

Home or Abroad? Irish Student's Attitudes towards Employment Prospects

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Research Project

Title

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Abstract

The extent of unemployment in Ireland today is of great concern, more particularly because the Irish economy enjoyed a prolonged period of growth, far in excess of European counterparts, which resulted in the lowest unemployment figures for decades. This study explores the attitudes and views of young graduates towards their career prospects in post Celtic Tiger Ireland, including their views on emigration. Qualitative research methods were used and the transcribed data was examined using thematic analysis technique. Six students took part in the survey which was structured around a set of semi-structured questions. A dictaphone was used to gather the data which was then transcribed. The research concluded that students were aware of the economic downturn and the unemployment crisis that has ensued. The results showed that participants now considered their best prospects for career development lay abroad, although they considered this option as a temporary measure. In addition students were critical of the education system as a preparatory mechanism for entering the workplace. Students also expressed a strong desire to remain within their chosen career path despite the bleak outlook.

Introduction

Unemployment and emigration are terms, which today's 19-24 year olds associate with previous generations, not realising that these societal piranhas are back to devour our educated and talented young adults. At the end of March 2011 unemployment in Ireland reached 14.7% of the total labour force (CSO). This percentage figure represents almost 442,000 adults who are now filling the dole queues with little prospects of finding work. A worrying aspect of these figures is that long term unemployment is on the increase and stands at 6.5% (CSO Quarterly Survey: 2010). At the end of January 2011 there were 442,677 people on the live register (CSO: Labour Market) and 82,237 of these were under the age of 25 years, of which 34% are registered for more than one year. In addition to these statistics, there are currently 155,000 third level students attending college, of which approximately 30,000 will be available to join the workforce annually (Department of Education and Skills: Education Statistics). Economic commentators (Ernst & Young: 2010) suggest that there will be no rebound in the Irish economy until 2013 and unemployment will remain as high as 14% until 2014. Against this backdrop it is difficult for college graduates to remain positive about their job prospects in Ireland.

The Union of Students of Ireland recently launched a proposal *Reigniting the Smart Economy* (2010), which further outlines the plight of college graduates. The headline statistics from this publication are:

- ❖ 90,800 under 25's signed on to the live register in August 2010 (CSO)
- ❖ Estimated that 150,000 graduates will emigrate by 2015 (ERSI Research)
- ❖ 30% of 2009 graduates remain unemployed (CSO)
- ❖ 59,000 graduates unemployed in March 2010 (CSO)

This study will endeavor to identify the attitudes of undergraduate students towards their career prospects in a post Celtic Tiger Ireland. The study will also determine the views of students regarding emigration and attempt to establish if young students consider working abroad as their only option. In addition the research will attempt to identify the variables which influence the attitudes of students and the factors which might build their perception that long term job prospects may be best served abroad. On this point Professor Eamon Walsh, Michael Smurfit Graduate Business School, in a recent news article asked a pertinent question *'who will stay in Ireland simply to have the opportunity to pay the bill for past excesses?'* (Sunday Times, Dec 2010)

A review of economic, migration, employment and education texts, publications and reports highlights key background theory, data and comment, which will place this research in context and assist in understanding the challenge that faces young graduates as they enter a period of uncertainty. This literature review is structured and set out to examine: the Irish economy; employment in a changed economy; migration and society; migration and the labour market; and the education system, employment and migration. This research endeavors to identify the attitudes of young students and in this respect the review will also briefly discuss what is understood when we study attitudes and their related concepts of behaviour and opinion.

The Irish Economy in Celtic Tiger Context 1992-2007

Following a decade (1980s) of rising unemployment, increased emigration, persistent inflation, increased public spending and annual budget deficits, the 1987 newly elected Government embarked on a Program for National Recovery. Government, employers,

unions and farmers (Social Partnership) worked together to agree on steps to deal with the economic crisis. Subsequent policies dealing with government spending, wage restraints, reduced corporation tax, education programmes, increased competitiveness, direct foreign investment, improved telecommunications, immigration and increased employment, all assisted in kick starting and boosting the economy. The 1992 Culliton report "*A Time for Change*" highlighted the importance of education, technical skills development, and installation of infrastructure, as key components for economic development, underpinning the importance of education in economic development. Education will be examined later in this review.

Over the following fifteen years Ireland experienced robust economic growth. The term "Celtic Tiger" was coined by the US economist Kevin Gardiner. He compared the unexpected economic growth in Ireland with those of the Asian tiger economies of the late 80s and early 90s. Over the ten year period, 2000-10, the Irish economy enjoyed annual growth rates in excess of 5% (Fig. 1.) During this period unemployment remained at less than 4% (Fig. 2.), emigration reduced and immigration increased, resulting in net inward migration not experienced in the previous three decades. The "Celtic Tiger" continued until 2007, after which the economy declined rapidly and officially entered recession in the later half of 2008.

The Celtic Tiger brought about many changes and challenges within Irish society during this period. Key aspects of our economy were radically altered and as a result Irish society changed in the areas of employment levels, emigration trends, lifestyle levels and education standards. Public and private institutions put in place policies and strategies in response to the improved economy. Public service costs rose and private sector competitiveness was

undermined. In hindsight many of these approaches were misguided and in the long term did not create measured and sustainable growth or equality within society. Many key areas of the Irish economy and society were adversely affected by the Celtic Tiger phenomenon. In 2010, in the face of low prospects for economic growth and ailing public finances, the Irish government have put in place austerity measures, which many people see as penal and incorrectly burdening the innocent. The failures and deficiencies in institutions and policies need to be addressed so that the economy and society as a whole can recover and stabilise.

The key areas affected by the Celtic Tiger are as follows:

1. Financial and banking sector.
2. The public sector and Government sponsored bodies (quangos).
3. The construction industry (particularly the domestic housing market)
4. The educational system.
5. Economic competitiveness.
6. Budgetary policy and public debt.
7. Our health and welfare systems.

The dramatic turnaround in the Irish economy has undermined the positivity created during the Celtic Tiger era. Undergraduate and postgraduates students are disillusioned with their prospects for employment in the coming years. Brian Mooney (The Irish Times, Jan. 2011) highlights the fact that almost 100,000 graduates holding bachelor's degrees, masters and doctoral degrees are unemployed in Ireland [in 2010]. Journalist commentary at the time of the [2011] general election highlighted the fact that there is a much greater public awareness of economic issues in today's society. In contemporary Irish society there is a higher level of young people attending college, which will be examined later, and this group is also much more aware of economic and current issues. The current condition of the Irish economy is not

clouded in mystery and will influence how young graduates view this country, at least in the short term.

Employment in a changed economy

By 2005 Ireland was the fourth richest country in the world as measured by gross domestic product per capita. In 2005 Ireland also ranked highly in terms of living standards and, specifically, low levels of unemployment (4.5%). Employment surpassed 2 million and net inward migration was experienced for the first time in three decades (O'Hagan *et al*: 2008). This position is now radically changed and many economic and societal advances achieved during the Celtic Tiger era have been eroded. The full extent of the fallout from economic decline is difficult to predict with economic and political commentators offering alternative opinions. In the words of Nobelist, Neils Bohr, "Forecasting is difficult, especially about the future" However, it is envisaged that employment is unlikely to increase, incomes will fall and living standards will decrease issues, which will be examined later in this chapter. In this context it is evident that prospects of employment for young graduates are bleak.

