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Employment-Lifestyle-Location: Future plans of post-secondary Students in Harstad Norway and Letterkenny Ireland

Gordon B. Cooke¹

Abstract. This study compares survey results from 330 students from Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT) County Donegal, Ireland, and 123 students at Harstad University College (HUC) in Harstad, Troms, Norway, gathered between 2013 and 2015. Both post-secondary institutions are in, or near, relatively small and remote communities and draw in students from the surrounding 'rural' areas, although those labels can be controversial. The purpose of this study is to explore the expectations and preferences that rural post-secondary education (PSE) students, at these two institutions, have in terms of future employment and location plans, as well as the relative importance of the factors affecting those decisions. The reality of contemporary labour markets is that skilled workers have a much smoother transition to good quality employment, on average, than their lesser-skilled counterparts. But, being in a relatively rural and/or remote location adds extra decision-making complexity.

Keywords: *Young workers, Careers, Out-migration, Education/training, Employment, Rural-urban, Quality of Life*

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1. Introduction

Due to a range of influences, labour markets in industrialized nations have become increasingly polarized. Among these forces is globalization, and other political, economic, technological, and competitive factors, but also management responses to these influences. Labour markets have become polarized in terms of job stability, security, work schedules, pay rates, and access to employer-provided benefits. Whether this is referred to as dual labour markets, a core-periphery segmentation of labour, or other terms, the key is that the challenges to acquiring good quality employment have risen, and the majority of workers face employment upheaval and uncertainty, if not an outright deterioration of working conditions. Note that this deterioration is real and tangible for many, while others are affected by a perception of declining quality of work options, or a declining sense of stability and/or security. In both cases, the effects are real. In broad strokes, the remedy for poor employment conditions is to hold labour market power, and in turn, that power is derived by having skills and experience that employers want. Because of their age and career stage, young individuals tend to have, or be perceived to have, lower work experience and/or job skills, and hence, little labour market power. Moreover, individuals in rural locations typically face the *additional* complication of less diverse local economies and the transportation challenge to reach other labour markets. Often, there is also lower access to skills/educational options within one's (rural) home community. Thus, the labour market situation facing rural youth can be especially daunting. This study compares survey results from 330 students from Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT) County Donegal, Ireland, and 123 students at Harstad University College (HUC) in Harstad, Norway, gathered between 2013 and 2015. Both post-secondary institutions are in, or near, relatively small and remote communities and draw in students from the surrounding communities and region, as well as a number from abroad. The definition of what is rural or not, or remote or not, can be controversial and emotional, since it can be inferred to have some negative connotations. In this paper, an expansive definition of rural is used, and without any hint of negativity. Here, it simply refers to regions or communities that are not urban (i.e. highly populated and with high density in a defined area), or that are located within adjacent locations (and hence would be categorized as suburban/commuter). Letterkenny and Harstad each have roughly 20,000 inhabitants, but based on size, amenities, and distance to metropolitan centres, both can be considered to

be 'big rural', more than 'small urban', in terms of labour markets and amenities.

The purpose of this study is to explore the expectations and preferences that rural post-secondary education (PSE) students, at these two institutions, have in terms of future employment and location plans, as well as the relative importance of the factors affecting those decisions. The reality of contemporary labour markets is that skilled workers have a much smoother transition to good quality employment, on average, than their lesser-skilled counterparts. By definition, PSE students are in the process of trying to increase their skills levels, and presumably in a way that has direct or indirect benefits in terms of employability. So, on the one hand, these individuals do, or will, have some valued skills, thereby improving their employment prospects. On the other hand, as relatively young workers in rural locations, these individuals are likely to face complicated employment decisions, for the reasons discussed above, notwithstanding their skill levels. Thus, they have advantages and disadvantages as they contemplate a transition from school to work. For this study, younger adults are those 18-30 years of age, while, for the sake of simplicity, all of the over 30 students will be considered to be older. While these older PSE students are also worthy of attention, this working paper focuses on the work expectations and preferences of young local students versus young students with more distant hometown locations.

Before reviewing and comparing the survey results, literature exploring current labour market issues will be reviewed to get a sense of the ongoing changes and challenges that are occurring, followed by methodological details of this study. Finally, at the end of the paper, the survey results will be explored, in terms of future work implications for the students and these rural communities.

2. Literature Review

In the current world of work, broad environmental forces including globalization and technological change are affecting the conditions in which organizations operate. That is, if political, social, or economic systems change, the effects ripple through the industrial relations system and affect outputs like wages, job security, and the distribution of power between employers and employees². While that, in turn, would and could affect individuals, the impact has been accentuated by strategic responses

² E.g. J.T. Dunlop, *Industrial Relations Systems*. Harvard Business School, 1993.

by private sector employers in particular^{3,4}. Although short-term, seasonal, and part-time employment has long existed, a feature of modern labour markets is the prevalence of these sorts of non-standard employment arrangements^{5,6,7}. Two decades ago, Betcherman and Lowe had predicted this sort of work future in which business risk is shifted from the employer to individuals via casual, on-call, non-permanent, and other variable work arrangements to suit operational requirements⁸. Unfortunately, the feared predictions of these authors have materialized, such that there is a real and/or perceived sense of growing economic insecurity among many individual workers⁹. Simply put, working conditions vary sharply within and across labour markets. Members of a lucky (and powerful) minority have a high quality jobs with good pay, hours, and security while many more less fortunate, and less powerful, workers endure relatively poor working conditions¹⁰. In terms of theory, the existence of these differences have long been identified as dual labour markets¹¹, a core-periphery segmentation of labour¹², a high road vs. low

³ T.A. Kochan, H.C. Katz, and R.B. McKersie, *The transformation of American industrial relations*. Cornell University Press, 1986.

⁴ R.P. Chaykowski and M. Gunderson, The implications of globalization for labour and labour markets, in R.P. Chaykowski (Ed.), *Globalization and the Canadian Economy: The Implications for Labour Markets, Society and the State*, Kingston, CAN: Queen's University, 27-60, 2001.

⁵ C.P. Green and G.D. Leeves, *Job security, financial security and worker well-being: new evidence on the effects of flexible employment*. *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*, ^2013, 60(2), 121- 138.

