

Young people in transition in local contexts: an exploration of how place and time frame young people's educational aspirations, decisions and anticipated transitions.

Ceryn Evans

School of Social Sciences

Cardiff University

Doctor of Philosophy

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This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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Abstract

It has been well documented that young people's social class, gender and ethnicity have significant bearing upon their participation in post-16 and higher education. Less research has considered how decisions regarding participation in post-16 education and HE are framed by the *places* and *timeframe* in which young people live. This comparative and qualitative study of young people aged 16-18 in the Rhondda Valleys and Newport considers how place and the contemporary economic context bears upon their aspirations and educational choices.

The research shows that the contemporary economic climate and popular commentaries of 'recession,' 'cuts' and 'crisis' persuade young people to remain in post-16 education and HE as a means of avoiding entry into this risky landscape and investing in human capital. The study revealed that place did appear to bear upon their decisions – albeit in subtle ways. Firstly, local opportunity structures informed the type of transitions young people made from compulsory to post-compulsory education. Drawing on Gambetta's typology, where opportunities are limited but available, young people *jumped* into post-16 education but where opportunities are severely restricted, they were *pushed* into post-16 education. Local opportunity structures also informed young people's plans to leave or stay within their locality, compelling them to leave places where opportunities are scarce. Place also matters to young people's university choices and future aspirations through their emotional attachments to immediate and national localities.

The research offers new insights into the importance of place in informing the processes by which educational decisions are made. It raises important questions regarding the extent to which differences in young people's decision making processes have implications for their future experiences of education and life chances. It also has political implications regarding the geographical location of higher education opportunities and the role of universities in outward migration.

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Chapter one

Introduction

Young people in transition: educational decisions and transitions in a 'cold' economic climate.

Few sociologists would deny that where a person lives and when they were born matter to their opportunities for learning and employment. Despite this, these concerns frequently pale into insignificance in much sociological research that explores the educational choices and transitions of young people. These concerns lie at the heart of this study. This thesis is about young people making educational decisions and anticipating their transition from school to further and higher education or elsewhere at a particular moment in time and within particular locations in South Wales. It forefronts time and place as lenses through which to explore youth transitions with the aim of deepening our understanding of how educational inequalities are produced and reproduced.

My curiosity with the significance of contemporary economic events for young people's educational aspirations and choices was sparked by heavy media coverage of the economic 'down turn' following global economic 'recession' which Wales experienced in 2008-2009. The global economic recession caused the UK economy as a whole, and Wales included, to rapidly contract during the second quarter of 2008. Although the global recession which had swept through Wales 'officially' ended in 2009, by the middle of 2010 unemployment figures in Wales continued to exceed the UK average at 9 per cent (StatsWales, 2013a) . The enduring impact of the economic 'down turn' on rates of unemployment was reflected in dramatically increased rates of individuals claiming 'Jobseekers Allowance', a form of financial support provided by the state for individuals living in the UK who are actively looking for employment but unable to obtain it. High rates of unemployment in Wales extended well into 2010 and media attention on this was extensive and was

steeped in popular commentaries which illuminated the impact of the ‘recession’ on the lives of young people (BBC News Wales, 2010a). Young people aged 16-24 were reportedly one of the hardest hit demographic groups, with 14 per cent unemployed between October 2009 and September 2010, a substantial increase from the 2007-2008 figures (Jennings, 2010).

Paralleling these increased rates of unemployment has been a large growth in the number of school leavers staying on in post-16 education. In Wales, while the statutory age at which young people leave compulsory education is 16, the numbers of young people remaining in education or training beyond this age have steadily increased over recent years. In 2010, 83 per cent of young people aged 16-18 were engaged in some kind of post-16 education in Wales, representing a substantial increase from previous years. Recent years have witnessed a growth in the diversity and quantity of subjects which young people can study at post-16 level, particularly within vocationally orientated subjects. This, as well as funding arrangements and financial support, has enabled more young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to stay in post-16 education.

However, in response to the UK economic down turn a newly elected Coalition Liberal Democrat/Conservative government introduced a number of ‘austerity measures’ putatively aimed at helping rebuild the economy. Public spending cuts began in 2010, including cuts to the funding of higher education (HE) and financial support for post-16 learners. Whilst Westminster Government abolished the financial support provided for post-16 students in England (the education maintenance allowance) in 2010 this financial support continued for post-16 learners in Wales. Yet cuts to the funding of HE were widespread. As a result of these cuts to the public funding of HE, by 2012, many HEIs in England and Wales were charging up to £9000 a year in tuition fees for all or some of their courses.

I became interested in how these conditions might bear upon young people’s educational decisions and future aspirations as they faced a landscape characterised not only by slumped employment opportunities and hugely competitive labour markets, but also the increased personal burden of funding their higher education. It was also a landscape in which rates of participation in post-compulsory education

had increased substantially following an expansion of vocational options available to young people who study in post-16 education in Wales. It was, in addition, a context in which dominant discourses continue to position post-16 and higher education as the means to economic security. Over recent decades, discourses dominated by human capital theory have galvanised the message that ‘the more we learn the more we earn’ (Brown, 2003). Such discourses have helped cement demand for higher education, thus increasing the supply of graduates and in turn exacerbating positional competition for a limited supply of jobs (Mayhew and Keep, 2004). Young people today are under increasing pressure to equip themselves with credentials needed to secure a ‘positional advantage’ in a highly competitive labour market. They are making transitions at a time in which further and higher education credentials do not guarantee success, but without them they have little chance of getting ahead in the competition for a livelihood (Brown, 2003).

My focus on this particular historical moment in which young people were and continue to be situated takes these characteristics to be at the centre of analysis. I was driven to consider how the opportunity structures that young people faced in 2010 in South Wales framed their aspirations, anticipated transitions and educational decisions. Specifically, I was concerned with how the peculiarities of the contemporary economic and education landscape might inform the decisions that young people make about their post-school lives. This required me to turn my attention to consider how the recent global ‘economic down-turn,’ with its associated popular commentaries of job-loss and unemployment, is understood and interpreted by young people and informs their decisions about their post-school lives. It was also necessary that I consider the ways in which educational opportunities, for example, the greatly expanded post-16 educational opportunities and expanded rates of participation in HE and the potentially looming changes to its funding, might inform their decisions. I was also interested in the ways in which the structures of education and employment opportunities in local contexts, as well as local social landscapes, might inform the aspirations and educational choices of young people.

I chose not to explore young people’s aspirations, educational choices and transitions longitudinally as others have done (Furlong and Biggart, 1999; Holland and Thompson, 2009) but to forefront a ‘snap-shot’ of time, the very particular, nuanced,

historical moment in which they moved through post-16 education. In so doing I hoped to reveal how educational and economic conditions at a particular point in history and the geographical settings in which young people live informed decision making processes underpinning their post-school destinations. It is in revealing these processes, which reflected nuanced differences in the localities in which young people live, as well as the contemporary economic climate, that the study claims to make an original contribution to existing understanding of educational decision-making and transitions.

Why place?

My chosen emphasis on place and its significance for young people's post-school transitions stems from interest in a body of sociological research which has illustrated the ways in which young people's educational choices are differentiated by class, gender and ethnic identities and inequalities (Ball et al 1999; 2000a; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). Young people with unequal access to material, social and cultural resources, experience different kinds of post-school opportunities and follow various pathways towards very different destinations (Ball et al, 1999; 2000a). Despite the important contribution made by research which has illustrated the socially and culturally differentiated nature of educational decisions and transitions, there has been less that has considered the role of geographical location in these decisions and transitions. It is this gap that my study hopes to fill, fore-fronting ways in which opportunity structures, varying across place and historically located, frame young people's opportunities. In light of this empirical gap, combined with changing landscapes in higher education funding and reduced employment opportunities for young people, it seemed appropriate to ask the following question;

How does time and place bear upon young people's aspirations, educational decisions and 'imagined' futures?

To explore these concerns, I conducted a comparative study of young people living in two geographical locations in South Wales: the Rhondda Valleys, a contiguous set of small towns and districts, and Newport, a medium-sized city. These locations are less than 30 miles apart, share similar levels of socio-economic disadvantage and are geographically proximal to a range of hierarchically differentiated higher education

institutions in Wales. Yet these places have very different industrial histories. The Rhondda Valleys have a coal-mining heritage whilst Newport has an industrial history associated with steel works and docks. Today, these localities continue to have very different landscapes of employment opportunities. Through qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 57 young people aged 16-18 living in these locations, fieldwork aimed to gather information on the extent to which local opportunity structures and social landscapes bore upon young people's aspirations, educational decisions and their 'imagined' futures. This necessarily required attention to the ways in which the historical trajectories of Newport and the Rhondda Valleys have given rise to sets of opportunities and constraints that young people living in them experience today.

'Place' is a slippery concept entrenched in meanings so wide ranging that to pinpoint a single definition is difficult and would be contentious. I therefore attempt to use the term as little as possible, instead referring to 'local opportunity structures' and 'local social landscapes' since I am primarily interested in them for young people's aspirations, educational decisions regarding staying on in post-16 education and their anticipated transitions from school to further, higher education or elsewhere. 'Local opportunity structures' refers to the scope and availability of employment and education opportunities in the immediate locality in which young people live. This required that I considered the sorts of employment opportunities available and accessible to young people living in the local area, taking account of factors such as transport systems and local infrastructure which might aid or inhibit access to employment opportunities for young people. 'Local social landscapes' refer to the character of the social fabric of a locality, particularly its kinship networks and demographic profile. I thus considered factors such as how long young people and their families have lived in the area and the extent to which their extended family lived nearby. I felt this was important for understanding how young people might be differently embedded in their locality by their kinship networks.

Whilst I will attempt to use these concrete terms rather than the more abstract term 'place' throughout this thesis, I have found Massey's (1995a) conceptualisation of place particularly useful. As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, her contention that places are made up of the accumulation of constantly shifting articulations of

social relations which make a place over time, has enabled me to explore how Newport and the Rhondda Valleys, as young people experience them today, are products of their social and industrial histories. It was therefore important that I attend to the social, political and economic heritage of these places in order to understand how these have created their present day social and economic landscapes which in turn bear upon young people's aspirations and educational decisions today.

Objectives of the study.

The study aims to explore the role of place and in particular, the role of local opportunity structures and social landscapes, in the aspirations young people hold, and the decisions they make about their post-school lives. In exploring this, the study aims to deepen our understanding of youth transitions. In exploring the aspirations, educational decisions and anticipated transitions of young people this brought my attention to their anticipated transitions after leaving the current stage of post-16 education in which they were engaged. This is referred to throughout the thesis as the 6th form, the name commonly attached to the physical space in schools in the UK where post-16 learners are located. These anticipated transitions invariably involve transitions to further, higher education, training or employment. In my focus on educational decisions I also look back at the decisions which brought young people to stay-on in post-16 education. Indeed, 'staying on' is a term I use frequently throughout this thesis, capturing the way that young people finish their compulsory education at the age of 16 in Wales, at which point they decide whether to remain in post-16 education (stay-on) or to leave and enter employment or training elsewhere. In this sense, my interest in young people's aspirations involved consideration of both their aspirations for their lives immediately following compulsory education as well as their longer term ones. This involved consideration of their career aspirations and their expectations and hopes for where they would live in the future. Attention to young people's aspirations and 'imagined futures' allows us to explore how local settings inform their anticipated trajectories, thus deepening understandings of how inequalities in young people's life chances are produced and maintained.

In bringing the 'local' to the forefront of the inquiry, (namely local opportunity structures and local social landscapes) this study does not deny the way in which

young people's opportunities are socially structured. Rather, a focus upon two localities which share similar levels of unemployment and economic inactivity enabled me to explore how the nuanced characteristics of similarly 'working-class localities' come to bear upon young people's aspirations, educational decisions and anticipated trajectories. In this way I was able to explore how the decisions which young people make about their post-school lives are informed not only by the material, social and cultural resources which they have access to, which vary with young people's social and economic backgrounds, but are also informed by the characteristics and features of local settings. I also explore how the contemporary economic and education landscape might inform the decisions that young people make about their post-school lives. This thesis therefore deepens our understanding of the ways in which young people's opportunities are not only socially structured but vary across place and are located in time.

Original contribution

The study makes an original contribution to the current literature on youth transitions by demonstrating the importance of place in the process by which the young people reach their educational decisions. Whilst reaching similar decisions regarding educational destinations, for example, choosing to remain in post-16 education and choosing to study in Welsh universities, the process by which young people reached these decisions was different across the localities. This reflected geographically differentiated employment opportunities and social landscapes. It is this original insight into educational decision making that the thesis offers. The findings of this study highlight the importance of looking beyond the destinations which young people reach to consider the decision making process underpinning them.

Structure of the thesis

In Chapter two I review theoretical approaches which have dominated explanations for socially differentiated educational choices and outcomes in order to present the theoretical framework underpinning the study. Here, I draw upon literature which explains young people's educational choices and transitions as products of rational choice on the one hand or cultural reproduction on the other. The overwhelming

focus of this literature has been on explaining socially unequal rates of progression on to higher education specifically rather than youth transitions more generally, and so the chapter overwhelmingly attends to this research.

Chapter three provides a more detailed look at literature which has explored the role of geographically differentiated education and employment opportunities in young people's post-school lives. Such research has overwhelmingly demonstrated that the scope and structure of employment opportunities in local contexts matter most for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. In this chapter I also consider research which has explored issues of place attachment and belonging in young people's university choices as well as their imagined futures. There is also consideration of research as to how the rhetoric of the knowledge economy, dominated by human capital theory, has impacted on participation in post-16 and higher education. In light of this literature a number of research questions are generated which aim to explore the role of local opportunity structures and local social landscapes for young people's educational choices and decisions.

Chapter four presents the rationale behind the use of semi-structured interviews as the method of data collection and attempts to make transparent the process of data collection and subsequent analysis. Chapter five aims to provide a detailed account of the places in which these young people live, illustrating how the present day structure of opportunities that exist in the Rhondda Valleys and Newport are products of their industrial and social heritages.

Chapters six to eight present the findings which emerged through thematic analysis of data which illustrate ways in which local opportunity structures and local social landscapes were important for young people's aspirations, choices and 'imagined' futures. The structure and position of these empirical chapters within the overall thesis broadly mirrors the transitions that the young people who were involved in the research were making, or anticipated making, from post-16 education on to further or higher education or elsewhere. Hence, Chapter six considers how the places described in Chapter five inform young people's aspirations and decisions regarding staying in post-16 education, as well as their anticipated transitions to FE and HE. It thus considers the first stage of transition from compulsory to post-compulsory

education by taking a retrospective look at the decision making process which brought the young people to stay-on in post-16 education. This chapter also considers young people's aspirations and anticipated transitions from the school 6th form on to FE, HE or employment. Specifically, it illustrates how local opportunity structures inform the decision making process by which these young people reached a decision to stay in post-16 education.

Subsequently, I turn to consider in greater detail, decisions regarding higher education in Chapter seven. Having explored aspirations and decisions regarding staying on in post-16 education and HE more generally in Chapter six, it seemed appropriate to take a closer look at this next stage of transition and to explore anticipated transitions to HE. Thus, in Chapter seven I explore the choices and decisions young people were making regarding where, geographically, to study for their HE. This brought close attention to issues of geography and place attachment in informing young people's university choices. Chapter eight then follows on from this, exploring young people's longitudinal aspirations. It considers *where* young people aspire and hope to live in the future, as well as their career aspirations, exploring how local opportunity structures and local social landscapes inform their aspirations and expectations for staying in and leaving their locality. The final chapter (nine) discusses the possible contribution that these findings make to theorising young people's educational choices and their sociological and political implications.

Chapter two

Aspirations, educational decisions and transitions: cultural reproduction or rational choice?

Extensive research has documented ways in which young people's aspirations, educational decisions and post-school transitions are informed by their cultural, social and material circumstances (Jackson and Marsden, 1962; Coffield et al, 1986; Bates and Riseborough, 1993; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Ball et al, 2000b; Pring et al, 2009). It has also illustrated ways in which young people's educational histories, including experience and prior attainment levels (Gorard and Smith, 2007), peer groups (Brooks, 2003) and family and social networks (Fuller et al, 2011) inform their post-school choices and transitions (Ball et al, 1999). Structures of opportunities in local contexts also frame young people's decisions and the routes they follow after compulsory schooling (Roberts, 1968; McDowell, 2003).

Sociologists and economists have also highlighted the differentiated post-16 routes that young people take; young people from the least socially advantaged homes are less likely to stay-on in post-16 education (Micklewright, 1986; Archer and Yamashita, 2003) and are less likely to pursue academically prestigious pathways through post-16 education, such as A-levels, than their peers from more socially advantaged homes (Sutton Trust, 2005; Hoelscher et al, 2008). These young people are also less likely to participate in higher education (HE) in general and elite higher education institutions (HEIs) in particular (Reay et al, 2001; Ball et al, 2002a). Since HE continues to be associated with destinations that are most financially rewarding, unequal access to post-16 pathways and qualifications leads to unequal access to hierarchically differentiated employment opportunities.

In explaining mechanisms underpinning both socially differentiated educational outcomes and patterns of participation in post-compulsory and higher education, sociologists have tended to position their analyses within one of two explanatory

frameworks. One illuminates the ‘powerful reproductive forces’ (Parker, 2000: 127) that underpin young people’s access to and participation in education. Such explanation implies that individuals are ‘pushed’ into given destinations by structural forces which are external to them. In contrast, sociologists committed to rational choice (or action) theory (RCT) emphasise the agency with which individuals construct their aspirations and make choices. They tend to argue that decisions and choices are based on considered judgement and calculative cost-reward analyses in relation to goals and preferences (Boudon, 1974; Goldthorpe, 1996). Others have also attempted to employ mixtures of these frameworks to explain class differences in educational decisions and transitions (Gambetta, 1987; Rees et al, 1997; Glaesser and Cooper, 2013). In the following section I discuss these contrasting explanations, and attempt to bring them together and, in doing so, describe the theoretical position underpinning this study.

‘Cultural reproduction’ explanations for post-school aspirations, choices and transitions.

Official versions of educational participation provide little acknowledgment of the role of cultural and social background in young people’s educational transitions. Young people are positioned as ‘a-cultural’, calculative and individualistic subjects who invest in their ‘human capital’ in order to improve their labour market prospects (Archer and Yamashita, 2003; Warrington, 2008). Non-participation in post-16 and higher education is consequently seen as reflecting ‘deficit aspirations,’ a failure to make the ‘right’ choice to embark on higher education as a means of achieving economic security. A corrective to these ‘a-cultural’ and overly individualist accounts of young people’s educational decisions and transitions has come from researchers who have been emphatic in their commitment to illustrating the importance of cultural and social contexts for young people’s likelihood of participating in post-16 and higher education (Ball et al, 2000a; Archer and Yamashita, 2003).

While this study is concerned with post-16 aspirations, choices and anticipated transitions on to a variety of pathways and destinations, including further and higher education, training and employment, much of the research which draws upon cultural

reproduction perspectives has attempted to explain social class inequalities in rates of participation in HE specifically (Reay et al, 2001; Ball et al, 2002a; Reay 2003). Researchers have drawn extensively upon Bourdieu's (1977; 1990) dual concepts of *habitus* and *cultural capital* to explain class differences in rates of participation in higher education and in hierarchically differentiated higher education institutions (HEIs) (Archer and Hutchings, 2000; Reay et al, 2001; Ball et al, 2002a). These researchers could be described as positioning their analysis within the perspective of 'cultural (or social) reproduction' because they largely support Bourdieu's contention that the family is the site at which educational and social advantage (or disadvantage) is reproduced (Reay, 1998a).

According to Reay et al (2001) and Ball et al (2002a) class habitus and cultural capital structure young people's orientations and dispositions towards HE. This means that young people from different social class backgrounds vary in the extent to which they position themselves inside or outside of the higher education arena. The concept of habitus has been used to explain why middle-class young people with access to dominant forms of cultural capital make largely 'automatic' transitions on to higher education (Reay et al, 2001; Ball et al, 2002a). Indeed, according to Bourdieu (1990:55):

Being the product of a particular class of objective regularities, the habitus tends to generate all the 'reasonable', 'common-sense' behaviours (and only these) which are possible within the limits of these regularities.

This conceptualisation of habitus is useful for understanding why transitions to HE are not so much a product of calculated decisions for middle-class young people, but rather, products of linear, predictable and unreflexive processes. It is a 'non-decision' (Ball et al, 2002a: 57) as they move into the HE arena as a 'fish in water' (Bourdieu 1990: 190). In contrast, young people with little in the way of family experience or knowledge of higher education, or without the appropriate kinds of 'cultural capital', are much less likely to *expect* to progress on to HE and are eventually less likely to do so (Reay et al, 2001). According to the latter and also Patiniotis and Holdsworth (2005) working-class young people not only experience material constraints but also

disjuncture between their working-class habitus and middle-class, elitist, higher education institutions. This gives rise to feelings of 'not fitting in' and thus to 'self-exclusion' from HE resulting in lower rates of participation amongst working class groups (Archer and Hutchings, 2000; Hutchings and Archer, 2001; Reay et al, 2001).

In as much as the concept of habitus is a tool for describing family socialisation (Reay, 2004), it is valuable for explaining how cultural and social contexts and parental experiences of education endow young people from different social class backgrounds with feelings and orientations towards HE which position some outside and others firmly inside it. The trajectory from school to HE is part of a 'normal biography' (Pring et al, 2009: 160) for young people from established middle-class families who provide a context of 'certainty and entitlement' regarding HE, born out of family experience and knowledge. This contrasts with the unfamiliarity and uncertainty with which many non-traditional HE applicants regard the transition (Pring et al, 2009). Thus, research which makes use of Bourdieu's concept of habitus helps to explain inequalities in patterns of participation in HE by demonstrating how social and cultural backgrounds come to bear upon young people's decisions about HE. It also very importantly challenges notions of deficit aspirations by illustrating how some young people will approach the transition to HE with a sense of confidence and entitlement which smoothes their transition to HE. Others, however, regard HE as a daunting and unfamiliar world and this may ultimately inhibit their progression.

In applying the dual concepts of habitus and cultural capital to explicate inequalities in rates of access to and participation in HE, researchers may, however, be critiqued for under-appreciating the agency with which young people make educational choices. Indeed, habitus has been widely critiqued for its determinism and for allowing little room for agency (Reay, 2004 Moore, 2004, Jenkins 1992 King, 2000). Such criticism is perhaps logical given that some of Bourdieu's own writings on habitus hint towards its deterministic elements, illustrated, for example, in his assertion that '*the habitus- embodied history, internalized as second nature and so forgotten as history- is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product*' (Bourdieu 1990:56). Thus, we can see why Moore (2004) and Jenkins (1992) have critiqued the concept habitus for allowing only a marginal role of

consciousness. They suggest that habitus is the grammar that structures consciousness, but this grammar exists mostly outside of consciousness (Jenkins, 1992; Moore, 2004).

However, whilst habitus is both structured by ‘conditions of existence’ and structures individual’s social actions and their ‘horizons of expectations’ (Bourdieu, 1990: 60), a reading of the concept of habitus as deterministic fails to acknowledge that Bourdieu saw habitus as a ‘generative structure’ (McNay, 1999) which predisposes rather than predetermines individuals towards certain ways of behaving (Allen And Hollingworth, 2013). Indeed, Friedman (2013) and Lee and Kramer (2013) illustrate both the fluidity and indeterminism of habitus in their powerful studies which explore the effects of social mobility on habitus, thus revealing its transformative nature. Lee and Kramer’s (2013) study explores how working-class young women attending an elite college in America reconcile shifts in habitus as they experience an elite educational setting which modifies the structure of their existing habitus. This study demonstrates the way in which the habitus is made up of a fluid set of dispositions, *‘constantly changing as individuals go through different experiences and interact within and with new fields’* (Lee and Kramer, 2013). This illustrates how habitus is adaptable to transformation, less deterministic and more permeable and responsive (Allen and Hollingworth, 2013) than critics have frequently appreciated.

Thus, while habitus is a ‘generative structure’ (McNay, 1999: 100) which predisposes certain ways of behaving, it is adaptable and responsive to new cultural contexts which can either reinforce or transform it (Lee and Kramer, 2013). This conceptualisation of habitus allows us to understand how young people’s ‘‘horizons’ of expectation’ (Bourdieu 1990:6) may well be informed by their habitus. But young people can and do orientate themselves towards HE in ways that might be contradictory to the orientations informed by the structuring function of the habitus. (This is discussed later).

In addition, the concept of habitus, used to understand young people’s HE decisions, has been hugely valuable for illuminating the way in which young people experience very powerful emotional constraints on their HE choices (Archer and Hutchings, 2000; Reay et al, 2001; Archer et al, 2003). This might appear somewhat

paradoxical, given the emphasis it places on the socially structured nature of choice. This may, however, be more apparent than real as the enduring dispositions of mind and body that become embodied in habitus are necessarily constituted through socialisation processes which induce deeply personal and emotional consequences. In illuminating the ways in which class cultures and socialisation inform university choice we can see how processes of 'self-exclusion' from HE in general (Archer and Hutchings, 2000) and from elite institutions occur (Reay et al, 2001; Ball et al, 2002a; Reay 2003). We can see how young people from working-class homes might self-exclude from prestigious universities because of perceived cultural and social differences between themselves and the middle-class culture and student bodies of prestigious universities. Such socially structured choices surely implicate emotional and affective correlates and reactions resulting in the reproduction of social inequality.

While such research usefully brings to light cultural dimensions of choice it can only partly explain the under-representation of working-class students in HE, particularly in prestigious institutions. Exclusion from HE and from prestigious institutions has, of course, an objective dimension that involves matching prior qualifications to specific universities and courses. Access to a particular institution and course will be obtainable only if entry requirements are met (Ball et al, 2002a). Irrespective of how choices are interpreted, and irrespective of how these interpretations are informed by class norms, social expectations and cultural resources, young people will be excluded or included in particular HEIs by their prior attainment levels (this is discussed further below).

Certainly, in illuminating personal and social constraints on choice associated with social and cultural contexts, the research discussed in this section challenges the 'emotionless and a-cultural deployment of 'rational action' - wherein education is viewed simply as an investment good' (Ball et al, 2002a: 69) which has appeared in official texts. Such texts insufficiently attend to the social and cultural environments in which young people are situated, as well as the emotional underpinning of educational choice making. It may go without saying that individuals and social groups are positioned unequally in terms of the personal and economic constraints they experience and resources they are able to draw on from their social and cultural

backgrounds. Social expectations and class norms also inform the decisions young people make regarding their post-school lives. The research discussed here has very importantly illustrated this and in doing so it reveals how social inequalities come to bear upon the decisions young people make regarding HE.

What about rational choice? Rational choice explanations for post-school aspirations, choices and transitions.

Cost-benefit calculations informing educational choices.

While the style of the research described above illuminates the social and cultural contexts in which educational aspirations are formed and choices made, (in particular, with respect of aspirations toward higher education) it problematically tends to underestimate rationality within educational decision making. Rational Choice Theory (RCT)¹ offers a corrective, in particular in the works of Boudon (1974) and Goldthorpe (1996), which signal a departure from cultural reproduction explanations of aspirations, choices and trajectories. According to RCT, social class inequalities in educational aspirations and pathways pursued by individual young people are to be explained by differences in their evaluations of cost and reward and the likelihood of success of pursuing particular pathways. Since the economic and social costs associated with mobility away from communities and class of origin are greater for young people from less advantaged backgrounds they are likely to evaluate a highly ambitious educational pathway as being less favourable (and more costly) than individuals from socially advantaged backgrounds.

These contentions suggest that educational choices are bound up with experience of 'risk.' This sense of 'risk' is associated with the financial or social costs of pursuing a particular pathway. Indeed, a number of researchers have illustrated the ways in which the transition to HE is experienced as particularly 'risky' for some groups of young people. According to Archer and Hutchings (2000), Reay et al (2001) and

¹ Rational Choice Theory is sometimes alternatively referred to Rational Action Theory. I have chosen to adopt the term Rational Choice Theory because I feel this concept will enable me to better capture the 'articulated rationalities' provided by young people for the educational choices and decisions they make. It must be noted that the abbreviation used throughout should not be confused with the abbreviation for Randomised Control Trials (RCT) which is commonly used in social science research.

Archer et al (2003) the transition to HE represents social costs for working-class groups who perceive the middle-class HE arena as a potential threat to their working-class identity. Archer and Hutchings (2000) argue that transition to a middle-class higher education institution would tend to entail a sense of loss of a working-class identity. Combined with associated financial costs and the sense that HE provides uncertain and tentative outcomes, a deep sense of 'risk' may be engendered for working class young people (Archer and Hutchings, 2000). Educational choices and transitions, particularly regarding HE, are inexorably informed by cost-benefit analyses. Where a pathway is interpreted as particularly costly and thus 'risky', whether socially, emotionally or financially, it is less likely to be pursued.

Goldthorpe (1996; 2000) conceives social costs and their associated 'risks' as being bound up with maintaining class location. His notion that educational choices are made with the aim of preserving class location has been widely regarded as particularly useful for understanding the choices and decisions of middle-class families regarding the education of their children (Power et al, 2003). For Goldthorpe, such choices tend to be made with the goal of preserving class location, or at least avoiding downward social mobility, recognising that economic cost-benefit calculations underpin educational choice. He also argues that a failed attempt at higher education has more damaging consequences for working-class families and individuals with fewer resources. It involves both direct loss and opportunity costs by delaying or preventing access to vocational options.

Goldthorpe's (1996) claim that educational decisions are made with the goal of maintaining class location is congruent with the notion of Rational Risk Avoidance (Holm and Jaeger, 2008). This regards educational inequalities as having persisted because desire to preserve class location and avoid downward mobility is stronger than that for upward social mobility. This notion is, however, questionable given that that much of the empirical evidence on post-compulsory education decisions suggests that there is not a unitary working-class orientation towards educational participation that involves such class preservation (Hatcher, 1998). Brown's (1987) study documented divergent types of aspiration among working-class school leavers ranging from securing working-class employment and maintaining their location to getting out and moving into the middle-class. Rational choice theory might be taken

to imply that young people from the same class location should have the same orientation towards education and make the same sorts of cost-benefit evaluations because they experience the same resources, constraints and opportunities, on which rational choices are made. However, on such a view, intra-class differences can no better be explained by rational choice theory than by cultural reproduction theories alone.

Notwithstanding such limitation, RCT's assumptions are useful for explaining the temporal stability of social class differences in attainment and post-school trajectories evident over time. They suggest that the relative costs and rewards associated with pursuing a particular option have remained stable because the structures on which cost-reward evaluations are made have persisted. If choices and decisions regarding participation in education are informed by cost-benefit calculations based on probabilities of success, it may be expected that 'high status' post-school pathways (such as higher education) may be discounted more readily by young people from working-class backgrounds than their middle class counterparts. This was illustrated by Hutchings and Archer (2001) whose study of non-participants of HE highlighted ways in which non-participants perceived the high levels of qualification needed to enter university as being out of reach. This led them to view HE as a hugely costly and improbable destination. Hutchings and Archer's (2001) study suggests that calculations of costs and benefits and probabilities of success, based on educational resources (prior qualifications), do inform educational choices and the likelihood of pursuing a particular pathway like HE.

Do economic cost-benefit calculations inform educational decisions?

According to RCT, since economic costs loom large for working-class groups, young people from such backgrounds require greater levels of aspiration and assurance of their ability and probability of success in order to consider embarking on ambitious options (Goldthorpe 1996). Moreover, if economic costs weigh heavily on people's decisions about participation in post-16 or higher education, participation in them is less likely when economic resources are most limited. This is precisely the claim made by Hutchings and Archer (2001) and Callender and Jackson (2005) whose research suggests that financial cost is a major deterrent for working-class and

mature applicants to HE, providing part explanation for the under-representation of working-class people in HE.

Yet, more recently, the extent to which financial constraints act as a direct ‘barrier’ to participation in post-16 and HE has been powerfully critiqued (Gorard 2005; Gorard and Smith 2007). Gorard and Smith (2007) argue that there is no strong evidence that the direct cost of HE deters entry. They claim that there is not a large body of suitably qualified socio-economically disadvantaged people who do not take up places in universities because of financial cost. Indeed, the notion that economic costs operate as a barrier to participation in HE is further questioned by evidence that suggests that since the introduction of top-up fees in the UK the number of applicants to full time undergraduate courses has continued to rise (Taylor and Gorard, 2005; Wakeling and Jefferies, 2013). The research on which these claims were made was, however, conducted prior to the introduction of the most recent tuition fee increase, whereby HEIs in the UK were able to charge up to £9,000 a year as from 2012/13². While evidence with respect to the impact of this fee regime on rates of participation is as yet inconclusive, there is some evidence to suggest that the fee hike has been associated with a drop in the number of applicants, particularly in the number of English domiciled applications to universities (UCAS, 2012) and to post-92 universities in particular. These early indications would suggest that economically rational decisions are made with reference to participation; such decreasing rates of applications imply that the financial cost of university is perceived by potential applicants to out-weigh reward.

Whilst the evidence with respect to the recent role of fees as a direct barrier to HE participation is somewhat inconclusive and contradictory, the role of economic resources in young people’s decisions about going to university is clearly significant (as will be discussed below). Notwithstanding this contradictory evidence, in understanding patterns of exclusion and exclusion from higher education it is important to recognise that participation in post-16 and HE is most strongly predicted by early school experience and prior attainment (Raffe et al, 2001; Gorard 2005).

² HEIs in England and Wales could charge new students entering their institution in 2012/13 up to £9000 a year in tuition fees. However, Welsh-domiciled students would have the additional tuition fee (anything above the basic rate of £4,000 charged by their HEI) funded by the Welsh Government, in the form of a ‘non means-tested tuition fee grant’ wherever they choose to study in the UK.

Given that attainment at GCSE and A-levels is the biggest predictor of progression to HE, and that attainment and social class are strongly correlated (Brooks, 2002; Gorard, 2005; Fitz et al, 2006), a more potent explanation for class differences in participation in HE may come from considering class differences in attainment. Working class propensity to participate in post-16 and higher education is likely to be determined by factors related to family, poverty, gender and opportunities in local settings which have their effect over lifetimes. Mindful of this, it seems likely that inclinations to enter HE will have been shaped by educational experiences and attainments in advance of perceptions of financial constraints which are less likely than might be thought to directly prevent individuals who are suitably qualified from doing so (Gorard and Smith, 2007).

This is not to say, however, that economic cost-benefit evaluations do not inform educational choices, nor that economic constraints do not weigh heavily on particular *types* of educational choices. There is strong evidence to suggest that economic costs loom large within the university choices of non-traditional HE applicants, particularly regarding *where* to study in terms of geographical distances from home to university (Warrington, 2008). As Reay et al, (2001) and Patiniotis and Holdsworth (2005) have illustrated, economic constraints clearly narrow the scope of universities to which young people feel able to apply. Davies and Trystan (2012) have also suggested that economic calculations of cost and benefit inform decisions about *where* to study. They found that in 2008, Welsh Government policy of providing extra financial support for Welsh domiciled students who studied in Wales operated as a strong incentive to do so for the prospective HE students in their study. Raffe and Croxford (2013) support these contentions by illustrating that the declining trend for Welsh domiciled students to study in a UK country outside of Wales, reaching a low point in 2006 and 2008, can be partly attributed to the financial support arrangements for Welsh students which was likely to incentivise home-county study. This suggests that choices about university at some margins are strongly informed by economic cost-benefit calculations.

Transition to university and its anticipated income and employment benefits can, of course, itself be conceived of as economically rational. This is evidenced by continuously rising rates of participation in post-16 and HE in the UK over recent

decades, despite increasing displacement of the financial burden of HE from state to individual. It would be over-stating the case to say that applicants make rational calculations based on knowledge of the exact economic rewards that a university education would bring. Yet participation is nonetheless rational; it is a means of acquiring higher levels of qualification in order to gain a ‘positional advantage’ (Brown, 2003) within competitive and congested labour markets, or at least a means of avoiding severely restricted employment opportunities. Indeed, Tomlinson (2008) found that while students had little awareness of the value or economic worth of their qualification, they did perceive higher education as a means of gaining ‘relative’ labour market success in competition for graduate employment; the rewards associated with going to university are perceived to outweigh the costs even if its exact scope is not fully understood.

Davies and Trystan’s (2012) research also suggested that particular decisions are made with regards to HE, which have economic motives. For example, they argued that the decision to study through the medium of Welsh or English had rational and strategic elements dependent on perceived labour market value in the sector which students envisaged entering. Decisions to study through a particular medium (either English or Welsh) constituted rational response to perceived ‘domain-specific’ requirements in the labour market. This research offers further evidence that economic cost-reward evaluations do inform educational choices, particularly with regard to universities, subjects and medium of instruction.

Rational choice within a framework of opportunity.

While such evidence suggests that economic cost-benefit calculations underpin decisions about participation in HE, it must be emphasised that educational decisions and aspirations ought not to be regarded simply as about cost-reward evaluations in pursuit of *economic* goals. Participation in further education, training or higher education may also be pursued for the intrinsic value attached to them, including enjoyment or the social or emotional rewards that they are deemed to bring (Reay, 2003). Educational choices, aspirations and transitions are also intimately bound up with identity formation (McLeod and Yates, 2006). Longings and dreams about becoming a particular person are integrally bound up with decisions about the future.

Thus, individuals have goals and preferences and make choices in pursuit of these goals, which are by no means purely economic, but may be driven by substantial social and emotional incentives.

Irrespective of whether rational choices are made in pursuit of social, economic or emotional rewards, they are made within a framework of opportunity which is defined by the scope of actually available alternatives (Gorard and Rees, 2002). As participation in post-16 and higher education reflects the scope of available alternatives for learning and employment (Gorard et al, 2001) aspiration should be conceived of as *relative* to class location and the resources, constraints and opportunity structures associated with that location.

Indeed, support has been found for Keller and Zavalloni's (1964, as cited by Ball et al, 1999) 'positional theory' of aspiration in which aspiration is relative to class location, rather than varying in absolute terms between social class categories. According to 'positional theory' of aspiration class location is important because it determines the social distance that an individual would need to 'travel' in order to reach the destination to which they aspire. We should say, therefore, that working-class young people aspiring for HE have higher aspirations than their middle-class counterparts because they face different sets of opportunities and constraints and a greater set of costs (Golthorpe, 1996).

Indeed, researchers have supported the notion that people from working-class backgrounds do not have 'lower' aspirations than their middle-class counterparts but, rather, their aspirations are relative to the constraints and opportunities they experience (Boudon, 1974; Ball et al, 1999). With particular respect to higher education, Gorard's (2005) research found that once prior attainment is taken into account working-class students are not under-represented in HE compared to their middle-class counterparts. This suggests that there are no systematic differences in aspiration between social groups and that prior attainment levels primarily inform rates of access to higher education. This questions the potency of the concept of habitus to explain lower rates of participation in HE amongst working class groups. It suggests that the propensity to embark on HE is strongly informed by the constraints and opportunities experienced by individuals and their understandings of

the probabilities of success of pursuing a pathway, rather than the dispositions and orientations of habitus.

Brooks's (2003) study similarly highlights the way in which probabilities of success inform educational aspirations and decisions. She found that young people's perceptions of their own academic abilities, often formed through comparison with the perceived abilities of their peers, had a very important bearing upon their university choices and the courses which they foresaw themselves studying. The young people in her research were not so much discrediting prestigious universities on account of 'social discomfort', as emphasised by Reay et al (2001) and Archer and Hutchings (2000) who suggest that high ranking universities are viewed as 'not for the likes of me' by working-class young people. Rather, their prospecting university choices were more likely informed by perceptions of their own and their friends' academic abilities. This suggested that evaluation of the probabilities of success in pursuing HE generally and particular courses within it very significantly informed their university choices. Brook's (2003) rather more contemporary research findings provide some support for Gambetta (1987) who argued that people made choices based on desires, preferences, intentions and on the expected probability of success of a given course of choice. Young people in his study were highly sensitive to their prior attainment levels and opportunities in local labour markets. The higher the perceived probability of success, the more likely was their education to be continued for longer periods of time.

The research of Roberts (1968), Gambetta (1987), Brooks (2003), Gorard (2005) and Sullivan (2006) suggest that aspirations are formed and educational choices are made within externally defined boundaries that define the scope of objective opportunity structures. Clearly, individuals have goals, alternative means of pursuing these goals and evaluate the probabilities of success in pursuing a pathway based on what they see to be their opportunities, resources and constraints (Goldthorpe, 1996). In this sense, goals, beliefs and decisions are rational but are made within the parameters of objective opportunity structures (Bukodi and Goldthorpe, 2012). When an educational pathway, like higher education, becomes an *objective* possibility because prior attainment levels make it so, it is likely to become an anticipated destination. This suggests that the effects of social class that inform attainment levels are hugely

important in forming aspirations, educational decisions and transitions. Since educational choices are informed by such evaluations of the relative chances of success of pursuing a particular educational pathway, the assumption that people are simply *pushed* into particular destinations by cultural forces is rendered problematic.

Rational choice theory assumes that actors are knowledgeable about their opportunities and constraints and make cost-reward evaluations based on this knowledge. Crucially, it assumes that they have the capacity to act autonomously in the pursuit of these goals rather than being ‘pushed’ unconsciously by cultural or social values and norms (Goldthorpe, 1996). Although it must inevitably be questionable whether individuals are fully knowledgeable about their constraints and resources and able to access complete and accurate information about their chances of success, for example their chances of success in the labour market (Gambetta, 1987; Furlong and Cartmel, 1995) the evidence presented above suggests that educational choices and transition are nonetheless rational.

Cultural and social contexts informing rational choices

The evidence suggests, then, that young people make choices within boundaries defined by the structure of opportunities in local and national labour markets (discussed further in the next chapter), past educational attainments, and material and educational opportunities and constraints. The frameworks of opportunity in which young people make choices are also informed by class cultures and social expectations which mediate how opportunities are recognised and interpreted – reminiscent of Bourdieu’s concept of habitus. There is strong research evidence of the roles played by family context and class cultures, which give rise to sets of social, cultural and economic resources which frame the educational decisions and pathways taken by young people (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Ball et al, 1999; 2000a; Pring et al, 2009). These contexts clearly inform young people’s interpretations of their opportunities explaining why, even when suitably qualified to embark on higher education, some young people from working class backgrounds still forgo the opportunity to do so (Forsyth and Furlong, 2003). This suggests that, as discussed above, cultural contexts play an important role in shaping young people’s orientations, feelings of confidence and entitlement towards higher education.

The role of cultural and social contexts is also illustrated in Gambetta's (1987) influential exploration of the decision making processes underpinning the transitions from elementary to middle school among young people in the Italian education system. His research found that even when income was low, middle rather than working-class families were more likely to choose post-compulsory education for their children. Middle-class young people are likely to experience greater normative pressure to stay in education, partly explaining their greater likelihood to stay-on, even when they experienced failure. Rational choices underpinned educational decisions and aspirations, subject to class differentiated constraints and opportunities and class-specific social norms that defined preferences and intentions. Gambetta (1987) pictured individuals facing cultural constraints which could operate independently of rational choices to narrow down the feasible set of alternatives from an *objective* to a *subjective* set of options. This contention is a useful contribution to the theorisation of educational decision making because it refrains from reducing educational decisions to either rational choices or deterministic cultural forces. It supports the notion that subjective opportunity structures limit and curtail the educational options that people face, as in Hutchings and Archer's (2001) study where young people discounted HE largely because they perceived it as 'out of reach', beyond the limits of their academic abilities. Young people tend only to prefer and expect what their opportunity structures, constraints and resources allow them to achieve; they will not cultivate goals and preferences outside a set of objectively and subjectively feasible alternatives (Gambetta 1987).

Aspirations and educational choices are, therefore, rational and strategic but made within parameters defined by *objective* opportunity structures. These objective opportunities are defined by the scope of material and educational resources, prior attainment levels and the structure of opportunities in local contexts. These parameters are also defined by subjective opportunities which are confined by the influences of cultural and social expectations which define what a 'person like me' does (Reay, 1998b; Hutchings and Archer, 2001).

Indeed, as Warrington (2008: 931) points out, educational decisions may be informed by home background, as well as local cultural understandings of success. For the young people in her research, work experience and 'working one's way up the

ladder' were more highly valued than formal qualifications. Since educational decisions and choices are made within a framework of opportunity which is defined by educational and cultural resources, social expectations, local cultures of understanding, this means that particular post-school pathways or options may not even be considered by young people because they fall outside the parameters of objective and subjective opportunity structures (Gambetta, 1987; Glaesser and Cooper, 2013).

This argument is expanded by Glaesser and Cooper (2013) who argued that cost-reward calculations do inform educational decisions but that rationality is subjective and operates within the boundaries of family habitus. The young people in their research frequently articulated the view that higher levels of qualification were necessary to obtain 'better' jobs, illustrating what the authors call 'subjective' rationality. Yet these researchers also emphasised cultural and social contexts in their assertion that the rationality underpinning young people's orientations to education is crucially defined by class habitus; young people from different class locations constructed very different upper and lower 'boundaries' for themselves in terms of what constituted costs and rewards in educational participation. It is habitus, they argue, which sets the upper and lower boundaries within which rational reasoning takes place.

While these ideas resonate with the notion that aspiration is relative to the constraints and opportunities associated with a particular class location, the use of the concept habitus to explain educational decisions might be regarded in some senses as somewhat problematic in view of the increasing numbers of students embarking on HE from 'non-traditional' backgrounds. If aspirations for and propensity to participate in HE reflect habitus it is difficult to account for increasing rates of participation in HE amongst non-traditional students (Goldthorpe, 2007). Without, at this point, detailing more general critiques of the contested nature of the concept of habitus as unchanging/ineffable, the research discussed above does illuminate the importance of social and cultural context in defining the boundaries within which rational choices are made whilst also highlighting the rationality in educational choices and aspiration. It suggests that even when options have been severely narrowed by the constraints of material resources or prior educational attainment or

by social norms, individuals still choose between a set of alternatives according to their preferences. As Gambetta (1987) argues, even when options are narrowed by constraints or ‘behind-the-back inertial forces’ individuals still choose between them, albeit often within limited, socially biased preference structures.

We could say, therefore, that educational aspirations and decisions are informed by three main processes; of ‘what one wants to do’ and ‘what one can do’ and ‘by conditions which shape preferences’ (Gambetta, 1987). While there has been extensive research documenting ways in which conditions or structures of opportunity and constraints inform educational choices and transitions (Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Ball et al, 1999; McDowell, 2003), emphasis on ‘what one wants to do’ has been somewhat overlooked in much of the aspiration and education choice-making literature. Yet, few sociologists would deny that young people’s lives and decisions are shaped in relations between individual attainment, preferences and personal efficacy, as well as structural and material limits and possibilities (Ball et al, 2000a). Self-efficacy is particularly important as illustrated by Brooks (2003) and Ball et al (2000b), while Furlong and Biggart (1999) go as far to say that confidence in one’s own ability can override external forces, such as labour markets and social class. Aspirations and educational decisions are also bound up with identity formation (McLeod and Yates, 2006), as well as hopes, desires and dreams (Ball et al, 2000a). Young people’s choices about their post-school lives and aspirations for their futures are products of their previous experiences, learning identities and self-esteem, as well as the opportunities, constraints and resources they experience (Ball et al, 2000b). Indeed, Ball et al (2000a: 280) emphasise the ‘reflexive individualism’ with which young people ‘creatively manipulate’ seemingly contingent opportunity structures; both individual factors, as well as wider social, cultural, material and spatial contexts, inform young people’s post-school aspirations and choices.

Conclusion

The literature strongly suggests that young people’s educational choices, aspirations and transitions are informed by the social, cultural and material contexts in which they are situated. Material resources, family experiences of education, prior attainment, local labour markets and educational institutions are the *conditions*, or

the opportunity structures, upon which educational choices are made and aspirations are formed. They inform what young people *can* objectively do. What individuals can do informs what they *want* to do. Whilst young people may entertain unrealistic aspirations, they are most likely to prefer what their constraints and opportunities allow them to achieve and are most unlikely to pursue pathways which fall outside the boundaries of the objectively possible.

These boundaries are not only defined by objectively available opportunities but class norms and socialisation which also inform what people *can* and *want* to do. Class norms, social expectations and educational and cultural resources importantly inform educational choices and aspirations, they construct boundaries around what is subjectively feasible to achieve. Since class norms define the scope of subjective opportunities, this means that particular pathways can fall outside the parameters of subjective opportunity structures (as something which is not what ‘someone like me’ does) which means that some options are not even considered. Thus, class norms can act on judgements and interpretations of available alternatives so that a set of *objective* opportunities is narrowed to a limited set of *subjective* opportunities. To re-emphasise, preferences, aspirations and choices are made within parameters defined by a set of objective opportunities (attainment, material resources, opportunity structures in local contexts) as well as by subjective opportunities which are constituted by socialisation, class norms and cultural resources.

Rational choice theory as an explanation for educational aspiration and decision making is useful for explaining class differences in educational choices and trajectories because it illuminates the ways in which structures of opportunity and constraint, on which cost-benefit evaluations and probabilities of success are made, inform aspirations and educational choices. There is evidence to suggest that educational decisions are contingent on rational choices, informed by evaluations of the probabilities of success based on students’ own abilities and labour market opportunities (Roberts et al, 1987; Gambetta, 1987; Brooks, 2003; Brown, 2003; Gorard, 2005; Glaesser and Cooper, 2013). Even when the economic gains associated with HE may not be known and may merely provide a ‘positional advantage’ in a highly congested labour market (Brown, 2003; Tomlinson, 2008), or where embarking on an educational pathway such as HE is a means of avoiding

‘risky’ employment conditions (potential unemployment), participation in HE is nonetheless a rational and strategic decision. The decision to participate, or not, in a particular pathway through post-16 education or HE may also be rational in the sense that a particular pathway avoids ‘risks’ associated with failure or threats to identity.

