risk compared to others in mainland locations. In particular, the challenges moving from rural to urban environments poses an additional challenge (Wiborg, 2001), and the challenges of transportation mean that young people cannot return home easily for weekends to ease their transition (Clayton et al., 2009). Perhaps unsurprisingly then, in this research similar strategies to those identified by Clayton et al. (2009) in terms of mitigating the risks of mobility are apparent, such as choosing relatively proximate locations, choosing locations where students have social connections, and moving with, or connecting with other people from the same geographical areas (in this case the islands) after moving. Similar strategies are also apparent more generally in rural-urban and international migration (Cuervo & Wyn, 2014; Hayfield, 2017; Wiborg, 2001; Wierenga, 2009).

In this research the dynamics of familiarity are evident across participant stories and are embedded in individual biographies. However, considering the participant group as a whole clear patterns of mobility are apparent – with Aberdeen being a key destination for the group. Understanding why Aberdeen is relatively a highly familiar location for graduates therefore can provide some insight into how a “culture of migration” focused on certain destinations may emerge. Considering this question, this research identifies that the importance of transport infrastructures (Lasselle et al., n.d.) and access to mobility (Kaufmann et al., 2004, 2018) are critical in constructing the relative proximity of places. However, the importance of

access relates not just to the present, but also to historic mobilities of students, with many familiar with the city of Aberdeen because of travelling through it en-route to other places as children. Transport connections therefore create both a present proximity and a familiarity with the place through previous mobilities. Students also often report being familiar with Aberdeen because of connections with friends and family in the city. Here, historical mobilities are again important, the popularity of Aberdeen as a university destination has existed over time and most students appear to know people in the city, including friends, siblings, aunts and uncles and so on. There are also potential connections facilitated by patterns of employment, for example participants often know people in the city, in some cases connected to the oil and gas industry. Potentially, of course, these patterns of mobility also influence ongoing transport structures with demand on certain routes likely to impact on frequency of flights or ferries for example. This research then demonstrates the significance of mobility *over time* in constructing familiarities of place, including temporary mobilities (such as holidays and visiting friends and family), as well as the influence of relational networks, employment and transport infrastructure in supporting these mobilities.

Historical social, economic and transport connections are important for many students in constructing Aberdeen as a highly familiar location. However, for others, most notably those who had lived elsewhere as children it was not always the most familiar. Further, relative confidence with mobility could impact on Aberdeen being seen as “too familiar” by some students. This warns against any interpretation of there being a culture of migration from the islands which is too hegemonic (Halfacree, 2004; Ní Laoire, 2000). Social class potentially has an important role here, and it is notable that the mobilities of participants who had lived elsewhere as children were all facilitated by parental employment in a professional role. Other impacts of class were potentially apparent even for those who had not lived elsewhere. So, for example, where students had degree educated parents but had not experienced residential mobility as children, they all still had experience of family *stories* of mobility, of going away for university, or moving to the islands.

Thinking about class and mobility in relation to parents, the role of structures of education as they have existed over time is important, as until relatively recently degree level education was not provided in the islands (see Chapter 3). Where

parental education level and mobility intention have been identified as correlated in other research (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; Donnelly & Gamsu, 2018), in this case it is notable that, especially where parents were originally from the islands themselves, parental level of education is *also* associated with particular migration trajectories, establishing normative patterns of leaving the islands to study and then later returning. Although therefore the role of family context can be thought of as conveying mobile attitudes (Corbett, 2007b), the present study identifies that the material (historic and present) mobilities of parents are particularly important in conveying mobility as a normal part of life.

Although hearing stories of parental mobility were *universal* experiences for middle-class students, it is notable that they were not exclusive to middle-class students. Other students also had relatively highly mobile parents, often facilitated by the industries in which they worked (for example fishing and oil and gas), and the students had travelled with their parents. Others from the outer isles had experienced mobility facilitated by the structure of the education system, being required to board in the school hostel in order to complete their education. Here, then, spatial horizons do not hold a straightforward relationship with class but are complicated by the distribution of opportunities (educational and employment) and the geo-spatial positioning of islands. Notably, for example, young islanders' experience of boarding away from home to attend school mirrors elite practices of private schooling elsewhere and the ways this confers mobility capital (Brooks & Waters, 2010). However, in the islands this experience is related to geographical location (being from the outlying isles) rather than social class.

A further complicating factor when thinking about spatial range and social class is the significance not just of parental mobilities but also sibling mobilities (Drozdowski, 2008). Here, where young people have older siblings who are based on the Scottish mainland, they often form a key reference point. This again complicates simple associations of family background or social class (in terms of *parental* status) and raises questions about things such as the potential significance of birth order and position in the family in terms of mobility. Further, the importance of the quality of the relationships with different individuals is clearly important. So, where a sibling, or an uncle or a friend lives may all be important potential

destinations, how these destinations feel to an individual will depend on the nature of the relationships with these people.

A final important note when thinking about frameworks for mobility is that choices are made in relation to wider structures of educational provision. In practice some students had, in effect, very little spatial choice of location depending on the particular subject or career pathway they were studying (see also Donnelly & Gamsu, 2018), and on whether they were following an established articulation route from college to university study. In this research, students in this situation were studying in Edinburgh, Aberdeen and two in Dundee, this is notable because of the variations in transport connections to these cities. What is particularly important to note here is that where students are able to enact choice of university, issues of familiarity and proximity are considered, but where there is little choice students could end up in locations that feel relatively unfamiliar and / or with more challenging transport connections, and this could, in some circumstances, present an extra challenge in terms of transition.

### ***Transition After Higher Education***

By the point of graduation issues of resources and frameworks for mobility have a quite different tenor. As in previous research, typically by the time students reach graduation they describe themselves as being able to go anywhere, and often express global mobility ambitions (Cairns et al., 2012). Specifically through the experience of moving away and acclimatising to urban environments, they have developed a level of generalised mobility capital in terms of the confidence and skills to manage further movements (Brooks & Waters, 2010; Murphy-Lejeune, 2017). *However*, just as in the statistical evidence more widely, the *actual* destinations of graduates six months and one year after graduation are much more constrained with a clear tendency to be living in their university towns or back in the islands (Ball, 2015; Sage et al., 2013). There is also evidence of relatively high instability, with some graduates moving a number of times during the year after graduation (Sage et al., 2013). However, in this research some graduates do show an expansion of geographical scope, with three moving to England who had not previously lived in the country and there is also notable mobility for some graduates

over the course of the first year after graduation, including moves to more rural locations outside of their university towns or cities.

The evidence from this project suggests that although graduates internalise notions of global mobility through their engagement with higher education (Brooks, 2019; Holt, 2009), and view this mobility primarily in terms of personal attributes (confidence), graduate mobility is largely limited by practical resources, particularly finance and accommodation. This creates new dimensions of inequality among graduates with two particular divisions evident, firstly between those with access to inexpensive accommodation (typically via partners or families) and secondly those following different career trajectories. Further, relationships take on a different significance post-graduation, with mobilities to and from the islands becoming more difficult (because of costs and time) and more acute dilemmas emerging about prioritising living near family or partners or living elsewhere where there may be better employment prospects.

The significance of finance, accommodation and relationships in mobilities are likely to have been important at the point of access to higher education too but are obscured because of the structures of higher education that support mobility. Entry to higher education typically provides some finance for mobility, support with student accommodation and relatively long holidays (allowing students to maintain relationships in two places). The obscured nature of these dynamics suggests that notions of mobility capital as developed in relation to student mobilities (Brooks & Waters, 2010; Corbett, 2007b, 2007a; Murphy-Lejeune, 2017), may only be partial and require adaptation for post-graduation pathways. The specific impacts of career pathway and relationships in terms of creating frameworks for mobility post-graduation are explored in the sections below.

**Career Pathway and Migration.** A key finding of this research is that the mobility pathways of graduates are related to their career pathways. The importance of career pathway was apparent at entry to higher education for some students who experienced restricted choices of location based on their course choice (see also Donnelly & Gamsu, 2018; Faggian et al., 2007b), however after graduation the impact of specific career routes on spatial horizons become much clearer. This is a significant contribution of this research, given the tendency in

existing literature to overlook the diversity of experiences between higher education courses, institutions and subsequent career routes (Purcell et al., 2008).

In the following sections the differences in spatial trajectories of three different groups of students are considered: those on vocational pathways, those in graduate roles, and those seeking to work their way into a career. Given the vast breadth of different degree courses and career routes, and the relatively small number of participants in this research project, these categorisations are not intended as a typology as such but more as a heuristic device, it should be recognised for example that university courses vary in terms of *degree* of vocationality (Purcell et al., 2009), and that definitions of “graduate roles” are challenging, and change over time (Elias & Purcell, 2013). However, it is hoped that the framework provides some indication of general patterns and indicates potentially important avenues for future research.

**Vocational Pathways.** In this research project, a particularly sharp distinction is apparent between graduate pathways from predominantly vocational courses and non-vocational courses. Previous research has found that after graduation students from vocational subjects are more likely to be in employment they want (Purcell et al., 2009), and in this research too, graduates from vocational courses were more likely to have clear employment pathways after university. However, these pathways also tended to have very specific geographical implications. Here, although the specific pathways of graduate transition vary in, for example medicine, veterinary medicine, dentistry, nursing, law and so on, students are generally required to undertake post-degree training or probationary roles. In some cases, students apply through central mechanisms for these roles which are then allocated, in others they are required to find their own roles.

These different ways of securing training or probationary roles produce different demands but in all cases produce restricted geographical horizons. Where students apply through a centralised portal for training places they typically have to identify *multiple* preferences for location, and are then allocated a place on this basis, this is the mechanism used for example in teacher training for those on the Teacher Induction Scheme (GTC Scotland, 2020). This creates a situation both of a highly defined geographical frame (only in Scotland, and a set number of locations)

but *also* requires students to at least in theory be willing to move to a number of locations. In other cases students are required to find appropriate training places themselves, and in this research the tendency to find work with previous placement providers was notable. These findings provide some insight into the relative regional immobility of those in some vocational routes (Ball, 2015). Firstly, it is clear that many of these vocationally-oriented students need to stay within Scotland at least to complete their training, given that training is designed for the Scottish system (Bond et al., 2008). Further, students in these fields are likely to have completed significant placement activities, and may well remain with these providers into the first years after graduation, supporting the findings of Ball and Higgins (2009). On the long-term, mobility for these graduates is also strongly framed. Professional roles potentially facilitate mobility with clearly defined opportunities that graduates would be eligible to apply for across the country, but mobility is also dependent on a role being available, as moving to a different role may risk the lapse of professional registrations for example. Further, where international mobility is imagined, the scope is defined by *where* a qualification may be recognised (Cairns et al., 2012; Manderscheid, 2009).

The necessity of finding training placements, and the importance of remaining in employment that allows for professional registration (or similar) results in a paradox. As other research has suggested, vocational routes in healthcare and education are highly desirable routes for those who may wish to return to the islands because of the relative size of these sectors in the area (Bjarnason & Edvardsson, 2017; Cooke & Petersen, 2019; Corcoran et al., 2010; Rérat, 2014a), however immediately after graduation in this research, *all* students following these routes remain away from their home island. This is not necessarily what students anticipate at the point of first applying for higher education but is not typically viewed as problematic by graduates who, through greater experience in these professions in urban environments, typically also adapt their geographical intentions, and (in many cases) positively embrace the chance to remain away to gather more experience in specialist areas of the profession rather than returning home immediately to be a generalist practitioner. Further some graduates indicate that they wish to gather more experience and develop a higher level of confidence and competence before returning back to smaller island communities, where

managing personal relationships alongside professional roles is imagined to be more challenging (see also Sultana, 2006).

The need for (or desirability of) staying away from the islands at least in the short term, potentially comes with some risks, given the evidence that the longer someone is away from their home community the less likely they are to return (Stockdale, 2006). In this research, as young people meet partners (especially where partners are based on the mainland), buy houses and settle down they can become quite embedded in their communities and less likely to return to the islands. Here the paradoxical nature of vocational routes is again clear, although they may be selected at least partially on the basis of a future return, the way these trajectories develop may actually lead graduates to settle elsewhere.

**Other Pathways.** Where students are not studying vocational courses, two different routes are identified post-graduation, those in graduate schemes and those seeking to work their way up.

Thinking about graduate schemes offered by large multinational companies, in this research graduates on these pathways came from engineering and accountancy backgrounds. If a graduate secured a place on a scheme it was understood that they might need to be mobile, and indeed the opportunity for international mobility was often seen as a selling point. Further, the evidence from this research shows with the impacts of Brexit and the oil and gas crisis, those with graduate roles may be asked to relocate (or even change their career focus, by being moved into a different work stream). Here, then, the evidence that some of the most mobile graduates in the UK are in management, engineering or business roles (Ball, 2015) may partly be related to the structures of employment in these areas. Not only is mobility *required* in some of these schemes, but it is also supported in the structures of these programmes, notably graduates typically join with cohorts of new trainees, and secure relatively high salaries. Here there are echoes of the ways that mobility was supported at entry to higher education when students felt their financial, accommodation and social needs in moving were all supported by the university system.

Students who are not on vocational routes, or in graduate schemes, typically pursue routes which are much more ill-defined, and involve “working their way” into

a career. In theory these students have much broader geographical scope, with their mobilities not constrained by vocational or career structures, however these are also students who are most likely to be in lower paid work, and without the stability and resource provided by a full-time graduate job, mobility potential is restricted. In this research it is these graduates who are potentially the most likely to either choose to live at home or to live with a partner. Here, as in previous research, accommodation availability and cost and career pathways interrelate to shape participant destinations (Hoolachan et al., 2017).

Thinking about the destinations of students, although as in previous research, the family home is a key location for graduates (Sage et al., 2013), proportionally for participants in this research *partner's* location is more significant (with over half of graduates a year after graduation living with their partner). This is slightly complicated, because for many of the students, the islands are both the location of their partner and their family and this demonstrates the danger of assuming that a return to a region after graduation is primarily motivated by family, as it overlooks the potential role of partners. The significance of partners will be explored in the next section where relationships are considered in more depth. However, here it is important to note that for graduates who are developing their careers, partner and family locations are important, potentially as a base from which to find work. Further, considering the job search processes of these graduates it is notable that social networks and contacts in their home areas can help them secure work and this is consistent with other research (Crescenzi et al., 2017; Pavis et al., 2000; Stockdale, 2002b). It is also particularly notable in this research, that where a participant moves to live with their partner, partners can also provide networks in *their* home communities. This encourages a conceptualisation of migration and entry to the workplace which moves beyond the focus on the individual (and their family of origin) to a focus on relational networks and how decisions (and support) may be offered between partners particularly.

**Relationships and Proximities.** Alongside career frameworks, the role of relational frameworks is also key in structuring the geographical destinations of young people. In the section above, discussion focused on how those without a clear career trajectory may be more likely to live with partners or families as a way of managing limited resources. However, this section thinks about the same issue

from a different perspective – how partners and families are important in their own right.

Although networks can be thought of in terms of facilitating mobility (Hayfield, 2017; Stockdale, 2002b) focusing just on relationships as functional (providing resources for mobility) would be to under-recognise the significance of personal relationships and emotional ties. In this research remaining “close enough” to family, partners and friends is important to participants, and this can constrain mobilities. Here the work of Finn (2015, 2016) in terms of “proximate” and “elastic” relationalities of graduates is instructive, with this research also highlighting the ongoing importance of relative proximity (or elasticity) of relationships to family. However, an important contribution from this current research is the evidence that the ability to maintain elastic relationships has a clear relationship to transport structures, especially given the very significant barriers to travel between the mainland and the islands. Although access to mobility was challenging during university, the challenges become more acute after graduation with access to travel posing *major* barriers for most. These barriers are three-fold: graduates are potentially less likely than they were at university to be based in one of the major Scottish cities with direct travel links to the islands, they are often time-poor (especially where juggling study and work, or demanding graduate jobs), and they may often also be experiencing financial challenges (a combination of low starting salaries and high rental costs). It is notable that where students move or travel beyond Scotland, the challenges of returning home can be much greater than anticipated, and potentially lead participants to a preference for living in Scotland in the long-term. Here, despite global narratives adopted after higher education, issues of maintaining relationships and the relative costs of this (impacted upon by available transport connections) lead to clear spatial preferences.

