

**The Post-School Pathways of Russian-Speaking Students in Ireland**  
**A Longitudinal Study**

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fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy

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## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this dissertation has not been previously submitted as an exercise for a degree, wholly or partially for any other academic award at this or any other university.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the post-school pathways of Russian-speaking young people in Ireland. In the previous two decades, Ireland has experienced exponential growth in immigration. This is due to several co-occurring processes. Firstly, the economic boom known as The Celtic Tiger required a rapid, significant increase in the labour force. Secondly, EU enlargement gave EU citizens the right to take up residency and employment in other EU member states. In addition to returning Irish emigrants, large numbers of economic migrants came from Central and Eastern Europe to Ireland, a sub-set within this group of Eastern European migrants are ethnic minority Russian-speaking migrants. Due to the relatively recent history of immigration Ireland's education system was not necessarily prepared for an influx of migrant students and was ill-equipped to cater for a growing diversity within the student population.

The aim of this study is to explore the decision-making processes involved in post-school planning for Russian-speaking young people in Ireland. Through two waves of interviews I assess the role of the school, family and the individual in decision-making while acknowledging structural and socio-cultural barriers that influence decision-making and post-school planning. To guide the research the study uses Bourdieu's social and cultural reproduction theories in conjunction with rational action theory as the theoretical framework for the study. The research also draws on several theoretical concepts, including agency, resilience, immigrant optimism and temporality which help to give a greater understanding of the nuances and complexity of the processes involved.

The qualitative longitudinal study explores the experiences of 14 Russian-speaking students. Semi-structured interviews were conducted over two waves, first during the students' final year of second-level school and second, approximately one year later when they had made the move from second-level to higher education or the labour market. This is the first longitudinal study of immigrant youth in Ireland.

The three main findings of the dissertation are: first, the cultural capital possessed by Russian-speaking students can be utilised in the Irish education system to increase Leaving Certificate outcomes. Second, parental level of education was a key influence and predictor of academic success for the participants in this research. Finally, above any external influences, personal resilience was the defining feature in making a successful transition from second-level education.

This thesis contributes to our understanding of the post-school pathways of migrant youth in Ireland with specific focus on Russian-speaking students. It raises the issue of studying Russian-speakers as a distinct group within broader migration research on Eastern European economic migrants as there can be additional push factors for migration for Russian-speakers.

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## **List of Acronyms**

CAO: Central Application Office  
CFE: College of Further Education  
CSO: Central Statistics Office  
DARE: Disability Access Route Entry  
DES: Department of Education and Skills  
DEIS: Delivering Equality of Education in Schools  
DIT: Dublin Institute of Technology  
ESRI: Economic and Social Research Institute  
GUI: Growing Up in Ireland: longitudinal study  
HEAR: Higher Education Alternative Route  
LCA: Leaving Certificate Applied  
LCE: Leaving Certificate Established  
LCVP: Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme  
NEET: Not in Education, Employment or Training  
OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development  
PLC: Post-Leaving Certificate Course  
QLS: Qualitative Longitudinal Study  
QLR: Qualitative Longitudinal Research  
QLD: Qualitative Longitudinal Design  
SES: Socio-Economic Status  
STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths  
SUSI: Student Universal Support Ireland  
TAP: Trinity Access Programme  
TCD: Trinity College Dublin  
UCC: University College Cork  
UCD: University College Dublin



## **Chapter 1: The Post-School Pathways of Russian-speakers in Ireland**

The aim of this research is to explore post-school pathways in Ireland, using Russian-speaking students living in Ireland as a case study. The study adopts a qualitative longitudinal methodology. Using this approach allows the research to observe, track and analyse the processes which occur during the final year of second-level school which in turn impact on student's post-school pathways. Through two waves of interviews, first during the final year of second-level school and the second after graduation, the complexity of the decision-making process in the final year of school can be better understood. In-depth qualitative interviews provided data on the main agents involved in the decision-making process: students, parents and school stakeholders. It also enabled examination of the structural and socio-cultural barriers influencing the post-school transitions. Several international studies refer to institutional transitions as a time when students are vulnerable, in particular students from lower socio-economic and minority ethnic groups who are perceived to be potentially more 'at risk' in making the transition (see Darmody et al., 2012, Smyth et al., 2004).

Longitudinal research in the area of post-school pathways in Ireland has so far focussed on the general student population. A longitudinal study that specifically focusses on migrants enhances an understanding of the outcomes of more vulnerable students. While there is now a growing body of literature exploring the experiences of migrants in the Irish educational system (Darmody et al., 2012; Eriksson, 2011; Ni Laoire et al., 2011, Smyth et al., 2009), research to date has not focussed on their trajectories after finishing second-level school. Furthermore, while existing research has focussed on migrant students in general or specific migrant groups such as Poles and Asians (see for example, Szmytkowska, 2011, Pan, 2011, Yau, 2007) some migrant groups – such as Russian-speakers from Eastern Europe have been overlooked, yet they make up a notable number of new arrivals to Ireland. Considering the different entitlements between EU and non-EU migrants, the use of Russian-speakers from Eastern Europe will show the extent to which background and structural factors play a role in outcomes. Within the limited body of literature that exists on Russian-speakers in Ireland, the need for a longitudinal study has been highlighted to explore how cultural socialisation inside and outside the home affects pathways into adulthood (Eriksson, 2011, p. 222). Students from Eastern Europe are often viewed in positive terms by their teachers who report that they have high levels of aptitude and academic ability (Smyth et al., 2009). There has been no longitudinal study which explores the post-school pathways of Eastern European students in Ireland, therefore it is not known whether the perceived academic ability and aptitude of these students translates into realised educational goals, such as a place in university.

## **Social Change in Ireland**

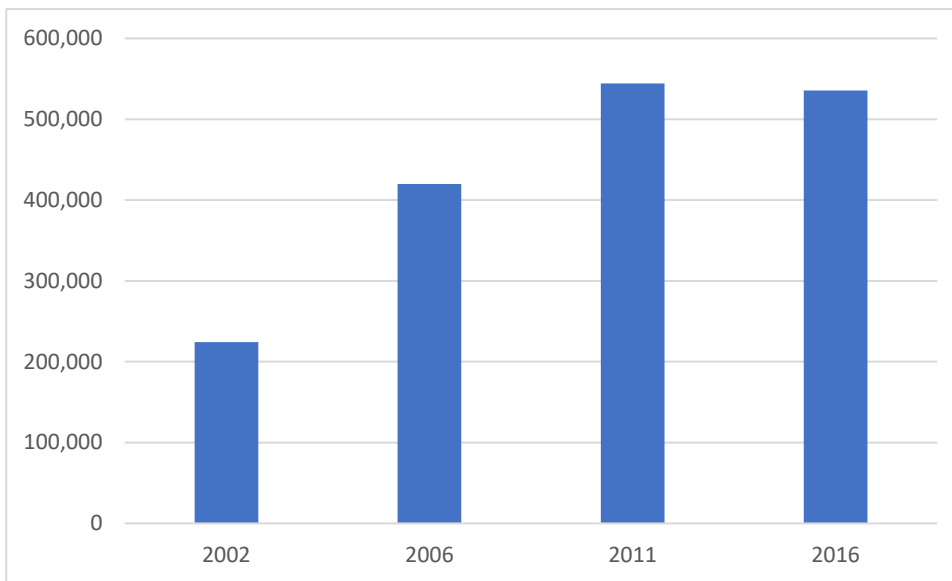
Traditionally Ireland has been a country of net emigration. Ireland's population was in decline due to emigration outflows from the 1840s to the 1950s (Turner, 2010, p. 25). Unlike other countries in Europe, Ireland did not experience the post-war immigration of other parts of Europe (Daly, 2003). In fact, net emigration greatly overshadowed immigration, with up to 40,000 people emigrating each year (Roeder, 2011) and remained a defining feature of Irish society well into the mid-1990s (Mac Einri and White, 2008). Ireland became a net immigration country for the first time according to 1996 census (Mac Einri and Walley, 2003). This notable shift to net immigration can be understood as a result of the improved economic situation in Ireland. A period of rapid economic growth from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s is generally known as the 'Celtic Tiger', which was driven by foreign direct investment (McAleese, 2000). Job creation during that period made Ireland a lucrative destination for migrants as well as returning emigrants. The numbers of returning Irish emigrants were significant, intercensal period data from 2000-2005 show that returning Irish emigrants made up 40 per cent of the total number of immigrants (Mac Einri and White, 2008, p. 153). Inward migration to Ireland increased from less than 20,000 in 1987, to just over 40,000 in 1997 to almost 100,000 in 2007 (CSO, 2008). While these figures show exponential growth in the numbers of immigrants in Ireland, data from the 2006 Census shows that 82 per cent of immigrant came from just ten different countries (OECD, 2009). The biggest shift in the rise of immigration to Ireland coincided with the accession of the ten new member states in 2004. Ireland was one of only three countries to allow new EU citizens full access to the labour market (Roeder, 2011, p. 2). According to Census 2016, there are 122,515 Polish nationals living in Ireland, thus making the Polish community the largest migrant population in Ireland (CSO, 2017). Longitudinal research conducted by Krings et al. on Polish migrants to Ireland highlights the multi-faceted reasons that Polish migrants chose Ireland as a destination. In addition to the economic reasons the study found that Polish migrants particularly those who were younger generation and highly educated saw possibilities for self-development and lifestyle choices as part of their migration journey (Krings et al. 2013). These possibilities were then challenged by the economic recession in Ireland with many Polish migrants facing the complex decision of whether to stay or go. The study found that migrants who viewed their move to Ireland as a temporary employment measure they were more inclined to 'go' back to Poland or move elsewhere. Many participants who had proficiency in English and had meaningful employment were less likely to 'go' and more likely to consider staying in Ireland for the short term at least despite the economic downturn and competition for resources (Krings et al. 2009). Various studies on

Polish migration to Ireland cite the movement post-EU expansion as a mass movement of large-scale immigration (Kropiwiec and King O’Riain, 2006; Krings et al., 2009; Roeder, 2011). At the peak it is suggested that there were up to half a million Poles who had lived or worked in Ireland since 2004 (Roeder, 2011). Ultimately in the case of Polish migrants post-2004, Krings et al. posit that as ‘free movers’ these migrants displayed new patterns in their migration strategies. For example, they did not rely on traditional ‘thick immigrant social networks’ for employment or housing as they were more transient and free to live and work across borders and therefore not reliant on strong ethnic ties (Krings et al., 2013). This pattern differentiates between EU migrants and those from outside the EU who do not have the same rights to live and work within EU member states. While the Polish wave of migration post-2004 could offer insights and share similarities with many Russian-speaking migrants there is a distinction between those Russian-speakers from EU and non-EU countries and therefore the patterns are not directly comparable.