Yet rational choice theory is insufficient for explaining educational choices, aspirations and trajectories because it fails to acknowledge the cultural and social contexts (which later I suggest are inherently spatial and historical) in which aspirations are constructed and educational choices are made. While Goldthorpe (1996) and Boudon (1974) recognise that resources, opportunities and constraints vary by class location, which gives rise to differential costs and rewards associated with pursuing a particular option, they make very little of the cultural context in which educational decisions are made. We therefore need to acknowledge the social, cultural and spatial contexts in which young people form their aspirations and make educational choices.

In light of these considerations the theoretical framework underpinning this study assumes that:

- Young people’s post-school aspirations and educational choices are informed by the *objective* structure of opportunities they face; these opportunity structures vary by social and economic location.
- Young people’s aspirations and educational choices are informed by rational and strategic calculations directed towards goals and preferences and based on the probability of success given prior attainment levels and labour market opportunities.
- Rational choices are, however, made within externally constituted parameters which define what is *objectively* feasible. What is objectively feasible (what people *can* do) is determined by prior attainment levels and by the material, educational and cultural resources on which young people can draw.
- The parameters in which young people make choices are also defined by cultural or social norms and expectations and class specific preference

structures which define what is *subjectively* attainable to young people. Class norms, social expectations and preferences will define what people *can* and *want* to do.

In the next chapter I discuss research that has illuminated the role of *place* in young people's post school lives. This research has illustrated how opportunities in local contexts and local social identities come to bear upon young people's post-school trajectories.

Chapter three

What about place? The significance of place for young people's aspirations, educational decisions and transitions.

In the last chapter I argued that social class has been the dominant lens through which young people's aspirations, educational decisions and post-school trajectories have been explored (Jackson and Marsden, 1962; Bates and Riseborough, 1993; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Ball et al, 1999). While providing invaluable insight into the ways in which young people's educational aspirations and choices are informed by the material, cultural and educational resources to which they have access, this research has said very little about how young people's lives are structured by opportunities in local contexts. It has also tended to underplay the role of young people's emotional relationships with their 'homes' in educational decisions and transitions. The bearing of both local opportunity structures and young people's emotional relationships with home upon their post-school opportunities, aspirations and anticipated post-school pathways will be the dominant focus of the literature review in this chapter.

Understanding the 'local' also means taking account of the temporal contexts in which young people are situated. Time is conceptualised as having importance in two ways for young people's post-school lives. Firstly, places are historically constituted (Massey, 1995a) which means that, in understanding how the scope of opportunities within local settings and local social landscapes inform young people's post-school lives, we need to understand their economic and social histories. Secondly, young people make choices, form aspirations and anticipate transitions within a particular epoch that is characterised by a historically specific set of learning and employment opportunities. This study, therefore, considers the extent to which contemporary educational and employment contexts bear upon young people's post-school lives. It considers, in particular, the combined effects of the expansion of formal post-16 education options in Wales, on the one hand, and on the other, the recent global

economic downturn on young people's post-school opportunities. In this chapter I will, therefore, also address research which has considered how popular discourses surrounding the rhetoric of the 'knowledge economy,' which has been dominated by human capital theory, have impacted on young people's post-school decisions about participating in higher education. The chapter begins with an exploration of the literature which has illuminated the spatially differentiated nature of opportunity structures. It then explores how opportunity structures can be conceived of as historically located and goes on to consider the importance of place attachment and emotional relationships with place for young people's post-school lives. It concludes by describing how *place* and *time* are brought into the theoretical framework underpinning this study.

Opportunity structures in local contexts

Objective geographies of opportunity.

It has been well documented that the material, educational and cultural resources on which young people draw have very important bearing on the social and educational trajectories they follow (Bates and Riseborough, 1993; Cartmel and Furlong, 1997; Ball et al, 1999). Research has also suggested that locality is important in structuring inequality (Furlong and Cartmel, 1995; McDowell, 2003; Rogally and Taylor, 2009). This research has revealed how young people's post-school choices, transitions and aspirations and post-school employment prospects depend not only on their qualifications, age, gender, social class and personal attributes but also on where they live and the availability of opportunities in local settings (Coffield et al, 1986; Roberts et al, 1987; Roberts, 1995; Nayak, 2003, McDowell, 2003; MacDonald et al, 2005).

A body of research has illuminated regional variations in young people's employment opportunities, especially since economic restructuring in the 1970s and 1980s (Roberts, 1984; Roberts et al, 1987; Nayak, 2003). According to Roberts et al (1987) young people in different localities in British society are unequally affected by economic and technological developments because of geographical variations in employment opportunities. Through exploration of educational and employment

opportunities in three contrasting local contexts in England (Liverpool, Chelmsford and Walsall) Roberts et al (1987) found that respondents in Liverpool, both young men and women, were obtaining a smaller proportion of unskilled jobs than those in either Chelmsford or Walsall. High rates of competition for unskilled employment in Merseyside meant that employers were more likely to recruit more experienced workers than school leavers. Economic returns associated with qualifications varied by locality. In Walsall and Chelmsford qualifications were irrelevant to chances of obtaining unskilled employment, but not in Liverpool where unemployment was highest and competition for unskilled jobs also high.

Roberts et al's (1987) study highlighted differences between local contexts in the employment opportunities that young people faced, showing that where they lived mattered to their life chances. Coffield et al's (1986) seminal work also described regional variations in employment opportunities for young people in the 1980s, showing that those growing up in the North East of England, with its history of economic decline, faced markedly inferior ones to those living in other areas of the UK. The importance of place, however, for people's employment prospects varies across age groups. Research suggests that the structure of opportunity in local labour markets has the greatest impact on *younger* rather than older people's lives (Roberts et al, 1987; Garner, et al, 1998). Since access to employment opportunities depends on formal qualifications as well as access to transport and material resources, such as private transport, young people tend to be most affected by local conditions, being more dependent on others for their mobility (Green and White, 2008).

Even more significantly, extensive research has suggested that opportunities in local contexts have greatest impact on the life chances of the least advantaged young people, particularly those leaving school with few formal qualifications (Roberts et al, 1987; Roberts, 1995; Garner et al, 1998; McDowell, 2003; Green and White, 2008). These young people particularly lack capacity to access high waged employment and the relative cost of travel is greater for them (Green and White, 2008). Limited to narrower geographical areas, during times of exacerbated unemployment, it is these young people who are most affected.

Young people³ are therefore unequally affected by conditions in local contexts; young people from the least advantaged backgrounds are most affected by local employment contexts (Roberts, 1995). If opportunity structures vary across place, this suggests that in order to fully understand young people's post-school trajectories we need to consider conditions in local contexts. Locality is not only directly important for young people's employment prospects but also bears upon their educational aspirations and post-school transitions (Ashton et al, 1990; Garner et al, 1998; McDowell 2003). Ashton et al (1990) documented ways in which local market conditions, in particular, types of employment available and provision of training and education, influenced young people's attitudes towards this work, and provision. In their comparison of St Albans, Leicester and Sunderland, they found that young people in the former (St Albans) were more likely to have the more positive attitudes to education. The authors attribute this to the large proportions of managerial, professional and clerical work requiring high entry level qualifications available in the area compared to those in other locations. It was contended that young people in St Albans were more likely to value education because of the greater need to gain such levels.

A little more recently Furlong and Cartmel (1995) explored educational and occupational aspirations among young people in four contrasting labour markets in Scotland. These ranged from urban areas of high levels of unemployment, to ones with relatively abundant employment opportunities. They accepted that generalised 'climates of expectation' existed and that young people were not only aware of local labour market conditions but that scarce opportunities would mean moving away, affecting their plans for the future. At the same time, they argued that social class had greater significance in informing young people's aspirations than local opportunity structures.

Evidently, young people's post-school lives are structured by opportunities which are both socially and spatially constituted (Ball et al, 2000b; McDowell, 2003). This is powerfully documented by McDowell's (2003) exploration of the post-school

³ 'Young people' are therefore not to be thought of as an undifferentiated group. The intersectionality of social class, gender, ethnicity, dis/ability and sexuality further differentiate the way young people experience the conditions in local contexts, impacting their transition from school to further, higher education or work.

aspirations, choices and transitions of working-class white young men in two contrasting locations in England. McDowell's (2003) work provided an important contribution to understanding youth transitions, revealing how the industrial and social histories and cultural identities of Sheffield and Cambridge interacted with present day economic and social landscapes to inform them. Young men from Cambridge, in a buoyant labour market, were far more likely to participate in some form of education or training than those from Sheffield and were more likely to emphasise the importance of qualifications and further training for securing employment compared to their father's generation. Historical and regional variations in employment opportunities across these places coincided with differences in the meaning of academic success. McDowell (2003) argued that Cambridge had long been a city which offered little in the way of well-paid employment opportunities for young men with few formal qualifications. This, allied with the historical prominence of its educational institutions, had created cultural emphasis on academic success. Moreover, its booming labour market, unlike that of Sheffield, ensured that Cambridge parents were more likely to be employed and therefore able to support their sons financially as they stayed in education than those from Sheffield.

McDowell's (2003) research, like that of Ashton et al (1990), seems to imply some support for human capital theory's assumption that people will invest in education where they see appropriate labour market returns on doing so. Like McDowell, Ashton et al (1990) found that the presence of professional forms of employment appeared to provide incentive to stay in education. Yet McDowell's (2003) study also illuminates the inadequacy of human capital theory. Since young people's labour market aspirations and likelihood of participation in post-school education and training are connected to local industrial history, social identities and structures of opportunity, we cannot explain educational choices resulting in decisions to participate or not in education as simply reflecting a desire to invest in human capital.

Nonetheless, these studies imply that people will participate in education where they perceive the labour market benefits of gaining extra qualifications. In this way, these studies contrast with research which supports the 'discouraged worker effect', a very different explanation for regional variations in participation in post-16 education

(Raffe and Willms, 1986; Garner et al, 1988; Biggart and Furlong, 1996). The ‘discouraged worker’ hypothesis describes the way in which adverse labour market conditions discourage entry into the labour market and encourage participation in education. This effect, according to Raffe and Willms (1989), was found amongst their sample of Scottish young people, whereby high levels of unemployment were positively associated with rates of staying on in education. Moreover, this effect was found to be slightly stronger for young people with attainment levels slightly above the average, that is, for those who are on the margins of deciding to stay in or to leave education.

Support for the ‘discouraged worker’ hypothesis was offered by Biggart and Furlong (1996) who argued that labour market opportunities have an important bearing upon the decisions which young people make at the end of compulsory schooling, suggesting that the effect is greatest for young people attaining middle to lower levels of attainment. A ‘discouraged worker’ effect has also been found by Garner et al (1988) who suggested that while young people from middle-class homes with average attainment levels were more likely to stay in full-time education than those from working-class homes with few qualifications, irrespective of location and gender, the probability of ‘advantaged’ school leavers being in full time education varied across cities. Advantaged school leavers (those from middle-class homes with at least average attainment levels) were more likely to stay in full-time education if they lived in Glasgow and Dundee (areas with higher levels of unemployment) than Edinburgh and Aberdeen (areas with lower levels of unemployment). This study not only illustrates the importance of local opportunity structures but also the ways in which young people from similar class locations may face very different opportunities depending on where they live. If this is so, in order to fully understand youth transitions we must explore the extent to which young people from similar class backgrounds but living in different places and facing varied sets of opportunities make different sorts of decisions and post-school transitions.

Indeed, Roberts (1995) also supported a discouraged worker hypothesis in his comparison of four geographical locations, finding that young people in Liverpool, with a chronically slumped labour market at the time of the research, were more likely to stay in education than those from Swindon, a place experiencing a booming

labour market. Roberts et al (1987) explain the contradictory findings of the research presented above by arguing that whilst young people might make similar sorts of calculations of cost and reward associated with staying on or leaving education at 16, their calculations might lead to very different conclusions. For some, high levels of local unemployment might encourage a person to stay-on in education in order to avoid facing difficult employment prospects whilst for others it might encourage a person to seek employment as soon as possible.

These studies contradict simplistic versions of human capital theory's assumption that young people will invest in education where they see the rewards of doing so finding that, within slumped labour market conditions, individuals are more likely to stay-on in school or college. What they do suggest is that place matters to young people's post-school education and employment because objective opportunities for education, training and employment opportunities are spatially differentiated and historically situated. It is likely that the extent to which local employment conditions produce a 'discouraged worker effect', where individuals stay in education in order to avoid entry into the labour market (Raffe and Willms, 1986) or, alternatively, are encouraged to enter the labour market, is dependent on people's interpretations of their labour market prospects (Roberts et al, 1987). There is a body of research that has illuminated the way in which young people's employment opportunities do not simply vary geographically in an objective sense but subjectively with geographical location. Young people's interpretations of their opportunities are important in informing how they act on these opportunities.

Subjective geographies of opportunity.

It has been suggested so far that young people's post-school pathways are shaped by opportunity structures in local contexts and are, therefore, geographically and historically located. Research has also suggested that there is a subjective geography to young people's employment opportunities (MacDonald et al, 2005; Green et al, 2005; Green and White, 2008). Young people's relationships with their localities, and place-based social networks, inform the ways in which they subjectively recognise their opportunities. Green and White's (2008) research suggested that place-based social networks could mediate ways in which young people interpret and

act on their objective opportunities. Social networks can work to expand opportunities; family connections with employers served as an important source of word-of-mouth recruitment through providing reliable sources of advice, guidance and encouragement about education and training options. However, social networks were also found to limit subjective opportunities, through giving misguided or inaccurate information about education or training options or confining young people's options to local and familiar places (Green and White, 2008).

Similarly, MacDonald et al, (2005) and McDowell (2003) demonstrated ways in which place-based social networks helped young people access employment once formal means of entering employment, such as educational qualifications, had been closed off. In their study of young people's transitions to adulthood in severely disadvantaged neighbourhoods MacDonald et al (2005) argued that friends and family were important for securing employment. Yet they also found that social networks could reproduce economic marginality whereby recommendations and 'tip-offs' provided by family members and social networks narrowed the scope of opportunities, thus trapping young people in insecure 'poor work'. Economic and social disadvantage was reproduced through ways in which social, or what Putnam (2000) termed 'bonding' capital in place-based social networks, mediated young people's post-school opportunities. It suggests that while bonding ties with family, friends and neighbours create a sense of inclusion within neighbourhoods, they also curtail young people's opportunities, limiting their chances of escaping conditions of social and economic disadvantage.

MacDonald et al's (2005) research, however, neglected attention to the *specificities and qualities* of place and how these might bear upon social networks or how social networks might vary across localities to give rise to different opportunities for young people. Green et al's (2005) work addresses this shortfall by revealing how characteristics specific to geographical localities operate to expand or curtail young people's subjective opportunities. It explored perceptions of employment opportunities of young people living in Belfast and demonstrated how a number of interacting factors including lack of confidence, prejudice born out of fear of violence (which in some cases was based on a region's past experience of religious conflict and violence, in others, involved misconceptions about a locality) and lack

of transport could work to limit their subjective and objective employment opportunities. Green et al, (2005) found that the objective opportunities which existed there were narrowed to a sub-set of opportunities which were local, easily accessible, familiar, or where friends or family members worked. In such contexts objective measures of employment opportunities, such as measures of distance of travel to work, are insufficient for understanding how people experience and interpret them in the face of social and institutional constructions that are a product of lived experience.

In illustrating ways in which the nuances and particularities of a geographical location (its social and religious history, for example) informed individuals' interpretations of opportunities in their locality, Green et al (2005) and McDowell (2003) provide an important contribution to our understanding of the significance of locality for young people's post-school transitions. Their research goes beyond using the term locality or neighbourhood as a proxy measure for social class which has been a feature of some historical as well as contemporary studies of education and the working class. Willis (1977) and Jackson and Marsden's (1962) influential studies provided insights into the ways in which young people from working class backgrounds and living in particular localities in England in the 1960s and 1970s experience their educational opportunities. These studies, as well as more contemporary studies such as McDonald et al (2005), have tended to use the term simply as a proxy measure for social class. They have documented ways in which localities which are more or less working-class or more or less middle-class bear upon young people's aspirations and post-school pathways but fail to specify ways in which characteristics and qualities specific to a location bear upon their lives.

Evidently, as the research discussed above suggests, educational and employment opportunities are structured socially, but they also vary across place. Thus, in order to understand young people's educational decisions and aspirations for their futures we need to consider both the objective set of opportunities they face in local contexts as well as how these opportunities are interpreted and understood by young people. This research calls on us to situate young people in local settings and to explore both objective and subjective structures of opportunity.

Historically located opportunity structures.

I have suggested above that there is a subjective geography to opportunity, meaning that the way young people interpret their opportunities for education and employment depends on their relationships with place and their social networks. It is important to emphasise, however, that irrespective of how individuals interpret their opportunities, they are unequal across time and place (Gambetta, 1987; Rees et al, 1997; Gorard and Rees, 2002). This is particularly well documented by Fuller et al (2011) whose work highlights the ways in which the time frame in which people are situated informs orientations towards participation in further and higher education. For example, while attaining level three qualifications (such as A-levels) during the 1960s was likely to be an end in itself for young people, it is increasingly not the case for contemporary cohorts in the context of credential inflation where level three qualifications are commonly a medium for accessing higher education. The historical landscape in which young people today are making decisions is one in which access to post-16 education has widened, the scope of opportunities for vocational training increased and employment opportunities for school leavers contracted relative to the 1970s and 80s (Fuller et al, 2011). Mass expansion of HE has been fuelled by successive UK governments' widening participation agendas, paralleled by dominant policy rhetoric stipulating that increasing numbers of jobs require the sorts of qualifications which only higher education provides (DfES, 2003). Such human capital theory dominated discourse has prevailed, positioning HE as the means of achieving economic security for individuals and 'knowledge' society.

Yet claims that increasing numbers of jobs require degree level qualifications have been questioned (Keep and Mayhew, 2004), as has the notion that higher education credentials guarantee economic security for individuals. A number of researchers have questioned the extent to which demand for high skilled workers has kept up with mass expansion of higher education (Mayhew et al, 2004; Keep and Mayhew, 2004) and others have been deeply critical of discourse which upholds the notion that 'the more we learn the more we earn' (Brown, 2003:142). Brown has argued that the rhetoric of the 'knowledge economy' and discourses dominated by human capital theory have overemphasised the roll of HE as the means to economic success. In the context of increasingly congested and competitive labour markets, fuelled by

credential inflation and the massification of HE, higher education is no longer such a guarantee of opportunity. Rather, Brown (2003) argues, 'positional' conflict has been intensified with the rise of mass higher education and credential inflation and increasing numbers of people competing for a limited number of well-rewarded jobs.

It is clear, therefore, that the economic and educational landscapes that young people enter today are vastly different from those confronting preceding generations. Congestion in the labour market and competition for top-end jobs is not only problematic for graduates but also for young people who do not obtain a higher education, particularly those with level three qualifications (Keep and Mayhew, 2004). Where credential inflation outstrips the expansion of high-skilled employment, graduates increasingly take jobs for which they are over qualified, displacing non-graduates into lower salaried and lower status jobs (Brynin, 2002; Keep and Mayhew, 2004). Holding a degree does not guarantee obtaining a good job (Keep and Mayhew, 2004) but it has become a minimal requirement for entering those most financially rewarding. This ensures that young people are kept under increasing pressure to acquire higher education (Brown, 2003). This intensifies both demand for higher education and the output of graduates (Keep and Mayhew, 2004), in turn exacerbating credential inflation, further disadvantaging non-graduates (Hoelscher et al, 2008) and heightening inequality in the geographical variance of the availability of 'top-end' jobs. Old forms of inequalities are being further reproduced as young people, whose material and educational constraints deny them access to higher education, face an intensified struggle to enter the most lucrative forms of employment in unequally geographically distributed, top-entry jobs.

Forefronting such intensified levels of competition and credential inflation which characterises contemporary UK labour markets in our enquiry enables us to explore how dominant discourses, which continue to construct higher education as a means of economic success, implicate young people's decisions about their post-school lives. In order to understand the decisions which young people make about their post-school lives we need to consider the wider economic and educational landscapes in which they are making transitions. We need to consider, in particular, how discourses, dominated by human capital theory, are interpreted by young people and inform their educational decisions and anticipated transitions. This is within a

landscape in which they are under increasing pressure to equip themselves with higher levels of qualifications.

Place, attachment and young people's post-school lives.

Place attachment and 'imagined futures'

The literature which has illuminated the emotional relationships that young people have with their home localities and the way in which these bear upon where they 'imagine' their futures to be located may, at first sight, seem superfluous, or at least tangential, to a study of young people's post-school aspirations, decisions and anticipated transitions. However, it must be engaged with in order to gain purchase on the research objectives outlined in Chapter one. While the notion that 'place attachment' still exists within post-modern society has been contested (Giddens, 1991), research has suggested that emotional relationships with home localities have important bearing upon young people's university choices (Hinton, 2011) and their aspirations for the future, in particular, whether to leave or stay within a locality (Jones, 1999; Jamieson, 2000; Wiborg, 2004).

Indeed, research has suggested that young people's migratory plans and aspirations cannot simply be understood as reflecting structural forces, such as the scope of employment opportunities in local contexts, which compel young people to *leave* or to *stay* within a locality (Jones 1999; Jamieson 2000). Future plans and aspirations are also informed by emotional relationships, senses of attachment and belonging to locality and meanings attached to them (Coffield et al, 1986; Hektner, 1995; Wiborg 2004). This is particularly well documented by Jones (1999) who explored young people's migration behaviours in rural Scotland. Jones (1999) found that migration behaviours were greatly influenced by the structure of opportunities for education and employment but also by young people's socio-spatial identities. In part, these were in turn informed by young people's sense of belonging and attachment to their 'homes' which in turn had arisen from historic migration patterns and duration of residence of their parents.

Kloep et al (2003) also documented people's emotional relationships with place in framing their migration plans in their exploration of young people's views on out-migration from localities in rural Norway, Scotland and Sweden. The young people in their study who anticipated staying in their locality in the future were more likely to express positive sentiments towards characteristics, such as its close-knit relations or physical geography. Likewise, Wiborg's (2004) study of Norwegian students' attachments to their rural home localities illustrates ways in which different qualities of place, particularly nature, social class and social and inter-personal relationships were ascribed with meaning which had important bearing upon young people's aspirations for staying in or migrating out of a locality. Coffield et al (1986) similarly identified a very strong sense of identification, loyalty and attachment towards the locality of their 'home' among young people in North East England which informed their views on leaving the area. Indeed, the authors contended that such was the strength of the feelings of emotional and financial security and support expressed by the young people towards their locality that young people's quality of life would have been lowered if they were to leave the area.

In highlighting the significance of people's emotional relationships with 'home' the aforementioned studies problematise the notion that place has weakened importance for identity and attachment. Postmodernists have tended to argue that globalisation and mobility have undermined attachment to place (Giddens, 1991; Bauman, 1992), questioning the notion that places have clearly demarcated social boundaries with historical and cultural significance. The research discussed above and the fieldwork findings presented in later chapters contradicts such claims that places are being eroded and replaced by 'no-place' space in which there is no single and clearly defined social space with clear historical or cultural significance (Watt, 1998). Evidently, people continue to express emotional and affective relationships with geographical localities which have real bearing upon how they plan and 'imagine' their futures (Hektner, 1995; Jones, 1999). If place attachment bears upon young people's aspirations and future plans this would suggest that in understanding how patterns of inequalities in young people's life chances become reproduced, we need to consider young people's relationships with and the meanings they attach to the places in which they live.

Place attachment and university choice.

Place attachment and ties with 'home' do not simply inform aspirations to stay in or to leave a locality in the future. Research has also illustrated its importance for young people's university choices and future career aspirations (Warrington, 2008; Hinton, 2011). In particular, it has highlighted the way in which emotional attachments to home and interpersonal and intimate relationships at home bear upon young people's university choices (Christie et al, 2005; Christie, 2007; Hinton, 2011). Hinton (2011) interviewed prospective Welsh-domiciled HE applicants about their preferences for Welsh universities and found that emotional connections with home often informed HE aspirations. She argued that moving away from 'home' and the immediate locality of 'home' but remaining within the area of Wales allowed the young people in her study to retain emotional connotations of 'home'. It allowed a sense of emotional security and familiarity associated with Wales to be carried across geographical space to be 're-made', through mobility, within new but familiar environments. A number of other researchers (Christie, 2007; Warrington, 2008; Jones, 2010) have similarly documented the importance of emotional relationships with home for prospective students' university choices. Young people in Warrington's (2008) research expressed a sense of familiarity with localities near to their homes and a sense of attachment to the North (of England) informing their preference for universities to those located there. Similarly, those in Christie's (2007) research were making cost-reward evaluations in their university choice that involved weighing up both the financial and social costs of moving away. They spoke about the emotional value they placed on support received from family and friends, some prioritising their relationships with local social and kin networks over geographical mobility, leading them to choose universities geographically close to their homes. All three studies resonate with research that has illustrated cultural incentives to stay close to 'home' or 'at home' while at university, highlighting how family and community ties 'pull' young people towards staying close to 'home', particularly for those from ethnic minority backgrounds (Ball et al, 2002b).

Both Hinton and Christie have challenged the emotionless assumptions of university choice presented in policy texts by illuminating the significance of place attachment in it. According to Hinton (2011), Davies and Trystan (2012) and Jones and

Desforges (2003), people express attachment not only to their immediate locale but to broader geographical space, Wales as a nation, choosing to study within their country as opposed to ‘border-crossing.’ Christie’s respondents similarly saw staying close to home as a valuable alternative to geographical mobility thus challenging normative representations of the mobile HE student.

These studies make a valuable contribution to the vast body of literature referred to earlier that has explored young people’s higher education choices through a lens of social class (Reay et al, 2001; Ball et al, 2002a). They highlight the way in which a greater multitude of considerations inform university choice, including location, finance and reputation of institution (Davies and Trystan, 2012), a sense of cultural ‘belonging’ and attachment to place (Jones and Desforges, 2003; Hinton, 2011) and interpersonal relationships at home (Christie, 2007). Yet these studies do not say enough about how the qualities and characteristics distinct to a particular location underpin feelings of attachment and belonging which, in turn, bear upon where young people choose to study for their higher education. Indeed, Brehm et al (2004) have noted that much of the literature which has documented emotional attachment to place has given little attention to the qualities and attributes of a place which underpin attachment. In understanding the importance of place for young people’s post-school lives, their aspirations and educational choices, it is necessary to consider how the qualities and characteristics which are specific to places might foster a sense of belonging and attachment. In order to gain purchase on this, I turn to literature from the ‘community studies’ tradition.

Community as context

A collection of studies, produced largely in the 1950s, 60s and 70s has been highly influential in documenting ways in which the economic relations which characterise a location are constitutive of its social landscape, in particular, the ‘sense of community’ which characterises it (Dennis et al, 1956; Young and Willmott, 1957; Jackson, 1968). These ‘community studies’ have also illustrated ways in which social and kinship networks within an area foster attachment and belonging to a locality (Young and Willmott, 1957; Rosser and Harris, 1965). These studies are not directly important to a study of young people’s post-school aspirations, choices and

transition. Yet they have indirect usefulness because they illuminate how 'community' can be seen as context which forms part of the scope of 'conditions' which frame preferences and aspirations. While I merely only touch upon the surface of this 'community studies' literature, I do so as way of acknowledging how communities form a part of the 'conditions' (along with local opportunity structures) which indirectly shape preferences (Gambetta, 1986) and impact on young people's post-school lives.

Highly influential examples of this tradition of literature are Rosser and Harris's (1965) seminal study of the family and social change in Swansea, South Wales, and Young and Willmott's (1957) sociological study of the urban working class in East London. These studies reveal ways in which family and social networks provide an important source of community and place through kinship ties facilitating connections and attachments with others in the locality. Young and Willmott (1957) illustrate the way in which kinship networks, particularly between mother and daughter, attach people to the Borough of Bethnal Green. Rosser and Harris (1965) argue, however, that the 'community' was not simply born out of shared residence but out of shared and common working relations and working conditions, community of worship in chapels and community of basic cultural and moral values and language. Jackson (1968) also documented the way in which economic relations bear upon the social landscape of a locality, for example, creating close-knit kinship and social networks, which in turn, foster feelings of attachment and belonging to place. According to Jackson (1968), employment and income compel the working class to live in more or less one-class neighbourhoods. He argued that through the necessity of mutuality and support, co-ops, societies and unions grew, which combined with other groupings around institutions, such as brass bands, helped bind members of a community together.

These historic research studies were particularly important in throwing light on the economic circumstances that constituted social landscapes in localities in the 1950s and 1960s. They highlighted ways in which the specific social qualities and characteristics of a location bore upon residents' emotional attachments with their homes. They revealed how a 'sense of community' or a sense of 'solidarity' between local inhabitants, arose out of the kinship and social networks which were products

of the economic landscape (Frankenberg, 1957). As Jackson (1968) argued, this sense of 'community' also arose from the duration of residence amongst local inhabitants that fostered bonds between neighbours, relatives and friends.

While more recent research has indicated that duration of residence within a locality continues to underpin a strong sense of attachment (Brehm et al, 2004), the extent to which communities based on face-to-face place connections are a feature of contemporary society has been questioned (Putnam, 2000). As Forrest and Kearns (2001) recognise, urbanisation in the early part of the 20th century was said to be creating a new social order in which the traditional ties of community (close-knit kinship networks, shared religious and moral values) were being replaced by individualism, anonymity and competition. In critique of this contention, Charles and Davies's (2005) research has illuminated the way in which face-to-face connections, rooted in geographical places, continue to be important in constructing a sense of community and fostering a sense of belonging and attachment to place. In their re-study of Rosser and Harris's (1965) family and social change locale, in which they consider three different areas of Swansea between 2001 and 2003, Charles and Davies (2005) found that despite the high degree of geographical mobility into and out of parts of Swansea, geographical stability continued to be a significant feature of its working-class areas. Moreover, their exploration of whether these localities continued to be characterised by the close-knit kinship networks which Rosser and Harris (1965) identified, revealed significant continuities in patterns of family formation and kinship relations.

Such evidence suggests that place attachment is fundamentally associated with the social landscape of a locality. In particular, it suggests that close-knit kinship social networks that characterise a place, underpin people's sense of belonging and attachment. If place attachment continues to exist, then place can be said to form part of the 'conditions' which indirectly shape preferences, aspirations and educational choices. Just as the opportunity structures which young people face are defined by the educational, material and cultural resources to which they have access and are therefore socially constituted, so place (the opportunity structures in local contexts and the social landscapes which foster emotional attachments with 'home') also constitute the 'conditions' which inform what people can and want to do.

Conclusion and research questions

The review of the literature presented in this chapter has been guided by the overarching research question stated in Chapter one. Here, I have unpicked the roles of local opportunity structures and social landscapes and contemporary labour market conditions for young people's future aspirations, educational choices and anticipated post-school transitions. This has entailed engagement with a broad range of literature, including that exploring the spatially differentiated nature of opportunity structures and documenting the affective dimensions of place.

The literature suggests that young people's post-school lives are informed by the structures of opportunities they face defined, as they are, by the material, cultural and educational resources to which young people have access (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Ball et al, 1999) in geographically differentiated local contexts (Ashton et al, 1990; Roberts, 1995; McDowell, 2003). Varying structures and scope of employment opportunities have crucial bearing upon young people's transitions from school to post-16 education or training (McDowell, 2003), chances of employment (Ashton et al, 1990; Green and White, 2008), their career aspirations and expectations and plans for migration (Furlong and Cartmel, 1995). Young people are, however, not equally affected by conditions in local settings; those from least advantaged backgrounds are particularly affected by the scope and structure of local opportunities (Coffield et al, 1986; Roberts, 1995; McDowell, 1997; 2003).

Research on the ways in which young people's opportunity structures are spatially differentiated has usefully contributed to our theorising and understanding of young people's post-school choices and transitions. Acknowledging that opportunities are spatially differentiated and aspirations strongly informed by local opportunity structures challenges notions of 'deficit aspirations' which have been used within popular commentaries to explain the lower take up of higher education among particular social groups living in particular geographical locations. To return to Gambetta's (1986) contention that conditions shape preferences, what people *can* and *want* to do leads to the question:

How do local opportunity structures bear upon young people's decisions and transitions from school to post-16 education, their imagined futures and their career aspirations?

The evidence also suggests that young people's aspirations regarding their future employment and 'imagined' futures cannot be understood simply as a response to structural forces. Rather, the meanings that young people attach to their localities, and their emotional relationships with 'home' may well be very influential in their university choices (Hinton, 2011), as well as aspirations for leaving or staying within a locality (Jones, 1999; Jamieson, 2000). Not enough has been said, however, about how the specificities and qualities of a place, in particular, the social landscapes of a place, are implicated in these aspirations and educational choices. The 'community' studies of Young and Willmott (1957), Rosser and Harris (1965) and Jackson (1968) have provided enlightening discussions on the role of social and kinship networks in creating close-knit communities and a sense of belonging to localities amongst local inhabitants. In light of this, the following question is asked;

How does place, in particular, local social landscapes, bear upon young people's university choices and 'imagined' futures?

The opportunity structures which young people face today are not simply geographically variable but also located in time. Young people form aspirations, make choices and anticipate their post-school transitions within economic and political contexts. In recent years, while access to HE has widened, job opportunities have become scarcer and labour markets more competitive and congested. Yet policy rhetoric and popular discourse continue to equate 'learning with earning' and neoliberal discourse has increasingly placed the onus on individuals to equip themselves with the qualifications needed for labour market success. The extent to which these contexts, and discourses dominated by human capital theory bear upon young people's choices and post-school transitions prompts the question:

How do current 'cold' economic landscapes (competition and congestion in the labour market and cuts to public spending on HE in the UK) bear upon young people's decisions about staying in post-16 education and higher education?

Framework underpinning the study.

The approach underpinning the study takes elements from both cultural reproduction perspectives and rational choice theory. The study is underpinned by the premise that young people's post-school aspirations and educational choices are informed by the opportunity structures they face. Objective opportunity structures do not simply vary by the class location of a young person but also by *place* and are situated within a particular historical moment. Young people exercise rational choice, (they can still choose between options even if these are severely limited) and their aspirations and decisions are informed by preference, prior attainment and perceived self-efficacy. However, rational choices are made within externally constituted parameters; these parameters are constituted socially (by the cultural, social and material resources available to a young person) and spatially (by opportunity structures in local contexts) and are thus inherently historical. As Rees et al (1997) and Gambetta (1987) have argued, educational institutions give rise to sets of opportunities which are specific to that historical moment entailing that, irrespective of individuals' interpretation of them, opportunities are unequal across time and place.

We can say, therefore, that educational choices and aspirations are socially and spatially located. They are partly based on the objectively available opportunity structures young people face, and these vary with social and spatial location. Young people must then interpret their opportunities, and these interpretations define the scope of subjective opportunities young people face. How young people interpret their opportunities will be informed by cultural or social norms and class specific preferences and expectations. Young people's subjective interpretations of opportunities also reflect the structure of opportunities in local contexts and historically located meaning of success (McDowell, 2003). They are also informed by young people's identities, which are themselves constituted through their social and cultural background and their interactions with family, friends and teachers (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997).

To conclude, therefore, this study is underpinned by Gambetta's (1987) contention that educational aspirations and choices are the joint result of three main processes; of what one *wants* to do, of what one *can* do, and indirectly of conditions that shape preferences; both causality and intentionality are at play. Young people are both pushed and jump towards goals that are often not socially equal. Yet this study makes an important addition to Gambetta's work by bringing time and place to the forefront of the analysis, viewing local opportunity structures and social landscapes as important in defining what young people can and want to do. In light of the relevance of issues made apparent in this chapter, my summary of the theoretical framework underpinning the study must now be augmented by two more goals than those listed at the end of Chapter two;

- Objective opportunities are also located in the geographical location and historical moment in which people are passing through a particular educational institution. Thus, irrespective of how individuals interpret them, opportunities vary by *time* and *place*.
- Local contexts, and in particular, local social landscapes which foster attachment and belonging, also inform individuals' interpretations of their objective opportunities which in turn inform their post-school choices and aspirations.

Chapter five will provide detailed description of the two different locations in Wales in which the young people who were involved in this research lived (and the opportunity structures and social landscapes which characterise these places). Chapters, six, seven and eight provide empirical evidence as to how these local opportunity structures and contemporary economic climates were brought into play in these young people's educational decision making process and anticipated transitions.

Chapter four

Research Design and Method.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an account of the research process with the aim of making transparent the rationale behind my choice of design and particular use of semi-structured interviews as the principal means of data collection. Explanation is offered as to how the research locations were chosen and why post-16 students within school 6th forms were considered appropriate for exploring the research objectives, and an account is given of the young people involved. The strengths and limitations of using semi-structured interviews are reflected upon, as well as the methodological and theoretical implications of situating fieldwork in schools and involving post-16 students. Much of this chapter is also dedicated to discussing some of the practical tasks involved in data collection, such as establishing contact with schools, gaining access to young people and conducting interviews. It ends with a description of my approach to analysis and a discussion of the ethical and moral dilemmas faced during the research process.

The study is small in scale and modest in its intentions, though its theoretical and political implications may be potentially wide reaching. The young people involved, and the places in which they live, were not intended to represent all young people and all localities. This is not to say, however, that the findings cannot inform our understanding of youth transitions and educational decisions in other regions. Hopefully, in many ways, this study exemplifies the ways in which a focus on the ‘particular’ can illuminate the ‘general’ (Arksey and Knight, 1999). In exploring the post-school aspirations, expected transitions and decisions of young people in two localities in South Wales, the study potentially illuminates the ways in which opportunity structures in local contexts and local social landscapes bear upon young people’s post-school choices and aspirations in other parts of Wales and the wider UK.

Methodology and Method

The study was guided by the question ‘How does time and place bear upon young people’s aspirations, educational decisions and ‘imagined’ futures?’ An appropriate research design and method was needed that would enable me to explore how objective opportunities and constraints, and young people’s understandings and interpretations of them, bear upon their educational decisions and anticipated transitions. Methodologically, the one chosen reflects critical realist ontology; it assumes that there is a real world which exists independently of our perceptions and theories of it (Maxwell, 2012). Social structures are located not just in the minds of individuals but beyond them. This is illustrated in the patterning of human behaviours and action, as exemplified in inequalities in educational participation and outcomes along the lines of social class, ethnicity, gender and ‘disability’. Such educational inequalities are objective realities. Yet, such inequalities are socially constituted, created through structures, institutions and socially constructed values and meanings that perpetuate and reproduce them. Thus, while social structures pre-exist human perception, this is not to say they exist independently of human action; they are produced and transformed in and through our everyday activities and actions.

While, then, I accept ontological realism I also adhere to a form of epistemological constructivism. This assumes that our knowledge of the social world is largely interpretive; a construction of that world, rather than a straightforward reflection or representation of it (Frazer and Lacey, 1993 as cited by Maxwell 2012). Thus, while I take the position that there is an objective ‘reality’ (i.e. of materiality and knowledge/s structured socially, historically and spatially) which exists independently of our theories and perceptions of it I also assume that this reality is socially perceived and constituted, albeit within conditions not always of our own making. Thus, like Maxwell (2012), I would claim that whilst knowledge about the world is always and inevitably partial, incomplete and fallible, this is not to say that some knowledge is more partial, incomplete and fallible than others. I hope therefore, through semi-structured interviews to offer young people’s interpretations of their social worlds as ‘honest’ and ‘valid’ representations. At the same time, where appropriate, highlighting the partiality and specificity of those understandings when

set alongside wider, extant bodies of knowledge ('truths' decoupled from the interests, beliefs and assumptions of specific contexts).

Research design

Given the study's aim to explore the role of place and time in young people's aspirations, educational decisions and imagined futures, an appropriate research design was needed. It was decided that comparison of two localities would be the best way to explore this aim because it would enable me to investigate the ways in which nuanced local opportunities and social landscapes come to bear upon young people's aspirations and educational decisions. Situating the research in just one location may well have enabled me to explore how local opportunity structures and social landscapes bear upon young people; yet without the addition of a comparison place I would not have been able to explore to extent to which the specificities and nuanced characteristics of a place play a role in young people's aspirations and educational decisions. Moreover, by comparing two places which are characterised by similarly high levels of socio-economic disadvantage, this enabled me to go beyond using place as a proxy for social class. I did not intend to view these places simply as 'working-class' localities in South Wales. Rather, by comparing two broadly working-class localities this enabled me to consider how these places, each with different social landscapes and industrial heritages are important in informing young people's post-school lives thus enabling me to explore differentiation between them.

Setting up and situating the research

Sampling the young people, choosing the locations and the research sites.

Once the research questions had been developed and an appropriate design established it was necessary to consider where I would locate the research geographically. Selecting the locations in which to situate the study was a product of lengthy thought and consideration. I travelled to various regions within South Wales, wandered through the streets of small towns and villages, spoke to locals and visited local community libraries in order to get a 'feel' for the places I visited. My final

choice of locations was the product of balancing judgments of practical considerations (time and access), the research foci and the aims and objectives of the research. The places were, therefore, sampled in a way that was both purposive and deliberate (Arksey and Knight, 1999). Since the study aimed to explore the role of local opportunity structures and local social landscapes in young people's aspirations, educational decisions and imagined futures, I wanted to locate fieldwork in places that would lend themselves to comparative study. This meant that it was necessary that I choose locations that had some key characteristics, such as socio-economic profile in common while also having interesting and relevant differences.

The study was located in two different locations in South Wales, a thorough account of which is provided in the next chapter. Within the social sciences it is conventional for researchers to conceal the real names of places that become the focus of their fieldwork (Coffield et al, 1986; Walkerdine, 2010)⁴. The taken-for-granted privileged status attached to the use of pseudonyms in social research has, however, been questioned (Guenther, 2009), and my decision to preserve the real names of these locations (the Rhondda Valleys and Newport) reflects a number of considerations.

As geographical areas, these localities are large enough to warrant undisguised use of their names without threatening the confidentiality of individual places and people who became the focus of the inquiry. Moreover, as demonstrated in the following chapter, my accounts of them would be likely to identify these areas, irrespective of any attempts to anonymise them. I also felt that preserving the names of these places would prevent me from being excessively candid in the way I represented them. As Guenther (2009) has suggested, the use of pseudonyms can give researchers a feeling of protection and encourages recklessness in the way they represent people and places. She has also suggested, however, that preserving the names of places can undermine analytic rigour because researchers present less nuanced representations of the places and people involved in their research. I felt, however, that preserving the names of these places would reduce loss of meaning attached to them and prevent the research findings from becoming decontextualised. Inability to hide behind a thin

⁴ There are of course exceptions to this. Some researchers have preserved the original names of places (for example, McDowell, 2003).

veil of confidentiality has encouraged me to be even more considerate, careful and sensitive in my representation of these places, while hopefully also ensuring rigour in reporting my findings. While I did not change the names of the broad geographical places in which the research was located I have used pseudonyms for smaller places inside them, the schools, young people and the teachers who were involved in the research. I felt this was ethically the most appropriate thing to do in order to preserve the promise of confidentiality given the people who kindly gave up their time to participate.

Having established the geographic locations in which to conduct the research, I needed to consider who should be the focus of the research and in which institutions. These decisions were made hand in hand. The sites or institutions in which I would situate the research, whether schools, youth clubs or FE colleges, would be the medium through which young people would be accessed. The decision to interview young people who were engaged in post-16, as opposed to those still in compulsory education, was informed by my research questions as well as theoretical and practical considerations. Involving this cohort of young people (post-16 students) would enable me to explore retrospectively the decisions that brought them to that point. Interviewing young people nearing transition from 6th form on to higher education, training, employment or elsewhere would also facilitate exploration of decisions regarding their further prospective transitions as well as aspirations for their futures.

Involving young people who were engaged in post-16 education would appear, then, to allow me to gain most purchase on my research objectives and questions. Situating the fieldwork in 6th forms of 11-18 comprehensive schools (as opposed to FE colleges) provided a particularly valuable arena in which to address them. The very nature of the school 6th form and the transience of students inside it (young people typically occupy the 6th form for a maximum of two years before moving on to further or higher education, work or elsewhere) highlights the centrality of expected and 'imagined' transitions and aspirations to their lives.

Yet situating the research in 6th forms in 11-18 comprehensive schools as opposed to further education colleges had theoretical and methodological implications. As Schagen et al (2006, as cited by Pring et al, 2009) argued, when all else is equal,

rates of progression on to post-16 education were *lower* in schools where there are school 6th forms than in 11-16 schools. They suggest that this is generally because the former continued to predominately offer GCE A-levels which are often perceived by pupils as being for the academically elite. A sample containing only students who have stayed-on would, therefore, exclude students whose academic attainment at GCSE level prevented them from entering post-16 education, thus causing a ‘skew’ in the sample towards young people from relatively advantaged socio-economic backgrounds.

Since Schagen’s (2006, as cited by Pring et al, 2009) time of writing there have, however, been considerable changes to the landscape of post-16 education and training in Wales. In recent years there has been a huge expansion in the number of courses (both vocational and academic) on offer to post-16 learners in Wales. This massive expansion of options, particularly vocational ones, discussed further in the next chapter, has meant that more students are staying on in post-16 education with attainment levels below the benchmark 5A*-C grades at GCSE. This has been associated with participation in post-compulsory education and training in the UK in general (Hoelscher et al, 2008), and Wales in particular, increasing greatly over recent decades. Among the Year 11 cohort in Wales, 85 per cent stayed-on in full time education in 2011, compared to 74 per cent in 2004 (CareersWales, 2013).

Situating the study within school 6th forms was, therefore, likely to encompass a greater diversity of students than would have been the case in previous decades, given such greatly expanded access to post-16 education. This is not to say that the notion of the school 6th form as a ‘middle-class’ arena has been completely eroded. Moreover, situating the research in school 6th forms was likely to exclude a section of a cohort of young people who have not progressed on to post-16 education. These young people were likely to have the lowest levels of attainment and come from the least socially advantaged backgrounds. Nonetheless, given the increasing rates of participation in post-16 education noted and the increasing social diversity of school 6th forms, I felt that confining fieldwork to 11-18 state comprehensive schools would allow me to consider the choices and transitions of a greater socio-economic diversity of young people who might have been excluded from the 6th form in previous decades. The sample was, therefore, both purposive and judgmental

(Babbie, 2013), informed both by my understanding of the changing landscape of post-16 education and training in Wales and with the aim of exploring the decisions and transitions of young people who had already made the transition on to 6th form.

Establishing contact with schools and gaining access to young people.

Having decided that school 6th forms would be the most appropriate location for fieldwork, my next problem was to identify how many and which ones. Using several, varied schools had to be balanced against whether it was going to be possible to get to know enough about practices and processes in each, as well as multiplying issues of negotiating entry and managing continuing contact. I decided that focus on two locations, and a school within each which I could come to know in some depth, would outweigh possible benefits of working with more sites. I identified Clayton High School in Newport and Llanon Community School in one of the Rhondda Valleys, described fully in the next chapter, as well suited to my study aims. Clayton High School was located adjacent to a large, local authority housing estate from which a substantial number of its pupils were drawn. The school's intake was largely working-class and ethnically diverse, reflecting the heterogeneous character of Newport's population. Llanon Community School drew its pupils from both the immediate community of Glynteg, which had high levels of economic inactivity and the relatively more economically advantaged community of Llanon. These communities are located in the northerly part of one of the Rhondda Valleys. The school's intake was overwhelmingly white and working-class.

Once I had identified schools located in sufficiently different locations to facilitate comparison, my concern was with establishing links with staff members and gaining access to young people who would be involved in the research. The latter has been documented as constituting a substantial hurdle in the research process (Mauthner, 1997; Pugsley, 2002). Indeed, establishing prior contact with the schools and their head teachers was initially slow and time consuming, involving unreturned phone calls and emails and letters of rejection. However, once I had made contact with key members of staff at both, the process of accessing students was relatively smooth. Following initial contact with the head teachers all my correspondence regarding

fieldwork, such as recruiting students to the study and arranging times to interview them took place through heads of 6th form.

The young people who became involved in the research were purposively and opportunistically sampled (Punch, 2000) in the light of my research questions and objectives, but the involvement of specific individuals was not in my control. Allocation of individuals to the project was greatly informed by teachers at both schools. In Clayton High School, the head of 6th form, Miss Greenwood, selected students from their personal and social education (PSE) lessons that took place on a fortnightly basis. At Llanon Community School, the head of 6th form Mrs Pritchard identified the times and days when students had 'free periods' and allocated them time slots for me to interview them.