⁶ V. Gash, *Bridge or trap? Temporary workers' transitions to unemployment and to the standard employment contract*, *European Sociological Review*, ^2008, 24(5), 651-668.

⁷ I.U. Zeytinoglu, *Introduction and overview*, In I.U. Zeytinoglu (Ed.), *Changing Work Relationships in Industrialized Economies* (pp. ix-xx). Philadelphia, US: John Benjamins Publ, 1999.

⁸ G. Betcherman and G.S. Lowe, *The Future of Work in Canada: A Synthesis Report*, Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks, 1997.

⁹ See also JY Boulin, M. Lallement, and F. Michon, Decent working time in industrialized countries: Issues, scopes, and paradoxes, in Boulin, J.Y., M. Lallement, J. Messenger, and F. Michon (eds) *Decent Working Time, New Trends New Issues*, Geneva, SUI: ILO, 13-40, 2006; and C.P. Green and G.D. Leeves, *Job security, financial security and worker well-being: new evidence on the effects of flexible employment*. *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*, ^2013, 60(2), 121- 138.

¹⁰ G. Vallée, *Towards Enhancing the Employment Conditions of Vulnerable Workers: A Public Policy Perspective*, Vulnerable Workers Series, No. 2. Canadian Policy Research Networks, 2005.

¹¹ P.B. Doeringer and M.J. Piore, *Internal Labor Markets and Manpower Analysis*. Cambridge, US, 1970.

¹² J. Atkinson, *Manpower strategies for flexible organisations*, *Personnel management*, ^1984. 16(8), 28-31

road approach to labour¹³, or employer-friendly versus employee-friendly work arrangements¹⁴. The key, though, is not that these differences exist, or what the differences are labelled. Rather, the important thing is the implication for the current and future world of work for workers broadly, or various sub-groups of interest.

Put bluntly, the quality of one's employment is correlated with one's labour market power, and the way to increase that power is to hold skills, experiences, or education that is valued by employers^{15,16}. It is unsurprising, then, that acquiring education is a strategy that has long been used by people to try to use to increase their employability and career prospects¹⁷. One alternative is that one could relocate to a location in which there is a shortage of workers holding the skills that employers are seeking, such as to a location with a booming economy. On the other hand, as will be discussed below, it is inaccurate to conceptualize the work-life decision as being merely an economic one.

While all workers have to deal with the changing nature of work, some face additional hurdles. For this study, the subgroups of interest are young rural adults. Rural individuals tend to have fewer, and potentially poorer, employment options, because local labour markets tend to be narrower, which means fewer industries and fewer occupations^{18,19}. While rural economies typically used to be centred around primary industries like farming, fishing, and forestry, technological advancements and the effects

¹³ e.g. A. Verma and R.P. Chaykowski, Employment and employment relations at the crossroads, in A. Verma, and R.P. Chaykowski (Eds.), *Contract and Commitment: Employment Relations in the New Economy*, Kingston, CAN: IRC Press, Queen's University, 1-20, 1999.

¹⁴ e.g. G.B. Cooke, *The Nature and Incidence of Non-Standard Work Arrangements*, PhD Dissertation, McMaster University, Canada, 2005.

¹⁵ G. Betcherman and G.S. Lowe, *The Future of Work in Canada: A Synthesis Report*, Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks, 1997.

¹⁶ G.B. Cooke, S.L. Mann, and J.K. Burns, Education and employment choices among young rural workers in Canada and Ireland: A tale of two studies, in Kelly Vodden, Ryan Gibson, & Godfrey Baldacchino (Eds.), *Place-Based Development in Rural, Island, and Remote Regions*, Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER), Newfoundland and Labrador, CAN, 2015.

¹⁷ G.S. Becker, *Investment in human capital: A theoretical analysis*, *The journal of political economy*, ^1962, 9-49.

¹⁸ E. Vera-Toscano, E. Phimister, and A. Weersink, *Short-term employment transitions of the Canadian labour force: rural-urban differences in underemployment*, *Agricultural Economics*, ^2004, 30(2), 129-142.

¹⁹ M. De Hoyos and A. Green, *Recruitment and retention issues in rural labour markets*, *Journal of Rural Studies*, ^2011, 27(2), 171-180.

of globalizations mean that it is possible- and necessary- for rural communities to undertake more diverse economic activity, and that means developing skill levels and creating the infrastructure to do so²⁰. Needless to say, these are easy said that done, and efforts to revitalize rural communities is a work in progress in most areas. In turn, this compels individuals to choose between living with local options, commuting to other communities, or out-migrating^{21,22}. But, those employment challenges can be partially, fully, or even more than offset by quality of life benefits for those who embrace rural living²³. ‘Embracing’, again, is critical. If a person has hobbies or pursuits that are more doable in rural areas, and/or craves proximity to friends and family (who are in a given rural area), then the benefits of ‘rural living’ might be worth enduring some employment complications, if unavoidable²⁴. Needless to say, those who do not value ‘rural living’ are not going to remain, if employment conditions are similarly undesirable.

To entice more young people to stay in a given rural region²⁵, local employment conditions need to be sufficiently attractive²⁶. The problem is that young people generally have trouble gaining foothold in the labour market, through a lack of skill/education, experience, or opportunity²⁷. That challenge can be accentuated for rural youth given the realities of rural labour markets, less access to educational programs, and fewer

²⁰ OECD, *The New Rural Paradigm: Policies and Governance*, OECD Rural Policy Reviews, 2006.

²¹ M.D. Partridge, K. Ali, and M. Olfert, *Rural-to-Urban Commuting: Three Degrees of Integration, Growth and Change*, ^2010, 41(2), 303-335.

²² G.B. Cooke, S.L. Mann, and J.K. Burns, Education and employment choices among young rural workers in Canada and Ireland: A tale of two studies, in Kelly Vodden, Ryan Gibson, & Godfrey Baldacchino (Eds.), *Place-Based Development in Rural, Island, and Remote Regions*, Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER), Newfoundland and Labrador, CAN, 2015.

²³ G.B. Cooke, J. Donaghey, and I.U. Zeytinoglu, *The nuanced nature of work quality: evidence from rural Newfoundland and Ireland*, *Human Relations*, ^2013, 66(4), 503-527.