There was also a sharp increase in the numbers of asylum seekers during the ‘Celtic Tiger’. Mac Einri and White (2008) note that only a ‘handful’ of asylum applications were processed in the early 1990’s, this increased to 7,000 applicants in 1999 and peaked at 11,634 in 2002 (Mac Einri and White, 2008, p. 153). Loyal & Allen (2006) connect the rise in asylum applications with the domestic political agenda. During the 1990’s, the ‘liberal period’ saw the introduction of the Refugee Act which expanded the definition of a ‘refugee’ and allowed generous provisions for the re-unification of families. This liberal policy contrasts with the successive U-turns in immigration policy of the later period when domestic politics were dominated by neo-liberal ideologies. The right to work and the provision of services extended to asylum seekers reflected the labour needs of the Irish economy during the height of the economic boom. Legislation and policies in this area acted deliberately as a ‘pull factor’ initially and subsequently as a deterrent in accordance with the demands of the labour market (Loyal & Allen, 2006, pp. 211-230). The country experienced a return to emigration in 2009, as a result of the economic crisis which began in 2008, when net migration to Ireland ended (Gilmartin, 2012). Unemployment increased from five per cent in 2008 up to 15 per cent by 2012 (O’Connell and Joyce, 2014). The economic crisis in Ireland had a disproportionately negative effect on migrant workers, total employment losses for non-Irish nationals were four times higher than for Irish nationals (McGinnity et al., 2011). According to the most recent Census 2016, Ireland has once again returned to net immigration for the first time since 2009 (CSO, 2017). The number of non-Irish nationals living in Ireland has remained relatively stable in

recent years, making up eleven per cent of the population in 2016 a total of 535,475 non-Irish nationals (see Figure 1.1)

**Figure 1.1: Number of non-Irish nationals in Ireland**



Source: CSO (2017)

### **Generation Status**

Amidst this wave of immigration to Ireland, many families migrated with young children who were born in their country of origin and were being raised in Ireland. This generation of children and young people are often referred to in international literature as ‘generation 1.5’. Their parents are referred to as first generation immigrants and younger siblings who were subsequently born in Ireland are second generation immigrants. However for the cohort of children and young people of school-going age who migrated alongside or very soon after their parents it can be argued that it is more accurate to use the term generation 1.5 to explain their positioning within the migration process (Gonzales-Berry et al. 2006). Rumbaut (2008) has created a generational cohort theory in relation to research on Mexican immigrants to the US ranging from first to second generation (see table 1.1). While the use of the term generation 1.5 is most prevalent in US research, it has been used as a concept with Russian migrants to Israel (Remennick, 2003). Literature on generation 1.5 tends to focus on transnationalism and construction of identities. Some research, particularly US based research on immigration, suggests that issues surrounding identity can be more pertinent for generation 1.5 than first and subsequent generations of immigrants as they can be seen as ‘straddling’ two identities, having a hybrid identity or having no ‘fixed’ identity (Remennick, 2003; Plaza, 2006). The idea that it is only immigrant populations that are negotiating hybrid identities is contested. Faas (2010)

argues that identities are fluid, hybrid and multi-layered for natives and migrants alike, constantly negotiated and renegotiated and produced through the productive power of discourse. In addition to the concept of hybrid identities, hyphenated identities for example African-American were seen as a political statement of identity as opposed to the emergence of a ‘new’ identity. Ultimately, Faas (2010) researching in a contemporary European field posits that ‘the notion of hybrid identities is perhaps more accurate when negotiating contemporary identities’ (Faas, 2010, p. 11).

**Table 1.1 Generational Cohort**

<b>Generational Cohort</b>	<b>Age at Immigration</b>	<b>Experiences of life in the host society</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> generation	Arrive in the majority society as adults	Interaction with the majority society depends on nature of employment as not legally obliged to attend educational institutions.
1.25 generation	Arrive typically between the ages of 13 and 17. They may or may not arrive with their families.	They may either attend secondary school in the host country or may enter the workforce directly. Their experiences are hypothesised to be closer to those of the first generation than to those of the 2nd generation.
1.5 generation	Arrive between the ages of 6 and 12	Preadolescent primary school aged children who have begun to read and to write in their native tongue before immigration but whose education is completed in the host country
1.75 generation	Arrive between the ages of 0 and 5.	Educational experiences close to those of the 2nd generation immigrants.
2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	Born in the host country but whose parents immigrated at a later stage of life	

Source: Rumbaut (2008, pp. 349-350)

The experiences of generation 1.5 very often depend on the age and stage of migration and the extent to which they maintain a connection to their country of origin either physically through visits, social media networks or culturally through language maintenance and media. The challenges for Ireland as the receiving country of a cohort of generation 1.5 migrants is that the education system must be able to accommodate a diverse student population who started their education in a different country and who may have little or no proficiency in English. However, this is true for all the generational cohorts featured in Rumbaut’s table (see table 1.1) and not only generation 1.5. The Irish education system has been criticised for its failure to adapt and prepare to offer a coherent plan for migrant students instead it has been criticised for being

reactionary and ‘piece-meal’ in its response to a growing diversity within the system (Devine, 2011; Ledwith and Reilly, 2013). Generation status as a concept is not something that is explicitly explored in Irish and European research it is more prevalent in research from the U.S (see Louie, 2001; Rumbaut, 2008; Perreira, 2015) there is more focus on the education level of migrants at time of arrival and their English language proficiency. Chapter 4 discusses some of the issues encountered by the participants in this study, who technically can all be labelled as generation 1.5 using Rumbaut’s generational cohort theory, enrolling in primary and secondary school in Ireland mid-way through their educational careers.

### **Linguistic Heterogeneity**

Migrants in Ireland are a highly heterogeneous group in terms of countries of origin and languages spoken. Until the 2011 Census the language spoken at home was not recorded in the data. According to the information collected in 2011, there were 514,068 people who spoke a language other than Irish or English at home. Amongst European nationals living in Ireland in 2011, Polish was the most common language with 112,811 speakers, followed by Lithuanian, Russian, Romanian and Latvian (see Table 1.1). According to the 2016 census there are 16,213 non-Irish nationals who speak Russian at home. In addition, there are 5,494 persons with dual-Irish nationality who speak Russian as the primary language at home. This brings the total number of people speaking Russian as a primary language at home to 21,707. If Russian-speakers were to be grouped as one homogenous group, then at 21,707 they would be the fifth largest migrant population in Ireland but due to their heterogeneity they become invisible and are underrepresented in many statistical tables. The need to study Russian-speaking migrant students as a distinct group was highlighted in Tereshchenko’s study of Eastern European migrant students in English schools (2013). In Tereshchenko’s study, there were statistically significant differences in educational attainment of Eastern European migrant students based on their primary language spoken (Tereshchenko, 2013, p. 4). The study found that Russian-speakers are a relatively high achieving group, performing above the national level in the English Baccalaureate. As a result, Tereshchenko suggests that more research is required to find out what causes the significant attainment gaps between different Eastern European language groups (Tereshchenko, 2013, p. 7).

**Table 1.2: Language spoken at home**

<b>Language spoken at home</b>	<b>Total</b>
Polish	135,895



French	54,948
Romanian	36,683
Lithuanian	35,362
Spanish	32,405
German	28,331
Russian	21,707
Portuguese	20,833
Chinese	17,584
Arabic	16,072
Other	212,198

Source: CSO (2017, p. 54)

Although the 2016 census records 21,707 persons who spoke Russian at home only 8.9 per cent of those are Russian nationals. 29.5 per cent were of Irish or dual-Irish nationality, 23 per cent were Latvian nationals, 9.1 per cent were Lithuanian, 4 per cent Estonian and 2.5 per cent Ukrainian (CSO, 2017, p. 54). Research is needed on Russian-speakers living Ireland because this group are at risk of suffering from cultural reductionism. According to Smyth (2011), Russian-speakers as a group ‘are verging on being invisible in contemporary Ireland: all Central or Eastern European countries are misleadingly referred to as ‘accession states’ in public discourse’. A similar situation is found to exist in Britain. According to a study on Russian-speakers in London, there is a relative invisibility which cloaks Russian-speaking migrants because of ‘the tendency of academic work to group together, rather than proliferate into the general sphere of migration studies’ (Malyutina, 2014, p. 110). The distinguishing feature of this group is their shared language, while many other characteristics, for example country of origin, religion, reason for migration often differ. Without a proper understanding of Russian-speakers as a distinct group from the other migrants in Ireland the story of the Eastern European migration to Ireland is misrepresented. Research focussing broadly on countries that were incorporated into the former Soviet Union does not allow for the heterogeneity of the group. Thus, the history of Russian-speakers in the Irish immigration story becomes indistinguishable from any other Eastern European migrants.