Whilst I indicated to the heads of 6th form that I would like to involve students following a range of pathways through post-16 education, including traditional routes (such as A-levels) and vocational qualifications and courses, there was a degree of 'skew' in the representation towards more academically able young people. This resulted in part from the way the students were selected by the heads of 6th form. It is likely that the head of 6th form at Llanon Community Schools put forward more academically high attaining students for interview than those with lower levels of attainment. The majority of students within the sample at Llanon had high levels of attainment and were studying for A-levels and only the minority of students had attainment levels below the level 2 threshold and were studying for vocational qualifications (this will be discussed below). At Clayton High School, students were more mixed in their attainment levels. These differences in the academic attainment levels of the young people who were involved in the research present a number of questions and issues, not least regarding the extent to which I am able to make comparisons between samples which differ in the number of students with comparable levels of attainment. As will be illustrated in later chapters, unequal numbers of young people from either school expected to progress on to HE, and this partly reflects differences in the academic attainments of the young people in each of the samples. Clearly, 'skews' in the representation of young people have consequences for the substantive claims I am able to make, for example, the conclusions I draw regarding university choice. However, whilst the sample of young

people at Llanon was numerically dominated by the more academically high attaining student, this veneer of homogeneity conceals important differences in the types and numbers of qualifications being studied by the young people (as discussed in subsequent chapters). Since the number and type of qualification being studied has implications for young people's subsequent educational choices, this suggests that even when a sample is skewed towards more academically able students this does not weaken a study's potential to provide important insights into the decision making processes and anticipated transitions of young people.

Who were the young people who were involved in the research?

All student interviewees were in post-16 education, 30 in school Year twelve and 27 in Year thirteen, aged 16-18. Reflecting the general pattern of increasing rates of participation in post-16 education in Wales among non-traditional post-16 students, the demographic profile of these two schools' 6th forms was diverse. Neither were monopolised by economically advantaged students, as has been the case in previous decades in some locations (Pring et al, 2009). In both schools, while students entered the 6th form with a broad range of academic abilities they overwhelmingly came from working class backgrounds.

At both schools students also overwhelmingly came from 'non-traditional' backgrounds; many were not only the first in their family to expect to progress to HE but were the first in their family to stay-on in post-compulsory education. While the majority came from 'working-class' homes, a small minority in both schools came from homes which might be described as 'middle-class'. Reflecting its fractured nature (Power et al, 2003), these came from different fractions of the 'old' and 'new' middle-class; six young people from Llanon Community School and four from Clayton High School had at least one parent in a professional or higher managerial occupation. They were typically the sons and daughters of teachers, social workers, nurses or owners or managers of small businesses. Of the six at Llanon, four had at least one parent with a higher education, of which, two had a parent who had experienced HE as a mature student. Of the four students from Clayton High School who would be described as 'middle-class', one had parents with experience of HE and another one had one parent with experience of HE as a mature student.

However, the majority of students (27 from Llanon and 24 from Clayton) did not have parents with experience of HE. These students might be expected not to have a stock of knowledge and experience of HE to draw upon in the way that ‘traditional’ A-level students elsewhere have been shown to do (Ball et al, 2000b). Though similar in the sense that they were overwhelmingly in the first generation in their families to expect to progress on to HE, they were as a group, in other senses, internally fractured and greatly heterogeneous. Their parents’ occupational status and experience of education might position them all as working class but they ranged from long-term unemployed, through to work in unskilled manual, skilled manual and skilled-non-manual occupations. Substantial minorities of those from both schools had parents who were unemployed, twelve at Clayton stating that either one or both of their parents was long term unemployed or currently not working (not counting parents at home with children), compared to seven at Llanon (See Appendix A for tables of parental occupation and education level).

While there was a considerable degree of similarity in the socio-economic intakes of the schools’ 6th forms, there were important differences in their ethnic composition. Students at Llanon Community School were all white, born in Wales and spoke English as their first language while a much more ethnically diverse pupil body existed at Clayton High School. Eight students in the sample were from ethnic minority backgrounds or mixed heritage backgrounds, seven of these speaking additional languages to English; usually Bengali. Two female students spoke English as a second language and were born outside Wales, one in India and the other Pakistan. The differences in the schools’ ethnic make-up reflected those of Newport and the Rhondda, which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Prior attainment and qualifications being studied by students.

While the majority of the young people came from working-class homes and non-traditional backgrounds in the sense that they were the first in their family to stay in post-16 education, a minority came from middle-class homes, and from different fractions of the middle-class. This diversity in the young people’s social backgrounds mirrored the qualifications they were studying, ranging from A-levels, BTECs and NVQs, and the variation in their attainment levels prior to entering the 6th form, as

indicated largely in their GCSE grades. While traditional GCE A-level continued to dominate the post-16 qualifications studied in both schools, individuals were studying for varying types and numbers of qualifications ranging from AS/A-levels to vocational qualification (BTECs).

Half of the students from Clayton High School (13 out of 26) and the majority of students at Llanon Community School (24 out of 31) had GCSE attainment levels which exceeded the level 2 threshold of at least 5 A*-C grades, including Maths and English or Welsh. These students were typically studying purely for GCE AS/A-levels. While the most socially advantaged students were studying for at least three A/AS-levels⁵, these qualifications were not the preserve of the middle-class. Traditional A-level was the most common qualification being studied by students across the whole sample, though those least privileged (for example, from families where at least one parent was unemployed) were most likely to be studying for fewer than two AS/A-level qualifications or level 2 vocational qualifications or were re-sitting GCSEs. These students typically had much lower levels of prior attainment than those studying for at least 3 A-levels and the pattern displayed reflects Connor et al's (2006) assertion that it is overwhelmingly students from less advantaged backgrounds who pursue vocational education.

Some students from both schools had also entered their 6th forms with qualification levels which only just reached or fell below the level 2 threshold (of five or more A*-C grades at GCSE). At Clayton there were 13 students (out of 26) at or below the level two threshold and at Llanon seven students (out of 31) fell into this category. These were typically studying either purely BTECs at level two or three⁶ or in conjunction with an A-level subject. Students were studying BTECs in public services, business studies, paralegal studies, e-media (media production), ICT, finance, travel and tourism, engineering, and health and social care. A very small number of students (two from Llanon and one from Clayton) were re-sitting GCSEs, such as maths, science and English.

⁵ A-level qualifications are the main currency for entering higher education institutions in the UK.

⁶ BTEC level 2 is the equivalent of 5 A*-C grades at GCSE. BTEC level 3 is the equivalent of an A-level.

Table 1. GCSE results by school and attainment level

GCSE results	Number of students at Clayton High School	Number of students at Llanon Community School
Attainment above the level 2 threshold, at key stage 4. (5 or more A*-C GCSE grades, including English and Maths)	13	24
Attainment at or below level 2 threshold, at key stage 4. (5 or more A*-C GCSE grades, but not including English and Maths)	13	7

The schools varied in the extent to which the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification (WBQ)⁷ was embedded in their school programmes. The Advanced level WBQ was compulsory at Llanon but only for students studying two or more AS/A-levels, not others. At Clayton the WBQ was compulsory for all students in the 6th form, those studying level two qualifications taking intermediate level, and level three students pursuing the advanced level WBQ (See Appendix B for detailed tables of student information).

⁷ The Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification (WBQ) is delivered in schools and colleges across Wales. It is available at Advanced, Intermediate and Foundation level. The qualification consists of two parts, the 'core' and 'options'. The 'core' consists of key skills, personal and social education, work-related education and an individual investigation. Students also study for 'options' (GCSES, A-levels, BTECs). Together, the 'core' and the 'options' make up the WBQ.

Conducting interviews

Why semi-structured interviews?

Guided by the overarching research questions set out in Chapter three and given the epistemological and ontological perspectives outlined above, semi-structured interviews appeared to be a valuable tool for exploring the meanings and interpretations that young people attach to their social worlds, acknowledging the ‘culturally honoured status of reality’ within these view points, meanings and interpretations (Miller and Glassner, 2004). As Holland and Thompson (2009) maintain, researchers need to account both for the ways in which young people experience, make sense of and describe their lives, as well as the structural conditions which constrain them. Accepting this, semi-structured interviews enabled me to gather insight into the kinds of opportunities and constraints young people faced and the meanings and interpretations they made of them which underpinned and shaped their lives (Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Miller and Glassner, 2004). What is more, they allowed these meanings to be explored in depth (Arksey and Knight, 1999) and interrogated in the process of analysis and representation (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996).

This approach aimed to overcome longstanding methodological debate over the extent to which interview data can be seen as providing direct access to interviewees’ ‘real life’ experiences, or whether they are constructed in the process of their collection (Silverman, 2001). Use of semi-structured interviews as a method of data collection, of course, exposes the study to critique regarding the status of the data produced, particularly how much of what was said in interviews provided authentic and trustworthy representation of what young people ‘really’ think and do. Reflecting the principles of critical realism, I did not assume I would be holding up a mirror to the social worlds of these young people, nor would I be ‘excavating’ objective ‘truths’ about their lives. I do, however, assume that interviews enabled me to gather young people’s interpretations and meanings they attach to their social worlds, and in this sense enabled me to understand their ‘social realities’.

In representing the data I acknowledge that my interpretations are fundamentally based on what young people said to me in the context of their interviews. In subsequent chapters I apply the notion of ‘articulated rationalities’ in recognition that their narratives were articulated rationales, justifications and explanations for the choices and decisions they were making about their post-school lives. When asked to reflect on and articulate their reasons for staying in post-16 education and for progressing on to higher education, their seemingly ‘rational’ choices were, perhaps, not surprising. Young people’s responses to questions posed at interview are unlikely to appear random and chaotic or as if a choice was made at the ‘flip of a coin’. The very act of articulating and explaining their reasons and explanations for their decisions and anticipated transitions from school on to elsewhere, will likely produce seemingly ‘rational’ and strategic choices. In interpreting their accounts I acknowledge that their ‘articulated rationalities’ might best be conceived of as approximations of what they did or ‘really’ thought or said in other contexts.

Conducting interviews with the young people

Interviews were conducted in two ‘waves’, the first between September and November 2010 and the second between March and May 2011. My initial intention was to interview 40 students (20 from each school) twice, once at the beginning of the academic year and once at the end. It was hoped that this would enable me to explore, as others have done (Furlong and Biggart, 1999; Holland and Thompson, 2009), developments or changes over time in young people’s aspirations and educational decisions. I soon realised, however, that the time constraints on my data collection (mainly imposed by school exam timetables and my own limited time-schedule) would mean that the relatively short gap between the first and second ‘wave’ of interviews would prove infeasible. I therefore took the second ‘wave’ of interviews as an opportunity to re-interview as many students as were accessible and add a second group of new respondents.

As a result of this process of data collection, in Clayton I interviewed 22 first wave students and re-interviewed ten of them, plus a further four new students at the second wave, giving a total of 26 individuals and 36 separate interviews. In Llanon I interviewed 20 first wave students and re-interviewed ten, adding a further 11 new

students at the second wave. In this way 31 individual students in total were involved and 41 separate interviews were conducted at Llanon. Each interview lasted approximately 35-50 minutes. (See Appendix C and D for student interview schedules and appendix E and F for consent forms and information sheets.) There was little difference in the characteristics of the students involved in wave one and wave two and interviewees were identified in much the same way in both waves.

Although I had hoped to begin fieldwork at both schools during the same week, first 'wave' interviews began in Clayton on September 20th, 2010 but not until November 3rd, 2010 in Llanon. The reason for this delay was partly a result of the way in which the head of 6th form at Llanon, Mrs Pritchard, recruited students for the study. Mrs Pritchard was greatly concerned with being thorough in her recruitment of students, establishing the times and days they had free periods, making lists of their availability and allocating time slots for interview depending on when they would be available. Whilst I was indebted to the time and efforts Mrs Pritchard put into collecting students for me, this process of recruiting participants delayed the onset of the fieldwork and meant that I did not begin interviews until a full list of students and the times of their availability was complete. At Clayton in contrast, Miss Greenwood, the head of 6th form, asked students to come out of their Personal and Social Education (PSE) lessons which took place at a regular time on a fortnightly basis. This meant that the timing of interviews was arranged with Miss Greenwood from the outset and this facilitated a much more rapid onset of fieldwork.

The interview as a 'structured conversation'

As Schostak (2006) argues, the initial, scene-setting moment is crucial in determining the progression of interviews. Mindful of this, at the start of each, I introduced myself and gave a brief explanation of my research. I began each in much the same way as Rapley (2004) describes, explaining to participants that they would remain anonymous and the data confidential (Rapley, 2004) and asking for permission to record. Each participant had previously been given the chance to read an information sheet and fill in a consent form, which I had given to the heads of 6th form prior to the interviews. I asked them if they had any questions after reading the information and hearing my brief explanation of the research. I then asked them to

reconfirm their consent to participate. I used a Dictaphone to record the interviews, which helped me to engage more closely in the act of listening and aiding the flow of the conversation, uninterrupted by excessive note taking.

As Frayne (2011) argues, qualitative interviewing is not reducible to formulaic techniques for the researcher must call upon the interactional competencies of everyday conversation. I attempted, therefore, to conduct the interviews as closely as possible to 'structured conversation' as recommended by Rubin and Rubin (2005: 129), and to embed everyday conversational competencies, careful listening, responding meaningfully, refraining from judgment and showing courtesy, within it. I attempted to keep conversations as fluid and flexible as possible, allowing students to bring their perspectives and concerns to them. I would ask questions in response to changing directions and emerging narratives throughout (Warren, 2002), while also structuring conversations around the interview schedule and themes I wanted to cover. Producing an ideal 'conversation-like' interview was, at times, difficult given the limited time available. This meant that I often needed to progress through interview questions in a more structured fashion than I would have wished in order to cover the most pertinent themes and questions that spoke most directly to my research objectives.

Informed by an understanding that interviews are 'non-neutral' contexts in which knowledge is created I did not, therefore, attempt to become invisible, a 'non-neutral' 'faceless interviewer' who discloses nothing of themselves (Rapley, 2004). Rather, I attempted to present myself as a 'real historical individual' with desires and intentions (Harding, 1987) who is 'human' and 'fallible' (Rapley, 2004). Telling participants a little about myself and answering their questions when they asked was an important way of fostering the rapport essential during successful qualitative interviewing. It helps to facilitate 'deep disclosure' on the part of the interviewee (Rapley, 2004), which in its turn helps to enhance the validity of data (Arksey and Knight, 1999). Since knowledge is gathered through achieving inter-subjective depth and mutual understanding (Miller and Glassner 2004), building rapport through presenting myself in this way was hugely important in gathering knowledge about the social worlds of these young people.

While I challenged the notion of the ‘neutral’ and ‘faceless’ interviewer in my approach to conducting the interviews, this is not to say that I did not aim for neutrality in my interactions with students. Asking non-leading questions, paying careful attention to the wording of my questions and responding to interviewees thoughts in a non-judgmental manner and encouraging their narratives without articulating or expressing my own personal opinions (Rapley, 2004) were important means of doing this. While neutral questions can be asked at interview, this does not mean that it is ‘neutral.’ Rather, the interview process and the data gained during it reflects what both interviewers and interviewees have brought to the setting. Indeed, I was hugely aware that my own identity and subjectivity would inevitably shape the process of data collection. My identity as a white, female PhD student at Cardiff University (with little in the way of a South Wales or ‘Valleys’ accent) is likely to have had bearing upon how students viewed me and on the narratives they produced. I recognised that the answers these young people gave to my questions, particularly those regarding their choice of Cardiff University, might have been different had they been asked by another individual with a different set of positions and perspectives (McDowell, 2003). This is not, however, to invalidate the narratives these young people provided, rather, it requires a degree of critical reflection upon what one is able to ‘see’ and ‘hear’ in the interview.

An interview schedule consisting of main questions, probes and follow-up questions was used to introduce main topics and guide the ‘conversation’ (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Each interview opened with questions regarding demographic and personal information including age, gender, ethnicity and languages spoken. These were followed by questions designed to gather contextual information about each participant’s academic history, such as GCSE subjects and grades and courses currently studied in 6th form.

The majority of the interview was dedicated to exploring central themes through a number of ‘main’ questions (Rubin and Rubin, 2005) designed to ‘speak’ to the overarching research questions. One of the ‘main’ questions (and its accompanying probes and follow-ups) centred on the theme ‘*staying on in 6th form.*’ Questions relating to this theme encouraged participants to reflect on their reasons for staying on in 6th form and their decision to stay-on at their school rather than go to another

school 6th form or college. A second main question was *'leaving 6th form'* in which participants were asked to reflect on what they hoped to do after finishing 6th form. Questions aimed to elicit narratives regarding university choice, intentions for further education or employment, the courses they hoped to study and the careers or employment they aspired for or envisaged themselves entering in the future.

Crucial to the progression of the interviews was maintaining flexibility and openness because occasionally interviewees gave answers to questions which rendered subsequent ones irrelevant or inappropriate. For example, a significant proportion of the schedule was dedicated to exploring issues related to university choice; course and location. These questions became largely irrelevant for young people who had indicated early on in their interview that going to university was not something they expected to do. Maintaining flexibility in these cases was a crucial way of responding appropriately to the direction interviews took (Warren, 2002).

A further set of questions centred on the theme *'your locality'*. Here, questions explored themes, such as duration of family residence in the locality, likes and dislikes about the locality and where friends and family lived. Researching themes related to *place* and *locality* raises a number of searching, practical questions. Scourfield et al (2006) discuss the difficulties researchers face when attempting to explore issues not easily accessible through direct questions, such as themes of identity, or young people's relationship with place. They highlight the importance of using creative and imaginative questions that search and explore these issues on a deeper level, enabling participants to talk freely and openly. It is not possible, for example, to ask directly 'what is your relationship with your locality?' because an answer to such an abstract question might not be consciously accessible or easily articulated (Scourfield et al, 2006). Questions were, therefore, asked which would encourage participants to reflect on their local areas in an 'imaginative' sense. For example, they were asked *'how would you describe your local area to a new family who have moved in next door?'* This sort of question aimed to explore participants' relationships with their local area, and to allow interpretations and the meanings they attached to their localities to emerge (McDowell, 2003).

A further set of questions explored young people's 'imagined futures', asking where they aspired and expected to live in the future, eliciting perceptions of employment opportunities in their local areas and elsewhere, including their views on the types of jobs that existed locally and whether they thought there were 'enough' of them. Questions were also asked which aimed to explore the extent to which opportunity structures in local contexts were likely to bear upon where young people 'imagine' themselves living in the future.

Given concern about the importance of contemporary economic contexts for young people's aspirations and educational decisions, a further set of questions drew attention to contemporary economic events and popular and political commentaries surrounding them that formed the backdrop to the fieldwork. During the early and mid part of November 2010, the UK government had announced that higher education institutions could charge up to £9,000 a year in tuition fees. This announcement resulted in widespread student protests across parts of the UK, including Cardiff, Manchester and London. Media coverage of these protests was extensive; stories such as '*How the student fees protest turned violent*' (BBC News Wales, 2010b) and coverage of widespread backlash against government cuts filled our television screens and newspapers on an almost daily basis from early November 2010.

The timing of these events had significant bearing upon the fieldwork. As proposed tuition fee changes became part of an increasingly publicised political and public agenda, I adapted and expanded certain topics in the interview schedule in order to encompass and explore them. This flexible approach to the collection of data mirrors the principles of Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006). Keeping questions broad and open-ended in this way enabled exploration of these 'unanticipated topics', while allowing individual stories to emerge more readily (Charmaz, 2006). As fieldwork progressed, the interview schedule evolved as I adapted questions in parallel to these changing social and political events. I explored topics that had become interesting, such as university choice, with respect to the proposed fee changes and which spoke to my research questions.

Interviewing 6th form teachers.

Interviews were also conducted with the heads of 6th form at both schools. These were conducted after student interviews were completed in June 2011 and lasted approximately an hour each (See Appendix G for interview schedule). The purpose of these interviews was to provide additional, contextualising information that would support analysis of student interviews. I wanted to gather information about the demographic profile of the 6th forms, number of students on roll, entry requirements and courses on offer. They were also intended to allow me to explore some of the themes that had begun to emerge in the students' interviews. I asked questions, for example, regarding how schools informed students about higher education fees and how much lesson time was devoted to talking with them about things like the recent economic 'down-turn' and proposed changes to tuition fees.

One of the main themes explored through these interviews concerned how much careers advice was given at the school and which year groups received it, allowing me to discern how far it informed students' understandings of their employment opportunities and aspirations. A further set of questions addressed the theme '*preparation for HE*', asking about the role of the school and teachers in preparing students for HE. Questions were asked, for example, regarding the part played by the schools in encouraging or helping students in application processes, including writing UCAS forms⁸ and personal statements. I also asked questions which aimed to address the theme '*preparation for alternative routes*' which aimed to explore the schools' role in preparing students for alternative destinations to HE. I felt these questions were particularly important given that a substantial minority of students expect to make transitions other than to HE. A set of questions also explored the theme '*the school and the local economy*' focussing on the extent to which schools had links to local employers and their roles in informing students of the scope of opportunities in the local area.

⁸ Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) is the dominant mode of application to HE courses in HEIs and FE colleges in the UK.

From transcription to data analysis

Analysing the data

Arksey and Knight (1999) assert that data analysis begins in research design and is embedded in the process of data collection, preparation and analysis. This embedded and continuous approach to analysis entails that notes of initial hunches, emerging ideas and thoughts, hopefully, inform the initial stages of analysis. My primary interest in the ideas, beliefs, logic and understandings embedded in respondents' revelations at interview (Arksey and Knight, 1999) focussed my attention, from the start, not only to the content of their narratives, but the meanings and themes embedded in them.

My approach was tentatively guided by principles of Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, Gubrium and Holstein, 2001). After some initial interviews had been transcribed I began a process of attaching 'indexes' or 'codes' to segments of the data that defined their content or meaning (Tesch, 1990; Seale et al, 2004). This process of coding was an important means of organising it into meaningful categories (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996), enabling me to identify some preliminary, emergent themes, together with jottings on my hunches, which formed the very preliminary stages of analysis. I also used some of Huberman and Miles's (1994) tactics to generate meaning, including counting the incidence of particular kinds of responses to particular questions, thus gauging how common a type of answer was and starting to identify patterns and themes.

A method of 'constant comparison' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Miles and Huberman 1984) was then applied to the data at the level of data segments as a way of developing categories and, at the level of the category, exploring connections and relationships (Dey, 2004). This method of coding and categorising the data underpinned the process of thematic analysis (Tesch, 1990), exploring data through making comparisons between categories of codes which emerged from interviews at both schools. The relationships and commonalities revealed allowed exploration of the theoretical questions guiding my research.

Overwhelmingly the data were analysed through an analytic lens of *place*. I asked questions of the data in ways that would help me consider the extent to which opportunities in local contexts and local social landscapes bore upon aspirations and educational choices. Comparisons were therefore largely made between data emerging from interviews with students from the contrasting locations. The data were also interrogated in a way that explored differences, commonalities and relationships *within* a set of data derived from interviews with students from the same school. This approach to analysis sought to allow the data to dictate the categories which emerge rather than imposing them upon it (Dey, 2004). This was a particularly useful method for allowing me to explore intra-class student fractions.

Carrying out preliminary stages of analysis on the data in this way, through identifying tentative concepts and themes, enabled me to pursue leads and ‘hunches’ in subsequent interviews when I returned to the field (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This helped me develop and refine these emerging analytic categories and to ground these concepts in the data. In light of the themes beginning to emerge some interview questions were adapted or changed, some topics expanded and others contracted. Having employed such a flexible and bi-directional approach to data collection, interrogation and analysis enabled me to refine the categories I had first developed and to use them as ‘sensitising’ devices to inform the collection of subsequent data (Arksey and Knight, 1999). This process of modifying initial categories was greatly enabled by entering the field to conduct the second ‘wave’ of interviews.

Taking this approach meant that the structure and format of the interview schedule continually evolved over the course of the fieldwork. This, of course, was not without a great deal of continuity in the structure of the interview schedule. Core interview questions that ‘spoke to’ my overarching research questions remained constant; ‘first wave’ interviews, for example, centred largely on topics, such as ‘staying on in 6th form’ ‘leaving 6th form’ and ‘my locality’ which continued to feature throughout all others, even when other items were added or omitted in light on the preliminary analysis of the first ‘wave’ of interviews.

Manual analysis

Much has been written about the benefits offered to researchers of the use of computer software packages such as NVivo and ATLAS-ti (Bryman and Burgess, 1994; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Flick, 2009). In particular, their value in terms of managing, storing and efficiently and effectively searching for large quantities and rich displays of data and their related codes and memos have been widely emphasised (Flick, 2009). They have also been celebrated for increasing quality and transparency in the process of data analysis (Flick, 2009). While qualitative data analysis software packages facilitate activity, they do not analyse data for the researcher (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Flick, 2009). As Bryman and Burgess (1994) argue, computer packages can hold myriad threads and explore 'sticky links to other categories' (p, 197) but the task of theory construction is that of the researcher who asks questions of the data and is responsible for its rigorous interrogation and categorisation.

My decision to analyse my data manually was informed by these understandings but, more importantly, my intention to 'stay close' to it. As Mannay (2012) has argued, in generating large numbers of categories, computer aided qualitative data analysis software (caqdas) can weaken the essence of participants' accounts. While coding and categorising data is essential to its analysis and interpretation, the process of generating large numbers of categories can mute individuals' voices within interviews. I felt that coding and categorising by hand would best maintain the spirit of each interviewee's accounts while allowing me to carefully employ an inductive approach.

Ethical issues and research dilemmas.

Ethical concerns related to access and consent.

The heads of 6th form, at both schools, acted as 'gatekeepers' to potential participants (Pugsley, 2002). As Morrow and Richards (1996) and Heath et al (2007) argue, it is in this process of 'gaining access' to participants that moral and ethical dilemmas are frequently raised regarding the extent to which they have given full consent. Without

the help and support of these teachers I would not have been able to conduct the volume of interviews in both waves as smoothly and as quickly as I did. I am, therefore, hugely grateful for their time and efforts. Nonetheless, I felt it important that I emphasise to participants that their involvement in the study was entirely voluntary, especially since interviews were conducted in educational establishments where teacher-pupil power hierarchies are routinely entrenched (David et al, 2001; Pugsley, 2002; Renold, 2002). Moreover, given that many requirements within school are obligatory for students, I was anxious to ensure that they would not experience inadvertent pressure to participate (Pugsley, 2002; Mason, 2002; Alderson, 2004).

In an attempt to alleviate this pressure, before beginning each interview I would introduce myself, explain a little about my research interests and then ask each participant to fill in a second copy of a consent form. I would ensure that each participant had read and understood the information sheet and that they understood that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could end the interview at any point, without giving a reason. Participants were also reminded that their names would be anonymised and were asked again for their permission to record. These procedures hopefully maximised the degree to which young people's participation in the research was informed and free from coercion or pressure.

The process of 'recruiting participants' for the study also raised questions about whose voices are heard and whose stories are represented in the research. This was particularly the concern at Llanon Community School where, as already noted, Mrs Pritchard's conscientious efforts to select 'appropriate' students for me may have created bias in the sample towards more 'able' 6th form students. I did, however, make attempts to alleviate this bias by emphasising my keenness to both heads of 6th form to interview students who were studying for a range of qualifications and had a range of attainment levels.

The research involved students whose status within the school positioned them as subordinate actors in staff-pupil/student relationships. Given this, and the position of power that I occupied as adult researcher within an educational context, I aimed to challenge entrenched power hierarchies through conducting interviews in neutral

spaces in the school. This was more easily achieved at Llanon than at Clayton. At the former school interviews were conducted in a room which was neither classroom nor staffroom and was, therefore, somewhat free of the entrenched power relations associated with classroom spaces. At Clayton, however, interviews were conducted in Miss Greenwood's 6th form office, a space arguably redolent of student/teacher power relations. While this made it more difficult for me to challenge the power hierarchy inherent in researcher-participant relationships, I attempted to assuage it through the approach I took during interviews. As discussed above, I did not position myself as a neutral, faceless interviewer (Rapley, 2004) but disclosed something of myself, answering students' questions as a means of building rapport. I attempted to be humble about my role, expressing gratitude for their participation and thanking them for their time.

My attempt to build rapport with individual participants was not, however, without its challenges. Time constraints arising from the schools' timetables, marked by end-of-lesson, lunch time and end-of-day bells (White, 2002) frequently limited the time I had to introduce myself to each participant, re-confirm their consent, re-cap my research interests and conduct an interview which typically lasted 40-50 minutes. On a number of occasions I was confronted with the uneasy ethical dilemma that arose from conflict between the schools' and students' 'time rhythms' (their timetables and exam periods) and my own research interests and agendas. Because I felt it so important to spend at least a few minutes before each interview building rapport through talking informally with students, introducing myself and putting participants at ease through a little 'pre-amble', on occasions four scheduled interviews turned into three. This decision was considered a necessary price to pay for building rapport for fostering the sorts of disclosure on the part of interviewees that seemed crucial for building authenticity and trustworthiness into the data.

Further ethical issues arose in some interviews when I was cast as 'expert' on the topic of higher education and the application process to university. When students turned to me for advice regarding specific higher education institutions the boundary between 'researcher' and 'expert advisor' became blurred. While these concerns did not present themselves on a regular basis they did sometimes arise. Given that a significant proportion of interview time with some, but not all, interviewees was

dedicated to the topic of university choice, some students would ask for clarification on issues about which they were unsure, for example, which courses could be pursued at specific institutions. In instances in which I was momentarily cast as 'expert' (Pugsley, 2002) and where I did not know the answer, I would explain that I was not certain about the answer while, on others, where questions were much more general in nature, such as questions regarding the location of a university, I did offer answers, always saying that I was not an 'expert on universities'. I did not want to offer advice which, at best would be naively erroneous and, at worst, damaging to students' HE choices.

Conclusion

Semi-structured interviews were a valuable means of exploring, in depth, ways in which opportunity structures in local contexts, and young people's interpretations of these opportunities and their relationships with their localities bear upon their aspirations, post-school choices and transitions. They allowed me to accept that young people faced a set of objective and subjective realities that informed their educational choices, decisions and anticipated transitions. In providing this account of the research process and the rationale behind the design and method used, I hope to have made these elements transparent in ways that will enhance their authenticity, credibility and trustworthiness and the interpretations which will be made of the data in subsequent chapters.

Chapter five

Localities: Newport and the Rhondda Valleys, similarities and differences.

This chapter provides an account of the places in which the research fieldwork was situated. Its main intention is to illuminate similarities and differences in the structure of opportunities and social landscapes within these localities. These places are located less than 30 miles apart and both are characterised by similarly high levels of unemployment and economic inactivity. Yet they have followed different trajectories in reaching their present day social and economic landscapes, which reflect their social and economic histories. In subsequent chapters I discuss how these differences in local opportunity structures and social landscapes come to bear upon how young people interpreted their educational opportunities and on their aspirations, anticipated transitions and educational decisions. In creating these accounts I have drawn upon a range of documents; historical books, newspaper articles and council documents as well as data produced by the interviews with young people. In addition, my own explorations of these places, my visits to community libraries and shops, my ‘chats’ with locals during my wanderings through the streets of the Rhondda Valleys and Newport have enabled me to get a ‘feel’ of these places, providing invaluable resource on which I have draw to help me construct representations of them.

Drawing upon Massey’s (1995a, 1995b, 2005) contention that places are constituted through the accumulation or ‘layering’ of articulating social relations over time allows us to understand from where these places’ social and economic landscapes have emerged. According to Massey, places are constructed out of the articulations of social relations which are not only internal to a locale but which link it to elsewhere. These global as well as internal relationships influence a place’s social character as well as the national identity claimed by inhabitants. Massey also sees places as having multiple identities, not static in time but as processes, open, porous and the product of other places. It is these understandings of place that I draw upon

to understand the historical trajectories of Newport and the Rhondda Valleys. Their present day social and economic landscapes are products of their pasts. Thus, in exploring their histories as I do here, I hope to understand these places present day social and economic landscapes.

Since this research is also concerned with the way in which current educational and economic landscapes frame transitions, an account is given of the post-16 education opportunities in Wales that these young people experience. Drawing upon Gambetta's (1987) assertion, my contention is that educational choices are the result of three main processes, of what one *can* do, of what one *wants* to do and indirectly by the *conditions* that shape preferences. The following three chapters, then, explore these processes in our chosen locations.

The Rhondda Valleys

The Rhondda Valleys form part of Rhondda Cynon Taf local authority which covers a broad geographical area in South East Wales. While made up of two valleys, the Rhondda Fach (small Rhondda) and Rhondda Fawr (large Rhondda) it is not uncommon to hear locals referring to them collectively as 'the Rhondda'. I will, therefore, refer to 'the Rhondda' and the 'Rhondda Valleys' interchangeably throughout this and subsequent chapters. In this chapter, many of the official statistics referred to here are for the broad geographical area Rhondda Cynon Taf as obtaining separate data for 'the Rhondda' which is just one of the regions within the local authority along with the Cynon Valley and Taff Ely was frequently not possible. While it might be argued that the lack of data available for the Rhondda Valleys specifically is problematic given that the regions within the local authority are hugely diverse in terms of their social and economic characteristics, I hope that the data provided for Rhondda Cynon Taf enable me to represent the borough as a whole in a way that enables it to be compared, in a more general sense, to that of Newport.

Rhondda Cynon Taf stretches from Cardiff in the south to the Brecon Beacons in the northern corner of 'Southern Wales' and covers rural, semi-rural and urban areas. In 2010 the local authority's population of 234,309 made it the seventh most densely

populated single tier local authority in Wales out of 22 local authorities. The young people involved in this research who lived in the Rhondda came largely from Glynteg and Llanon,⁹ small communities located in the northerly end of the Rhondda Valleys. Reflecting the socio-economic landscape of the Rhondda Valleys as a whole, these communities are socially and ethnically homogenous, white and working-class.

The Rhondda Valleys' economic and cultural background.

The Rhondda Valleys' industrial background

The South Wales Valleys generally and the Rhondda in particular are often represented in the public imagination as having been the centre of coal mining in South Wales. Davies et al (2008) claim that for over 100 years the name 'Rhondda Valley' was synonymous with the coal mining industry, while historians Francis and Smith (1980) believe that it was 'the greatest coal producing Valley in the world' from the 1800s to the 1990s.

During the second half of the 19th Century, the mining industry in the eastern South Wales expanded rapidly and in the mid 1850s the Rhondda Valleys were being greatly exploited for its steam coal. By 1914 it had become the most intensely mined area in the world (Lewis, 1975) and Williams (1998: 27) argues that the South Wales coalfield came close to being a 'mono-industrial society'. The huge dependence on mining for employment in the Rhondda Valleys was reflected in approximately three quarters of its male workforce being employed by the industry according to the 1921 census. A fundamental accompanying feature of an economy wholly dependent on coal mining was the scarcity of paid employment for women (Davies et al, 2008). There was very little in the way of employment opportunity for them during the late 1800s and early 1900s, when they were overwhelmingly restricted to the domestic sphere (Williams, 1998), their role very much in the home, looking after male breadwinners. While female employment increased with the onset of the Second

⁹ Glynteg and Llanon are pseudonyms, used to conceal the identity of the localities in which the young people live.

World War, even by the mid-1960s, in some areas of the Rhondda Valleys, it remained as low as 20 to 25 per cent (Massey, 1984).

Expansion of the coal mining industry in the 19th Century had stimulated dramatic population growth in the Rhondda. In 1841 the area had fewer than 1000 inhabitants but by 1924 the population had peaked at 167,900. Such growth was largely the product of the influx of migrants responding to the demand for labour required by the coal industry. Initially migrants came largely from rural coastal regions in West Wales (Carmarthen, Pembroke and Cardigan) but, by the end of the 19th century, increasingly from English border counties and South West England, along with small numbers of migrants from Ireland and Italy. Whilst Rhondda's migrants came from a variety of origins, inhabitants belonged to essentially one class communities and working-class radicalism found expression in electoral politics and strong support for the Labour party.

Population growth was also facilitated by the nature of the coal mining industry itself. The heavy physical nature of the work demanded physical health and strength of men who typically reached their greatest earning potential at a young age. Consequently, families were large, adding to the burden of the women and creating demand for a massive programme of house building in the late 19th and early 20th century. In such a mountainous area, the density of housing was high resulting in extreme over-crowding in many parts of the Rhondda.

While mining was a dirty and dangerous occupation it was also relatively stable and secure in the conflict ridden years running up to the Great Depression of the late twenties (Williams, 1998). Davies (1975) reflects on his arrival in the Rhondda Valleys in 1925 and describes the sense of security and the belief held by local inhabitants that the industry would have an enduring existence. Indeed, the pre-First World War years had been a time of expansion for mining while also one of industrial unrest, with extensive and repeated disputes between miners and the coal companies. Williams (1998) argues that coal miners in the South Wales Valleys were five times more likely to strike than the British average in 1901-13. The industry hit difficult times in the 1920s when it began to lose its domination in terms of coal

tonnage and by the 1930s unemployment was disastrously high. By 1932 nearly three quarters of adult males in Glynteg were unemployed.

As a result of such chronically high levels of unemployment, emigration seemed like the only possible option for many residents. Up to 50,000 people left the Rhondda between 1924 and 1939. Davies (1975) describes how the impact of the 1926 miners' strike was devastating, so much so that miners and their families left the Rhondda in their thousands in search of work in other parts of the country. Following the strike there was growing contempt towards the mining industry and education was increasingly seen as a means of escaping the prospect of mining and the Valleys in general (Davies, 1975).

The Second World War temporarily solved the problem of unemployment; the industry picked up as a result of demand for coal and the profits gained by coal owners increased during the Second World War. Yet, by the end of the 1940s coal export had almost completely disappeared, resulting in the closure of collieries and the loss of many jobs. The number of mines in the South Wales Valleys reduced from 500 in 1920 to approximately 222 by 1947 (Williams, 1998). While most coal mining areas continued in production well into the 1980s, with some parts of the Rhondda Valleys continuing to have working mines until the 1990s, the period following the Second World War was one of considerable contraction in their number, the tonnages of coal produced and numbers employed.

Industrial disputes between the National Union of Miners (NUM) and the Government occurred throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and the strike of 1984 left miners defeated. The effect of this defeat on miners and their families was devastating. By the 1990s the mining industry in the South Wales Valleys was nigh on non-existent. Glynteg had the last deep mine in the Rhondda and its closure in 1990 marked the end of the industry in the area. Williams (1998) describes how, between the opening of the first coal mine in the Rhondda in 1809 and the closure of the last mine in 1990, the area had been transformed from rural idyll to industrial heartland and then, finally, to a quintessential 'Valley of unemployment' (Williams, 1998).

Social features

On approaching Glynteg by road, travelling over the hills which surround this Northern part of the Rhondda Valleys, the small community of Glynteg sprawls out below. Its housing estates and terraces are surrounded by a cluster of rolling hills. The single main road which passes through the centre of Glynteg in this northern part of the Valleys continues south into Llanon stretching out in front of a long row of small terraced houses behind which Llanon Community School is situated. Glynteg has a single row of shops consisting of small businesses and convenience stores, a small community library, a small number of take-away outlets, a primary school, and the secondary school, Llanon Community School. A number of shops in Glynteg have closed in recent years which some of the students and teachers tell me has been caused partly by the opening of two large supermarkets in the nearby towns in lower parts of the Valley in recent years. The main road which runs through Glynteg and Llanon carries the bulk of the traffic travelling through the communities in this northern part of this Valley over into the next Valley in the North of Rhondda Cynon Taf. To the South, the road stretches into the adjacent community Llanon. It then continues on to the smaller adjacent communities before reaching Coed y Bryn, the closest town. Compared to Glynteg, Llanon with its greater number and range of high-street shops, take-away outlets, busy library and primary school, feels more lively and bustling during the day.

It is in the material and physical characteristics of Glynteg and Llanon that the legacy of coal-mining in the area is revealed; the densely packed rows of slate roofed terraces and the coal wagon monument which commemorates the miners in Glynteg's small park are reminders of its industrial heritage. Much of the housing in Glynteg and Llanon typifies the image of miners' cottages and were largely built between 1920 and 1944 and continue to provide a striking image of the area's industrial and social heritage. These material structures constitute not only contemporary reality and a key to the past but the Valleys' identity as an 'ex-mining' community.

It is in Glynteg's small community library that the area's industrial heritage is also so visually presented. This small and newly refurbished library holds a large selection

of books and newspaper articles which construct the Rhondda Valleys as a place with an industrial and social heritage strongly embedded in the social and economic relations of the coal-mining industry. These books and articles document the mines; their size, depth and volume, their coal tonnage, their disasters, deaths and dates of closures. They construct the Valleys as a place which is characterised by solidarity and socialism. Narratives of unity and great courage permeate these articles through a language which speaks of a proud community whose inhabitants displayed unwavering and militant support for the trade unions and staunchly socialist orientations during periods of industrial action.

The industrial heritage of the Rhondda Valleys has left an enduring imprint on its social landscape. During its prime, the coal mining industry monopolised the economy in the Rhondda Valleys. According to Massey (1984), the dominance of a single industry, such as coal mining, the common working experiences of miners and its relatively undeveloped hierarchical structure had a number of effects; the working class itself was relatively undifferentiated and there were relatively few within the area who could be not be defined as belonging to it. The industry allowed little geographical mobility as workers were bound to their locality by the necessity of employment, further inhibiting differentiation (Massey, 1984).

The social landscape of the Rhondda emerged out of such a nexus of economic relations. Jackson (1968) discussed the way in which the division of labour within a locality bore upon the social character of a community. He argued that, combined with a lack of variation in wages amongst families, their common working experiences, (often physically sharing working conditions, such as working in the mill or down the pit) and the shared and repeated experience of poverty and hardship throughout lifetimes, bound its working-class members together. The necessity for support and trust, born out of mutual experiences of hardship and poverty within working-class communities, fostered the growth of co-ops, unions and other societies and group activities and engendered 'life-styles' which held members of a community together. A number of commentators, though sometimes in rather over-romanticised terms, have described the way in which chapels and workmen's institutes offered evidence of a strong, if changing, tradition of communal activity in the Rhondda Valleys (Davies et al, 2008).

The social landscape of the Valleys was also constituted by its geographical landscape and the structure of the coal mining industry itself. The main road that carries traffic through the communities of Glynteg and Llanon is lined, in parts, with stretches of terraces which are just one or two rows deep. This structure is owed to the steepness of the hilly slopes which has meant that housing developments were confined to the Valley floors. This resulted in chronic over-crowding in the 19th century that, at the same time, fostered the formation of close-knit communities (Lewis, 1975). Gilbert (1992) argued that the organisation and structure of the mining industry in the 19th century impacted on the social landscape of the Valleys. The opening of new pits attracted immigrants whose common experiences of being new arrivals to the area, of work and of residence in densely packed houses, together with the relative isolation of communities in the Heads of the Valley, forged strong 'community' qualities. They created strongly self-contained interests and social activity, a sense of place and of local loyalty and attachment.

The total collapse of an industry based on deep coal mining has left an enduring imprint on the social and demographic landscapes of the Valleys. Today they are largely socially and ethnically homogenous, overwhelmingly white and working-class. In 2010, in Rhondda Cynon Taf, only 2.6 per cent identified themselves as from a non-white background, lower than the Welsh national average of 3.8 per cent (StatsWales, 2013b). Moreover, many parts of the Rhondda continue to be characterised by the sorts of social relations which Jackson (1968) argued are typical of localities dominated by single industries, such as extensive, close-knit kinship and social networks and geographical immobility. This is not only evidenced in the Rhondda's demographic profile but in patterns of habitation that exist in the Valleys today. These were evidenced in student responses to their families' duration of residence. The vast majority of students had roots in the Valleys spanning a number of generations. All but one of them was born in the Rhondda and a significant majority had lived in exactly the same area all their lives (25 out of 31). All of the students had at least one parent who was born and brought up locally and many also had grandparents born and bred in the Rhondda as well. A large majority of them had extended family living in or near the local area and it was frequently the case that

extended family lived within very close proximity to their own homes, sometimes in the same or adjacent streets or in adjacent communities.

A very striking theme to emerge from interviews with young people from the Valley was defined by the way they constructed the area as having a '*sense of community*'; students very frequently emphasised the social and physical proximity to family and friends, they readily used phrases such as the '*closeness of people*', '*close-knit*', and '*community feel*' to describe the local area. A large majority of students used the term '*sense of community*' when they described their locality and approximately half used the *exact* phrase '*everybody knows everybody*' when they talked about the social character of their local areas.

Indeed, my own experiences of the localities reflect these narratives. During my wanderings through the local high streets of Glynteg and Llanon, and on chatting with the local residents in the shops and in the small community libraries I was struck by the friendliness, the openness and warmth with which people approached me. Despite my unfamiliarity and my apparent status as 'tourist' within the area I found that I was frequently acknowledged by local residents on the streets or in shops with friendly smiles and nods of 'hello'. The sense of friendliness and of community was palpable, people frequently stopped to talk to one another on streets, outside shops and at bus stations.

We can fairly say that the social characteristics of Glynteg and Llanon in the Rhondda, in terms of the sense of 'community' evinced by such responses and my own experiences of these places were not only a product of its industrial heritage but also of its geographical landscape. The lengthy duration of inter-generational family residence, coupled with the densely packed houses in the area, had created the conditions for a distinctive social fabric characterised by strong, locally based kinship and social networks. Strongly bonded social ties with friends, family and neighbours were highly evident in a physical geography which allowed only relatively limited transport networks between the Valleys and elsewhere and has accentuated the formation of discrete communities with strong local identities. Subsequent chapters will illustrate how such local social landscapes have a bearing

on young people's feeling of attachment and belonging to their localities which, in turn, informed their 'imagined futures' and university choices.

Sense of national identity

The South Wales Valleys have traditionally been characterised as a place whose inhabitants hold a strong sense of Welsh identity. In 2011 over three quarters of the inhabitants of Rhondda Cynon Taf identified themselves as Welsh. This represents one of the highest rates of such identity among all local authorities across Wales and reflects Balsom's (1985) '*Three Wales model*' in which he identified three distinct identities associated with distinct geographical areas and defined by political affiliations and language. According to Balsom (1985) the Welsh-speaking Welsh ('Y Fro Gymraeg') are mostly situated in North West and west-central Wales, have a strong Welsh identity, largely speak Welsh and have strong political affiliations with Plaid Cymru. Balsom (1985) termed the geographical area which encompasses the industrial South Wales Valleys 'Welsh Wales' and conceived of it as being characterised by strong Labour support and 'traditional radicalism' (Cloke et al, 1998) stemming in part from its industrial heritage. Indeed, as Massey (1984) has argued, Labour support amongst miners was greater than among any other group of manual workers. Inhabitants of these areas were and are predominantly English speaking but hold a strong and distinctively Welsh identity. Born in Wales, they largely see themselves as sharing a collective experience of the recent industrial past and a common cultural heritage (Osmond, 2002). Finally, the 'British Welsh' in Balsom's model are situated along the coastal belts, South Pembrokeshire and the bordering areas with England, thus encompassing Newport (this will be discussed below).

While the durability and validity of Balsom's (1985) model has been questioned and problematised for presenting an essentialist model of regional identity (Scourfield et al, 2006), it has some validity insofar as it maps regional variations in Welsh language use and identity and is reflected in regional differences in the provision of Welsh medium schools across Wales (Davies and Trystan, 2012). Moreover, the notion of a 'Welsh Wales' identity was commonly expressed by young people in this study; over half of those from the Rhondda identified themselves as 'Welsh' (18 out

of 31) or Welsh or Welsh-British (23 out of 31) (the remaining eight out of 31 students identified themselves as 'British'.) Robert (1994) argued that the existence of a distinctive 'Valleys Welsh' identity has been created out of the economic relations of bygone eras. Its distinctive Welsh identity partly stems from the close-knit social and kinship networks, which are residues of the once dominant mining industry and its geographical landscape. In this way we can say that the Rhondda's industrial heritage has not only left an imprint on the local identities and subjectivities of people living in the Valley, but also their national identity, creating a distinct non-Welsh speaking '*Valleys Welsh*' variant.

Current structures of opportunities

Labour market opportunities

The strikes in the 1970s and 80s, and political determination dictating pit closure, had devastating effects on the Rhondda Valleys. They led to almost total disappearance of coal mining, since when there has been little in the way of a substantial job replacement. The effects of de-industrialisation are still being felt today. Population has fallen drastically in the Rhondda from 167, 900 in 1924 to 72,443 in 2001. Much of the local authority has suffered chronically high levels of unemployment, standing at 11.6 per cent at the end of 2010, a figure higher than the national average of 8.4 per cent. Rhondda Cynon Taf is, however, an area of contrast in terms of prosperity and deprivation, with the central and Northern Valleys of the local authority (including the Rhondda Valleys) suffering the highest levels of deprivation in 2008. By the end of 2010 Rhondda Cynon Taf had slightly higher rates of economic inactivity than the Welsh National average, standing at 27 per cent (excluding students) compared with 24 per cent. This rate of economic activity does, however, mask considerable variation within the local authority. Economic activity was highest in the South of the borough (for example, economic activity in Pontypridd was 79 per cent in 2005) whilst rates of economic activity were lowest in the Rhondda at 70 per cent in 2005 (which is located in the central and Northern part of the borough and is where the young people who were involved in the research lived) (Huggins, 2006). While the coal mining industry attracted migrants from

England, parts of rural Wales and, in smaller numbers, Scotland and Ireland, the Valleys have attracted very few inward migrants after the closure of the mines. There has been a net outflow of *young* people aged 16-24 from Rhondda Cynon Taf, and the area has the largest net outflow of daily commuters of all local authorities in Wales (Huggins, 2006). Whilst outflow of young people continues to be high, there has been a net inflow of some 2,300 people of all other ages into the local authority between 2000 and 2004, partly a result of the appeal of its affordable housing to those travelling to work elsewhere (Huggins, 2006).