²⁴ X. Tang, *Career Choices for Current Post-secondary Students in Newfoundland and Labrador*, Unpublished report, Memorial University of Newfoundland, MER Program, 2009.

²⁵ D. Gillies, *Learning and leaving: education and depopulation in an island community*, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 2014, 44(1), 19-34.

²⁶ see also M. Culliney, *The rural pay penalty: youth earnings and social capital in Britain*, *Journal of Youth Studies*, ^2014b, 17(2), 148-165.; and H. Dickey and I. Theodossiou, *Who has two jobs and why? Evidence from rural coastal communities in west Scotland*, *Agricultural Economics*, ^2006, 34(3), 291-301.

²⁷ OECD, *Off to a good start?*, Jobs for youth, 2010.

public transportation options^{28,29}. From a rural community or regional perspective, population levels are often aging and/or shrinking, which raises the prospect of future economic challenges if youth out-migrate^{30,31}. As a result, governments in industrialized nations who are experiencing aging populations and workforces are looking to attract and retain skilled international students³². But, local employment opportunities should be viewed as potentially very important, but not the only factor to retain (young) people. The decision as to where to live and/or work is both an analytical and emotional one. It depends upon the strength of one's social and economic ties, and also one's risk tolerance, personal or family situation, and career aspirations, but also the characteristics-good and bad-of one's home (or host) community^{33,34,35,36}. Beyond employment options, there also needs to be sufficient social and leisure activities available locally, even in remote communities, to retain young people³⁷. For this study of students in post-secondary education (PSE), it is reasonable to wonder if they have a somewhat higher level of ambition than non-

²⁸ M. Culliney, *The rural pay penalty: youth earnings and social capital in Britain*, *Journal of Youth Studies*, ^2014b, 17(2), 148-165.

²⁹ G.B. Cooke, S.L. Mann, and J.K. Burns, Education and employment choices among young rural workers in Canada and Ireland: A tale of two studies, in Kelly Vodden, Ryan Gibson, & Godfrey Baldacchino (Eds.), *Place-Based Development in Rural, Island, and Remote Regions*, *Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER)*, Newfoundland and Labrador, CAN, 2015.

³⁰ B. Jentsch, *Youth migration from rural areas: moral principles to support youth and rural communities in policy debates*, *Sociologia Ruralis*, ^2006, 46(3): 229-240.

³¹ OECD, *The New Rural Paradigm: Policies and Governance*, OECD Rural Policy Reviews, 2006.

³² OECD, *Better skills. Better jobs. Better lives*, The OECD skills strategy executive summary, 2012.

³³ M. Corbett, *Rural education and outmigration: the case of a coastal community*, *Canadian Journal of Education*, ^2005, 28(1&2), 52-72.

³⁴ M. Culliney, *Going nowhere? Rural youth labour market opportunities and obstacles*, *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice*, ^2014a, 22(1), 45-57.

³⁵ A. Nixon, *Youth Attitudes and Employment: Is the Emerging Workforce Changing?*, Unpublished report, Memorial University of Newfoundland, MER Program, 2010.

³⁶ A. Locke, *The Social Factors Affecting the Pursuit of Higher Education and Employment for Rural Students*, Unpublished report, Memorial University of Newfoundland, MER Program, 2010.

³⁷ e.g. F. Thissen, J.D. Fortuijn, D. Strijker, and T. Haartsen, *Migration intentions of rural youth in the Westhoek, Flanders, Belgium and the Veenkoloniën, The Netherlands*, *Journal of Rural Studies*, ^2010, 26, 428-436; and P. Rerat, *The selective migration of young graduates: which of them return to their rural home region and which do not?*, *Journal of Rural Studies*, ^2014, 35, 123-132.

students, and potentially higher level of mobility and employment and lifestyle expectations^{38,39}.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This paper is based on the survey responses gathered from 330 Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT) students in January 2013, as well as responses from 123 Harstad University College (HUC) students surveyed in April 2015. LYIT's main campus is located in the (small) city of Letterkenny, County Donegal, Ireland, and a second campus is located in the small town of Killybegs, which is a much smaller, more rural, coastal town about one hour southwest. Surveys were gathered from students in various programs within both LYIT campuses. Letterkenny is a community of slightly more than 20,000 inhabitants in the Northwest corner of Ireland. It is the capital of the County Donegal, which is among the most remote jurisdictions on the island, and with among the lowest population density. While it is within 40 kilometers of London/Derry City (a community of 90,000 in the adjacent county), it is at least a two, or three, hour drive away from the metropolitan cities of Belfast or Dublin, respectively, with public transportation taking even longer.

As was done at LYIT, students were surveyed from several different programs within HUC.

Harstad is also a community with a population of about 20,000, and is located in Troms, which is the second most northerly county within Norway. While considered a city according to Norwegian definitions, Harstad is nonetheless of modest size. It is also remote in the sense that it is north of the Arctic Circle, and is the largest community, by road or ferry, for at least two hours of travel. Moreover, while it serves as a regional centre, its economy consists of public sector (i.e. university/college, hospital, and municipal) and retail organizations, but

³⁸ G.B. Cooke, High Fliers versus Upstream Swimmers: Young rural workers in Canada and Ireland, in *Youth Unemployment and Joblessness: Causes, Consequences, Responses*, Association for International and Comparative Studies in the field of Labour law and Industrial Relations (ADAPT), Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 151-168, 2012.

³⁹ G. Paulgaard, Geography of opportunity. Approaching adulthood at the margins of the northern European periphery, in Bæck, Unn-Doris Karlsen and Paulgaard, Gry (eds) *Rural Futures? Finding One's Place Within Changing Labour Markets*, Stamsund, NOR: Orkana Akademisk, 189-215, 2012.

has fairly small private sector businesses, aside from those in the supply chain for resource development.