Economic decline, increased unemployment, and the high levels of emigration that ultimately follow, will have many implications for modern Ireland. The most obvious implication is that population growth will slow down or stagnate, based on net outward migration and a changed age demographic. Growing populations bring larger domestic markets, greater economies of scale, higher productivity, improve overall living standards and help to create a dynamic society. This scenario would encourage young students to remain in this country, increasing population levels further, which ultimately leads to further economic prosperity. An opposing view, in the face of economic decline, is that emigration acts as a safety valve and allows those remaining at home greater opportunity in terms of employment and productivity. The late Brian Lenihan, government minister, in 1987 infamously suggested that "we can't all live

on a small island". While the comment may have been flippant in its delivery emigration as a "release valve" for distressed societies is a common economic belief. However, a well educated population will emigrate in the knowledge that they can find productive employment abroad, improve their skills level and eventually return (O'Hagan *et al*, 2008).

During the first half of the 1980s unemployment rose very sharply, increasing by 150% over five years and reaching 17.3% of the labour force in 1985. Net outward migration had reached over 40,000 by the end of the 1980s. The increases in unemployment coincided with stagnant economic growth (Tansey, 1998). This scenario broadly matches employment and economic trends over the 2007-2010 periods. During these years unemployment increased by 285% and the economy declined by 15% (CSO). Net outward migration is set to return as outlined earlier. A significant feature of unemployment characteristics during the 1980s and one which is resurfacing again, is the rate of long term unemployment, now standing at 6.5%, as outlined in the opening section. Employment in a changed economy looks certain to be challenging and mirrors the problems faced by young adults in the eighties. One striking difference between young adults of the eighties and their counterparts today lies with their education levels. In 1980 20% of 18 year olds attended third level education, while this figure has increased to 65% in 2010 (HEA, 2011), a point which will be discussed later in this review.

Rationalisation and work satisfaction

The overriding reality is that young graduates will rationally examine their prospects, form opinions based on the information which is now pervasive in the public domain and behave in a manner which best suites their individual goals. The combination of youth, education and the globalisation phenomenon, will allow young students to look beyond their country of origin in seeking employment, independence and an improved lifestyle. Max Weber (as cited

by Watson 2008, 56-59) theorises about the 'rationalisation process' in his writings on the sociology of work, and explains that a person will 'adopt a deliberate calculated approach in the pursuit of a consciously selected end'. For young students this rationalisation process occurs as they read and hear commentary regarding the declining Irish economy and rising unemployment. Therefore students work orientation is socially constructed, reflects the 'legitimate order' views of Max Weber, (Watson 2008, 57) and is grounded in basic societal influences.

Reviewing literature in the examination of students' attitudes towards their employment prospects cannot be complete without examining some of the motivations behind the concept of work. Watson (2008, 232-241) refers to the work of Dubin (1956) which concluded that the principal life interest of the majority of manual labourers existed outside of work. Watson then points to the work of Orzack (1959) which suggests that the principal interests of professional[s] nurses lay within the work environment. Blauner (1960), as cited by Watson (2008, 234) observed that 'professionals and business people claimed relatively high levels of satisfaction compared with manual workers'. At this point the main interest in life came from within their work, leading to increased levels of job satisfaction. These arguments lead us to understand that educated young students will find greater levels of satisfaction from work they are professionally trained to do, job satisfaction being a key motivating factor within the work experience.

The decline in the Irish economy (Fig. 1) has resulted in mass unemployment with little prospect of recovery before 2014. The ERSI (Quarterly Economic Commentary: Winter 2010) recently published data which predicts that GDP and GNP will see positive growth

during 2012, for the first time since 2007. Nevertheless, employment will continue to fall in 2011 with a marginal improvement in 2012.

Migration and society

Because of the huge decline in employment and Irish economy, as described above, net outward migration is forecast to reach 100,000 over the two year period April 2010 to April 2012. This is the highest level of net outward migration in historic terms, according to the ERSI report.

These statistics form the backdrop for postgraduate students as they make career choices and plan their future employment prospects. Unemployment rates amongst graduates are high and many are contemplating emigration, as outlined earlier. It is estimated that the equivalent of every student graduating over the next five years will emigrate from Ireland. Many of these graduates, having been the subject of huge investment from the State throughout their education, now have no choice but to emigrate (USI, 2010). The existence of economic disparities between geographical areas generates migration. As the Irish economy remains weak, with high unemployment and reduced incomes, net outward migration will remain a constant feature. This scenario has significant negative implications for future generations. Castles and Miller point out that in circumstances where net migration exists, it is the higher skilled members of society who are most likely to emigrate at first (2003, 23). Migration theorists argue that individuals will search for the country of residence that maximises their well-being (Borjas 1989, 461) and in this respect Irish society will experience the classical brain drain associated with emigration of the 80s. Boyle *et al* explains that forced migration is a term used where individuals have only a negligible choice over whether to move or stay (1998, 180). Historically this term refers to issues such as war, natural disasters,

persecution and slavery, where people are forced to travel. In today's economic climate, the term continues to describe college graduates exodus except the overriding forcing factor relates to lack of employment opportunities.

Migration can be categorized as either "exciting and challenging" or "rootless and sad" (Boyle *et al*, 1998). From a sociological perspective this is an important distinction. Students who feel that their only career and life opportunities lie outside of Ireland, and feel that they have little choice in the decision, are more likely to view migration as rootless and sad. During the period of economic growth students chose to emigrate and viewed their move abroad as exciting and challenging. Castles *et al* (2009, 20) makes the point that "the experience of migration and of living in another country often leads to modification of the original plans, so that migrants' intentions at the time of departure are poor predictors of actual behavior". The writers also explain that migration is often a "collective action" which arises out of social change and impacts on both the receiving and sending countries. In the Irish context young students may become premeditated in their approach to emigration and never view their own country as a legitimate prospect for employment. Emigration decisions are not always made at an individual level but are heavily influenced by communities and families (Castles *et al* 2009, 24).

Historically Ireland has been exposed to forced emigration, which will be discussed later. Despite this experience and the recognition that "international migration is part of a transnational revolution that is reshaping societies" (Castles *et al* 2009, 7) Irish emigrants will undergo some level of psychological stress as they relocate. Ryan *et al* (as cited by Fanning, 2007, 113-127) distinguishes between the psychological impacts associated with forced migration versus voluntary migration. The writers posit that "the decision to uproot themselves must be understood in terms of the difficult conditions of their home environment rather than expectations of better conditions in the host environment". Irish emigrants will

have to make adjustments in relation to their personal goals, language difficulties, racism, resources, security and legal status when the move abroad. Emigrants will also have to contend with the stress-inducing aspect of the erosion of personal control. As Ryan *et al* points out psychological well-being are intimately linked with the pursuit of personal and life goals. On the plus side the Irish Diaspora is far reaching and will accommodate social networking which will assist in dealing with separation from family and friends. The world is now a smaller place and the pervasive nature of globalisation will also minimize the psychological effects of forced emigration. Castles *et al* (2009, 2-7) writes that ‘human beings have always moved in search of new opportunities, or to escape poverty, conflict or environmental degradation’. The writer goes on to say that ‘migration is not just a reaction to difficult conditions at home: it is also motivated by the search for better opportunities and lifestyles elsewhere’. Migration and society are inextricably linked. This study focuses on students attitudes towards emigration in the context of economic decline and unemployment. Emigration is not new to Ireland and existed during the Celtic Tiger era, a point which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Migration and the labour market

One of the most remarkable features of the Celtic Tiger era has been the dramatic increase in employment. Between 1961 and 1993, employment rose by 130,000 (12.3%). Whereas, in the fifteen years up to 2007 an extra 912,000 joined the labour force, an increase of 77%. Also, during this fifteen year period, unemployment fell from 15.7% to 4.5% of the labour force (O’Hagan *et al*, 2008). This success in the labour market coincides with economic growth discussed earlier and highlights the linear relationship between the two. The increase in the labour force did not arise purely as a result of increased birth rate but was heavily supported by net inward migration and demonstrates the role of migration in satisfying and reacting to labour market demands.