The relative desire to maintain elastic or proximate relationships in this research, and issues of relative proximities (facilitated by transport structures), are also experienced differently dependent on the family and relational configurations of graduates. There are two aspects to this, firstly, *where* family are: if all immediate family (parents, siblings and grandparents) are in the isles, then maintaining connections, and potentially moving home at some point is more important than for those people with siblings (and even parents) in other areas. Secondly the nature of

the relationships is important as there are certain relationships that are much harder to maintain over space through digital connections. This includes relationships with young children, particularly nephews and nieces, and relationships with elderly relatives. In both these cases the potential for communication via technology can be impaired, but *also* these relationships can involve aspects of physical care that are impossible to provide via technology. These are also relationships where time is perceived as critical, seeing children grow up, or spending time with an elderly or terminally ill relative is important for many graduates. Here it is notable that the *requirement* for mobility varies between individuals (and their relationships), not just their mobility capital.

Thinking about care, it is notable that out of a sample of 22 graduates who took part in this research, two had significant caring responsibilities (in both cases for grandparents) that directly result in choices to stay in or return to the islands. This research therefore supports indications in the literature of the role of young people and students potentially as *care-givers* (Finn, 2016) and highlights the particular considerations for young people working as unpaid carers, something that has often been overlooked in the literature (Abrahams & Ingram, 2013). More broadly it highlights the limitations of thinking of relational networks as *resources* and identifies the importance of care and familial interdependencies in the spatial locations of graduates (see also Finn, 2016; Sage et al., 2013).

A further important contribution from this research is that it is clear that relational networks are not static, and family mobilities especially may impact on young people's mobilities. Examples of particularly important family mobilities included siblings moving to live on the mainland (often for university), and parents moving to live on the mainland. Further, in some cases, over time capacity for temporary mobility may also change, for example there were cases where an increase in parental resources in terms of time (through retirement) or finance, meant that parents were more mobile, and cases where parental mobility also increased when all children had left home and were based on the mainland. These visits of parents to some extent mitigated the challenges graduates experienced in returning home. This is an important finding because again, it suggests that focusing on the *individual* and their trajectories is to overlook the significance of how decisions are located within wider family (and other) mobilities. In terms of the

interdependent and interwoven nature of family mobilities, it is also notable that whereas in previous literature parental homes may be considered a resource for students (Sage et al., 2013), this research shows that in some cases younger islanders are effectively a stimulus or a resource for parental mobilities.

Alongside family relationships, the impact of partners on the location of graduates is also quite striking and provides support for the importance of “love migration”, a topic which has typically been overlooked in the literature (Mai & King, 2009). Here, the location of partners is important and varied between participants with some students having partners in the islands, some on the mainland and some *from* the islands but also living on the mainland. The evidence in this research that graduates are more likely to live with a partner than with parents is a particularly notable finding, given the lack of attention to romantic relationships in graduate career trajectories (Finn, 2015) and suggests that further attention is needed in this area. It is also important to note that not only is the academic literature prone to using age as a proxy for life-course event (Holdsworth & Morgan, 2005; Ní Laoire, 2008; Tyrrell & Kraftl, 2015), but in this research graduates typically present quite normative notions of youth transition which are premised on independence and mobility in young adulthood. In this research, just as in Finn’s (2016) previous work, there is some evidence that students too may under-report or feel embarrassed about discussing relational components to decision-making because of the sense that career decisions “should not” be influenced by relationships, especially for young people. Despite this, it is notable that some graduates in this project settle down with partners and buy houses earlier than expected.

Importantly in this research, partners impact not just on present spatial location but also on future movements of graduates, dependent on their partner’s own location and migration intentions. So, graduates who are in a relationship with someone from the islands who is also based in the islands typically return home as soon as they can. They may foresee futures away from the islands but only where partners wish to travel. Those with partners who are from the islands but also live on the Scottish mainland may foresee immediate futures on the mainland, but with longer term returns potentially relatively likely. Those with partners from the mainland typically view the possibility of return migration as challenging as it would require “uprooting” their partner. In these cases moving to a rural part of mainland

Scotland which is “like” the islands, is often viewed as a more realistic option, enabling a lifestyle which is like home, but without expecting a partner to move too far away from their own families. Finn’s (2015) work has identified that where partnerships are formed, whether at home or at university, hold different meanings for female university students, and to a certain extent in this research these findings are mirrored. However, it is important to note that simple categorisations of relationships from “home” or “university” potentially overlook the importance of *partner* mobilities, relationships with islanders who have moved or are willing to move may be experienced quite differently to relationships with islanders who are more embedded in the islands.

### **Career Development Over Time and Space**

So far in this discussion, normative narratives of youth premised on mobility followed by a later settling have been explored, as well as some of the limits on graduate and student mobilities. Career pathways have been shown to be important in these trajectories with different trajectories providing different spatial potentials. This section will address the question of how individuals enter different career pathways, exploring the spatial elements of career decision-making. The section is split into two halves, considering decisions made at school and through university, and then how career decisions are made after university (which is particularly relevant to those who leave university without a clear plan).

#### ***Career Decisions at School***

This research highlights that although many young people embrace the opportunity to move away for new experiences, they also understand that they may want to (or need to) return at some point in the future.

Potentially, here, although most young people had similar aspirations for the future, there are challenges in working out the best ways to achieve these when they involve pathways that occur across time and space (Lundqvist, 2019). This is particularly the case in small islands where access to professional careers may require a period of study elsewhere (Cooke & Petersen, 2019). Typically in this research, young people adopted one of three kinds of decision-making strategy:

1. Choosing a vocational route that would qualify them to potentially take up roles in the community in the future (in this project all of these choices related to healthcare)
2. Choosing a “general” degree route that would be equally applicable in the islands as elsewhere (most commonly this related to business).
3. Choosing a subject with no consideration of space, typically on the basis of which school subjects they were best at or enjoyed most.

In this research the different strategies that participants pursue come with quite different possibilities and risks. For those who pursue vocational routes, they may have to wait until a suitable job comes up before they can return home, and some vocational choices are likely to be riskier than others depending on the relative size of the workforce in different professions in the islands. Those who pursue more general routes may not *need* to stay away but on the other hand do not have such clearly defined career routes and may risk not being able to find something that “fits” them in the islands.

Although some students do identify that future migration intentions have some impact on their decision-making, the overarching narrative, as in previous research, is that decision-making at school was based primarily in terms of what they are “good at” or they “enjoy” (Rönnlund et al., 2018; Scottish Government, 2018b). This narrative remains important even for those who are pursuing vocational courses. Here the logic of career choice reflects dominant narratives of good career choices based on models of rational decision-making which focus on determining the level of match between an individual and an occupational area (Bimrose, 2006; Hodkinson, 2008; Parsons, 1909). These narratives are notably context-less, and highly individualistic, and can be connected to notions of individual choice and aspiration as embedded in neoliberal ideologies and narratives of modernity (see Chapter 2).

However, in this research project, it is clear that context is important in the development of career ideas. Students develop ideas about where they might fit (in the future) through the experiences they have had in the past, and these experiences have a spatial dimension: learning “who I am” and “where I fit” involves interaction with the wider environment (Colley et al., 2003; Hodkinson, 2008;

Hodkinson et al., 2006; Holmes, 2015; Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996). Therefore, even where students describe career development in an a-spatial way, the influence of space is still evident in providing access to different kinds of opportunities, which then influence pathways of becoming and belonging, with students learning from these experiences where they fit. These dynamics are explored further in the sections below, which consider the importance of educational and work experience, first for school pupils, and then for graduates. It is important to note, that although these sections describe “experience” this should be understood both in terms of practical experiences and also the social interactions and relationships that are built up in these experiences. For example, interacting with teachers, colleagues and bosses, and observing people within these settings are all really important for students in terms of understanding “who I am” and “where I fit”.

**Places and Educational Experiences.** Engaging with education is a key means for students to learn “what I am good at” and “what I enjoy”, particularly the subjects they take and the grades they receive. For most students, a relatively wide provision of courses was available in their schools, and spatial location does not have a clear impact on educational provision. However, it is notable that students from the smaller outer isles where there is much more limited provision did report direct impacts on career decisions. This provides evidence of the challenges of limited breadth of rural education provision (Bridge Group, 2019; Lasselle, 2016; Scottish Government, 2016) and particularly how this impacts on future career pathways.

However, a much clearer or wider impact of the availability of education is the breadth of post-compulsory education available in the islands. In this research, educational provision via the island colleges is an essential part of many participant’s stories. For some it enables the chance to build up the qualifications they need to go away to university, others undertake NCs, HNCs or HNDs through the college and later move away, and still others stay beyond an HNC or HND to complete a degree programme. The specific subjects offered at the colleges can therefore frame quite clearly a student’s career development, a finding which is echoed by Atkins (2017) in her consideration of how career decisions may be “mediated” (p. 647) by educational institutions. However, in this research not only does educational pathway influence the subjects students go on to study at degree

level, but also potentially the *locations* at which they complete their studies, through articulation routes to specific universities on the Scottish mainland.

It is notable here that Corbett's (2007a) notion of "learning to leave" is complicated by further education provision. In this research, some students report almost the opposite experience at school – learning that they were "not academic" and therefore that they would not go away. Here, there are connections to the wider literature that has explored how students who are not destined for higher education can "learn" that they are non-academic (Avis & Atkins, 2017, p. 173), or can "learn to labour" (Willis, 1981). Students in this research who described themselves as not very academic typically also described strong orientations to local opportunities (see also Roberts, 1997; Rönnlund et al., 2018). However, students in this research also described how their geographical horizons changed through engagement in further education at the colleges, and particularly through encouragement from lecturers and achieving success in the college context. For some students this engagement resulted in a later "learning to leave", as they left their islands to continue their education at universities on the Scottish mainland.

The two students who graduate from the island colleges are also notable. Both students originally both considered universities elsewhere, enrolling at the college just as a short-term strategy (to complete an HNC/D), but ultimately choose to stay for their whole degree. One subsequently leaves the islands and the other remains. Understanding the ways that migration decisions change over time reinforces the importance of overcoming notions of staying and leaving as a binary, and instead recognising these as dynamic processes (Stockdale & Haartsen, 2018). Thinking about the role of college provision in influencing mobility pathways also highlights the complexity of education provision in both creating pathways "out" of communities and pathways to "remain". The role of further education is a particularly important finding in this research because it has typically received very little attention in terms of mobility from rural areas, with much research focusing on the decisions made at school only. A focus on college provision is also likely to be very important in Scotland given the structure of the education system, and the importance of the college sector in delivering HNCs and HNDs with articulation routes to degree study (see Chapter 3).

Given the relatively specific career and mobility potentials for those who engage in college education, it is perhaps important to note that it is also the case that many (but not all) students who transition to higher education via college provision are students who face additional barriers, in this research these included not having the grades for direct entry to university, having additional caring responsibilities, and not feeling confident enough to go away. Here this research raises important questions about the *different* experiences of leavers; those who are most academically successful and face least barriers to transition are more likely to experience a greater choice of degree subject, while others who have more barriers may experience relatively more constrained pathways to higher education (in terms of courses and locations) because of the limitations in further education provision in their spatial location.

**Places and Work Experiences.** Alongside educational experience, work experience is another key means by which students learn “who I am” and “where I fit”, and again the nature and availability of work experience in a particular geographical location has an impact on the ways that young people imagine their future career and spatial pathways. The local labour market has a clear impact in terms of the availability of experience, with some forms of experience much more difficult to secure than others. Importantly this does not just relate to spatial differences in labour markets (Ball, 2019b; Bridge Group, 2018), but also to specific differences in the *nature* of work. This is clear for example where students on vocational pathways typically describe the difference between the generalist nature of these careers in small labour markets, versus the higher levels of specialism in urban labour markets (see also Sultana, 2006). Further, confidentiality in smaller places can be an issue (as highlighted by Sultana, 2006), and interestingly a number of students describe this as a barrier to gaining experience in the islands, preventing students shadowing professionals in areas where confidentiality is important. However, at the same time, thinking in terms of small labour markets as *limited* is an oversimplification, the small labour markets of the islands can provide insights into niche and specialist careers too such as in this research, the exposure to renewable energy careers that had a direct influence on one student.

Unlike previous research which has considered relative exposure to labour markets (and the ways this is mediated through the careers of family and friends)

(Corbett & Bæck, 2016; Rosvall et al., 2018) this research then specifically highlights the importance of *concrete* opportunities for workplace experience. Here, where structural impacts in terms of available jobs in a local labour market have been identified for school leavers in previous research (Green & White, 2007; Hodgkinson et al., 1996; Roberts, 1997), this research highlights similar issues around the availability of opportunities, specifically in terms of work experience, for students progressing to higher education. Experiences that young people have of the workplace can shape future ideas, but also, are increasingly important in securing access to some higher education courses (for example Heath, 2007; Wright, 2015).

**Places and University Experiences.** As well as work experiences and educational experiences at college and school, the experiences students have at university in terms of the courses they have taken, and the work placements or experiences they have engaged in are critical for further developing ideas of where they might “fit” in their careers.

Again the spatial component of educational experiences is not necessarily immediately evident at university. However the clear exception in this research, is for students who studied in Aberdeen, known as the oil and gas capital of Europe (University of Aberdeen, 2020, para 1.). Here, the significance of the industry in the city can impact directly on the kinds of modules students’ study, the nature of work placements and graduate opportunities available, and the information offered by peers and lecturers. This is significant, because not *all* students have an interest in oil and gas but may choose Aberdeen for other reasons (often because of its proximity to the islands). However, these students can end up gathering connections to an industry that has a very specific geographical spread across the world, and where Aberdeen is a primary location for employment. Where policy has considered the role of universities in regional economic development then (Benneworth & Fitjar, 2019), what this research shows is that there is also the potential that students will be exposed to certain sectors or industries (depending on the local labour market) which can then have implications for their futures.

More broadly the spatial location of universities is important in terms of accessing work experience, as work experience does not just offer a form of

socialisation into particular careers (Colley et al., 2003; Hodkinson, 2008; Hodkinson et al., 2006; Holmes, 2015; Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996), but *also* into particular working environments. Here, where universities provide opportunities for work experience, students perceived these as likely to be in the vicinity of the university, in urban spaces, and in larger companies. The kinds of attributes or skills needed for these environments show some synergy with the different attributes needed to live in smaller or larger communities; bigger places and larger, corporate working environments are understood typically as requiring a high level of extraversion and confidence, smaller places (and companies) are understood as being less corporate, more relaxed. Here, whereas previous scholars have thought about constructions of urban and rural places in terms of how young people construct their identities in relation to these (Dunkley & Panelli, 2007; Pedersen, 2018; Wierenga, 2009), this research identifies the importance of specifically how *workplaces* in urban and rural areas are understood, and then how participants position themselves in relation to these.

Further, different workplace experiences are likely to result in the gathering of different “location specific capitals” (Corbett, 2007a; Crew, 2018; Moilanen, 2019; Waters, 2006)., so thinking about relative levels of specialism or generalism for example, the development of specialist skills in urban environments may become valuable for future work in urban environments, whereas the generalism may be associated with rural environments. The networks students build up on placement can also sometimes have a direct impact on being able to secure graduate opportunities (see Villar et al., 2000 on the importance of networks in graduate employment). These findings offer some explanation for findings in previous research that island graduates who have more work experience elsewhere are less likely to return (Crescenzi et al., 2017).

Where students undertake work experience is therefore important. Typically students *either* undertake placements in their home island settings or in the vicinity of their university, or in some cases both. Relative levels of confidence, personal experiences and whether or not students have a partner (and where they are based) can all impact on where a student undertakes work experience. Although work experience is often a socialising experience, negative experiences of work could also be off-putting for students – feelings of “not fitting” are as profound as

feelings of fitting in some cases. It is also notable in this research, that the potential value of multiple work placements, especially for rural students is indicated. This is because some students describe the challenge of managing unfamiliar geographical spaces and workspaces meaning that they initially seek experience in their island communities, and once they have built up confidence in a workplace environment then feel able to seek experience elsewhere.

A particularly important point when considering university experience is that students on vocational routes, who may have chosen these for the potential to return to the islands, typically gain experience in their professions in other locations (apart from the islands). These students typically report being exposed to a much wider range of activities, including specialisms that are not available in the isles and for some this leads to an intention to remain away to further their specialist experience. This discussion raises an interesting question about how far higher education provides not just “decontextualised” knowledge (Rosvall et al., 2018; Wiborg, 2001) but supports notions of specialism which potentially privilege urban working environments (Corbett, 2013; Sultana, 2006). As students progress through their studies, then, an increasing focus on developing “specialist” knowledges, and an awareness (through placement) that these are best developed in urban areas, potentially supports individuals to remain away from their communities.