### **Religious Affiliation**

The 2006 census recorded some 20,798 Orthodox Christians in the Republic of Ireland. Most of these were members of the Russian Orthodox Church whilst just under a quarter (4,234) belonged to the Romanian Orthodox Church. By 2011 the Orthodox Christian population had

risen to 45,223 reflecting the rise in numbers of immigrants from Latvia, Lithuania and other countries. A religious community has the potential to provide a network which Russian-speaking migrants may not otherwise have. This can be understood as religious social capital a concept Putnam uses to describe the emotional commitment that members of a church have to one another which can be distinct from any ties to theology. According to Putnam, faith communities in which people worship together are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America. Putnam ascribes this to the fact that churches provide an important incubator for civic skills, civic norms, community interests and civic recruitment (Putnam, 2000). Putnam uses the rise of megachurches in the United States to illustrate how religious social capital can be utilised by new migrants to a community, ‘these churches form in places of high mobility, people live there for six weeks and the church provides the community connection’ (Bunting, 2007). Russian-speakers are a heterogeneous group, however, the high numbers of Russian Orthodox Church members in Ireland suggest that a network or community linked by religious affiliation could exist in the absence of other unifying characteristics. This overlooks the fact that while Christian Orthodox religion is prominent in Russian, other religions have prominence across Eastern Europe such as Catholicism in Poland or Protestant Lutheranism in Estonia and Latvia. The variables of religious affiliation throughout Eastern Europe again serves to underline the heterogeneity of Russian-speakers as a group and dilute the seemingly unifying effect of such high numbers of Russian Orthodox Church members in Ireland.

Conducting research with Russian-speakers coming from EU and non-EU countries enables an exploration of the factors which shape experiences and outcomes. Russian-speakers in Ireland have emigrated from a variety of countries. While some (typically from non-EU countries) have needed to apply for work visas, others are EU citizens and therefore have no restrictions in terms of entry into the labour market while yet others have arrived through the asylum process. According to the Census 2016, Russian is the primary language spoken at home by people who have registered their nationality as Russian, Irish or dual Irish, Latvian, Lithuanian, Estonian and Ukrainian. Only 8.9 per cent of those are Russian nationals and the majority at 29.5 per cent were Irish or dual Irish nationals. The status of Russian-speaking migrants coming from non-EU and EU countries is likely to have an impact on their post-school pathways. Non-EU citizens are subject to different requirements, for example they must pay considerably higher fees for tertiary education than EU citizens. Within this group, there is the potential for observing a diversity of pathways due to some students facing structural barriers to further education, higher education and the labour market, while other students from this group may

be facing socio-cultural barriers to their preferred pathway. The varied nature of immigration status and country of origin means that within the Russian-speaking community their experiences of the education system and their post-school pathways can be equally as varied.

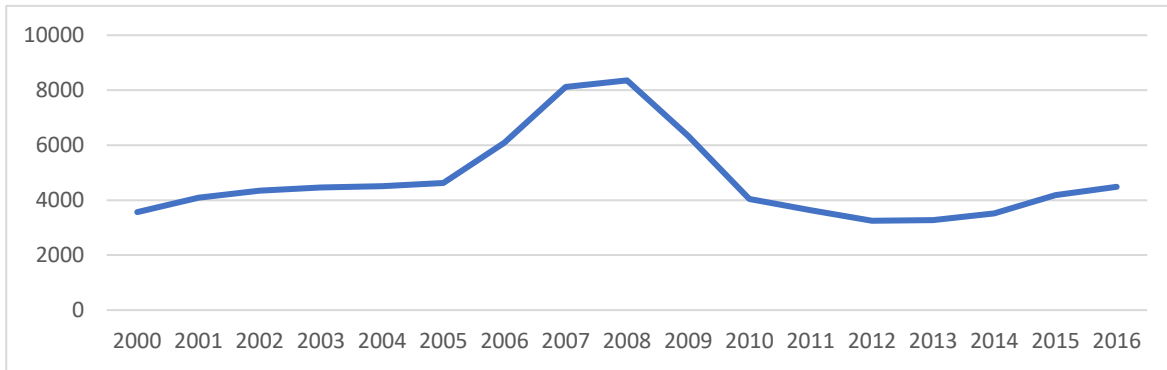
Ireland's migrant children and youth have been the subject of several studies (Smyth et al., 2009; Devine, 2011; Darmody et al., 2011). Much of the literature on migrant youth in the Irish context uses the education system as the focal point (Darmody, 2012, Nestor and Regan, 2011; Curry et al., 2011; Smyth et al., 2009; Devine, 2011). This is a natural starting point as young people spend a large quantity of their time in formal schooling on a daily basis which results in school life, exams, after school activities playing a central role in their daily life. These studies suggest that migrant students are at a disadvantage in the Irish education system as they are more likely to attend a school with DEIS (Delivering Equality of Education in Schools) status and migrant students are among those who leave school early at a higher rate than non-migrant students.

Another reason education features so prominently in the literature is due to the fact that it is a natural recruitment area for researchers gathering qualitative and quantitative data on children and young people. Quantitative data is generally collected using surveys. Such information often provides invaluable base line data or a 'snapshot' of the topic under investigation. Although, useful in identifying general patterns, it has its limitations for example it can be difficult to contextualise the data and explain a phenomenon especially if there is no secondary data available that is related to the study. Qualitative data enables the researcher to get more nuanced information on the topic under investigation. Much of the existing research in Ireland relies on semi-structured interviews because statistical data can prove problematic in the case of migrant populations for example in situations where migrants have arrived illegally they are therefore not accounted for. This is further compounded in the case of migrant children and adolescents. Ni Laoire et al. (2011) highlight a problem when interpreting quantitative data such as census data for migrant children. Children's nationalities are defined in census returns by their parents; therefore, they may not adequately reflect how the children perceive their own identities (Curry et al., 2011; Bushin, 2009; Aptekar, 2009).

Reflecting the migration trends, the diversity of the student population in schools has grown. Figure 1.2 illustrates the number of non-Irish national students entering primary level school from 2000 to 2016. This figure reflects the trend in Figure 1.1 as it shows lower levels in the early 2000s reaching a peak at over 8,000 non-Irish national students in the mid-2000s. The numbers drop from their peak after 2008 and remain at a consistent level ranging between 3,000

to 5,000 from 2010. The numbers remain relatively stable up until 2016 which was the most recent year of statistics available

**Figure 1.2: Entrants to mainstream classes in national school (numbers)**



Source: DES (2016)

### **Irish Education System at Second-level**

In order to contextualise the study, this section provides an overview of the Irish education system at second-level. The decision-making process during second-level school is of particular focus in this study, although there will be discussion on the primary system as some participants migrated to Ireland during their primary education. Voluntary secondary schools cater for the largest proportion of students in Ireland with 374 schools compared to 241 vocational schools and 96 community colleges or comprehensives (see table 1.2). The second-level system in Ireland can be characterised as ‘general’ rather than vocationally specific (Smyth et al., 2011). The Irish education system allows for ‘active’ school choice amongst parents, unlike the UK there is no requirement that young people attend their local school. In Ireland attending a non-local school is quite prevalent across all social groups, however, those from higher professional backgrounds are significantly more likely to be attending a school outside their local area (Byrne and Smyth, 2011, p. 44).

**Table 1.3: Second-level schools in Ireland (numbers)**

Type of School	2016/17
Voluntary Secondary	374
Vocational	241
Community/ comprehensive	96

Source: DES (2017a)

The majority of schools in Ireland cater for 500 students or more, with a small group catering for less than 300 students (see Table 1.3). While larger schools tend to be better equipped with more resources there is the risk of students ‘getting lost’ in the system.

**Table 1.4: School size**

Number of students	Number of schools
Less than 50	11
50-99	12
100-199	72
200-299	97
300-499	179
500+	340

Source: DES (2017a)

Distinctions can be made between second-level schools as they can differ in ethos and values for example religious schools, non-denominational or multi-faith or schools which operate through the Irish language. However, these are not distinct or necessarily defining features of a school. For example, an Irish language school could be multi-faith or denominational, a religious school can differ through enrolment such as single sex or co-educational or have DEIS status or be a fee-paying school. There are only 18 Irish language schools offering second-level education in Ireland (Gaelscoileanna, 2016). Voluntary secondary schools are privately owned or managed by a religious order or Board of Governors with a specific intention or mission, for example religious ethos (Smith, 2006). Vocational schools are state-owned and managed by Education and Training Boards (ETB). Vocational schools were originally established with the intention to provide a technical education and to develop manual skills, this has evolved and VEC schools currently provide academic and practical subjects as well as providing adult and community education courses. Community and comprehensive schools were established in the 1960’s in many cases as an amalgamation of voluntary secondary and vocational schools. Community or comprehensive schools offer a broad curriculum of both academic and vocational subjects for students in their local communities and are managed by boards of management (Darmody and Smyth, 2013).

Each school has the autonomy to create its own admission policy as per the Education Act 1998. Criteria can vary between schools based on living within catchment area, religious beliefs or date of enrolment. A school’s admission policy is subject to the Equality Act 2000-2001 therefore a student cannot be refused on grounds that are deemed to be discriminatory based on the Equality Act. The education sector and admissions policies are currently on the cusp of major overhaul. The Equality Status (Amendment) Act 2017 seeks to amend the earlier act to

ensure that publicly funded schools cannot discriminate against students on the basis of religious beliefs (Oireachtas, 2017).

Within the 711 second-level schools in Ireland there are varying degrees of socio-economic disadvantage (DES, 2017b). The Department of Education created a scheme to assist schools with a high proportion of students coming from low socio-economic status neighbourhoods. This scheme is known as DEIS (Delivering Equality of Education In Schools). Most recent figures for 2017 states there are now 197 second-level schools which have been awarded DEIS status. The scheme recently underwent a review, a new method has been adopted using census data and centrally held data in the Department of Education to map the areas of disadvantage to establish which schools should be awarded DEIS status. This new system resulted in a further 13 second-level schools being added to the scheme for September 2017 (DES, 2017b). Schools which are part of the DEIS scheme have access to a wide range of additional supports including additional funding for books, school meals and home school community liaison services. This is of importance because migrant students in Ireland are mostly enrolled in large urban DEIS schools (Smyth et al., 2009).