As mentioned in the introduction, the definition of what is rural or not can be controversial and emotional, since it can be inferred to have some negative connotations. In this paper, an expansive definition of rural is used, and without any hint of negativity. Here, it simply refers to regions or communities that are not urban (i.e. highly populated), or that are located within adjacent locations (and hence would be categorized as suburban/commuter). Based on their relatively remote locations, amenities, and the local labour market, both can be considered to be 'big rural', more than 'small urban'. While the definition of cities versus towns varies from country to country, the key is that many people surveyed or interviewed in or around these two communities provide employment and lifestyle descriptions that fit as being more rural than urban⁴⁰.

For much of the last two centuries, Ireland endured a series of economic, social, and political hardships which led to economic hardships, sustained unemployment and even poverty, declining populations, and regional disparity. That said, Ireland's economic rebound over the past two decades, culminating in its economy being labelled the 'Celtic Tiger'. This rebound was accomplished by labour partnerships, shrewd government planning to attract foreign investment in offices, research and manufacturing facilities (and hence, jobs) in Ireland, and an emphasis on having a highly skilled and educated workforce⁴¹. While Ireland was badly injured by the global financial crisis of 2008-2009, economic activity and employment levels rebounded robustly. That said, County Donegal continues to have relatively low per capita incomes and labour market participation rates, and high unemployment within Ireland^{42,43}. Moreover, due to its location in the Northwest corner away from major cities as well as major transportation hubs, County Donegal can be considered to be remote, relative to the Eastern and urban part of Ireland.

⁴⁰ Results from those semi-structured interviews are otherwise beyond the scope of this paper.

⁴¹ see P. Teague and J. Donaghey, *The life and death of Irish social partnership: lessons for social pacts*, *Business History*, ^2015, 57(3), 418-437; and S. Dorgan, *How Ireland became the Celtic tiger*, The Heritage Foundation Backgrounder# 1945, 2006.

⁴² T. Haase and J. Pratschke, *The 2011 Pobal HP Deprivation Index for Small Areas (SA): Introduction and Reference Tables*, 2012.

⁴³ Donegal County Development Board, *Making the Future Happen: Addressing the unemployment challenge in Donegal*, Research report prepared for Donegal County Council's Research and Policy Division, 2010.

Prior to the discovery of oil in the 1960s, Norway had been relatively a relative poor country within western (or northern) Europe. However, due to prudent development of its energy discoveries, Norway has transformed itself into an economic powerhouse on a per capita basis⁴⁴. Part of the acclaim that Norway receives is due to its commitment to regional development, including of its northernmost regions and communities, and to economic diversification and inclusion⁴⁵. Thus, even Troms, the second most northerly county and one located north of the Arctic Circle, has had a vibrant economy and has retained its population base. Norway has a well-earned reputation for high prices and high taxes. But, that is coupled with a heavy strategic emphasis on technology investment, infrastructure investment, and education, training and innovation⁴⁶. Thus, Norway has been able to achieve a high level of labour force participation, generous social services, and yet unemployment at or below 5% for the past two decades^{47,48,49}.

Through investigation, these two communities were chosen to be studied because of their size, relative level of rurality and remoteness, and presence of a post-secondary educational institution. The intention was to select multiple communities, and regions, with comparable locations within the North Atlantic region. Other locations, and institutions, have also been selected and studied, but they are beyond the scope of this paper.

Via cold-calling and site visits, permission was received from LYIT and HUC to conduct this survey based research. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted among the student bodies, but that qualitative

⁴⁴ Economist, 2013a. Northern Lights. *The Economist*. 2 Feb 2013. Downloaded 30 August 2016 from <http://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21570840-nordic-countries-are-reinventing-their-model-capitalism-says-adrian>

⁴⁵ C. Recknagel, 2014. What Can Norway Teach Other Oil-Rich Countries?

RadioFreeEurope Radio Liberty. Downloaded on 31 August 2016 from <http://www.rferl.org/a/what-can-norway-teach-other-oil-rich-countries/26713453.html>

⁴⁶ Economist, 2013b. Norway The Rich Cousin. *The Economist*. 2 Feb 2013. Downloaded 30 August 2016 from <http://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21570842-oil-makes-norway-different-rest-region-only-up-point-rich>

⁴⁷ Economist, 2013a. Northern Lights. *The Economist*. 2 Feb 2013. Downloaded 30 August 2016 from <http://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21570840-nordic-countries-are-reinventing-their-model-capitalism-says-adrian>

⁴⁸ C. Recknagel, 2014. What Can Norway Teach Other Oil-Rich Countries?

RadioFreeEurope Radio Liberty. Downloaded on 31 August 2016 from <http://www.rferl.org/a/what-can-norway-teach-other-oil-rich-countries/26713453.html>

⁴⁹ Statistics Norway, 2016. Downloaded on 31 August 2016 from <https://www.ssb.no/en/arbeid-og-lonn/statistikker/akumnd/maaned>

research component is also beyond the scope of this paper. Once institutional permission to survey was received, then volunteer instructors were sought to be able to attend the start or end of class. Surveys were distributed to all present students within each of these classes. The survey included a cover letter with information, and indicating that partial or full completion of the survey would imply consent. Students were encouraged to retain the cover sheet and to fold the survey in half, before being collected en masse, with folded surveys placed into a large envelope. That way, it was impossible to link any survey to any, and its degree of completeness, to any individual. The surveys were compiled in a Microsoft excel file, and then imported and analyzed in SPSS.

3.2 Variables & Data Analysis

By intention, the surveys were kept short and simple to fit the data collection opportunity, and in an attempt to boost the response rate. Several demographic questions were asked, including details about the location and size of one's hometown, and proximity to the post-secondary educational institution. Students were also asked about the preferred and expected location for their first job after completing their studies. Finally, the third section of the survey asked participants to rate the relative importance of a range of working conditions and location factors regarding future employment.

For this working paper, only descriptive data analyses were included. Nonetheless, this simple approach illustrated the interrelationships between the hometown characteristics of participants with work location expectations and preferences after graduation. In turn, this facilitated comparisons between the participants surveyed at LYIT with those surveyed at HUC. Thus, emphasis was placed on the substantiveness of differences that were found, rather than statistical significance thresholds.