Castles *et al* (2003, 22) outline the neo-classical economic 'push-pull' migratory theories. The 'push' factors impel people to leave their country of origin and the 'pull' factors attract people to the receiving countries. For young graduates today, in the context of the current economic climate, the 'push' factors include 'high unemployment', 'increased personal taxation', 'restricted credit facilities' and 'decreasing income levels'. The pull factors include 'employment', 'good career opportunities', 'demand for labour' and 'high living standards'. The authors go on to explain that this model emphasizes that the decision to emigrate is a rational one, which is based on making comparisons between the benefits of moving abroad as opposed to staying at home. It also has to be recognised that sections of young graduates look on emigration as an adventure, part of post-graduation lifestyle and a 'letting loose' process. Emigration is a feasible and attractive option in the absence of family commitments and financial pressures. As mentioned earlier voluntary emigration has been a feature of Irish society even during the boom years. Having said that, 'push factors' will play a more significant role in the decision making process today.

Immigration did not always feature in Ireland's economic history and only came to prominence during the growth period of the Celtic Tiger. In 2011 Ireland has an excess of labour and very limited skills shortages. As a result of this, the number of first time work permits issued to immigrants declined by 68% between 2007 and 2009. Current government migration policies have now focused on limiting the number of permits issued, with specific emphasis on the duration of the permit (Quinn 2010, 63). These policies reflect the current decline in the labour market and the impact of excess labour on migration patterns.

The examination of young students' attitudes towards emigration cannot ignore what may seem to contradict migration movements during the economic boom. Right through the period of economic growth Ireland continued to experience outward migration, the majority of which were young Irish nationals (CSO). This may be explained by the fact that outward

migration has always been a feature of Irish society. Migration systems theory, as explained by Castles *et al* (2003, 23), suggests that populations may emigrate based on 'prior links' such as economic, cultural or trade, with other countries. This in part explains the continued flight of Irish nationals despite economic prosperity and high employment opportunities. Substantial outward migration persisted during the 1996 ó 2007 period. While the annual figures during this period fluctuated between 25- 40 thousand they did not reach the levels forecast by the ERSI for the coming years (previous section). Nevertheless, this propensity to emigrate amongst the Irish population will help to put the current trends into context and demonstrate that emigration exists regardless of economic status. It is obvious that emigration during the boom years was one of choice and lifestyle change, whereas in the coming years emigration decisions will also be influenced by economic necessity. In a global context Castles *et al* (2009, 299) posits that migration patterns are 'rooted in historical relationships and shaped by a multitude of political, demographic, socioeconomic, geographical and cultural factors'. This viewpoint supports an argument that expected Irish emigration patterns, over the coming years, may not be exclusively connected to poor economic conditions. The research attempts to identify the attitudes of students to career prospects and emigration. The analysis of the responses will also attempt to establish if labour market employment opportunities is a key influencer in migration decisions amongst the target demographic.

Education system, employment and migration

Ireland has long enjoyed a long tradition of educational excellence. Successive governments have maintained a focus and emphasis on education as a key ingredient for economic development and sustainability. It should be the case that strategic economic growth policies are closely linked with strategic education policies. According to the OECD Directorate for Education, 'education systems reflect national societies, cultures and economies and shape

them, too. Richard Langford (as cited by Ward and Dooney 1999, 216) outlined the absence of a single global approach to organising education and goes on to explain that two broad and very different models of education and training provision exist. The Northern European Model places emphasis on vocational training at the earlier age of 15/16 while the Anglo-American Model maintains a more general approach for a longer period, with occupational specific development deferred to a later stage.

One of the key structural differences between the two models centres on the involvement of business and industry. The North European Model gives a key role to the workplace in determining the content, mode and location of the learning. This model is used in Germany, a highly industrialised country, with high innovative and productive characteristics. The link between businesses [employer] and education in this model is very strong and is likely to be more beneficial in matching strategic economic growth policies with education strategies. The Anglo-American model is most prevalent in Ireland and looks to provide a broad extended general education programme. From an overall perspective the Northern European Model appears to offer a more integrated education and industry combination. The Anglo-American approach is more flexible and appears to be best suited to those students who face emigration. There is a strong argument that the application of the Anglo-American model in the Irish education system actually assists and sustains emigration patterns. The involvement of the workplace in education would lead to a much stronger innovative, productive and entrepreneurial ethos amongst students.

In Ireland, progression rates from first to second year amongst students stands at 85% and the higher education system compares favourably with other countries in terms of student progression and completion (HEA Report, 2010). Equally the numbers applying for and

attending third level education courses are increasing with record number of CAO applications for the 2010/11 academic year. In 1980 20% of 18 year olds attended third level education and this figure has increased to 65% in 2010 (HEA Report, 2011). The high levels of participation and completion in degree courses and the recognition that education will play a central role in making Ireland a country recognised for innovation, competitive enterprise and continuing academic excellence, and an attractive place to live and work with a high quality of life (National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030; 2011), are encouraging only to an extent. The education system contains deficiencies which may undermine economic growth and ultimately employment, leading to increased emigration.

Ireland's universities have fallen in world rankings while at the same time reading, math and science disciplines levels have weakened. Ireland has dropped from 5th to 17th in reading, 16th to 26th in math and now stands in 18th position in science (OCED/PISA). Reports on 'dumbing down' in Irish education are widespread. University graduates receiving top classification in Level 8 courses has doubled between 1997 and 2008 (Department of Education, March 2010). This trend surpasses international trends and is cause for concern with international corporations questioning the validity of Irish exam systems (Dr Craig Barrett, Farmleigh Economic Summit; June 2010). A key role for education is to produce a well-educated, skilled and flexible workforce that meets the demands of economic growth. A skilled labour force is more productive, supports a competitive economy and high value knowledge-based industries (O'Hagan *et al*, 2008). The decline in the education system needs to be addressed if Ireland is to remain an attractive location for direct foreign investment and maintain a strong innovative approach to industry development.

As outlined earlier, education systems must reflect the requirements for economic growth strategies. Following the collapse of the construction industry scores of architects, engineers and construction graduates remain unemployed and have little option but to find employment elsewhere. In addition education systems must be robust and include assessment criteria based on recognised standards, which are internationally acceptable. A mismatch between the skills of the labour force and the nature of the work that is available will result in a serious problem for young students. O'Hagan and McIndoe, (O'Hagan *et al*, 2008, 132) write that the structure of work in the industrialised world has been changing. There has been a shift away from low-skilled jobs to more high-skilled, high wage jobs. In this respect Irish education systems must be designed to meet the demands of a modern labour force. An education system should take account of the changing environment and nature of work and ensure that a high degree of flexibility is built into qualification attainment and skills learning. Paradoxically this structure will accommodate students who, either choose to or are forced to emigrate, and those who wish to remain in this country.

Literature Review Conclusion

Reviewing economic, migration, employment and education statistics publications and articles highlights key background data which demonstrate the enormous challenge facing young graduates as they complete their studies and attempt to find a position in the labour market. Following a sustained period of economic growth, the Irish economy is in decline with little prospects of significant growth in the short term. Unemployment has reached 14.7% of the labour force and 34% of these are unemployed for more than one year. It is estimated that over the next five years the equivalent of every graduating student will emigrate. It is the higher skilled members of society who are most likely to emigrate according to Castles *et al* (2003).

Historically Ireland has been exposed to forced emigration, and yet over 25,000 people continued to emigrate during the Celtic Tiger era. This pattern relates to historical ties with host countries and a variety of other sociological factors. Emigration in this context is voluntary and is regarded as 'exciting and challenging' as opposed to the 'rootless and sad' aspect associated with forced migration. Education and employment are inextricably linked. Ireland enjoys a long tradition of educational excellence although this has been tainted in recent years. A successful education system must match the skills of the labour force with the nature of the work; otherwise students will be forced to look elsewhere. On the positive side the progression and completion rates through the education system compares favourably with other countries and the numbers who attend third level institutions has increased. Over 65% of over 18s now attend third level. The improvements in education provide a higher level of skill and flexibility, and help to meet the demands of a modern labour force. Equally educated young students are better positioned to travel and look for opportunities outside of the native land.