### ***Career Development Post-Graduation***

As has been discussed in the previous section, some students describe developing relatively clear career ideas either before entering university (typically these students follow vocational routes) or during university (when vocational pathways may further clarify, and others may develop career ambitions based on their work experiences). Some students however leave university without a clear career pathway, seeking relevant opportunities that allow them to “work their way up”. These graduates are more likely to be living at home or with a partner. For those who return to the islands, this research shows that there may be particular challenges in terms of career development.

Graduates who return to the islands typically demonstrate a high level of flexibility in specific occupational route. This is clear in the case of students who secure graduate trainee positions (but did not plan for entering these particular

positions or sectors). Students also describe experiences of waiting for relevant jobs to come up and strategizing based on what opportunities *are* available or *might become* available, seeking to gather experience that would be relevant for these opportunities in the future. These experiences demonstrate the limitations of career decision-making models which focus on occupational *choice* and do not recognise the importance of place, as for these students their career destinations were framed by their places. Here, then, the limitations of the local labour market do not just impact on the destinations of school leavers (Roberts, 1997), but also graduates. However, it is also not the case that graduates are passive, with outcomes being simply structured by the labour market, but rather individuals are active in making decisions and strategizing and trying to find ways of proactively building their careers.

In terms of managing career development strategies, a key challenge for graduates in the islands comes not just in terms of limited employment options, but limitations in the availability of further training, postgraduate study and relevant work experience. Where graduates do not necessarily have high expectations of salary or status in island careers, the ability to “build on” their degree studies and secure a role that enables self-development *is* critical, particularly to enable them to feel settled. Without such opportunities, individuals can start to feel stuck in their island communities. The experience of feeling stuck is potentially especially acute where a returner has neither a (good enough) job or a partner in the islands. Some of these graduates would prefer to be elsewhere but return home for primarily financial reasons. These graduates can perceive significant barriers for moving (costs of accommodation, caring responsibilities and so on), and also see their opportunities for working their way into careers of their choice as considerably more difficult than their mainland counterparts. Where some graduates may hope to return to the mainland for work, their chance of working their way into a career route on the mainland may further be hampered by a lack of development opportunities (work experience or additional training) in their islands.

Here, the comment in the Milburn report comes to mind: “If a prospective intern does not live a commutable distance from London or does not have friends or relatives to stay with, then the cost of the internship can be very high” (Milburn, 2009, p. 103). In this research, the location of family homes is found, consistent with

the Milburn report, to impede access to some careers and this includes access to internships but notably also includes access to other development opportunities, including postgraduate study and work experience. Given the increasing instability of young people's transitions into work (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007) and after university (Purcell & Elias, 2004), and the evidence around the increasing importance of parental homes for graduates in managing these complex transitions (Lewis & West, 2017; Sage et al., 2013), particular issues are raised for rural graduates. Here the access to experiences or qualifications needed to secure graduate careers are unequally dispersed across space, posing critical limitations for rural graduates. Although graduates in this position do consider potential future mobilities, issues of spatial inequalities are again clearly apparent; for island students the costs of postgraduate study (if it cannot be completed online) are perceived as much greater, as it can *require* mobility, whereas mainland students are more likely to be able to live at home. A less clear impact, but another consideration is that those graduates who do move away and progress a career elsewhere potentially also experience limitations on their ability to secure a "good life" in the future, as they are unable to live in the family home to save for potentially buying a home in the future. These issues could be considered in terms of social justice, or more accurately perhaps "spatial justice" (Soja, 2009, 2010). The notion of graduates as "global" in outlook or "transcending" space (Ball et al., 2000; Green & White, 2007) is therefore shown to be deeply problematic.

For those graduates who have less clear career trajectories after university but do hold relatively clear spatial aspirations (wishing to return home), one common possibility is vocational post-graduate training (typically in teaching). The value of teaching particularly as a strategy that graduates may pursue for return to rural communities has been identified before (Rérat, 2014a), and is closely associated to the vocational strategy of school leavers who know they want to return to the islands. However, where students pursuing vocational routes from school typically chose healthcare routes, at post-graduate level it was teaching rather than healthcare that was of interest. What is notable here is that where healthcare and education are, as in other research, identified as key vocational areas that may be relevant in the smaller labour markets of the islands (Bjarnason & Edvardsson, 2017; Cooke & Petersen, 2019; Corcoran et al., 2010; Rérat,

2014a), there are potential differences between participants in terms of *when* they make the decision to return / stay and *what* careers they follow. This is because structures of education provision make some routes easier to follow as a postgraduate (with teaching possible to enter via a relatively short postgraduate training course) than others (if they require undergraduate study).

Therefore, following Lundqvist (2019), it is clear then that dimensions of time are important in how career and spatial trajectories are managed. And in this research, the specific career route that individuals pursue is evidently embedded to some extent in their spatio-temporal position and available opportunities. This effectively builds on Roberts's (1997, 2009) notion of the importance of opportunity structures in career decision-making but extends it across time and space, recognising career development as something that happens across the life-course – what is relevant is *what* comes up, *when*, *where*, and *how* this intersects with a graduate's position in their life-course and mobility intentions. Another connection is potentially to Hodkinson's (2008) later revisiting of careership theory, where he explores research into different decision-making styles of individuals (Bimrose & Barnes, 2007) and concludes there are “yet unexplored links between decision-making styles and positions in fields” (Hodkinson, 2008, p. 10). In this research, it could be said that individuals are making different decisions based on their *spatial* positions and imagined future mobilities.

### **The Wider Context of Career**

In this last section of the chapter, the spatialised model of career development presented in section Figure 9 will be revisited. This section draws together the previous discussion presenting an outline of career decision-making and career development that incorporates place. Given the findings of this research project, the model considers career development and career decisions as positioned within much wider life-courses and decisions. This significantly extends the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2, and the work of Hodkinson and colleagues (Hodkinson, 2008; Hodkinson et al., 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). The model will also be discussed in relation to the Bourdieusian tools of habitus, field and capital.

### ***Spatialising Experience: Beyond Bourdieu***

The potential for spatialising the theory of careership was explored in Chapter 2, particularly in relation to how the Bourdieusian “thinking tools” (Bathmaker, 2015; Jenkins, 2002; Webb et al., 2017) of habitus, field and capital could be applied in terms of understanding the influence of place. The influence of Bourdieusian thinking is apparent throughout this research, with notions of habitus, field and capital underpinning the ways different issues are presented and considered. However, Bourdieusian terminology has not been rigorously applied in this research because of the challenges with any straightforward application of these terms to issues of place and space. The rationale for adopting “framework” rather than capital has been explored in an earlier section of this chapter. In this part of the discussion the rationale for not adopting notions of habitus and field is explored in more depth.

Hodkinson’s (2008) theory of careership states there are three overlapping dimensions to career decision-making that include:

The positions and dispositions of the individual, the relations between forces acting in the field(s) within which decisions were made and careers progressed, and the on-going longitudinal pathways the careers followed.  
(p.4)

Given the previous discussion, it is clear that “the positions” of the individual include not just their social location, or location within different educational or occupational fields, but also their *spatial* location. Further, it is also clear that the “on-going longitudinal pathways” represent not just journeys in time but also through space.

Spatial locations can, to a certain extent, be thought of as fields for decision-making. Where Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) specifically consider career decisions in relation to different occupational fields, the findings from this research identify that occupational field overlaps with spatial location (or field). This is particularly clear in terms of how work experience is both an experience of a specific occupation (and potentially industry) *and* is a spatialised experience – embedding individuals into specific working contexts. Habitus (to use Bourdieusian terminology) in this case is therefore layered, covering occupation, industry, employer *and* place. This layered habitus then generates the conditions for

reflexivity (Adams, 2006; Atkinson, 2016; Decoteau, 2016) both in terms of spatial and occupational futures.

Although using Bourdieusian notions of field and habitus provide some insight, the terminology has not been adopted however. This is because I would suggest that to think about place as a field for decision-making overlooks the role of spatial mobilities, and the ways that young people may have multiple historic and present connections to different spaces. Thinking about place as a field, and individual spatial habitus, also risks overlooking the variety of experiences and meanings place can hold, the “non-classed elements of space, which carry meaning for the middle and working classes alike” (Donnelly & Evans, 2016, p. 89). Further, there are risks in thinking of habitus or field in terms of the way it lends itself to a conceptualisation of place as a neatly bounded entity, with individuals occupying fixed locations. Instead in this research a much more fluid experience is apparent, individuals move between spaces, and places can hold different meanings and provide different contexts at different points in an individual’s life. Experience is therefore spatialised rather than “located” in a certain place.

Rather than using the terminology of habitus and field then, the construction of becoming-belonging has been chosen. Blending belonging with becoming enables a recognition of how belonging may change over time through processes of learning or socialisation and also in terms of how fields themselves may change over time (Decoteau, 2016), as well as a person’s position in the field (Colley et al., 2003; Hodkinson, 2008; Hodkinson et al., 2006). Although connected to habitus, the notion of belonging is also preferred because it is aligned more closely to participant experiences, to belong is what it feels like when habitus and field are aligned (Thomas, 2015). Belonging is also terminology that has often been used in scholarship related to rural young people and their attachments to place (e.g. Abbott-Chapman et al., 2014), however the construction of becoming-belonging challenges the implicit notions of *stability* in notions of spatial belonging. Rather, as has been shown, some young people actively pursue strategies of mobility and becoming in order to change their relationships with place, allowing a return to a rural area, and facilitating a belonging that is premised on stability rather than being stuck.

The construction of becoming-belonging also works on a more metaphorical or philosophical level, challenging the binary whereby “time is aligned with movement and progress and a progressive project of ‘becoming’ ... [while] place becomes stasis and reaction – a passive ‘being’” (Simonsen, 2008, p. 17). The notion of becoming-belonging highlights the understanding that processes of (physical) mobility originate at least partly in a form of belonging (to educational environments), and that more widely processes of career development are embedded in senses of belonging – of where I fit now, and where I might fit in the future – and they generate movement towards these futures. Through these movements, however, young people learn from their experiences, refining their sense of “fit” and, potentially changing their future pathways.

Importantly, young people themselves embrace the possibilities of change, of becoming. To utilise a Bourdieusian metaphor, students actually do not want to be a “fish in water” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127) but equally they do not want to be a “fish out of water”, they want to put themselves in situations where they feel they are a little bit out of their comfort zone, but not too far. New experiences produce conditions of disjuncture which can be valued because of their ability to help students choose options, that is they are valued for the reflexivity they produce. However, managing these pathways so they do not feel *too* unfamiliar is important otherwise young people risk not being able to cope (see also Clayton et al., 2009; Hinton, 2011). Effectively the process of good transitions involves keeping some aspects of experience stable while changing others, pursuing familiar enough pathways or building on previous experiences.

### ***People, Place, Careers: A Conceptual Triad***

Contributing to the existing literature on career development then, the findings from this research specifically consider the layered experiences of belonging to career pathways and to places. A third important area of belonging is people – creating a triad of people, place and career. This triad represents areas of belonging, but each element of the triad also creates certain frameworks of mobility: with the career pathways people follow, the people they know, and the places that they live influencing ongoing mobilities. Further these ongoing mobilities then influence the development of new social contacts, and new career opportunities and

so on. The emphasis on people in this model perhaps draws out an implicit focus in the model of careership, whereby one of the three elements of decision-making (alongside a focus on the position of the individual and change over time) is the “relations between forces acting in the field(s) within which decisions were made” (Hodkinson, 2008, p. 4) including relationships with employers and families. However, this research extends and strengthens this focus in several ways – firstly by identifying the very significant potential role of *partners* even for young students (in line with other calls to include a stronger focus on partners in graduate transition e.g. Finn, 2015, 2016), secondly by highlighting the importance of affective and emotional relationships, and finally by understanding that relationships can have an indirect impact on career decisions, particularly through the impact of relationships on mobilities, and thereby on the career opportunities individuals access.

Ultimately, considering the three areas of belonging (people, place and career) participants imagine ideal futures where all three areas align: where they settle down with partners, in places that they choose, in careers that feel like they fit. However, rural places pose dilemmas for students in terms of *how* they manage to achieve all the different elements of a good life. Here, the intersecting timelines and experiences of relationships, careers and places are apparent for this cohort of young people. In some cases students return home straight after graduation, and are settled in relationships but struggle with managing to secure the work they want, others settle with partners who are from mainland Scotland in careers they like, but struggle to imagine futures at home, and still others return home without a partner and without a career pathway.

These intersecting spheres of belonging explain why some students who return home but without a career or a relationship, can feel a profound sense of being out of place. Cuervo and Wyn’s (2017) similar finding that someone can be in a familiar place, but still feel “out of place” is a key reason that they reject Bourdieusian notions of habitus and prefer to think in terms of belonging. In a different paper Cuervo and Wyn (2014) identify three dimensions of belonging: to people, place and time (notably a similar triad of people, place and mobility is identified by Fallov, 2013). My position is broadly aligned with these in terms of the use of the notion of “belonging” and the understanding of belonging as layered, and with place, time and people being important. However, from this research I would

argue that to these areas of belonging, career needs to be added. Here I define “career” holistically (see Chapter 2), it does not relate necessarily to opportunities for progression (in terms of salary or status) but relates to having access to opportunities that feel meaningful and build on one’s skills and experiences.

The dual drivers of people and professional motivations in framing mobility trajectories for graduates have been identified by previous scholars (Bond et al., 2008; Crescenzi et al., 2017). Further, Rérat’s (2014b) research on rural graduates combines a focus on socio-familial, professional and migration trajectories. However, in this research conceptualising the three areas of people, place and career in terms of belonging, moves beyond an understanding of careers and relationships as simply push or pull factors in migration, and positions them more as fundamental areas of lived experience, which have a (not always) conscious role in decision-making, and the dynamics of which intertwine over time. Thinking in terms of belonging also has the advantage that it is closer to participants’ own experiences – with participants describing anticipated futures where they are able to “settle”, and where they feel they “fit”.

### ***Reflexivity***

Although in this discussion I have chosen not to utilise terminology of field, habitus and capital, the Bourdieusian theoretical toolkit remains useful. In particular, this framework assists with understanding *how* experiences of disjuncture result in the development of reflexivity. So, for example, in this research a particularly notable disjuncture for students is the experience of moving spatial location which is experienced as a big jump for students. The jump that students describe shows some synergy with the literature on working-class transition to university, where notions of habitus and reflexivity are particularly apparent. The literature on working-class transition to university demonstrates that students do not necessarily “leave behind” their roots when proceeding through higher education (Abrahams & Ingram, 2013; Reay et al., 2009) but rather hold on to aspects of their backgrounds, adopting a critically reflexive stance on their university environments (Reay et al., 2009). In this current research project, the finding that individuals often describe an experience of “two lives” is notable given a similar finding for working-class students in middle-class higher education environments, with both Reay et al. (2009) and

Abrahams and Ingram (2013) noting that participants often described two lives of their working-class homes and middle-class universities. Reay et al. (2009) and Abrahams and Ingram (2013) identify that the discontinuity between these fields can generate additional reflexivity, or a “chameleon habitus”. What this current research shows then, is that experiences of spatial difference in the transition to university (identified elsewhere by Pedersen, 2018 and Wiborg, 2001) can *also* lead to experiences of reflexivity. What is notable in this research is that *spatial* discontinuity can lead to a level of spatial reflexivity (Cairns et al., 2012). Here students potentially develop both a critical stance on aspects of urban or corporate life, but also on island life, and reflecting on where they may “fit” best. Conceptually then, although thinking about belonging rather than habitus is the preferred terminology, the Bourdieusian toolkit offers a means of understanding how students who follow pathways into “new” experiences (including new places) may develop reflexivity. And this provides some explanatory potential to explain how even when young people leave their rural areas their rural background continues to be influential in how young people view themselves and their futures (Pedersen, 2018; Wiborg, 2001).

### ***Chance and Unpredictability***

A key finding in terms of the lived experience of graduates is that the intersecting dynamics of people, place and careers, and the ways that mobilities are shaped by frameworks of career and relationships, creates a significant amount of instability and complexity in career development. Although as in other research the aspirations of young people can seem relatively modest (Lundqvist, 2019; Woodman & Wyn, 2018), to achieve conditions for settling in a career, place and with a person of their choice can be experienced as a risky business for island students. This is particularly because achieving a satisfying career can seem to require mobility away from the islands at least for a period of time, which raises questions about how and when a return might be possible, and the best strategies for achieving a positive return. These risks, in some ways are a product of the education and skills system whereby some careers require specific qualifications that students cannot study at their local institutions, but it is also more widely about embedding values of *specialisation* in career pathways which can lead students away from their rural, and more generalist, labour markets. For some students this

can lead to experiences of conflict – wanting to return home, but not being able to see possibilities to have the kinds of career that they want.

