Contents

Career, community, place and locality

Career is a concept which is concerned with the way in which we link life, learning and work and past, present and future. This kind of thinking about career can often lead us to a level of abstraction which sits in opposition to our everyday experience of career. Day-to-day and even year-to-year career is lived in spaces and places. We go to school, we move to university, we commute to work, we sit hunched at our desk or toil under the burning sun. Work, learning and life do not take place in an abstract no-place, but rather in geographical (and increasingly in digital) spaces. Not all spaces are the same and nor do they offer the same kinds of opportunities or contexts for career thinking, exploration and decision-making. This issue of the NICEC Journal foregrounds the issue of space and place and explores how it impacts on career.

The geography and materiality of spaces and places also have a major impact on the way that career guidance and other forms of career support are delivered. Career guidance is necessarily situated in place as it seeks to link individuals to opportunities and educate them about the local, national and international labour and learning markets. It is also situated within institutions and enacted within diverse spaces including interview cubicals, classrooms, community centres, factories and a growing range of online spaces. The issue therefore also grapples with the question of how these spaces reframe and enable different kinds of career support.

We begin with a piece from **Bill Law** which explores the issues of space and community theoretically. Bill proposes the concept of the 'enclave' as a way to organise our thinking about career and our ideas about how best to organise careers work. **Rie Thomsen** also explores the issue of how career guidance is enacted within places and communities. She argues that this has been ignored for far too long and demonstrates how the nature of the activity is reshaped by its movement into different kinds of spaces and places.

The next three papers all explore the way in which living in a particular place shapes both the career thinking of individuals and the practice of career guidance. First **Kim Slack and Katy Vigurs** look at the career and learning journeys of a group of young people in a working class, urban area in the English midlands. They show how a range of career decisions all emerge out of the intersection between individuals and place and argue that this is something that needs to be recognised in thinking and acting on careers. Next **Siobhan Neary** discusses career and career guidance within Sri Lanka. She introduces the Sri Lankan concept of 'foundation' as a concept that Sri Lankan career practitioners have used to connect the needs of the individual with those of the wider community. **Shaun Morgan** also explores the intersection between community, place and career, this time in a small rural community setting within the UK. Shaun argues that career support workers need to make use of their own cultural capital to propel young people towards social action.

The final three papers look at the relationship between moving place and career. **Rosie Alexander** explores the careers of graduates living in the very rural location of Orkney. She highlights the difference between incomer, loyal and returner graduates and notes a tension between the 'rural' and 'graduate' identities that may need to reframe the way in which careers advisers relate to such clients. **Nancy Arthur** examines the experience of international students coming to Canada. For this group challenges abound in relation to career support, particularly in helping them to navigate questions about staying or returning and providing advice and guidance on remote labour markets and culturally diverse approaches to recruitment and work. Nonetheless, there are considerable challenges for this group which require sensitive handling by careers professionals. Finally the issue closes with an article from **Colleen Reichrath-Smith and Roberta A. Neault** who discuss the experiences of the 'global careerist'. They argue that global careerists (those who pursue their careers across two or more countries) have unique career development needs which career professionals need to better understand in order to be able to help them effectively.

All of these papers explore the importance of space and place in career. Whether it is about how our careers are pursued or how career support is delivered, about staying put in our communities or moving on to new countries, it is clear that space and place need to be considered as a central part of career theory, research and practice.

Tristram Hooley, Guest Editor

'Here you have to be a bit more fluid and willing to do different things': Graduate career development in rural communities

Rosie Alexander

This article presents the background and findings to a research project focusing on how graduates living in a very rural area understand themselves, their careers and their futures. In this project a cross section of recent graduates living in a very rural area (the Orkney Islands) were interviewed and the data were analysed using a qualitative methodology. The findings show some tensions between 'rural' and 'graduate' identities and show some practical ways that graduates managed this tension. The article concludes with some tentative suggestions about implications for careers advisers when working with clients from rural areas.

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Introduction

For higher education career services the pressure to be getting graduates into work has perhaps never been more acute. With increasing fees, the value of higher education has come under scrutiny, and demonstrating the economic value of a degree has become politically important. Questions about the value of different kinds of degree from different institutions are increasingly debated both in the academic world and in the press (Walker and Zhu, 2010). However, much of the literature in this debate makes the assumption that graduates have *access* to the *same* opportunities. This assumes either a) that all graduates are mobile and prioritise high status well paid employment over location, or that b) there are no regional or local differences between labour markets.