In conclusion, the literature review considers the impact on the labour market of a robust Celtic Tiger economy and subsequent employment prospects in an economy which has altered dramatically over the last three years. The review also considered the issue of migration and its impact on society along with the influence of education on migration and employment. In particular the views of Boyle *et al* (1998), Ryan *et al* (cited by Fanning, 2007) and Castles *et al* (2009) provided an insight into the nature, impact and extent of migration across the globe. Editors Ward and Dooney (1999) outline the importance of structured education in the pursuit of economic growth, competitiveness and employment opportunities in times of economic stress. These writings, supported by economic, labour market and education statistics provide the basis for examining the attitudes of young

graduates entering the workforce. Within existing literature there is not enough data regarding the attitudes of young graduates in contemporary Irish society in the context of rapid and severe economic decline.

Research Objectives

The objective of the study is to identify the attitudes and views of students regarding their prospects of achieving full employment and rewarding careers in post Celtic Tiger Ireland. In addition the study will also determine the views of students regarding emigration and attempt to establish if young students consider working abroad as their only option. The research will also attempt to establish in what way the attitudes of students determine the direction of career and course choice. It is also the aim of the study to explore the reasons why students have formed particular viewpoints regarding their future prospects.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study was conducted using qualitative research methodology, which provided a flexible approach to analyse the attitudes and views of students towards employment prospects and economic decline in contemporary Irish society. The research involved in-depth interviews with six undergraduate and qualified students which provided a framework to explore the challenges facing young adults when deciding on their prospects. Interviews were based on a set of semi-structured questions (Appendix 1.) which maintained a focus on the key study objectives while allowing for the capture of unplanned information pertinent to the study. A dictaphone was used to capture the data during the interviews. Following the completion of the interviews the data was transcribed and prepared for analysis.

Analysis technique

The data was examined using Thematic Analysis which looks for common themes within the body and across the range of the transcripts. This analysis technique offers broad and insightful information and that allows for unexpected themes, which may arise in the course of the interviews. Qualitative research produces new research theories and may also add to established theories and text. In this case, the study attempts to understand the views of young adults in the context of established theory and understanding by analysing their responses. The results and discussion will attempt to add to this existing body of work.

Participants

The study consisted of interviewing six young adults who were either completing their undergraduate courses or have recently completed their studies. Participants were selected on the basis of a diverse range of studies associated with a broad range of potential work

opportunities. The work career sectors which are represented in the study are; pharmacy, fashion, law, social care, arts and teaching. Male and female sexes were represented and the group included participants from urban and rural backgrounds. The participants fitted the majority 20 ó 25 year old demographic who are now completing their college courses and who will be seeking employment in the coming years.

Researching Attitudes

According to Bohner *et al* (2002, 4) attitudes represent an evaluative response to an object....a summary evaluation of an object of thought. The writers draw on various theorists who describe attitudes as either an enduring concept which are stored in memory....stable over a longer period or as a temporary construction, which individuals construct at the time an evaluative judgement is needed. Bohner *et al* (2004, 1-10) put forward the notion that that a person's attitude towards an object....may influence his behaviour towards this object.

The concept of attitudes involves knowledge, the effects of this knowledge and the behaviour that ensues. The purpose of the study is to understand how students feel towards employment in Ireland. In this regard the study attempts to understand their attitudes towards job opportunities, their most likely employment location and the knowledge which help to form these views. The formation of attitudes will instigate a particular behaviour. In this case the behaviour may constitute plans to either emigrate, look for work within these shores or continued education. Determining the attitudes of students will demonstrate the likely plans of postgraduate students as they complete their graduate programmes.

Results

This chapter presents the key themes which have emerged from the qualitative research. The data was examined using Thematic Analysis which highlighted common themes within the body and across the range of the transcripts. For the purpose of the research and this results chapter each participant [interviewee] is identified by the letter P and sequentially numbered 1-6.

The themes generated through the analysis process will be outlined and supported by relevant extracts from the interview transcripts. In some cases the opinions expressed on the various themes differed while in others the level or tone of opinion varied. This will be demonstrated through the citation of additional or alternative transcript extracts, where appropriate. The key themes generated through the thematic analysis process are:

1. A stressed economy
2. Employment and careers at home or away
3. The reality of unemployment
4. Forced emigration
5. The role of education in career development

A stressed economy

The analysis showed that students are very aware of the poor state of the Irish economy and recognise that a dramatic change has taken place. Overall the participants are not overly interested in the detail and did not articulate the economic problems in quantitative terms. The language used suggested that students were resigned to medium and long term

difficulties within the Irish economy with little immediate job opportunities.

“Well things certainly aren’t looking too well at the moment. There doesn’t seem to be any signs of improvement. Every day, there’s more and more bad news, even with the new Government. It will take some times, and in this time, Ireland will lose a lot of their young graduates. The next generation is moving and settling elsewhere, leaving Ireland and its current state behind, this isn’t the way forward” (P2)

In the medium term participants did not hold out much hope for economic recovery in Ireland. The general view was that little economic opportunities existed although some expressed a view that it depended on which sector a person sought opportunities. Overall confidence in Government is poor and graduates feel isolated and abandoned.

“The prospects for the coming years are still going to be bleak. The Government don’t have plans, policies or prospects for the people that are most affected. It is the lower and middle classes that are once again been targeted at. Young people are given no hope, it is just driving us young graduates out of the country” (P5)

The majority of interviewees were not entirely dismissive of Ireland as a prospect for economic prosperity in the long term and hold the view that opportunities will arise again.

“I think it will be at least six or seven years before the Irish economy is recovered to a degree that graduates will focus on Ireland to build careers. I think many graduates have the best intentions to work and support Ireland but realistically the graduates of today are moving abroad to find immediate work” (P3)

Interviewees were of the view that the Irish economy did not offer diverse opportunities for the range of skills and qualifications attained during college. Jobs were undertaken just to provide income as posed to career building.

“You hear that young people are now working in McDonald’s etc, even with degrees behind them. People are not doing the jobs they set out to do, they are doing jobs for the sake of it, just to get by” (P5)

Employment and careers – home or away

The general view is that the downturn in the Irish economy has changed the landscape to such a degree that career prospects are limited and reflect the economic outlook. In response to a question on career prospects interviewees were of the opinion that employment opportunities were scarce and whatever opportunities did exist, they did not match their expectations in terms of particular career choice and security.

“Well in my area of work, pharmacy, there aren’t as much opportunities at the moment, like there was five years ago. There is locum work but this isn’t permanent and I guess I feel it’s therefore not secure. Not as secure as I’d like it to be” (P1)

“There not too good as I hope to go into law and there are virtually no jobs in this sector in Ireland at the moment, it may take some time for these positions to open again, at that costs time” (P2)

Interviewees, when asked to if they considered a change of career in light of the changed economy, expressed a reluctance to do this, wanting to persist with their chosen career despite altered conditions.

“No. I always wanted to teach, even if there are no jobs out there. I will not change what I always wanted to do. So that’s why I have decided to go abroad to teach rather than giving it all up just because I can’t find a job here, at least then I will be able to do what I always wanted and dreamt of going” (P6)

“No. I still want to do what I want to do but I may have to take another job until I get a job in the area that I have my degree in” (P5)

Participants were queried as to the role of monetary remuneration in their career choice, as part of understanding attitudes towards careers in a changed economic climate. The analysis showed that five out of the six participants were definitive in their response citing job satisfaction and career advancement as key motivating factors in profession choice. Respondents were quite animated on this topic, expressing clear and detailed answers,

demonstrating a real passion for their future work. At the time of choosing careers respondents did not have a full appreciation of income levels but have become more aware as knowledge levels builds.