4. Results

4.1 Sample Characteristics

Sample characteristics for Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT) are shown in Table 1. To recap, these were LYIT students who volunteered to be surveyed in early 2013. Slightly more than half of the respondents are 18-20 years of age, 1/3 are 21-29, with the remaining 1/3 being at least 30 years of age. Since LYIT is primarily an undergraduate institution, this young average age is expected. That said, the rather sizable mature

student cohort (of 30+ years of age) probably reflects an upsurge of adults entering programs at LYIT to seek a career change during Ireland's economic crisis of 2009-2011. Roughly 3/4 of respondents were female, which reflects the reality that females make up the majority of students at post-secondary institutions, as well as the fact that our survey included a number of health care students- a female-dominated course of study. Otherwise, students were fairly evenly split between business, culinary/hotel, and other programs.

In terms of hometown information, only 7% of surveyed students had a hometown outside of Ireland. Among the Irish students, almost 3/4 were from County Donegal, and the vast majority of the rest were from an adjacent county, leaving only 9% from further away in Ireland. Given those statistics and the primarily rural nature of County Donegal and surrounding counties, it is not surprising that half of the respondents are from a hometown with 1,000 or fewer people. Only 22% are from a community with greater than 5,000 people. Thus, only 11% of respondents consider themselves having a city for a hometown. Moreover, almost 2/3 of respondents said that their hometown is at least 20 kilometres from a city. Thus, as expected, many of the students in this survey, at this university, have 'rural' roots.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics for LYIT survey participants

<u>Key Variables</u>	Mean/Proportion	Std. Dev.
Completed surveys (full or partial)	330	
Age		
18-20 years	51.4%	
21-24	21.6%	
25-29	11.2%	
30 years or more	15.8%	
Gender		
Female	73.8%	
Male	26.2%	
Hometown location		
Outside of Ireland	7.3%	
Within Ireland	92.7%	
Among those with Irish hometown		
Within County Donegal	71.7%	
In Adjacent County to Donegal	19.3%	
Elsewhere in Ireland	8.9%	
Hometown degree of rurality		
Hometown is a city	10.5%	
Hometown is within 20km of a city	24.0%	
Hometown is 20-50km from a city	40.8%	
Hometown >50km from a city	24.7%	
Academic program		
Business	21.8%	
Culinary or tourism	22.1%	
Health care	37.4%	
Other	18.7%	

* Figures exclude missing data.

Among the 123 students surveyed at Harstad University College (HUC) in spring 2015, very few were 20 years of age or younger, and less than half were under 25, and 29% were at least 30 years of age. In terms of gender, two thirds identified being female, with one third being male. While 85% had a hometown in Norway, 15% were from outside Norway. Among Norwegians, more than half had a hometown within the County of Troms (in which Harstad is located), while almost one quarter are from the

adjacent County of Nordland (which has a boundary that is only about 25 kilometres south of Harstad). The remaining 18% of Norwegians are from a more distant county than Troms and Nordland. Unexpectedly, only about 10% of the HUC students surveyed were from a hometown of at 1000 people or less, while 30% were from a community of 1,000-5,000 people, and a full 60% have a hometown of at least 5,000 people. While it was presumed that HUC would attract lots of local students, it appears that a substantial proportion is either from Harstad itself, or from a neighbouring town, rather than village. While one third of participants are from a city of 20,000 or more, 42% have a hometown that is at least one hour's travelling distance from a community of at least that size, with the remaining quarter have a commute to a city of under one hour. Thus, a sizable majority of Norwegian students attending HUC have a rural hometown, although relatively few are from a village (of under 1,000 people).

Finally, turning to educational details, more than half of those surveyed had attained at least two years of post-secondary education, one fifth had completed one year, and the remaining 28% were first year post-secondary students. Surprisingly, 62% of the students indicated being in a business program, with one fifth being in a nursing or health care program, and 16% having a different academic major.

Table 2: Sample Characteristics for HUC survey participants

<u>Key Variables</u>	Mean/Proportion	Std. Dev.
Completed surveys (full or partial)	123	
Age		
18-20 years	10.6%	
21-24	35.8%	
25-29	25.2%	
30 years or more	28.5%	
Gender		
Female	68.6%	
Male	31.4%	
Hometown location		
Outside of Norway	14.6%	
Within Norway	85.4%	
Among those with Norwegian hometown		
Within Troms	58.1%	
In Adjacent County of Nordland	23.8%	
Elsewhere in Norway	18.1%	
Hometown degree of rurality		
Hometown is a city	33.3%	
Hometown is within 20 minutes of a city	6.7%	
Hometown is 20-60 minutes from a city	18.1%	
Hometown >60 minutes from a city	41.9%	
Academic program		
Business	62.3%	
Culinary or tourism	0.8%	
Nursing/Health care	20.5%	
Other	16.4%	

* Figures exclude missing data.

When comparing sample characteristics, it is noteworthy that the Norwegian sample included double the proportion of mature students (of at least 30 years of age), and double the proportion of international students. The higher proportion of international students was expected, and probably reflects the low, or non-existent, level of tuition charged to outsiders⁵⁰. It should be noted that the mix of students per academic program or major varied sharply between the two locations, but the cause

⁵⁰ See Study in Norway, 2016. Downloaded on 31 August 2016 from <http://www.studyinnorway.no>

is unknown. It is presumed that there is a labelling issue, with the set of program choices provided to HUC students (that was used across all surveys and schools) not fitting the local terminology used by students and administrators in Norway.

4.2 Location Expectations and Preferences

In Tables 3 and 4, the expectations versus preferences of work location after finishing education are presented for the female and male respondents, sorted by hometown location. As before, only those under 30 are shown, since older adults are presumed to be less mobile, and thus less likely to face a relocation decision than young adults.