Here, following Massey (1991) and the notion that the “specificity of place... derives from the fact that each place is the focus of a distinct mixture of wider and more local social relations” (p. 29), it can be seen how this creates particular spatialised dynamics in terms of gender. The key here is the gendered nature of the islands’ labour market (HIE, 2017b, 2017a), and graduate’s perceptions of the labour market as particularly restrictive for women unless they hold a degree. The statistical evidence from the islands shows a proportionally higher rate of return from female graduates than male and shows some indication that those in teaching and nursing and midwifery may be relatively likely to return (see Chapter 6). Here there is a strong possibility that there may be an association between gender, career pathway and migration trajectory for the islands, as has been found in other rural communities (Corcoran et al., 2010).

In contrast, to restricted opportunities for women, opportunities in “male” industries may be stronger, especially for those following apprenticeship routes straight from school. In this research, the three graduates who returned home to live with a partner after graduation were all women returning to male partners, with these male partners having relatively established careers. Here, moving home is common sense as their partners were already settled into careers and, in some cases, earning reasonable salaries, despite the fact that the female graduates then move into labour markets which potentially restrict their options. For those with boyfriends on the mainland, graduates also moved to be with them, often benefitting from access to living accommodation and their partner’s networks (to find work), although often experiencing some level of compromise (or loss) in terms of being distant from the islands and their families. In no cases did a partner (from the mainland) move to the islands to be with an island graduate. Here, the local labour market and the opportunities it provides must be understood in relation to wider national structures of education and training, which impact disproportionately on women, creating gendered pathways out of the islands. The subsequent trajectories of women, and the interrelation of relationships and career development, then create specific risks of loss – loss of career aspirations (for those with island

partners who move home) and loss of the potential to return (for those with mainland partners).

This raises questions about potential inequalities and how gender pathways and spaces are interrelated, and the spatial aspects of how inequalities are formed and performed (Gieryn, 2000). Further, the spatial implications of educational policy are also highlighted. In particular, nursing and teaching are examples of career areas that have not always required a degree and, as higher education expands, and new kinds of graduate careers emerge (where a degree is now necessary or increasingly common) (Purcell & Elias, 2004), there can be particular impacts on rural students, who may increasingly need to leave their areas to pursue these careers. In this research, the desire for postgraduate study and the specific difficulties of rural students in accessing this study, is indicative of the possibility that “credential inflation” whereby increasingly graduates seek to secure a “positional advantage” through additional qualifications (Brown & Hesketh, 2004; Tomlinson, 2008) may pose specific problems for rural students.

In terms of risks and inequalities, the instabilities in the world around graduates and the impacts on career and migration trajectories is important. This includes experiences of economic and career instability (particularly around the oil and gas crash and Brexit), but also unpredictabilities of if and when jobs may come up in the islands. Further, there are experiences of more personal instabilities in relationships in terms of family illness, birth of nephews and nieces, beginning a relationship, ending a relationship, and in various family and partner mobilities. Here the findings are aligned to previous research which has explored the complexity of youth transitions to adulthood, involving multiple transitions in terms of employment, relationships and accommodation which can lead to fragmented pathways (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). Questions are raised here about how far wider political and contextual factors such as the precaritization of work (Chadderton, 2019; Hooley et al., 2018b; Sultana, 2018), and (regarding caring responsibilities) the rolling back of the welfare state (Chadderton, 2019; Hooley et al., 2018b; Sultana, 2018), may impact on student experiences. Where the parental home is increasingly a “safety net” (Lewis & West, 2017; Sage et al., 2013) what are the implications if the family home is geographically situated in a remote or rural location? If the state has less of a role in the provision of childcare (for nephews and nieces) and adult social care

(for grandparents and others), what impacts does this have on young people and their geographical mobilities?

All of these factors add a considerable element of chance and unpredictability to the intersection of spatial and career trajectories. The impact of chance has been considered in career development theories such as planned happenstance (Krumboltz, 2009) and the chaos theory of careers (Pryor & Bright, 2011). Hodkinson has also considered serendipity and contingency in career development, highlighting that: “chance is important in people’s careers, but that very serendipity is influenced by positions and by the field.” (Hodkinson, 2008, p.9). That is, people’s responses to chance events vary according to individual positions and resources (see also Atkins, 2017 and Avis & Atkins 2017). In this research chance is also important, both in terms of serendipitous opportunities, and also in terms of difficulties and instabilities in their lives: redundancies of partners, closure of education or training routes, relationship break ups, family illness and so on. These issues of instability in relationships and career trajectories can change the frameworks within which decisions are made quite radically and in unpredictable ways. Where Hodkinson considers position in a field as having an impact on how individuals respond to chance events, importantly for these students, their spatial position (and the position of loved ones) is important - having family homes in the islands may impact on their ability to maintain continuity in a career trajectory in the case of a sudden return home to care for a loved one for example. Equally, the terminology of “fate” and of “stars aligning” is typically used to explain how spatial decisions and career and relationship decisions align. How chance impacts on career development therefore relates not just to career opportunities and field position (in Hodkinson’s terminology), but to wider relational and spatial positions of individuals and how these intersect. Further, “chance” experiences should not be understood purely in positive terms as the emergence of new opportunities, but chance must also relate to contingency, instability and loss.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusions**

This final chapter of the thesis draws together the key conclusions from the research before moving on to consider some of the implications of the findings in terms of educational and regional development policy and practical implications for supporting students and graduates in the islands and other rural areas. There is then a final section where I reflect on the process of the PhD, key limitations and opportunities for further research indicated in this project, and key learning for me as a researcher.

### **Summary of the Findings and Contributions of the Project**

This research project contributes to the growing literature on the role of space and place in career development (Alexander, 2013; Bakke, 2018; Rönnlund et al., 2018; Rosvall, 2020; Rosvall et al., 2018). It also contributes to the literature which has considered issues of geographical mobility in terms of entry to higher education (Donnelly & Gamsu, 2018, 2019; Gibbons & Vignoles, 2012), and extends this by considering not just mobilities into higher education, but also mobilities as they develop after graduation. Further, and more broadly this research contributes to a growing body of literature that has argued for place and mobility to have a greater focus in understanding young people's transitions (Cairns et al., 2012; Farrugia, 2014).

The main contribution of this research is to have identified how dynamics of place and mobility remain important to young people from island or rural areas who pursue higher education. Typically in much of the existing literature, these young people are considered to transcend space, leaving others behind who are trapped by space (Ball et al., 2000; Green & White, 2007). This current research has problematised these assumptions, identifying how young people's futures continue to be shaped by their previous (spatialised) experiences, and their future spatialised horizons, which are particularly shaped by their career and relational frameworks. Further, young people in this research imagine spatialised futures, frequently imagining a return to their island homes, or at least imagining being able to settle in a place "like" their island homes.

In terms of exploring these pathways, the intertwining dynamics of stability and change have been apparent – how students move along pathways of becoming

but which are also influenced by dynamics of belonging. Further, and in a more concrete sense, dynamics of stability (in terms of staying in a community) and change (as in leaving a community) have been problematised in this research, with some young people who stay for higher education adopting mobile outlooks and later leaving their communities, and some who leave later returning to their communities. As such this research contributes to a growing body of literature which has argued for moving beyond binary conceptualisations of stayers and leavers (Stockdale & Haartsen, 2018), and concepts of mobility and place as opposite forces (Fallov et al., 2013; Massey, 2005).

A specific contribution of the project has been the development of a theoretical framework to describe how place and space are important in the career pathways of young people in this research (shown in Figure 9). This framework draws on the theory of careership and, in particular the notion of horizons for action but identifies how these horizons are *spatial* horizons as well as career horizons. Here, and following Prince (2014) this thesis has demonstrated that “one cannot imagine the future without place” (p. 699). However, the framework that has been developed has a clear focus not just on the importance of *imagined* futures but also explores the impacts of materialities and resources in terms of the ways that pathways are developed. This research has provided some support for notions of mobility capital, with student confidence in mobility important in framing their spatial horizons (Brooks & Waters, 2010; Corbett, 2007b; Murphy-Lejeune, 2017). However, the research ultimately moves away from thinking about mobility capital, in favour of thinking about frameworks of mobility, as part of focusing on how *specific* connections to specific places are important, and the important role of relationships. These dynamics are particularly apparent post-graduation when, compared with undergraduate mobilities, issues of “confidence” are less apparent, and issues of relative economic resources become much more apparent. After graduation the specific relational frameworks that people inhabit (and the potentials for connecting with significant others through the availability of transport connections) become very important, as do the specific geographical potentials of different career routes. In this research, the level of specificity in terms of different relational and career circumstances and how these factors intertwine can make graduate pathways difficult to predict.

For graduates themselves following pathways of becoming-belonging are replete with potential, but also potentially risk experiences of loss. Imagined futures are ones where graduates can settle down – choosing their location, their career and the partner with whom they settle. Being able to articulate their movements in terms of *choice* and elective belonging (Savage et al., 2005) is important, part of potentially achieving the ability to engage in a “reflexive project of the self” (Giddens, 1991). However, *how* to achieve the conditions for settling is more problematic, as managing relationships and careers over space can be challenging, especially so for young people in rural and remote communities, and for women in these communities who experience particular constraints in terms of the local labour market. Here, the purpose of the research could be thought of as seeking to contribute to a more socially just society (Atkins & Duckworth, 2019), by highlighting the particular issues of place and space as they are relevant in career development.

Importantly, these findings do not suggest that geographical location can be thought of as a linear dimension of inequality in terms of how “more” or “less” urban a location is (see also Cuervo and Wyn 2012, and Farrugia, 2015). Such a perspective potentially overlooks the different relative positions of individuals within a community, and the different perspectives on communities that individuals hold. It also overlooks the ways that these island communities cannot just be thought of in terms of lack, but should be thought of in terms of difference: although there are fewer economic opportunities in some areas, in other areas the islands are world-leading, for example in renewable technologies. More fundamentally, it is important not to position rural or remote places in terms of deficit because of the way that this continues to valorise neoliberal ideologies that privilege mobility and the pursuit of economic success. Rather, wider questions are raised in this research project about whether mobility and the pursuit of economic success is always “good”, especially if this means remaining distanced from family relationships. Further, questions could be asked about whether seeking to mobilise individuals to overcome the constraints of space is really positive, given the developing environmental crisis, and particularly the damage caused by air travel (Sheller, 2018).

However, in the current neoliberal climate, participants in this research potentially display experiences of conflict. Just as they feel they “should” be prioritising career development, they also recognise the fundamental importance of

relationships in their lives. Although they may return home with “modest” hopes for a career that is “good enough” (Lundqvist, 2019; Woodman & Wyn, 2018), they may still find that limitations in the local labour market prevent them from accessing the training and opportunities they need. Here, wider questions about economic systems, and the organisation of work and education over geographical space are raised. The ideological position of increasing mobility and communication across space potentially overlooks the ways that material opportunities are still heavily influenced by spatial (and social) position. So, whereas the growth of internet technology has sometimes been promoted for enabling access to work from remote communities, in this research students identified that this is a possibility but *only* at a later point in their career development, not as new graduates. This aligns with previous research which has shown remote working is not available equally in all professions and may be granted as a privilege to those with greater bargaining power or status in the workplace (Davies, 2021). Further, although technology may increase access to postgraduate education, this access has not been universal, with vocational provision particularly often being limited for distance learners. Here, then, neoliberal ideologies of global trade, global movement, global interconnection, and ultimately global outlooks, can have a direct impact on young people in rural and island communities. At the same time as feeling that they “should” be mobile, the possibilities for mobility, both material and virtual are constrained, and, for those who return or remain in their communities there remain constraints in local labour markets that make the achievement of even a “good enough” career a challenging prospect.

Overall, therefore, this research project has shown how career pathways are embedded in time and space, and in line with Furlong and Cartmel (2007) I argue that “our opportunities and our life chances continue to be structured by our lived rather than our mediated experiences. The country we live in, and the neighbourhood where we reside powerfully shape life experiences” (p. 143). To this statement I would also argue for the inclusion of time, with individuals moving through spaces over time, and through these movements gathering different social and career experiences that then influence future development.

### **Policy and Practice Implications**

Although this research project has not primarily been focused on issues of policy, the findings do have implications for policy and practice in a number of areas – regional development, education and career guidance. These implications are explored in this section, starting with considering issues of youth migration and regional development, and then exploring how individuals from rural or island areas can best be supported in their educational and career development.

### ***Youth Migration and Regional Development***

The findings of this research particularly speak to the longstanding concerns in Orkney and Shetland, (and in other Scottish and global island communities) around youth out-migration and population sustainability (Hall Aitken, 2007, 2009; Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2009a, 2009b, 2015b, 2018c). Although previous research has often explored youth out-migration in terms of stayers and leavers, one key finding of this research is that such binary presentations of young people's trajectories is problematic.

**Supporting Returners and Potential Returners.** In this research the strength of the appeal of returning to the islands to settle down and have children is striking. This is consistent with other research which has identified the appeal of return to home communities including Ireland (Ní Laoire, 2008), Sardinia (Crescenzi et al., 2017) and the Faroe Islands (Hayfield, 2017). This research therefore supports previous findings from Stockdale (2006) and Crow (2010) that policy relating to the Highlands and Islands of Scotland would benefit from a greater focus on return migrants.

In terms of drivers for return migration, this research generally supports findings that people and career factors are critical (Bond et al., 2008; Crescenzi et al., 2017). Thinking about career factors, this research highlights that some (potential) returners have highly occupationally specific qualifications (typically in healthcare and education) and may need to wait for an appropriate job to come up in the islands. Others may be more flexible in terms of the career routes that they would engage in but require opportunities that feel purposeful and provide for growth and development. Therefore, a broader policy focus on opportunities for meaningful work and self-development opportunities in the islands is likely to be

important rather than just focusing on “graduate jobs” or highly-skilled, highly-salaried jobs more broadly.

A second important finding of this research is that some graduates return *without* work; these may be graduates who are in relationships with islanders, or return for family reasons, or who do not have access to accommodation on the mainland. In this research, these graduates typically experienced some challenges in terms of their career development – waiting for jobs to come up, delaying entry into masters courses, adjusting their area of occupational interest, or planning to go away to retrain. This research therefore suggests that strategies that consider how best to support this group of graduates would be highly beneficial, helping to utilise existing skills in the islands, and potentially helping those in the islands to stay in the islands (rather than moving away), and to stay in a more positive way (rather than feeling stuck). Considering the importance of partners, it is also notable that decisions are made in partnerships, so exploring how to support under-employed graduates is also potentially a means of supporting not just one but two young people (in many cases). Although this research focuses on those originally from the islands, it is also likely that issues of under-employed partners may impact on incoming couples and could also threaten their long-term futures in the islands.

Developing systems for supporting early-stage career development therefore may benefit both potential returners who are looking for jobs with development opportunities, and those who have already returned. Here, although increasing employment opportunities is important for encouraging return (Stockdale, 2006), it is not necessarily sufficient. And although graduate placement schemes are valuable, creating enough placements in all possible different career areas is not feasible, with these challenges even more acute for very small island communities (such as the outer isles of Orkney and Shetland) where there may only be one or two graduates graduating each year and a limited range of businesses. Therefore, other strategies that think beyond the creation of internships or placements could be valuable, for example, seeking to increase the range of postgraduate education and training opportunities, as well as providing support for new graduates through island networks or through mentoring schemes.

A key challenge in supporting graduates relates to the limitations in the local education and labour markets. Given the specific nature of many of the qualifications necessary for progression into some careers, and the demands for specialist experience, questions have to be asked about the feasibility of providing a full range of opportunities *on* the islands. Rather it may be that bespoke support for graduates related to their specific interests may be valuable, potentially including funding to allow for accessing opportunities via Scottish mainland providers or periods of work experience or learning exchanges with other areas. Approaches that seek to connect individuals with other communities elsewhere are also likely to be particularly beneficial in terms of supporting graduates to not feel stuck or trapped by space, but to facilitate an ongoing sense of connectivity across space, and an ongoing sense of elective belonging in their communities.