The Rhondda Valleys continued to experience high levels of unemployment in 2010. The local authority's working age population (those aged 16 and over) who were unemployed exceeded the national average at 11.6 per cent compared to the Welsh national average of 8.4 per cent. In 2008, Rhondda Cynon Taf also had a higher number of workless households than the national average (21 per cent compared to 19 per cent) and by 2011 this had risen to 28 per cent. Planning documents produced by Rhondda Cynon Taf Borough Council¹⁰ state that the Northern Valleys of the local authority (of which Llanon and Glynteg are a part) were experiencing particularly high levels of deprivation and dereliction, compounded by a declining population, below average levels of economic activity and low rates of housing development. While this same document stated that economic activity, business start-up rates and business density in the Rhondda were increasing and qualifications rates showing signs of improvement, it also acknowledged the 'deep seated social, economic and environmental factors that need to be addressed' (Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan. Deposit draft Local Development Plan 2006-2021: 20).

Employment opportunities for young people are particularly scarce in the Rhondda. The collapse of mining swept away opportunities for school leavers, particularly young men. While access to the nearest major towns and cities where more opportunities exist has been greatly increased since the opening of the M4 and substantial A road improvements, the distinct geography of the Rhondda has made transport links to the heads of the valley region (including the communities of Glynteg and Llanon) difficult to improve. Residential streets and town centres have remained congested and have been obstacles to developing roads which would

¹⁰ Rhondda Cynon Taf local Development Plan. Deposit draft local development plan 2006-2021

accommodate a heavy flow of transport. Since neither Llanon nor Glynteg has a train station, access to cities and towns by rail, where employment opportunities are more abundant, is a lengthy and time-consuming process.

Consistent with economic restructuring across Wales and the UK, there has been decline in employment in heavy manufacturing industries and growth in service sector employment (Parry, 2003) in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Despite its decline there remains a higher than national average proportion of employees in manufacturing; just under one in four employees in the local authority were in manufacturing employment compared to 15 per cent nationally in Wales in 2004 (James et al, 2006; Huggins, 2006), though the former represents a decline from 28 per cent in 2000 (Huggins, 2004). It also has a smaller share of jobs in the service sector compared to the rest of Wales (James et al, 2006). Its largest sector being 'public administration, health and education', employment here accounting for over a third of the authority's total (Huggins, 2006) and, 'manufacturing' and 'distribution, hotels and restaurants', accounting for approximately three quarters of all Rhondda Cynon Taf's jobs in 2008 (Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan 2006-2021).

While there has been a slight increase in employment in business and financial services, employment in this sector was still relatively low in 2004 in the local authority with only 7 per cent of employees in this sector, compared to 12 per cent throughout Wales (Huggins, 2006). Business 'birth rate' has increased since 2001, yet the overall density of businesses in Rhondda Cynon Taf is lower than the national average. The proportion of businesses operating in knowledge-based sectors was 12.5 per cent in 2004, below the national average of 14 per cent. There was a higher rate of employment in the public sector than the national average, at 35 per cent compared to 30 per cent in Wales in 2011.

At 11,400 the number of people employed in skilled trades was much higher in Rhondda Cynon Taf than all other local authorities in Wales, except Swansea, in 2010. This was mirrored in the number of those involved in the research who reported having fathers with skilled manual occupations, where strikingly, over half were in occupations, such as builders, electricians, plasterers or plumbers. Thus, despite the collapse of the coal mining industry, a strong culture of manual labour

associated with traditional ‘working-class’ occupations continues to exist. Rhondda young people’s mothers, by contrast were overwhelmingly in the public ‘administration, education and health’ sector, also reflecting its dominance in the area, their occupations ranging from teachers and nurses to shop assistants, dinner ladies and cleaners.

Educational opportunities.

Given the high levels of unemployment that have characterised former mining regions of South Wales over recent decades, participation in post-compulsory education is seen as having a crucial role in the regeneration of the region (Gorard and Rees, 2002). In recent years, a number of programmes have been implemented in the Valleys, including Head of the Valleys Education Programme (HOVEP), aimed at area regeneration, as well as economic development more generally across Wales. While rates of participation in post-16 and higher education among people living in the Rhondda have traditionally been low, those in Rhondda Cynon Taf have increased over recent years, as they have in Wales as a whole. This trend reflects a number of factors, including contraction of the youth labour market and scarce opportunities for school leavers, widened access to post-16 and higher education and credential inflation, whereby the value of educational qualifications has tended to decline (Fuller et al, 2011).

In Rhondda Cynon Taf in 2011, 87 per cent of the Year eleven cohort stayed-on in full-time, post-16 education, either in schools or FE colleges. This represented an increase from 84 per cent in the previous year and was similar to the situation in Wales as a whole, where 85 per cent stayed-on in this way. By Year thirteen, 56 per cent of the cohort remained, markedly lower than the national average of 69 per cent (CareersWales, 2013). Paralleling these increasing rates of participation in post-16 education in the local authority were declining numbers of school leavers entering employment following compulsory schooling. While in 2004, 6.4 per cent of the Year eleven cohort entered employment, only 1.2 per cent did so in 2011, not dissimilar to the national average of approximately 2 per cent.

In 2012, Rhondda Cynon Taf had 19 state maintained secondary schools, which is the largest number of secondary schools in all 22 local authorities in Wales. The students who were involved in the research attended Llanon Community School which is situated in the mid-Northerly part of the Rhondda Valley on the boarder of two communities, Llanon and Glynteg. The school largely serves these communities and a small number of its pupils come from the communities further south of the Valley. In 2011, the school had 651 pupils on roll in total and 96 of these were in its 6th form. The number of pupils in the school who were entitled to receive free school meals exceeded the national average at 38 per cent in 2011 compared to 15.8 per cent of pupils entitled to FSM in secondary school in Wales in 2011/12. (StatsWales, 2013c).

Reflecting the Rhondda's low ethnic minority population, in 2010, 99 per cent of the pupils at Llanon Community School were white, well above national average. Less than 1 per cent of them were able to speak Welsh and the vast majority were first language English speakers. Some 42 per cent of pupils achieved the Level two threshold at Key Stage 4, (five or more A*-C grades at GCSE) which was below the national average of 66 per cent in 2010. The majority of pupils (approximately 60 per cent) entered the 6th form after completion of Year eleven, the remainder progressing on to the further education college. At Key Stage 5, 80 per cent of pupils who entered for two or more A-levels or their equivalent achieved this Level three threshold.

Llanon Community School's 6th form was part of the local authority's '14-19 Consortium' which is made up of all of nineteen secondary schools in the local authority working collaboratively with Coleg Morgannwg and the University of Glamorgan¹¹ to provide a broad range of vocational and academic subjects to 14-19 year olds. The school made links with six other schools in the Rhondda Valleys, giving its 6th form pupils the opportunity to travel to neighbouring schools or the college to pursue particular courses. Of the students who were involved in the research, only two were taking subjects for which they had to travel to another school.

¹¹ Since the fieldwork was conducted, the University of Glamorgan, and the University of Wales, Newport merged to form the University of South Wales in April 2013.

Newport

Newport is situated in South East Wales and is the third largest city after Cardiff and Swansea. In 2010, Newport County Borough's population was 141,306 and like Rhondda Cynon Taf, it fell within the top seven most densely populated local authorities (out of 22) in Wales. Newport is located on the river Usk twelve miles from Cardiff and approximately 32 miles from Bristol and is much more accessible to both than the Rhondda Valleys.

Newport's economic and cultural background

Newport's industrial background

Newport has long been established as an industrial 'working-class' city. It shares with the Rhondda Valleys an industrial heritage centred on manual labour and has since retained an image associated with an industrial working class. Yet these places differ in the extent to which a single industry dominated them. While the Rhondda Valleys were dominated by a single industry for decades, Newport experienced a more varied industrial heritage centred on its docks and steel works and, to a lesser extent, ship building. Newport's fluctuating periods of economic growth and decline have centred largely on these industries. The position of its river and port have facilitated access to both people and materials propelling an economy centred around shipping and steel through, to and from Newport.

The industrial revolution propelled Newport into a period of economic prosperity as one of the most important manufacturing centres in Britain (Drysdale, 2006). During this period, discovery of rich deposits of coal and iron ore in the valleys surrounding Newport brought it increasing wealth. Newport's prosperity was enabled by the development of infrastructure needed to transport these resources to the ports for manufacture into commercial products. Newport was exporting charcoal smelted iron in the 18th Century and the iron reaching Newport for export increased rapidly, aided by the opening of the Monmouthshire canal in 1799 which linked Newport with Pontypool and Crumlin. By 1830, Newport had emerged as South Wales's leading coal export port, with tonnages four times greater than that at Cardiff (Davies et al,

2008). The significance of manufacturing within the city earned it a reputation as an 'industrial working town', evolving around its docks and steel industry (Finch, 2006 see Drysdale, 2006: 8).

Mirroring the pattern of economic prosperity and associated population growth in the Rhondda Valleys in the 1800s, the economic prosperity that Newport enjoyed propelled dramatic population growth and by the 1830s it had become the largest town¹² in South East Wales (Drysdale, 2006). Its population continued to expand with continuing economic development from 38,469 in 1881 to 83,691 in 1911. The docks, which were founded on the growth of export of coal and iron and the import of iron ore and timber, played a central role in the latter. When South Dock opened in 1892 this was the largest dock in the world, crowning Newport's 19th century worldwide reputation for their accessible, modern character, expanded greatly by a steady increase in trade (Drysdale, 2006).

A number of infrastructural developments during the early part of the 20th century helped facilitate Newport's developing economy, not least the opening of a major Transporter Bridge in 1906. Consequently, the late 19th and early 20th centuries were the most flourishing years in Newport's history (Davies et al, 2008). The docks continued to have a significant role in the growth of the economy and, by the early 1900s, coal accounted for almost 90 per cent of their trade. In 1914, Newport shipped over 6 million tonnes of coal (Drysdale, 2006) and, during the First World War, became the UK's third largest coal exporter (Roderick, 1994). Newport's dock trade did, however, decline thereafter but its industrial base was strengthened as the demand for products of its foundries and engineering works increased (Davies et al, 2008).

Like the Rhondda, Newport's industry was badly affected by the Depression in the 1920s, which similarly resulted in high rates of unemployment. The Depression had detrimental repercussions for Newport's seaborne trade that declined from 5.53 million tonnes in 1919 to 3.12 million tonnes in 1936. Unemployment levels increased dramatically, especially for males, reaching 35 per cent in 1930. The

¹² Newport was a town up until 2002. In 2002, it was granted city status by the Queen in celebration of her Golden Jubilee.

Second World War brought some relief to these devastatingly high levels of unemployment and, while there were fears that the 1940s would throw the dock industry into decline, their importance to Newport's economy continued up until the late 1960s.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Newport's ports became important for the import of iron ore following the construction of a major steel works in Newport costing £60 million and housing the largest blast furnace in Europe (Davies et al, 2008). The importance of the steel industry during the 1960s was documented in an article by the 'Western Daily Press' (1967) which stated, 'Today, steel is no less important and the 4 mile long site a few miles outside of Newport houses one of the most modern steelworks in Europe'. It describes how both the opening of this large steel works and the opening of the Severn Bridge in 1966 launched Newport into a 'boom period' that caused a substantial influx of both visitors and permanent residents responding to the industrial expansion they brought. The opening of the Severn Bridge and the M4 in 1966 and an important section of the dual carriageway (A449) in Newport in the early 1970s greatly increased its transport connections with towns and cities in other parts of Wales and the UK. These links cast Newport as one of the best connected places in Wales (Davies et al, 2008).

Towards the end of the 1960s and early 1970s Newport's docks were losing significance as an industrial base. The import of iron ore ceased in 1975 when it was diverted to much more recently completed docks in other parts of South Wales. Similarly, while shipbuilding had also been an important part of Newport's industrial history, this ended in the 1970s in face of increasing international competition with larger firms (Drysdale, 2006). Despite this, Newport grew even more prosperous on the back of its steel production, in contrast to the Rhondda where industry centred around coal declined throughout the 1960s. As a result of this prosperity large shopping and business centres were developed in Newport in the 1960s and the building of the largest microchip and semiconductor factory in Europe was anticipated to bring thousands of new jobs. The 1980s saw the development of a car terminal within the Docks estate to receive the import of Japanese cars.

The steel industry continued to play a central part in Newport's economy until recent decades when it underwent considerable contraction. Employment in the city's major steel works declined in the 1980s and major production at Llanwern eventually ended in 2002. Yet, unlike coal mining in the Rhondda, various other sorts of steel production still maintained, albeit having a declining role in Newport's economy. As recently as 2009, approximately 500 jobs in the steel industry in Newport were lost (BBC News, 2009), and in 2011 a major steel works announced the loss of 115 jobs (WalesOnline, 2011) completing the local de-industrialisation of the 1970s and 80s' major impact on Newport's economy.

Social features

Newport shares with the Rhondda Valleys an image of a working-class locality centred on an industrial past. In contrast to the Rhondda, which is overwhelmingly white and working-class, however, Newport is much more ethnically diverse. This diversity is due in part to its proximity and extensive communication and transport networks to major cities in England and South Wales which have attracted a variety of visitors and both temporary and permanent residents over time. Its ports have also facilitated an influx of international migrants over the centuries. The generation of new jobs and housing developments in the city and increased levels of migration from the EU in recent years have further increased its ethnic diversity (Newport City Council, 2010). Newport has been one of highest recipients of migrant workers in Wales since 2004, receiving flows from Eastern Europe, particularly from the Czech Republic and Poland in recent years.

In 2010, 6.5 per cent of residents of Newport identified themselves as non-white: a figure far higher than the 2.6 per cent of inhabitants in Rhondda Cynon Taf and the Welsh national average of 3.8 per cent (StatsWales 2013b). Like the Rhondda Valleys, however, Newport has similarly retained an image of industrial working-class, with some areas becoming increasingly socially advantaged in recent years. The young people who were involved in the research largely came from the working-class areas of Clayton, Portside, Maplewell, Cleaveland and Thornwood¹³ in Newport. Like many of the areas in the Rhondda, including Glynteg, they are

¹³ These localities are pseudonyms to preserve identity.

Communities First areas (StatsWales, 2013d), indicating their high levels of social and economic disadvantage¹⁴. While all these areas in Newport can be described as largely working-class, they vary greatly in ethnic composition. Portside is an ethnically diverse, working-class inner city district in the South of the city and contains the city's dockland area. In 2001, roughly a quarter of Portside's population identified themselves as being from a minority ethnic background, a level far exceeding the national average. Clayton, by contrast is a predominantly white, working-class district situated south-west of the city of Newport. In 2001, 4 per cent of its residents identified themselves as ethnic minority compared to 4.8 per cent in Newport as a whole and only 2.1 per cent in Wales (StatsWales, 2013e). We can see, therefore, that in contrast to the Rhondda Valleys, Newport is a much more socially and ethnically diverse place.

Indeed, during my visits to Newport I was struck by how socially and ethnically diverse the city appeared to be. Within very small distances I passed through housing estates characterised by large semi-detached houses with spacious gardens and private driveways, then, within only a matter of a short walking distance, entered large council estates where houses were smaller, densely packed and with very little space for private gardens or parking. Despite the pockets of prosperity within the city, and their visible presence, the city's working-class and ethnically diverse character is evident. The streets of Portside, the area adjacent to the city centre, are lined with food stores which have a distinctly cosmopolitan flavour; Asian Halal, South Indian, Caribbean and Polish food stores are abundant. While the city centre is busy and bustling in the day, a large number of shops appear to have closed down; shutters and 'To Let' signs adorn the shop fronts lining the streets which stretch into the city centre and clusters of young people gather around the entrance of a 'Business Exchange' centre which advertises job and training opportunities. Thus, whilst Newport's city centre is busy with shoppers in the day, beneath this image of apparent economic buoyancy, Newport's economic and social landscapes have, evidently, been victim of the economic down-turn and de-industrialisation. The large

¹⁴ 'Communities First' was a Welsh Government programme launched in 2001 which aimed to tackle the causes and effects of deep-seated social and economic disadvantage. 'Communities First' areas are identified as being within the top 100 most deprived wards in Wales, as identified by the Welsh index of multiple deprivation.

numbers of shut up shops, towards which the media directed its attention during 2010 (Newport faces ‘tough’ recession, BBC News, 2010c) suggest that Newport had been badly hit by the recession.

Given Newport’s social and ethnic diversity it does not have as homogenous a social landscape as the Rhondda Valleys but, rather, a variety of them which characterise its various localities. While Glynteg and Llanon where our Rhondda fieldwork was situated could be characterised as having extensive, local, close-knit kinship and social networks which construct a ‘sense of community’ in these areas, Newport as a whole cannot be characterised in this way. Only particular parts of Newport, such as ethnically diverse and working-class Portside may safely be characterised as having those sorts of landscapes. Reflecting such difference, less than half of all our students from Newport articulated that a ‘*sense of community*’ characterised their local area. Students made fewer references to the ‘closeness of people’, the ‘sense of community’ or the ‘close-knit’ character of local residents when describing their local areas and only a small minority, less than a third, used the phrase ‘*everybody knows everybody*’. Students who did allude to the closeness of locally based social and kinship networks tended to come from Portside and Clayton.

Differences between Newport and the Rhondda students’ articulation of a ‘*sense of community*’ reflected differences in their families’ patterns of residence. Of the 26 students from Newport, 22 were born there and 13 students had lived in exactly the same area of Newport all their life. The majority (17) students had at least one parent born in the area. These numbers represented much smaller proportions than those in the Rhondda. Newport students’ parents were much more likely to have been born outside of Newport and in other parts of the UK, mainly England. A small number (seven) had parents who were born in Bangladesh, Pakistan, India and Kenya. Just less than half of all Newport students said that the majority of their extended family lived within close proximity to their homes, or within the same areas of Newport, a much smaller proportion than the Rhondda students. However, when both Rhondda and Newport students did live in close proximity to extended family, it was not uncommon for them to live on the same or adjacent streets to grandparents or aunts and uncles. This was particularly the case for students from Asian families where it was not uncommon for their families to have migrated to Newport because extended

family already lived within the area. On the whole, students from Newport, and their families, were much less 'rooted' in their locality in the sense that their inter-generational duration of residence was shorter. In subsequent chapters I will explore how this bore upon young people's emotional relationships with their localities and in turn their educational decisions and aspirations for the future.

Sense of national identity.

As suggested above, residents living in the South Wales Valleys have traditionally been characterised as holding a strong 'Welsh' identity that still tends to be claimed by residents today. But whereas 79 per cent of inhabitants of Rhondda Cynon Taf identified themselves as 'Welsh' in 2011, only 65 per cent of those of Newport did so. These differences were reflected in the national identity claimed by the young people involved in this study; students from the Valleys being much more likely to identify themselves as Welsh than students from Newport. While a significant majority (23 out of 31) of Rhondda students claimed some form of Welsh identity as Welsh or Welsh-British, less than half of those from Newport identified themselves as Welsh or Welsh and British, even after excluding those who identified themselves as Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Indian.

These geographical differences in Welsh identity claimed by inhabitants of Newport and the Rhondda Valley support Osmond's (1988:129) notion that Wales is a 'fractured and fragmented' country made of many different 'Welshnesses,' marked by differences in language use and political and national identity between regions, rather than a unified sense of 'Welshness'. Balsom's (1985) '*Three Wales Model*', in which he attempted to illustrate the diverse nature of 'Welshness' through an analysis of political and cultural identity in the 1980s, located the 'British Welsh' in South Pembrokeshire and the border areas with England, including the geographical area of Newport. Here, Welsh identity is weakest and a British identity strongest with traditionally stronger support for the Conservative party than in other regions. While there have been changes in national identity, political affiliations and language use since Balsom's time of writing (for example, as in the 2012 election when the Labour party retook control of Newport, an area encompassed in Balsom's model as

traditionally holding support for Conservatives), his model does hold some validity for documenting regional variations in sense of national identity.

Newport has a stronger British-Welsh identity than the Rhondda, which claims a stronger 'Valleys Welsh' (Roberts, 1994) or 'Welsh Wales' identity (Osmond, 1988; Balsom, 1985). This stronger British-Welsh identity is the product of its industrial heritage and physical geography, in particular, its proximity to England. Newport's local identity is influenced by the influx of immigrants from England, Ireland and Asia and, more recently, Europe drawn to Newport's docks and steel works and succeeding employment opportunities. Its physical proximity to, and extensive communication and transports links with England, as well as the dominance of broadcasting from England, has resulted in Newport's local and national identity, its accent and dialect, being more anglicised than that of the Rhondda Valleys. Osmond (2002) argues that there is a distinctive split between the East and West of Wales in terms of the kind of Welsh identity claimed, partly engendered by media and communication emphases. Newport has been able to receive English news stations, such as BBC Points West, which broadcasts news to the West of England, as well as BBC Wales, when other areas in Wales had to tune their aerials to do so or had such capacity, in pre-satellite and digital eras, effectively blocked. As a result of such factors, Newport's complex, historical national identity continues to be characterised by stronger claims to a British identity than many other parts of Wales. Indeed, not part of historic Wales and Monmouthshire from the Tudor settlement until comparatively recently, Newport's national identity has long been subject to dispute. With the influx of Irish and English migrants over the decades, Davies et al (2008) claim that Newport came to be seen as a thoroughly 'un-Welsh' town.

Drawing upon Massey's (1995a, 1995b, 2005) contention that places are constantly changing, as 'under construction', as fluid spatio-temporal 'events' (Massey 2005), we can see how the industrial and social past comes to bear on local social landscapes and national identities of the present. The social and economic heritages of the Rhondda and Newport have left an enduring imprint on their social landscapes. This is revealed in the sense of national identity claimed by local residents, which is reflected in the different 'types' of Welsh identities claimed by residents of Newport and the Rhondda Valleys. In subsequent chapters I will discuss

how the national identity claimed by young people in these contrasting localities comes to bear upon their decisions about university, and their aspirations for the future.

Current structures of opportunities.

Labour market opportunities

Like the Rhondda, Newport suffered badly from the effect of de-industrialisation in the 1970s and 80s. Today, the character of its economy is radically different from that of its industrial past. The docks have almost completely disappeared and the steelworks have decreased dramatically in volume, employing just a fraction of the workforce they once did (Drysdale, 2006). These industries, Drysdale (2006) argues, have been greatly ‘streamlined and specialised’ and mostly have been relocated to other parts of the UK or overseas. Significant contraction of manufacturing employment and that associated with the docks and steel works over recent decades has exposed Newport to periods of fluctuating levels of unemployment paralleled by changing population and demographic profiles.

Like Rhondda Cynon Taf, Newport today continues to have slightly higher levels of manufacturing employment than the national average (Newport City Council, 2009-2010), but a much more important service sector. While Rhondda Cynon Taf has a smaller share of jobs in the service sector compared to the rest of Wales, (James et al, 2006), Newport’s service sector employment has grown both in absolute terms and as a proportion of the total workforce. In 2009 the ratio of manufacturing to service sector employment was 20:80, with over half of services in the public sector (Newport City Council, 2011-2015). A planning and development document¹⁵ contends that Newport has ‘evolved from an historic port, a major steel producing and manufacturing town and is beginning to emerge as a dynamic service economy’ (Newport City Council, 2011-2015:9).

Newport’s economy is also strikingly different from that of Rhondda Cynon Taf not only on account of the dominance of the service sector but its growing diversity,

¹⁵ Newport Economic Development Strategy 2011-2015.

though 'public administration, health and education' provided its largest employment sector in recent years, with 31 per cent in 2008 (Newport City Council, 2009-2010). Whilst comparable data are not available for the same year, this is not dissimilar to Rhondda Cynon Taf where it was also the largest sector, accounting for 36 per cent of employees in 2004. While in both Rhondda Cynon Taf and Newport there is greater emphasis in both manufacturing and public administration than in Wales as a whole, 'Distribution, hotels and restaurants' is also very large, accounting for just less than a quarter of all employment in 2008 in Newport. While there is no data available for Rhondda Cynon Taf for this date, this sector accounted for 20 per cent in 2004.

There are, however, substantial differences in the importance of the sector 'Banking, finance and insurance' across the localities. It accounted for 18 per cent of employment in Newport in 2008 but just over 7 per cent in Rhondda Cynon Taf in 2004 (national average 12 per cent). And while in recent years there has been employment growth as a result of business expansion and inward investment across a range of sectors, Newport has a relatively small proportion of employees in skilled trades (6,200 in 2012, relatively low compared to other unitary authorities in Wales and much lower than in Rhondda Cynon Taf at 11,400). Employment in the public sector in Newport in 2012 was 28 per cent, smaller than in Rhondda Cynon Taf at 35 per cent, compared to the national average of 30 per cent.

With Newport's growing service sector and its proximity to other major cities in Wales and England it receives a large, daily influx of employees. 43 per cent of its workforce travel in to Newport from outside which is the second highest figure in Wales to Cardiff (Newport City Council, 2008-2011). This is starkly different from the situation in the Rhondda where the opposite pattern of mobility occurs, Rhondda Cynon Taf having the largest net outflow of daily commuters of all 22 local authorities across Wales, with approximately 22,000 daily commuters from Rhondda Cynon Taf in 2004 (Huggins, 2006). These differences reflect spatial variations in local employment opportunities and proximity to other towns and cities and transport connections between them. Evidently, these areas contrast markedly in their scope of accessible employment opportunities. Newport's extensive transport networks to cities in England and South Wales create access to employment opportunities in

these places. This contrasts starkly with the situation in many of the northern communities in the Rhondda Valleys, including the communities in which the young people who were involved in the research live. Here, inadequate transport links to the nearest major towns and cities mean that people living in the most northerly communities of the Rhondda have to travel for up to two hours to reach the nearest city.

However, despite its relatively large influx of daily commuters, Newport continues to experience high levels of unemployment and manifests high levels of social and economic disadvantage. Its unemployment levels at the end of 2010 were roughly similar in both Rhondda Cynon Taf and Newport where unemployment levels stood at roughly ten per cent of the working age population compared to eight per cent in Wales (StatsWales, 2013f). As a result of these high levels of unemployment and its de-industrialised image, Newport has long been depicted as a dreary, lacklustre city, (Roderick, 1994), a place which is imagined in the public eye to be ‘chaotic’ and ‘sprawling’, lacking both aesthetic charm and culture (Roderick, 1994:1).

In more recent years, however, numerous regeneration and redevelopment projects have taken place. While Roderick (1994) was critical of Newport’s lack of a university¹⁶, professional theatre, airport or football league club in the 1990s, things have changed somewhat since his time of writing. Funding from the Welsh Assembly Government, Newport City Council and a number of private companies has facilitated transformation of some of its economic, physical and aesthetic landscape in recent years, particularly between 2000-2006, through projects including the redevelopment of old dockland area into housing and flats and the redevelopment of the railway station. These regeneration projects have aimed to bolster Newport’s economy and facilitate greater ‘connections’ between it and other parts of Wales so as to bring economic benefit. In recent years, Newport City Council’s web pages and a number of local planning documents¹⁷ have represented

¹⁶ Gwent College of Higher Education (in Newport) was granted degree awarding powers in 1995 which eventually resulted in its admission to the University of Wales as the University of Wales College, Newport in April 1996. In 2003, it became a full Constituent Institution of the University of Wales. In 2013 it merged with the University of Glamorgan to become the University of South Wales.

¹⁷ ‘Newport Unitary Development Plan 1996-2011’ (Newport City Council, 2006a) and ‘Newport local development plan 2011-2026’ (Newport City Council, 2006b)

Newport as a city which, having experienced chronic employment shortages following the contraction of its once dominant docks and steel works, is now becoming a place that is prospering, developing and becoming increasingly attractive both economically and in its visual appeal.

Thus, while Newport has in recent years received considerable financial investment with the aim of bolstering its economy, the northern communities in the Rhondda have received little and continue to have very limited transport and telecommunications. This growth in economic prosperity in Newport has been documented by the Urban Regeneration Company '*Newport Unlimited*' which, in 2010, stated that Newport had been ranked seventh in the UK on account of its rapid economic growth in recent years (Newport Unlimited, 2010). Indeed, an evaluation carried out of the contribution made by '*Newport Unlimited*' claimed that the effect of these regeneration projects on both the economic landscape and aesthetics of the city has been substantial; business and professional services grew between 2003 and 2008, when 3,347 new jobs were created (AECOM, 2010). Newport has, therefore, witnessed some considerable transformations over recent years. Indeed, Finch (2006 cited in Drysdale, 2006: 8) argued that its present is nothing like its industrial past which was that of an 'industrial working town' of steel works and docks.

Yet, planning application numbers declined over the period 2009-2010 while Newport was still suffering the effects of the economic downturn that had swept through Wales in 2008/9. Some regeneration plans were never fully implemented. Moreover, those designed to propel economic growth in recent years seem to have left relatively untouched high levels of unemployment and pockets of disadvantage in a city that felt the effects of the down turn more intensely, given the relative dominance of the service sector in Newport, compared with that of the Rhondda. Approximately 5,000 jobs were lost in Newport in the four years since global economic recession took effect (Newport City Council, 2008-2011), with slumped labour market conditions disproportionately affecting young people (Newport City Council, 2008-2011).

Educational opportunities

In Newport rates of participation in post-16 education have increased over recent years, as they have in the Rhondda and Wales as a whole. In 2011, 83 per cent of the Year eleven cohort entered post-16 full time education in schools or colleges in Newport, representing an increase from 81 per cent in 2010. This was slightly lower than the rate in Rhondda Cynon Taf, where 87 per cent stayed-on, but similar to the level for Wales as a whole, at 85 per cent. Slightly lower rates of progression on to higher education are found in Newport than in Rhondda Cynon Taf at 50 per cent of the Year thirteen cohort, as compared to 56 per cent in our Valley's local authority. These rates are lower than the National average in Wales which was 69 per cent of the Year thirteen cohort continuing into full time higher education in 2011.

Mirroring this increased rate of participation in post-16 education in both Newport and Rhondda Cynon Taf in recent years have been declining rates of school leavers entering directly into employment. In Newport less than two per cent of the Year eleven cohort entered employment in Newport in 2011 compared to nearly seven per cent in 2004, very similar to the marked decrease to 1.2 per cent in Rhondda Cynon Taf compared to 6.5 per cent in 2004 already noted, reflecting the Welsh national trend. Increasing rates of participation in post-16 education and higher education in Rhondda Cynon Taf, Newport and Wales at large reflect widened access to post-16 and higher education across Wales, the contraction of employment opportunities for school leavers and credential inflation.

In both Rhondda Cynon Taf and Newport the percentage of pupils achieving the Level two threshold (5 or more A*-C GCSE grades including English/Welsh and maths) at Key Stage 4 over recent years has also mirrored the national trend. In 2010/11 in Newport, 48 per cent of pupils achieved it compared to 43 per cent in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Both were slightly lower than the national average rate of 50 per cent in 2011.

Newport has eight state maintained secondary schools, of which Clayton High School, the school in which the research was situated, is one. Clayton High School is located within Clayton, a district which is located a little more than two miles south-west of Newport city centre. In 2011 the school was an 11-18 comprehensive, larger

than Llanon in the Rhondda Valleys with 1,236 pupils on roll, of whom 213 were in its 6th form (compared to 651 and 96 in the latter). Clayton High School's ethnically diverse intake also differed from Llanon Community School's predominantly white student body. This was reflected in the approximately 34 home languages spoken there in 2008 and the large proportion of the pupils who received support for the learning of English as an additional language (136 in 2008). We have already noted that, in contrast, Estyn reported in 2010 that 99 per cent of the pupils at Llanon Community Schools were white.

While differing in their ethnic composition, both schools had in common high levels of pupils from socio-economically disadvantaged homes and drew most of their pupils from areas characterised by high levels of socio-economic disadvantage. 35 per cent of pupils aged five to fifteen at Clayton were entitled to free school meals (FSM) compared to 38 per cent at Llanon. These figures both greatly exceed the national average of approximately 16 per cent entitled to FSMs in secondary schools across Wales in 2011/12 (StatsWales, 2013g). In 2008 no pupils spoke Welsh as a first Language in Clayton while, again as we have already noted, less than 1 per cent did so in Llanon.

Post-16 education has changed greatly in recent years in Wales and, while there is a great deal of commonality between England and Wales in the provision of education and training opportunities for 14-19 year olds, following devolution in 1999 the Welsh Government implemented a number of distinctly different education and training policies. In Wales, as in England, the majority of post-16 learning takes place in schools and colleges. Work-based learning only accounts for a minority of learners (Pring et al, 2009). Where Wales differs, however, is in its adoption of a strongly collaborative approach to 14-19 learning (Pring et al, 1999) and since devolution the Welsh Government set out guidelines for restructuring and transforming 14-19 education through the introduction of 'Learning Pathways'. These embodied the necessity of collaboration between schools, FE colleges and training providers in the management and delivery of learning opportunities aimed at achieving the target of 95 per cent of 25 year olds being prepared for high skilled employment or higher education:

Over the next few years all 14 –19 year old learners in Wales will become entitled to a Learning Pathway framework which will help them achieve their maximum learning potential - and help us, as a country, to achieve our aim that “95 per cent of young people by the age of 25 will be ready for high skilled employment or higher education by 2015. (Learning Pathways 14-19 Guidance II, April 2006, Welsh Assembly Government 2006.)

The Welsh Government hoped that this target would be fulfilled through increasing choice and flexibility for learners, ensuring that all young people could pursue individually tailored learning pathways and equipping them with skills and experiences needed for life and work. It aspired to the notion that these ‘transformations’ would ultimately increase opportunities for young people and their participation in their local communities, while enhancing their contribution to the economy. A key aim was to increase choice and flexibility allowing young people greater breadth of options, including both general (academic) and applied (vocational) subjects. 14-19 Networks were established in the 22 Local Authorities in Wales involving representatives from all sectors to ensure that all learners have access to all of the key elements of the ‘Learning Pathways’ framework.

Both Clayton High School and Llanon Community School 6th forms worked collaboratively in ‘consortium partnerships’ with other colleges and schools in their county boroughs. This ‘consortium’ arrangement provided breadth and scope of course options to post-16 learners. Heads of both 6th forms described this as a recent phenomenon. The increasing diversity, particularly of vocational options available to students at their schools had enabled students with a wide range of academic and vocational qualifications gained at the compulsory stage of their schooling to stay in post-16 education.

Conclusion

My intention in this chapter has been to illuminate differences and commonalities between the two locations in which fieldwork took place. In providing these accounts I have attempted to draw out their historical trajectories, describing how their social

and industrial heritages have left an imprint on their recent structures of employment opportunities, local social character and the senses of national identity claimed by local residents. Drawing upon Massey's (1995a) contention that the local 'uniqueness' of a place is product of wider contacts, (the local is already partly product of global forces), we can see that respondents both in Newport and the Rhondda evince social characteristics and senses of national identity constituted by the accumulation, or layering of articulations of social relationships both with other places and internal to locality, over time. What we take to be the 'real Valleys' or the 'real Newport' is the product of influences, contacts and connections which, over time, have settled into and moulded each other and produced something new out of events that we now think of as old. Understanding these localities' present day social and spatial structures requires us to consider their social, economic and political pasts. These places are understood as historically constituted; they do not exist as discrete identities in the present but are products of their past identities and articulated social relations with other places over time.

These places share an industrial heritage associated with manual forms of labour which has formed their image of industrial 'working-class' localities. They have experienced chronic and long-term unemployment levels which today continue to exceed the national average as a result of deindustrialisation which swept away the industries which once dominated. In both localities, their experience of disadvantage is evident, reflected in the shut-up high street shops, the queues outside the job centres and large sprawling local authority housing estates in parts of Newport and the Rhondda Valleys.

Yet these places exhibit present day structures of opportunities, social landscapes and senses of national identity that are very different. While educational opportunities within them are relatively similar and although less than 30 miles apart and with employment opportunities for school leavers scarce in both, the structure of opportunities faced by young people living in these localities is different. Despite being badly hit by the economic down-turn and having suffered from the effects of de-industrialisation Newport experienced a period of economic optimism during the middle of the 20th Century in a way that the Rhondda Valleys had not. Today, Newport's economic base is becoming increasingly diverse, its expanding service

sector and proximity and extensive transport networks to other cities provides it with relatively greater scope for opportunities in comparison with overwhelmingly white, working-class, geographically isolated Rhondda. The Rhondda's slumped economic landscape is more entrenched than Newport's due to the demise of the mines and its physical geography which has prevented extensive economic investment.

In providing these accounts of these localities, I have illuminated the *conditions* which young people experience. In subsequent chapters I explore how these *conditions* (the local structure of opportunities, the local social landscapes and sense of national identity) shape preferences and aspirations, (what young people *want* to do) and also define the parameters of what young people *can*, objectively do. In subsequent chapters, therefore, I address the research questions which ask, how do the local opportunity structures and local social landscapes, described in this chapter, bear upon young people's educational decisions, their aspirations and imagined futures? These conditions are partly informed by external forces which are classed (such as material and educational resources), but as I have illustrated here, these conditions also vary with geographical place, and change over time. The conditions which young people living in these localities experience today are very different from bygone eras, and these conditions will inform not only what people *want* to do, but what they *can* do.

Chapter six

The role of local opportunity structures and contemporary economic landscapes in young people's post-school transitions.

This chapter explores how local opportunity structures and contemporary economic conditions bear upon young people's decisions regarding 'staying on' in post-compulsory education and for some, their transitions to higher education. The last chapter described the conditions, (the local opportunity structures, local social landscapes, sense of national identity and educational opportunities) which young people experience in two different locations in South Wales. In this chapter I seek to establish the extent to which these local employment opportunities, and the context of a 'cold' economic climate, informs the transitions young people made from compulsory to post-16 education. My contention will be that young people's interpretations of local opportunities informed the process by which they made decisions about staying on. Staying on in post-16 education and progression on to higher education was also a means of avoiding scarce employment opportunities within what young people recognised as a highly congested and competitive labour market, as well as a means of investment in human capital. Thus rational choices are made with respect to educational transitions, but these choices are made within boundaries defined by external forces.

This chapter takes as its focal point the very specific time frame in which these young people were progressing through post-16 education and, for some, anticipating progression to higher education. The very particular time frame in which these young people were passing through the end stage of their compulsory education and on to post-16 education proved to be an historical moment in which employment opportunities for school leavers were scarce, labour markets competitive and access to post-16 education and higher education (HE) substantially widened in Wales, as elsewhere in the UK. It was also one in which contemporary economic events, in particular, global economic down-turn, accentuated discourses which equate

‘learning with earning’. These form the backdrop to our exploration of how opportunity structures in local contexts bore upon these young people’s educational choices and aspirations. This chapter addresses the theoretical problem outlined in the introduction concerning the extent to which decisions are informed by structural and cultural forces or rational and strategic evaluations of cost and reward.

Commonalities across the locations: How ‘time’ frames aspirations, educational decisions and anticipated transitions.

Competitive labour markets and ‘credential inflation’.

A strong theme to emerge from the data was the frequency with which students articulated aspirations for higher education. From Newport, sixteen, or over half of the young people responding in Clayton High School, said that they hoped or intended to go on to higher education and a large majority (23) did so from Llanon Community School in the Rhondda. Moreover, the vast majority of young people from both locations emphasised the notion that educational qualifications provide the currency for securing well-paid employment. They frequently alluded to what they perceived to be a highly competitive and congested labour market and made implicit reference to the notion of ‘credential inflation’. Higher education was viewed as a means of securing a competitive advantage in a severely restricted labour market. This was illustrated by Steven and Craig, young men from the Rhondda and Newport:

The current conditions in Britain I’d say it’s better to stay-on because even in, at A-level, if you go into employment with A-levels with people who have got a degree there’s no point, you’ve already lost, so get as much as you can, work for it like. (Steven, Newport)

... um like if I go to uni now there will be more debt and if I go to uni I’ll have no money so I’m going to have to look for a better job to um fund university after I go. But then the job, the people with better degrees there is more competition all the way down the ladder but there is more people looking for jobs now cos there is less jobs cos of cut backs and stuff. (Craig, Rhondda)

These quotes capture one of the most prominent narratives to emerge from interviews with students, illustrating the way in which they constructed higher education as offering them ‘positional advantage’ (Brown, 2003) within a highly competitive and congested labour market. They reveal that young people’s articulated rationalities for staying in post-16 education are economic; staying in education is rationalised in terms of financial gains associated with further and higher education. In this sense, we can see that the contemporary economic landscape in which these young people were situated, informed their educational decisions and transitions through the way they interpreted the wider economic landscapes as competitive and congested. This was further illustrated by Ruth and Lewis from the Rhondda when asked why they thought education was important:

I think it’s, because like it’s so much more difficult, so much harder to get a job now so like the more qualifications you get through school it puts you on a better level to somebody that didn’t stay-on and get their A-levels and things. (Ruth Rhondda)

I think it’s the best option [referring to going to university], um it’s easier to get employed, far easier to get employed after going to university than trying to look for an apprenticeship if you leave at 16, obviously you’re just more qualified. (Lewis, Rhondda)

Jonathan, from Newport, also reflected on the way in which higher education qualifications are associated with financial reward:

C.E. So why did you decide to stay-on in 6th form?

J. Cos I’ve always, well you know like the best way to earn the highest money is to get a degree, so I further my education as much as possibly because then it opens up all my opportunities. (Jonathan, Newport)

These quotes capture the way in which young people equated higher education with financial success. This narrative, which has emphasised heightened competition and congestion within the wider labour market, has dominated popular commentaries surrounding contemporary economic events in recent years. The frequency with which young people reproduced such a narrative of *competitive labour markets* was striking; more than half of all students from both schools felt that employment opportunities were scarce and competition for jobs fierce and they frequently alluded to the contemporary economic landscape as their causes. This was further illustrated

in Mark's reference to the difficulty he believed he would have in obtaining a job within what he perceived as an increasingly competitive labour market:

C.E. Imagine that you hadn't stayed-on in 6th form, what do you think you might be doing now?

M. Um probably nothing, (laughs), I'd hopefully get a job, well I have got a job but if I wasn't in school it would just be a job but because of everything that's going on it would probably be a rubbish job, but yeah.
(Mark, Newport)

Mark, from Newport, illustrates the way in which post-16 education was viewed as a valuable alternative to obtaining a 'rubbish job' in the context of scarce employment opportunities, which he recognised as a feature of the current climate in his assertion 'because of everything that's going on'. Again, we can see here that young people's interpretations of the current economic landscape had bearing upon their post-school decisions. While participation in post-16 and higher education was rationalised as a means of achieving economic security, entering the former and progression on to the latter was also rationalised, not so much in terms of a desire to invest in human capital but as a means of avoiding unemployment.

Irrespective of whether young people's 'articulated rationalities' for entering post-16 education and HE were in terms of investment in human capital or a means of avoiding unemployment, in both locations they alluded to the way that shrunken and competitive conditions were a contemporary feature of the labour market and that educational qualifications are important in this context. This was exemplified not only by Mark's excerpt above but also Bethan's from the Rhondda and Parveen's from Newport:

C.E. Do you think it's better to stay-on in education at the age of 16 than to leave straight away?

B. Yeah definitely well cos you get a better job, better career, more money and I think it's not really, you got all the credit crunch and things now and I wouldn't want to go out and work now cos I tried to do part time work and I can't get a job. **(Bethan, Rhondda)**

P. Well at the moment with the recession and stuff and the cutbacks it's really hard to find a job, and even earning enough money, so I thought well if you go to university there is more chance of you getting

qualifications and getting into different jobs that you might want to do in the future. (Parveen, Newport)

These responses exemplify the way students frequently positioned post-16 and higher education as means of gaining qualifications needed to secure employment or to get a 'better job', as Bethan suggests, within what is perceived to be highly competitive labour markets. To some extent these data suggest that a 'discouraged worker' effect (Raffe and Willms, 1989) characterised these young people's transitions; staying in post-16 education was a means of avoiding (or delaying) entry to a labour market which had severely limited opportunities. Yet, as will be discussed below, the notion of a 'discouraged worker' does not do justice to the complexity of their transitions.

Given the frequency with which popular commentaries surrounding the economic 'down-turn', with its jargon of labour market competition, job loss, 'recession,' 'cuts' and 'credit crunch', were being reproduced in the media over the months in which the research was conducted, it is hardly surprising that these narratives were frequently reproduced in students articulated rationalities, their explanations and qualifications for staying in post-16 education and entering HE. In emphasising the value of higher education for securing well-paid employment, they were reproducing a more pervasive discourse that has been dominated by human capital theory and has characterised official 'widening participation' texts in recent years. Human capital theory postulates a linear relationship between higher education and well-paid employment. It positions individuals as rational choosers who invest in skills and credentials as a way of securing economic success. These young people's aspirations and expectations for higher education and their articulated rationalities for entering HE were steeped in such human capital theory dominated discourse. This reflects a historical moment in which HE is almost universally held up as the most lucrative means of success within the contemporary economic context.

Moreover, at each school, the heads of 6th form acknowledged that their students were only too aware of current economic conditions. Mrs Pritchard threw light on why they so frequently reproduced a narrative of 'recession' and 'credit crunch' and 'competitive labour markets' associated with the economic down turn:

I think a lot of that is covered in their careers lessons that they have and certainly when they have outside speakers to deliver certain, through EBP days, partnership, but certainly the economy and the recession and the challenges now. I think a lot more of them are far more aware now than they might have been five years ago but then the economy has changed in the last five years and so I think a lot of them asked questions when we hit our crisis point um, and I think a lot of them understand more because of family experiences, um you know they know that money's tight and things are more expensive now than they were. And I think a lot of them as well perhaps pay more attention to the news, certainly some the 6th formers, you know, they seem to take an interest in national and international news, I think they are a lot more informed.
(Mrs Pritchard, Head of 6th form, Rhondda)

Mrs Pritchard believed that students received their information from a number of sources, both inside school and the media, contending that this explained why they reproduced a narrative of 'competitive labour markets' so frequently in their interviews. Similarly, when I explained to Miss Greenwood, head of 6th form at Clayton High School, that I had been surprised at how frequently students referred to the 'recession' and 'credit crunch' she suggested that 'form time' discussions had probably contributed to this:

C.E. Yeah cos they talk quite, they are quite clued up, they use terms like credit crunch, recession, economy...

G. Yeah, yeah. We try and do that sort of thing in form time, you know current affairs, they have little snippets of news that are on, and then sort of form teachers say 'oh that was really good this morning' they'll discuss that, they are very good at doing that, er, so at least then they are getting the knowledge because they wouldn't do it at home, they wouldn't go home and read a paper and watch the news, they're out and about, doing stuff, watching trash on the telly, so yeah, yeah they do it that way
(Miss Greenwood, Head of 6th form, Newport).

While these 6th form teachers generally agreed that their school mediated these messages, Miss Greenwood, unlike Mrs Pritchard, suggested that her students were unlikely to receive these messages from the media without its assistance. Both suggested that school played an important part in forming young people's representations of the current labour market and promoting the dominant discourse postulating a linear relationship between learning and earning:

Yeah (chuckles) it comes from lower down the years, when I was in Key Stage 4, they used to have assemblies with Mr Williams who's the oldest

person in the school and he used to say that folk with A-levels get paid on average £140,000 more in their life, I don't think it was £140,000, I can't remember but you could just see all the kids go [she pulls a 'shocked' face] like that, and I think that did it for them, the assistant heads especially in charge of Key Stage 5 and she makes a lot about you know GCSEs aren't going to be enough in this environment, at the moment you need to have the best possible opportunities, you need to be better than the next person which does push them to apply. (Miss Greenwood, Head of 6th form, Newport)

When I asked Mrs Pritchard whether or not current issues regarding employment were discussed with students she explained how they discussed issues like 'graduate employment' with their students:

Yeah, yeah we do mention it definitely, um it's something they do need to be aware of, that even if they do go to university and they graduate even then they might find it difficult to get into an area of interest or field that is linked to their degree because I think they've heard so many times that lots of people with a degree end up doing a job that has nothing to do with what they've studied so I think they're becoming a lot more aware of those challenges as well, definitely. (Mrs Pritchard, Rhondda)

These excerpts suggest that their schools played a strong part in delivering these messages and this helps explain their views as to why so many young people said that they hoped to go on to HE. Evidently these schools were mechanisms for delivering the official discourse in ways that affected the students directly. These messages were seen to reinforce the notion that high aspiration was synonymous with participation in higher education. Contemporary events and popular commentaries upon them, so dominant in the media over the months of 2010, the time at which these young people were making decisions about higher education, certainly constructed the UK economy as 'cold,' congested and competitive. These commentaries reinforced a wider and more pervasive discourse dominating official 'widening participation' texts postulating a linear relationship between higher education and well-paid employment. Whether received through the popular media, school, peer group or home, these young people appeared to receive its messages so powerfully that they tended to position higher education as the means to economic success. This was irrespective of whether it would be a realistically attainable pathway for them, discouraged as they were from entry into a labour market with limited opportunities for the young.

Widened access to the school 6th form.

To suggest that these young people were simply positioned by dominant discourses is, however, to overlook the wider educational contexts in which they were situated. Young people's decisions to stay in post-16 education and to progress to higher education are neither simply products of the internalisation and reproduction of discourses that construct educational credentials as a means of economic success nor simply driven by a desire to invest in human capital. These young people were situated in a context in which labour market opportunities were scarce and highly competed for and access to post-16 education and HE widened, facilitated by increased breadth and depth of subjects and available courses including vastly more vocational subjects on offer.