As shown in Table 3, among the young adults from County Donegal attending LYIT, 76% prefer to work within the county after finishing their education, but only 55% expect to do so. Amazingly, none of the local Irish females- or indeed, any of the Irish females regardless of hometown location- prefer to work outside of Ireland, although $\frac{1}{4}$ expect to do so. Finally, among local females, about $\frac{1}{4}$ prefer and about $\frac{1}{4}$ expect to work elsewhere in Ireland. Among those from an Irish county nearby Donegal, $\frac{2}{3}$ of the females would prefer to work in a similar location after education, while $\frac{1}{6}$ would actually prefer to stay and work in County Donegal, and the remainder prefer to work elsewhere in Ireland. Only 35% actually expect to be able to work nearby to County Donegal, 17% expect to work in County Donegal, a similar proportion expect to be elsewhere in Ireland, and 12% expect to work beyond or possibly beyond Ireland. A similar set of patterns for Irish females with a hometown elsewhere in Ireland. Thus, the pattern among the Irish females at LYIT is that $\frac{2}{3}$ or more tend to prefer to work close to their home region (i.e. Donegal, nearby, or elsewhere) after finishing their education, and otherwise prefer to stay in Ireland. However, a sizable proportion of Irish females are expecting to have to relocate to another location in Ireland, or even beyond. From a County Donegal perspective, there are some positive signs. Namely, that most of the educated local females prefer to stay locally, and over half expect to be able to do so, and about 20% of Irish students from other locations are expecting to work within County Donegal after finishing their education.

Among young males from County Donegal, only 43% prefer to work locally whereas slightly more than half expect to do so. One third of these local males prefer to work elsewhere in Ireland, and another 23% wish to work or possibly work beyond Ireland, whereas those expecting to do so are 29% and 20%, respectively. Thus, among the LYIT students from

County Donegal, the females *all* prefer to stay close to home or at least in Ireland, but a sizable proportion expect that they might have to go further than they wish for employment, whereas the opposite case exists for young local males at LYIT. Because the counts are small for Irish males with a location outside of County Donegal, we only look at the overall pattern. These males are unlikely to prefer to stay in County Donegal after education, and do not expect to stay either. Slightly more than half of these males prefer to work elsewhere in Ireland, and about the same percentage expect to do so, but possibly in a different part of the country. Regardless of whether from a county nearby to Donegal or further away, a substantial proportion of these young males expect to work beyond or possibly beyond Ireland after education.

Among students with a hometown outside of Ireland, about 30% of the females prefer to work in Ireland, and about the same percentage expect to do so after finishing their education, although the majority wish to be in another location within Ireland. Among the males, 40% prefer and 40% expect to work in Ireland (and in fact within County Donegal), albeit with very small sample sizes. Nonetheless, from an Irish perspective, it should be viewed as good news that these educated- and mobile- young adults are interested in staying within the country.

Table 3: Location Expectation and Preferences among LYIT Students

<u>Only females</u> <u>under 30</u>	Hometown not		Hometown within County Donegal		Hometown adjacent to County Donegal		Hometown elsewhere in Ireland	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Location EXPECTING to work after education:								
Within County Donegal	1	8.3%	70	54.7%	7	17.5%	4	22%
In or adjacent to County Donegal	0	0.0%	7	5.5%	14	35.0%	2	11%
Possibly further within Ireland	3	25.0%	21	16.4%	14	35.0%	10	55%
Beyond or possibly beyond Ireland	8	66.7%	30	23.4%	5	12.5%	2	11%

Location PREFERRING to work after education:								
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Within County Donegal	1	7.7%	82	75.9%	6	17.6%	3	20.0%
In or adjacent to County Donegal	0	0.0%	5	4.6%	22	64.7%	1	6.7%
Possibly further within Ireland	3	23.1%	21	19.4%	6	17.6%	11	73.3%
Beyond or possibly beyond Ireland	9	69.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<u>Only males under 30</u>	Hometown not in Ireland:		Hometown within County Donegal		Hometown adjacent to County Donegal		Hometown elsewhere in Ireland	
Location EXPECTING to work after education:								
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Within County Donegal	2	40.0%	18	51.4%	0	0.0%	1	12.5%
In or adjacent to County Donegal	0	0.0%	1	2.9%	2	20.0%	0	0.0%
Possibly further within Ireland	0	0.0%	9	25.7%	4	40.0%	5	62.5%
Beyond or possibly beyond Ireland	3	60.0%	7	20.0%	4	40.0%	2	25.0%
Location PREFERRING to work after education:								
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Within County Donegal	2	40.0%	15	42.9%	1	12.5%	1	14.3%
In or adjacent to County Donegal	0	0.0%	2	5.7%	5	62.5%	0	0.0%
Possibly further within Ireland	0	0.0%	10	28.6%	1	12.5%	4	57.1%

Beyond possibly Ireland	or beyond	60. 0%	8	22.9 %	1	12.5 %	2	28. 6%
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* Figures exclude missing data

Turning back to HUC students as shown in Table 4, attention is again limited to only those under 30. Among young females with a hometown with Troms, almost three quarters expect to work within the county after graduations, with most of those expecting to be in Harstad in particular. 16% expect to be in Southern Norway, and 12% expect to work beyond, or possibly beyond, Norway. Among these young females, location preferences are very similar to expectations, although slightly fewer prefer to work in Harstad, and a slightly higher proportion prefer to work elsewhere in Troms, elsewhere in Southern Norway, or beyond. Among young females from the adjacent county of Nordland, almost all prefer to work in Nordland or further south in Norway, but 30% expect to work in Troms. Similarly, among young females from elsewhere in Norway, 83% prefer to work elsewhere in Norway, but a portion of those expect to work in Troms or possibly beyond Norway after graduation. Finally, among young international female students at HUC, while the majority expect and prefer to work outside of Norway, about one third expect or prefer to work within Troms after completing their education.

Among young males from Troms, only slightly more than half expect to work in Troms after graduation, and in fact, more than half would prefer to work in Southern Norway or beyond. Among the few young males from Nordland who were surveyed at HUC, none expect or prefer to work in Troms. That pattern continued among those from elsewhere in Norway or beyond. Among young males from elsewhere in Norway, only one of four expected or preferred to work in Troms after graduation. Finally, among the few young international male students who were surveyed, all expect and prefer to work beyond Norway upon completion of their education.