Challenging these assumptions, a number of commentators have noted regional differences in graduate employment. In *What do Graduates Do? 2012* Ball notes that 'It is clear from the DLHE information that jobs are not spread equally around the whole country, nor can everyone move to any part of the UK in search of a job.' (Ball, 2011: 4). The regional differences Ball and others are concerned with, however, are large scale differences – comparing, for example, outcomes in 'Scotland' to 'Wales' and the 'South East'. Such large scale comparisons like this are useful, but tend to overlook smaller scale regional differences between rural and urban communities. Indeed graduates living in rural areas will (like rural dwellers generally) make up a small proportion of the overall population, and quantitative research on large data sets risks glossing over differences in the experience of rural graduates. This article concerns a research project that was designed to address this gap by focusing on graduate experiences in a very rural area.

Migration patterns and rurality

One key question in this research was why some graduates choose to live in very rural and remote areas. Looking at the reasons for graduate migration research has shown that although employment *is* an important factor in graduate migration it is not the *only* factor, with graduates making decisions based on a range of economic, personal and social factors (Ball 2009; Bond, Grundy and Charlsey, 2006; McGregor, Thanki and McKee, 2002).

Further research has also shown that different migration decisions by graduates can be correlated to quite different employment outcomes. In one key piece of research Ball (2009) studied graduate employment in relation to migration choices in the South West of England. In this research 'incomer' graduates (originally from elsewhere, and who studied elsewhere) experienced the best outcomes and were the least likely to be employed in non-graduate roles. Loyal graduates (those who lived in the area prior to study, studied in the area and stayed in the area after study) also had strong outcomes, with a strong tendency to be employed in nursing, social work, teaching and other vocations. And Returners (originally from the area, studied elsewhere and then returned) had the least favourable outcomes. One of the recommendations from the final report was that further work was done to 'examine the motivations of these different groups for choosing their employment location' (Ball, 2009: 31)

The question of what motivates people to live in very remote and rural areas is something that has been of interest to policy makers in Highlands and Islands region of Scotland for some time. Against a backdrop of depopulation and an ageing population, retaining and attracting more young people to the Highlands and Islands is an identified priority (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2009a). In research commissioned by the regional enterprise agency lack of employment is identified as a key detractor from the area and 'lifestyle' factors as key attractors to the area (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2009a, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2009b). This raises the question, for graduates, how do they come to live in areas with perceived 'lack of employment' and how does living in a rural area impact on their career decision making?

When considering the relationship between career pathways and location, a social constructionist viewpoint may be useful. Social constructionism proposes that social reality is constructed by individuals in interaction with their environment. So, for any of us, our contexts help shape and co-create our realities. From this perspective, the social environment we grow up in will impact on how we construct our ideas of ourselves and our career identities. Furthermore, the social environments we find ourselves in later in life will also impact on

how we understand ourselves and our developing career identities. This may be a particularly important perspective when considering rural areas which some rural geographers have suggested are characterised by distinct 'rural narratives' (Cloke, 2006; Woods, 2010). Rural narratives are typically constructed in opposition to urban narratives and characterised by values of 'stability, egalitarianism, geographical roots, community, a sense of responsibility to others and family relationships' (Holt, 2010: 5).

Where there is a potential distinction between 'urban' and 'rural' narratives, it is also important to consider the findings of some educational research from Canada and Australia which suggest that educational narratives are typically more urban than rural. Corbett in his research in Canada identified how rural school children going to university had to 'learn how to leave' by distancing themselves socially from their peers, and developing an ability to be 'social floaters', by not over identifying with any individual group (Corbett, 2007). Holt's study in Australia looked at how students from rural areas going to university were disadvantaged by the 'urban public narrative' of their higher education settings (Holt, 2010).

The Research Project

As the Careers Manager for the University of the Highlands and Islands, the questions of why graduates live in rural places and how living in a rural place impacts on career decision making and finding work are very real to me. The university I work for has thirteen campuses covering some of the most rural and remote communities in the UK and every day I work with graduates from these areas. In order to develop an in-depth understanding of the experience of these graduates, the research project I conducted took a case-study approach into graduate experience in one particular rural and remote community: the Islands of Orkney.

Orkney is an archipelago off the north coast of Scotland made up of approximately 70 islands, 20 of which are inhabited. 67.5% of the population are classified as living in 'a remote rural area' and 32.5% are classified as living in a remote small town (Scottish Government, 2012). The population stands

at approximately 20,000. In terms of employment, self-employment and part-time employment are more common than in the rest of Scotland, and the economy is characterised by a higher proportion of small or medium size enterprises (SMEs) (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2011). In terms of sector of employment, construction, transport and communications, public administration, education and health, and tourism all employ statistically more people in Orkney than the national average, with manufacturing, services, and finance, IT and other business employing statistically fewer (Orkney Islands Council, 2010).

Fourteen participants were involved in the research, all of whom were living in Orkney and had graduated within the last 7 years. Two focus groups were conducted and then a series of in-depth follow up interviews were undertaken with a cross-section of graduates, including representatives from the incomer, returner and stayer migration categories identified by Ball (2009). The interviews and focus groups were recorded and the data were analysed to identify key themes. The aim of the project was to generate a theoretical framework for understanding the experience of rural graduates, with specific objectives to:

- Identify constructions of 'graduate' identity and 'rurality' and the interplay between these.