The second-level sector consists of two cycles; junior cycle where students typically range from 12-14 years of age and senior cycle where students typically range from 15-18 years of age. The minimum school leaving age in Ireland is 16 years old or after three years of second-level education (junior cycle) whichever is later (Child and Family Agency: Education Welfare Services). The junior cycle consists of first to third year, students sit a state examination at the end of their junior cycle which is their Junior Certificate. Transition year is the fourth year of second-level school. It is available to all schools, the latest figures available from the Department of Education show that there are 550 schools which offer transition year as an option. Depending on the school it can be mandatory or non-compulsory. It is a year for students to bridge the gap between junior and senior cycle with a focus on creative and personal development and is not academically focussed. Students can opt to move from junior certificate straight to fifth year and bypass transition year. The senior cycle consists of fifth and sixth year with the final state examination taking place at the end of sixth year, the Leaving Certificate.

There are several types of Leaving Certificate available to students in Ireland; Leaving Certificate (Established) programme, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). The results from the Leaving Certificate established are used to access further or higher education and the labour market. The LCVP offers a strong vocational programme in addition to the Leaving Certificate established subjects. Students who choose LCVP will also complete two courses; preparation for the world of work and enterprise.

These additional courses are known as link modules and aim to develop vocational, technological and interpersonal skills in students as well as preparing students for the labour market and establishing their own business. The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) is a distinct programme from the Leaving Certificate Established and LCVP. LCA is a two year programme which is aimed at students whose needs, aptitude or aspirations are not catered for in the other two Leaving Certificate options. LCA is a preferred option for students who do not wish to go directly into further or higher education, as such the courses taken over the two years are more directly focussed on training and education for entering the labour market (State Examinations Commission, 2017).

### **Migrant Students in the Irish Education System**

The Irish education system has become more culturally diverse in recent decades (see Figure 1.2). While a spike in entrants to primary level schools can be seen in Figure 1.2 to correlate with the height of the economic boom in Ireland, a consistent number of non-Irish nationals continue to enter the primary education system in Ireland each year.

Migrant students and their families can face more challenges when navigating the education system. The Irish system may be unfamiliar to parents who have not come through the system themselves and they may not be aware of the choices or pathways available (Devine, 2011). Research suggests that there is an achievement gap between migrant and non-migrant students in the Irish education system. This gap could be attributed to the barriers and obstacles facing migrant families surrounding educational decision-making and school choice (Ledwith and Reilly, 2013). Teacher's perceptions of migrant students' ability can also play a role in their students' outcomes. International literature suggests a narrative that Asian students are considered to be a 'model minority' or 'model immigrants' with teachers' perceptions of this group being high achievers, good students and well behaved' (Nowlan, 2015, p. 107). A study in Irish second-level schools found that teachers often praised the work ethic and behaviour of newcomer migrant students in their classroom, they were especially positive about the aptitude and ability of migrant students from Eastern Europe when compared to other migrant groups such as African or Asian migrants (Smyth et al., 2009, p. 27). The Smyth et al. (2009) study attributes this difference in attitude to class and race based perceptions. This illustrates how teachers' beliefs can shape a student's educational journey and their educational outcomes. Similarly, Nowlan and Devine (2016) conducted research on minority ethnic immigrants in secondary schools in Ireland and found that 'there was evidence that some students' minority ethnic identifications impacted positively on perceptions of their academic ability, and

suggestions that there were beneficial elements to subjectification as Asian' (Nowlan and Devine, 2016). Research suggests that low levels of migrant academic achievement can be explained by migrant families' lower socio-economic position. However, while migrants' backgrounds and countries of origin differ so vastly it can be difficult to ascribe outcomes to one indicator alone such as social class. There is evidence to suggest that a mother's education level can be a strong influence on their child's education outcomes (McGinnity et al., 2015). The social and cultural capital possessed by migrant families does not necessarily travel to the country they migrate to which can create another level of disadvantage. Research in an Irish context found that the biggest gap in English reading skills was amongst East European students and that their parents had the lowest proficiency in the English language. Since the parents are not proficient in English the research found that they were less likely to engage with their child's academic work or engage with cultural activities such as reading in English. As a result of the parents limited cultural capital there was a direct negative impact on their child's academic achievement as verified by their low reading scores (McGinnity et al., 2015).

There is evidence to suggest that migrant students are at a disadvantage in the Irish education system. For example, migrant students are more likely to be attending a designated disadvantaged school (a school with DEIS status) than non-migrant students (Byrne et al., 2010). Ledwith and Reilly (2013) found that foreign born children of foreign born parents are almost nine times more likely to attend a DEIS school than their non-migrant peers (Ledwith and Reilly, 2013, p. 57). In addition, issues have been raised surrounding segregation and clustering of migrant students in certain schools. Statistics from the Department of Education show that 23 per cent of schools cater for four out of five migrant children in Ireland (Duncan and Humphreys, 2015).

Migrant students are represented across the three Leaving Certificate programmes on offer, however there is a higher proportion of migrant students on the Leaving Certificate Established programme compared to their Irish national peers and less of an uptake on LCVP and LCA options (see Table 1.4). Each type of Leaving Certificate programme has a different profile, for example there is no direct third level entry from LCA.

**Table 1.5: Irish National and Migrant students in Leaving Certificate programmes 2001-2008 (Percentages)**

<b>Programme</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>
<b>Leaving Certificate</b>								
Migrants	72	70	68	68	67	68	67	66
Irish Nationals	62	61	61	60	59	59	59	59



<b>LCVP</b>								
Migrants	22	24	25	25	26	24	26	27
Irish Nationals	28	29	29	30	32	31	32	32
<b>LCA</b>								
Migrants	3	4	4	4	5	6	5	5
Irish Nationals	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7

Source: DES, 2011

This data suggests that migrant students in Ireland are more likely to be following the most academic option available however, recent research suggests that migrant students are more likely to be streamed into lower ability classes (Smyth et al., 2009). Therefore it is possible that while migrant students are over-represented in the Leaving Certificate established programme they are likely to be in lower level classes than their Irish peers. In certain circumstances their immigration status may act as a barrier when applying for jobs or access to third level institutions<sup>1</sup>. Migrant students from EU countries are required to pay the same fees as Irish students. Each institution has its own pricing structure for non-EU students, in some cases this can be up to three times as much for their courses compared to EU students. For non-EU students third level fees can be prohibitively expensive compared to EU counterparts (Citizens Information, 2017).

### **Inequality and Marginalisation**

The potential post-school pathways for a student are dependent on many factors. Structural inequalities such as poverty and discrimination play a key role, familial habitus can influence potential pathways from early childhood, the location of the family within the broader social context as well as the socio-economic status of the school attended can also create institutional barriers for students (Mc Coy et al., 2014; Smyth et al., 2011; Frigo et al., 2007). In this way, it can be understood how students who are disadvantaged or marginalised within the school system continue to be at a disadvantage in their post-school planning. As the cumulative nature of their disadvantage increases, their choices of post-school pathways become more eroded and limited. Students living in disadvantaged areas and coming from low socio-economic status households are likely to be disadvantaged within the education system. Parents who may not have attended higher education themselves or are new to the country with little knowledge of the Irish system are at a clear disadvantage in guiding their children's post school pathways. Some migrant families find themselves in a juxtaposing position of living in a disadvantaged

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<sup>1</sup> In Ireland, third level institutions refer to universities, colleges and institutes of technology.

area, working a low-paid unskilled job but having a high level of education (Devine, 2011; Darmody, 2012). This juxtaposition is discussed throughout Chapter 4 and 5 because some of the participants in this research are in this position. It is interesting to note the different approaches they take in response to this imbalance. Russian-speaking families from Latvia and Lithuania may have already experienced marginalisation in their country of origin which could have acted as a contributory factor for migration. There is some evidence to suggest that Russian-speakers in both countries have experienced their rights and language being diminished (Hughes, 2005). This issue is discussed in depth in Chapter 4 which explores the migration experience of Russian-speakers from Latvia and Lithuania versus those from other Eastern European countries in this study<sup>2</sup>.

The socio-economic status of the school attended cannot be underestimated as an influence on post-school pathways. There is strong evidence to suggest that the school social mix is more powerful than any other factor in influencing the post-school pathways of students (Smyth et al., 2014). Through the use of streaming into lower ability classes<sup>3</sup> and a programme such as Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), not all students are afforded the same opportunities to compete for a place in higher education. Students from migrant families are more likely to be streamed into lower level classes because of their perceived ‘deficiencies’ for example language ability (Darmody et al., 2012, p. 8). Working class students are over-represented in LCA compared to their middle or upper-class peers and these students are less likely to plan to go to higher education due to the nature of the programme (Smyth et al., 2011). From this, it can be observed that a channelling of students into lower streams and the LCA programme is likely to limit their choice of post-school pathway from university courses to Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) colleges.

The issue of inequality and marginalisation is of importance because OECD research has found that in an increasingly competitive labour market, it is those with multiple disadvantages who are likely to face the greatest difficulties (Scarpetta et al., 2010). Participants in this study were planning their post-school pathways within the context of having experienced institutional transition which for some students may pose problems (Smyth et al., 2004). In addition, these

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<sup>2</sup> When the Baltic states regained independence in the 1990s, the Russian Federation established a right to return programme for the Russian-speaking diaspora in these countries. Only a small percentage of Russian-speakers returned with sizeable numbers remaining in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. Aptekar (2009) notes that Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltic States are among the most sizeable minority populations in the European Union.