“No, not at all. And I may soon regret that! I’m so passionate about the fashion industry and have been all my life, although I have considered other careers, some with great income levels, my heart was always in fashion. It was only when I started working in the industry and assisting stylists, photographers and editors that I learned how little they get paid. So much of the work is done out of love for the job rather than the money. I had quite a good business head in school and loved writing so I thought a career in the marketing aspect of fashion would be a wise move” (P3)

The research questions were also designed to elicit student’s views regarding the rights of citizens as regards employment and who should fulfil the role of employment supplier. The responses were consistent in that the widely held view was that people had the right to employment and the state was responsible for providing work opportunities for its citizens.

“Well in Ireland it is the responsibility of the state. The Irish Government let the state get itself into such a disgrace that there is no employment. It is their job to keep the country going; it is their job to keep society functioning, with that it’s not the fault of the citizens. It’s the responsibility of the state, as a developed country, to keep its people in the workforce, with many opportunities available to them” (P5)

“Yes, a developed country should have the opportunity for employment, training and work opportunities. So for that reason I think one does deserve the right of employment, especially in a modern society” (P3)

“Yes, if we all get a good education or work hard to get to where we are today, well then yes one does deserve the right to employment. I mean we are losing young educated graduates to other countries” (P1)

The reality of unemployment

Participants were asked for their views on unemployment and their replies were universal in that they recognised the burden unemployment placed on students and society in general. Comments also indicated that something should be done, at government level, to reduce the

numbers of unemployed in the state.

“Well it’s something that we are all beginning to get used to. We are hearing about it every day. You can’t turn on the TV or open a newspaper without seeing people losing their jobs or struggling to find work. I think it’s a sad state of affairs. I never thought things would get this bad, it’s kind of worrying. I mean two years ago people were saying it was going to get this bad, but I guess as a student you are totally oblivious to it all. You think you will be fine by the time you get out there” (P1)

“I think a lot of it could be turned around, creating more jobs. Instead of building up the economy and creating the jobs they [Government] are doing the opposite and forgetting they still pay out welfare to the unemployed, which is increasing every month” (P6)

When queried about the prospects of unemployment, in the context of receiving unemployment benefit, participants were clear and did not accept the inevitability of joining the dole queues, suggesting other alternatives in the event of unemployment. There was a general sense of disappointment as to the numbers which were out of work and unable to find employment.

“I guess for me it leaves me the option of emigrating in hope to find work in another country or to try get as much experience to my name in the industry [of choice] as possible. Then when the economy picks up again, I have all the experience behind me, which can only be beneficial” (P3)

“I’m versatile, and have no employment snobbery. If it were to happen I would remain productive” (P4)

“No matter what happens I will not go on the dole, to be quite frank. I will temp wherever; [I] will travel across seas and work in the field I’m trained in. Even if I have to scrape pennies to live, but I will not go on the dole queue” (P6)

The study found that students had strong opinions on the impact of unemployment in contemporary Irish society. Unemployment was regarded as a failure and a loss of identity. Unemployment was also found to undermine a person’s sense of achievement and independence to enjoy a decent lifestyle, on a day to day basis. In the context of

unemployment, education was also seen as a waste of time.

“It would mean a loss of self-identity, income and opportunities to travel within my area of work. I need employment in order to survive and get by in life. Employment gives a sense of achievement and something to build on. Also with employment comes a salary, which is needed to get by on a day to day basis” (P3)

“I think it would be a smack in the face to go on the dole after three years in college, the hard work and then the Government to turn around and say there are no jobs but you can get the dole. It’s like, why bother paying that money, to go to college, and all the hard work if I’m going to end up on the dole, in the first place” (P6)

Forced emigration

The research attempts to understand the attitudes of young students towards the prospects of emigration in the light of economic decline. The responses did not universally support emigration as the only option, following completion of education programmes. Instead the majority considered it as a likely option, but only in the face of unemployment in their own particular sector.

“No. I think I will stay here. I see it as an option but I don’t want it to be an option. I want to have settled here first, qualify and work here for a few years and then maybe travel once I’ve settled. Not the other way around, where I have to move [abroad] and settle somewhere else and then come back home when I get a chance. It was never what I planned” (P5)

“Yeah, it’s an option, the educational sector is universal as long as I can migrate to an English speaking country employment should be possible to me. However, although it is an option it is not a necessity” (P4)

Continuing on the theme of emigration participants had mixed views when asked if emigration was always part of their plans even if employment was available at home. In some cases respondents said that emigration was always on the agenda while in other cases the original intention was to find employment in this country.

“Yeah. I’ve always wanted to move abroad after college to work and live in a different country. Although Ireland is a great country and we gone far over time, it seems to be going downhill at the moment. Although it has always been part of my plans, it’s good to know if those plans didn’t go through then you could have

something here, but now there's nothing here" (P2)

"No. I studied in Scotland, as I said before, so I planned to come home once I qualified. However, now being back in Ireland and with not having many career opportunities, emigration has only recently become part of my plans, so it's not something I had planned years ago" (P1)

"As a definite career and lifestyle option, I want to work in a fast pace city, and this is where most of the employment is in fashion" (P3)

Research participants were also asked as to whether they would travel in a group or join colleagues on arrival, in an attempt to understand the social aspect of emigration. In general, the analysis indicated that participants either expressed a desire to travel with friends or suggested that they would link up with friends. This signified a desire to seek social network support as part of the migration process.

"No, with friends definitely. I want someone I know with me. Friends have already emigrated so my plan would be to join them" (P1)

"But I know a couple of people from my college that have applied for Dubai so there is at least twelve of my friends I know plan to move. That's twelve out of fifty people in St Pats [college] that are planning on emigrating, so I would know people" (P6)

"Well, I would be willing to travel alone, yeah. If someone else was planning a similar move to mine, then I'd probably try to organise something together but I wouldn't be averse to setting off on my own" (P2)

The role of education system

The thematic analysis highlighted the role of education in personal and career development. The students were asked to comment on the importance of education in the pursuance of work and were also asked if there was always an intention to study at third level. Participants outlined the significant role of education in their career development and highlighted the fact that third level education is an important part of student thinking and has become the accepted post-secondary school route amongst contemporary 17/18 year olds.

"Yes, definitely it's kind of expected of us to go to college. I always knew I wanted to teach so I don't really have an option to teach without going to college" (P6)

“Emm....like yeah I have always wanted to do a third level course myself. I know it’s probably the way were brought up and who influences us but I always felt that a third level education was the best way to secure your future like getting a job etc.” (P1)

The analysis underlines the fact that the students did not necessarily choose college courses based on working home or abroad. The predominant factor at the time the course was chosen related to a desire to enter a particular profession and career. At course application time issues such as emigration did not feature in student thinking.

“Well I suppose with my career, like pharmacy, I knew myself I could work anywhere in the world. It didn’t matter to me at the time of applying for college course as I always intended to work in Ireland. Looking back on it now, I’m lucky my career choice allows me to work abroad with the way things are now. It’s definitely something I would advise the younger generation to consider the future when doing their CAO” (P1)

Strong views emerged regarding the education system and its suitability in preparing students for employment. The overriding view was that second level education, while academically good; it did not adequately prepare students for working life. Many respondents put forward the view that the leaving certificated focused far too much on ‘points’ and regurgitating information. One interviewee describes the leaving certificate as a ‘memory test’

“It’s not great in that regard. I don’t think that Irish secondary school students get any practical experience of their subjects or of their potential career options. I think as well, that they’re too limited in what subjects to do. Like, some of the compulsory ones in school, such as Irish or other languages or sciences are of absolutely no use to some students but they still have to sit through them. I’d much prefer the English system where they pick fewer subjects but ones that’ll be relevant to whatever career they want to do” (P2)

Discussion

The key objective of the study is to explore and identify the attitudes and views of students regarding their prospects of achieving full employment and rewarding careers in post Celtic Tiger Ireland. In addition the study will also determine the views of students regarding emigration and attempt to establish if young students consider working abroad as their only option. The study also attempted to establish in what way the attitudes of students determined the direction of academic course, career and work location choice. It is also the aim of the study to explore the reasons why students have formed particular viewpoints regarding their future.