- Identify rhetorical strategies in the construction of graduate identity in a rural context.

Outcomes of the research

Following qualitative analysis of the interview and focus group data, key themes were identified, and these are summarised below.

Constructions of Rurality: Working in Orkney

The graduates in this research generally portrayed Orkney in a way that was consistent with 'rural' narratives – of family, equality, community and stability. For many the desire to 'settle down' was linked with living in Orkney, particularly where this involved having children or building or buying a house. One participant commented 'Orkney: it's home, it's where my family are but… also having my own family, I wanted to be

back in Orkney because Orkney, it's somewhere that is safe'.

Orkney was perceived to be a very small community, where social and working identities were not always distinct. So, many of the graduates described the challenge of meeting clients, bosses or customers in social situations such as in the street or the supermarket. Where in some ways this was a challenge and prevented graduates from 'letting their hair down', it was also described positively, because it could be very rewarding to see how their work had positively impacted on people.

Orkney was also described as a community-spirited place, where being part of the community was important. In an employment context this meant that working or volunteering in a role that had some community benefit was seen as a strong tactic for developing a reputation and future employment prospects (as well as allowing better integration with the community).

> If people don't see you doing anything or people can't form an opinion on you based on anything you're doing then they're just not going to bother approaching you – they're not going to bother speaking to you.

'Being seen' in the community and building social relationships were commonly cited as more important in job search than more direct techniques. Some graduates directly contrasted the direct techniques of writing speculative applications, CVs and networking, to the more informal approaches they would use in Orkney. Indirect, informal approaches were preferred particularly by employed graduates, because of the risk for them of their employer finding out they were looking for work from other employers. One graduate described this as operating 'under the radar,' and her advice when looking for work was that 'the best thing to do is kind of not advertise it but not deny it at the same time, just kind of play the middle ground and put out feelers'.

Constructing a graduate identity: being a graduate in Orkney

Many of the graduates in this research expressed caution about disclosing or discussing their degree

level study freely in open conversation in Orkney. One commented that she didn't talk about her degree because she didn't want people to think that she was 'too big for [her] boots'. However, this did differ according to the contexts the graduates found themselves in. So for graduates in professional jobs it was felt that discussing their studies or their professional expertise at work was often appropriate, although in their social lives they normally avoided talking about their degree because they socialised in very mixed friendship groups. Occasionally this was contrasted to how they thought it would be if they lived in bigger places where they imagined they may both work and socialise in 'young professional' social sets. Managing these different social-professional environments for many graduates resulted in them displaying behaviour consistent with Corbett's concept of 'social floating'– that is 'they saw social space, abstracted about it, and planned their moves within it' (2007: 780). However, where for Corbett social-floating was an aspect of 'learning how to leave' a rural area, it could be suggested from this research that 'social floating' is rather about learning how to stay (and be successful) in a rural area.

In terms of career opportunities for graduates, working environments were characterised as 'smaller' than in large cities – so that the same job in Orkney would involve more variety and require greater flexibility and enterprise. Practical and 'day to day' skills and social-professional contacts were seen as being of high value in working contexts Orkney. In this way the physical realities of the workplace were linked to the rural narratives that value community and equality.

In terms of career development, opportunities for progression were felt to be limited, although the potential for lateral moves was seen as good. Flexibility was therefore very important for a graduate developing a career in Orkney, and as the quote from the title of the article says: 'here you have to be a bit more fluid and willing to do different things'. Compromise was also a common theme, and graduates expected to have to compromise in their career path in some form or other – either by first taking jobs south before being able to move to Orkney, or by taking jobs in Orkney that were at a lower level than they had had (or could have had) south. For the graduates in the study, developing a career in Orkney

was characterised by luck, and if the cards fell right, many graduates actually felt that career prospects in Orkney could be *better* than elsewhere: 'if you know the right people and have the right connections, then actually opportunities can arise that wouldn't maybe be there for you otherwise'. In order to maximise their chances, being flexible, thinking strategically and using social contacts were all identified as important.

Rhetorical strategies used by Returner, Incomer and Stayer graduates

In the context of Orkney, returner, incomer and stayer graduates used specific rhetorical strategies to describe their experiences.