<sup>3</sup> The core Junior Certificate subjects Irish, English and Maths can be studied at higher, ordinary or foundation level. All other subjects can be studied at higher or ordinary level, with the exception of Civic, Social and Political Education which is set at a common level. If a student studies a subject at ordinary or foundation level for the Junior Certificate it generally means they cannot study this subject at higher level for the Leaving Certificate.

students did not have English as their first language, their parents may have had no knowledge of the Irish education system and in some cases, were living in socio-economically disadvantaged areas and attending designated disadvantaged schools.

### **Aspirations: Decision Making and Post-School Planning**

Decisions made for post-school pathways and during the post-school planning process evolve from aspirations. A person's aspirations develop out of past experiences and vision for the future and are bound by structural factors such as social background, parents' level of education and minority status (Hegna, 2013; Frigo et al., 2007). In addition to the structural factors there are many socio-cultural factors which are addressed in this study that shape students' aspirations and influence the decision-making process. Research conducted in the UK which explored the dynamics of educational decision-making within families dispelled some popular misconceptions in the area. For example, what is widely regarded to be disengagement by working class families in the choice process can be better understood as a powerlessness within the education system that directly reflects their lack of power in wider social contexts (Reay and Ball, 1998, p. 434). This perceived disengagement, which masks powerlessness, could give rise to the idea that some parents were not interested in their child's education or post-school pathways. However, it is likely that they were exhibiting the behaviours observed by Reay and Ball (1998) in the UK. Reay and Ball (1998) also found that the child becomes the 'expert' in decision-making process in working-class families due to the fact that they have gone further in the education system than their parent(s). Devine (2003) also references powerlessness amongst students within the education system, drawing on the power dynamics between adults and children to explain the power dynamic in the teacher-student relationship. This dynamic within a school environment reinforces the power of the teacher whilst students reported that they held little power in their relations with teachers (Devine, 2003). The findings from Devine's (2003) study can be used to draw parallels with Reay and Ball (1998) by understanding how a working-class parent with low levels of education can feel that they hold little power in the relationship with their child's school or their child's teacher.

It is important to understand how educational aspirations can become reduced over the course of a school career. In the Irish system, subject choices made in first year can impact the options for post-school pathways (Darmody, 2012; Smyth et al., 2011; Gillborn, 2010). As previously mentioned, if a school does not offer all subjects at higher level or offer a European language it curtails the aspirations of its students and reduces the number of post-school pathways available. This is particularly relevant in the case of migrant students who may have arrived in

Ireland late in their second-level school career and had their subjects and levels determined for them by teachers based on their language ability (see Darmody et al., 2012). Low socio-economic status students and migrant students are likely to be more reliant on formal guidance from their schools in post-school planning, possibly because their parents have limited or no experience with higher education or in the case of migrant students their parents may lack knowledge of the Irish system and the requirements. Smyth and Banks (2012) found clear distinctions in the type of guidance offered to students in a disadvantaged school and those attending a fee-paying school. In the fee-paying school, guidance and the high expectational culture actively encouraged its students to pursue a university pathway, with one student noting ‘there was never really any question of anything else’ (Smyth and Banks, 2012, p. 265). In contrast, guidance in the disadvantaged school was found to be clearly favouring PLC courses. The only official open-day visits for post-school education organised by the school was for PLC Colleges and none for Universities or Institutes of Technology. As a result of the low expectational culture in this school, 37 per cent of students were expecting to do a PLC course after school (Smyth and Banks, 2012, p. 275). The reluctance of a school to organise open-day visits for its students to a diverse mix of further and higher education institutions undoubtedly influences the aspirations of its students and in turn the decisions made for their post-school pathways.

Having considered how structural and institutional factors impact educational aspirations, it is important to acknowledge the role of parents. Frigo et al. (2007) found that family or more specifically the social capital held by a family is the most significant influence in students’ futures. Within families there can be a mismatch of aspirations, for example if a student wishes to pursue higher education but there is no history of this in their family the emotional support may not be there. In contrast, some parents may have higher aspirations for their children than the pathways being encouraged by the school they attend. There is a lot of international literature which shows that first generation immigrants tend to have higher educational aspirations than their non-migrant peers (Sweet et al., 2010; Crosnoe and Lopez-Turley, 2011). In the case of Russian-speakers in Ireland it appears that they have high educational aspirations for themselves and their children. This is in keeping with findings from Tereshchenko (2013, p. 4) which found that Eastern European families have a strong impact on aspirations and engagement with education (Tereshchenko, 2013, p. 4). Research conducted with Russian-speaking parents in Ireland suggests that Russian-speaking parents strongly supported their children to be as fluent as possible in the Russian language (Kraftsoff and Quinn, 2009). While this desire for language maintenance may be linked to culture and history there is also evidence

to suggest that it is closely linked to educational aspirations in the Irish education system. Another study of Russian-speakers in Ireland suggests that the main motivation for students to maintain their Russian language proficiency is to give them a better chance of ‘getting high results helping them to enrol into prestigious tertiary education institutions’ (Eriksson, 2011, p. 115). This is evident in the results achieved by Russian-speakers in the Leaving Certificate. In 2014, 292 students sat the Russian Leaving Certificate paper. Of these students 97.5 per cent achieved an honours grade and within that 82.5 per cent of students who sat the Russian language paper achieved an A grade (McGuire, 2014). This was the highest proportion of A grades out of all the Leaving Certificate subjects taken in 2014. Considering that Russian is not taught as a Leaving Certificate subject (it was added to the list of foreign language exams in 2003) this indicates that students taking this paper are most likely native speakers who are studying in their own time with the support of Russian language schools at the weekend. This indicates that there are high levels of educational aspirations amongst Russian-speaking students and support coming from their family. The link between language maintenance and attending additional classes also highlights how aspirations can be limited or at least influenced by the economic capital possessed by a family.

It is important to note the role that gender plays in the formation of educational aspirations and underscore this with how gender and immigration intersect to influence educational aspirations. Research in the UK indicates that girls have higher educational aspirations than boys during secondary school, with girls outperforming boys in GCSE exams since the 1970s (Rampino and Taylor, 2013). Boys from low socio-economic status households and minority ethnic families have particularly low aspirations (Rampino and Taylor, 2013). Research on immigrant groups in the US found emerging gendered patterns with girls outperforming boys in academic settings across various ethnic groups (Baolian Qin, 2006). The difficulty for researchers is to disentangle the influences of gender from social class and immigrant status in order to effectively state the extent to which gender as a standalone factor influences educational aspirations. Influences between gender and educational aspirations can be fostered in the home through the socialisation patterns of parents towards their children, the type of school attended whether it be co-educational or single sex as well as teachers’ perceptions of certain subjects promoting different subjects, courses and pathways for male and female students.

Finally, the aspirations of the students themselves are influenced by the aspirations of school staff and those of their family and peer group. The peer group has a particularly strong influence, as previously mentioned school social mix is a strong predictor of post-school pathways over and above other influences such as social status of the family and parental

education level (Smyth et al. 2014). Students may be less likely to pursue a pathway which is unfamiliar to their family, community or school tradition. There can be a reluctance, particularly among students from low-SES neighbourhoods to follow unfamiliar routes or take a risk by stepping outside of the norm. Rather, these students are more likely to attend their local school and continue on to their local PLC College or work within their immediate locality (Green and White, 2008; Henderson, 2007).

This section has explored the structural, institutional and socio-cultural barriers which can reduce a student's educational aspirations. It must be noted as a caveat that first generation immigrants can defy these 'barriers' to maintain higher than average aspirations despite the presence of negative influences on their education. Research conducted in Irish second-level schools found that over half of principals rated migrant students higher than Irish students on both motivation and educational aspiration (Darmody et al., 2012). This is a global trend which is sometimes attributed to 'immigrant optimism' (see Chapter 2) where aspirations of migrant families and their children are higher than their native peers (Storen, 2011). Darmody (2012) found that principals may have noted the higher levels of aspirations and motivation, however, teaching staff expressed concern about the academic progression of migrant students once they finish second-level school. This concern about progression indicates that the aspirations of migrant students may be heavily reliant on the safety-net and support of their school. This situation has been found in a longitudinal study of youth in Norway which showed that low-SES youth in general reduced their aspirations to a greater extent than high-SES youth after finishing high school (Hegna, 2013, p. 594), suggesting that their aspirations were heavily reliant on the support structure of the school environment.

### **Contemporary Pathways and the Associated Difficulties**

Internationally, there have been several key difficulties noted in the area of post-school pathways for school leavers of immigrant and non-immigrant background in the last decade. The nature of post-school pathways has changed from a linear pattern to more diverse and divergent routes. This adds a layer of uncertainty to the path ahead for students (Raffe, 2010; Cotterell, 2007, Frigo et al., 2007). This phenomenon of 'academic drift' where students are moving away from traditional vocational and apprentice style courses to more general studies poses a problem for young school leavers (Raffe, 2010; Wallace and Kovatcheva, 1998). Considering this new phenomenon, there is an intergenerational element which can compound the difficulty facing students in choosing a pathway. Research conducted on second generation Russian migrants in Israel found that disagreement with parents was a key factor regarding

future career plans, particularly when the students' plans were in opposition to the unanimous family preference for science-based occupations (Eisikovits, 2014, p. 6).

Traditional pathways such as apprenticeships can become quickly outdated or undesirable during periods of rapid change (Raffe, 2010). For example, during the recession in Ireland the severe downturn in the construction sector was reflected in a striking growth in the number of unemployed individuals with a PLC level qualification including apprenticeships (Bergin et al., 2014). By recognising that the stability of 'traditional' pathways no longer exists, students choosing a more general course of study may also discover that this does not offer a direct inroad to the labour market and become dissatisfied with their choices. This is reflected in findings which show that almost half of school leavers in Ireland expressed regrets about the pathway they had taken (McCoy et al., 2014). Such high levels of students reporting regrets raises questions around guidance provision in school and the fact that there is such a high emphasis placed on getting a third level education.