Overall the study found that the students were aware of the economic stress that existed in post Celtic Tiger Ireland, although quantitative economic detail was not offered. The attitude of participants towards emigration was one of an acceptance that emigration was now inevitable although not necessarily one of choice. Emigration was seen as -forcedø and suppressed original career plans. Unemployment was judged to be a scourge on society and joining the dole queue was to be avoided. The role of education was acknowledged as critical in career development, while there was universal criticism regarding the Irish education system as a preparation for future working life.

Stressed Economy

All of the participants fully acknowledged the economic stress that persists in this country. They were also aware that this was a dramatic change, one which they did not envisage as they first began making plans for third level education and subsequent careers. The age profile of the respondents placed them in a position where they would have enjoyed economic prosperity for most of their lives and were not to be exposed to employment difficulties in society. The literature review outlined that the Celtic Tiger years presented a

position where unemployment fell below 4%, 2 million were employed and economic growth remained at over 5% annually (O'Hagan *et al*, 2008). While the participants did not quantify this economic prosperity they were fully aware that Ireland had enjoyed a period of wealth and opportunity.

There was also recognition amongst the respondents that the economic outlook was bleak and that there was no signs of an immediate upturn. There was a unanimous view that the poor prospects for the economy would have a negative impact on jobs for the coming years. Not all respondents held the view that job opportunities were completely gone but the majority were of the opinion that job hunters would have to look outside of their chosen careers for employment.

The responses to the questions posed on the economy during the interview process aimed to elicit specific quantitative economic data from the students. Instead participants choose to make general comments and did not seem interested in the detail of the economic decline. While the views expressed were generalised they were also consistent. The conclusions reached by the students regarding poor career prospects were based on media comment and opinions were formed through social networking. These conclusions are supported by the economic commentators (Ernst & Young: 2010) who predict that there will be no rebound in the Irish economy until 2013 and unemployment will remain as high as 14% until 2014. The views of respondents feed into the *rationalization process*, theorized by Max Weber (Watson: 2008), whereby students will adopt a deliberate calculated approach to acquiring employment. The attitudes of students towards future employment in a declining economy are further enhanced by the socialisation process developed through social networking commonplace amongst the student population.

Employment and careers – Home or Away

All survey participants had a clear and premeditated career plan, which predated entering college, and expressed continued committed to that plan. Employment and career development were considered to be an automatic process with little concern over whether this process would take place home or away. Prior to the economic downturn slightly more than half of the respondents had held the view that they would seek employment in Ireland while the remaining group had intended to move abroad to build their careers. The survey results indicated a significant change and the majority now felt that their best opportunity now lay abroad. Serious consideration was being given to emigration.

The views expressed by interviewees suggested that there were almost an equal amount of students who had originally planned to build their careers abroad versus those who planned to work at home. These original plans were formed before the influence of the economic crisis. In this respect the survey suggested that a significant proportion of the respondents had always intended to build their careers outside of this country regardless of economic conditions. This response is reflected in the writings of Castles *et al* (2009, 2-7), where they comment that ‘human beings have always moved in search of new opportunities’. This also fits with migration systems theory outlined by the same writers (2003, 23) suggesting that populations move based on ‘prior and historical links’ and ‘culture’ as well as economics. The literature review (CSO) also highlighted the fact that young adults sought to build their careers outside of Ireland even during the economic boom. The study also found a direct correlation between those who planned to move abroad after completing their education and those who choose a universal education course that would allow them to work abroad. This structured approach to career development again reflects the ‘rationalisation process’ and ‘legitimate order’ views of Max Weber, outlined by Watson (2008, 57).

Half of the respondents felt that their original career path was no longer available to them in Ireland while the other half expressed some hope that opportunities were still available. Even with the respondents who expressed hope, there was a recognition that the challenge facing prospective job seekers was enormous and job applicants with the highest academic grades were best placed to succeed. The research demonstrated a huge desire for participants to remain within their chosen careers, despite the economic downturn. The majority were quite vociferous in that they would not change their careers and would choose the option of travel in pursuance of their chosen profession rather than abandoning their academic work. This defiant position is taken at a time when they have not yet emigrated and contrasts with the position they may find themselves exposed to later. Castles *et al* (2009, 20) posit that the experience of migration and of living in another country often leads to modification of the original plans, so that migrants' intentions at the time of departure are poor predictors of actual behaviour. A minority of participants also suggested that they would be flexible and expand on their options, within their chosen sector. This desire to remain within a chosen career path, and if necessary emigrate, was further demonstrated when respondents were asked if monetary reward was a key motivator in career choice. The unanimous response was that job satisfaction was more important than money, although monetary reward was necessary to maintain lifestyle. These educated young adults fit the broad categorisation of professionals and business people whom, according to Watson (2008, 234), claim high level of job satisfaction compared with manual workers.

The reality of unemployment

The reality of unemployment came as a shock to the respondents. There is now, a broad understanding amongst interviewees of the level of unemployment and its significance. The

respondents expressed the view that the reality of unemployment influenced their decisions regarding home or away employment. At a personal level unemployment was not a desirable outcome to years of study and most respondents were of the opinion that citizens have to right to work within their own state. It is the responsibility of the state to provide career opportunities. It was the view that unemployment affected the working class and poorly educated most.

Respondents expressed dismay at the levels of unemployment and described the current position as 'disgraceful', 'devastating' and 'appalling'. The swift move from 4% to 14% unemployment over the last three years (CSO) came as a huge surprise to most. Reference was also made as to the pervasive nature of unemployment commentary, which exists across all media outlets. The general feeling was that people were 'forced' onto the dole queues with little opportunities for graduates. Borjas (1989, 461) describes how individuals will look for an environment that will 'maximise their well-being'. Given the current rate of unemployment and the attitudes of respondents towards this position, their 'well-being' will be best served in alternative work locations.

The study demonstrated how participants view unemployment from a personal perspective. They viewed unemployment as a 'loss of identity', 'waste of education', 'loss of security' and attracts a negative stigma. There was an air of despondency portrayed at the thought of going through difficult years of study without the expected reward of employment. Respondents took the prospect of unemployment personally, felt let down by the state and expressed an attitude of '*well to hell with it, I'm leaving*'.

Forced Emigration

The study attempted to gauge student's attitudes towards emigration and the overwhelming response from participants was that young graduates were confronted with 'forced emigration'. This concept fits with the writings of Boyle *et al* (1998, 180) where forced migration is described as situations where individuals have only negligible choice over whether they move or stay within their own country. The research showed that less than 50% of participants originally planned to emigrate while they all now viewed emigration as a real option. With forced emigration circumstances in the host country may not turn out as planned. The experience could be 'rootless and sad' as described by Boyle *et al* (1998, 20) and carry psychology stress as described by Ryan *et al* (2007).

The 'push-pull' neo-classical migratory theories, outlined by Castles *et al* (2003, 22), were reflected in the results of the survey. Respondents were of the view that foreign economies offered better living standards and good career opportunities. These 'pull factors' attract graduates to stronger economies. In the opinion of respondents the Irish economy offered little in the way of employment, coupled with high taxation and falling income levels. These are the 'push factors' which force students to emigrate.