A final point is that the logic of specialisation in career development can result in some young people feeling that island labour markets cannot provide the kind of specialist working environments that allow professional development. In this research, one student mentioned a specialist pathway in their profession in rural practice, and it is notable here that the existence of this pathway, meant that returning to the islands felt like less of a compromise in terms of career than it might otherwise have been. Examples of specialist pathways in rural practice include the medical profession, where there are specialist training options available at Aberdeen university, and remote and rural fellowships to support practitioners develop the specialist skills necessary to work in very small communities (MacVicar et al., 2012; Siderfin, 2005). With the evidence that rural environments may require some particular skills across different professions, such as the ability to manage confidentiality, to work across multiple areas of knowledge or specialism (see also Sultana, 2006), it is possible that similar rural specialisms could be developed in other professions. Alternatively, communities themselves could explore the possibilities for cross-profession training in rural skills, which may equip graduates to return or enter the island labour markets and *also* generate a sense of specialism in rural practice.

**Questioning Retention and Supporting Rotation.** A further important point raised by this research is that *preventing* youth out-migration appears relatively problematic as a policy strategy. First of all, many of the graduate careers that are

available in the islands currently *require* mobility as they require degree or post-graduate level qualifications that can only be gained elsewhere (see also Cooke & Petersen, 2019). Although expansion of further and higher education is a policy objective in the Highlands and Islands (Scottish Government, 2019b), expansion of education to cover *all* possible career routes in the region, I would suggest, is problematic given the specialist nature of some qualifications. Expansions of options for distance education, especially in professional routes, may be valuable, but it would remain highly unlikely that local skills needs could be met entirely by local training routes. Further, an important consideration is that locally provided education opportunities can still risk out-migration from the most peripheral communities (Bjarnason & Edvardsson, 2017), so even if the islands of Orkney and Shetland were able to provide much expanded options for study, mobility from the outer isles to the mainland is still likely to be an issue, and these are the communities that experience the most acute challenges with population sustainability (see Chapter 3).

Another limitation on seeking to provide a full range of opportunities in the islands, is that the wider appeal of migration for self-development, for city lifestyles, and as a stage in life, means that even if opportunities were expanded, out-migration would not necessarily be stemmed. These findings are in line with previous research that has identified that increasing educational options may not always encourage students to stay (Drozdowski, 2008). It is also important to recognise that the perspectives, connections and experiences students gain from living in other communities may be conceptualised as resources that they can bring back to their island communities and stemming migration would potentially restrict these flows of resources (Crow, 2010; Stockdale, 2006). Further for individuals themselves, mobility is part of being able to enact choice and to achieve a sense of “elective belonging” (Savage et al., 2005) in their island communities.

Planning for the economic and population sustainability of island communities therefore needs to take into account population *movements*. This aligns to arguments that rather than “brain drain” alternative metaphors of “brain diffusion”, “brain rotation” and “brain circulation” may be more appropriate (Baldacchino, 2006b; Crescenzi et al., 2017; Gaillard et al., 2015). Important to these ideas is that leavers are not necessarily a loss to island communities because

they may well return at a later point, and even if they do not return, they can remain a resource for other islanders. Therefore, facilitating ongoing retention of networks and connections back to the home community can be important for allowing the community to benefit from these leavers (Baldacchino, 2006b; Gaillard et al., 2015; R erat, 2016). In this research, the vast majority of participants, whatever their mobility pathway, demonstrated strong connections back to the islands both in terms of frequency of travel, and in connecting with diasporic islander communities on the mainland. However, these connections were strongest for those with family in the islands. The two graduates who did not have family originally from the islands experienced a much less strong connection. Exploring means for continuing to enable connections back to the islands for those young people who may find themselves drifting away may, therefore, be valuable, as well as connecting young people who are in the islands with the knowledge, resources and insights of those who are elsewhere.

Seeking means to retain engagement with leavers is one side of encouraging “brain rotation”, another side is considering how to support stayers to connect with other communities and enact forms of mobility. Some ways of doing this for graduate returners were considered in the section above. However, supporting the mobility of stayers is also important for undergraduate students who study in the islands. The evidence in this research is that these students who stayed sought to develop mobile identities, connecting with other communities and individuals on the mainland and in one case moving away after completing their degree. Considering further structural means to facilitate virtual and physical mobilities of students who remain on their islands may well be beneficial (Alexander, 2018a). This could include for example opportunities to study on the mainland for part of a degree course (facilitated potentially for UHI students through the existence of other UHI colleges in other communities), study trips, exchange programmes, mentoring schemes and networking with other students in other locations. These kinds of activities are relatively common where a focus has been on increasing international mobility (Artess et al., 2017; Diamond et al., 2011), but this research suggests similar schemes may be valuable for facilitating domestic mobility (Alexander, 2018a).

In order to support brain rotation one practical challenge surrounds the key issue of the costs of transport to and from the islands, which are particularly acute for young people from the outer isles. Travel costs and times are a significant barrier to travelling to and from the islands, and this causes issues in retaining connections with the isles (for those who live on the mainland) but also in terms of allowing young people in the islands to opportunities to connect with communities elsewhere. Issues of transport have been identified as challenging in the Highlands and Islands region as a whole, and regionally young people in Orkney and Shetland are some of the most likely to report this as a challenge (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2018b). However, there are two different scales of transport here, transport *within* the islands and transport *away* from the islands to the mainland, and the existing research blurs this boundary. In this research the issue is specifically the costs of travel from the mainland to the islands and vice versa, and this places particularly acute pressure on students in the first year of undergraduate provision, when frequent visits home can assist with transition (Clayton et al., 2009), and in the early years after graduation when typically young people are both in more financially precarious positions, and are relatively time poor. Exploring means to support students and young graduates with the difficulties of travel would be beneficial. It is notable for example that students can typically access concessionary fares but not graduates, and some concessionary fares are also restricted to those who live on the islands (Air Discount Scheme, nd). Schemes that support mobility for other groups are available, such as for older residents who can claim two free trips on the mainland ferry per year (Transport Scotland, 2020), and similar schemes for young people would be beneficial. For those in full time study, universities allowing flexibility in terms of attendance may be a means by which young people are facilitated to make the, sometimes lengthy, journey home.

Although addressing barriers with travel is important, another means by which brain rotation could be supported is through virtual networks (Rérat, 2016) of islanders and ex-islanders. This could include, for example, schools staying in touch with alumni or the development of networks for islanders and ex-islanders. Here the proposed “young islander network” in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2019b) could potentially be extended, or a similar network developed, to include not just islanders in the islands, but also those who are based elsewhere with a connection to the

islands. This moves beyond strategies of attraction and retention, common in much of the existing grey literature relating to the islands (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2018c), and considers the value of retaining ongoing connections in terms of the flows of knowledge between different communities much more widely. It also recognises the ways that migration decisions are developed through and over time rather than being made at a single point in time, with networks like this potentially facilitating future returns.

Finally, rotation strategies might also involve quite a different way of thinking about challenges to youth migration. Firstly, analysis of migration statistics needs to be done with care – the key issues to explore in terms of the statistics may well *not* be proportions of out-migration of young migrants associated with entry to higher education, but to focus on the levels of net migration in slightly older age groups, as understanding the proportions of people coming and going in their twenties and thirties is likely to be highly significant in terms of the sustainability of island communities. Further population projections based on the existing proportions of young people in the islands are likely to overestimate population deficits unless they take into account projected return and in-migration. Where a policy focus is on supporting potential return, other interventions (not just education and employment opportunities) could also be considered. The importance of addressing housing in the region is likely to be important for example (see also Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2018c). Other possibilities are that to support notions of islands as good places to return to, policy interventions that seek to improve the experience of young people *prior* to leaving may be valuable, including potentially increasing civic engagement (Simões et al., 2020). In Orkney and Shetland, positive experiences of growing up in the islands, including experiences of school and feeling safe, are a key part of a desire to return to the islands in later life; therefore, one part of a strategy focused on return migration may be to continue to invest in children and young people, including the education system, to provide these positive early childhood experiences.

### ***Education and Guidance Provision***

A number of implications from this research in terms of educational policy and practice are also apparent. These focus particularly on the accessibility of different forms of work experience, and different approaches to career guidance.

**Work Experience.** During secondary schooling, participants in this research reported limitations on their career choices through the lack of some work experience opportunities in their local areas. Further, work experience in rural settings was not felt to give a good exposure to the experience of the same sector in an urban setting. Exploring means to broaden the available work experience (in terms of sector, and exposure to different geographical areas) for rural school students is therefore likely to be beneficial. Connecting with school alumni working in different locations or developments in virtual work experience may provide some possibilities in this area. Alongside work experience, experience of mobility and of urban life is also important for young people in managing the transition to university. Therefore, opportunities for mobility through school activities, such as a school trips and exchange programmes and through other arts and sporting activities, are highly valuable. It is also important to consider how to make these experiences as equitable as possible rather than restricting opportunities just to those who are able to afford these activities or who achieve certain grades. With evidence that existing university outreach activities tend to be clustered in urban locations (Davies et al., 2021), rural students may face a double disadvantage, being less familiar with university provision *and* less familiar with the urban spaces and mobilities required to access this provision. The costs potentially of facilitating mainland trips for island students is very high indeed, but without such opportunities, rural students, particularly those from the least affluent families, are likely to face persistent additional barriers to higher education.

At university level, both the occupational area and the geographical location of work experience are also important in terms of future pathways. Universities are noted by students as being particularly good at identifying work placements and internships within the urban labour markets of the universities themselves, but students seeking work placements at home in the islands have to find these opportunities themselves. Elsewhere similar findings have shown how rural students perceive university career services as being primarily focused on urban labour markets and of limited relevance to students in rural areas (Alexander,

2020a). Providing additional support for securing placements in home regions is therefore likely to be valuable, either through universities supporting students to contact and negotiate with employers, or through rural regions themselves developing support for undergraduate work placements. Further, for those students who are studying in the islands, but interested in careers elsewhere, or for students who need to return home during holidays or after graduation (due to accommodation costs for example) capacity for students to undertake virtual work placements in mainland communities may also be valuable.

**Career Guidance.** Spatial elements of career decision-making are not widely recognised in the career development literature (Alexander & Hooley, 2018; Inkson & Thorn, 2010; Patton & McMahon, 2014). Similarly, participants in this research typically articulated ideas of career choice that were a-spatial and based on “what I like” and “what I enjoy”. This research project however challenges these ideas, identifying the importance of place in career development. This raises several implications for career guidance practice.

Firstly, it is important for career guidance practitioners themselves to be aware of issues of place in career development. Given the evidence that participants do not always articulate space as relevant in their career decisions, but *also* that mobilities are constrained, it may be important to directly address issues of place and mobility with career guidance clients (Alexander & Hooley, 2018). Further, it would be valuable for advisers to take care not to explicitly or implicitly privilege (or normalise) mobility in the ways that career decisions are discussed, as these messages are potentially problematic both for those who wish to move but do not have the resources to do so, *and* for those who may wish to remain in or return to their communities (Bridge Group, 2019).

Further, given the evidence of inequality in terms of (spatial) access to opportunities and relative mobilities, and building on the work of a growing number of authors writing about career guidance and social justice (Hooley et al., 2018a, 2019b) an approach to career guidance that considers space and place in terms of social justice is important (Alexander, 2018b). Some potential means to address access to mobility and opportunity through the education system and graduate transition are identified above, and career advisers may have a key role in

supporting mobilities and access to opportunities, either directly or through advocating for clients, and challenging systems which unfairly impact on rural or remote students (Alexander, 2018a). Such approaches align with redistributive approaches to social justice, which seek to provide equality of opportunity, however they do not necessarily address wider systemic issues, or offer wider challenges to neoliberal ideologies (Irving, 2005; Sultana, 2014). As I have argued elsewhere in this thesis, much wider questions are raised by this research in terms of the neoliberal valorisation of mobility, asking whether mobility is always “good” for individuals, and indeed for society (and the environment) more widely. Here, a more critical approach to social justice whereby practitioners engage with clients to “expos[e] the value-laden ideologies of the global labour market to scrutiny” may be valuable, and through this to help individuals to “explore alternative visions and develop their own understanding of ‘career’ within a lived context” (Irving & Malik, 2005b, p. 5). Although critical reflection may be facilitated in one-to-one guidance, collective approaches to career education and guidance are likely to be highly valuable, for example, classroom sessions, or group guidance (Alexander, 2018b). Seeking to connect individuals together through group or classroom activities can be particularly beneficial for helping participants to identify “that they are not alone – there are others with similar thoughts and experiences” (Thomsen, 2012, p. 216). In this research project for example, the importance of relationships in geographical and career decisions, were common amongst participants. However, typically participants viewed prioritising relationships rather than career development as anomalous, and in some cases, this could come with a sense of shame or embarrassment. Group approaches may help to surface commonalities and prevent students from feeling alone with some of their decisions and dilemmas.

This research also raises questions about community involvement in career development more broadly. It is evident in this research that there are challenges of matching graduates in a small community to available jobs given that graduates (and graduate jobs) are so diverse in skills and interests, and not all graduate jobs will be relevant to all graduates. Therefore, questions are raised about whether potentially more bespoke approaches, especially in the very small island communities would be valuable. For example, what would an approach look like that considered the *specific* skills and interests of the graduates and then asked

“how could we (as a community) support this graduate? How could their skills support us?”. This may, for example involve sustained career guidance or coaching, and more community involvement, to identify opportunities, and potentially create opportunities, that would be suitable for the specific needs and interests of the graduates who are in the community.

Finally, there may be a role for career advisers and policy makers more widely to question some of the dominant ideas about work and careers. This may involve working to broaden notions of good jobs so that they are not just based on salary or status but focus on the dignity of work, and work which is purposeful and meaningful (Blustein, 2019; Sandel, 2020). Such approaches may be more inclusive of the modest career aspirations (for good enough careers) typically articulated by participants in this research project. Thinking about models of guidance that support individuals to access and develop more localised forms of work may also be valuable (Pouyaud and Guichard, 2018). Such moves may also help to address problematic associations of career development and progression that focus on increasing specialisation and can lead students out of their communities. There are potential alignments here to work in other parts of the world that have sought to “decolonise” notions of career, and to suggest more holistic notions of “livelihood planning” and livelihood counselling (Arulmani, 2014, p. 9). From this research project, finding ways of de-urbanising notions of career may also be important (see also Cahill & Martland, 1993)

### **Reflections, Limitations and Future Research**

This research project has considered the specific trajectories of a small group of university graduates who were originally domiciled in the Scottish islands of Orkney and Shetland. By focusing on a group of individuals typically assumed to be “global” in orientation, and from an island community where issues of place and mobility are highlighted, this research has highlighted the significance of place in career development. However, because of the distinctive nature of these communities, and the relatively small scale of this research, further research may be valuable to explore how far the themes and the model identified could be applied to other groups of young people in communities where issues of space and place are often less acutely apparent, including urban spaces.

Additionally, given suggestions that mobility is associated with education (Corbett, 2007a) and social class (Brooks & Waters, 2010; Jamieson, 2000; Rye, 2011; Wierenga, 2009), it would also be valuable to explore the mobility and career pathways of those island and rural young people who do not progress to higher education. In this research engaging with further education was, for a number of students associated with subsequent trajectories out of the community, whereas for another engaging with the local college resulted in staying. So, further research on the variety of further education trajectories would be valuable, alongside further research on rural and island stayers more generally (Stockdale & Haartsen, 2018).

The sample of participants who took part in this research had an over-representation of women, and of people who had “always lived” in the islands. This indicates some limitations potentially in the applicability of the findings to all social groups. This research did include two outliers who had not been born in the islands, and further these participants both had significant (and different) experiences of mobility as children. Data from these participants has been very valuable in this project as a counterpoint to data from other participants, however a full exploration of the experiences of young people who are not born in the islands, and who have different and extensive experiences of mobility prior to entering higher education has not been attempted. There would be significant value in such a piece of work. In particular exploring the experiences of young people who are the children of incoming families but who have never lived anywhere else themselves, and the experiences of children who have extensive experiences of previous mobility would be interesting, as this may further help to elucidate the different values of material mobilities, and family “stories” of mobility in supporting mobility intentions.

The potential skew in the data towards born and bred islanders is perhaps related to the initial search for participants and the promotion of the project. Although the criterion for inclusion were clear that participants only needed to have been resident in the islands directly before applying to university, my use of terminology for example in the initial promotion included the phrasing: “are you *from* [emphasis added] Orkney or Shetland?” (see Appendix 3). Although for me, this was a shorthand way of indicating residence, it is potentially unclear. Further it is likely that young people with a strong connection to the islands may be more likely to see this kind of research project as interesting and valuable, rather than those

who feel less of a connection to the islands. Future research projects may therefore need to consider different forms of research design and promotion. One possibility would be to seek to explore pathways of an entire cohort (perhaps a school year or a school class) as they travel through their post-school years.