Returner graduates commonly constructed their experience using the dichotomous terms 'home' and 'South'. When asked about their experiences at university, returner graduates tended to translate this into talking about going 'south'. 'South' was characterised as young, exciting, and dynamic. University was positioned as 'south' and 'going south' was presented almost as a rite of passage – something you did while you were young before you moved 'home' to settle down and have children. This narrative of leaving and return provided a powerful way for these graduates to distance themselves from the uncomfortable aspects of degree level study (implications of hierarchy and being 'too big for your boots'), while at the same time aligning themselves with the 'rural' values of family and community (because they were choosing them over 'south'). Where the terminology of university may be associated with arrogance, the terminology of 'going south' was more positive and associated with success – 'going south' was perceived as something many young people did, but not just for university, also for vocational training, or just to travel and develop confidence. In contrast *not* to go south could be, in the words of one graduate, 'a sign that I'd already failed without even trying'.

Incomer students interestingly often used similar rhetorical positioning to returners. Although unable to use the 'home' / 'south' dichotomy, they were able to describe living in Orkney as a choice, and were able to talk about moving to Orkney for the lifestyle thereby

endorsing the values of rural life and also distancing themselves from experience elsewhere (including university experience). Many of these graduates also mentioned their own 'rural' backgrounds, allowing them to use a similar narrative line to returning students, talking about 'returning' to a rural community.

Although only small numbers of loyals were interviewed as part of this research, the preliminary findings suggest that they may be the group of graduates that find most difficulty in positioning themselves in the rural labour market. Both loyal graduates who took part in this research described feeling disillusioned and unsure about what the point was of having done a degree, and whereas some other graduates also described feelings of disillusion, they had always experienced this in a location other than Orkney and, indeed, this experience was often the stimulus for making the choice to move to Orkney. Loyal graduates who studied in Orkney and graduated in Orkney, were less able to use the narratives of 'home' and 'south' and were therefore also less able to use these narratives to distance themselves from their university experiences and to emphasise the choice to stay in Orkney.

These tentative findings do need further research however, because in this research none of the loyal graduates who took part identified as 'Orcadian', instead they all thought of themselves as incomers (albeit that they had arrived in Orkney some time before starting their studies). This meant that they tended to position themselves more like incoming graduates – as if they were outsiders to Orkney. It is possible that loyal graduates who identify as Orcadian have an experience that is quite different, being more able to position themselves as insiders, and therefore closer to the positions adopted by returner graduates.

Supporting career development in rural communities

The results of this research suggest that graduates in rural areas perceive their career development opportunities as different to those offered in larger communities. And this suggests that when working

with people in rural areas it may be important for careers practitioners to be sensitive and responsive to the rural context.

The clearest conclusions can be drawn in terms of job search strategies that guidance professionals may help clients to develop. Firstly the results suggest that in remote rural areas a more indirect method of job search may be preferable to direct methods such as sending speculative letters or CVs. Networking is important, but it may be important to operate 'below the radar' building social networks and sounding out potentially useful contacts indirectly. Avoiding too much self-promotion is also advisable, with a better approach being to get involved in community projects or voluntary work – anything which helps your abilities be 'seen' and for you to get known, but without having to directly promote yourself and risk coming across as 'too big for your boots'.

There are also implications for careers education in terms of the kinds of employability skills which may be valued in rural communities and which may be taught in school, college or university settings. Enterprise skills, problem solving and creative thinking were all identified as perhaps more important in rural than in urban areas, because of the smaller working environments. In addition people and communication skills, specifically in terms of the ability to 'operate below the radar' or to 'socially float' are also very important.

In terms of approaches to career development it is also possible to make some tentative conclusions. What this research suggests is the importance of thinking tactically and flexibly within rural labour markets. In practical terms in a community like Orkney it may be difficult to 'plan' a career path because ultimately there are limited numbers of people employed in each profession, which may mean that specific opportunities never arise during a graduate's working life. The alternative to career planning for many of these graduates was to develop a strong reputation in the community, to develop a range of skills and experience (from lateral career moves, or through social, voluntary or community activities) and to develop a wide range of contacts. This prevents becoming over-identified with one career path, and maximises the potential progression

routes the graduates could take (if they happened to come up). For career practitioners this may suggest that encouraging clients to have a more open and flexible approach to career development may be more important in rural areas than talking about career planning.

Finally, for careers advisers working in rural communities with rural clients, there is an additional consideration to be made – in these contexts meeting clients in social situations is very likely and cannot be avoided. Rather than being problematic, this fact of rural life does actually offer great potential – by maintaining a professional-but-social attitude with our clients when we meet them outside of our work, this effectively models and encourages clients to develop the social floating skills that can be so useful in their careers.

Conclusion

The results of this research project suggest that living in a rural area can have a significant impact on how graduates perceive their career opportunities. In comparison to more urban areas graduates felt that developing a career in Orkney required greater flexibility and compromise and more indirect job-search methods. Where opportunities were generally felt to be limited, graduates understood the role of chance and of trying to maximise their chances by using their social contacts. Understanding the rural context and how it can provide both career opportunities and challenges is vital for careers advisers in order to deliver informed, effective and appropriate services to clients.

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