As a result of this vastly increased access to post-16 education in Wales, neither of our school 6th forms were dominated by academically 'elite' nor economically advantaged young people as has traditionally been the case (Pring et al, 2009). The young people in both 6th forms largely came from working-class homes and were the first generation in their family to stay-on in post-16 education and there was striking heterogeneity amongst them in terms of their prior attainments and the courses they were pursuing.

The young people involved in the research were pursuing a variety of pathways through post-16 education towards very different destinations. Even among the majority who were studying for A-levels, the qualification most readily accepted by university admissions tutors, there was variation in their attainment levels, in the number of A-levels they were pursuing and the courses and universities they expected to enter. While there was an overwhelming consensus among them that higher education was a means of securing 'positional advantage' (Brown, 2003) in an increasingly competitive labour market, the courses and higher education institutions they envisaged entering were not equal in terms of the economic returns associated with them.

There was also a significant minority of students from both schools (nine from Clayton and seven from Llanon) for whom higher education was not an anticipated pathway. Before discussing in greater detail the students for whom HE was an

anticipated pathway in the next chapter, it is important to discuss further the processes by which young people are excluded or included in HE, against a discursive backdrop which positions it as a means of personal and economic success.

Exclusion and inclusion from higher education

There were nine students from Clayton and seven students from Llanon who did not anticipate going on to HE¹⁸. For the majority of these students HE was not so much actively rejected but had been excluded as an option by their previous educational experiences and attainments. While this chapter is concerned with aspirations for and decisions about staying on in post-16 and higher education, I use the term ‘decision making’ in a way that recognises Archer et al’s (2003) assertion that, for the majority of young people, there is not a single ‘moment’ of decision making about HE. Participation in HE is most strongly predicted by prior qualifications, almost exclusively at GCSE and A-levels (Gorard, 2005). Thus, processes of inclusion and exclusion begin to emerge at earlier stages of education, often long before young people ‘actively’ make decisions about participation. This was particularly well exemplified by Chloe from the Rhondda who did not mention higher education, suggesting that her prior attainment levels had closed it off as an option. This suggests that objective opportunities had been internalised, becoming subjective ones too:

C.E. Why did you decide to stay-on in 6th form?

C. (long pause) I dunno, um (long pause). I think I just wanted to re-sit most of my things so that’s why I wanted to stay-on (Chloe, Rhondda).

Similarly, Laura, also from the Rhondda, excluded herself from what she was already objectively excluded:

C.E. Do you see yourself going to university?

L. Not at all. (laughs)

C.E. Why not?

¹⁸ There was also one student from each school who was very unsure about what they would do after leaving 6th form so they are not counted in this, or in the above group of students who expected to go on to HE.

L. I dunno (laughs). I don't think I'm brainy enough for that! (laughs)
(Laura, Rhondda)

Similarly, for Robin, given that his GCSE attainment prior to entering the 6th form fell well below the Level two threshold (which is 5 or more GCSE grades at A*-C), HE did not fall within the scope of his opportunity structures:

C.E. And do you have any ideas about what you want to do after that, when you've left 6th form?

R. Well I wish to carry on further education and move into either child care or animal care. (Robin, Newport)

For many young people like these, higher education is not so much actively rejected, it simply does not lie within the boundaries of the objectively feasible. Their prior attainment levels have excluded them and they do not construct it as an achievable pathway. Bourdieu's (1990) notion of 'the choice of necessity' is useful for understanding why young people only come to expect what is objectively possible to achieve. Young people will not anticipate progression on to HE if it falls outside the realms of the objectively possible; insufficient prior attainment levels act as objective opportunity structures not so much to shape but obviate certain possible preferences (Gambetta, 1987). Natalie from Newport has also discounted the possibility of HE:

C.E. So will you look for jobs as soon as you leave 6th form?

N. Yeah probably.

C.E. So you don't really want to go to uni or college?

N. Na, I thought about it and I think I'll stop here, if you know what I mean, so. (Natalie, Newport)

Evidently, prior attainment operated to exclude long before active choices were made and importantly defined the scope of objective opportunities young people faced. Yet feelings and orientations to HE, informed by cultural and social expectations also influenced the parameters within which educational aspirations and choices played out. Higher education might be rejected or never considered because cultural and social expectations and norms dictated alternative, post-school pathways, or young people may not have had access to the right kinds of 'educational inheritances', the knowledge and experience of HE (Ball et al, 1999), to enable them to construct HE as a feasible pathway. This was illustrated by Paul from Newport:

C.E. Have you had any thoughts about going to uni?

P. Yeah, I don't think uni would be for... I don't like the thought of uni.

C.E. Right? Why not?

P. I don't know why, I just, wouldn't like to go, I just don't reckon it would be for me. I've looked at the uni websites; I just don't think it would be. (Paul, Newport)

Paul's sense that university is 'not for me' might illustrate the way in which dispositions and schemes of perception, structured by habitus (Bourdieu, 1990), along with the limited scope of resources and knowledge of HE on which he is able to draw, lead him to view HE as unobtainable and undesirable. Similarly, the uncertainty with which Megan spoke about her future may have reflected the very limited resources of family experience and knowledge of higher education on which she was able to draw:

C.E. And have you got any ideas about which college?

M. I haven't thought that far ahead yet! (laughs)

C.E. And did you say you'd like to go to uni as well?

M. (Pause)...I'm not sure. (Megan, Rhondda)

However, class habitus and resources alone cannot fully explain these young people's orientations towards HE given that the majority of the young people who anticipated entering HE were the first generation in their family to do so. It is necessary also to account for their objective opportunity structures, or, 'plausibility structures' (Skeggs, 2004), defined by factors like prior attainment levels, which determine the scope of what is possible, thinkable and desirable. Indeed, as Gambetta (1987) has argued, individuals come to prefer what their constraints and opportunities will allow them to achieve. This may help explain why young people like Paul, who had very low GCSE grades, did not aspire for or expect to progress on to HE because it fell outside the boundaries of what was objectively feasible. It had been closed off by his prior educational experiences and attainment. It was positioned outside the realms of the objectively possible for him while, for others, adequate attainment levels allowed them to construct university as a feasible and attainable pathway.

In contrast to students who were excluded from HE on account of their prior, insufficient attainment were those whose prior attainment made HE not only a feasible but inevitable pathway. This is clearly illustrated by Finn from Newport who is the first generation in his family to anticipate progression on to HE. His high levels of attainment mean that HE is a feasible pathway and so alternative pathways were not considered:

C.E. What made you decide to stay-on in the 6th form?

F. Um it was, um basically, I knew that I wanted to go to do, I wanted to go to university and I knew that I had to do A-levels to do that so I was thinking well I could go to the college or I could just go round the corner to school and stay here. (Finn, Newport)

Going to university seemed to be similarly unquestioned by Hannah and Lewis from the Rhondda, given their previous educational success:

C.E. Why did you decide to stay-on in 6th form?

H. Um I dunno it's more of a comfort zone than going to college I'd say. But it weren't because of that, it was because A-levels, I just wanted my A-levels, I wanted to just go on to Uni and I thought it's better to stay-on in school than to go to college in my opinion. (Hannah, Rhondda).

C.E. Why did you decide to stay-on in 6th form?

L. Um, cos I want to go to university and it's the best option to get into a good university is to stay-on and do A-levels, so, that's my only reason really. (Lewis, Rhondda).

For these young people, while HE fell within boundaries defining what is objectively obtainable, they tended to hold only uncertain ideas about the destinations towards which a higher education would itself lead. This did not make their aspirations any the less informed by rationally contingent decisions. They expected to succeed in HE and improve their chances in the labour market or, at least, delay entry to its currently risky character. The frequency with which they and most other young people interviewed in these schools articulated that they intended or hoped to progress on to university was striking. This reflected a time bound landscape of greatly widened access to HE, positioned as the most favoured means to economic success, and limited employment alternatives facing young people who were neither, on the whole, traditional A-level students nor HE applicants. Very few

were expecting to enter elite universities in far away locations, as discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Clearly, however, cultural contexts, internalised in dispositions and orientations towards institutions like HE, and resources of knowledge and family experience of HE are important. Cultural contexts operate not only through the association between class and attainment but in informing people's feeling and orientations towards HE, and defining what is expected for a person 'like me', as illustrated in Paul's assertion '*I just don't reckon it would be for me*'. This is an indication, perhaps, of the way '*habitus tends to generate all the 'reasonable' common-sense' behaviours (and only these) within the limits of these [objective] regularities* (Bourdieu, 1990:55). Indeed, it is striking that none of the young people who did not anticipate transition to HE, from both schools, had parents with experience of post-16 or higher education and the majority of these young people had at least one parent who was long-term unemployed. It is in this pattern of exclusion from HE that we can see social inequalities becoming reproduced in educational inequalities. Young people like Megan, who had reached the Level two threshold at GCSE but who did not have the appropriate educational resources and family experiences to draw upon, might be unable to envisage HE as a destination with any certainty. In this sense, cultural and social contexts inform the ways in which young people interpret their opportunities and, in particular, the cost-benefit evaluations they attach to them. Absence of aspiration for, or positive expectations of, HE are themselves cultivated by the social expectations and resources of information and knowledge young people glean from their families. These social expectations and resources, among other things, inform how costly (socially, emotionally and financially) young people interpret the opportunity to participate might be (Hutchings and Archer, 2001). Following Gambetta (1987), we can see that class norms and social expectations shape preferences which means that certain options may be ruled out 'automatically.'

The structure of opportunities in local contexts also defines the parameters in which choices and aspirations are made since these, along with educational and material resources, define the scope of what people can objectively do. This is the focus of the next section where it is suggested that young people's decisions about staying on

in post-16 and going to higher education are framed by opportunity structures in local contexts and young people's subjective recognition of them.

Differences between the locations: How local opportunity structures bear upon young people's transitions from compulsory to post-16 education.

Local opportunity structures

As described in the previous chapter, both the Rhondda and Newport have suffered badly, though unevenly, from industrial change and decline. The scope of employment opportunities for school leavers in the former is severely limited and reaching employment opportunities in nearby locations difficult, particularly for young people without private transport. In contrast, Newport has a more prosperous economic context and relatively more accessible employment opportunities.

These considerable regional differences in structures of opportunities are well recognised by their young people. It was striking that nearly all (28 out of 31) Rhondda students construed their locality as a place with few employment opportunities. When asked if they felt there were enough jobs locally, Lewis, Fay and Bethan replied:

No, there are very few jobs round here I think, um, there's not a lot which happens here to create jobs, um, the majority of jobs around here that are now being created are like charity, well not charity but um, Communities First jobs and things like that, um, which is quite insulting to the local area (laughs). I mean there is a lot of councillors and things like that but um the majority of people who can take those jobs come from elsewhere anyway. (Lewis, Rhondda)

No, definitely not, no. Well like obviously the mines were the biggest employer, that's all closed down so like a lot of people have left, but there's still quite a lot of people here who have got like no employment at all. (Fay, Rhondda)

No, I don't think there is. They've closed all the factories, there used to be, on the way in home from school on the main road there used to be all factories but there's not any more so I think all, most, everybody I know travels away to work, there's just supermarkets and things. (Bethan, Rhondda)

These quotes illustrate the way in which the Valley is constructed as a place with limited employment opportunities, a very common theme to emerge from Rhondda

interviews. In contrast, only 10 out of 26 from Newport said that this was the case with their locality. These spatial differences in the structure of opportunities in local contexts and young people's interpretations of them were reflected in subtle differences in the nature of their transitions from school to 6th form. For young people from the Rhondda, especially the academically successful, staying in post-16 education was interpreted as their *only* real option in the context of severely limited employment opportunities, particularly for high-skilled jobs. Approximately a quarter of them made reference to such lack when explaining decisions to stay-on in 6th form, which appeared to be less positive choice than necessity:

C.E. So why did you decide to stay-on in 6th form?

R. Because I didn't want to go to college cos it's too far away, and there's no real job opportunities really in the Rhondda Valley so there's no real option then really. (Robert, Rhondda)

Robert expresses a subtle but important theme from the Rhondda; post-16 education was the only 'real option', as it was for Hywel:

Yeah well, yeah I think cos you know there's not so many jobs around for 16 year olds, like I tried for an apprenticeship and didn't get in so I had to stay-on. (Hywel, Rhondda).

While Hywel's positive prior experiences of education and level of previous attainment allowed his transition on to post-16 education to be perfectly possible, he reported having decided to do so only after failing to obtain an apprenticeship. His assertion that 'I had to stay-on' suggests at least ambivalence, a second-bestness about doing so; local contexts had defined what he could objectively do but did not necessarily match what he wanted to do. Similarly, Luke illustrated the way in which staying on in post-16 education was constructed as the *only* possible option in the face of scarce labour market opportunities:

C.E. Imagine that you hadn't stayed-on in 6th form, what do you think you might be doing now if you hadn't stayed-on?

L. Probably applying for college I think cos that's...it's very hard for young people to get a job I think. I don't think I could have done anything else apart from go to college. (Luke, Rhondda)

While Luke expressed a sense that post-16 education was the only possible option, given the scarcity of labour market opportunities, Adam and Shaun constructed

staying on as a beneficial alternative in the context of scarce employment opportunities:

C.E. Why did you decide to stay-on in 6th form?

A. Something to do (laughs)...na I wanna go to uni like, and there's nothing out there anyway is there if you leave school. (Adam, Rhondda)

C.E. Why did you decide to stay-on in 6th form?

S. Further my education I suppose, and university, I thought that would be a better way to go and there's not a lot of jobs about and things so I thought university would open doors and hopefully get something that way like. (Shaun, Rhondda)

Evidently, local opportunity structures informed the decisions young people made about their post-schools lives and the types of transitions they made from compulsory to post-compulsory education. The fact that such young people seemed to have been 'pushed' into post-16 education by scarcity of opportunity in local contexts surely questions the notion that people will only be incentivised to gain qualifications where they see the rewards for doing so. Contrary to McDowell's (2003) finding that school leavers were more likely to stay in education in the context of successful labour markets, the narratives presented here suggest that scarce opportunities in local contexts encourage people to stay in education, implying some support for a 'discouraged worker' hypothesis, of young people 'pushed' into post-16 education.

Post-school opportunities are particularly limited for young women living in the Valley. For young men from the Valley there are *some*, albeit severally limited, employment opportunities in trades such as building and plumbing (reflected in the large number of students' fathers holding these sorts of occupations (see Appendix A)). As discussed in the previous chapter, the presence of these forms of occupations reflects the area's industrial heritage, whereby the legacy of mining has left an imprint on the industries which exist in the area. These sorts of jobs provide some opportunities for employment for young men leaving school, but very limited opportunities for young women. This means that staying in education is a choice made within severely restricted alternatives. Academically successful young men who reject employment within these forms of employment and who recognise the

severely limited professional employment opportunities within their locality view further and higher education as their *only* alternative. Dylan, when asked to imagine what he would be doing if he did not stay in post-16 education, alluded to the availability of manual trades but suggested that these are not the sorts of jobs to which he would personally aspire;

C.E. Imagine if you hadn't have stayed-on in 6th form, what sort of job might you have got if you had not stayed-on?

D. Um definitely something to do with labour I think. It would be difficult for me to pick up an academic job at this age I think, um plumbing, building, bricking, you know being like a labourer, that's about it, I don't know. (Dylan, Rhondda)

Evidently, the scarcity of professional forms of employment in the Valley led academically 'successful' young people, such as Dylan to construct post-16 and higher education as their only option in the context of scarce opportunities in both local and national labour markets. When such students explicitly made reference to scarcity of employment opportunities to qualify their decisions to stay in education, they were not always necessarily merely referring to employment opportunities in the *local* area but to scarce opportunities in general. Staying in education was not so much a positive choice, but one among very limited alternatives, suggesting that a 'discouraged worker' effect characterised their transitions. What young people *wanted* to do and what they *could* do did not always balance in the Rhondda; the scope of local opportunity structures is so limited that, even if young people wanted to enter employment, it was almost always an infeasible option.

For students from Newport, by contrast, 'staying on' was not so much constructed as the *only* option but, rather, the most valuable and rewarding alternative to entering a labour market with a substantial service-sector. In Newport nobody alluded to lack of employment opportunities when they qualified their decision to stay-on in post-16 education. Rather, it was frequently constructed as means of getting a 'better job':

C.E. Why did you decide to stay-on in 6th form?

N. I want to go further in education. Cos I think if you stay-on more in school and you work here you're gonna get a better job, I don't want to go straight into working, that's why. (Nathan, Newport)

C.E. And why did you decide to stay-on?

P. So I could get better qualifications, so I could get a better job. (Paul, Newport)

Certainly, students from Newport, like those from the Rhondda, similarly constructed post-16 education and HE as a means of gaining a competitive advantage within the labour market and a beneficial alternative to entering a congested labour market, as illustrated immediately above and by Karimah's response below:

C.E. So why do you think that it's important to go on to college?

K. Um, I'd say like it is important to go college because like you get to get a lot of qualifications like you get to learn quite a bit as well, but then at the same time I think it depends like I said before, like it depends what you want to be, so in a way it is important, because say, like these days it's hard to get a job as well so you rea...they look at the qualifications more. So I'd say in a way it is important these days. (Karimah, Newport)

Yet the overwhelming sense, expressed by young people from Newport, that staying on in post-16 education is the most *rewarding* alternative to entering employment, set these young people apart from those from the Rhondda where post-16 education was more likely to be constructed as the *only* option. The proximity of Newport's young people to the city centre, a hub of employment opportunities within service-dominated industries, meant that they were more likely to perceive entering employment rather than 6th form as a possibility, albeit one which they rejected:

C.E. Why did you decide to stay-on in 6th form?

P. Um well I dunno I don't think that I wanted to get a full time job at 16, I think I wanted to go to uni cos, obviously for the uni experience and everything and get a good job at the end of it, pay off the debts and all of that so yeah I didn't want to go into full time employment, cos I got a part-time job now, so I don't think I could do that 5-6 days a week.' (Pratik, Newport)

Pratik's experience of part-time employment and the ease at which he secured it was partly a product of his physical proximity to employment opportunities which clearly informed his subjective interpretation of the opportunity structures surrounding him. He described how his decision to stay in education was primarily informed by his aspiration toward HE and the opportunities it offered, both in terms of the '*uni*

experience, as well as getting a *'good job.'* He saw higher education as means of securing a more rewarding job than he currently had but does not discredit the possibility of having a full time job now.

The notion that employment opportunities were available in the locality was also expressed by Miss Greenwood, head of 6th form at Clayton, who suggested that students in her school recognised alternatives to staying on and going on to HE:

C.E. Yeah I mean does anyone talk to them about other options, like if they're not going to university?

G. Oh God yeah, yeah discussions go on about jobs and stuff, but like I said a lot of our kids work in Lloyds TSB so quite a few of them, 'well if I don't go to uni I'll just go full time there' and they seem to think that's acceptable, and I'm not saying it isn't acceptable but I think, you know, their aspirations at times are (pause) bricked off at the end. (Miss Greenwood, head of 6th form, Newport)

The data suggest, then, that local opportunity structures, and young people's interpretations of them, informed the process by which young people reached a decision to stay-on in post-16 education; both staying on and going to university were not perceived as their only options but, rather, as their most lucrative ones, the means of gaining labour market advantage. For those from Newport, their transitions to post-16 education were more likely to be product of a more positive choice than for those from the Rhondda; they were more likely to 'jump' in to post-16 education.

Among the Newport students there were six young men with qualification levels below the level 2 benchmark (5 A*-C GCSE grades) compared to only one in the Rhondda. This may reflect the scarcity of local employment opportunities within manual forms of employment and the dominance of a so-called 'feminised' service-sector industry in Newport (McDowell, 2003) which requires educational qualifications. This may well mean that for young men with few qualifications, post-16 education is the most rewarding option where the alternative is to enter a feminised service-sector. Under these *conditions* young men were more likely to 'jump' in to full-time post-16 education. Thus, such features of local opportunity structures had important bearing upon the types of transitions young people make from school to post-16 education, certainly informing the process by which they reached a decision to stay in post-16 education.

Destinations after the 6th form.

This study was primarily interested in the decision making of young people at a snap-shot of time, exploring how educational and economic conditions at a particular historical moment and opportunities in local settings inform the aspirations, decisions and anticipated transitions of young people. I felt, however, that obtaining data on where these young people went after leaving their school 6th forms would further reveal the extent to which local opportunities bear upon young people's post-school lives. My attempts to gather information regarding the actual post-school destinations that all these young people reached were, however, only partially successful as I was able to obtain information regarding the post-16 destinations of only some. I had discussed with heads of 6th form my intent to gather information regarding the destinations of these young people some months after conducting the fieldwork. Evidently, this made it more difficult for them to retrieve the appropriate data for me given the time delay between these young people leaving the 6th form and me requesting the information.

Through discussions with the heads of 6th form at the schools I gathered a greater and more detailed amount of information regarding the destinations of the young people from Llanon Community School in the Rhondda Valleys. In total, I was given information on the destinations of 29 out of 31 young people from Llanon, but for only eight of these students did I receive details regarding the course they went on to study and institution they attended at higher education. The information I was able to obtain regarding the destinations of the young people from Clayton High School in Newport was far less complete, reflecting the difficulty Miss Greenwood, head of 6th form at Clayton, had in retrieving the necessary information for me. It detailed only partial information about 18 (out of 26) of the students who were involved in the research. No details were supplied regarding the specific HE destinations reached by these young people.

While incomplete, these data show that the educational destinations these young people achieved overwhelmingly matched their 'aspirations' and expectations expressed at interview. Where young people had expressed an intention to go on to university, on the whole, they did, as did those who had expected to go on to FE

college. There were, however more students from Clayton who entered employment after leaving the 6th form despite not expressing the intention to do so at interview. Moreover, the data revealed subtle differences in the post 6th form destinations of young people, with relatively more young people from Newport entering employment than those from the Rhondda, and relatively more young people from the Rhondda continuing to further or higher education. While the sample is small these differences in destinations are compatible with wider patterns of participation in higher education amongst young people in these respective locations, with young people from our Valley's local authority being slightly more likely to enter HE than those from Newport. Moreover, these data revealed that whilst eight young people from Newport entered employment following the 6th form, no students from the Rhondda did so (although, it is possible that the two students for whom I have no information regarding their destinations entered employment). These data suggest that the severely limited scope of employment opportunities in the Rhondda encourages participation in education and discourages entry to the labour market, as illustrated in the frequency with which young people entered further or higher education. This compares to the relative frequency with which young people from Newport entered employment following post-16 education reflecting the available, albeit contracted employment opportunities for young people.

It seems, therefore, that while staying in education immediately following compulsory education represented a more positive choice amongst a range of alternatives for young people from Newport, where entering employment was immediately rejected, their longer term destinations (after leaving the 6th form) would suggest that the existence of employment opportunities eventually encouraged more people to enter employment. Thus, whilst opportunity structures in local contexts did not seem to manifest in different immediate post-school destinations (these young people stayed-on irrespective of whether they 'jumped' or were 'pushed'), these local opportunity structures do appear to have implications for their destinations following the 6th form.

Conclusion

Aspirations, educational choices and anticipated transitions in contemporary economic contexts.

My intention, in this chapter, has been to explore the ways in which young people's decisions about staying in post-16 education and higher education are framed by the *historical* and *geographical* context in which they are situated. Specifically, I set out to explore how local opportunity structures and the current 'cold' economic climate following the global economic down-turn, which is characterised by competitive and congested labour markets, bear upon young people's aspirations, their decisions and transitions from school to post-16 education.

My contention is that the historically and geographically specific educational and economic conditions which young people experience as they pass through post-compulsory education define what young people can objectively do. These conditions in turn shape their aspirations and preferences and the sorts of educational decisions and transitions they make. Their aspirations and educational choices reflected the context of widened access to post-16 and higher education in Wales, scarce employment opportunities for young people and competitive labour markets that have been exacerbated by contemporary economic events.

The data suggest that the 'cold' economic landscape bears upon young people's educational decisions and anticipated transitions through the way that popular commentaries of the recent economic down-turn have reinforced and exacerbated wider and more pervasive discourses, dominated by human capital theory, which postulate a linear relationship between higher education and well paid employment. Reflecting this, young people from both locations, frequently identified higher education credentials, in particular, as the currency of opportunity, the means of achieving a competitive advantage (Brown, 2003) in what young people perceived as a highly congested and competitive labour market.

Neither staying on in post-16 education nor moving on to HE, however, simply reflected a desire to invest in human capital. For young people in today's economic

and job climates, staying in post-16 education and progression to higher education was a rational option, not just in terms of gaining qualifications needed to secure positional advantage in the labour market, but as means of avoiding scarce employment opportunities.

While there was a widespread acceptance that higher education provided the qualifications and credentials needed to gain positional advantage (Brown, 2003) in the labour market, young people were unequally positioned in their capacity to enter it. Processes of exclusion and inclusion operated long before 'active' choices could be made, meaning that a significant minority of young people from both the Rhondda and Newport did not expect to progress on to HE at all because their prior educational experiences and attainments rendered it outside the realms of the objectively and subjectively obtainable.

What about place? How do local opportunity structures bear upon young people's decisions and transitions from school to post-16 education?

Young people's aspirations and educational choices are not simply made within parameters defined by their educational and material resources, or social expectations and class norms, or the historically specific landscape of educational and economic opportunities. They are made within parameters defined by the structure of opportunities in local contexts. Since different geographical places and particular historical moments gave rise to a specific set of conditions or opportunity structures, educational decisions were inherently spatially and historically framed.

My contention is that these conditions, specifically the structure of opportunities in local contexts and young people's interpretations of them, informed the type of transitions young people made from compulsory to post-16 education and the decision making process by which their decisions to stay in education were reached. With very little replacement for employment in and around the mining industry, continuing in post-16 education had become the *only* option for young people from the Rhondda, particularly those academically successful. Entry to it constituted not so much a choice made between an equal set of alternatives but within a severely limited set of options. Thus, young people were more likely to be 'pushed' into post-

16 education by scarcity of local opportunity. While it is only possible to speculate given the incomplete 'destinations' data available, and its small sample size, these data suggest that local structures of opportunity have implications for young people's longer term destinations following their 6th form education. Severely limited opportunities in the Rhondda seemed to encourage participation in further and higher education, and discourage entering the labour market.

In Newport, while labour market opportunities for the young were limited, they were not nearly as restricted as in the Valleys. For academically successful young people staying on in post-16 education was not so much the only but the most rewarding option for securing labour market advantage in the context of recently slumped, now service sector dominated, local industry. Entering employment was an option, but one which they rejected (at least in terms of immediate post-school destinations) because the rewards associated with education were perceived to be greater. With the collapse of the steel making industry the service sector has provided Newport with at least a limited supply of opportunities over recent decades. Thus, for its young people, transition to post-16 education was likely to be more of a positive choice; they were more likely to 'jump' into it in response to local opportunity structures. In terms of their longer term transitions, the existence of available although limited opportunities in Newport seemed to encourage greater entry into the labour market following 6th form education.

Thus, while place did not seem to matter in terms of the immediate post-16 destinations of our young people, it did matter to the processes by which they reached this destination; they either 'jumped' or were 'pushed' in to it. Such processes might be usefully further researched in order to explore their possible consequences for young people's educational experiences and outcomes. In Chapter nine I consider some of the speculative implications of these different types of transitions for young people's future life chances. We can say, therefore, that young people's choices and preferences, and tentatively, the transitions they made, were not simply informed by their subjective interpretation of their opportunities. They were also informed by the structure of objectively available alternatives, and these alternatives are, importantly, placed.

These findings have sociological implications for the way we understand youth transitions. In response to the theoretical problem outlined in the introduction regarding the importance of rational choice and structural and cultural forces in young people's educational decisions and transitions the data suggests that young people make rational choices within parameters defined by external forces. Educational and economic opportunities within national settings, as well as local opportunity structures and material resources and prior attainment, are the conditions that define the boundaries of what young people *can* objectively do. It is within these boundaries that young people's choices are made, and these conditions in turn inform their aspirations and preferences and the sorts of educational decisions and transitions they make. In this sense, historically and spatially specific *conditions* shape what young people *want* to and *can* do (Gambetta, 1987).

Chapter seven

The role of local social landscapes and the contemporary landscape of HE funding in young people's university choices.

This chapter explores the role of place, in particular local social landscapes, in young people's university choices. It also considers how contemporary economic climates inform their university choices. Specifically, I consider how change and uncertainty in the funding of HE in Wales following public spending cuts to the funding of HE in England, informs young people's university choices. In the last chapter I explored young people's decisions about staying on in post-compulsory education, and for some, their anticipated progression on to higher education. In this chapter I intend to take a detailed look at young people's decisions about *where* (geographically) to study for their higher education. I ask, 'how does *place* bear upon the decisions young people make about *where* to study?' and 'how does a 'cold' economic climate which characterises the time frame in which young people are making choices impact on these choices?'

In the previous chapter I described how 39 students out of the group of 57 made available to me by the two schools aspired for or expected to progress to university (16 from Newport and 23 from the Rhondda). Because not all of them had very clear ideas about the courses they hoped to study or the institution they wanted to attend, the focus of this chapter is narrowed to the choice making process of the 33 of them for whom progression to HE was an expected and realistically feasible pathway following completion of the 6th form (21 from the Rhondda and 12 from Newport). These students had at least some ideas about the course they intended to study and the institution they hoped to attend. I have not included students who made very vague reference to 'wanting to go to university' but at the time of interview, had undeveloped ideas about courses they hoped to study or the institutions which they might apply to. Of course, where young people expressed tentative notions of 'going to university' but had little idea about what to study or where to apply to perhaps indicates a 'push' relationship with higher education. Yet, in this chapter I have not

included these young people in the analysis since its focus is the decisions made regarding studying at institutions in Wales and ‘close to home’.

The majority of the young people were from ‘non-traditional’ backgrounds and though they all had experience of a broad range of social, cultural or economic resources which were likely to bear upon their decisions, only six had a parent with experience of higher education. For most of these young people, then, higher education represented a pathway on to a largely unfamiliar and uncertain environment, bringing with it risks, costs and uncertainties which impacted upon and complicated their decision making.

This chapter takes as its focal point the finding that an overwhelming majority of these students expressed a preference to study in Wales and at universities geographically proximal to their homes. It begins by exploring the commonalities across the two localities in terms of the explanations these young people gave and the meanings they attached to ‘studying in Wales’ and at universities which they recognised as ‘close to home’, thus illustrating how current economic climates bear upon young people’s university choices. My contention will be that choices reflected myriad considerations - geographical, material and personal - which were not specific to the contemporary economic climate in which they were made but were exacerbated by them, in particular uncertainty and change in the funding of HE at the time these young people were making choices about their higher education. With respect to the role of local social landscapes in young people’s university choices the data reveal that local social landscapes, which foster place attachment, had important bearing upon university choice. Studying ‘close to home’ reflected young people’s affective relationships with their immediate localities and Wales in general. There were some spatial differences here; for young people from the Rhondda affective relationships with ‘home’ had greater significance in their university choices than were evident in those of their contemporaries in Newport.

Common factors in young people’s higher education choices.

For the 33 young people upon whom we focus here, the frequency with which they expressed a preference to study at universities in Wales was striking. 11 out of 12

from Newport and 19 out of 21 from the Rhondda expressed preferences to study in Wales. Over half of the students from both the Rhondda (twelve) and Newport (seven) listed only Welsh universities and over three quarters from both locations listed a Welsh HEI as their first choice. Only five students out of 33 stated that English universities are their first choice institution¹⁹. A further strong theme to emerge from the data, an overwhelming preference expressed to study ‘close to home,’ showed some common features across the two schools.

Table 2. University choices of students from Llanon Community School in the Rhondda

Student and year of study	University choice and course?	Destinations (where data available.)
Adam Year 13	Swansea University, Cardiff University and Aberystwyth University (Politics and economics)	University
Faye Year 13	Cardiff University or Bristol University (English Lit or Journalism.)	University
Craig Year 12	Cardiff University or Bristol University (History, geography or English literature).	Aberystwyth University. Medieval and early modern history
Mike Year 12	Cardiff University or University of Glamorgan ²⁰ or Swansea University (IT).	Cardiff Metropolitan. Business Information Systems.
Rhys Year 12	Cardiff University and Bristol University (Medicine).	Cardiff University. Biology
Shaun	Swansea University, Aberystwyth University or	University

¹⁹ Applicants to UK HEIs can list up to 5 choices of course and institution and although they do not have to express a preference the young people I spoke to did express hierarchical preferences of universities.

²⁰ In April 2013, the University of Glamorgan merged with the University of Wales, Newport to become the University of South Wales.

Year 13	University of Glamorgan. (Science/biology/marine biology.)	
Luke Year 13	UWIC ²¹ and Bristol University (environmental health).	University
Ben Year 13	Cardiff University, University of Bath, Bristol University and Loughborough University. (Banking and Finance degree). Also hopes to play semi-professional rugby	Took a gap year to play semi-professional rugby before going to university
Dylan Year 13	Cardiff University (history)	Cardiff University
Hannah Year 12	Cardiff University or Swansea University (biomedical science.)	Swansea university. Criminology and criminal justice
Callum Year 13	Cardiff University, University of Glamorgan and Bristol University (geography and GIS)	University
Lewis Year 13	UCL and Cardiff University (Law)	University
Robert Year 13	UWIC, University of Glamorgan and Aberystwyth University (Politics).	FE college
Bethan Year 12	University of Southampton, Bath Spa (Travel journalism or writing, fashion and	University of Kent. Comparative literature and classical and archaeological studies.

²¹ In 2011, the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff changed its name to become Cardiff Metropolitan.

	culture)	
Hywel Year 13	Cardiff University, Swansea University, University of Glamorgan or Trinity St David, Carmarthen (nursing or teaching).	University
Emily Year 12	Newcastle University (Accountancy).	Plymouth University. Primary teaching (mathematics)
Jack Year 13	University of Glamorgan (Art foundation).	University
Rachel Year 13	University of Glamorgan or Swansea University (English Lit).	University
Rhian Year 13	University of Glamorgan or UWIC (English language).	University
Ruth Year 12	Swansea University, Cardiff University or Aberystwyth University. (Sports Science, physiotherapy or PE teaching)	Glamorgan University. Nursing
Vicky Year 13	Trinity St David's, UWIC, University of Glamorgan or University of Wales, Newport ²² . (Teacher training)	University

²² The University of Wales, Newport merged with the University of Glamorgan in April 2013 to form the University of South Wales.

Table 3. University choices of students from Clayton High School in Newport

Student and year of study	Expectation post 6th form?	Destinations (where data available)
Zairah Year 13	Newport University (Teacher training.)	
Alice Year 13	UWIC, University of Glamorgan (Sports Science and PE, Sports Science or marketing)	University
Parveen Year 13	Cardiff University or Newport (Art)	
Finn Year 13	Bristol University or Cardiff University (cellular medicine or molecular biology).	
Alistair Year 13	Cardiff University, UWIC, Swansea or Bristol University (Health or sports courses).	
Charlotte Year 12	A university in London or Liverpool John Moores University (Psychology and criminology at university)	
Mark Year 13	Cardiff University, UWIC, University of Glamorgan or Swansea University (English language or Literature).	University
Alexandra Year 13	University of Glamorgan (Police Science)	University
Pratik	Cardiff University, Bristol University, University of	University

Year 13	Portsmouth, Aston University and UWIC (Biomedical science)	
Sheena Year 12	Cardiff University (Pharmacy, medicine or nursing)	
Pritika Year 13	UWIC or University of Glamorgan (Fashion and business).	
Jonathan Year 12	Cardiff University or University of Birmingham (Medicine or Physiotherapy).	University

Geographical constraints within the context of change and uncertainty in higher education funding.

Students' concern over the financing of higher education was a theme to emerge in half of the interviews. Such findings are similar to those of Davies and Trystan's (2012) study in which financial support in the form of a grant provided by the Welsh Government with devolved power over student support and tuition fee regimes for Welsh domiciled students who study in Wales, operated as an incentive to do so among their students in 2008. However, in 2010 this form of financial support for Welsh domiciled students who remain in Wales was ceased by the Welsh Government. This meant that the students in Year thirteen entering HE in 2011 would not receive greater financial support if they studied in an institution in Wales, as opposed to outside of Wales. Yet it seemed that historical legacy of financial support provided by the Welsh Government for Welsh domiciled students had remained within these young people's understanding of financing HE. They commonly expressed the notion that studying in Wales was an economically better option and that this was an incentive to stay. (See Appendix H for a description of the funding arrangements for Welsh domiciled students in UK HEIS in 2010-11).

This was exemplified in Rhys and Adam's explanation for why they chose Welsh HEIs only:

Well I think that it's cheaper if you stay in Wales to go university than go away, I think that, and I think how expensive it would be with how much it costs to live there and tuition fees on top as well. (Rhys, Rhondda)

Well I want to stay in Wales cos I'd be able to afford it then. So it would be Swansea or Cardiff, Aberystwyth, things like that? (Adam, Rhondda)

Similarly, Charlotte and Alice from Newport expressed the idea that staying in Wales would be financially better since they believed the fees to be lower:

I dunno, it is easier and like it's cheaper to go to a university in Wales if you're Welsh so yeah I probably would go to the Cardiff one. (Charlotte, Newport)

It's cheaper aint it, the tuition fees and then, I've got quite a big family and we're all close and stuff like that, and my boyfriend, he's here and so just to stay...I'd probably go but close enough, cos you know Cardiff's only half an hour drive. (Alice, Newport)

These excerpts all suggest that economic incentives at least partly informed students' preferences for studying in Wales. Alice's choice was also influenced by her wish to stay close to her family and boyfriend (discussed further below). The generosity of the financial support that Welsh domiciled students had received seemed certainly to partly explain the overwhelming preference of our respondents to study in Wales. It also reflected contemporary events regarding the funding of HE occurring at the time these young people were making choices. During the months of October and November 2010, when interviews were being conducted at both schools, there was considerable uncertainty with respect to the financing of HE. During 2010, David Cameron, leader of the recently elected Westminster Coalition government, proposed substantial tuition fee increases, from an average of £3,000 to a maximum £9,000 pounds a year. This was part of long-term cuts to public spending intended to help rebuild the economy by cutting the public expenditure deficit. Increasing tuition fees, government argued, though initially increasing public expenditure, would constitute a 'fairer' system of higher education funding than the current one, where commencement of loan repayment would be delayed until income levels reached something approaching average wage levels.

These proposals stimulated heated public and political debates, extensively reported in the media during the latter months of 2010. Numerous student protests against the proposed fee increase figured in them on an almost daily basis. Headlines, such as ‘*Students from across Wales protest over fees and cuts*’ (BBC News Wales, 2010b) were frequent and this coverage engendered public concern about student debt, in association with rising costs of higher education. The climate in which these young people were making their university choices was thus characterised by change, uncertainty and insecurity in the financing of HE in Wales. Evidently, this context informed university choice through the way that it operated to deter young people from leaving Wales. We can see therefore that these *conditions* which constitute young people’s experiences shape (but do not necessarily determine) their preferences and choices of universities. Students commonly positioned studying in Wales as an economically beneficial option in comparison to studying in England, where it had already been widely accepted that tuition fees would be increased, pretty much across the board toward the permitted maximum. Robert and Fay were both acutely aware of all this:

C.E. Yeah thinking about the tuitions fees do you think about that when thinking about going to university?

R. You got to really haven’t you really, cos I wouldn’t go to England now, knowing that I gotta pay 9 grand for tuition fees then you got student loan on top of that, you gotta pay that back, you gotta pay 9 grand, it’s just too much money and the Lib-Dems should be ashamed of themselves because they promised not to raise tuition fees and they’ve just gone back on their word, which is, well they only got into the government cos of the student vote, which is terrible like. (Robert, Rhondda)

Yeah I think it has, it’s made me think, cos like I know it’s been announced in England that they will be going up next year but it hasn’t been announced here yet so I think it’s quite risky cos if I do defer and suddenly they do go up that is gonna, it is gonna affect me quite a lot, because I think the new fees are going to be like 9,000, 9,000 compared to 3,000 is a lot of money so I think I’m not gonna risk it, I think I’m just gonna go for it. (Fay, Rhondda)

This is also illustrated by Hannah from the Rhondda when I asked her why she had chosen Welsh universities.

The fees are cheaper, they're much cheaper, um I couldn't afford to pay 9 grand a year in England, so that's probably why. (Hannah, Rhondda)

Thus, studying in Wales can be seen as a rational choice, albeit a choice made within boundaries defined by external forces; the contemporary changes to the funding of HE position crossing the border into England, as perceived by these young people, as a costly and less attractive option. This was also well documented by Alexandra's explanation as to why she has chosen Welsh universities:

Because I'm Welsh! And well yeah because I'm Welsh, and family obviously, and the prices are lower. You know I don't want, really, the only thing that's putting me off uni is the amount of debt that I'd be in, I don't want it all, and going to England it costs more so. And it's too far away, I'd miss home (laughs). (Alexandra, Newport)

Alexandra's extract is a pertinent example of the complexity of the university choice-making process. It illustrates how decisions are assembled from a multitude of considerations (clearly some are more pressing than others) rather than any one consideration. While preference for studying in Wales was viewed as a financially less costly option, there is also an emotional dimension to Alexandra's university choice. Her choices of universities are bound up with a sense of national identity, belonging and loyalty to nation (this is discussed in greater detail below). Alexandra also privileges her interpersonal relationships with family over making large geographical movements away from home. Alexandra's concern over incurring financial debt also, interestingly, put her in something of a minority among respondents who more usually constructed it as expected and inevitable (discussed further below).

Geographical constraints and staying 'close to home'

Preference for studying in Wales did not, however, simply reflect the uncertainty and change that characterised the landscape of higher education funding within the time-frame in which these young people were making choices. To re-emphasise, young people were largely operating within very narrow geographical boundaries in terms of their choices of universities; they were overwhelmingly selecting Welsh universities and universities which are less than 60 miles from their homes. Interviews with these largely non-traditional HE applicants were saturated with the

sorts of 'localism' identified by Reay et al (2001), emerging in the data as an overwhelming emphasis on studying at universities recognised as being 'close to home'. This theme (defined by a preference to study 'close to home') was present in nearly three quarters of interviews in the Rhondda and over half in Newport.

For a substantial majority of students from both locations, decisions about where to study were informed by the limits of their material resources. Concerns over the cost of travel and accommodation were frequently referred to, placing considerable geographical boundaries in terms of the distance they were prepared to move from home to university. Such geographical constraints were very well exemplified in the responses given by Callum and Hywel from the Rhondda and Alice from Newport in their explanations for living at home while at university:

Well it's only Ponty [Glamorgan University], and I wouldn't be allowed to live there because I live too close so, and it's easier anyway, it's like cheaper if I stayed with my parents because they're offering me support that's all. (Callum, Rhondda)

Yeah I'd rather, because it's cheaper to stay at home and live and commute rather than moving to the actual university. So it's making me decide maybe I should stay home and commute rather than move away and then it's making me choose even more local universities, say with in Wales than looking to England and such. (Hywel, Rhondda)

Um, I think it's cos of the type of person I am, like if I was in uni in the big halls I'm a bit of a clean freak and stuff like that, I don't think I would cope well with mess. And it's the money for them, like some of them, one place I looked was like 92 pound a week and it's just to keep cost down as well and I got like a nice environment at home, I don't need to move out if you know what I mean. (Alice, Newport)

Similarly, Pratik's preference for Cardiff University is informed by financial considerations, amongst others, including his perception of the status of Cardiff University and the facilities it offers:

Um, I just, cos it's like I can live there but I can still keep my job as well cos obviously university is quite expensive so I'll live there and I can just drive back and come to work, cos it's only 15 minutes away. But it's a good university as well, like we've had a couple of, in year 11 I think it

was, we did like a 'Step Up' to uni scheme and like we stayed there for a few days, had a look around, the facilities are awesome as well so it's quite a good uni as well. (Pratik, Newport)

Clearly, decisions about 'where' to study were partly informed by the financial resources needed to cover the cost of accommodation. Choosing universities geographically 'close to home' would enable reduction of living and travel costs. These young people's responses notoriously lacked anticipation of the sort of 'nomadic individualism' celebrated within neoliberal discourses and usually presented in official texts concerning higher education participation (Reay, 2003).

The extent to which young people's university choices were informed by their limited material resources was not always explicitly articulated, yet the absence of geographically distant universities in their list of choices revealed that they weighed heavily. For some, institutions at large distances away from home were not rejected, but simply not considered. Many distant and high status institutions were eliminated from choice by inadequate previous qualifications, as well as considerations of economic or pragmatic necessity. This was clearly shown in Zairah's university choices:

C.E. So did you just look at those universities [referring to the universities Zairah mentioned]?

Z. Like locally what, I just, because my cousin's done teaching I'd look, thought ok that would be good, like I wanted to do teaching anyway so she suggested [Newport campus] do it and that is local so I just went for that, but if I'd like spent more time then I would have maybe looked outside of Newport but then once again it would be like travelling back and forth which would be...(trails off). (Zairah, Newport)

Zairah was a working-class young woman from Newport describing herself as 'half-Indian, half-Pakistani' and in the first generation of her family to anticipate progression on to HE. Although she aspired to go to university to do teacher education, her previous academic experiences and qualifications (she was re-sitting GCSEs whilst studying for BTECs) had closed-off options to study at high status institutions. Moreover, the scarce experiential and knowledge resources upon which she seemed able to draw meant that access to a university of her choice was uncertain and somewhat doubtful. For Zairah, as was commonly the case for other students in

this study, universities in distant locations and elite institutions were positioned outside boundaries which defined their objective opportunities. As Gambetta's (1987) work would again suggest, the choices of students such as this, constrained by prior attainment and limited material resources, resulted not in their rational rejection of high status universities in 'far away' places but, rather, not considering them in the first place. Universities in distant localities were rendered impractical, impossible and unimaginable because they fell outside the boundaries of their objective (as well as subjective, as discussed below) opportunity structures. Since they were making choices for universities defined by what their constraints and opportunities allowed them to achieve, they did not cultivate preferences outside a feasible set of alternatives. We can say, therefore, that young people's university choices are informed by the conditions which shape what they *can* and *want* to do. These young people were making rational and strategic decisions about HE, albeit, within tightly defined parameters and between limited options which define what they can, objectively, do.

Financial debt and going to university.

A surprising finding to emerge from the data was the infrequency with which students, overall, expressed concern over financial debt. This seemed somewhat paradoxical given the above mentioned data which illuminate the material constraints which act upon university choice, and the concern students expressed over the financing of university. Notions that financial debt was '*not a concern*', was '*to be expected*' or '*worth it*' were expressed with surprising frequency. More students said that they did not have concerns about financial debt than those who did. A sense of fatalism and indifference towards debt was exemplified by both Callum from the Rhondda and Mark from Newport:

C.E. Are things like coming out of uni with debt and things a concern for you or not so much?

C. It is a b, um (pause to think), well it's a concern but it's not at the same time cos I know that it's not gonna be like, I can't explain it, it's not the type of debt where they take your house off you is it? They just take the money out if you earn over a percentage in it? So I'm not really worried about, it's just like something I've gotta pay for once every month or something. (Callum Rhondda)

C.E. So has the cost of going to university been something you've considered?

M. Well it's obviously really expensive and it puts you in debt a lot but if you want to go to uni then you gotta do it really haven't you, but um, that wasn't really what I was thinking about when I was applying, it was just where I wanted to go and then see what costs are and stuff. (Mark, Newport)

This sense of indifference and expectation of financial debt, expressed by these young men, was also often accompanied by a narrative that constructed debt as 'worth it', as illustrated by Hannah from the Rhondda and Alistair from Newport:

C.E. So thinking about things like loans and debt and things, does that, do you think that's a concern for you when you're at uni?

H. I'm not really that concerned about the debt, I'm aware that I'm going to come out with a lot of debt and I'm willing to pay it back afterwards, without, if I couldn't have it I couldn't be able to go to uni so it's allowing me to actually do what I want to do. (Hannah Rhondda)

A. Um to be honest no. I'm not, I know this sounds proper, well it sounds quite stupid but I'm not really bothered about debt and all that, eventually it will get paid off, so no not really I applied to where ever. If it's a really good university then you've got nothing to lose really, if you're getting a good degree at the end of it surely you'll be able to pay it off eventually, so. (Alistair, Newport)

The sense that financial debt associated with university was worth it maps directly on to the narratives discussed in the previous chapter. Popular commentaries and policy rhetoric have increasingly positioned higher education as the most lucrative means of achieving economic security and students frequently reproduced these discourses that are dominated by human capital theory. They appeared to have overwhelmingly accepted the rhetoric of 'learning equals earning' which has dominated discourses underpinning participation in HE (Brown, 2003). It is perhaps understandable therefore why they perceived financial debt as both 'expected' and 'worthwhile' because they perceive the economic gains associated with a higher education to outweigh the cost of going to university.

Thus, even in the current landscape of extensive media coverage of the rising tuition fees and of public concerns over rising levels of graduate debt, these young people

expressed a sense that debt is ‘worthwhile’ and to be expected. Whilst financial constraints seem to bear upon their decisions about where to study, finance did not seem to operate directly as a barrier to participation in HE. It seems, therefore, that the current economic climate, with its accompanying popular commentaries of labour market ‘congestion’ and ‘competition’, appear to inform young people’s decisions about HE through the way they perceive financial debt as a necessary and worthwhile aspect of gaining a higher education.

Maintaining interpersonal relationships.