Considering the spatial mobilities of individuals and career routes, this research has indicated some general considerations and dynamics, but there is considerable scope for further research into *specific* career routes. In particular, there are indications that there may be some relationship of aspirations to return home with undertaking vocational degree programmes and this would bear further exploration, including research that considers specifically the point of university application and how far there is a correlation between envisaged future spatial pathways and career pathways. Further, there would be considerable value in longitudinal research to identify over the long-term how migration and career trajectories develop – do graduate aspirations change for example as they spend longer away from home and progress further into their working lives? How do the anticipated challenges of parents ageing, and experiences of settling down and having children impact on actual spatial and career experiences?

Further research into differences between islands and island groups would also be valuable, particularly in terms of developing a more nuanced understanding of issues surrounding population sustainability and youth return. In the case of this research project, three students were originally brought up in the outer islands. The stories of these students exposed very specific spatial dynamics, particularly in terms of the mobilities they enacted as children to access secondary education. Participants also commonly described a potential future return to the islands but *not* to the outer islands and this was often connected to issues of transportation. Given the significant and enduring issues of depopulation in the smallest islands of Orkney and Shetland, understanding the specific dynamics and complications for those from these islands is likely to be highly valuable.

Finally, there would also be scope for practice-based research exploring different practical interventions to assist graduates in the islands and graduates who may wish to later return to the islands. Action research that seeks to explore the

provision of more bespoke support for graduates and community-based approaches to guidance for example may be particularly valuable.

### ***Reflections***

At the very end of this thesis I would like to offer some reflections on the process of completing the PhD. In particular how my thinking as a researcher, my practice as a career adviser and my reflections on my own story have changed during the project.

One particular area of development in my thinking relates to how I think about the production of knowledge. The question of the ethics of working in small communities and particularly the “ownership” of participant stories was considered in Chapter 5. However, in this section I would like to highlight how, as I have progressed, I have become more and more aware of how my work as a researcher is heavily embedded in my own communities. The perspectives of my participants for example have impacted on me not just as a researcher, but more widely as I sought to make sense of my own story and experiences, and those of others who I meet in a professional or personal capacity. Discussions within my friendship group and wider community about staying and leaving, mobility and immobility, jobs and careers are also common, and throughout these ongoing conversations and reflections I have felt my own awareness deepened and extended.

In many respects, then, this research project has not been my own sole endeavour, or even that of just me and my participants, but has been embedded much more widely within my community and has involved relationships with lots of other people, as well as relationships with the particular places of Orkney and Shetland. I remain immensely grateful both to my participants for sharing their time and insights so generously, and also to the wider communities. Although these kind of thanks traditionally appear in an acknowledgements section (and indeed do in my thesis too), acknowledging in the body of the thesis the importance of community in this work feels important.

Reflecting on my own learning through this process of the research, I have certainly learned a great deal in terms of the technicalities of being a researcher, and about my topic. However, on top of these things I have also learnt specifically about how to be a researcher in a (relatively) small community. For me, issues of

representation and confidentiality are acute in smaller contexts, and I have reflected on these a great deal. My approach in this research project to addressing these issues is outlined in Chapter 4. However, in a subsequent project in Orkney I have taken a different approach, rather than seeking to totally anonymise participant details, I have used case studies from particular participants where these have been anonymised but *also* consented to by participants. Here, I wonder if I was designing the research project again whether I would make the same decisions, or whether now, with a little more confidence as a researcher, I may be more likely to explore participative and collaborative methods, especially given my increasing interest in issues of social justice (see Atkins & Duckworth, 2019 on the value of participative methods in socially just research). These are not easy decisions of course, but through the process of the PhD my sensitivity to these issues, and awareness of different potential responses to these has been highlighted.

As well as developing as a researcher, the PhD journey has also impacted on my development as a career adviser, allowing me to develop a greater sensitivity to, and awareness of, the particular needs of some of my clients. In terms of my own personal development, this research process has also been hugely valuable, allowing me to reflect on and process what was a very challenging point in my own life (going away to university and first years after graduation) and to understand some of the dynamics behind this. Thinking about the importance of challenging dominant neoliberal assumptions of career development and mobility, I hope that one of the things I can offer through this thesis is to highlight different experiences of place and career that may help other graduates from rural and remote communities understand, reflect on, and contextualise their experiences.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Application for Ethical Approval

#### Request for ethical approval for research undertaken by staff, post-graduate research and post-graduate professional students

Please submit your completed form to the chair of your subject research ethics committee (SREC)

<b>Your Name</b>	<b>Rosie Alexander</b>
<b>School / Faculty</b>	<b>Education, Health and Sciences</b>
<b>Subject Research Ethics Committee</b>	<b>Education, Health and Sciences</b>
<b>Staff / Student ID</b>	<b>P39017028</b>
<b>Unimail address</b>	[redacted]
<b>Programme name / code</b>	<b>PhD</b>
<b>Name of supervisor(s)</b>	<b>Tristram Hooley, Kirstin Aune</b>
<b>Title of proposed research study</b>	
The impact of island location on students' higher education choices and subsequent career narratives: a case study of the Orkney and Shetland Islands	
<b>Background information</b>	

<p>Has this research been funded by an external organisation (e.g. a research council or public sector body) or internally (such as the RLTF fund)? If yes, please provide details.</p>	<p>No – but fees have been paid by candidate’s employer (University of the Highlands and Islands)</p>
<p>Have you submitted previous requests for ethical approval to the Committee that relate to this research project? If yes please provide details.</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>Are other research partners involved in the proposed research? If yes please provide details.</p>	<p>No</p>
<p><b>Signatures</b></p>	
<p><b>The information supplied is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, accurate. I clearly understand my obligations and the rights of the participants. I agree to act at all times in accordance with University of Derby Policy and Code of Practice on Research Ethics: <a href="http://www.derby.ac.uk/research/uod/ethics/">http://www.derby.ac.uk/research/uod/ethics/</a></b></p>	
<p><b>Signature of applicant</b></p>	<p>[redacted]</p>
<p>Date of submission by applicant</p>	<p>05/08/2014</p>
<p><b>Signature of supervisor (if applicable)</b></p>	
<p>Date of signature by supervisor (if applicable)</p>	

For Committee Use    Reference Number (Subject area initials/year/ID number) .....

Date received .....

Date considered

.....

Committee decision .....

Signed

.....

## **1. What is the aim of your study? What are the objectives for your study?**

**Aim:** To identify how living in a remote island community (the Orkney or Shetland Islands) prior to entering higher education impacts on students' narratives of their higher education choices and subsequent career journeys.

### **Objectives:**

- Identify the role of place in the construction of self and the biographical narratives of higher education students from the Orkney and Shetland Islands.
- Identify the role of place in the way these students construct the decision to enter higher education and the associated migration choices.
- Identify the role of place in the way these students construct their career and migration choices in the period immediately after graduation.
- Track the development in the career-narratives of these students to identify changes in self and career construction in relation to place.
- Compare and contrast the narratives of students who make different migration decisions for higher education and for work.
- Develop a theoretical framework to explain the role of location in narratives of higher education and career development.

## **2. Explain the rationale for this study (refer to relevant research literature in your response).**

In the Highlands and Islands region of Scotland out-migration of young people is a particular problem, with an estimated population gap of 21,700 people, there is a 'missing generation' of 15-39 year olds. The region's economic and community development agency (Highlands and Islands Enterprise) is concerned to address this population gap, and has commissioned research into the factors influencing youth migration. This research has shown that education and employment are key drivers behind the out-migration of young people, with quality of life a key driver of in-migration (HIE, 2009).

However, understanding key push and pull factors for young people generally does little to aid understanding of individual decision making processes. As Halfacree and

Boyle (1993) have pointed out factor based models tend to overestimate rational decision making, and are based on positivist assumptions about the world. In their analysis they suggest that migration decisions are actually highly personal, based on an individual's past, present and anticipated future, and they are heavily value laden. Taking a more nuanced and personal perspective on migration also helps to elucidate the role of individual differences – such as the role of family connections on migration (Bond, Charsley and Grundy, 2008).

Although in depth research into personal experiences of migration has not taken place in the communities of Orkney and Shetland, there is some precedent for this kind of research from other areas. In one key piece of research in Atlantic Canada Corbett (2010) identified, how education helps young people to 'learn to leave' their communities, but also how historical period, social context and family background influence these decisions. This research project aims to build on Corbett's study by examining issues of migration and education but this time in the context of British rural island communities. In addition this research will track students after graduation, in their first movement into the working world and any associated geographical movement. This is important because the literature around graduate employment tends to assume that graduates are a highly mobile population. However, there has been some research which has shown that mobility varies between different graduates, and that motivations for migration include a range of other factors as well as the availability of work (Sage, Evandrou and Falkingham, 2012).

In order to understand individual decision making processes, this research will utilise a qualitative approach influenced by social constructionist philosophy. In particular the research is influenced by Halfacree and Boyle's (1993) 'biographical approach' to migration, which emphasises that migration has to be understood as part of an individual's biography. Because our personal stories are highly contingent - always in the process of being written and rewritten, this research also utilises a longitudinal design, to track how participants stories change (or are re-told) at different points in their transition. The use of longitudinal biographical methods to research young people's transitions has an important precedent in the 'Inventing Adulthoods' research

project carried out by a team of researchers in Britain. In this research interviews were conducted with young people over a period of time, and the analysis showed how personal constructions changed through time and how these biographies were influenced by the context of the participant – with, for example, important differences being noted between young people in rural and urban communities (Henderson, Holland, McGrellis, Sharpe, Thomson, 2006).

This research will therefore use a longitudinal biographical approach to analyse how individuals from two island communities construct their choices of higher education and subsequent employment. By examining the role of contextual factors within these constructions the research aims to elucidate how living in a small rural island community influences the way that young people make choices and how they construct these choices. The results of the research will fill a gap in the literature around understanding rural student migrations, and will also contribute to the literature on graduate transitions by examining this transition in the context of wider individual biographies.

#### References

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HIE (2009) 'Orkney Population Change Case Study' [online]

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Sage, Evandrou and Falkingham (2012) 'The Complex migration pathways of UK graduates' ESRC centre for population change, briefing 9, October 2012.

### **3. Provide an outline of study design and methods.**

Following a similar approach to Henderson *et al* (2006) this research will primarily utilise longitudinal biographical interview methods. A small sample of students (20) who were ordinarily resident in Orkney or Shetland prior to entering higher education, and who are due to graduate from a first full time degree course in 2015 will be interviewed three times: once before they graduate, once six months later, and once another six months later.

In order to generate a sampling frame, the first stage of the project will be to circulate a short questionnaire to potential participants. This will be done by sending a targeted letter to known individuals who may fulfil the criteria and widely advertising the project through other media. Once a sampling frame has been generated, a sample will be selected. The sample will be selected through theoretical sampling to ensure good coverage of different kinds of student studying different kinds of courses at different institutions. Further details are given in section 4 below.

Once the sample has been selected, participants will be contacted and sent a briefing about the project in order to seek their informed consent to take part in the research. Once consent has been gained interviews will be arranged.

The interviews will take place over the telephone. They will be biographical in nature that is they will utilise open ended questions, and be designed to elicit participants' stories as far as possible. Each interview will only use 3-5 key questions, but these will be supplemented with summary statements and probe questions as appropriate to help generate the narrative. This kind of open interviewing approach has been described in more detail by Reissman (1993). Broadly the first interview will be split into two parts – the first part will ask participants to reflect on their reasons for choosing to study at university and how they decided what and where to study. This will generate their 'story' of entering higher education. The second part of the interview will ask students about their plans for the future. Subsequent interviews will ask students to reflect on what has changed / happened since the previous interview, and will also ask participants about their plans for the future. This will enable the researcher to follow the development of the participants' stories over time.

Participants will be debriefed after each interview. The interviews will then be typed up into a transcript, and this transcript will be sent back to the participant after each interview. The participant will be invited to make any further comments they wish following receipt of the transcript – and these further comments will be stored as file notes alongside the transcripts.

By the end of the data collection phase, each participant will have three interview transcripts as well as any additional file notes recorded. As with other longitudinal biographical projects (e.g. Henderson *et al*, 2006), analysis will take place on these documents both longitudinally (tracking changes within a single participant's accounts) and cross sectionally (comparing different participants accounts at the same point in time). Analysis will predominantly be concerned with the constructions of individual stories, rather than attempting to identify common themes between

stories. This follows Reissman's approach to narrative analysis, and this is an appropriate approach to take as this research is seeking to understand how individuals construct their (different) choices, rather than trying to identify commonality between stories.

#### Additional References

Reissman, Catherine Kohler (1993) *Narrative Analysis: Qualitative Research methods*  
London: Sage

#### **4. If appropriate, please provide a detailed description of the study sample, covering selection, sample profile, recruitment and inclusion and exclusion criteria.**

##### Sample profile:

Twenty students in the final year of their degree programme who were ordinarily resident in Orkney or Shetland directly before entering higher education.

##### Inclusion and exclusion criteria:

Students must:

- Be registered on a full-time first degree programme.
  - Students may previously have started a degree programme but not completed.
- Be in their final year of their degree and due to graduate in spring 2015. 'Final year' in this case means either honours year, *or* ordinary year (as in Scotland some students choose to graduate before completing honours, and in some cases honours are not available). Where a student is in their ordinary year, they should not be intending to progress to honours.
- Have been ordinarily resident in either Orkney or Shetland directly before entering their degree course. 'Ordinarily resident' is not clearly defined but is a term used to determine eligibility for benefits including student finance. The term means that a person *normally* resides in a location apart from temporary or occasional absences. Temporary or occasional absences would include periods of travel or time away for study where a permanent base or family home is retained in the location of residence (further details are available on: <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/manuals/cbtmanual/cbtm10020.htm>). In the terms of this study, students will be included who:
  - Have taken time out for travelling before entering higher education will be included as long as they can be deemed 'ordinarily resident' in Orkney or Shetland.
  - Have been on other education courses elsewhere prior to entering their current degree providing that their 'ordinary residence' could be deemed to be Orkney or Shetland.
  - Are mature students who have been living in Orkney and Shetland prior to entry to higher education although who may not have completed their schooling in the counties.

Part time students are excluded from this research, as are students on other higher education courses (e.g. HNC or HND) or postgraduate courses. This is to enable the research to be comparable to other research on graduate destinations which tends to be focused on full time first degree students.

##### Recruitment

Identifying the target population in this research is challenging as there is no single source of data on students who are currently registered on Higher Education courses by completion date.

Therefore, the first stage in recruitment will be to generate a sampling frame (that is a group of potential participants from within which I can sample participants). In order to do this a short initial information sheet and questionnaire will be circulated to potential participants. The questionnaire will collect only factual information to determine eligibility (e.g. graduation date) and to provide demographic information to enable a representative sample to be selected. Students will not need to provide their name and contact details unless they are happy to be considered for further interviews.

The information and questionnaire will be circulated widely to seek participants. The main method of recruitment will be by sending a letter to potential graduates through Skills Development Scotland. Although there is no central source of details of current students by residence and anticipated graduation date, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) do collect annual School Leaver Destinations, and as a company they hold contact details and university destinations of S5 and S6 school leavers. As it is anticipated that the majority of students who are due to complete a full-time degree course in spring 2015 are likely to have started their degree course in Autumn 2011 (if studying for honours) the details SDS hold could be invaluable. Skills Development Scotland have already been approached and have provisionally agreed to send a letter on the researcher's behalf to all students from the Orkney and Shetland 2011 cohort who were recorded as progressing to a full time degree course after school.

This strategy should reach a significant proportion of students, however it will not cover students who took some time out after school to work or travel before progressing to a degree course, or those who have taken more or less time to complete their undergraduate studies. Therefore in addition, the researcher will also make the information about the research available online via the researcher's blog, and the questionnaire available online through [surveyMonkey.com](http://surveyMonkey.com). The links will then be made available by:

- Promoting the project in the Orkney College Newsletter, and also individually contacting Higher Education lecturers at the college and asking them to circulate to relevant final year classes.
- Promoting the project through the researcher's personal social media feeds (Facebook and Twitter) and via her blog.
- Posting links to other relevant Facebook and Twitter feeds as appropriate.
- Writing a press release for the local papers – the Orcadian and The Shetland Times
- Seeking an opportunity to publicise the project through the local radio stations BBC Radio Orkney and BBC Radio Shetland

It is anticipated that these activities would happen in Autumn 2014, and that the survey will be closed by 1<sup>st</sup> November 2014.