Participants also acknowledged that their attitudes towards emigration were influenced by the views of friends and peers. They expressed a view that they would travel with other students or would link up with friends and acquaintances on arrival. This behaviour reflects the notion put forward by Castles *et al* (2009, 24) that emigration decisions are not always made at an individual level but are heavily influenced by family and communities. Although emigration was viewed as necessary, respondents expressed a desire to return to this country in due

course. This pattern of behaviour replicated the trend of the late nineties and early noughties when thousands of Irish emigrants returned home, as the Celtic Tiger took hold (CSO).

The role of education in career development

The role of education in career development came across strongly in the research. The participants were either completing or had just completed their third level courses. This life-cycle position brought education into focus and strong views emerged regarding the Irish education system.

The unanimous view of respondents was that education was critical in career development. According to the research education is equally important to employment at home or abroad. Respondents had always planned to attend third level education in preparation for employment. This decision was influenced by family and society in general. The majority of leaving certificate students are now expected to submit a CAO application.

The research also showed that career plans dictated course choice, indicating a structured and rational approach taken by students in pursuing career development. This approach was identified in the literature review where Watson (2008) outlined Weber's view that a person will adopt a deliberate calculated approach in the pursuit of a consciously selected end. The research also held that, in the opinion of the respondents, career development depended on education level achievement, although personal ambition also played its part.

Respondents were critical of the secondary level education system and their responses outlined that the system did not offer sufficient preparation for working life. The view was that secondary level curriculum was too broad and contained compulsory subjects not

required for work. The research suggested that the system did not allow for practical experience and focused too much on exams and points attainment. It was felt that this system pushed students into unsuitable and inappropriate college courses. The literature review pointed out that the Irish education fits with the Anglo-American model which looks to provide a broad and extended education but is void of a practical element found in the Northern European model.

The literature review into migration trends identified that people will travel when economic disparities exist between economies. In these situations, according to Castles *et al* (2003, 23), it is the higher skilled members of society who are most likely to emigrate. This supports the attitudes and views of respondents who concluded that emigration was the most likely route and their education achievements equipped them to do this.

Conclusions

The views of students towards employment in a post Celtic Ireland was found to be clear and they regarded emigration as the most likely option. All students recognised the difficult economic climate that now exists in this country and they are of the opinion that employment in their particular chosen field would be difficult. The research also highlighted the fact that at the outset of their third level education programs slightly less than half of the respondents had already planned to emigrate, demonstrating the propensity to emigrate amongst Irish students.

Respondents were also of the view that education was crucial in attaining employment but were critical of the structure of the education system. The key problem area, according to respondents, was the absence of practical experience within the secondary school curriculum.

The practicality of some leaving certificate subjects was also called into question on the basis of their inappropriateness to employment and work.

The research also indicated that students viewed the state as the provider of employment and expressed the opinion that it was a citizen's right to find employment and work within their own country. Unemployment was seen as a scourge on society, which resulted in a loss of self-identity and placed a stigma on those who ended up on the dole queues.

A number of surprising issues emerged during the research which was not discussed in previous articles and texts. Going into third level education respondents had a clear vision as to the area of work they would like to pursue. This vision determined their third level course choice and despite the bleak economic outlook they wished to remain within this chosen career path, albeit for some, the place of employment would change. This conviction to pursue a career path was surprising and differed from previous attitudes. In the past young emigrants would have expressed a willingness to take up work in any field. The new found belief amongst students in their own abilities and ambitions was a surprising outcome and demonstrates a confidence not previously evident amongst previous emigrants.

Respondents also looked on emigration as a temporary measure and were forthright in their view that they would return home, despite that fact that economic outlook is poor. In the past there was a certain finality associated with emigration, today it is considered a temporary measure. This is a surprising but an encouraging outcome and suggests that a mold has been broken and emigration is regarded as a temporary alternative. The research demonstrates positivity towards Ireland as a long-term place of employment despite the anger displayed regarding the immediate reality of forced emigration. This positivity did not come across in

previous commentary on emigration behavior of past generations.

The overall attitude of young Irish students towards education was also surprising. The literature review did not highlight views of young adults on the importance of education in career development and most of the literature came from academics and political commentators. Students expressed a mature and informed view on the benefits of education and recognised that third level courses allowed greater choice, both home and abroad. The increase in third level attendance and the greater level of understanding, which has obviously ensued, has opened student's minds the value of higher education.

Limitations

The study is based on interviews with six individuals. The results and discussion are generalised against this small sample. When you consider that there are currently 150,000 students attending third level courses this sample size may therefore be problematic.

All respondents made decisions on course content and career choice at a time when the economy was in a much healthier state. The subsequent economic decline was swift and has attracted a high level of media attention. This scenario may have created a bias response. It is questionable that a different set of responses may have resulted had economic conditions been consistently weak throughout the period covering course to employment decisions.

Future Research

This area of study is important in attempting to understand the links between forced emigration, employment prospects [the economy] and education. In this respect future research should focus on establishing the specific reasons why students choose particular career paths. The question remains as to why individuals have chosen specific careers. Is it related to employment prospects alone or does it relate to an innate desire to work in a particular field, which best suites their interests and abilities? From a sociological perspective this area is of enormous importance.

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Fig. 1. Economic Trend (2000-2010) Source: ERSI Report