As mentioned in the previous section, students from migrant families and those attending designated disadvantaged schools rely more heavily on formal guidance for their post-school planning. Since 2011, there have been major cuts to guidance provision in schools in Ireland. The Institute for Guidance Counsellors described the service as 'decimated' (McLoughlin, 2016). The Education Act 1998 states that guidance in schools has several functions:

Guidance in schools refers to a range of learning experiences provided in a developmental sequence, that assist students to develop self-management skills which will lead to effective choices and decisions about their lives. It encompasses three separate but interlinked areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and guidance (Education Act, 1998).

It is clear from the Education Act 1998, that guidance provision is an integral part of the decision-making process for students. In this new era of contemporary pathways where there are more choices but not necessarily more stability, it is important for students to receive support and guidance during their senior cycle at school. This is even more so the case for migrant students or students attending designated disadvantaged schools. Therefore, the cuts to guidance provision have a more adverse effect on these students which is an illustration of cumulative disadvantage a concept that will be explored in detail in Chapter 2.

### **Migrant Students and Post-School Planning: An International Perspective**

There is growing international research on the experience of immigrant students in the education system. As previously noted in this chapter, Ireland has a relatively short history of immigration when compared to countries such as the U.S. and Australia. As such, literature

from countries with longer histories of immigration also have more research on immigrant students in their education systems. Research on immigrants in the education system tends to focus on second-level education (Ochocka, 2006; Perreira and Spees, 2015; Suarez-Orozco, 2015; Rerak-Zampou, 2016; Kalalahti et al., 2017). More recently there has been a trend to try and understand students of immigrant origin's transition from compulsory schooling to third level education or the labour market (Sweet et al., 2009; Ait-Said et al., 2009; Froy and Pyne, 2011; Dag-Tjaden, 2013; Lagana et al., 2014;). This is of growing importance as young people with immigrant backgrounds are more likely to be unemployed than native youth in almost all OECD countries (Froy and Pyne, 2011). The economic recession in Ireland had a negative impact on the post-school pathways of young people. The proportion of young people not in employment, education or training in Ireland rose sharply during the period of recession. The rate of young people not in employment, education or training was at a comparatively average level of eleven per cent until 2007 and rose to 22 per cent by 2011 (OECD, 2016, p. 1). Kelly et al. (2014) found that Irish national youths were more likely to exit unemployment and enter employment than non-Irish national youths during the recession. The recession in Ireland was part of a global economic downturn which negatively impacted the employment outcomes for youth in general, however, this was intensified for immigrant youth (Froy and Pyne, 2011).

There is evidence to suggest that migrant students in an Irish context are facing some forms structural racism on their post-school journey to college and/ or the labour market. Research conducted in University College Cork (UCC) suggests that immigrant students are experiencing institutional racism within the education system. Institutionalised racism in this context refers to 'a system which has developed over time and operates 'routinely' as part of a system that appears to be neutral and universally beneficial something which education systems are generally assumed to be' (Kitching and Curtin, 2012). Teachers perceptions of immigrant students based on their country of origin was found to be a key factor in the experience of structural racism experienced by migrant students for example, 'racist and classed geographies are now legally differentiating between (productive) citizen worker and (burdensome) non-citizen worker across 'Fortress Europe' (Kitching and Curtin, 2012). This structural racism is amplified in the case of young migrant students in the asylum system in Ireland where children face significant barriers to social inclusion. Asylum seeking children living in direct provision centres were classified as being 'subject to 'a form of apartheid' whereby they are compelled to live apart from the majority community without the structures to interact with the native population' (Fanning, 2001, p. 67). Certain school enrolment policies, higher college fees for non-EU students, inefficient guidance provision for migrant students and students in the asylum



system not being eligible for higher level education are all further examples of institutionalised racism and will be discussed in relation to the Russian-speaking participants throughout the data chapters 4, 5 and 6 in this thesis.

There are many approaches taken to understand the post-school pathways of immigrant youth which vary in theoretical underpinnings and methodological frameworks. For example, some studies aim to explain the process by placing emphasis on the generation status of the students and arguing that first generation immigrants have higher aspirations than subsequent generations (Lagana et al. 2014). Other studies focus on ethnicity or nativity by highlighting the disparity between the consistently high aspirations found amongst some migrant groups, for example Chinese migrants (Sweet et al. 2009), compared with migrant groups that are found to underperform in the education system for example Latina/o migrants in the U.S. (Perreira and Spees, 2015; McWhirter et al., 2013). Longitudinal studies are popular in youth research as they allow for scope to revisit the same cohort of students and track their success or failure over a period of time (see for example Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2002) for the largest ongoing study of immigrant children and their families in the U.S.). The continuous investment and commitment required by a longitudinal study means that although they are popular they are limited in number. Many studies advocate the concept of cumulative disadvantage, a concept which has been used in Irish research on migrant students (see Darmody et al. 2012). In an international context, cumulative disadvantage is understood as intersectionality, that is to say, the intersection at which multiple levels of disadvantage meet. There is a general consensus in the literature that ethnicity and nativity influence immigrant students' educational achievement (Sweet et al., 2010; Ait-Said et al., 2009; Perreira and Spees, 2015; Suarez-Orozco, 2015), as one study noted immigrant students can be among the most advantaged and least advantaged groups in society (Suarez-Orozco, 2015). This reflects a nuanced and complex reality whereby some immigrant groups are at a strong disadvantage in the education system and represent a high proportion of early school leavers and those who are NEET (Froy and Pyne, 2011; Darmody et al. 2012; Perreira and Spees, 2015). This disadvantage is in comparison to groups of immigrant students who consistently outperform their native peers, for example Asian immigrants in the U.S., with high proportions continuing their education to university and postgraduate levels of education (Sweet et al., 2010; Rerak-Zampou, 2016). Therefore, in the growing body of literature on post-school pathways of immigrant youth there is a persistent focus on this schism. The aim of many studies has been to explain this differentiation between migrant groups in an attempt to understand their divergent trajectories. One of the main explanations offered throughout the literature is that the level of social capital possessed by the

family is a crucial indicator of educational success. For example, Lareau (2003) found that social class had a stronger influence than race or ethnicity on the advantages and benefits that some families possess over others. Social capital will be discussed alongside social and cultural reproduction theories in Chapter 2. Socio-economic background factors such as parental wealth, education and occupation all translate into social capital and in turn influence the educational pathways of the children in the family (Sweet et al., 2010; Ait-Said et al., 2009; Lagana et al., 2014; Sandin-Esteban and Sanchez Marti, 2014). In some of the literature there is a tendency to separate immigrant groups into those who are self-selected economic migrants (Szmytkowska, 2011; Rerak-Zampou, 2016) versus those who are escaping war, conflict and violence in their country of origin (Ait-Said et al., 2009). In research conducted in the U.S. a similar thread can be seen in literature which focuses on authorized immigrants versus non-authorized immigrants and the differences in their educational achievements and outcomes (Perreira and Spees, 2015; McWhirter et al. 2013). A possible explanation for this division of ‘types’ of immigrants is that migrants fleeing conflict are much less likely to trust in government institutions and thus do not believe that school is a ‘way out’ for their children (Ait-Said et al. 2009). For unauthorized immigrant students, there can be a number of anticipated barriers to continue their education. As a result, research indicates that these students lower their educational expectations and therefore have poorer educational outcomes than self-selected or authorised immigrants (McWhirter et al., 2013). However, for self-selected immigrants in a global context education has been a viable route to upward mobility for generations of immigrants (Crosnoe and Lopez-Turley, 2011). The act of migration for self-selected migrants can be understood as the pursuit of intergenerational social mobility (Teney et l. 2015).

Another distinction which is frequently made in the literature to explain educational achievements of immigrant groups is their generation status (Lagana et al. 2014; Suarez-Orozco, 2015). Generation status is closely linked to the concept of immigrant optimism. Some studies have sought to explain how first-generation immigrants with low levels of social capital and facing a language barrier can outperform their native peers in the education system (Crosnoe and Lopez-Turley, 2011; Sweet et al. 2009). Consequently, studies have also been carried out to understand how first-generation immigrants outperform subsequent generations of the same ethnicity or country of origin who possess higher levels of social capital and do not face the same language barriers as their first-generation counterparts (Suarez-Orozco, 2015; Sweet et al., 2010). Immigrant optimism as a concept is used in the literature to explain this juxtaposition. Suarez-Orozco (2015) presents the argument that first-generation immigrants

may compare their lives in their destination country to the circumstances their families left behind. This can act as a motivation and offer hope or ‘optimism’ which later generations cannot draw upon as points of reference (Suarez-Orozco, 2015, p.4). Since the second and third generation immigrants lack these ‘points of reference’ their optimism tapers off and does not offer the same motivation. Thus, the high aspirations to attend university that are prevalent amongst some first-generation groups are not as common amongst subsequent generations

## **Research Questions**

While Eriksson’s (2011) research on Russian-speaking students in Ireland is comprehensive inside the classroom environment, there is no information available on what happens when migrant students move on after finishing second-level school. Research suggests that students from lower income and minority ethnic groups in Ireland are potentially more ‘at risk’ and have more difficulties in making the transition from primary to second-level than their peers (Smyth, 2017, p. 1). Therefore, there is a need for research on how young migrant students in Ireland experience the transition from second-level to post-school education and the labour market (Darmody, 2012). This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1. To what extent do economic, political and socio-cultural factors influence Russian-speaking families to migrate from their country of origin to Ireland?*
- 2. To what extent do Russian-speaking students and their families face inequality, marginalisation or disadvantage in the education system and how does this impact on their educational careers?*
- 3. How important are personal factors such as length of stay in Ireland and English language proficiency versus institutional factors such as guidance provision in shaping Russian-speakers’ transition from compulsory schooling to higher education/labour market?*

By answering these research questions, the multi-faceted transitions that Russian-speaking students make after leaving school can be better understood. The influence of migration on their decision-making and futures, the preparedness of Russian-speaking students for their post-school pathways; whether they feel they had sufficient information and guidance to choose their pathways and to what extent their choices were influenced by structural and socio-cultural factors.