### Selection

In November / December 2014 the responses to the survey will be collated, this will provide the sampling frame for the research. From within the frame 20 participants will be selected. Selection will take place using a theoretical sampling approach. Theoretical sampling involves selecting participants based on theoretical constructs that are being researched. This research is concerned to compare the migration decisions of different students, therefore it will be important that the sample selected includes people who have made different migration decisions and have chosen to study in different locations. However as the nature of the opportunity, and the nature of the original location have been shown to impact on migration patterns it will also be important to ensure the sample contains people who have taken up different opportunities and who have come from different kinds of location (ie more urban and more isolated parts of the islands). As previous research has suggested that past migration increases the likelihood of future migration, and as family links have been shown to be important, it will also be important to ensure the sample contains people who have always lived in Orkney and Shetland and those who have moved before. It is anticipated that:

- Ten students will be selected from Orkney and ten from Shetland
- The sample will be representative of the sampling frame in terms of demographic information (e.g. age and gender)
- The sample will be selected on a theoretical basis to include:
  - o Students who have moved to different locations.
  - o students who come from different parts of Orkney or Shetland (i.e. including those who live in more remote or central parts of the islands)
  - o students who have migrated in the past and those who haven't (this will be determined by identifying how long a student has lived in Orkney or Shetland)
  - o Students who have studied at 'older' universities and 'modern' universities.

- Students who have studied different courses (e.g. including vocational or professional courses)

**5. Are payments or rewards/incentives going to be made to the participants?**

Yes  No

If so, please give details.

**6. Please indicate how you intend to address each of the following ethical considerations in your study. If you consider that they do not relate to your study please say so.**

**Guidance to completing this section of the form is provided at the end of the document.**

**a. Consent**

The initial questionnaire will be sent to potential participants by letter or email on behalf of the researcher by Skills Development Scotland (who hold details of students from Orkney and Shetland in Higher Education). The survey will be accompanied by an initial information letter. This will brief participants about the research project and assure the student of the confidentiality of the questionnaire. Signed consent forms will not be used at this point as the questionnaire collects only basic factual information which will be used to generate a sampling frame only. In addition a student does not have to leave any identifying information (unless they want to).

Once the sampling frame has been generated and a sample selected, the students in the sample will be sent a much more extensive briefing document. This information sheet lays out:

- Details of the research project.
- Details of what being an interviewee involves.
- Confidentiality, withdrawal and data protection.
- Contact details for further information.

Attached to the information sheet is a consent form, and participants will be asked to sign the form if they consent to take part in the research and return to the researcher. If a student has any questions they are asked to contact the researcher. Only once signed consent has been received will interviews take place. However, in addition at the start of the first interview participants will be verbally briefed and the researcher will check if they have any questions.

The initial questionnaire, initial information letter, information sheet and consent form are all shown in the appendix.

**b. Deception**

This research project does not involve covert research or deception. The topic of the research and the themes that will be considered as part of the interviews are made clear to the participants in the information sheet.

### **c. Debriefing**

Participants will be debriefed after each interview verbally (details included in the interview schedule). Participants will also be sent a debrief document (shown in the appendix) which restates the verbal debrief, and lays out contact details of the researcher alongside details of organisations who can offer further support with careers information and guidance.

Once the interview transcripts are written up they will be shared with the participants who will be invited to make any further comments at this point. They will also be offered the chance to mark any sections of the transcript that they would not want included in the final thesis.

Prior to the completion of the final thesis a short summary of the results of the research will be produced and shared with participants. The primary purpose of this will be to debrief the participants, but again they will be asked to make any further comments if they wish

### **d. Withdrawal from the investigation**

Participants will have the right to withdraw from the investigation at any point up to 1<sup>st</sup> October 2018 (approximately six months prior to the submission of the degree). A cut off point of six months prior to submission is necessary in order to ensure that any changes necessitated by the withdrawal can be made to the thesis prior to submission. Participants can withdraw by contacting the researcher directly, who will then destroy information held about that participant.

Information about withdrawal is provided in the information sheet for participants, which will be provided to participants before the first interview, and will be clarified (if necessary) at the start of the first interview.

### **e. Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is likely to be a considerable concern for some participants because of the sizes of the communities of Orkney and Shetland, which has an impact particularly because providing minimal information (e.g. subject of study and place of study) may make an individual identifiable in these communities even if names etc are disguised.

In order to address the issue of confidentiality, the following activities will be undertaken:

- Participants will be fully briefed about the project in the initial information sheet. Given the size of the communities it will be made clear that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, but that every reasonable step will be taken to protect the student's identity in any published work or in any academic presentation. In addition participants will be reassured that the researcher will not discuss the content of the interviews with other people, with the exception of discussions held in an academic context (e.g. between supervisor and researcher)

- Participants will be briefed about the likely uses of the research including possible audiences. These will include Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Orkney and Shetland Islands Councils, Orkney and Shetland Colleges etc. They will also be informed about potential online circulation, for example through the researcher's blog. This list will not be exhaustive, and students will be made aware that further research or publications may be produced from the data.
- Confidentiality will be verbally discussed at the start of the first interview, and participants will be given the chance to discuss any particular areas of concern, and to negotiate appropriate boundaries – for example to tell the interviewer anything in particular they do not want disclosed.
- In the final thesis names will be changed and identifying details where possible will be disguised.
- Interview transcripts will be shared with participants enabling them to identify any information they don't want included in the final thesis.
- Participants will also be sent a summary of the research findings prior to submission of the dissertation.
- Finally, participants will be sent a copy of the final thesis for their information.

#### **f. Protection of participants**

This research involves semi-structured interviews around the topics of place, higher education and career choices. It is possible that during this research participants reveal personal difficulties, and / or experience some kind of personal distress. It is more likely that as a result of discussing their career ideas, participants feel uncertain about their career choices. As part of the debrief, participants will be provided with a list of useful contacts for additional support, and will be encouraged to access this where necessary. In addition any participant who becomes visibly distressed during interviews will be signposted to additional support, and they will be given the option to pause or terminate the interview.

#### **g. Observation research**

N/A

#### **h. Giving advice**

This research project concerns the career decisions of participants', and the researcher is a professionally qualified careers adviser who works for the University of the Highlands and Islands. However, the briefing makes clear to participants that although the topics of the interviews relate to careers, careers advice and guidance will not be provided by the researcher. The debriefing information contains contact details of organisations from whom participants can secure careers advice and guidance.

Students from the University of the Highlands and Islands are a special case in this research as they are entitled to request careers guidance from the university outwith the research project, and if they did so then they would be given an appointment to speak to the researcher in her role as careers adviser. The briefing sheet makes it clear that as with other students these students will not be entitled to careers guidance as part of the interview process. Instead they would need to request careers support through the university directly, and an appointment would be arranged for them to speak to the researcher as part of her day job. Information provided as part of the research would not be used in the careers advice appointment, and vice versa. If a student were to receive careers advice from the researcher during this project then the boundaries will be restated as part of the guidance process and it will be made clear to them that careers advice is being provided as a separate service, and that information shared as part of the advice session will not be used in the research.

#### **i. Research undertaken in public places**

N/A

**j. Data protection**

Data will be held electronically and securely. Arrangements are as follows:

- The initial survey will be hosted on [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com). Data will be held securely in accordance with the [surveymonkey security statement](https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/policy/security/):  
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/policy/security/>
- Recordings of telephone interviews will be digital and stored in a password protected folder on the researcher's computer. Within this folder, there will be a series of other folders for each participant, and each folder will contain: transcripts of interviews, file notes, emails and other information will also be recorded and stored in the file. In these documents the participant's names will be changed so that no identifying information is stored in this folder.
- Consent forms will be scanned and stored digitally in a separate password protected folder on the researchers' computer.

For purposes of analysis, the researcher will use hard copy and digital copies of the transcripts. Hard copies will be stored in a file in a locked filing cabinet at the researchers' workplace during the process of analysis. Once analysis has been completed and the dissertation submitted, all hard copy materials will be scanned and stored digitally and securely within the University of the Highlands and Islands archives. Interview transcripts will also be aimed to be deposited in the [UK Data Archive](#) in line with their data processing standards and ethical guidelines.

**k. Animal Rights**

N/A

**l. Environmental protection**

N/A

**Are there other ethical implications that are additional to this list? Yes X No**

There are possible ethical implications because of the researcher's 'insider' status in this research. As a careers adviser working for the University of the Highlands and Islands based in Orkney College she may have professional relationships with some participants prior to the research taking place, or indeed with participants after the research has finished. Because she lives in Orkney and has family connections

to Shetland she is also likely to be known by some participants on a personal basis or by their friends or family. The potential ethical implications include:

- **Dual roles of the researcher:** care will need to be taken to clearly set research boundaries. This will be done primarily through the briefing document, but will also be done verbally at the start of the first interview with participants where dual roles may be a consideration (e.g. where they are known to the researcher, or their family is known, or where they are students of Orkney or Shetland college).
- **Position of power:** holding a great deal of information about a group of participants, and holding the status of a PhD researcher, may put the researcher in a position of power. In considering this issue, the researcher will follow ethnographic traditions that emphasise a reflexive approach – reflecting on the researcher’s own role in the research process. This will assist the researcher to consider issues of power in the research data. In addition care has been taken when designing the research to ensure that participants’ rights are clear and that they are involved in the research process – being given the opportunity to discuss acceptable boundaries of confidentiality, to view transcripts of interviews and to mark passages that they don’t want released. This should help to counteract some of the potential negative impacts of the researcher holding a position of power. In addition the interviews themselves will be semi structured and relatively conversational in style, this should also help to redress the balance of power between researcher and participants (to some extent).

**7. Have / do you intend to request ethical approval from any other body/organisation? Yes  No**

**If ‘Yes’ – please give details**

**8. Do you intend to publish your research? Yes  No .**  
**If ‘Yes’, what are your publication plans?**

No specific plans as yet, but anticipated journal article(s), and conference presentation(s).

**9. Have you secured access and appropriate approval for any resources that you may require? (e.g. psychometric scales, equipment, software, laboratory space). Yes  No .**

**If Yes, please provide details.**

NVIVO access agreed through UHI

Provisional permission granted from SDS (Skills Development Scotland) for them to send a letter on my behalf to appropriate students registered on their database.

**10. Have the activities associated with this research project been risk-assessed? Yes  No**

Risk assessed as part of RD05 submission

**Which of the following have you appended to this application?**

Focus group questions

Psychometric scales

Self-completion questionnaire

Interview questions

Other debriefing material

**Covering letter for participants**

Information sheet about your research study

Location consent form

***Informed consent forms for participants***

Other (please describe)

- *Initial information for potential participants*

**PLEASE SUBMIT THIS APPLICATION WITH ALL APPROPRIATE DOCUMENTATION**

## **Advice on completing the ethical considerations aspects of a programme of research**

### **Consent**

Informed consent must be obtained for all participants before they take part in your project. The form should clearly state what they will be doing, drawing attention to anything they could conceivably object to subsequently. It should be in language that the person signing it will understand. It should also state that they can withdraw from the study at any time and the measures you are taking to ensure the confidentiality of data. If children are recruited from schools you will require the permission, depending on the school, of the head teacher, and of parents. Children over 14 years should also sign an individual consent form themselves. If conducting research with children or vulnerable adults you will normally also require Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance. Research to be carried out in any institution (prison, hospital, etc.) will require permission from the appropriate authority.

### **Covert or Deceptive Research**

Research involving any form of deception can be particularly problematical, and you should provide a full explanation of why a covert or deceptive approach is necessary, why there are no acceptable alternative approaches not involving deception, and the scientific justification for deception.

### **Debriefing**

Debriefing is a process of reflection once the research intervention is complete, for example at the end of an interview session. How will participants be debriefed (written or spoken feedback)? If they will not be debriefed, give reasons. Please attach the written debrief or transcript for the oral debrief. This can be particularly important if covert or deceptive research methods are used.

### **Withdrawal from investigation**

Participants should be told explicitly that they are free to leave the study at any time without jeopardy. It is important that you clarify exactly how and when this will be explained to participants. Participants also have the right to withdraw their data in retrospect, after you have received it. You will need to clarify how they will do this and at what point they will not be able to withdraw (i.e. after the data has been analysed and disseminated).

### **Protection of participants**

Are the participants at risk of physical, psychological or emotional harm greater than encountered ordinary life? If yes, describe the nature of the risk and steps taken to minimise it.

## **Observational research**

If observational research is to be conducted without prior consent, please describe the situations in which observations will take place and say how local cultural values and privacy of individuals and/or institutions will be taken into account.

## **Giving advice**

Students should not put themselves in a position of authority from which to provide advice and should in all cases refer participants to suitably qualified and appropriate professionals.

## **Research in public places**

You should pay particular attention to the implications of research undertaken in public places. The impact on the social environment will be a key issue. You must observe the laws of obscenity and public decency. You should also have due regard to religious and cultural sensitivities.

## **Confidentiality/Data Protection**

You must comply with the Data Protection Act and the University's Good Scientific Practice <http://www.derby.ac.uk/research/policy-and-strategy> This means:

- It is very important that the Participant Information Sheet includes information on what the research is for, who will conduct the research, how the personal information will be used, who will have access to the information and how long the information will be kept for. This is known as a 'fair processing statement.'
- You must not do anything with the personal information you collect over and above that for which you have consent.
- You can only make audio or visual recordings of participants with their consent (this should be stated on the Participant Information sheet)
- Identifiable personal information should only be conveyed to others within the framework of the act and with the participant's permission.
- You must store data securely. Consent forms and data should be stored separately and securely.
- You should only collect data that is relevant to the study being undertaken.
- Data may be kept indefinitely providing its sole use is for research purposes and meets the following conditions:
  - The data is not being used to take decisions in respect of any living individual.
  - The data is not being used in any which is, or is likely to, cause damage and/or distress to any living individual.
- You should always protect a participant's anonymity unless they have given their permission to be identified (if they do so, this should be stated on the Informed Consent Form).
- All data should be returned to participants or destroyed if consent is not given after the fact, or if a participant withdraws.

## **Animal rights.**

Research which might involve the study of animals at the University is not likely to involve intrusive or invasive procedures. However, you should avoid animal suffering of any kind and should ensure that proper animal husbandry practices are followed. You should show respect for animals as fellow sentient beings.

### **Environmental protection**

The negative impacts of your research on the natural environment and animal welfare, must be minimised and must be compliant to current legislation. Your research should appropriately weigh longer-term research benefit against short-term environmental harm needed to achieve research goals.

## Appendix 2: Ethical Approval

Kedleston Road, Derby  
DE22 1GB, UK

T: +44 (0)1332 591060  
E: researchoffice@derby.ac.uk  
Sponsor License No: QGN14R294

Dear Rosie

ETH2021-2919

Thank you for submitting your application to the College of Arts, Humanities and Education Research Ethics Committee, which has now been reviewed and considered.

The outcome of your application is:

approved.

Feedback on your application is available [here](#).

If any changes to the study described in the application are necessary, you must notify the Committee and may be required to make a resubmission of the application.

Please note that ethical approval for this application is valid for 5 years

On behalf of the Committee, we wish you the best of luck with your study.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan O'Donnell

### **Appendix 3: Initial Information**

*Initial information drafted for the purposes of publicising the research and generating responses to the initial survey.*

Are you from Orkney or Shetland? Are you due to graduate from a full time degree course in 2015?

If so, can you help me with my research?

My name is Rosie Alexander and I am a PhD student researching Orkney and Shetland students' higher education choices, I live in Orkney, but am studying through the University of Derby.

At this stage I am looking for people to fill in a very short questionnaire in order to help give me an overview of the decisions of higher education students. After the questionnaire I will also be conducting in-depth interviews with a small sample of students who have indicated that they are willing to be interviewed.

*Am I eligible?* If you lived in Orkney or Shetland before you started studying for a degree, and if you are due to graduate in 2015 then you are eligible. It doesn't matter how old you are, or what you did before you started your degree.

I am keen to get as many responses to the questionnaire as possible and would be very grateful if you could fill it in. The questionnaire only asks for basic factual information, and is confidential. You don't have to leave your name unless you want to, and you will only be contacted by the researcher if you indicate that you are happy for this to happen. The questionnaire is attached below and is also available on *[insert surveymonkey address]*.

If you would be willing to be interviewed as part of the second stage of the research please indicate this at the end of the questionnaire and include your name and contact details.