Geographical constraints did not fully explain the overwhelming preference for studying in Wales and ‘close to home’. Students also strongly expressed a preference for universities nearby or to live at home in order to maintain emotional connections with family and friends. For some, these personal relationships were privileged over moving large distances away from home, with its attendant emotional costs and benefits. Moving large distances away from home represented an emotionally costly option because of its anticipated detrimental impact on their personal and social relationships. This was illustrated by Mark and Alexandra from Newport in their explanations for choosing ‘local’ universities:

I think it’s just cos I’m close to everyone here, my family and friends, I’m happy in my comfort zone really, I don’t want to move away, I don’t want to get out of it, I’m happy. (Mark, Newport)

C.E. So is it important to you to stay fairly close to home?

A. Yeah, cos you gotta keep your family close, I couldn’t, like I know my brother’s up in Staffordshire and he just doesn’t come home, we haven’t seen him for a year so it’s too, no, I’m a family person, I’ll stay home. (Alexandra, Newport)

Similarly, Ruth from the Rhondda privileged her interpersonal relationships over moving a large distance away from home:

R. I don’t think I’m ready to go into England and like be that far away from my parents, yet. Like if I was in Wales and I needed to go ‘ome for anything then I’d know it’s only like a train journey away from my mother (chuckles). (Ruth, Rhondda)

We can see here that some young people privileged intimate and interpersonal relationships over academic and intellectual considerations. Commonly, studying close to home was not regarded as a second best option, rather, living at home or studying 'close to home' represented a valuable alternative to geographical mobility even if this was at the expense of greater diversity in choice of course or institution. Evidently, decisions to stay close to home while at university are tied up with emotional ties with home and family. Studying close to home was a rational choice, though the cost-reward evaluations which young people were making here were not economic but emotional; studying in Wales and 'close to home' is constructed as an emotionally rewarding option through staying close to friends, family and locality. Since staying close to home was an emotionally rational option, resting on a belief that it would maintain emotional well-being, any equation of emotionality with 'irrationality' is problematised; for these young people, the affective dimension of decision making importantly informed cost-benefit analyses.

A minority of students did, however, allude to the notion that going away to university was a means of gaining independence from parents and positioned it as an integral part of the transition to adulthood as illustrated by Pratik and Vicky. They also perceived moving away as an opportunity for new experiences as illustrated by Lewis from the Rhondda.

C.E. Why do you want to move further a field?

L. I just need, I want a change from around here, I don't want to feel like I'm at home like, if I go to Cardiff I'll feel like, if I can go I probably will but I wouldn't mind a change, huh. (Lewis, Rhondda).

P. Um my preference would be to live away, yeah cos I, like I said, like half, most, like say a quarter of uni is about the student life as well, and you've gotta see obviously if you can live independently if you can handle stuff by yourself. Cos like it's a transition stage from going from a child to like an adult kind of thing, so I would live...I'd most, I'm probably gonna live away, live in Cardiff, hopefully. (Pratik, Newport)

V. I want to go away and get a bit of independence and stuff but I don't want to be so far that I'd never see my mother and father or nothing, I want to be able to come back if I need too. (Vicky, Rhondda)

As Vicky illustrates, however, preference for moving away to university to gain independence from parents conflicted with a desire to remain close to family. We can

see, therefore, how these young people's narratives regarding 'living away from home' confirm dichotomies of staying 'close' or 'going far' which map on to binaries of dependence and independence. Yet, at the same time, for a minority of young people like Vicky and Dylan, staying 'close to home' did not mutually exclude enjoying a sense of independence. As exemplified here, university choices were informed by a multitude of considerations, which involved gaining independence while maintaining emotional security at home. Dylan, with an elder sibling going before him, wanted all this and no compromise about institutional status:

C.E. And why is Cardiff your first choice?

D. Um I think my brother's been and that's had a big influence on me, um the fact that it's relatively close to home but still I can have my own time and privacy from the parents and it's a really really good university so it makes sense for me. (Dylan, Rhondda)

Similarly, Alexandra from Newport also emphasised her preference to maintain her interpersonal relations at home in her explanation for choosing a local university but also valued the university 'experience' for offering opportunities to develop socially:

I think yeah, it's the experience isn't it, you know if I went to uni and started coming home I'd miss out on the part, the social side of it, you know I'd make friends but then I wouldn't be there to spend time with them so I'm, it's the experience of the new friends, the uni life, that's it really you know. (Alexandra, Newport)

These data challenge dominant normative constructions of the HE student in which mobility is accorded high status and value within public and political discourses (Christie, 2007; Holdsworth, 2009). Holdsworth (2009) argues that, within them, dichotomies of mobility-immobility are bound up with the binaries of independence-dependence in which the former is positioned as valuable and the latter is positioned as marginalised and disadvantaged practice. While students recognised that going away to university was tied up with transition to adulthood, a means of gaining independence and autonomy from parents, they frequently privileged their interpersonal relationships over geographical mobility. In this sense they frequently did not view studying close to home as a less valuable option to moving large distances away.

The geography of institutions.

To fully understand the overwhelming preference for Welsh HEIs and for universities which were geographically ‘close to home’ it was important to consider where these young people lived in relation to them, as well as the status of those institutions within the HE market. In South East Wales, there is a range of universities, varying in status from the prestigious, ‘traditional’ to post-92. Our students’ overwhelming preference for Welsh institutions and to those which were geographically ‘close to home’ partly reflected their clustering in South Wales. In 2010, this cluster comprised Cardiff University, UWIC (now Cardiff Metropolitan), University of Wales Newport, University of Glamorgan (these latter two institutions merged in April 2013 to form University of South Wales) Swansea University, Swansea Metropolitan and University of Wales Trinity St David (formerly Trinity and Lampeter, now the new site of the University of Wales, in association with Swansea Metropolitan). Only one institution (Aberystwyth University) is located in mid-Wales and two in North Wales (Bangor University and Glyndwr University). The location of Cardiff University, Wales’ most prestigious HEI and the first to leave the historic University of Wales²³, meant that it was possible for students living in either research location to study at a university which was geographically relatively ‘close to home’ and high status, or else to choose from others less research intensive, more vocationally oriented. This may partly explain the high rate at which these students expressed a preference for Cardiff University, a substantial majority from both locations listing it as a choice among their predominantly Welsh HEI selections. Dylan, Alistair and Bethan were well aware of such matters:

C.E. So would you prefer to go to a university in Wales or England or does it...

D. Yeah, I think yeah, I would definitely.

C.E. And why is that?

D. Um again being close to home, it’s somewhere I know and I feel safe in where I know the area well, like I say it’s one of the top universities in Britain so there’s not much advantages of going to England than Cardiff sort of thing. (Dylan, Rhondda)

²³ The University of Wales was subsequently abandoned by other universities including Aberystwyth, Bangor, and Swansea Universities. The University of Glamorgan was never part of it but autonomous from its inception.

C.E. So you've chosen Welsh universities, apart from Bristol, so why Welsh universities?

A. I dunno to be honest, it's just, they're just close really aren't they and plus they're pretty good ones, or really good ones, so if you can get to a really good one which is close to home it's better than going to a good one which is really far away. So yeah. (Alistair, Newport)

B. Well like I'd prefer Cardiff because they're not quite sure whether they're changing the fees yet but then I think then Cardiff is the only Welsh University that really stands out to me, if it's not Cardiff I'd probably have to go further away. (Bethan, Rhondda)

Evidently, decisions about 'where to study' were here products of interactions between where these young people lived, in relation to the geographical location and status of their preferred institutions. As Bethan's excerpt illustrates, her choice of university is also economically pragmatic; studying in Wales avoids the greater financial cost that studying in England might potentially bring. We can see, therefore, how *conditions* (the availability and status of universities in close proximity) shape what young people *can* and *want* to do. Young people make rational choices about their chosen universities, but within boundaries defined externally by factors such as geography of institution and material constraints. Students like Dylan, Alistair and Bethan were able to satisfy their preference for studying in Wales because a high status university was located in close geographical proximity to their homes, so that they perceived little benefit in going outside Wales. As with Alistair, greater value was attached to staying close to home than moving a large distance. At the same time, in other parts of his interview Alistair expressed hope of moving out of the parental home in order to achieve independence and autonomy. Preference for staying close to home and gaining independence were, hopefully, to be actualised simultaneously. They were not seen as mutually exclusive.

Personal constraints.

Decisions to study in Wales and at universities which were 'close to home' were also informed by the availability of resources of knowledge and experience about higher education gleaned from family. Most of these young people were in the first

generation of their family to expect a higher education, meaning that such information upon which they could expect to draw was limited. A large minority of them perceived going to university as an unfamiliar pathway, about which they talked with some reticence and little confidence:

I dunno, I was really like, a few years ago I was like I wanna move out, I wanna go far away I just want to go to university and the closer I got I got a little bit freaked out. I dunno, cos I stayed-on in 6th form, I stayed in the same school, I didn't go to college, and then it was just the thought of so much change you know it was crazy, just really really weird. (Fay, Rhondda)

Their very limited resources of knowledge and experience of HE often led students to construct it as a 'risky' pathway; the personal, emotional and material 'costs' associated with a failed attempt at gaining a degree loomed large (Archer et al, 2003; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005). Progression to HE represented disjuncture in the normative trajectory to adulthood, which would typically involve transition from school to work, a more certain, familiar and potentially less 'risky' destination. For some, studying close to home was a 'risk reduction' strategy, as exemplified by Alexandra in her explanation for her preferences for institutions in Wales rather than England:

Because in a way, I'm sc..not scared, it's a type of a scared, I don't want to move to England and be alone, it's cos it's scary now thinking I'm going to Cardiff all alone cos none of my friends are going, so that's scary enough but going to England I think no, it's out of my comfort zone, at least when you're in Wales it's kind of your own country (chuckles) you know, so it's a bit of a comfort thing, just to feel like you're at home, cos I know if I went to England I'd be lost, I wouldn't like it. (Alexandra, Newport)

Alexandra's preference for a nearby Welsh university appeared to be informed by not only her attachment to Wales and concern over tuition fees but her emotions and dispositions towards university-going, in turn informed by her family and friends' experience and knowledge of higher education. For her, like many others here, universities in geographically distant locations were rendered inaccessible by her subjective interpretation of her objective opportunities (the scope of institutions which she could feasibly access). Her objective opportunities were defined by prior attainment and material resources and narrowed by the knowledge and information

upon which she drew. We can see, therefore, that young people's university choices are informed by three main processes; of what they *want* to do (such as preferences to maintain interpersonal relations at 'home') and what they *can* do (informed by prior attainment and material constraints) and *conditions*, which are socially constituted (such as the scope of knowledge and information about HE that young people can draw upon), which shape their preferences (Gambetta, 1989).

Differences across place: Preferences for Welsh universities.

Welsh National identity and attachment to Wales.

The conditions which shape preferences are not only socially constituted but vary across place. Young people from either location experience conditions in local contexts which are subtly different and these appeared to inform their university choices. Besides the commonalities across the locations in terms of the explanations that young people gave and the meanings they attached to studying in Wales and 'close to home' there were also important differences between students' explanations for their choices of universities. While the numbers are small and any inferences drawn must be highly tentative and modest, they provide important insight into the significance of 'place' for young people's university choices.

An important difference between the two groups of young people was in the way that they explained their preference for studying in Wales and at a university that they recognised as '*close to home*'. Students from the Rhondda, more frequently than those from Newport, explained this preference in relation to a sense of attachment to Wales in general and the physical locality of their home in particular. The choices of just less than half of them were constructed through narratives that revealed such a sense of attachment to Wales or affective relationships with the geographical locality of their 'home'. In contrast, only a quarter of those from Newport explained their preferences in this way. Evidence of this sense of attachment to Wales is found both in Dylan and Hywel's explanations for their preferences for Welsh universities:

I do think that I would feel more comfortable in Cardiff [University], I know that you'd have all walks of society in each university but I think it

is kind of on my territory sort of thing and Bristol I'm new to that so yeah.
(Dylan, Rhondda)

C.E. So you've listed all Welsh universities, what makes you want to go to a Welsh university?

H. A Welsh heritage. I wouldn't want to go further abroad, well I say abroad, England, just to stay close to the community, to stay close to where you're from. **(Hywel, Rhondda)**

Dylan's attachment is powerfully signified in his construction of Cardiff University as being 'on my own territory' which indicates a sense of attachment and belonging to the wider geographical space, his nation. It is also revealed in Hywel's explanation for choosing Welsh universities ('a Welsh heritage'). Attachment and belonging to Wales was also expressed, albeit in more subtle ways, by students such as Rhys:

C.E. So would you prefer to go to a Welsh one or an English one [University]?

R. Probably a Welsh one yeah

C.E. Why is that?

R. Because um, well I'd just rather stay in Wales anyway because I'd probably miss it and it would be cheaper as well. **(Rhys, Rhondda)**

This sense of attachment to Wales, more common in the narratives of Rhondda students, was reflected in their constructions of Welsh institutions as 'home-like':

Yeah I think Wales is a little bit of a sense of home in Wales isn't it, whereas England, you'd probably realise, then it'll kick in that you're not at home. **(Vicky, Rhondda)**

I just feel more, I'm not really sure, at home like, yeah. And the Welsh Bac is accepted there. **(Jack, Rhondda)**

These extracts illustrate the way in which a sense of 'home' is associated with Welsh institutions. Jack was not alone in revealing that his university choice was not only informed by a need to feel 'at home' but by the necessity of having to apply to institutions which accepted the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification. This qualification is studied by 6th form students in Wales but recognised by HEIs and courses across the UK in different ways. Most HEIs across the UK accept it in one form or another, either in terms of contributing towards required UCAS points or in terms of

achievement of the Advanced level which is the equivalent of an A grade at GCE A-level. However, a common misconception held by young people was that the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification is not accepted by all universities, thus restricting their choices to those which are deemed to accept it. Both Jack's, Vicky's and particularly other Rhondda respondents' sense of 'home' appeared to imply that nationalist sentiments were embedded in their university choices. Blunt and Varely (2004) have suggested that the notion of 'home' can represent a physical space, (a locality, a 'material dwelling') but can also be transported across space so that certain places and spaces can be experienced as 'home-like'. Attending a university which was within Wales seemed to evoke connotations of 'home' in which the concept of 'home' was transported from one physical 'place' (the Valleys), to another (their chosen Welsh HEI). In this way we can see how place informs university choice through the way that particular local places foster a sense of attachment to the wider geographical space, the nation.

Besides the construction of Welsh universities as 'home-like' the 'imagined' greater proximity of Welsh institutions in comparison to English ones seemed also to influence a minority of young people's university choice. Though influenced by the, presumably, positive experience of friends, when asked to imagine the scenario that both Aberystwyth University (a Welsh university) and Bristol University (an English university geographically closer to the Valleys than Aberystwyth) had offered him a place, Jack's quote implies that Welsh universities are 'imagined' as geographically more proximal than English ones:

J. I think I'd choose Aberystwyth.

C.E. Oh right, why Aber?

J. Um, it just seems closer really. And I have friends who have gone there, so yeah. (Jack, Rhondda)

The 'imagined' proximity of Welsh institutions in comparison to English universities seemed to inform the preference for institutions located in Wales. Ruth's perception of Welsh universities as closer than English appeared similar, though mediated by the pragmatic consideration of where she might possibly best achieve:

R. Um, (pause), I think it would depend on like which one I'd feel like I'd achieve the best in but I think it would probably be Aberystwyth.

C.E. Right, and why is that?

R. Um, I think it's [Aberystwyth] just the fact that I know I'm still in Wales so it's like, it is again like if I could, my mother and father could just come out easier than it would be for 'em to have to go to Bristol.
(Ruth, Rhondda)

That a small number of students from the Rhondda listed a preference for Aberystwyth, compared to none from Newport, alongside narratives of 'staying close to home,' suggests that preference for universities in Wales reflected a stronger sense of national attachment among the former. It also reflects the different kinds of Welsh identity claimed by these young people, such as were noted in Chapter five. Just as those from Newport were less likely to claim a purely Welsh identity than those from the 'Welsh Wales' Rhondda, so they were less likely to qualify their preferences for Welsh universities in terms of a sense of attachment and loyalty to Wales. Thus we might understand this sense of national attachment, which appeared to inform these young people's university choices, through attention to their sense of national identity. As mentioned in Chapter five, the majority of young people involved in the research from the Rhondda identified themselves as Welsh compared to less than half of those from Newport. Differences in national identity claimed by these young people map on to Balsom's 'Three-Wales' model in which he identified geographical differences in national identity. This 'Welsh Wales', or 'Valleys Welsh' (Robert 1994) identity, most commonly claimed by young people from the Rhondda, seemed to be projected into their university choices through the way it created a sense of national attachment. We can see, therefore, how the present day social landscape of the Valleys, product of its industrial heritage and geographical landscape, fosters local and national attachments and a sense of national identity which in turn informed the university choices of these young people.

In contrast, the local identity which characterised Newport, as suggested above, has fostered a particular kind of Welsh identity which ultimately leads to less intense feelings of attachment to a common locality whose heterogeneity was greater. Young people from Newport were perhaps unsurprisingly less likely to qualify their university choices through a narrative of attachment and loyalty to Newport or Wales

than the young people from the Valleys. To emphasise, whilst young people from Newport and the Rhondda were common in their very frequent preference for Welsh universities, young people from Newport were much less likely to qualify this preference through narratives which imply a sense of attachment to Wales in general through constructions of Wales as 'home-like'. Only a minority of students from Newport expressed a sense of attachment to Wales or constructed Welsh universities as 'home-like'. Parveen (and Alexandra, presented above) from Newport are something of a minority here. Parveen's university choice was, at once, as for others, informed by a sense of attachment and belonging to Wales and also characterised by conflicting aspirations to move *away* and stay close:

C.E. So you've applied to just universities in Wales, why only Welsh universities?

P. Well I do like to stay in Wales cos I do like my own country here, and I thought it would be more closer to home really, as much as I do want to go away from the house, I don't want to as well at the same time, so I just thought I'd stay in Wales. (Parveen, Newport)

Affective relationships with 'home': attachment and belonging

Besides this stronger expression of loyalty and attachment to their nation, young people from the Valley were also more likely to express a sense of attachment to their immediate locality. Moreover, like Ruth, they tended almost exclusively to explain their positive feelings towards their locality in terms of affection towards the social landscape of their locality:

I think it's just cos I've grown up here like all my life and it's just, like it's so comforting to know, like well everyone, like you know everyone in this part of the Rhondda Valley, like somebody knows me through a different something or another, it would be a nice thought just to stay here with everybody like. (Ruth, Rhondda)

The social landscape of the Valley was a source of attachment and belonging for some young people, and their emotional relationships seemed to have particularly important bearing upon university choice. Mike expressed his longing to stay close to 'home' while at university as being predominantly in terms of continuing friendships:

C.E. So is going to one [university] that you can stay quite close important to you?

M. Yeah. Well to stay connected with my friends and the area I live in and that. (Mike, Rhondda)

For Mike, choosing to study at a university which is geographically close to the Rhondda enables him to stay physically close to the Valley and to the people which constitute 'home'. Hywel's impulse to '*stay more closer*' leads him to prefer a university a few miles closer in Swansea and its night life over a first choice of course in Carmarthen:

C.E. What would be your first choice?

H. Swansea.

C.E. Why Swansea?

H. I dunno they've, well I say the night life, the life there but I've heard it's a good course as well but like Camarthen, that would be my first choice but it's too far away. I'd rather stay more closer to the Valleys. (Hywel, Rhondda)

At interview Hywel expressed very strong positive sentiments of fondness and affection towards what he perceived as strong, close-knit kinship networks, which formed the social fabric of the Valleys and was quite adamant that Aberystwyth would be a step too far:

C.E. Would you choose a university say a bit further afield, say if Aberystwyth gave you an offer?

H. No I'd turn them down, I wouldn't go.

C.E. So it's quite important for you to stay close to home? Why is that?

H. Well my family, my partner's here. I couldn't bear leaving them. (Hywel, Rhondda)

While students in both locations frequently justified choosing geographically 'close' universities in terms of a longing to stay close to family, friends, boyfriends or girlfriends it was only those from the Valleys who explained their choices in terms of affection towards and longing to stay physically close to their locality.

In Chapter five I suggested that the economic landscape of the Rhondda in bygone eras has left an enduring imprint on its social landscape, creating close-knit communities which foster a strong sense of attachment and fondness towards the

locality. Combined with this social landscape were distinguishing characteristics (such as accent, culture and values) highly geographically specific to the South Wales Valleys. Together, these appeared to foster a strong sense of attachment and belonging which operated, if not as a social ‘cement’ then as a ‘pull’ towards remaining ‘close to home’ while at university. The social and industrial heritage of the Valleys appears to have created a local ‘sense of place’ (McDowell, 2003) which impacted upon young people’s identities and sense of attachment not only to Wales in general but to the Valleys in particular, forging a local ‘structure of feeling’ (McDowell, 2003). This helps explain why students from the Valleys more frequently expressed their longing to study ‘close to home’ in ways that reflected affective relationships with their locality.

We can see, therefore, that local social landscapes, particularly those characterised by extensive close-knit social networks, inform university choice through the way they foster place attachment. Evidently, self-exclusion from high status and geographically distant universities was not simply classed (Reay et al, 2001; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005) but also geographical. For non-traditional students from the Rhondda, in particular, attending a local and, most importantly, a Welsh university seemed to promise not only continuing contact with friends and kin but maintenance of class, national and local identities, smoothing transition. Evidently, the geographical location in which young people lived bore upon the decision making *processes* underpinning their choice of university. It cultivated dispositions and attitudes, affective relationships with ‘home’ and a sense of belonging to the wider nation and operated as a ‘pull’ towards staying in Wales and studying ‘locally.’ These deeply affective associations were more significant among young people from the Rhondda Valleys than those from Newport.

HE destinations

In the previous chapter I described how I had attempted to gather information from the schools regarding the destinations of the young people who were involved in the research, but have gathered only incomplete information. With respect to the higher education destinations of the young people from Llanon Community School, the information I gathered showed that out of the 21 young

people discussed in this chapter (who expressed a preference for a specific HE course and institution) 20 eventually went on to university. Only one of these students, Robert, who at interview had expressed intention to go on to university, went on to further education at college. In addition, two students who I have not included in this chapter because they had very uncertain ideas about the course they would study or the institution they would apply to, also went on to HE. Thus, out of 23 who articulated an intention or hope of going on to university at interview, 22 students eventually did so (see Appendix B).

Out of these 22 students I have obtained information regarding the course studied and higher education institution entered of nine students. The data for the remaining 13 shows that these young people went on to HE but does not indicate which institution they entered. The data for these nine students show that aspirations and expectations to stay in, or leave Wales for their HE were largely realised. Where students had anticipated going to a university in Wales, they had largely done so, and where they had expressed a preference for one outside Wales, they had also done so. Out of these nine students, seven of them went on to an institution in Wales, reflecting the overwhelming preference for Welsh universities as described above. Of the remaining 13 students for whom I did not obtain data regarding the HEI they went on to it is likely that an additional 11 also went to universities in Wales. Given that they had listed Welsh universities and had expressed a preference for either local or Welsh universities at interview it is likely that they were accepted on to these preferred Welsh institutions. Thus, out of 22 students from Llanon, it is likely that 18 went on to Welsh universities.

At Clayton High School, the information on the destinations of these young people is much less complete. The information I received suggested that seven students in total made the transition to university (I have no information regarding the institution they entered), although I expect this to be a gross underestimation of the actual figure. There was no information on the destinations of some of the students from Clayton who had some of the highest levels of attainment and had expressed very strong preferences to go to

university. These young people I would have expected to have realised their aspirations for higher education.

While it is only possible to draw highly tentative conclusions from this incomplete data, the interviews would suggest that young people were making rational choices regarding their higher education within socially as well as geographically constituted parameters. The preference to study at Welsh universities was informed by cost-reward analysis, itself informed by a myriad of considerations. Amongst these considerations were attachment and loyalties towards their geographical 'homes', concerns over the financing of university and geographical constraints and interpersonal relationships.

Conclusion

In this chapter I set out to explore how the contemporary economic climate, which was characterised by uncertainty and change in the funding of HE in Wales at the time these young people were making choices, and the geographical location in which they live bear upon their university choices. Specifically, I intended to explore how these considerations come to bear on young people's choices about *where* to study for their HE.

The majority of young people from both study locations were choosing to study at Welsh institutions and universities 'close to home.' My contention is that while their choices reflected myriad considerations - geographical, material and personal - the contemporary context in which they were situated, characterised by change and uncertainty in the funding of higher education, seemed to increase their propensity to choose 'local' and *Welsh* universities.

Such choices were frequently perceived to be the means of reducing the financial burden of HE and thus involve a less risky option, particularly in light of the proposed increase in tuition fees in HEIs in England. At the same time financial debt was commonly 'expected' and constructed as '*worth it*' by these students. Evidently, these young people had accepted the rhetoric of 'learning equals earning' and considered financial debt to be necessary to their long-term financial security.

Yet, irrespective of this contemporary climate of financial uncertainty in the funding of HE, the majority of these young people would still have chosen 'local' and Welsh HEIs in virtue of various geographical and personal constraints and particularly strong longings to stay close to family and friends. Attachment and loyalty to both nation at large and immediate locality also operated within their decision making, and this was particularly so for those from the Rhondda. Evidently, when local social landscapes foster particularly strong place attachment this operates as a 'pull' to stay. Important differences in the decision making processes by which young people reached a preference to study in Wales gave place greater significance in the choices of students from the Valleys than those in Newport. Despite differences in degrees of local attachment, however, both groups made choices for Welsh and local courses in almost equal measure.

We might speculate as to whether these different processes underpinning the preference to study 'close to home' and in Wales and reflecting differences in young people's relationships with their locality have very profound implications for young people's life chances. We have no evidence as to the extent or pattern of geographical mobility or occupational fates of these young people following university study. The strong affective relationships with home and sense of attachment and loyalty to their locality expressed by young people from the Rhondda may well have implications for their future job prospects and locations. A strong sense of loyalty and belonging to Wales has been celebrated by the Welsh Government which has, over recent years, emphasised a need to increase the number of Welsh domiciled students who study in Wales remaining in Wales after graduation as a means of rebuilding and securing a 'buoyant economy' (Welsh Government, 2009). Neither individual nor official career aspirations may, however, be realised if young people are to return 'home' to places where employment opportunities are scarce and where chances of fulfilling their career aspirations are weak.

Evidently, young people engage in rationally contingent considerations about where to study, but they make choices within boundaries defined by external forces. The universities which young people can *objectively* access are most importantly informed by their prior attainment levels and geographical constraints which exclude

some young people from prestigious universities and from those in geographically distant places. Objective opportunities are the conditions which define what young people *can* objectively do.

Choices are also made within parameters which are defined by young people's *subjective* interpretations of their opportunities. These interpretations are informed by class norms, social expectations and the resources of experience of HE gleaned from their family (resources which inform their orientations towards university, their feeling of confidence and entitlement and assuredness of success). These subjective opportunities are also informed by young people's affective relationships with their nation and locality which construct subjective boundaries around their homes in relation to universities in Wales. Thus, in adapting Gambetta's (1987) assertion that (classed) inertial forces, embodied in norms and values, shape preferences as well as perceptions of perceived alternatives, I would also argue that geography informs the preference structure in which choices are made. These geographical and classed forces (which are not always consciously recognised by individuals) so shape young people's preferences to an extent that they do not even cultivate preferences and make choices for universities outside of Wales.

In this sense then, the affective component of university choice has a geographical dimension whereby border crossing entails a move away from a familiar and known culture, accent and disposition which brings an element of uncertainty, unfamiliarity and potential 'risk'. Clearly, socially and geographically constituted external forces (class norms and the limits of knowledge and information of HE and affective relationships with 'home') reduce the range of universities young people can objectively access to a narrower set of *subjective* opportunities. To emphasise, young people's university choices, their preferences for local and Welsh institutions are informed by *conditions* which shape their preferences; these conditions, which are socially and geographically constituted, inform what young people *can* and *want* to do.

Chapter eight

Young people's 'imagined futures': Staying local or moving out?

This chapter explores the role of geographical location in young people's 'imagined futures.' Specifically, it considers how local opportunity structures and young people's interpretations of them bear upon *where* they 'imagine' their futures to be located, as well as their future career aspirations. It also considers how local social landscapes and local and national identities, which inform young people's affective relationships with 'home', bear upon their aspirations and expectations to leave or stay in the future.

In documenting the aspirations and expectations of these young people regarding their future personal and working lives, this chapter illustrates how the characteristics and features specific to geographical places (and not just social class) are implicated in the reproduction of social disadvantage. My contention will be that local opportunity structures and young people's interpretations of them inform their aspirations for leaving *or* staying within their localities in the future, as well as for their careers. While aspirations are informed by rational calculations of the likelihood of securing employment in the future in their locality, young people's 'imagined futures' are also informed by their affective relationships with 'home'; their feelings of belonging and attachment. This means that rational calculations not only reflect evaluations of probabilities of labour market success but also these emotional relationships with home.

This chapter follows on chronologically from the foregoing exploration of young people's aspirations and decisions about staying on in post-16 education and higher education and their university choices, illuminating how place is implicated in these aspirations and decisions. It now focuses on the next stage of the transition, that is, young people's aspirations and expectations for their future personal and working lives which I have captured in the term 'imagined futures.'

‘Leaving’

‘Get out to get on’

One of most important ways in which young people from either location differed in their narratives about their ‘imagined futures’ lay in how they articulated aspirations to leave. Students from the Valleys expressed a hope to leave their locality more frequently than those from Newport. Approximately half of the young people involved in the study from the Rhondda expressed a strong intention or desire to leave their locality compared to approximately a third of the students from Newport.

This aspiration to leave can be partly explained by Valleys students’ interpretations of their local employment prospects, which broadly reflected the structure of opportunities locally. As described in Chapter five the effects of deindustrialisation in the Valleys, which caused the collapse of the area’s biggest employer, the coal mining industry, are still being felt today. The area suffers high levels of unemployment and the scope of employment opportunities for school leavers is limited. Scarcity of employment in the Rhondda, particularly of the high skilled kind, was readily acknowledged by its young people; a significant majority (nearly all) of the students from the Valleys recognised a surrounding lack of job opportunities. Ellie from the Rhondda recognised the area as a place with insufficient jobs locally, and when asked why she thought this was the case, she replied:

E. Cos it’s such a little place maybe, and you can’t...there’s not much more you can build in the Rhondda really. There’s just no place for it.
(Ellie, Rhondda)

Reflecting this, young people frequently articulated the view that leaving would be necessary in order to fulfil future career aspirations:

C.E. Do you have any ideas about where you might look for jobs?

R. It wouldn’t be in the Rhondda Valley, you can guarantee that cos there’s no jobs up here, it’s like our MP, when he came up here he was saying it would be nice if people come back to the Rhondda Valley to do jobs, there’s just no, how can we? I wouldn’t come back to the Rhondda Valley, if I got a degree and stuff and, there’s just no jobs out there, it wouldn’t stick to the door would it? You gotta go out and look for work, there’s no work in the Rhondda Valley, it’s not like before where we had

all the mines open and stuff and there was work here, there's nothing here! (**Robert, Rhondda**)

You can find jobs but it's not really good jobs, you can get a job in the local pub or Asda, not like a proper job that you can stay for the rest of your life, there's no jobs like that round here. (**Toby, Rhondda**)

These excerpts capture a theme that was prominent in Rhondda young people's narratives. This theme was defined by the way young people viewed the Valleys as a place with scarce employment opportunities and, in particular, a dearth of high-skilled employment. It was also defined by a notion that these types of jobs existed mainly outside of the Valleys. Indeed over half (eighteen) of the students from the Rhondda articulated the notion that out-migration or commuting from the Valleys was necessary in order to secure employment opportunities which existed in abundance elsewhere:

C.E. Do you think about where you might be able to find jobs in the future, like do you see yourself finding jobs around here or...?

H. No definitely not around here. I'd have to move to a city, Cardiff, London. (**Hannah, Rhondda**)

C.E. Do you have any ideas about where you might look for work say in 10 years time?

A. I don't know where I'll be? If I'm round here then, there'll be nothing around here so I'll have to go to Cardiff or Pontypridd or somewhere like that, but I don't know where I'll be though. (laughs) (**Adam, Rhondda**)

There's not much jobs around here. There's only one factory up the top there and that's Ferners up Glynteg, na there's not much jobs around in this area like you gotta go elsewhere for a job. (**James, Rhondda**)

C.E. Do you think that you would come back here in the future, or not really?

R. To see family and stuff, but not move back.

C.E. Right, why is that?

R. Cos then I wouldn't have a job. (**Rachel, Rhondda**)

It is interesting to note that this overwhelming aspiration to leave, expressed by young people from the Rhondda, is directly opposite to their university choices described in the previous chapter where those from the Valley expressed very intense preferences to stay local. Evidently, part of the reason for the greater rate at which

young people from the Valley aspired to leave their locality can be explained by their subjective interpretations of their opportunities. These interpretations reflect the objective scope of limited jobs for school leavers and professional forms of employment. Scarcity of both in the Valleys was a major incentive for a substantial minority of young people (just less than a third) to prospect leaving the Valley in order to obtain work. Since young people frequently articulated the need to travel outside, or permanently leave the Valleys in order to secure employment, this suggests that their 'imagined futures' were informed by considerations of their own abilities and the opportunities in the local and national labour markets and therefore involved rational calculations of the likely chances of securing employment (Gambetta, 1987). As Adam, Hannah and Rachel's extracts illustrate, staying in the Valleys was frequently perceived as being detrimental to their future employment prospects. Implicit within them was the notion that you need to 'get out to get on', reflecting their interpretations of the opportunities they face in their locality.

While the vast majority (28 out of 31) of young people from the Valleys felt that there were insufficient jobs locally, only about two fifths of those from Newport thought there were scarce employment opportunities locally (10 out of 26). Despite its unemployment levels remaining higher than the national average following recent global economic down-turn, the dramatic expansion of a service sector and its extensive transport networks allowing relatively easy access to employment opportunities in adjacent cities in South Wales and England meant that employment opportunities were within relatively close commuting distance from the city. This, in large measure, explained why these young people did not construct leaving Newport as an economic necessity in the way that those from the Valleys did. Those from Newport were also more likely to expect to stay within their locality in the future than those from the Rhondda. Like students from the Rhondda, however, they also alluded to the way in which employment opportunities are greater elsewhere. While three students from Newport expressed such a belief, importantly none felt that moving away was necessary in order to secure employment. Though, as can be seen in Alice's extract, Cardiff was seen as a place with a greater abundance of opportunities than Newport and one in which chances of employment were better:

C.E. So you said Cardiff might be a place, why Cardiff?

A. Cos there's just so much access to everything in Cardiff, and you've got a good chance of getting there, of getting any employment really.
(Alice, Newport)

As with students from the Rhondda, leaving their locality was tied up with beliefs about better opportunities elsewhere, yet it did not feature nearly as heavily in the 'imagined futures' of young people from Newport. They were more likely to perceive Newport as having enough employment opportunities locally, as expressed by Pratik:

C.E. So thinking now about employment locally, do you think there are enough jobs around here?

P. Yeah you just got to look in the right places to be honest. Like some people, they just can't get a job but it's just, just I reckon it's cos they're not looking hard enough and I know they started getting a job like two weeks ago and now all four of them have got a job now. And like the Lloyds TSB where I work they employ so many people there as well they've got like a staff of about a thousand, two thousand staff members and they employ temporary for December and then it could go on so it really depends where you look but I reckon if I quit my job I think I could get another job like within two weeks, you just gotta look at the right places. **(Pratik, Newport)**

Pratik's view was that employment opportunities were available locally and that obtaining employment rested on the efficacy of individuals. His and others' perceptions that there were local employment opportunities partly explained the greater expectation of *staying* and of being able to find work in Newport in contrast with the greater emphasis on *leaving* among young people in the Rhondda. Over half of Newport's students expected to live in Newport in the future, while only approximately a quarter of those from the Valleys did so. Local opportunity structures informed young people's 'imagined futures' through their interpretations of their opportunities; expectation to stay partly reflected the structure of opportunities locally and young people's subjective recognition of these opportunities. This suggests that young people's 'imagined futures' were partly informed by rational calculations of their probabilities of success, made within boundaries defined by the scope of opportunity structures in local contexts.

The structure of opportunities locally did not, however, provide a complete explanation for why young people from Newport were more likely to expect to stay local. Part of the explanation of an 'expected' local future could be accounted for by the social and ethnic composition of the sample; over half of the students from Newport expressed a desire or need to live close to family in the future compared to less than a quarter from the Valley. This was partly accounted for by the social heterogeneity, reflecting the ethnic diversity of the young people from Newport. It was largely Asian young women who expressed a need or preference to live close to family. This is illustrated in Sheena's words in which she emphasised her expectation of living in Newport close to her parents:

C.E. Why is that, why do you think you'll probably be likely to be living here?

S. Because even if I get a job I'll, even if I get qualifica... even if I pass nursing I'll try looking for a job in Newport because my parents are here, my family's here so then I won't have to move away from them so I'll try looking for a job in Newport or, I don't think I'll, Wales, I'd live around Wales probably. (Sheena, Newport)

Sheena's extract illustrates the way in which she cannot imagine living in a place where her family do not live. This was a sentiment expressed commonly amongst the Asian young women in the sample who readily constructed their future life in relation to the location of their family:

Well most probably either Newport, Cardiff or Birmingham, that's the only possible places because we're more, like in Birmingham I've got more family there, I've got like a good few relatives there so if we was to move, like my dad was from Birmingham and they all moved here, so it'd either be Birmingham or Cardiff, I'd say. Either one of them. (Karimah, Newport)

Clearly, the heterogeneity of Newport may account partly for why students from Newport were more likely to expect a local future. Yet emphasis should still be laid on the significance of objective opportunity structures in young people's aspirations and expectations for where they 'imagined' themselves to be living in the future.

Escape from a stigmatised place.

Aspirations to leave were not only explained by young people from the Rhondda in terms of needing to migrate in search of jobs elsewhere. Young people from both locations also qualified their desires to leave through disparaging representations of their localities. These aspirations to leave were also bound up with personal development and identity formation. Young people frequently constructed the Rhondda Valleys and Newport in powerfully negative ways; they represented these places as pathological and stigmatised through reference to the social problems (such as anti-social behaviour or petty crime) that they perceived to exist locally. Approximately a third of young people from each location expressed strongly negative sentiments towards their location and, for some, this justified aspirations to 'escape' their locality. Luke and Amy's responses exemplified such views when asked where they would like to live in the future:

L. I dunno really, it's a city like, I wanna live close to the city. I don't really like living round here, not so much, cos like the area it's a bit rough really.

C.E. How do you mean rough?

L. Well with all, um certain people like, how they behave and stuff like that, drunk or whatever, just aggressive and stuff like that (Luke, Rhondda).

C.E. And where do you think you'll likely to be living and working in the future?'

A. Not in Glynteg.

C.E. Why not?

A. Aw it's just crap! (giggles)

C.E. Why is it crap?

A. There's just nothing, I don't know, I want to be out of the way somewhere, I dunno. (Amy, Rhondda)

Similarly, Robert depicts the Rhondda in powerfully negative ways:

C.E. Thinking a bit more about your local area, so describe to me what it's like to live where you live?

R. You're lucky then! Well like, obviously you get like crime everywhere but cos it's in a small community everyone knows each other it's more of

a, it's more heart breaking like when you get crime and stuff like that. It's like you get people, you see the same culprits and stuff like that, I don't, the Gov, well the crime system in the UK is shocking, it's like people, it's happened not long ago, we've been to school with boys and they've gone to prison, I'd say most people in the Rhondda are doing drugs. And vandalism is a problem and old people get intimidated because that's all they see then, I wouldn't say it's the majority of young people, it's the minority of young people really, just hanging round street corners and stuff like that, loitering and stuff which is obviously intimidating for older people. (Robert Rhondda)

These stigmatising representations of the local area were also present in the narratives of the minority of students from Newport who expressed aspirations for 'escape':

C.E. So imagine, where could you see yourself living in ten years time?

L. London.

C.E. Why London?

L. I dunno, it's just. I want to get out of here. It's just boring, so yeah there really. (Lisa, Newport)

C.E. Do you have any ideas about where you might be living in the future?

A. I don't want to live in Newport. I hate it. Somewhere a bit nicer than Newport really.

C.E. Why do you hate Newport?

A. It's a horrible place. It's rough it's, you know, it's just not a nice area. (Alice, Newport)

These disparaging representations are also present in Finn and Alexandra's description of their local area:

Um, I'm not sure, between like the loud music and the gangs and the people on quad bikes constantly and the dogs and the things being thrown all over the place it's quite hard to sort of find a pleasant side to it! (Finn, Newport).

It's a mess, and I don't, there's nothing special here, you know, it's either chavs, yobs or, it's just a mess, not like Cardiff, you go to Cardiff and it's nice up there, so Cardiff would be nice to live, but I don't like Newport. I wanna leave. (Alexandra, Newport)

Evidently, aspirations to leave were not simply informed by economically rational calculations, in turn informed by the structure of opportunities in local contexts, whereby leaving was prospected as a means of pursuing more abundant employment opportunities. They were also informed by interpretations and meanings attached by young people to their localities and their representations of them as stigmatised and pathologised places. In this sense, the aspiration to leave was nonetheless rational since leaving an area was bound up with the benefits of gaining independence, experiencing more opportunities elsewhere and was, thus, integral to personal and social development. As Ben's outlook exemplified, moving away in the future was a rational choice in the sense that it would enable him (and his future children) to experience new opportunities:

B. Um well, to be honest I wouldn't really be happy living round here. I'm wanting to, to live, and if I had to have children myself I want them to grow where there's more opportunities for them to do things, um, yeah. I can't see myself living round here.

C.E. Why not?

B. I dunno really, it's, it's been great growing up here, but um I think there's more to life than just growing up in the Valleys, and just not a lot to do, that's it really. (Ben, Rhondda)

The sense that leaving the area was integral to gaining independence and experiencing new opportunities elsewhere and was intimately bound up with personal wellbeing was illustrated by Pratik from Newport and Lewis from the Rhondda:

Um, like I like living there [Newport] but it's like if you just stay in the one place for the rest of your life it's like you haven't really moved forward so it's better like to, I want to like travel around, hopefully live abroad for a while stuff like that, just experience like new things, if you just live in the one place oh you're eventually gonna get board of it, probably gonna get miserable as well. (Pratik, Newport)

C.E. And um, if someone said to you that you're going to live here for the rest of your life, how would you feel about it?

L. I, I, the thought of that depresses me. This topic has come up with my friends and they say 'I don't want to move anywhere else, I'm happy here for the rest of my life'. It's not somewhere I could live from childhood to my death, it's er, it would be a depressing life. It's like Groundhog Day living round here, it's the same thing every day, and er, I'd need a bit of

change I think. It's going downhill round here as well I think, it's getting worse every year.

C.E. Why do you think that is?

L. I think a lot of good people move out. Which is, a lot of good people move out and um, the generations, as they're growing up are gradually getting more, they're getting worse with drugs and drinking and things, and er, there's no ambition really. (Lewis, Rhondda).

Evidently, rational aspirations to leave were not simply about maximising economic rewards, they were also about enhancing personal and social wellbeing. We can see therefore that young people's interpretations of the social and economic character of their locality had a very important bearing upon their aspirations concerning future migration, whereby negative interpretations compelled young people to leave.

Staying local

Hopes and dreams of 'staying local'.

A minority of young people from both locations also evinced very powerful aspirations to stay within their area. Again, there were subtle but important differences between young people from each location in the intensity with which they expressed positive sentiments towards their locality and in the qualifications they offered for wanting to stay. There were also important relationships between those who wanted to stay local and their future career aspirations.

Whilst there was little difference in the frequency with which young people from either location articulated that living in Newport or the Rhondda in the future was an *aspiration* or a *hope* (approximately a third from the Rhondda and slightly more than a third from Newport articulated that they wanted to stay within their area), they differed markedly in the intensity of their positive emotions towards their localities. Rhondda young people expressed more intense emotions of attachment, belonging and fondness towards their locality, as were expressed by Ellie when asked where she thought she would look for jobs in the future:

E. In the Rhondda Valley I'd go definitely.

C.E. Why in this area?

E. I don't think I'd like to move, I like it too much. (Ellie, Rhondda)

Similarly, James expresses a sense of attachment to his locality:

C.E. And where do you imagine, say in like 10 years time, where do you think you'll likely to be living and working?

J. I dunno really, it's dependable on my job and stuff isn't it. But um, I couldn't see me moving away, I do, I like it around here I do, with all my friends and everything here as well (James, Rhondda).

In contrast, only a small minority of students from Newport expressed strongly positive emotional sentiments and feelings of attachment, belonging or fondness towards their locality, such as those, untypically, made by Sharn when asked how she would feel if she were to move away:

I'd be really gutted. I don't know if I'd cry or not, because I've got really close neighbours and they're like respectful and they help me with problems so. (Sharn, Newport)

Students from the Rhondda more commonly qualified their longing to stay in their locality in the future in terms of their fondness for the social landscape of the Valleys, particularly the close-knit kinship of family, friends and neighbours. Hywel expressed his fondness for these in particularly graphic terms:

C.E. So what's it like to live there?

H. I really, well I've never known any different but I personally I like that sort of community, I love sitting on my windowsill talking to my next door neighbours, I like that see, um that sort of simple folk like, I enjoy, I just enjoy living in a small knit rather than walking down the street and not knowing anyone you see. (Hywel, Rhondda)

Hywel captured the intensely positive sentiments that a small but important number of students from the Rhondda expressed. Similarly, for Chloe it was the close-knit kinship and social networks that she perceived as characterising the Valleys where 'everyone knows everyone' that evoked positive emotion. Both responses exemplified that bonding social capital in the form of ties with family, friends and neighbours (Stone, 2003) operated as a 'pull' towards staying local in the future:

C.E. Do you have any ideas about where you'd like to be living in 10 years time?

C. I think I wanna stay in Glynteg, I like it.

C.E. Why is that?

C. I dunno it's just everyone knows everyone and it's friendly and I just like living here. (Chloe, Rhondda)

Again, such young people's aspirations to leave or stay cannot simply be understood as reflecting rational and strategic evaluations of the chances of labour market success (Gambetta, 1987) but are clearly influenced by their emotional relationships with 'home'. The sense of historically forged attachment to close-knit kinship and social networks which existed within a largely homogenous working-class community characterised by little geographical out-migration meant that for some students migrating away from friends and family was unimaginable and unthinkable, as Lauren's words suggested:

C.E. Have you got any ideas about where you want to be living in 10 years time?

L. I don't want to really move away cos all my, all the people I know are around here and I don't really like saying goodbye to people, I'd rather just go like a couple of miles down the Valley and then I can always drive up and see everyone or a couple of miles over the other way something like that, so meet half way really. (Lauren, Rhondda)

Evidently, the social landscape of the Valleys had a bearing upon young people's 'imagined futures' through the way it fostered particularly strong emotional attachments with home. Kinship and local social networks underpin the sense of attachment and belonging to the Valleys that young people expressed, and this in turn underpinned their hopes to stay within or close to the Valleys in the future. In this way, we can see how the social and industrial heritage of the Valleys and the traces of practice which characterise the locality accumulate over time and seep into local consciousness and constitute the local identity of the Valleys (McDowell, 2003). It is this local identity which underpins young people's 'local sense of place' (McDowell, 2003) which is projected in the intensely positive emotional relationships with 'home' expressed by a small but significant number of young people. These emotional relationships in turn inform their 'imagined' futures and their aspirations to stay within the Valleys in the future. We might say then that both social class and place interrelate to inform young people's horizons for spatial mobility, echoing Allen and Hollingworth's (2013) assertion that class-based

dispositions inform not only what is thinkable for ‘people like me’ but also for ‘people from around here.’

Students from Newport also expressed a sense of attachment towards their locality and alluded to their social and kinship networks as ‘pulls’ that embedded them in their locality. Yet they did so much less frequently. In contrast to those from the Rhondda they were more likely to frame their preference to live in Newport in terms of staying close to family or friends:

L. Yeah it would be nice to be locally but I would like to move but it's just that I'm so close to my family, I'd like to move to London, that would be nice. (Leona, Newport)

While Leona has tentative ideas about moving to London her ‘imagined future’ is constructed in relation to where her family lives. She expresses ambivalence towards moving away and forging an independent life on the one hand, (as she also emphasises in other parts of her interview), and staying close to family on the other. It might be contended that differences represented by her feelings and aspirations are as much related to the legacy of the social and industrial histories inscribed on patterns of residence in her locality in Newport as those presented above as typifying some from the ‘deep rooted’ Rhondda. As described in Chapter five, patterns of residence among Newport’s young people and their families tended to be more heterogeneous and less deeply rooted in generational time. Close-knit kinship and social networks were less characteristic except among respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds. These varied circumstances, in turn, had an important bearing upon future aspirations through emotional relationships fostered with ‘home.’

Conflicting aspirations

For a small minority of young people from the Valleys the expectation to leave the area (resting on the notion that leaving is necessary in order to secure future employment) resulted in conflicting aspirations for those who felt strongly attached to the area. It was not the case that it was simply those who did not expect to go on to HE who hoped to stay within the Valleys in the future. Rather, out of the eleven young people who expressed a strong aspiration to *stay*, the majority of these

expected to progress on to HE. For these young people, conflicting aspirations of ‘staying’ and ‘leaving’ permeated their narratives about their ‘imagined futures.’ Shaun’s response when asked how he would feel at the prospect of living in the Valleys in the future attempted to put the best of faces on it:

I wouldn't mind what so ever, no, because I think it's a lovely area and the people are nice and, it's just the job sort of opportunities, there is not a great deal of them up this end. (Shaun, Rhondda)

While he expresses positive emotions towards his home locality, he recognised the need to move out in order to secure employment suggesting that his career aspirations conflicted with his interpretation of his opportunities; the sorts of employment he envisaged obtaining were not those that existed in the Valleys. This sort of conflict and ambivalence was also present in aspiring teacher Ruth’s response:

C.E. Where would your dream place to live be?