Table 4: Location Expectation and Preferences among HUC Students

<u>Only females under 30</u>	Hometow n not in Norway	Hometow n within Troms	Hometown adjacent In Nordland	Hometown elsewhere in Norway
Location	EXPECTING	to		

work after education:								
	Co unt	Per cen t	Co un t	Per cent	Co unt	Per cent	Co unt	Perce nt
Within Harstad	1	5%	13	52.0	2	%	1	10.0
Elsewhere in		25.		20.0		10.0		10.0
Troms	2	0%	5	%	1	%	1	%
In Finnmark		0.0		0.0		20.0		
Nordland	0	%	0	%	2	%	0	0.0%
Elsewhere in		0.0		16.0		50.0		70.0
(Southern)		0.0		%		5%		7%
Norway	0	%	4	%	5	%	7	%
Beyond or		62.		12.0				10.0
possibly beyond		5%		%		0.0%		%
Norway	5	5%	3	%	0	0.0%	1	%
Location PREFERRING to work after education:								
	Co unt	Per cen t	Co un t	Per cent	Co unt	Per cent	Co unt	Perce nt
Within Harstad	0	0.0	10	40.0	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Elsewhere in		33.		24.0				
Troms	3	3%	6	%	0	0.0%	1	8.3%
In Finnmark		0.0		0.0		44.4		
Nordland	0	%	0	%	4	%	1	8.3%
Elsewhere in		0.0		20.0		44.4		83.3
(Southern)		0.0		%		4%		10%
Norway	0	%	5	%	4	%	10	%
Beyond or		66.		16.0		11.1		
possibly beyond		7%		%		1%		0.0%
Norway	6	7%	4	%	1	%	0	0.0%
<u>Only males under 30</u>								
	Hometow n not		Hometow n within		Hometown adjacent		Hometown elsewhere	
	in Norway		Troms		In Nordland		in Norway	
Location EXPECTING to work after education:								
	Co unt	Per cen t	Co un t	Per cent	Co unt	Per cent	Co unt	Perce nt
Within Harstad	0	0.0	5	38.5	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
		%		%				

Elsewhere	in	0.0	15.4				25.0
Troms		0 %	2 %	0	0.0%	1	%
In Finnmark	or	0.0	0.0		40.0		
Nordland		0 %	0 %	2	%	0	0.0%
Elsewhere	in						
(Southern)		0.0	38.5		60.0		50.0
Norway		0 %	5 %	3	%	2	%
Beyond	or						
possibly beyond		100	7.7				25.0
Norway		4 .0%	1 %	0	0.0%	1	%
Location PREFERRING to work after education:							
		Co	Per	Co			
		unt	cen	unt	Perc	Co	Perc
			t		ent	unt	ent
			0.0		28.6		
Within Harstad		0 %	4 %	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Elsewhere	in	0.0	14.3				25.0
Troms		0 %	2 %	0	0.0%	1	%
In Finnmark	or	0.0	0.0		60.0		
Nordland		0 %	0 %	3	%	0	0.0%
Elsewhere	in						
(Southern)		0.0	28.6		20.0		50.0
Norway		0 %	4 %	1	%	2	%
Beyond	or						
possibly beyond		100	28.6		20.0		25.0
Norway		4 .0%	4 %	1	%	1	%

* Figures exclude missing data.

4.3 Work and Life Preferences

Tables 5 and 6 show the preferences of these two groups of students in terms of work and life preferences after completing school. As before, students at LYIT and HUC are sorted according to hometown location. In the interest of brevity, only four of a range of work and life preferences are included. Simple means are shown, showing how important each of these four factors are when looked at in isolation, with scores closer to zero meaning the issue is relatively unimportant, and scores approaching three (the maximum) indicating high importance.

As shown in Table 5, being in a big city is relatively unimportant to those not from Ireland, but still higher than among those with an Irish hometown. This is in line with expectations, since LYIT is not located in a big city, and presumably survey respondents are attending by their own choice. In contrast, chances for advancement is very important to most

LYIT students, and is even slightly more important for international students. Strangely, salary is considered to be important to international students at LYIT, but noticeably less so than among those Irish-born. Since wages and salaries in the Northwest corner of the Island of Ireland are considered to be lower than the more urban eastern area, perhaps this is a manifestation of local students being concerned about being offered a low compensation package (in the area) even after completing third level education. If the international students have a higher level of mobility, then they might simply subconsciously expect to search for jobs that meet their financial expectations. Finally, being close to friends and family, after completing school, is somewhat unimportant to international students at LYIT, as well as among Irish students not from Donegal or an adjacent county. That makes sense given that these two groups travelled furthest to attend LYIT. Conversely, those from County Donegal place higher importance on being close to friends and family.

Table 5: Work and Life Preferences after completing school: LYIT students

Importance of:	Among:	All Under 30
A. Being in a big city	Hometown not in Ireland:	1.17
	Hometown within Cty Donegal	0.75
	Hometown in adjacent county	0.91
	Hometown elsewhere in Ireland	1.10
B. Chances for advancement	Hometown not in Ireland:	2.46
	Hometown within Cty Donegal	2.36
	Hometown in adjacent county	2.40
	Hometown elsewhere in Ireland	2.41
C. Salary	Hometown not in Ireland:	2.08

	Hometown within Cty Donegal	2.38
	Hometown in adjacent county	2.30
	Hometown elsewhere in Ireland	2.38
D. Being close to friends & family		
	Hometown not in Ireland:	1.63
	Hometown within Cty Donegal	2.15
	Hometown in adjacent county	2.09
	Hometown elsewhere in Ireland	1.69

* Figures exclude missing data.

Note: All scores are means based on: Unimportant=0, somewhat important=1, Important=2, Very important=3.

Turning to the responses of HUC students in Table 6, being in a big city was, again, unimportant to HUC students, regardless of hometown location. As was the case among the LYIT students, HUC students place relatively high importance on having chances for advancement, but that importance is much lower, on average, among those with a hometown within Troms than all other subgroups. That potentially signals a higher desire to work locally after completing school. Turning to salary preferences, international students at HUC place an equivalent importance on salary as did the international students at LYIT, on average. The Norwegian students at HUC, however, placed less importance on salary than the international students, and much less importance than the Irish students had at LYIT. Presumably, this is due to the lower income inequality within Norway. Finally, as was the case among LYIT students, international students at HUC place less importance on being close to friends and family than Norwegian students at HUC. However, the HUC students placed higher importance on being close to friends and family than the LYIT students had. One possible explanation is that since income inequality is relatively low in Norway, as is unemployment generally, then Norwegian students face less economic uncertainty, and can, instead, place higher emphasis on other aspects of life when considering work after completing school.