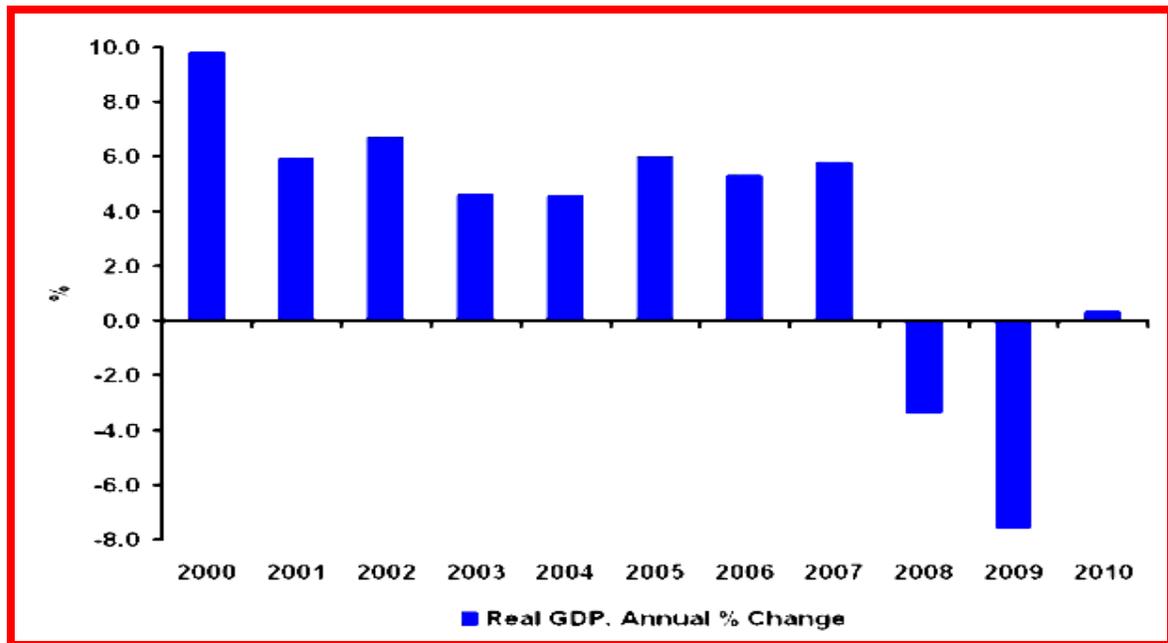


Fig. 2. Unemployment Trend (2000-2010) Source: ERSI Report

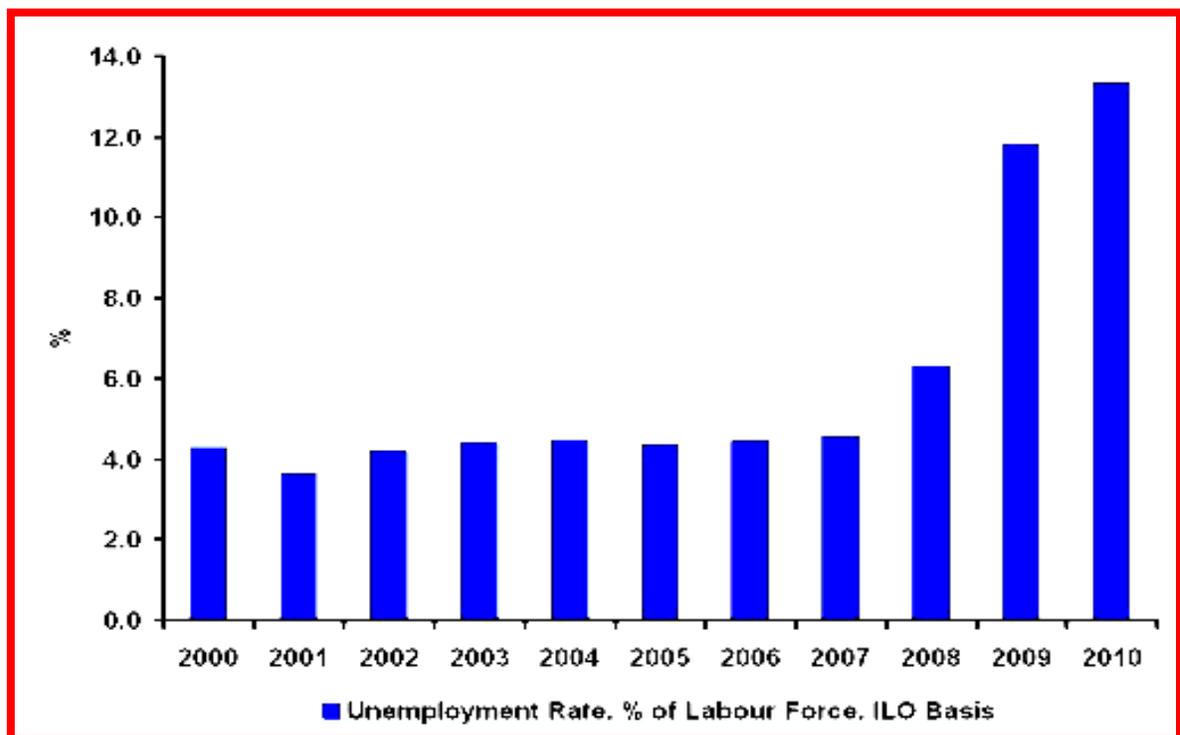
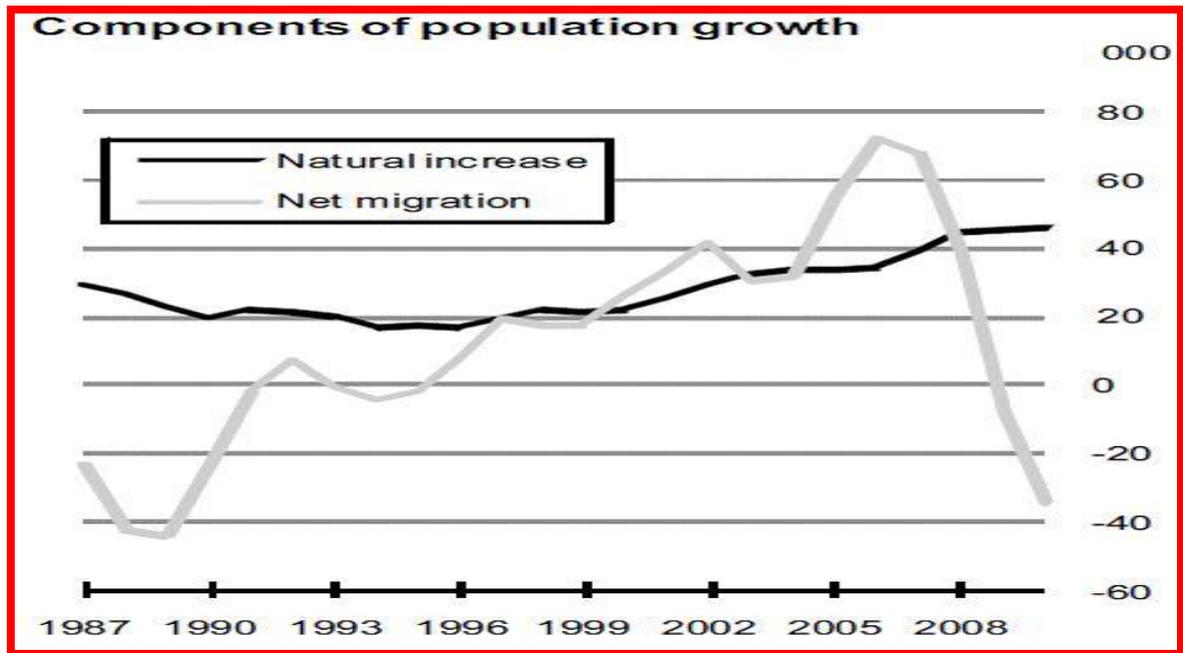


Fig. 3. Migration Trend (1987 ó 2008) Source: Finfacts Ireland



Appendix 1

Interview Questions

Education

- Has it always been your intention to take up a third level course?
- Is your education important for your employment prospects?
- Did your career ambitions dictate your choice of third level course?
- To what extent is your career dependent on your education?
- Are post graduate courses part of your strategy for career advancement and in what context?
- When choosing your third level course had you considered the course in the context of working at home versus working abroad?
- What is your opinion of the Irish education system as regards preparation for employment and career growth?

Migration

- Do you think that emigration is an option for you following completion of degree? Why?
- Is emigration something that has always been part of your plans?
- If it was, for what length of time had you expected to emigrate?
- Had it always been your intention to emigrate either for a short period or as a definite career option?
- If you considered emigrating would you follow your original career plan or would you take up whatever opportunity presented itself?
- If you were to emigrate would you travel alone?
- If so, on arrival would you join others who have previously left this country?
- How do you feel your education has equipped you to work in a different country?

Government Policies

- What do you think of government education policies as a preparation for working life?
- What do you think about government policies in terms of employment and job creation in the coming years?
- Do you think the government can encourage young people to choose Ireland as their place of work?

Appendix 1(Cont.)

Irish Economy

- What do you think of the current state of the Irish economy?
- What do you think about the prospects for the coming years?
- Do you think there will be employment opportunities in this country for graduates in the short, medium and long term?
- Do you think the Irish economy offers a range of opportunities for young graduates?
- In your opinion, will the Irish economy recover to a degree that young graduates will focus on Ireland to build careers?
- Are governments responsible for ensuring that jobs are available for an educated workforce?

Career Prospects

- What are your career prospects in today's economic climate?
- Is your initial career path open to you in this country?
- When you first considered your future career did you intend to work in Ireland?
- Would you now consider changing your career plans considering the decline in the economy?
- Would this career change be influenced by job opportunities at home or abroad?
- Was your original career choice based expected income level?
- Was your choice based on being able to work in a number of employment sectors?
- Did your original career choice take into account the possibility of having to move abroad?

Unemployment

- What do you think of unemployment in this country?
- What is your opinion on the prospect of unemployment?
- What would that mean for you?
- Do you think that employment and work opportunities is a citizen's right in a modern society?
- Is employment the responsibility of the state or the citizen?