R. I'd like, I'd love to still live in the Valley but it's, that's more of a dream than anything I think.

C.E. So where do you think you'll actually likely to be living?

R. In like Cardiff or Swansea or something, like a bigger city or something.

C.E. And why those places?

R. Because it seems to be like there's more different options and that down there, there's more like schools and stuff you could apply for, there's not that many here really. (Ruth, Rhondda)

Like Shaun, Ruth’s longing to live in the Valleys in the future is antagonistic with her career aspirations which she recognises as unobtainable if she were to stay. Hektner (1995) argued that the limited range of career opportunities in rural areas mean that young people are more likely to experience ‘conflict’ aspirations (on the one hand, dream of staying in the area but, on the other, recognise the need to ‘move out’ in order to ‘move up’ socio-economically). These conflicting aspirations also characterised Valleys’ young people’s narratives; living there in the future was constructed as a dream or a hope in face of the economic need to migrate, they did not so much express a desire to leave the Valleys but saw it as a necessity in order to meet their personal and economic needs.

Since no student from Newport expressed the view that out-migration was economically necessary such conflict was completely absent from their narratives, reflecting better local opportunities. While a small number of them alluded to the notion that better and more abundant opportunities existed in cities and locations outside Newport, they did not construct migration as an economic necessity in the way that young people from the Rhondda did.

The data suggest, therefore, that Rhondda's young people's imagined futures were more polarised than those from Newport; they expressed more intense aspirations and expectations to leave, on the one hand, but also more intense positive affective relationships with their locality on the other. These affective relationships, for a small but significant minority, underpinned their aspirations to stay. These binary longings to stay and leave reflected both the structure of opportunities in local contexts facing them, in particular the scarcity of employment, which worked to 'push' them towards leaving, as well as social 'cement' which embedded them in the Valleys.

Newport's young people's 'imagined futures' were less polarised; fewer expressed an aspiration to leave the locality and, although similar proportions expressed the preference to stay as did those in the Rhondda, they expressed less intensely positive feelings of belonging and attachment towards their locality. This meant that their 'imagined futures' were characterised by less conflict and ambivalence. This reflects the greater social heterogeneity of their city and the structure of opportunities which existed there.

It must be underlined that in neither Newport nor Rhondda were students homogenous in their orientations towards their home locality. From Newport about a third expressed a preference to leave and a third to stay. Similarly, from the Rhondda about a third expressed the desire to stay whilst approximately half expressed a strong intention or desire to leave. What is evident, however, were important differences in the intensity with which young people from the Rhondda expressed positive emotional attachments with home, compared to those from Newport, as discussed above. It seems that the extent to which young people expressed a longing to stay local in the future reflected the degree to which they were embedded in their

area. Again, as discussed in the Chapter five it was noteworthy that among the eleven Valleys' young people who expressed most intense preference to stay local, all of these had at least one parent born and bred in the Rhondda and had some or all of their extended family living nearby including, not uncommonly, grandparents living just a couple of streets away.

There is a similar pattern of association between a preference to stay and family residence in the area amongst students from Newport. Whilst fewer of Newport's students had parents born and bred in the area and much fewer had most of their extended family living in the area, it is noteworthy that amongst the ten students who wanted to stay local in the future, the majority of these had at least one parent born and bred in the area and had most of their extended family living in the area. In contrast, amongst the remaining 16 students who did not express particularly strong preference to stay in Newport in the future, a smaller proportion of these (six) had extended family living in the area. Thus, whilst I want to emphasise that the locality in which young people live has very important bearing upon their imagined futures, fostering aspirations to *leave* on the one hand, or a sense of attachment which underpinned aspirations to *stay* on the other, there were differences *within* the samples of young people from each location. The young people who most want to stay were, then, the most embedded in their localities through length of family residence and existence of extended family and kinship networks in the area.

Local opportunity structures and career aspirations.

To emphasise, local opportunity structures had a very important bearing upon young people's aspirations to stay or leave. Valleys' young people expressed more intense aspirations to leave while Newport's more frequently 'expected' to stay, partly reflecting differences in these opportunities. It also emerged that the types of employment sectors young people aspired to mirrored the different structures of employment opportunities in their locality. Nearly half of young people from the Rhondda aspired toward employment in the public sector, in particular jobs in teaching and health care:

I'd love to do teaching, I wanna be a teacher. (Hywel, Rhondda)

I'd love to teach PE in a comp, (giggles) I'd love to! (**Ruth, Rhondda**)

The frequency with which young people aspired to employment within the public sector, and in particular careers in health care or teaching reflects the structure of opportunity in the Valleys; public administration, teaching and health care accounts for over a third of all employment within Rhondda Cynon Taf. Reflecting this, approximately half of the young people had at least one parent who was employed in the public sector, in particular education and health care.

In contrast, less than a third of young people from Newport aspired to employment in this sector, directing their hopes towards more varied job destinations and with marginally higher aspirations toward employment in the private sector. This also reflected the structure of opportunities locally. While Newport had a large service sector and public administration, health and education was its largest area of employment, there were also increasingly diverse opportunities in a growing number of businesses. Again, it also reflected the fact that just over a quarter of Newport students' parents were employed in the public sector, in health care or education while the majority worked in local or national private businesses:

...I wanted to be in the RAF as an engineering officer. (**Steven, Newport**)

...Like I wanna go in a bank and like do courses in a bank and work my way up and eventually I wanna save as much money as I can and then go into business, like maybe start up my own business or invest in a business somewhere, something like that, along those lines. (**Natalie, Newport**)

C.E. So what would be your dream career?

A. I'm not sure yet, something to do with the bank probably, I don't know what specific jobs yet. (**Amir, Newport**)

Evidently, the structure of opportunities in local contexts informs young people's subjective perceptions of their opportunities and, in turn, their career aspirations. If place matters in their career aspirations, it suggests that opportunity structures in local settings are importantly implicated in the reproduction of social and educational inequalities. Young people's aspirations do not simply reflect the scope of opportunities that vary with their access to material or educational resources (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Ball et al, 2000a) but those existing in local contexts. This created an important relationship between career aspiration and longing to stay in the

locality among the eleven students who wanted a Rhondda future, seven of whom aspired to employment in the public sector. It may be that young people who do not expect or want to leave only aspire for those types of employment which exist locally, jobs which they can 'see', which were most likely to allow them to live locally. Hywel, for example, saw himself finding employment in teaching or nursing within the Valley.

C.E. Imagine in say 10-15 years time, where do you imagine yourself living and working?

H. The local community. Well working in, if I got into teaching the nearest primary school, if I got into nursing the nearest hospital, but living around here. (Hywel, Rhondda)

Ellie also exemplified this aspiration to live and work in the Rhondda.

C.E. So do you see yourself living here in the future?
E. Yeah

C.E. And you said that you, where would you kind of look for jobs?
E. Around the Rhondda Valley way and probably go to Cardiff but I wouldn't go any further.

C.E. And why not?

E. I dunno, it's just the fact of travelling so far on my own. Yeah.

(Ellie, Rhondda)

It must be emphasised, however, that this aspiration to *stay* within the Valleys was an aspiration of the minority and so this does not explain the contradiction between the frequency with which these young people aspired for public sector employment (such as teaching and health care) on the one hand, and the overwhelming aspiration to *leave* the locality on the other. One explanation might come from the industrial history of the Valleys and relatively recent dominance of post-industrial, public sector employment. This may well have created a local culture around which private sector employment is marginal and public sector employment is the culturally and socially normative sector to enter, reaffirmed by the types of work their parents did. This is also likely to explain the more diverse career aspirations of students from Newport who neither had to 'get out to get on' nor felt constricted to narrow, 'realistic' job choice. Newport's diverse employment sectors were made 'visible' to them by the types of employment their parents held. Where friends and peers commonly aspired for careers within one sector or another this further tended to

strengthen their appearance as socially and culturally normative ones to enter. This may explain why young people overwhelmingly aspired to public sector employment in the Valleys and a varied scope of sectors in Newport. Yet, for young people from the Valleys, they were all too aware of the scarcity of employment opportunities, a perception gathered from their own and their friends' parents' status as unemployed and through media representations of the Valleys as a place of decline and degeneration born out of its economic landscape. It is perhaps not surprising therefore that the aspiration to 'escape' was so dominant. This aspiration is further compounded by popular notions of '*getting out to get on*', a sentiment which was implicit but bold in the narratives of many of these young people's imagined futures.

This sentiment '*get out to get on*' was also expressed by young people who aspired for employment within the public sector such as teaching. Whilst students did see opportunities for teaching as existing in the Valleys, it was also clear that they recognised teaching opportunities as existing in greater abundance elsewhere:

C.E. So explain why, so you don't think there's not much jobs around here?

R. No, it's, well there's not that many like, (pause) I dunno, there doesn't seem to be that many career options for like, say I went down the physio route, there doesn't seem to be many careers here or like, teaching PE there's not, I don't think there's many places around here, you'd have to be lucky like to see if there are vacancies to apply like. (Ruth, Rhondda)

We can say, therefore, that locality had important bearing on these young people's future aspirations. This was demonstrated by the large numbers of Valleys students aspiring to public sector employment and Newport students' to careers in more varied sectors of employment. This was, however, intersected with aspirations to stay or to leave which itself was complicated by young people's affective relationships with their locality.

Staying in Wales

So far I have illustrated some of the ways in which opportunity structures in local contexts bear upon young people's 'imagined futures'; their aspirations and expectations to stay in or to leave their locality as well as the types of employment to which they aspired. I also discussed the ways in which the social fabric of these

localities has bearing upon young people's aspirations to stay or to leave through their sense of belonging and attachment to their 'home'. Localities also inform young people's sense of loyalty and belonging to the wider geographical space, the nation. A striking theme to emerge from interviews captured the way in which students expressed a sense of attachment and belonging to Wales, reflected in their hopes and plans to remain within it, particularly pertinent in the narratives of young people from the Valleys. The desire to live in Wales was much less intense among young people from Newport where only one expressed strong attachment to the nation and three others a sense of contentment were they to stay but no particularly strong preference for doing so. Explicit hope of living in Wales among Rhondda students' responses was often difficult to disentangle and quantify in relation to hope about living in the Valleys or close to family and friends. Nonetheless, they certainly evinced a much stronger sense of attachment and loyalty to Wales than those of Newport students. In Callum's words it sounded pretty visceral and unproblematic:

C.E. And why in Wales, why would you want to stay in Wales?

C. Oh well it's a place of birth isn't it (laughs), it's like yeah, it's your country isn't it? (Callum, Rhondda)

Callum's construction of Wales as his '*place of birth*' was echoed in Hannah's words, in the way she thought of Wales as being '*my home*' and '*familiar territory*' indicating a sense of attachment to Wales, to both '*get away*' and '*stay close*':

C.E. Where do you imagine yourself living in say 10 or 15 years time?

H. Hopefully Cardiff (sighs). I like Wales, I just, (pause), I dunno growing up it's like I can't wait to get away from here but I'd probably feel, if I could stay close I would probably feel better, and it's like I grew up here but now I live here like...

Later in her interview she says:

H. I dunno, it's just, I'm quite patriotic really, it's like this is my home, it's familiar territory so. (Hannah, Rhondda)

These extracts illuminate the way in which these young people's 'imagined' futures were informed by their feelings of attachment and loyalty to Wales. Aspiration to leave the Valleys in order to seek employment elsewhere was by no means incompatible with hopes and dreams of staying within Wales. Vicky emphasised

hopes to live within Wales, though she also expected to leave the Rhondda in the future to pursue her career aspirations:

C.E. Do you think that you'd find jobs around here?

V. Probably further away. I know I'd probably have to move if I did do a teaching degree.

C.E. Whereabouts might you go to?

V. I dunno, I wouldn't mind as long as I stayed in Wales. (chuckles)

C.E. Why Wales in particular?

V. I dunno, it's just home like in it, so. (Vicky, Rhondda)

Vicky perceived migration out of the Valley as necessary for securing employment while directly attesting a sense of attachment and belonging to Wales. A minority of others similarly explicitly said that they hoped to stay in Wales in the future. A sense of attachment and belonging to Wales can be only partly gauged through the way students explicitly articulated that they hoped to stay in Wales in the future since only a minority did so. If, however, I consider that over half of students from the Valleys listed only localities in Wales as places in which they hoped to live in the future this reveals a more intense group sense of attachment, loyalty and belonging than those from Newport. Typically, Jamie expressed a far less intense sense of affection and loyalty to Wales:

C.E. Would you see yourself living in England or Wales in 10 years time?

A. Wales

C.E. Why is that?

A. I dunno I just, I just end up staying in Wales instead of moving away. (Jamie, Newport)

Jamie's 'imagined future', located in Wales, did not so much reflect longing as fatalism as to where he would simply 'end up'. Moreover, Newport students less frequently listed only places in Wales as those where they aspired to live. They were more likely to express a longing to leave Wales or to live in border areas, such as Bristol or Monmouthshire, as Alice did when asked where she would like to live in the future:

A. Um, not in Newport. Um maybe Cardiff or probably like Monmouth way.

C.E. And you said also Monmouth? Why there?

A. Just because it's known to be a nice area ain't it? And it's not too far, it's only like half hour drive so. (Alice, Newport)

I don't think I'd want to be in the same place for the rest of my life even within the estate of Clayton it's very sort of you know, I'd like to at least go out of Britain at some point, you know at least out of Newport, out of Wales, that would be a bit better. Just because you know staying within the same place would be terrible! (Finn, Newport)

Alice and Finn exemplify the way in which Newport students' 'imagined futures' were characterised by less intense affection, loyalty and sense of belonging to Wales than those from the Rhondda. This mirrored variations in the types of national identity claimed by these young people where, as discussed in Chapter five, young people from the Valleys were more likely to claim a 'Welsh' identity than those from Newport, which mapped on to those 'futures':

C.E. And where do you see yourself kind of living and working in the future?

R. I've always wanted to stay in Wales, I don't think I'd move that far away, so. (Rhian, Rhondda)

This non Welsh speaking 'Valleys' Welsh' identity seemed to foster attachment to both immediate locality and Wales in general, as alluded to by Dylan, whose future plans to teach in the Valleys were underpinned by his sense of familiarity with what he perceived to be a distinct Valleys' culture:

I think I'd prefer to work in Wales, just because of the culture and stuff, I'd like to relate to it and I wouldn't have to worry so much about my accent and stuff... if I went to England. (Dylan, Rhondda)

Dylan's excerpt suggests that characteristics distinct to the Valleys in particular and Wales in general, such as accent and dialect, had important bearing upon his aspirations to stay in Wales. I suggested in Chapter five that a distinctive Welsh identity may in part stem from the very specific qualities and characteristics of the Valleys; the close-knit social and kinship networks which are residues of its industrial heritage, namely the legacy of mining which once dominated the Rhondda. The heritage of mining has left an imprint on the social character within the Valleys in the form of close-knit kinship relationships which, for some young people from

the Valleys, underpins their strongly positive emotional relationships with their locality. Combined with the distinct accent, culture and values which Valleys' young people alluded to in their interviews, this fosters particularly strong attachment to Wales and in turn bears upon their 'imagined' futures which are located within Wales.

By contrast, the less intense Welsh identity claimed by young people from Newport mapped on to their less intense aspirations to stay within Wales and greater hopes of leaving. Their greater claim to a 'British Welsh' identity and their less intense sense of attachment to Wales reflected Newport's industrial and social heritage, as well as its greater geographical proximity to England. While overwhelmingly they spoke with an urban South-Wales accent, I was struck by its underlying mild, West-country twang. It is Newport students' claim to a 'British Welsh' identity that underpins their less intense expressions of belonging to Wales that is projected in their 'imagined futures'. Like much of the origin of their accents, this may help explain why their 'imagined futures' more frequently existed outside of Wales:

C.E. And would you see yourself living around here in 10 years time?

L. Not in Wales. I'd like to live in London but not in Wales, there's nothing round here. I've never like searched up a person who's been in media, big media production things in Newport or Wales. (Lisa, Newport)

G. Yeah, I wants to move away from here. I would like to go to Cardiff and then move to London.

C.E. Oh right, why's that?

G. I don't know, it seems like you've got more opportunities in London cos it's a bigger place so you've got more opportunities for jobs and things like that. (Grace, Newport)

Both Lisa and Grace's responses illuminate the way in which their hopes to leave Wales were bound up with career aspirations, as well as signifying their weak sense of attachment and belonging to Wales. These extracts and the others presented above demonstrate the way that local social landscapes come to bear upon young people's aspirations for the future through the way they foster particular kinds of affective relationships with place. They illustrate the way in which traces of practice

associated with local social practices, gender divisions of labour and political orientations are reflections of the social and economic history of these places. These accumulate over time and ‘seep’ into local consciousness and construction of identities (McDowell, 2003). For young people from the Rhondda this local identity leads ultimately to a strong sense of loyalty and belonging to Wales which becomes projected in their ‘imagined futures’, specifically, their longings to stay. By contrast, the local identity of Newport is characterised by a ‘British Welsh’ identity, which engenders less strong loyalties and sense of belonging to Wales, which becomes projected in their less intense desires to remain within its borders.

Conclusion

Local employment opportunities

In this chapter I set out to explore how local opportunity structures bear upon young people’s ‘imagined futures.’ Specifically, I explored how young people’s aspirations to *stay* in or to *leave* their locality in the future, as well as their career aspirations are informed by the structure of opportunities which exist locally. I also set out to explore how local social landscapes and local and national identities bear upon these ‘imagined futures’. The data presented in this chapter suggests that local opportunity structures, and young people’s interpretations of them inform their aspirations for leaving *or* staying within their localities in the future, as well as their career aspirations. Place also bears upon the ‘imagined futures’ of young people through their feeling of belonging and attachment to ‘home’. These affective relationships are informed by the degree to which young people are ‘embedded’ in their locality by their family’s duration of residence and kinship networks in the locality.

The stronger emphasis placed on *leaving*, *escaping* or ‘*getting out*’ of the Valleys among young people from the Rhondda can be partly explained by the structure of opportunities which existed there. History led young people from the Rhondda to view unemployment as a long-term problem from which to ‘escape’, particularly, but by no means exclusively, among those who anticipate progression to HE.

This aspiration to leave a place young people saw as stigmatised and offering few employment opportunities was, however, juxtaposed against a dominant aspiration for employment in the public sector, particularly jobs in health care and teaching which dominated employment in the area. It seems, therefore, that the structure of opportunities locally provided a '*generalised climate of expectation*' (Furlong and Cartmel, 1995: 366) affecting young people, while at the same time, scarcity of employment opportunities and popular notions of '*getting out to get on*' compel young people to leave.

By contrast, young people from Newport were less likely to aspire to 'escape' and more likely to expect to stay local in the future. This partly reflected the structure of opportunities locally and young people's understandings of Newport as a place with some employment opportunities. Reflecting Newport's increasingly diversified structure of the local economy, growth of private business in recent years and proximity to adjacent cities offering greater employment opportunities, young people aspired to employment in more varied employment sectors. The greater frequency with which they expected to stay also reflected their class and ethnic make-up in terms of which many young people could imagine themselves living only where their families currently were located.

The extent to which young people aspired to leave or to stay not only reflected the scope and structure of opportunities in local contexts but also their emotional and affective relationships with their 'homes'. Young people's 'imagined futures' are not only informed by rational calculations of the likelihood of securing employment in local settings but they are also informed by calculations of the emotional costs and rewards of staying or leaving. While young people from both locations expressed a sense of attachment to their locality and articulated their hope to remain within it, those from the Rhondda expressed more intense emotional attachments and expressions of affection towards their immediate locality and Wales in general. It seems that when ties to friends, family and neighbours are strong within particular communities, strong attachments to place are fostered which many young people prefer to maintain. The geographical place in which young people are situated and its social and industrial history impacts upon locally based social relations and

identities, fostering a particular ‘structure of feeling’ (McDowell, 2003) which influenced young people’s aspirations to stay local *and* in Wales.

Why does it matter?

Why does it matter that local opportunity structures frame young people’s aspirations to stay or to leave, as well as their career aspirations? The data suggest that young people’s aspirations are rational and strategic in relation to their chances of securing future employment in local contexts. Where opportunities in local settings are scarce (as they are in the Rhondda Valleys in comparison with Newport), this compels young people to aspire to leave. But when young people leave, particularly those with the most educational and material resources, this reproduces disadvantage locally. Whilst aspirations to leave a locality reflect rationally and strategically contingent decisions to pursue employment elsewhere, the extent to which these aspirations become realised will vary with young people’s capacity to be geographically mobile. Young people with little in the way of educational and material resources are likely to face most difficulties when it comes to accessing employment and for this reason, opportunities in local contexts matter most to the life chances of these young people.

If local opportunity structures frame career aspirations this matters in terms of the sorts of careers advice and guidance that young people receive in schools and colleges. It suggests that careers tutors should ensure that young people are provided with advice about the scope of employment opportunities locally as well as in national labour markets. This would enable them to make informed decisions about their futures, especially if they hope and plan to stay or to return to the place they call ‘home’.

What are the consequences when young people have strong emotional attachments to stay but when staying means facing scarce local employment opportunities? Where young people’s ‘imagined futures’ are demarcated by conflicting aspirations of leaving the locality, on the one hand, and staying local, on the other, as they were more frequently among young people from the Rhondda, it meant that they had to engage in difficult, cost-benefit calculations. The consequences of strong bonding

ties that embedded people in place are not so damaging when opportunities are abundant or when there are ample transport links to nearby opportunities. When opportunities are severely limited, however, staying *local* means facing severely restricted opportunities that have negative implications for young people's future life chances and prospects of fulfilling their career aspirations. Leaving is emotionally costly, however, as it means severing ties and attachments to 'home.'

We can see, therefore, how disadvantage becomes reproduced in local contexts, occurring in part through social relations that exist locally. In particular, bonding ties which embed people in place make it very difficult for them to leave. I contend, therefore, that rational choices are made by young people regarding their 'imagined futures' but these rationally contingent decisions are not simply about maximising economic outcomes but also about maximising emotional wellbeing. Local disadvantage and young people's material and educational resources define the boundaries in which rational choices are made and realised. This means that the extent to which young people are able to realise aspirations to leave, or to leave and to return to the locality which they call 'home,' is crucially informed by the resources they have which enable them to become geographically mobile. These resources are socially and spatially structured.

Chapter nine

Discussion: Re-conceptualising youth transitions

This study has been an exploration of young people making their transitions from school to post-compulsory education and beyond in particular places and timeframes. It has set out to explore the ways in which young people's decisions about their post-compulsory school lives, aspirations and anticipated transitions from school to further or higher education and employment were informed by conditions in local contexts and the contemporary economic landscape in which they were situated. Particularly, my intention has been to explore how local opportunity structures and local social landscapes bear upon their decisions about staying on in post-16 education and progression to HE, as well as their future career aspirations and 'imagined futures'. I have also set out to consider how current 'cold' economic landscapes, characterised by strong competition and congestion in the labour market and cuts to public spending on HE in the UK have borne upon young people's decisions about staying in post-16 education and higher education.

In exploring the role of *place* and *time* in young people's post-school lives, the study aimed to address, more widely, the role of *location* in the reproduction of educational and social inequalities. Concentrating on place and time as the analytic foci of the study has served to highlight the complexity of young people's aspirations and educational choices and the ways in which they are informed by a multitude of factors which are socially, spatially and historically located.

Through interviews with 57 young people living in two different localities in South Wales, the study has illuminated the way that local employment opportunities as well as local social landscapes inform young people's educational choices and future aspirations. It has highlighted the way in which characteristics which are specific to the time and place in which young people are situated bear upon the *processes* by which young people reach decisions about their post-school lives. This chapter will discuss the contribution that these findings make to our understandings of youth

transitions from school to further and higher education or elsewhere. I will return to ideas and concepts presented in the Chapters two and three, and on reflection of the data presented in the empirical chapters, I discuss how we might re-conceptualise educational choice-making and transitions in order to better understand them.

In Chapters two and three it was suggested that cultural reproduction approaches were necessary but insufficient for explaining youth transitions and that aspirations, educational choices, and anticipated transitions reflected rational choices. But rational choice theory presents an overly individualised and rationalised view of educational choice making at the expense of acknowledging the cultural, social and spatial contexts in which young people are situated. The fieldwork findings presented in the empirical chapters suggest that young people's aspirations and educational decision-making are embedded in social relations and within a framework of multiple influences, which both close down and open up opportunities simultaneously. Before discussing this further I provide a brief summary of the conclusions drawn in each of the empirical chapters.

Summary of findings

1) *The role of local opportunity structures and contemporary economic landscapes in young people's post-school transitions.*

Structures of opportunities in local contexts inform the *type* of transition young people make from compulsory to post-16 education. They inform decision-making processes to stay or not in post-16 education. Where local employment opportunities were contracted but available, albeit in restricted form, young people were more likely to *jump* into post-16 education, as they did in Newport. Remaining in post-16 education was perceived as an option set against limited, possible job entry. Where local employment opportunities were very severely limited young people were more likely to be *pushed* into post-16 education, as they were in the Rhondda, where post-16 education was commonly perceived as the *only* option within the context of scarce employment opportunities.

Evidently, despite differences in the *type* of transition made by the young people in the study, opportunity structures in local contexts did not seem to inform their *destinations* (i.e. their very high propensity to participate in post-16 education). This perhaps reflects the pervasiveness of popular commentaries surrounding the economic climate at the time these young people were making transitions (2010-2011). These popular commentaries constructed the economy as particularly ‘cold’, competitive and congested and they seem to have accentuated discourses which position HE as a means of accessing well paid employment. These young people are also subject to the global penetration of the neo-liberal project (Ball, 2012), and ‘knowledge economy’ rhetoric that puts pressure on them to take responsibility for their biographical plans and to invest in education and training in order to enter their future work.

Given these circumstances, it is not surprising that the young people in this study, like those in others (for example, Ball et al, 2000b) have internalised these powerful discourses and constructed post-16 and higher education as the means of economic security. Given these powerful discourses, exacerbated by contemporary economic events, this explains why young people express indifference to the prospect of financial debt whilst gaining a higher education. Within the context of a ‘cold’ economic climate, staying in post-16 education and progression on to higher education is a rational choice, both a means of avoiding scarce employment opportunities within what young people recognise as a highly congested and competitive labour market and of investment in human capital.

2) *The role of local social landscapes and the contemporary landscape of HE funding in young people’s university choices.*

The majority of young people from both our study locations were choosing to study at Welsh universities and universities which were geographically ‘close to home.’ There was little difference between young people in either location as to the extent to which they expressed a preference to study in Wales and at geographically ‘local’ universities. While their choices reflected myriad considerations which were geographical, material and personal, the contemporary economic landscape and change and uncertainty in the funding of higher education seemed to accentuate their

choices of 'local' universities and universities in Wales. Many perceived studying in Wales and close to home as a financially less 'risky' option.

While there was virtually no difference in the extent to which students from either location chose Welsh or 'local' universities the *processes* underpinning this preference were different, reflecting variations in young people's relationships with their locality. Attachment and loyalty to both nation and immediate locality had a very important bearing upon young people's university choices and operated most strongly on those from the Rhondda Valleys. They served as additional incentives to study in Wales and at local universities.

3) Young people's 'imagined futures': Staying local or moving out?

Young people's interpretations of local employment opportunities informed their plans and aspirations for leaving or staying in their localities in the future. Young people from the Rhondda were more likely to aspire to and expect to leave their locality in the future than those from Newport, reflecting in part the relatively greater scarcity of their employment opportunities. In contrast, young people from Newport were more likely to expect to stay there in the future. The extent to which young people aspired to leave or stay not only reflected the scope and structure of local opportunities but also their emotional and affective relationships with their 'home' localities. Those from the Valleys expressed more *intense* emotional attachments and expressions of affection towards their immediate locality and to Wales in general. Aspirations were not only informed by rational calculations of the likelihood of securing employment in the future in their locality but also emotional relationships with home.

Opportunity structures in local contexts also informed young people's career aspirations. Those from the Rhondda were more likely to expect and hope to enter jobs in the public sector, reflecting its local dominance, while those from Newport were more likely to hope to enter careers in a greater variety of sectors, reflecting its increasingly diverse economy. There was evidence of conflicting aspirations, not least in the Rhondda, particularly for academically successful young people. Here, local social landscapes fostering emotional attachment and belonging to 'home'

successfully ‘embedded’ young people in place while scarce employment opportunities compelled them to leave.

Were they pushed or did they jump? The role of structure and agency in young people’s post-school transitions and ‘imagined’ futures.

Staying on in the 6th form and anticipated transitions on to higher education.

The study has highlighted the centrality of young people’s post-school aspirations, choices, and anticipated transitions from school to further and higher education or employment being informed by their preferences, intentions and perceived self-efficacy. They were also informed by their expectations regarding the probability of success associated with a given course of action and were directed towards goals and preferences even when the latter were only tentatively formed. While aspirations for the future are also integrally bound with identity formation (McLeod and Yates, 2006), progression to post-16 education clearly had rational and strategic motives. As illustrated in Chapter six, Post-16 and higher education were perceived by young people to lead to greater financial rewards, or at least provide means of avoiding entry to a ‘risky’ labour market characterised by severely limited employment opportunities. Participation in post-16 education was a rational and strategic option where, almost always, the perceived benefits outweighed the perceived costs.

Aspirations were formed and rational choices were made, however, within boundaries defined by external factors. While young people made choices informed by emotional and intellectual considerations, this was not to say they were arbitrary. Decisions about staying on in post-16 education and the pathways taken through it were informed by the structure of actually available opportunities, structured both socially and spatially and inherently historically located. Likelihood of progressing from compulsory to post-16 education, the pathways taken through it, and the likelihood of participating in HE have been shown repeatedly to be strongly predicted by prior attainment and earlier experiences of education (Forsyth and Furlong, 2003; Gorard 2005; Vignoles and Crawford, 2010). This was illustrated in Chapter six where it was shown that the extent to which young people expected to progress on to higher education was heavily informed by their prior attainments and

educational experiences. Where HE had been closed off as an objective possibility, young people tended to exclude themselves from what they had already been objectively excluded. Attainment in turn is seen to be highly associated with the cultural and educational resources upon which young people can draw, which are largely gleaned from their social backgrounds (Forsyth and Furlong, 2003; Gorard and Rees, 2002). The trajectories followed by individuals from compulsory education to post-16 education and, for some, on to HE are, in these ways, informed by earlier experiences of education and prior attainment, which inform 'learner identities'. A young person's 'learner identity' (Rees et al, 1997) is likely to be formed long-term, over the course of their educational careers, informing the post-school transitions that individuals make (Gorard and Rees, 2002). Indeed, in Chapter six we saw that for some young people, their 'learner identities' (informed by their prior educational experiences) led them to view HE as being outside the boundaries of their objective and subjective opportunities.

Early educational experiences and achievements do not alone define young people's framework of opportunity. They are not simply presented with a range of objective learning opportunities from which to choose, such as a range of vocational or academic post-16 pathways. They interpret these opportunities and make choices based on the imputed costs and benefits associated with a particular pathway. How young people interpret the opportunities they face for learning is informed by their prior educational experiences, and intellectual and emotional dimensions (Rees et al, 1997). They are also informed by gendered and ethnic identities and social background; or in Bourdieu's terms, 'conditions of existence' (Bourdieu, 1990). These socially constituted conditions, including class norms and social expectations, inform young people's interpretations of their opportunities, particularly those regarding participation in higher education. They can bias their preference structures so that the range of objective opportunities is narrowed to a smaller range of subjective alternatives. For a young person to cultivate an aspiration for a pathway through an option such as higher education, it needs to be both objectively feasible, based on prior educational experience and material resources, and subjectively feasible, based on class, gender and ethnic norms and social expectations which define 'what a person like me does'.

In this sense, then, external forces not only define what is objectively feasible but also what is subjectively feasible for young people. The mix includes not only the determinative force of prior achievement and educational experiences but also socialisation, class and other norms and social expectations in shaping the way young people understand the costs and rewards associated with a particular pathway. Subjective opportunities do not simply exist within the 'psychology' of an individual but are externally, socially constituted; choices and decisions are situated within cultural and social contexts.

In emphasising the importance of cultural contexts and socialisation in framing young people's educational choices and pathways, however, it is vital to avoid presenting an over-socialised view of the individual. The concept of habitus is valuable for explaining how socially constituted dispositions and orientations towards HE, acquired unconsciously through socialisation by 'domestic' or family influences, inform decisions and choices about participation in HE (Reay et al, 2001; Ball et al, 2002a). Yet the concept of habitus does not enable us easily to explain how young people from similar class backgrounds may be orientated differently towards HE and why the young people in this study were largely expecting to progress on to higher education despite coming from families with no tradition of previous participation. With the expansion of higher education, and the vastly increased numbers of people from all social backgrounds entering it (albeit, different social groups entering hierarchically differentiated institutions at different rates) this questions the notion that the family can be the only site for the transmission of cultural capital (Goldthorpe, 2007).

A more useful explanation for decisions regarding participation in post-16 and higher education comes from Gambetta's (1987) contention that young people aspire to and expect only what their constraints and opportunities allow them to achieve. Indeed, Skegg's (2004) notion of 'plausibility structures' enables us to see why young people with little family experience of HE might anticipate progression on to HE. When young people expect to progress to HE it is largely because it has become an objectively achievable destination. This was clearly illustrated in this study whereby the majority of the high attaining students expected to progress on to HE because it was a pathway made possible and obtainable given their prior educational

attainment. Thus, while a class structured habitus might influence the way in which young people conceive and relate to the prospect of going to university, it is important to acknowledge that processes of exclusion operate long before active choices about HE are made (Archer et al, 2003). Choices are made, therefore, within a framework of opportunity, the parameters of which are defined by external forces; educational and material resources, social expectations and cultural norms and prior educational experiences and attainments (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Ball et al, 1999; Ball et al, 2000a). Even when the boundaries in which young people make choices are defined by external spatial and social forces, they are still able to choose between options and in ways which are rationally contingent upon the relative costs and benefits of pursuing particular ones.

The extent to which young people will, therefore, expect to participate in HE reflects the objective and subjective opportunity structures they face, which are socially and spatially historically constituted. Where class norms and social expectations confine options to a narrower set of alternatives than what is objectively available (Gambetta, 1987), young people will not cultivate expectations for high status pathways like HE. Where HE is not an expected pathway, this does not reflect 'lack of aspiration', rather, it suggests that this pathway has been closed off as an objectively and subjectively feasible option. The data suggest, therefore, that young people's aspirations and the choices they make about post-16 and higher education are set in the relationship between individual factors, structural and material limits and possibilities. These understandings of educational choice-making problematise the 'deficit aspirations' thesis which often appears within popular commentaries to explain low rates of participation in higher education amongst young people from working-class groups (Bright, 2011).

What role does time and place have in framing educational choices and transitions?

Young people's educational choices, aspirations and the post-16 pathways they follow are not simply informed by their educational and material resources, or by class norms and social expectations which inform their interpretations of these opportunities. Irrespective of how young people interpret their opportunities the scope of actually available alternatives for learning and employment vary across

place and over time. This means that *where* young people live has important bearing upon the sorts of transitions they make from school to post-16 and HE. The decisions, choices and anticipated transitions young people make reflect the historically specific scope of opportunities they face.

Place had a very important bearing upon the types of transitions made by young people in both of our research locations. As discussed in Chapter six the decision-making processes underpinning whether to stay in post-16 education were different, reflecting the scope and structure of employment opportunities in local settings. In both localities limited employment opportunities appeared to operate as a particularly strong incentive to stay in post-16 education, which tentatively implies some support for a ‘discouraged worker’ effect (Raffe and Willms, 1989). The ‘discouraged worker’ effect does not, however, do justice to the complexity of the relationship between the labour market and young people’s participation in education. As this study has illustrated, severely limited employment opportunities in places like the South Wales Valleys, operate as a ‘push’ towards staying in post-16 education. In localities where opportunities have also contracted but remain somewhat available, young people are more likely to ‘jump’ into post-16 education. In both contexts, therefore, their destination is the same but their ‘articulated rationalities’ for staying in education are different, largely reflecting differences in the structure and availability of employment opportunities in local settings.

We can see, therefore, that transitions are informed by rational and strategic decisions but not necessarily in the way that human capital theory conceptualises them. Participating in post-16 education seems to be as much about avoiding ‘risky’ transitions, in particular, avoiding severely restricted labour market opportunities, as it is about investment in human capital. These findings suggest, therefore, that the nature of young people’s post-school transitions and choices are informed by conditions in local contexts but these cannot simply be understood as reflecting motives to invest in human capital, on the one hand, or a ‘discouraged worker’ effect, on the other.

While the importance of place for young people’s post-school destinations are not easily discernible from this study alone, these data illustrate the significant role that it

has in the *process* by which young people reached a decision to stay in post-school education. In light of this, we might speculate whether these different decision making processes have implications for their future experiences of education, fulfilment of career aspirations and consequent life chances.

Speculatively, young people who are ‘pushed’ into educational pathways may have different experiences of education from those who ‘jump’. If young people are ‘pushed’ into post-16 education, their transitions may be more tenuous, fragmented and convoluted and themselves, possibly, more vulnerable to drop out and non-completion in further or higher education. This in turn might make their pathways towards their hoped for destinations more fractured and fragmented. Drawing upon Rose’s (1999: 104) assertion that work and career is the means through which we ‘produce, discover and experience our selves’ we might speculate that, in making tenuous transitions and being pushed down pathways which are not congruous with career aspirations, young people are unable to realise their aspirations to ‘become’ the ‘self’ to which they aspire. This possibly leaves them more vulnerable to ‘drift’ and to difficulties in realising career aspirations, weakening their chances of securing socially and financially rewarded jobs. These observations are necessarily speculative as to whether and how the type of transition young people make, whether they are ‘pushed’ or ‘jump’ into particular pathways, has bearing upon their future life chances. Further longitudinal research exploring their implications would enable us to reveal the extent to which local opportunity structures really are implicated in the future life chances of young people.

Hopefully, the study has brought to the forefront the importance of the historical moments in which young people are situated that shape participation in post-16 education in a number of ways. Just as places are historically constituted (Massey, 1995a) so are the learning opportunities young people face and the transitions they make. The meanings that are attached to education and training are a product of socially constituted norms and expectations which are located in place and change over time.

The young people in this study were making transitions within a time in which the youth labour market was severely contracted, opportunities for both vocational and

academic learning within post-16 education expanded greatly and access to higher education much widened, partly fuelled by credential inflation which has caused the value of qualifications to decline (Fuller et al, 2011). In these contexts, staying in post-16 education became both socially and numerically normative for school leavers in Wales. In 2010 staying in post-16 education was numerically the most dominant pathway to take, with approximately 83 per cent of the Year eleven cohort staying on in full time education in 2010, compared to 74 per cent in 2004 (CareersWales, 2013).

This historical moment in which young people were passing through post-16 education was also characterised by discourses dominated by human capital perspectives which presented further and higher education as the most secure means of achieving economic security. Over recent decades, the rhetoric of the knowledge economy has promoted the notion that exploitation of its expanded opportunities was available to all (Brown, 2003). This, in turn, encouraged increasing numbers of young people to embark on HE, which in turn fuelled credential inflation and further increased demand for HE (Keep and Mayhew, 2004). Contemporary economic events which characterised the landscape at the time these young people were making choices and anticipating their transition had accentuated this discourse. As we saw in Chapter six, in Newport and the Rhondda, young people's interpretations of the opportunities they faced were informed by their internalisation of such culturally and historically situated discourses. In this sense, we can say that the contemporary economic events bear upon young people's educational aspirations and choices through the way they internalise these powerful discourses.

Young people make rationally informed educational choices within parameters defined by external forces (objective and subjective opportunity structures). Since any objective set of learning opportunities is located within a particular historical time frame, and opportunities vary across place, the external forces that define the parameters within which people make their choices also vary over time and place. Young people's post-school aspirations and choices are situated in classed and spatial contexts that define the conditions that shape choices and transitions, as well as their articulated rationalities for engaging in HE.

What role does time and place have in young people's higher education choices?

Extensive research has established that working-class young people are less likely to enter HE (Archer et al, 2003; Vignoles and Crawford, 2010) and when they do, they enter universities of unequal status, compared to their middle-class counterparts (Reay et al, 2001; Ball et al, 2002a). Young people from different social backgrounds also make different geographical movements from home to university (Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005; Christie, 2007). Indeed, this study illustrates ways in which geographical constraints come to bear upon university choice. It particularly enhances our understanding of why young people from non-traditional university going backgrounds are more likely to choose to study at universities that are close to their homes than their middle-class counterparts. As demonstrated in Chapter seven, geographical and personal constraints, location and reputation of institution and the subjective experience of 'risk' associated with the social and economic costs of going to university all inform university choice. Where material resources are limited and personal constraints loom large, universities in geographically distant locations are very often rendered unimaginable or impossible by young people. They represent a particularly 'risky' option, both financially and emotionally, for non-traditional students for whom the transition to HE represents stepping into to a world in which outcomes are uncertain and tentative. Studying at a university that is 'close to home' is, therefore, a rational and strategic choice, a means of reducing the emotional and identity costs associated with embarking on higher education by maintaining a sense of security during the transition to a potentially 'risky' and unfamiliar world.

Demonstrating such geographical and personal constraints increases our understanding of why, in recent years, growing proportions of Welsh-domiciled students have remained in Wales for their higher education, as opposed to border crossing to England (Rees and Taylor, 2006). While in 2005/6, 19,580 Welsh domiciled students were studying at universities in Wales and 12,010 in England (StatsWales, 2013h), by 2010/11, 24,130 Welsh domiciled students were studying on undergraduate courses at institutions in Wales, and 10,640 in England (StatsWales, 2013g). Rising rates of participation have been paralleled by increasing numbers of young people from non-traditional backgrounds and regions like the South Wales Valleys entering HE. Increasing rates of non-traditional students embarking on HE

have been shown to be associated with increasing rates at which students study at local universities (Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005; Holdsworth, 2009). This study affirms the way in which limited material resources encourage young people to study at 'local' universities and those in Wales.

However, while studying locally and in Wales is likely to be partly informed by financial considerations, and, as illustrated in Chapter seven, changes to the funding of HE have appeared to encourage young people to do so, they do not fully explain the increasing rates at which this has recently occurred. Extensive research has suggested that the emotional costs associated with embarking on HE are related to socially unequal distributions of 'risk' (Archer and Hutchings, 2000; Reay et al, 2001; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005). This study furthers this understanding of 'risk' by highlighting the way that experience of it is also associated with the geographical locations in which young people live. As illustrated in the university choices of the young people in this research, studying at a university located in Wales and 'close to home' was prospected by many of them as capable of ensuring a sense of security, not only through maintaining interpersonal relationships *at home*, but also a sense of connectedness, belonging and affinity to a specific geographical locality, in this case the Valleys in particular and Wales more generally. What this study has shown is that place, and in particular, local social landscapes, inform young people's university choices through the way social landscapes foster particularly strong emotional place attachments. The decision-making *processes* by which choices about university were reached (i.e. preferences for local and Welsh HEIs) were differentiated by young peoples' localities and emotional relationships with their 'homes'. Those like the Rhondda, which are characterised by extensive kinship and social networks, cultivate, for some young people, a strong sense of attachment and belonging to 'home' that informs their university choices in ways that sought to reduce the experience of 'risk' of embarking on HE.

These findings, then, demonstrate that 'risk' is contingent on factors relating to both social class and locality and highlights the affective dimension of university choice, which is related to attachment and loyalty to place. That increasing numbers of students are drawn to HE from places like the South Wales Valleys, characterised by such strong emotional attachment with home and nation, provides further explanation

for why an increasing proportion of Welsh-domiciled students choose to study in Wales.

Higher education choice- challenging dichotomies.

The findings of this study urge us to go beyond binaries whereby emotional-emotionless are mapped on to rational-non-rational. This study suggests that the emotional aspect of university choice informed young people's rational choices rather than inhibited them. Whilst Ball et al (2002a) and Reay et al (2001) have importantly emphasised the emotional dimension of university choice, their work has not emphasised enough the 'rational' dimension of emotionality. This study suggests, however, that staying 'close to home' while at university was a rationally informed choice, bringing emotional rewards through maintaining a sense of familiarity when making a transition to an unfamiliar and uncertain world. In illuminating this, the study also challenges dichotomies of staying 'close' or 'going far' that map on to binaries of dependence and independence. Young people emphasised the value of studying 'close to home' while also enjoying some independence away from their parental homes, thus challenging the hegemonic status of mobility which Holdsworth (2009) argues dominates popular notions of the HE student. The perception of 'staying local' as a valuable option by young people, problematises its construction as a binary and inferior opposite to geographical mobility, seeing the latter, indeed, as disadvantaged practice (Holdsworth, 2009).

This is not, however, to ignore the way in which spatial mobility remains a privilege of those with the highest qualifications and the most abundant financial resources. As demonstrated in Chapter seven, geographic and personal constraints limit the '*spaces of choice*' (Reay et al, 2001, pp 861) in which young people can operate, meaning that the scope of universities and courses that they choose between are narrowed to those that are local and easily accessible. As suggested above, emotional allegiances to particular geographical regions also operated to narrow down a set of *objectively* feasible universities to a more limited set of *subjective* alternatives. Nonetheless, the findings of this study urge us to rethink the meaning of spatial mobility in relation to university choice, challenging us to question the taken for granted association between immobility with marginalised and disadvantaged practice.

The role of place in young people's 'imagined futures'.

This study has shown that young people's educational choices and aspirations are informed by the structure of actually available, socially and spatially constituted, opportunities. They frame young people's aspirations and expectations for the future, their plans to migrate or to stay within their locality. As opportunities in local contexts vary, so do young people's expectations of leaving or staying. As documented in Chapter eight, plans to leave a locality were, in large part, informed by local opportunity structures; scarce opportunities inform young people's articulated rationalities for leaving and their career aspirations. These tend to reflect local patterns of employment, so that it was more common among young people from the Rhondda to aspire to jobs in its dominant public sector, while those from Newport aspired to more varied job futures, reflecting the increasingly diverse nature of their local economy. Patterns of opportunities in local settings can be said to operate as a reference structure, or a culture of expectation (Furlong and Cartmel, 1995), informing young people about possible kinds of employment for future entry.

While young people's aspirations are rational and strategic, based on their calculated chances of securing future employment (Gambetta, 1987), their anticipated migration out of a locality is also informed by their affective relationships with their 'home' localities. While place attachment has been well documented (Hektner, 1995; Jones, 1999; Kloep et al, 2003), this study has further revealed ways in which the scope of social and kinship networks which exist in a locality bore upon the senses of attachment and belonging that young people have with their localities. In the same way that local social landscapes inform university choice through fostering emotional place attachments, they also inform young people's aspirations for the future. As shown in Chapter eight, bonding ties with family, friends and neighbours provided a source of security and support (Stone, 2003) for some groups of young people, embedding them in locality. The extent to which young people are embedded in their locality is related to the duration of intergenerational residence of family members in a locality, and this varies across place. This in turn informed their articulated rationalities for staying in or leaving their locality. Sense of national identity also informed young people's 'imagined futures', illustrated in the intense

preference to stay within Wales amongst young people in this study, particularly amongst those from the Valleys.

In Chapter seven it was suggested that the strong sense of attachment to Wales and the Valleys, where employment is scarce, which informed many young people's preference for Welsh and local HEIs, may prove to have implications for their post-graduation employment prospects. It may leave them vulnerable to unrealised career aspirations and 'projects of self' (Rose, 1999). Further longitudinal research exploring postgraduate geographical mobility patterns, particularly among those whose affective relationships with home appear to bear so heavily on their university choices and imagined futures, would help in teasing out possible relations and consequences for their life chances.

Our findings also chime with some of the claims made by authors of the community studies produced in the UK in the second quarter of the last century (Young and Willmot, 1957; Jackson, 1968). They have illustrated ways in which places, as economically constituted social landscapes, can foster strong senses of loyalty and attachment. Evidently, communities based on extensive and close-knit social and kinship connections between people, rooted in physical place, continue to exist. This challenges the assertion that face-to-face communities, so rooted, no longer exist in today's society (Putnam, 2000). Our findings as to how attachment to place informed young people's 'imagined futures' and university choices call into question post-modernist claims about the declining significance of place for identity and attachment (Bauman, 1992; Giddens, 1991). They require us to attend to young people's emotional and affective relationships with their 'home' localities in order to understand their aspirations and educational choices.

In order to understand young people's aspirations for the future and, in particular, their future migration plans, the study encourages us to question dichotomies in which staying-leaving is mapped on to place attachment-detachment. Aspirations to leave or stay are informed by the structure of opportunities in local contexts and young people's interpretations of them, informed by historical meanings of education and academic success. Depending, therefore, on the structure of local opportunities, young people may be more or less inclined to leave their locality. Yet their

anticipated migration plans are unlikely simply to be responses to local disadvantage; they are also informed by emotional relationships with home which define what young people want to do. For some young people, these multiple considerations result in polarised aspirations to *stay local* but also to *leave*. This problematises the deficit representations of working-class relationships with place, whereby working-class attachments and immobilities are seen as reflecting defeat, fixity and failure (Skeggs 2004). Dichotomies of *place attachment-detachment and staying-leaving*, therefore, do not adequately explain migration aspirations of working-class young people. Conflicting aspirations seem to be particularly prevalent where young people live in areas where scarce employment opportunities compel them to leave the locality but where the social landscape fosters particularly intense feelings of attachment and belonging, as illustrated most commonly by the young people from the Valleys in this research. For young people in these localities what they *want* to do, and what they *can* do does not always balance.