## **Structure of the Dissertation**

Following this Introduction, Chapter 2 is the theoretical and conceptual framework which discusses the influence of migration on educational decision-making and post-school planning by focussing on social and cultural reproduction theories and rational action theory. Surrounding these theories there is discussion around the influence of migration by using the push-pull model and the concepts of agency and resilience to explain how varied the experiences and pathways can be. Chapter 3 puts forth the research design and methodology for researching the post-school pathways of Russian-speaking young people in Ireland.

Chapter 4 focusses on the migration experience. There is discussion of the reasons for migration, expectations of life in Ireland and experience in the education system. It also provides an insight into the issue of language maintenance amongst Russian-speaking families. Chapter 5 examines the decision-making process within the education system, beginning with choosing a school, deciding which subjects and level to take for exams and post-school planning. This chapter explores the key influencers in the decision-making process and other structural influences which can determine a student's post-school pathways. Chapter 6 explores the post-school transitions of the students based on the second wave of data collected. This includes the institutions they moved to, how they have adjusted academically and socially. There is also space given in this chapter for the participants to be reflexive, and share their own perspectives on their experiences. In Chapter 7, I offer a critical analysis of the methodology and the theoretical framework and analysis of the themes. I highlight the contribution of this study to the gaps in the current research on Russian-speakers in Ireland and to the broader research on post-school pathways to which this study provides data on minority youth.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

This research seeks to understand how Russian-speaking students in Ireland make the transition from second-level school to higher education and/or the labour market. It is important to identify at the outset of this chapter that there is no single, one size fits all theory which explains the different processes occurring in this research. Russian-speakers in Ireland are a heterogeneous group with different nationalities, histories and political backgrounds. This research has three focal points: migration, decision-making in the education system and post-school transition.

The theoretical framework for this thesis begins to explain the push-pull factors of migration with specific reference to reasons which contribute to Russian-speakers migrating from Eastern Europe to Ireland. The chapter then offers an overview of temporality as a conceptual tool and indicates how it will be used throughout this thesis. Bourdieu's social and cultural reproduction theories are used in conjunction with rational action theory. Both theories offer differing perspectives which facilitates a more holistic understanding of the decision-making surrounding migration and post-school planning processes. The following part of this chapter will move to rational action theory also known as a rational choice model. The rational action theory section will focus on the pragmatic decisions taken by families who have migrated from their country of origin in order to achieve the ambitions and goals they have set for themselves and their children. Rational action theory offers a key perspective in understanding educational decision-making and post-school planning as it provides an insight into the thought processes and judgements which are utilised to achieve their desired goals. This chapter will then explore the concept of agency. A thorough understanding of agency is pivotal when researching young people's lives. Bourdieu's social and cultural reproduction theories are criticised for being too deterministic and underestimating the power of the individual (Jenkins, 1982). The rational action/choice model is explored mainly from the parents' perspective because of the nature of the parent-child power dynamic, therefore it is important to understand child/youth agency and bounded agency in this context. The next section explores two key concepts; agency and resilience which are central to understanding the position of the young person at the centre of the decision-making processes around education and post-school planning. By questioning the level of agency possessed by a student during their post-school planning and decision-making this adds an important dimension to the overall understanding of the process. This chapter will move from the concept of agency to the concept of resilience which again will build an understanding of the students' personal experience during the transition from second-level school to higher education and the labour market. In the final section, I summarise the

theoretical and conceptual framework before moving to Chapter 3 which outlines the research design and methodological approach to researching the post-school pathways of Russian-speaking young people in Ireland. The aim of this chapter is to show how the different theories and concepts interlink to shape Russian-speaking young peoples' pathways.

### **Push-Pull Factors for Migration**

Classical push-pull approaches can be used to explain the motivation for migration. Traditionally they outline the negative 'push' factors of the sending country and highlight the positive 'pull' factors of the receiving country (Castles and Miller, 2009; Datta, 2004). This classical model works best for explaining economic reasons for migration, for example, high unemployment in sending country versus labour shortage in receiving country. Through a push-pull approach, the push of economic necessity in the sending country is contrasted with the pull of opportunity in the receiving country (Watson, 1977). In addition to economic necessity there are other conditions such as political and social issues at play, for example, marginalisation, discrimination and denial of citizen's rights. These issues can also act as a catalyst for migration particularly in the case of Russian-speakers migrating from Eastern Europe. It is important to understand this additional layer of 'push' factors in order to comprehend the climate in which the participants in this research migrated from their country of origin to Ireland. There are participants in this research who have migrated from Latvia and Lithuania. Successive governments in Latvia and Lithuania (as well as Estonia) have supported a nationalisation project which Russian-speakers perceive to be discriminatory towards them. It has been suggested that key policy decisions have diminished the rights of Russian-speaking minorities in these countries which include, conditional granting of citizenship, cultural subordination and restriction of participation in political and economic life linked to poor proficiency in the state language (Hughes, 2005, p. 3). Some authors argue that government regimes in these Baltic countries have made emigration rather than integration<sup>4</sup> a more attractive option for some Russian-speakers (Aptekar, 2004; Hughes, 2005). Whilst this has been contested (for example, in 1997 the European Commission stated that 'on the whole the rights of Russian-speaking minorities are safeguarded') this is still a controversial topic as these 'safeguards' have been criticised as inadequate (Van Elsuwege, 2004, p. 1). It is important to note the 'pull' factors which made Ireland seem an attractive destination for Russian-speaking migrants from Eastern

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<sup>4</sup> The concept of integration has been used sparingly throughout this thesis as it is acknowledged to be a 'loaded' concept which does not necessarily reflect a holistic representation of that migrants' experience in a new country. Despite claims that integration is a two-way process, there are asymmetric power relations between migrants and the host society that often result in the onus for integration being placed solely on migrants (Feldman et al., 2008, p. 4).

European countries. Ireland's rapidly growing economy from 1993 to 2007 saw an increase in employment by 77 per cent. The demand for labour increased immigration in Ireland on a large scale. The majority of non-European Economic Area (EEA) nationals coming to Ireland to work pre-EU enlargement were permit holders. The total number of work permits issued between 1999 and 2003 increased by 800 per cent (Smyth et al., 2009). There was a marked drop in the issuing of work permits following the accession of new member states in 2004 while migrants from the enlarged EU continued to join the Irish workforce. By 2006 two thirds of migrants came from the enlarged EU. These figures point to the scale of immigration from Central and Eastern European countries into Ireland. It is important to note that the type of worker migrating to Ireland from Eastern Europe had a comparatively high level of education if not higher than their similar age cohort of Irish nationals whilst at the same time lower attainment than West Europeans (Darmody et al. 2016). Despite high levels of educational attainment, Eastern European immigrants were not necessarily employed in occupations that reflect their education levels. In fact, almost two thirds of work permit holders that were sampled reported being overqualified for their current job, which suggests that there was an additional barrier such as English language proficiency (McGinnity et al., 2006, Barret et al., 2006). It is also important to understand that if a key 'push' factor for some Eastern European migrants was because of their diminishing rights in their home country, as EU nationals in Ireland they would have permanent resident rights and have access to all levels of education. If the migration of Russian-speaking minorities from Latvia and Lithuania is viewed through the perspective of leaving a potentially marginalised society, then it is clear why Ireland was seen as a good opportunity both politically and socially in addition to the economic benefits which attracted migrants from other countries.

### **Temporality**

The concept of temporality is of importance to this study for two reasons. First, the research design is longitudinal and therefore centred around temporal milestones. Second, temporality is used as a theoretical concept to highlight key moments in the lives of the participants which are of temporal significance for example, the time in their lives at which they migrated, leaving school and enrolling in college, university or joining the labour market. Temporality is a complex concept for which there is no singular definition (Maines, 1987). The concept of temporality is not strictly interchangeable with the idea of 'time', as temporality seeks to encapsulate the messy, moving relations between past, present and future' (McLeod, 2017, p.13). The study of youth is immersed in temporality. Temporality draws attention to temporal transitions. Events, places and people always have a past, present and future (Clandinan et al.,

2016). Temporality is a key feature in the lives of all young people however it is particularly pertinent in the lives of migrant youth for example, the time in their lives at which they migrated, the amount of time they expect to stay in their new country, the time which they envision returning to their country of origin. The crucial aspect of temporality in the lives of migrant youth is that while parents will usually have control over the timing of key events in their children's lives, for migrant youth their parents' control is often governed by immigration policies, procedures, work permits and visas. The idea that parents make decisions which may cause disruption to their child's life in the present in order to improve their prospects in the future will be discussed in later sections on immigrant optimism and rational action theory. An example of this is when a parent migrates ahead of their family to find work leaving their children in the care of other family members. In these instances, it can be viewed that parents are prioritising their children's futures by sacrificing their presence in the present time (Tymczuk, 2015). The concept of temporality is central to the methodological design of this research; therefore, it will be discussed further in the research design section of the Chapter 3 and when discussing the theoretical underpinnings of the study in Chapter 7.

Having introduced the importance of temporality as a concept in this thesis and explained the broader push-pull factors which influenced migration from their country of origin to Ireland, it is now clear that there is a need for the multiple perspectives which include theories and concepts employed in this chapter to explain the processes which occur during migration and post-school planning. The next section will begin by examining the use of Bourdieu's social and cultural capital and the school as an example of institutional habitus.