Table 6: Work and Life Preferences after completing school: HUC students

Importance of:	Among:	All Under 30
A. Being in a big city	Hometown not in Norway:	1.00
	Hometown within Troms	0.79
	Hometown adjacent (i.e. in Nordland)	0.64
	Hometown elsewhere in Norway	0.67
B. Chances for advancement	Hometown not in Norway:	2.50
	Hometown within Troms	2.05
	Hometown adjacent (i.e. in Nordland)	2.40
	Hometown elsewhere in Norway	2.33
C. Salary 1	Hometown not in Norway:	2.07
	Hometown within Troms	1.95
	Hometown adjacent (i.e. in Nordland)	2.00
	Hometown elsewhere in Norway	1.67
D. Being close to friends & family	Hometown not in Norway:	2.00
	Hometown within Troms	2.13
	Hometown adjacent (i.e. in Nordland)	2.29
	Hometown elsewhere in Norway	2.13

* Figures exclude missing data.

5. Discussion

This study was based on surveys of students at Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT) in Letterkenny and Killybegs in the northwest corner

of Ireland, and at Harstad University College (HUC) in Harstad, which is north of the Arctic Circle in Norway's second most northerly county. To recap, the purpose of this study was to explore the expectations and preferences that rural post-secondary education (PSE) students, at these two institutions, have in terms of future employment and location plans, as well as the relative importance of the factors affecting those decisions. The rationale was that in addition to the general labour market uncertainty that is occurring throughout the industrialized world, rural youth face incremental complications in terms of deciding what skills to try to acquire, where to acquire it, and where to seek employment afterwards. This study forms a part of a continued effort to deconstruct the employment-education-lifestyle- location dilemma facing young rural adults. While the boundary between what is rural or not is subjective, these two locations are considered to be rural within this paper because they have modest populations, and are beyond daily commuting distance to the closest large urban centre. The focus was placed on younger students (aged 18-30) at LYIT and HUC, since older students potentially have a different set of life expectations and obligations, and might be less able to relocate after completing their education. Younger rural adults, in contrast, are facing several decades of participation in the labour market, and presumably have to consider how to weigh work, life, and location factors as they look to the future.

There are several labour market trends that are pertinent for this study because they can directly or indirectly affect how rural youth view their employment options. First, working conditions are increasingly polarized, with a small number of privileged workers receiving high rewards and security, while the bulk of others have, or perceiving that they have, lower access to good quality employment. As an aside, this polarization is thought to be smaller in Norway, and the broad social safety net means less economic insecurity, and this has potentially played a role when Norwegian, or Norwegian-based, students look to the future. Acquiring education is among the most important factors to acquire more power, and hence privilege, in the labour market, and so it is interesting to look at the opinions of post-secondary education students. Of course, if their power increases, then so too might the employment expectations of these individuals.

The literature also suggests that rural labour markets tend to be narrower and weaker, on average, but that can also vary depending upon the public policies within a particular jurisdiction. Again, Norway is considered to have relatively vibrant rural employment conditions. That said, many rural governments are keen to retain and expand upon current population

levels, and that often extends to the challenge of retaining rural youth, especially those educated or having acquired sought after skills. This study sheds some light on this issue, by looking at the location expectations verses preferences of these young, skilled rural individuals.

Turning to findings, 7% of the students surveyed at LYIT were international (i.e. having a hometown outside of the country), compared to 15% of those surveyed at HUC. These proportions are important, because a sizable minority of international students are now expecting and preferring to stay and work in their host country, although not necessarily in or around Donegal or Trosms in particular. Thus, from a rural community perspective, the more international students that can be attracted to attend, the more of this source of skilled workers (and citizens) can be retained. That said, the expectations and preferences of domestic students can be somewhat different. Roughly speaking, about two thirds of local students expect to work locally (i.e. in or around Donegal or Trosms) after completing their post-secondary education, but a sizable minority expect and/or prefer to out-migrate. On the other hand, that is offset by the other cohort of domestic students (with a 'non-local' hometown) who are now expecting to stay and work in the vicinity around LYIT or HUC.

The vast majority of individuals surveyed at these two rural PSE institutions view living in a big city as being relatively unimportant. Thus, it can be inferred that many of these would prefer, or at least accept, living in a rural (or commuter) location, if local employment opportunities are acceptable. Both surveys indicated that having the opportunity for advancement, and to a lesser extent, salary, is more important. Hopefully, future studies can try to link students' employment decisions more directly to their perceptions of local employment conditions.

The decision regarding where to work and live after graduation is a complicated one for anyone, and is especially so for young people in a rural location. Young educated workers are an interesting subgroup because their skills provide them with extra power in the labour market, but potentially also higher expectation levels. The main limitation of this study is that it can only capture a fraction of the full set of personal, social, community, economic, and lifestyle factors that can impact the decision-making process facing these individuals. Admittedly, this study can only 'scratch the surface' of that decision, and to raise questions and issues that deserve attention in future research. Another limitation is that only participants from the industrialized world, and from Western/Northern Europe in particular, have been included. Moreover, only descriptive statistics have been used. Finally, some arbitrary

definition of rural and remote must be chosen for any particular study. Critics could argue that the chosen locations are ‘big rural’, or even ‘small urban’, and do not capture the full extent of remoteness that exists. That is true, but in few of those very small and remote locations is there a post-secondary institution! Given these limitations, generalizability of results is not claimed or inferred. Rather, the findings and conclusions merely provide insights into the thinking of these students at these institutions in these relatively rural and remote communities. The current nature of work is complicated, and the only thing certain about the future of work is change and uncertainty. Public policy makers must gather analysis from all available sources, academic and otherwise, to develop remedies to sustain rural communities by retaining some ‘local youth’, to attract at least some ‘outsiders’, and to facilitate members of both groups to develop and utilize their talents. Studies show that some proportion of rural youth will choose to out-migrate. The challenge is to ensure that those wanting to be in a specific rural and remote area, regardless of hometown origin, have opportunities to stay and thrive.

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