Further information is available from the researcher: [\[redacted\]](#)

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this and I hope you can consider taking part in this research.

## Appendix 4: Initial Questionnaire

### ***About you***

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Your Current Course**

Course name (e.g BA (hons) French and German): \_\_\_\_\_

Mode of study:      part time / full time

Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

Term time location: \_\_\_\_\_

Due to graduate in: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Before you started your degree**

Were you ordinarily resident in Orkney or Shetland?    Y/N

What parish did you live in: \_\_\_\_\_

How long had you lived in Orkney or Shetland?

- Less than 5 years
- 5-10 years
- More than 10 years
- All my life

### **What are your plans after you graduate?**

What do you intend to do, and where you intend to live?

\_\_\_\_\_

---

---

**Further research.**

If you would be willing to take part in interviews in the future please leave your contact details here.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

If you don't wish to take part in the interviews, but would like to stay in touch with the research project, you can follow the progress by looking at the researcher's blog: <http://rosiealexander.wordpress.com/>

## **Appendix 5: Information Sheet for Participants**

**PhD Research Project:** “The impact of rural location on students’ higher education choices and subsequent career narratives: a case study of the Orkney and Shetland Islands”

**Researcher:** Rosie Alexander

**Institution:** University of Derby

**Supervisors:** Dr Tristram Hooley and Dr Kristin Aune

Thank you for expressing an interest in being interviewed as part of this research project.

This information sheet is designed to give you some further details about the project to help you decide if you want to take part. Please take time to read the information carefully, and if you have any questions please don’t hesitate to contact me.

### What is the research all about?

This research seeks to find out how living in Orkney or Shetland before going to university impacts on people’s higher education choices and their subsequent career decisions. The project involves interviewing twenty participants about their experiences of higher education and then analysing the data to look for key themes. Interviews will take place between 2015-2016 and the findings from the research will be available from 2019.

### Who is the researcher?

The researcher is Rosie Alexander. Rosie works as the Careers Adviser / Careers Manager for the University of the Highlands and Islands, and is based in Orkney. Rosie is studying for a PhD with the University of Derby, and the research is being supervised by Dr Tristram Hooley and Dr Kristin Aune and is being conducted in line with the university’s code of ethics.

### What does being an interviewee involve?

- You will be interviewed three times, once in the final months of your degree course, then again six months later, and again another six months later.
- Interviews will take place over the telephone.
- The first interview may take 1-2 hours, subsequent interviews are expected to last 40 mins – 1 hour.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed, and the transcription will be shared with you.

Interviews will be biographical, semi structured interviews – this means that rather than having a set list of questions we will explore your experience in a relatively open way. This will allow you to discuss your experience in the way that you want to. The key themes of the interviews will be: your experience of entering university, your experience during university and your experience after university.

#### Will I be able to get advice from the researcher about my career?

Although the interviews will focus on your decisions, the interviews are not intended to provide you with careers information or advice. If you feel that you would like to access careers guidance outwith the interview process then you can do this and the researcher will provide you with information about services available to you.

#### What will happen after the interviews?

Once all interviews have been analysed the research will be written up as part of a dissertation. Other publications e.g. journal articles or conference papers may also be produced as part of this research. The researcher also maintains a blog about her research, and some findings may appear on the blog too.

It is anticipated that the findings may be helpful to organisations who are involved in planning education, careers support and community development within Orkney and Shetland. Therefore, publications will be circulated to these organisations as appropriate, and circulation is likely to include the following organisations:

- Highlands and Islands Enterprise (in Orkney and Shetland, and nationally)
- Skills Development Scotland (in Orkney and Shetland).

- Orkney Islands Council and Shetland Islands Council
- Orkney College UHI and Shetland College UHI
- The University of the Highlands and Islands.

#### Will I be identifiable in the research?

In publications and presentations about the research project extracts from the interviews may be used. Every reasonable step will be taken to protect your identity, and your name will not be used at any point, in addition other identifying details (e.g. family names) will also be left out or disguised in publications.

However, because reports may be circulated within the small communities of Orkney and Shetland, and because *some* details about your background may be included (in particular your subject of study and institution) absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

In order to ensure that you are happy with the way you have been represented in any reports, the following steps will be taken:

- Confidentiality will be discussed at the start of the first interview. You will have the opportunity to discuss with the interviewer any particular concerns or requirements you have.
- Interview transcripts will be shared with you after each interview. You will be invited to make any further comments you wish, and you will also be given the chance to mark any sections of the transcript that you would not want included in the final thesis.
- Prior to the completion of the final thesis a short summary of the results of the research will be produced and shared with you. Again at this point you will be offered the chance to make any further comments if you wish.
- Once the dissertation has been completed it will be circulated to you for your information.

In addition to seeking to protect your identity in any reports produced, the researcher will also not verbally disclose participants' names or discuss the content of the interviews with anyone else, except, on occasion her academic supervisors.

#### If I decide to take part and then change my mind, can I withdraw?

You can decide to stop an interview at any point. In addition you need not answer any questions that you do not wish to. Even after the interviews have been completed, you may withdraw from the research project at any point up to 1<sup>st</sup> October 2018. If you wish to withdraw, your data will be destroyed and will not be included in any publications. If you wish to withdraw please let the researcher know as soon as possible, you do not have to give a reason.

#### Will my data be held securely?

The researcher will hold your personal details, interview recordings and interview transcriptions securely and in line with the data protection act. Hard copy data will be destroyed on completion of the project. Digital records will be securely stored within the University of the Highlands and Islands archives, and it is anticipated that some digital records will be deposited with the [UK Data Archive](#) which is a specialist repository for social and economic data in the UK.

#### How can I request further information?

The researcher is happy to provide further information or answer any questions.

Rosie can be contacted at:

Rosie Alexander

[\[contact details redacted\]](#)

#### What happens next?

Once you have read all this information, if you have any questions please contact Rosie Alexander who will be happy to discuss with you in more depth.

If you are happy to take part in this project, please sign the attached consent form and return to Rosie Alexander. She will then contact you to arrange a suitable time and date for the first interview.

## Appendix 6: Informed Consent Form

*PhD Research Project:* “The impact of rural location on students’ higher education choices and subsequent career narratives: a case study of the Orkney and Shetland Islands”

*Researcher:* Rosie Alexander

*Institution:* University of Derby

*Supervisors:* Dr Tristram Hooley and Dr Kristin Aune

### AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

I have read and understood the research information sheet, and have asked for clarification where necessary. I agree to be interviewed for this research project and consent to have the interviews digitally recorded. I understand that I can withdraw my participation at any point up to 1<sup>st</sup> October 2018.

Signature of Respondent:

Date:

Signature of Researcher:

Date:

## **Appendix 7: First Interview Schedule**

### Introduction:

Thank you for being willing to take part in an interview for this research project.

Thank you also for sending back the consent form and for agreeing for the interview to be recorded. I would like to start by checking that you have read and that you are happy with the information I provided about this research. Do you have any questions?

So, this is the first of three interviews, this interview may take longer than the other ones and I have allowed 1-2 hours for this conversation. Is that time okay for you?

If you don't have any other questions, then I will start by introducing the interview. As you know I am researching how living in Orkney or Shetland before going to university impacts on people's higher education choices and their subsequent career decisions. In this interview I am interested in hearing about your story in your own words of how you got to where you are and what you are thinking about for your future. I only have three main set questions, and these are really just starting points for our conversation.

### Questions:

Note, only three main questions will be used. But the researcher will ask a range of follow up exploratory and open questions with the purpose of facilitating the participant to tell their stories in greater depth. Possible questions include things like: 'can you tell me more about that?' 'what was that experience like for you'. The researcher will also offer short summaries to the participant, again these are offered as ways of encouraging the participant to offer more depth to their story, clarifying points or offering additional information.

1. Can you tell me the story of how you came to be studying this course at this institution?

- a. Follow up question on the significance of place if this hasn't already been mentioned e.g. 'how did living in Orkney or Shetland impact on you and the choices you made?'
2. Can you tell me what you are planning to do after you finish your course?
    - a. Follow up question on specifically where they think they will be in six months' time.
    - b. Follow up question on the significance of place if this hasn't already been mentioned e.g. where they expect to be living
3. Can you tell me how you imagine your life will progress over the next twenty years or so?
    - a. Follow up question on the significance of place if this hasn't already been mentioned e.g. where they expect to be living

Debrief:

Thank you for taking part in the interview today. What will happen next is:

- I will listen back to the recording and transcribe our interview
- I will send the transcription to you, at this point you will be able to mark any sections that you do not want included in the final thesis, or offer any further information that you wish.
- I will analyse the transcript and the transcripts of the other interviews to draw out themes.
- I will contact you in about another 6 months to arrange a follow up interview.

Please do contact me at any point if you have any questions or if you wish to offer any further information.

## **Appendix 8: Second Interview Schedule**

### Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to speak to me again. Our conversation today will be similar to the conversation we had last time. As before I am recording this conversation, and our discussion will be confidential. Do you have any questions before we start?

Before we start the interview itself can I also ask if you have had a look through the transcript I sent you from our last interview?

- If they have and have responded, ask them if they have any further comments.
- If they have but haven't sent a response, check if they have any comments
- If they haven't – restate that they can look through it and send comments / mark sections to be left out of the dissertation.

So, as with the previous interview, the topics for this conversation are relatively open, and I am really interested in hearing about your experience in your own words.

### Questions:

Note, only four main questions will be used. But the researcher will ask a range of follow up exploratory and open questions with the purpose of facilitating the participant to tell their stories in greater depth. Possible questions include things like: 'can you tell me more about that?' 'what was that experience like for you'. The researcher will also offer short summaries to the participant, again these are offered as ways of encouraging the participant to offer more depth to their story, clarifying points or offering additional information.

1. Could you start by telling me what you are doing now and the story of how you came to be here?
2. Looking back at where you were last time we spoke, is this how you imagined things to work out? Has anything changed?

3. Can you tell me how you imagine your life will progress over the next twenty years or so?
  - a. Follow up question on the significance of place if this hasn't already been mentioned e.g. where they expect to be living
4. How do you think living in Orkney or Shetland has influenced you and your life-choices?

Debrief:

Thank you for taking part in the interview today. What will happen next is:

- I will listen back to the recording and transcribe our interview
- I will send the transcription to you, at this point you will be able to mark any sections that you do not want included in the final thesis, or offer any further information that you wish.
- I will analyse the transcript and the transcripts of the other interviews to draw out themes.
- I will start working on the final thesis, and will send you a short summary of the thesis in winter 2018. This will be your last opportunity to make any final comments or to withdraw from the research if you wish.
- I will send you a copy of the completed thesis for your information after it has been submitted to the University of Derby. This is anticipated to be Spring / Summer 2019.

## **Appendix 9: Additional Questions Added to the Second Interview**

Alongside the basic interview schedule above, following the first rounds of data collection and analysis a set of additional questions were added to probe emerging themes. These questions mostly sought additional detail about themes that had emerged in other interviews, they were asked towards the end of the interviews and only when these themes had not already been discussed.

- Do you have siblings? Where do you fit in the family structure?
- What jobs did your parents do growing up? Did they go to university?
- What about other family members / friends – what exposure to other jobs did you have?
- What other family do you have in Orkney / Shetland?
- What family do you have elsewhere?
- What were your experiences of migration as a child (including holidays)?
- Did you do any work experience at school / university – how did this influence things?
- Did you speak to a careers adviser or teacher about your decisions at school? What influence did this have?

## Appendix 10: Second Survey

### Orkney and Shetland Graduates: Six Month Survey

#### Welcome to the survey

Hello again,

Last year you took part in an 'Orkney and Shetland Students' Survey' which I circulated as part of my PhD studies into the career and migration routes of higher education students from Orkney and Shetland. Some of you have also taken part in interviews for this project. Thank you all very much for your help.

I am now hoping that you would be willing to take part in this 'six month' survey which aims to find out some information about what you are doing now you have left university. This survey asks for some factual information and also has some longer questions where you can leave your thoughts and reflections about your experiences.

The survey should only take five to ten minutes to complete. All answers are confidential, and will not be disclosed to anyone. Some of the information you provide may however appear in my final PhD dissertation, where I will be discussing different people's experiences after university. In order to protect confidentiality, I will change your name and avoid (as far as possible) using any identifying information (e.g. employers' names). If you are uncomfortable with any questions in the survey feel free to leave them blank. You may also withdraw from the research at any point up to 1st October 2018. You can find out more about participating in this research from my [blog](#).

I do hope you'll be able to help me out with this next stage of the research, if you have any questions do feel free to get in touch with me at [r.alexander@derby.ac.uk](mailto:r.alexander@derby.ac.uk)

Thank you,  
Rosie

### Orkney and Shetland Graduates: Six Month Survey

#### Your University Experience

**\* 1. In 2016 you graduated from university. Please can you tell me more about the course you graduated from:**

University

Course title

**\* 2. Prior to starting this university course, where did you live? e.g. 'Stenness, Orkney', 'Levenwick, Shetland'**

## Orkney and Shetland Graduates: Six Month Survey

### Your Current Activities

**\* 3. On 12 January 2016 were you...? Please tick ALL the activities you were doing.**

- Working full-time (including self-employed/freelance, voluntary or other unpaid work, developing a professional portfolio / creative practice or on an internship / placement)
- Working part-time (including self-employed/freelance, voluntary or other unpaid work, developing a professional portfolio / creative practice or on an internship / placement)
- Due to start a job in the next month
- Engaged in full time further study, training or research
- Engaged in part time further study, training or research
- Taking time out in order to travel
- Unemployed
- Doing something else
- Other

#### 4. Further details about your activities

Job title (if working)	<input type="text"/>
Employer's name (if working)	<input type="text"/>
Salary (optional)	<input type="text"/>
Course title (if studying)	<input type="text"/>
University/ College / Training provider (if studying)	<input type="text"/>

**\* 5. Where were you living on the 12th January 2016? (please give location)**

## Orkney and Shetland Graduates: Six Month Survey

### Your thoughts about your journey so far

The questions on this page ask for your thoughts about your journey so far. This is the most important part of the survey for my research, and I am interested in as much as you can say about the topics.

- \* 6. What happened after you left university? Please tell me the story of how you came to be doing what you're doing and living where you're living.**

- \* 7. Looking back to the moment when you left university was this how you imagined things would work out? Have your ideas changed and if so how?**

- \* 8. What do you expect to be doing and where do you expect to be living in six months' time, and how you expect to get there?**

- \* 9. How do you imagine your life will progress over the next twenty years or so? e.g. what kinds of things do you hope to be doing / have done, and where do you expect to be living?**

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### Further information

This page asks for some further information. Your name and email address are only asked for so that I can track your answers from the last survey to this one, they will not be disclosed to anyone.

#### 10. Further details

Gender (male or female)

Age

Name

e-mail address

## Appendix 11: Initial Coding Framework

*The following framework was drawn up prior to coding of the interviews*

### 1. Context

- Orkney is / Shetland is...
  - Employment
  - Social context
  - Physical environment
- Who I am (identity)
  - Islander identities (Oradians are, Shetlanders are)
  - Personality (who I am, where I fit)
  - Interests (what I enjoy)

### 2. Experiences:

- Experience of school / university:
  - Modules and pathways
- Experiences of work:
  - Work placement / experience
  - Paid work
- Experiences through other interests (sports, hobbies, religious belief)
- Experiences of mobility
  - Holidays and travel (including exchanges)
  - Living elsewhere
- Other experiences

### 3. Social influences:

- Explicit messages: peer, family or partner
- Explicit messages: Professionals (e.g. teachers, careers advisers, employers)
- Implicit messages / context: family background
- Implicit messages / context: peer 'what (young) people do' or 'what young people experience' (what is normal)

### 4. Practicalities

- Costs: of study, living, travel
- Proximity to friends / family
- Familiarity
- Joint decisions with partners

### 5. Experiences of transition (to HE, to world of work & points between)

- Managing stress
- Social context: new people
- Learning about subject / workplace

- Independence & confidence
- Process of job search
- As expected / not as expected

## 6. Early career development

- Personal and professional development
- Types of activity
  - Further study
  - Having a break
  - Travel
- Political and economic factors
- Lifestyle consideration
- Changing career ideas

## 7. Future planning

- Life course events
  - Ageing parents / grandparents
  - 'settling down'
    - Finding a partner
    - Buying a house
    - Having children
- Ideal locations:
  - Physical geography (physical environment)
  - Localised geographies (workplace, commuting)
  - Possibility for hobbies / interests
- Perspectives on Orkney / Shetland futures?
- Planned / unplanned