While young people may have aspirations to leave a locality, reflecting structurally limited local opportunities, or desire to achieve independence, the capacity to become geographically mobile is not equal amongst all social groups (Ball et al, 2000a; McDowell, 2003; MacDonald et al, 2005). It varies with the material and educational resources on which individuals can draw. Some are able to exercise mobility and access employment in national labour markets, others will be restricted to local ones by material resources and educational qualifications. It is for the latter that conditions in local labour markets matter most. In understanding how disadvantage is reproduced in local contexts we must, therefore, consider how migration behaviours are set in the relationship between the structure of opportunity locally, socially structured access to education and employment opportunities and people's emotional relationships with their 'home' localities. We simply cannot expect to understand why young people aspire to stay local or why they aspire to leave through a lens of social class exclusively. Young people from similar social class backgrounds but growing up in different localities face very different employment opportunities and construct very different types of aspirations regarding their future careers and their migratory behaviours.

‘Working-class localism’ has been a term used by a number of scholars to explain some young people’s educational decisions (Reay et al, 2001) and working lives (MacDonald et al, 2005). Aspirations to leave a locality are commonly explained in terms of middle-class access to material and cultural resources that facilitate mobility. These explanations, however, are insufficient and this study strongly suggests that the opportunities in local contexts and young people’s affective relationships with home inform their aspirations for their futures. Indeed, in exploring the ‘imagined futures’ of young people living in relatively geographical proximal and similarly ‘working-class’ localities (based on measures of employment/unemployment), such as the Rhondda and Newport, the data has illuminated the heterogeneity of working-class groups. This heterogeneity is partly *placed*. The study has illuminated how the nuanced characteristics of particular localities’ social and industrial histories and present day economic and social landscapes have important bearing on young people’s aspirations for their personal and working lives. It is inadequate to say that the structure of opportunities in local contexts is implicated in the reproduction of disadvantage without considering how different social landscapes of similarly working-class localities might be implicated in this reproduction. To re-iterate an earlier emphasis, and echoing Allen and Hollingworth (2013), clearly both social class and place interrelate to inform both young people’s aspirations and capacity for spatial mobility

Conclusion: re-conceptualising youth transitions

This study makes an original contribution to the youth and educational transitions literature by illuminating the importance of place in informing the processes by which young people make decisions about their post-school lives. It makes an important sociological contribution to our understanding of structure and agency in youth transitions, highlighting the way that young people and their aspirations, post-school choices and ‘imagined futures’, are located at the intersection of multiple influences.

The decisions and choices that young people make and the aspirations they have for their futures take place at the intersection of a set of horizontal and vertical relationships, which constitute the *conditions* which frame young people’s lives.

These conditions are individual, (related to emotional and intellectual dimensions of choice), social (related to socially differentiated access to learning opportunities, and social norms and expectations which shape young people's interpretations of the costs and benefits associated with these opportunities) and spatial (related to spatial variations in learning opportunities). Young people passing through post-16 education and making transitions from school to FE, HE, employment or elsewhere, in 2010/11, faced a set of opportunities that were at once both complex and nuanced, inherited from generations before them. Within these externally constituted parameters their educational choices and decisions were made.

The shape of young people's lives may be pictured as intersected by a vertical axis on which a set of relations constituted by wider global forces, such as neoliberal discourses, is positioned. Neoliberal discourses penetrate globally, meaning that whole transitions from youth to adulthood over many parts of the world have become more complex, contested and fragmented than in previous eras (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Jeffrey and McDowell, 2004). Greater uniformity is revealed across geographical places in young people's aspirations and post-school choices and transitions. The neo-liberal project enshrines the doctrine of personal responsibility and freedom, casting individuals as responsible for their life plans and destinations and, consequently, guilty of their failures. This very powerful discourse which, according to Ball (2012: 145), is 'insinuating itself into almost every aspect of contemporary social life', has for some time now framed the educational transitions of young people (Ball et al, 2000a).

But young people are not simply positioned by both globally and locally penetrative neoliberal discourse, their lives can also be seen to be intersected by a set of relationships which are located on a horizontal axis; their home, locality and nationality are the conditions which constitute the framework of opportunity in which choices and aspirations are made. The vertical axis (on which neoliberal discourses are located) is intersected by factors which are set in local relations. These local relations define the structure of actually available opportunities, as well as how access to these opportunities is constrained by social and cultural contexts. They also inform young people's affective relationships with home and nation which in turn

informs aspirations and educational decisions, leading to geographical differences in the way young people construct their aspirations and educational choices.

If we conceive of young people as being positioned at the intersection between a set of relationships which frame their opportunity structures, it becomes impossible to carve up the determinants of educational participation into simplistic categories of agency and structure. Instead, we need to acknowledge how young people, at the intersection of multiple influences, make rational and strategic choices based on costs and benefits oriented by goals and preferences, within parameters defined by external forces. These external forces are cultural and social. They operate through the way that they structure people's expectations, dispositions and orientations and inform their aspirations and behaviours towards institutions like HE. Educational and material resources also constitute these opportunity structures which change over time and vary across place meaning that processes of social reproduction are temporally and spatially specific. The study demonstrates the need to go beyond exclusively cultural reproduction or rational choice explanations for educational decisions and aspirations and to appropriate mixtures of both. Young people cannot simply be construed as cultural dupes who are structured by external forces and simply pushed towards particular destinations. Nor do they simply make choices free of socially and spatially structured influences. Young people must interpret their opportunities, make sense of them and make decisions based on the perceived costs and rewards of pursuing a particular pathway. Educational decisions and anticipated transitions can therefore be understood as informed by what young people *can* do, what they *want* to do, and the conditions which shape their preferences (Gambetta, 1987). These conditions are socially, spatially and historically constituted.

Framing the debate about policy

This study was situated in two distinct locations in South Wales, revealing ways in which characteristics specific to their social landscapes and local opportunity structures informed young people's aspirations and decisions regarding transitions from school to post-16 education, university and their 'imagined futures.' However, the policy implications may be regarded as far more wide-reaching than the specific regional contexts in which the study was located. Illustrating the ways in which

characteristics specific to particular localities and time frames inform differences in *processes* by which young people reach decisions about their post-school lives should enable us to understand young people's educational decisions and transitions more generally. These places, located in relatively close geographical proximity to one and other, afforded important and interesting evidence of such differences. This implies that places set in even more distinct social and economic landscapes, and further afield geographically, may be associated with even greater differences which may have even greater implications for the educational outcomes and future life chances of young people.

Raising aspirations for participation in post-16 and higher education.

The trajectories followed from school on to post-16 education, the pathways and courses taken through it and propensities to progress on to HE, are primarily informed by individuals' earlier educational experiences and prior attainment. These are strongly associated with the educational, social and cultural resources on which young people can draw which are, in the main, gleaned from social background. Inequalities in educational participation reflect manifestations both of profound multiple advantage, such as wealth and privilege, and disadvantage, such as poverty or social exclusion (Gorard, 2005) to which policy makers need to direct attention and resources.

While increased rates of participation in post-16 education have appeared to have appeased the widening participation agendas of UK governments over recent decades, they conceal increasing differentiation and stratification among post-16 learners. As illustrated in Chapter six, once inside school 6th forms the pathways which young people take and the qualifications they gain are hugely differentiated and have unequal currency in terms of access to hierarchically differentiated HEIs (Connor et al, 2006; Hoelscher et al, 2008) and within the labour market (Greenwood et al, 2007). Academically 'successful' young people who follow prestigious routes through post-16 education (namely, A-levels) acquire the sorts of qualifications needed to enter HE, which continues to be strongly associated with forms of employment which are most financially rewarded. For those who stay-on in post-16

education with few academic qualifications, however, entry to HE is less likely and, when achieved, is more likely to be to lower status universities and courses.

We might speculate that differentiation and stratification within post-16 education and training will be exacerbated by contemporary economic landscapes in the UK and in Wales in particular. Scarce employment opportunities for young people, combined with intensified competition for high status and well-rewarded jobs, and congestion in graduate labour markets, will exaggerate credential inflation and cement demand for HE. Indeed, as highlighted by this study, young people commonly alluded to the necessity of gaining higher levels of qualifications in order to secure entry into what they perceived as a highly congested and competitive labour market. They were, however, differentiated in terms of the extent to which a higher education was accessible, and therefore the extent to which they could achieve a competitive advantage. Evidently, within the context of increasing rates of participation in post-16 education, old forms of social and educational inequalities are being reproduced. In this context, policy makers need to work to raise the esteem of alternative routes to HE, as well as pathways which are not directed towards it but which also provide viable means of achieving economic security. This would require facing the daunting task of challenging normative middle-class ideas about ‘aspiration’ and require working to establish parity of esteem between vocational and academic pathways. This would seem to entail including, within the concept of ‘high aspirations,’ routes, pathways and destinations that are alternative to HE (St Clair and Benjamin, 2011).

Higher education choice in a ‘cold’ economic climate

If patterns of exclusion or inclusion in higher education are established long before young people make choices about whether to participate (or not) in HE, as argued above, it questions the extent to which financial constraints, as widening participation agendas assume, determine participation in HE. It is too early to tell what the effect of the new higher education tuition fee regime introduced in 2012/13

in the UK will be on rates of participation²⁴. Based on this study, there is little evidence to suggest that proposed tuition fee increases will deter applicants whose attainment levels would allow them to enter HE.

Financial constraints do, however, have an important role to play in young people's choices about *where* to undertake HE. This was clearly illustrated in the university choices of the young people in this study, as shown in Chapter seven, where decisions about studying at local and Welsh Universities were partly informed by geographical constraints. Yet, if they do not act as a direct *barrier* to participation, as this study implies, this might, paradoxically, lead to inequalities in the rewards associated with different degree courses and institutions becoming more polarised (Brown, 2003; Chevalier and Conlon, 2003; Smetherham, 2005; Hussain et al, 2008). Prevailing knowledge economy rhetoric incentivises participation in HE with the promise of economic security (Brown, 2003). Where young people perceive HE as the means to economic success, or at least a means of avoiding entering 'risky' employment conditions upon leaving school, participation rates are likely to increase, or at least be relatively unaffected by tuition fee hikes, such as the one imposed in 2012/13 in the UK. Moreover, as this study has shown, applicants are largely indifferent to incurring financial debt while at university because they believe that it will be paid off by the rewards incurred from gaining a higher education. But entry to HE does not guarantee 'graduate employment' which means that the prevailing discourse of the knowledge economy has serious implications for social justice. As the financial cost of embarking on particular degree courses at particular institutions rise, for some students graduating from lower ranking universities and with particular degrees, the relative rewards decline²⁵.

Thus, despite greater numbers of young people staying on in post-16 education and HE, inequalities are reproduced within the contemporary economic context. Contemporary events, along with popular narratives surrounding them, have simply

²⁴ A recent study published in the Sunday Times newspaper (Jan 13th 2013) found that the initial decline in applicants to UK HEIs has stalled, and in some cases rates of application have increased.

²⁵ At the time of writing this would not be an issue faced by Welsh domiciled students because the Welsh Government had agreed to subsidise the cost of a student's HE course if it amounts to anything above the basic level of £4,000 a year wherever they study in the UK.

placed greater onus on the individual to make the 'right' choice to invest in post-16 and higher education. But as this study has shown, young people make unequal choices regarding HE and some social and ethnic groups continue to be excluded from it and from high status institutions within it by external forces that define their objective and subjective opportunity structures.

Place and university choice.

This study has illustrated ways in which a sense of attachment and belonging to immediate 'home' locality and nation can have important bearing upon university choice, creating barriers around young people's homes in relation to university. If young people are choosing local institutions in order to maintain their interpersonal relationships at home, or to maintain a sense of continuity with a familiar and known culture, this may narrow the scope of universities and courses that young people are prepared to apply to. For the young people involved in this study, choosing to study locally was not detrimental in its effects. They were located geographically close to a range of traditional and post-92 universities, which meant that studying 'close to home' and in Wales gave possible access to close by elite and more vocationally oriented institutions. For young people in other parts of England, Scotland and Wales where institutional variety and scope is more limited, choosing to study 'close to home' might unduly limit the institutional range from which they can choose. In this way, the geographic distribution of HEIs across the UK is projected into social and educational inequalities.

This is particularly concerning given that 'positional conflict' (Brown, 2003) has intensified the importance attached to where a degree is acquired in an individual's ability to secure employment (Brown and Lauder, 2006). The question is, therefore, should policy makers direct resources towards encouraging schools and teachers to 'widen the horizons' of young people so that universities in distant locations fall within the scope of their subjective opportunity structures (Gorard and Rees, 2002)? The success of policy makers' endeavours to sever young people's emotional ties with community and 'home' in order to 'broaden their horizons' so that they aspire for universities in 'faraway places' might, however, exacerbate depopulation and

local disadvantage if even more young people were to leave their localities, never to return after graduation (Corbett, 2007).

A more favoured alternative solution at present, though it may not constitute an answer to the same question, would appear to be to seek increased provision of further and higher education opportunities in local contexts so that studying ‘close to home’ becomes a feasible option for even more young people. Drakeford’s (2011) contention that *supply* of educational provision can actually stimulate latent *demand*,²⁶ would suggest that increasing provision of learning opportunities in places like the South Wales Valleys will increase demand, meeting widening participation agendas targeted at disadvantaged areas. Yet the extent to which educational provision in local contexts targets the most disadvantaged within such communities has been questioned (Parkinson, 1998). Moreover, and somewhat paradoxically, enhanced educational provision in particular regions may lead to the reproduction of disadvantage through increasing the outmigration of young people holding high levels of qualifications (Gorard and Rees, 2002; Corbett, 2007). This questions the extent to which education institutions can play a positive role in the regeneration of disadvantaged areas. As Corbett (2007: 20) argues:

‘Schools tend to float above the communities in which they operate, apparently ushering certain successful individuals out of increasingly destitute rural areas and launching them into space’.

If valid, such assertions question the value of area based regeneration programmes, such as the Universities Heads of the Valleys Institute (UHOVI) to contribute to area regeneration. This initiative was part of the Welsh Government’s aim to tackle the ‘challenge’ of low participation in education or training in the South Wales Valleys and contribute to their social and economic regeneration through providing local, accessible, learning opportunities. Moreover, educational programmes such as UHOVI which aims to provide education and training that will meet the needs of the local economy may, in reality, cement people in places where there are few prospects

²⁶ Drakeford’s (2011) argument is based on his analysis of Welsh Medium education in South Wales in which he argued that supply of Welsh Medium schools actually stimulated latent demand, rather than supply following demand, which is the taken for granted relationship between educational provision and consumption.

of employment. On the contrary, however, opportunities for education and training such as UHOVI which are located in areas where opportunities are limited, and provide education and training designed for local industries would, it seems, extend opportunities to those who would otherwise be denied access. The 'visible' presence of such opportunities provides scope for engaging in education and training whilst maintaining ties with home for those who are deeply embedded in their locality, through their emotional attachments.

Opportunities in local contexts

The evidence of this study would call on policy makers to direct resources towards meeting the needs of local areas by making enhancement of provision of employment opportunities in particular localities their key concern. We have seen that where opportunities for employment are scarce, out-migration is likely to be perceived as a necessity in order to achieve career aspirations. But young people may be bound to their home localities not only by limited material resources but affective relationships that operate as a significant tie to their localities. As it stands, young people who are not successful at school and who stay within localities that have few employment opportunities are positioned as discursive 'losers' who have not made the right choices, which is to acquire educational qualifications and migrate out of rural or disadvantaged areas (Corbett, 2007). But since out-migration contributes to the maintenance of disadvantage its increase merely contributes to further social and spatial polarisation between places. The concern for policy makers should be, therefore, to provide opportunities for young people who stay as well as for those who leave. Challenging the equation of staying 'local' with 'failure' and promoting ways in which staying local is not a marginal position, should be an important objective for them.

Final remarks.

My close involvement in the lives of these young people and their teachers who kindly gave up so much of their time to speak with me throughout the year in which I conducted the fieldwork, intensified my initial concern over the ways in which educational and social inequalities become produced and reproduced. I have been

alerted to just how important conditions in local contexts (local opportunity structures and local social landscapes) are for the processes by which young people make their decisions about their post-school lives. I hope that this study, in its qualitative detail, will strengthen our academic understanding of how educational inequalities are constituted and reproduced, while calling on politicians to engage critically with and acknowledge the socially and spatially structured nature of ‘equality of opportunity’. I hope that resources are directed to overcoming these inequalities through providing new learning and employment opportunities for young people in places where they are limited, and particularly for those who tend to be excluded from engaging in such opportunities. Only by fully understanding the importance of the *local* in structuring opportunity might we begin to work effectively to tackle inequalities in access to education opportunities and outcomes.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Parental occupation and education level.

Parental occupation and education level.

Table 1. *This table shows the parental occupation and education level of the students from Llanon Community School in the Rhondda Valley.*

Student	Father's occupation	Mother's occupation	Parental experience of higher education
Adam	Engineer	Teaching assistant	None
Chloe	Absent	Long-term unemployed	None
Faye	Plasterer (part self-employed)	Care home manager	None
Lauren	Step-father Builder (self-employed)	Bar maid/supervisor	None
Craig	Builder	Social worker	Father none. Mother returned to further education as adult.
Mike	In advertising (unsure)	Unemployed (long term)	None
Rhys	Electrician	Shop assistant	None
Shaun	Builder (Self-employed)	Shop assistant in a Chemist	None
Lucy	Absent	Dinner lady and cleaner	None
Luke	Supervises small production line in factory	Hospital cleaner and dinner lady	None
Ben	Electrician	Secretary	None
Dylan	Office manager. (Engineer)	History teacher	Mother yes but Father none
Hannah	Electrician	Post-office manager	None
Callum	Senior Engineer for electrical company	Works for council	None

Appendix A: Parental occupation and education level.

Lewis	Teacher	Teacher	Yes. Both parents
Megan	Long term unemployed.	Long term unemployed	None
Robert	Factory worker (Bosch). Examiner.	Shop assistant	None
Bethan	Unemployed	Carer for council	None
Gwilym	Step father- Office worker Father- Self employed Carpenter	Office worker	None
Hywel	Deceased Formerly cleaner	Deceased Formerly nurse	None
Emily	Supervises a production line at Griffin windows	Formerly a nurse but currently at home with children	None
Amy	Taxi driver	District nurse	None
Laura	Security guard.	Long term unemployed	None
Toby	Self employed painter and decorator	Pharmacy technician	None
Ellie	Unemployed due to arthritis. Previously a scaffolder	Unemployed	None
Jack	Office worker	Nurse	Yes-Mother as mature student
James	Engineer	Care assistant in nursing home	None
Rachel	Unknown- does not live with father	Unemployed. Previously a teaching assistant.	None

Appendix A: Parental occupation and education level.

Rhian	IT worker for RCT Homes	Dinner lady	None
Ruth	Supervises a section in a factory	Librarian	None
Vicky	Tool maker	Factory worker	None

Table 2. *This table shows the parental occupation and education level of the students from Clayton High Schools in Newport.*

Student	Father's occupation	Mother's occupation	Parental experience of higher education?
Zairah	Unknown doesn't live with father	Unemployed, at home caring for sister who has disabilities.	None
Sharn	Unknown	Carer in a residential home	None
Karimah	Taxi driver	House wife/unemployed	None
Amir	Owens a restaurant	Unemployed.	None
Sophie	Unknown (parents split. Little contact with father)	Recently unemployed (used to own a martial arts business with partner)	None
Alice	High voltage electrical engineer	Branch manager of building society	None
Parveen	Chef	Unemployed (used to work in a factory)	None
Finn	Gardener/labourer	Teaching assistant	None
Aeron	Building site worker	Dinner lady	None
Jamie	Bus driver	Long-term unemployed	None
Leona	Unemployed	Unemployed	None
Alistair	Furniture	Fish and chip shop	None

Appendix A: Parental occupation and education level.

	deliverer (lorry driver)	assistant	
Natalie	Unemployed (formerly a mechanic)	Unemployed	None
Grace	Builder	Beautician	None
Charlotte	Owens small building company	Shop assistant	None
Mark	Steel worker	Bank assistant	None
Robin	Long term unemployed	Long term unemployed.	None
Alexandra	Director of locally based national coinage making business	Construction company-managerial	Father did HE course part-time as mature student whilst working. Mother none
Pratik	Doctor but currently owning a restaurant and delivery service	Doctor but currently a housewife.	Yes-both
Sheena	Works in laundrette	Nursing home nurse	None
Nathan	Lorry driver	Absent	None
Lisa	Mechanic	Chip shop assistant	None
Paul	Shop assistant in supermarket	Long-term unemployed	None
Pritika	Manager of small corner shop	Housewife/unemployed	None
Steven	Lorry driver	Unemployed (formerly worked in a shop-till work)	None
Jonathan	Call centre work	Human resource manager	None

Student information for students at Llanon Community School in the Rhondda.

Student and year of study	Sex	Ethnicity¹	Born in the Rhondda ?	Prior attainment levels (GCSEs)	Qualifications studying	Expectation post 6th form?²	Destinations (where data available)
Adam Year 13	M	White	Yes	8As, 1B, 1C	Maths, Welsh and IT (A-levels).	Swansea University. (Politics and economics)	University
Chloe Year 12	F	White	Yes	All Ds except 1 C in IT	Re-sitting GCSE maths and science plus, BTEC health and social	FE college (to study hairdressing or beauty or teaching)	No data
Faye Year 13	F	White	Yes	4A*s, 4Bs and 2 Cs	History, English Lit and RS. (A-levels)	Cardiff or Bristol University (English Lit or Journalism).	University
Lauren Year 12	F	White	Yes	4 As, 4 Bs and a C.	Maths, Geography and Art (A-levels)	University (uncertain about course or institution)	University
Craig	M	White	Yes	1A*, 2 As, 5 Bs,	Geography,	Cardiff or Bristol University	Aberystwyth

¹ Ethnicity as self-defined by students.

² Students varied greatly in the confidence with which they expressed expectations for life after 6th form. Quite often students held only vague and tentative ideas about their expected destination after 6th form (especially with respect to specific course and institution).

Appendix B: Student information

Year 12				and 1C	History and English Lit- (AS- levels)	(history, geography or English lit)	University. (Medieval and early modern history.)
Mike Year 12	M	White	Yes	3 As, 4Bs, 5 Cs	Geography, Biology, IT (A-level)	Cardiff University, University of Glamorgan ³ or Swansea University (IT degree)	Cardiff Met. (Business Information Systems).
Rhys Year 12	M	White	Yes	6A*s and 3 As	Biology, Chemistry, Geography and English Literature (AS-levels)	Cardiff University and Bristol University (medicine)	Cardiff University. (Biology)
Shaun Year 13	M	White	Yes	5 Bs, 1 A and 2 Cs and 1 D.	Biology, history and geography (A-Levels)	Swansea University, Aberystwyth University or University of Glamorgan) Science/biology/marine biology	University
Lucy Year 12	F	White	Yes	Mostly Bs and Cs and a couple of As (As in English and Biology)	English, Biology, Art (AS-levels)	FE College to study animal care	Stayed in school for a year 14 and intends to go to university.
Luke Year 13	M	White	No	Mostly Cs and Bs. Merit in DIDA ⁴	Geography and RS (A-levels)	UWIC ⁵ and Bristol University (environmental health)	University
Ben Year 13	M	White	Yes	8A*s and 1 A	Biology, Geography, Maths (A-	Cardiff University (other choices also include Bath, Bristol and Loughborough)	Took a gap year to play semi-professional rugby before going to

³ In April 2013, the University of Glamorgan merged with the University of Wales, Newport to become the University of South Wales.

⁴ DIDA (diploma in digital appliances) is not a GCSE but it can be studied at level 1 which is equivalent to GCSE grades C-G, or level 2 which is equivalent to GCSE grades A*-C.

⁵ In 2011, the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff changed its name to become Cardiff Metropolitan.

Appendix B: Student information

					levels)	Banking and Finance degree. Also hopes to play semi-professional rugby	university
Dylan Year 13	M	White	Yes	3A*s, 4As 2Bs and 1C	Biology, Geography, History (A-levels).	Cardiff University history degree	Cardiff University
Hannah Year 12	M	White	Yes	2 A*s, 6 As and a B	English, Biology and History (AS-levels)	Cardiff or Swansea University (Biomedical sciences)	Swansea university. (Criminology and criminal justice.)
Callum Year 13	M	White	Yes	Mostly Bs, English and Maths C and Biology A*.	Geography, Biology, and RS (A-levels)	(Cardiff University, University of Glamorgan, and Bristol University (geography and GIS)	University
Lewis Year 13	M	White	Yes	8A*s, 1 A and 1 C.	French, History and Geography (A-levels)	UCL and Cardiff University. Law	University
Megan Year 12	F	White	Yes	1 B, 5Cs and 2 Ds	Health and Social, Biology (AS-levels)	College. Child Care.	FE college. (Completing level 3 teaching assistant qualification).
Robert Year 13.	M	White	Yes	All Bs and Cs.	Welsh and History (A-levels)	UWIC, University of Glamorgan and Aberystwyth University (Politics.)	FE college
Bethan Year 12.	F	White	Yes	4 As and 3 Bs	Art, RS and English Language (A-level)	University of Southampton, Bath Spa. (Travel journalism or writing, fashion and culture)	University of Kent. (Comparative literature and classical and archaeological studies).
Gwilym Year 12	M	White	Yes	6 Cs and 2 Ds	RS, BTEC, Music and Performing arts GCSE	College or University to do media studies or acting and performing arts (unsure about specific institution).	Glamorgan University. (Media production).
Hywel	M	White	Yes	6 Bs, 2 Cs and 1	History and	Cardiff University, Swansea	University

Appendix B: Student information

Year 13				D	Biology (A-levels)	University, University of Glamorgan or Trinity St David, Carmarthen (nursing or teaching).	
Emily Year 12	F	White	Yes	All Cs and above	Biology, Economics, IT and Maths (AS-levels)	Newcastle university. (Accountancy).	Plymouth University. (Primary teaching (mathematics))
Amy Year 12.	F	White	Yes	1 A and 1 C the rest Ds and below	Art (AS-level) re-sitting English and Maths GCSEs	Beauty therapy FE college	FE college
Laura Year 12	F	White	Yes	Mostly Ds and 1 C and Failed maths and science	Health and Social care BTEC	College. Nursing auxiliary.	FE college
Toby Year 12	M	White	Yes	5 Cs, 2Ds and 1 B	Geography and PE (A-levels)	Gap year/vague ideas about university.	FE college
Ellie Year 12	F	White	Yes	3 Cs, 1 D, 3 Es,	Health and Social Care BTEC	College Nursing/health care support work	No data
Jack Year 13	M	White	Yes	9 GCSEs from B to D.	RS and Art A-level	University of Glamorgan (Art foundation course).	University
James Year 13	M	White	Yes	1 A, 8Bs and C.	BTEC sport and IT A-level	Apprenticeship in IT or join RAF	FE college
Rachel Year 13	F	White	Yes	2 As, 6 Bs and 2 Cs.	English and Art A-level	University of Glamorgan and Swansea University (English Lit)	University
Rhian Year 13	F	White	Yes	1 A*, 4 As, 1 B, 3 Cs and 1 D	English and Art A-level	University of Glamorgan or UWIC or college. (English)	University
Ruth Year 12	F	White	Yes	1 A*, 2 As, 4 Bs and 2 Cs	Biology and History (AS-levels)	Swansea University, Cardiff University or Aberystwyth University (Sports Science, physiotherapy or PE teaching)	Glamorgan University. (Nursing).
Vicky	F	White	Yes	Mostly As and Bs	History, IT and	University. Trinity, UWIC,	University

Appendix B: Student information

Year 13				(10 GCSES)	RS (A-levels).	University of Glamorgan and University of Wales, Newport ⁶ (teacher training)	
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Student information for students at Clayton High School in Newport.

Student and year of study	Sex	Ethnicity	Born in Newport ?	Prior attainment levels (GCSEs)	Qualifications studying	Expectation post 6th form?	Destinations (where data available)
Zairah Year 13	F	Asian (Pakistani and Indian heritage)	Yes	All below D grade	Business and media and Paralegal studies (all BTECs) Plus re-sitting GCSE Maths and English	University of Wales, Newport (Teacher training)	No data
Sharn Year 12	F	White	Yes	4 Cs, F. She doesn't say grades for other subjects.	Level 3 Health and Social care and level 2 business studies (both BTECs)	FE college to do childcare	College
Karimah Year 13	F	Asian. Bangladeshi	Yes	Mostly Cs and D, and 1 G and 1 merit (for a BTEC)	Business studies, E-media and legal studies (all BTECS)	FE college to do legal studies. Hopes to become a solicitor	No data
Amir Year 12.	M	Bangladeshi	Yes	All Cs and 1 B	Public services, travel and tourism and business studies (all BTECs)	Take a gap year. Unsure what to do afterwards	Employment

⁶The University of Wales, Newport merged with the University of Glamorgan in April 2013 to form the University of South Wales.

Appendix B: Student information

Sophie Year 12	F	White	Yes	All Cs and Above	Business, RS, History and Psychology (AS levels)	University (unsure of course or institution)	Employment
Alice Year 13	F	White	Yes	All Cs and above	Business, PE and English A-levels	UWIC, University of Glamorgan (Sports Science and PE, Sports Science or marketing)	University
Parveen Year 13	F	Asian-Begali	Yes	All As, Bs and Cs	Finance, Drama and Art (A-levels)	Cardiff University or Newport (Art)	No data
Finn Year 13	F	White	Yes	4As, 2Bc, 3Cs, 2Ds and 1E.	Biology, Chemistry, Maths and Psychology (A-levels)	Bristol University or Cardiff University (cellular medicine or molecular biology)	No data
Aeron Year 12	M	White	Yes	3 Cs, 2 Ds and 2 Es	ICT and Engineering BTECs	Tentative ideas about engineering or mechanics at college	Employment
Jamie Year 12	M	White	Yes	7 Cs, 2 Ds and an E.	Public services and Engineering (BTECs)	FE college. Fire Service	Employment
Leona Year 12	F	White	No	1 B and mostly Cs, Ds and Es.	Art and Design, Public services and Media (all BTECs)	Tentative ideas about going to university. To do Architecture or fashion and design.	Employment
Alistair Year 13	M	White	Yes	Mostly As, Bs and Cs.	PE, Biology and Chemistry (A-levels)	Cardiff University, UWIC, Swansea or Bristol University. (Health or sports courses).	No data
Natalie Year 13	F	White	Yes	Almost all Cs, expect E in Maths	Business (A-level), Finance and Public services	Work in a bank and also study in FE college. Eventually start own business	Employment

Appendix B: Student information

					(BTECS)		
Grace Year 12	F	White	Yes	All Cs and above	Psychology, History and Business (A-levels)	Law at University no thoughts about institution.	University
Charlotte Year 12	F	White	Yes	All C and above	Psychology, RS and Media studies (AS levels)	A university in London or Liverpool John Moores University (Psychology and criminology at university)	No data
Mark Year 13	M	White	Yes	7 Bs, 4Cs and 3Ds	English Language and literature and Media studies (A-levels)	Cardiff University, UWIC, University of Glamorgan or Swansea University (English language or Literature).	University
Robin Year 12	M	White	Yes	Cs and below	IT, engineering and finance (BTECS)	Very tentative ideas about doing child care or animal care	College
Alexandra Year 13	F	White	Yes	4 Cs, 3 Bs and 2 Ds	Public services(BTEC) and business studies A-level	University of Glamorgan (Police Science)	University
Pratik Year 13	F	Bangladeshi-British.	No	3A*s, 2 As, 1 C and the rest Bs	Chemistry and Biology A-levels	Cardiff University, Bristol University, University of Portsmouth, Aston University and UWIC (Biomedical science)	University
Sheena Year 12	F	Indian	No	3 As, 3 Bs, 3 Cs	Biology, Chem, Physics (AS-levels)	Cardiff University (Pharmacy, medicine or nursing)	No data
Nathan Year 12	M	White	Yes	5 Cs and the rest D.	Public services (BTEC) and Art (A-level)	FE college to train as a fire fighter	College

Appendix B: Student information

Lisa Year 12	F	Describes herself as 'mixed-race'	Yes	7 Cs, the rest D and below	Public services and Media studies (BETCs)	Unsure. Photography course at college or IT related employment	Employment
Paul Year 13	M	White	Yes	Mostly Es, Fs and G and one D.	Public services and Legal studies (BTECs)	Tentative ideas about going into the police force.	Employment
Pritika Year 13	F	Muslim, Pakistani	No	5 Cs, 1 B and 1 D	Business, Finance and Art and Design (A-levels)	UWIC or University of Glamorgan (Fashion and business).	No data
Steven Year 12	M	White	Yes	All Bs and Cs apart from F in Welsh	Maths, Physics (A-levels) and Public services (BTEC)	Join the RAF (as an engineering officer) Or engineering at University	University
Jonathan Year 12	M	White	No data	5 A*s, 2 As, 5 Bs and 2 Cs	Psychology, Biology, PE (A-levels)	Cardiff University or University of Birmingham (Medicine or Physiotherapy).	University

Appendix C: Interview schedule 1 (student interviews)

Note: This schedule was used for interviews with students in the first wave and with students interviewed for the first time in second wave.

About you?

Name

What year are you in?

How old are you?

What would you describe your ethnicity as?

Do you speak another language apart from English?

Do you speak Welsh?

Do you receive EMA?

About staying on

What subjects did you take at GCSE and what grades did you get?
(What grades did you get)?

What subjects have you taken (at A-level) (check whether these are A-levels, BTECs)

Do you do the Welsh Bac as well?

Is this your closest school to you?
(Did you go to this school from year 7?)

Why did you decide to stay on into 6th form?

What do your parents think about you staying on?

Did you think about going to a 6th form anywhere else?
-(did you think of going to one in ...?)

What were the main reasons for choosing the subjects that you are doing?

How many of your friends stayed on into 6th form?

Appendix C: Interview schedule 1 (student interviews)

Do you take any subjects that are at another 6th form?

Do you think it's a good idea that schools link up so that pupils can go to other schools to do subjects?

-Do you think the consortium has affected your post-16 experience?

-Did you decide to take/ not take particular subjects because they are at certain places or because you thought that it would mean travelling a lot?

-Did you think about where the subjects were when you were deciding on what subjects to do?

Imagine that you had not stayed on in education, what do you think you would be doing now?

Do you think it's better to stay on in education than to leave school straight away to go to work?

Do you have siblings?

-Did they stay on?

-What do they do?

Did your parents stay on?

What do they do for a living?

Did they go to university/has anyone in your family been to university?

Leaving 6th form

What do you want to do when you leave 6th form?

If you hope to go to Uni, have you had thoughts about where you want to apply?/have you applied?

Could you list the universities that you've applied to?
(Why have you applied to those unis?)

Why do you want to go to those universities?

If they list all Welsh universities; You have listed all Welsh universities why do you want to go to a Welsh university?

Appendix C: Interview schedule 1 (student interviews)

Do you want to go to universities only in Wales?

Why do you think that going to university is important?

Geographical mobility

(Here I want to explore what constitutes a 'suitable university')

Is it important to you that you go to a university that is close to home?

Would you like to be able to commute to university or to live there?

Is it important to you to live away whilst at university?

Imagine that a university in England offered you a place and one in Wales did too, they are both equally good? Which one would you choose? (eg Cardiff and Bristol)

Imagine that two Welsh universities offered you a place, one was in the North and one was in the South, which one would you choose?

What do you hope to get from going to university?

What do your friends/ family/ parents think about you wanting to go away to university?

Cuts

'If a student who was born and lives in Wales is going to University in anywhere in the UK in 2012 they will only pay £3290 a year in fees (plus any inflationary uplift in fee levels) – the same as this year' –This is taken from WAG website, explain this to them.

Have the announcements made by the WAG that Welsh students will not have to pay the extra fees set by some universities had any impact on your decisions about the institutions you apply to?

Do you think about getting into debt whilst at university?

Course

Do you know what course you'd like to study?

Why do you want to study that?

Did you think about doing another course?

Appendix C: Interview schedule 1 (student interviews)

If university is not on the agenda-

Do you have any ideas about the training you need/if you would like to go to college?

Have you looked into colleges?

'Imagined futures'

Do you have any ideas about the sort of career you would like to go into?

What would be your dream career?

What do you think you are actually likely to be doing in the future, say in 10 or 15 years time?

If everything went well for you, what would you be doing in say 15 years time?

If you could live anywhere, where would your dream place to live be?
Why there?

Where do you think you'll be living in 10/15 years time?
(Why X place, why not here?)

How do you think the current economic climate, ie the increased job loss, the need for most qualifications might impact on your employment prospects in the future?
-how do you think it might impact on your locality?

About you and your local area

I'm interested in finding out a bit about you and your home.....

Where do you live?

How long have you lived in?

Do your family come from.....?

How long have your parents come from the local area/grandparents?

Where do your family live now?

Where do your grandparents/relatives live?

Where do most of your friends live?

Appendix C: Interview schedule 1 (student interviews)

What sort of things do you do after school (in the evenings)/in your spare time around here?

Where do you go in the evenings if you go out?

Where do you go on the weekends if you're going out?

Do you have a part time job?

How easy or difficult did you find getting your part time job?

How did you get your part time job (was it through a friend or family)?

Where is it?

Do you use public transport?-how often?

Is it easy to get to other places from here?

Do you think there is a good level of public transport around here?

How often do you go to Cardiff?

Have you ever been to England?

-Where have you been?

Do you every go on holiday with your friends/family?

- where have you been?
- Where have you been most recently?

About your area?

What is it like to live here?

(I don't know anything about the area that you live in could you tell me about it?)

What has it been like growing up here?

If you could have been brought up somewhere else, would you have choose somewhere else?

Imagine that a new family has just moved in next door. They don't know anything about the local area. How would you describe the local area to them?

Appendix C: Interview schedule 1 (student interviews)

What are the nicest things about.....(your area)?

What is not very nice about living here?)

How does your local area make you feel?

If someone told you that you had to live here for the rest of your life how would you feel about that?

Where do you see yourself living in 10 years time?

Where do you think you would move to if you had to look for work?

-How do you think that your locality differs from other places in Newport/Rhondda?

-How does the valleys differ from Cardiff?

In the future, do you see yourself returning to this area?

About local employment

Do you think there are enough jobs around here?

What type of job do you think is most common around here?

Do you think it is easier or more difficult for someone to get a job around here say compared to Cardiff?

If you hadn't stayed on, where do you think you might have looked for jobs (where do they see their employment opportunities)?

Recession

Thinking about the recession which caused an increase in people losing their jobs and being unemployed....

Do you think that the recession has effected your decision to stay on in education?

Do you think that younger people or older people were most hard hit by the recession?

Appendix C: Interview schedule 1 (student interviews)

If you had gone straight into employment (rather than staying on in 6th form), what sort of job do you think you would have got?

Thinking about the past

Do you think that it's more difficult or easier for people leaving school nowadays to find a job than say 40 years ago?

What sort of jobs do you think you would have gone into if they left school straight away say 40 years ago?

Much more people stay on in education beyond age 16 now than they did in the past, why do you think that is?

Additional questions

Parental occupation

Parental level of education

What did your grandparents do for a living? (eg is there a history of mining in family?)

Appendix D: Interview schedule 2 (student interviews)

Note: This interview schedule was used for interviews conducted with students who were re-interviewed in the second 'wave' of interviews.

Interview

Thank them for coming back to be re-interviewed. Explain that I would like to re-cap some things we talked about in the first interview.

Recap questions

1. what subjects are you studying

- are these A-levels or BTECS. Is the public services a diploma (is this the equivalent of A-levels)

Are you doing the Welsh Bac?

Imagine if you **didn't** stay on in 6th form, what do you think you would be doing now?

For those who want to go to university?

Which universities have you applied to?

Last time I spoke to you, you listed. X...as your choices of universities, why have these changed?

Discuss how these universities are different from the universities they listed last time (if they are different).

- Why have you chosenas your first choice?

- Why did you decided not to apply to?

-Why did you apply to those?

-The universities you have listed are all in Wales, why have you listed only/mainly Welsh universities? (Find out whether it's for financial reasons or because of a continuity of place)

- What is pulling you towards Welsh universities? WHY WELSH UNI?

-Did the announcements by the WAG that welsh students wouldn't have to pay the extra fees have any impact on your decision? (Discuss the announcements- that Welsh students won't have to pay the extra fees)

-Do you think about debt from student loans whilst at uni?

Appendix D: Interview schedule 2 (student interviews)

-What do you want to do at uni?

Geographical mobility/immobility whilst at university

-Do you want to commute to university or live there?

-Is it important to you that you go to one that is close to home?
(Why is it important to you to go to a university which is close to home?)

-Is it important that you go to 'live away' when you're at uni? Why is it important to live away?

Is it important to you that you go to a university which is quite far away?

What do your friends/ family/parents think about you wanting to live away whilst at university?

If you were given an offer from say X (e.g. Cardiff) and also from Aber (both in Wales but one close and one far) which one would you choose?

Imagine that a university in England offered you a place and one in Wales did too, they are both equally good? Which one would you choose?
(eg If you were given an offer from Cardiff or Bristol (two elite universities) which one would you take?)

What do you hope to gain from going to university?

Why do you think that going to university is so important?

- Do you know what course you will be studying? Why do you want to study that?

-More people these days go on to university than they did in the past, why do you think that is?

Has anyone else in your family been to university?

Parents occupations?

For those who do not want to go to university after 6th form?

What do you want to do when you've left 6th form?

Appendix D: Interview schedule 2 (student interviews)

-Discuss how this differs from what they spoke about last time?

-why the change of plan?

-Do you know anything about training for this?

-Do you know where you might be living and working once you've finished training?

'Imagined futures' (After university/college/training)

What would be your dream job?

If everything worked out well for you, what do you imagine yourself doing in the future, say in 10 or 15 years time?

If you could live anywhere, where would be your dream place to live?

Where do you think you'll actually be living in say 15 years time?

Do you want to return to where you live now or not? Why that place, why not around here?

-Do you think that it would be possible to come back here to pursue the career you want to pursue?

Where do you think the best opportunities for employment in the career/job you want are?

Would you like to be living inside or outside or inside Wales in the future?

Is it important to you to be living close to family in the future?

How do you think the current economic climate, ie the increased job loss, the need for most qualifications might impact on your employment prospects in the future?

-how do you think it might impact on your locality?

About your local area

-What has it been like living and growing up here?

- If you could have had the choice to have been bought up where you live or elsewhere which would you choose? To have been bought up here or elsewhere, where would you choose?

-Some people have suggested that living in the valleys 'teaches you certain values' what do you think these values are?

Appendix D: Interview schedule 2 (student interviews)

-how do you think that your locality differs from other places in Newport/Valleys?

How long have your parents and family resided locally?

-Do you know what sorts of employment your grandparents had?

Do you have a part time job (did you get it through a friend or family member?)

Appendix E: Participant consent form

Participant consent form

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

I have read and understood the information sheet and any questions I've had have been answered satisfactorily.

I understand that the data I provide will be held confidentially.

I agree to take part in this research.

Date:.....

Signed:.....

Young people in transition: educational decisions and transitions in a 'cold' economic climate.

Information sheet for participants

Who am I?

My name is Ceryn Evans and I am a student at Cardiff University studying for a PhD. I am interested in young people who are participating in post-16 education and the decisions and choices which brought them to 'staying on' in college or school. I hope to understand how people make choices about their education or training and how they think about their future employment, training or education. I will be asking young people questions like what they expect to be doing next year, or in say, 10 years from now and how they see their future employment or educational prospects. There is no right or wrong answer to the questions I ask.

What does the research involve?

The research will involve interviews about your thoughts, expectations and anticipated transitions on to further or higher education or employment. There will be some set questions but you will be able to talk freely and bring up issues that you feel are important.

Consent?

Firstly, you will be asked if you would like to take part in this research. If you agree, you will also be asked to give consent. If you wish to contact me my email address is evansc15@cardiff.ac.uk I am happy to answer any questions you have about this research.

Participation in my research is completely voluntary and you are free to stop the interview whenever you wish if you feel you don't want to continue.

What will happen to the information I collect?

After each interview, I will type up the interview and store the information in a place where only I have access. Your name and any names that you mention will be changed.

The interviews will form part of my PhD and my research may be read by people who are interested in the decision making of young people.

Appendix G: Interview schedule for heads of 6th form

Interview schedule with heads of 6th form.

Year 11 pupils

When pupils are in year 11, do they get careers advice, advice about staying on, their options and stuff?

Who gives them advice, is it teachers, careers advisors?

Would you say that year 11 students are greatly encouraged to stay-on into 6th form?

Would you say that there has been an increase in the options available to 6th formers?
(How do the options compare to the options available in the past?)

-why has there been an increase?

-Has this had any effect on the demographic character of the 6th form?

6th formers

Is there a requirement of at least 5 A*s to C at GCSE to do A-levels?

Is there a benchmark requirement to do vocational subjects?

Are there options for apprenticeships (or alternative pathways) for students?

Are these options made explicit to students?

Do many students take up subjects that are in another school? (Part of the consortium)

Are all students supposed to do the Welsh Bac?

Do you encourage students to take the Welsh Bac?

Do you think that the Welsh Bac is a good thing?

Do you advice on which universities accept the Welsh Bac?

Do they get careers advice in year 12 and 13?

Who gives them this advice? (is it 6th form tutors, careers advisors, individual teachers)

Do you find that you have many students dropping out before they get to year 13?

UCAS and university choice

Appendix G: Interview schedule for heads of 6th form

I'm interested in the process of doing UCAS- how does this happen?

Do they get advice on university choice?

Who gives them advice (form tutors, careers advisors etc)

Do they do UCAS forms in their form groups?

How much time is dedicated to doing UCAS forms?

How much help is given?

Are students advised about particular universities? (are certain students encouraged to apply to certain universities?)

Are some universities promoted more than others?

Do students go on university access days?

Do you talk to students about tuition fees?

Do you have representatives from universities coming into the school to talk to students?

-Who helps them fill in UCAS forms?

Do you think that for some students who say they want to go to uni it is unlikely that they will be going onto university?

Alternative routes

For students who don't want to go on to university are they helped in terms of their options for after finishing school?

Do you talk to students about apprenticeships/alternative routes from university?

The school and the wider economy

Do teachers talk to them about the state of the economy? Recession, cuts, where jobs are and aren't

Do teachers talk to them about their employment prospects after university?

How far does the school attempt to make links with the local economy?

Does the school call in representatives/employers from local businesses?

Appendix G: Interview schedule for heads of 6th form

Why do you think that there has been an increase in vocational subjects in the last few years?

Do you think this 'need to stay on' is communicated to your pupils and students?

How you recruited participants

How did you recruit participants for me?

Some technical questions about students

How many students do you have in 6th form?

Would you say that students come from a range of backgrounds? (talk about class, ethnic backgrounds)

Do you think that the demographic character of the 6th form has changed over the years.

Could you give me an indication of how many students are taking A-levels, how many are doing vocational courses and how many are re-sitting GCSEs in the 6th form?

Is the BTEC the equivalent of an A-level.

-is the BTEC accepted by most unis?

Financial support for Welsh domiciled students.

Powers over education and training passed from Whitehall to the Welsh Assembly Government when it was formed in 1999. Following devolution, the Welsh Assembly Government subsequently introduced education policies which were specifically geared to meet the needs of the Welsh economy and society more generally. A number of policies, particularly regarding the financing of higher education and student support followed which signalled the Welsh Government’s strong commitment to social inclusion.

This table documents the changes in the Welsh Government’s approach to student support over time.

Date	Welsh Government HE funding arrangements and student support
2001	Up-front tuition fees introduced by Westminster Government in 1998-9. Initially set at 1,000 pound a year. The Welsh Assembly has no powers at this time to implement an ‘end loaded, income contingent graduate endowment’ recommended by the Rees Review (2001)
2002	‘ Assembly Learning Grant ’ introduced. These are means-tested grants to support Welsh domiciled FT and PT FE and HE students where ever they study in the UK.
2003/4	The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) introduces the ‘ Financial Contingency Fund (FCF) ’ for students domiciled inside <i>and</i> outside of Wales.
2007/8	Fees of up to £3,000 a year for full-time students in Wales are introduced. A non-means-tested grant of £1800 is introduced for all Welsh-domiciled students attending Welsh HEIs only.
2010-2013	In 2010, the Welsh Government (WG) announces that HEIs and FE colleges in Wales can charge up to £9,000 a year for full-time courses as from 2012/13. Additional financial support for Welsh-domiciled students who study in Wales is withdrawn by the Welsh Government. However, Welsh-domiciled students have the additional fee charged by their HEI (anything above the basic rate of £4,000) funded by the WG, in the form of a ‘non means-tested tuition fee grant’ wherever they choose to study in the UK. Thus, students entering HE in the UK in 2012/13 would not pay any more for their studies than if they started a course in 2011/12. Students are also eligible to a tuition fee loan of up to £3,465.