### **Social and Cultural Reproduction Theory**

There are several theories which offer possible explanations about how the decision-making process occurs in the final years of school and why certain options are chosen and others disregarded. Bourdieu's social and cultural reproduction theories as they have been used normatively in Irish educational research offer a starting point for this research. This thesis will draw on Bourdieu (1986;1990;1999) to discuss social and cultural reproduction theory in relation to education. This thesis uses the growing secondary literature on social capital and immigration emerging (Putnam, 1995; 2000; Fanning and O'Boyle, 2009; Fanning, et al. 2011) to discuss linkages between migration, migrant students and the education system in Ireland. For Bourdieu, there are three forms of capital: social, cultural and economic. Each form of capital has the potential to 'produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 241). All three forms of capital can overlap and interplay but it is



social capital (which can encapsulate both economic and cultural capital) that can play a pivotal role in a student's educational opportunities. By social capital I am referring to:

The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintances and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 246).

Coleman (1988) breaks down social capital to its basest function observing that 'social capital is productive-making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible' (Coleman, 1988, p. 98). The intergenerational transmission of social capital within families is referred to as 'social reproduction'. Bourdieu outlines how this reproduction of the social structure can be used to maintain advantage whilst reproducing inequalities through the transmission of education and skills from one generation to the next (Bourdieu et al. 1999, p. 186). Parents with low social capital may not know how to navigate the new school system and may lack either the supportive networks or economic capital that would allow them to spend more time with, and be more involved in, their children's education (Lareau, 2003). Bourdieu explains why it would appear that middle-class families navigate the transition to higher education with ease facing no obstacles or barriers by using the concept of habitus, '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' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 55). This is a particularly pertinent point in the lives of migrant parents who may possess high levels of social and cultural capital in their country of origin but find that their forms of capital 'do not travel' to their destination country. For example, if both parents have third level qualifications but their skillset is not required in their destination country they have problems activating the capital. In addition, if parents have third level qualifications but do not speak the language of their destination country they are effectively 'locked out' of the dominant culture. Whilst Russian-speakers do possess a form of cultural capital by virtue of the fact that they can speak an additional language, research in an Irish context shows that students do not find that this type of cultural capital translates into social capital in a school environment (Devine, 2009, p. 526). Lareau (2003) notes that possessing the 'wrong' type of capital in their destination country can be just as alienating and exclusionary as non-migrant parents possessing low social capital in their own country. By not possessing the capital of the dominant culture this can act as a structural barrier for migrant parents engaging with their children's formal education and navigating the education system to ensure their child is making the most of all the opportunities that are available.

Putnam (1995) illustrates the effect of migration on a person's social capital and network through a horticultural analogy 'for people, as for plants, frequent repotting disrupts root systems. It takes time for a mobile individual to put down new roots' (Putnam, 1995, p. 204). Migrant social capital can be used pre and post-migration to find work, accommodation and make connections in the new country. Migrant social capital refers to the ties or network a person has with other people living in the country they intend to migrate to. As previously discussed in Chapter 1, religious social capital can create a network or community for migrants, in other words, a form of migrant social capital. Research on African integration in Ireland has to date focused considerably on the role of religious social capital and immigrant civic participation (see Mutwarasibo and Smith, 2000; Ugba, 2007). Putnam argues that social capital has both bonding and bridging functions, in the case of an African Pentecostal church in Ireland there is bonding social capital among members of the church. When members of the church engage in civic activities with wider society, this outward reaching behaviour can be understood as bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000). Research in an Irish context suggests that some migrant groups possess more migrant social capital than others for example Fanning et al. (2009) found that African migrants possessed more bridging and bonding capital based on engagement with both Irish and immigrant organisations than East European migrants. Putnam's migrant social capital and religious social capital theory are useful when researching a homogenous group such as Nigerian or Polish migrants in Ireland who share many unifying characteristics within their migrant group, however the heterogeneity of Russian-speakers as outlined in Chapter 1 creates a difficulty in applying these concepts to a group with different religious affiliations and different countries of origin.

Australian research has highlighted how socio-economic status can be misinterpreted or misrepresented by researchers and to the reader if the criteria are not clear. For example, parental education may have a more powerful effect on school achievements and aspirations for further education than parental occupation (Frigo et al., 2007, p. 11). Therefore, when using the label of low socio-economic status or socio-economically disadvantaged one needs to consider whether to use a measure of parents' education level, household income, area in which they live or a combination of all three. Research in an Irish context conducted with the nine-year-old cohort of the Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) longitudinal study found that nine per cent of Irish parents who were interviewed have a post-graduate qualification compared with 16 per cent of the Eastern European parents (Darmody et al., 2016).

As previously outlined, Russian-speaking young people in Ireland are generally situated in the lower socio-economic group in Ireland. This is in terms of their parent's current occupation and

living in low-income or ‘working-class’ areas. As a result, their children are more likely to attend schools which have DEIS status as these schools are less likely to be oversubscribed. It is here that the interplay between Bourdieu’s familial habitus and Reay et al. (2001) institutional habitus (the school as an educational institution) can be seen and often a ‘mismatch’ can occur. For example, Russian-speaking parents who set goals for higher education for their children may find that the local school does not have a college going culture and has low educational aspirations for the students. As mentioned in Chapter 1, over and above the effect of individual social background, young people who attend working-class schools are much less likely to plan to go to higher education than those in mixed/middle class schools, even controlling for prior achievement and other factors (Smyth et al., 2011, p. 218). In this context, institutional habitus has a stronger influence than familial habitus. Bourdieu’s description of the habitus and its ‘horizons of expectation’ (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 60) has been criticised for being overly deterministic ‘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, p. 56). The concept of agency has a role in negating the ‘deterministic’ effects of habitus. The significance of agency and bounded agency in the lives of migrant youth will be discussed towards the end of this chapter. There are some strategies that parents can employ to attempt to negate the effects of a school with low aspirations for their students. These strategies require ‘insider knowledge’ of the education system which is not generally available or easy to gain for newly arrived migrants. In the case of extra-tuition or ‘grinds’ economic resources are required which again can be limited for some newly arrived migrants. Insider knowledge can include knowing which feeder primary schools to enrol their child into upon arrival so as to offset the risk of their child enrolling in a second-level school which does not have a good academic reputation or strong college going culture. In the event that their child is of second-level school age at migration, it is not possible to spend time conducting research to find out about admission policies and academic reputations in advance. If a family has economic resources to invest in their child’s education they can opt to send their child to a fee-paying school or pay for academic grinds to supplement their school tuition. They can also enrol their child in weekend language schools which can serve a dual purpose. Firstly, it enables young people to maintain their native language skills and keep a connection to the culture and history of their country of origin. Secondly, if their native language can be taken as an exam subject (which is the case for Russian for the Leaving Certificate), weekend classes which prepare students for their exams offer an opportunity to achieve higher results and increase their post-school options. The ability to engage these strategies are usually based on networks and ‘word of mouth’ through connections making recommendations or offering insight from experience. Networks can take time to build

particularly for newly arrived migrants and as a result many decisions regarding their child's education can be taken without understanding the system or having the knowledge to make the 'best' decision.

If it is assumed that familial and institutional habitus are well-matched, social and cultural capital are still influential features. The types of social and cultural capital possessed by families will influence the planning of post-school pathways for their children (Frigo et al., 2007, p. 12), thus, it is clear how the reproduction of social and cultural capital occurs. Reay et al. (2001) propose Bourdieu's concept of pragmatic rationality to explain the decision-making process of those with limited social and cultural capital. Reay et al. (2001), argue that choices are governed by what it is 'reasonable to expect' using Bourdieu's belief that it is a 'sense of one's place which leads one to exclude oneself from places from which one is excluded (Reay et al., 2001, p. 864). Bourdieu argues that social capital relies on both formal and informal networks and connections (who you know), and the ability to employ these networks and connections to get ahead in the world. Children inherit social capital from their parents, and their ability to accrue further capital (social, cultural, or economic) is often limited or amplified by the social capital possessed by their parents (Bourdieu, 1986). As previously noted, migrant parents are not necessarily employed in jobs which are commensurate with their education or skill level. Research carried out on post-school pathways in Ireland during the recession found that 'parental employment is found to have a strong association with employment chances, reflecting the way it enhances access to social networks which may have valuable information about job opportunities' (McCoy et al., 2014, p. 14). In other words, young people from families with low social and cultural capital are further disadvantaged in the labour market during times of recession or economic uncertainty.

The importance of social capital in the lives of migrants is widely acknowledged (Palloni et al., 2001; Garip, 2008; Bankston, 2014). Although it has mainly been researched from the perspective of adult migrants 'emerging focus has been on the ways in which the lives of migrant children and young people are also shaped by their own, and where relevant, their parent(s), access to different forms of social capital.' (Ni Laoire et al., 2011, p. 27). Studies of migrant experiences show how social capital in the destination community helps new migrants to become successful more quickly than those lacking ties and associations (Dufar et al., 2012, p. 19). Consequently, having low or weak social capital can act as a barrier to higher education and the labour market. Darmody et al. (2012) argue that the barriers faced by migrant students in Ireland's education system directly impact their future life chances. Migrant student's futures

are hampered in terms of progress to further education and their place in the labour market as well as their general social positioning within Irish society (Darmody et al., 2012).

This section has acknowledged that migrant families can find that they lack the social and cultural capital of the dominant culture, thus becoming situated in the lowest social class when they arrive in their destination country. Social and cultural reproduction theories do not allow for the determination and motivation which self-selected migrants have displayed by migrating to a new country. In the pursuit of social mobility for themselves and their children migrant families are subverting traditional social reproduction theories through their active agency.

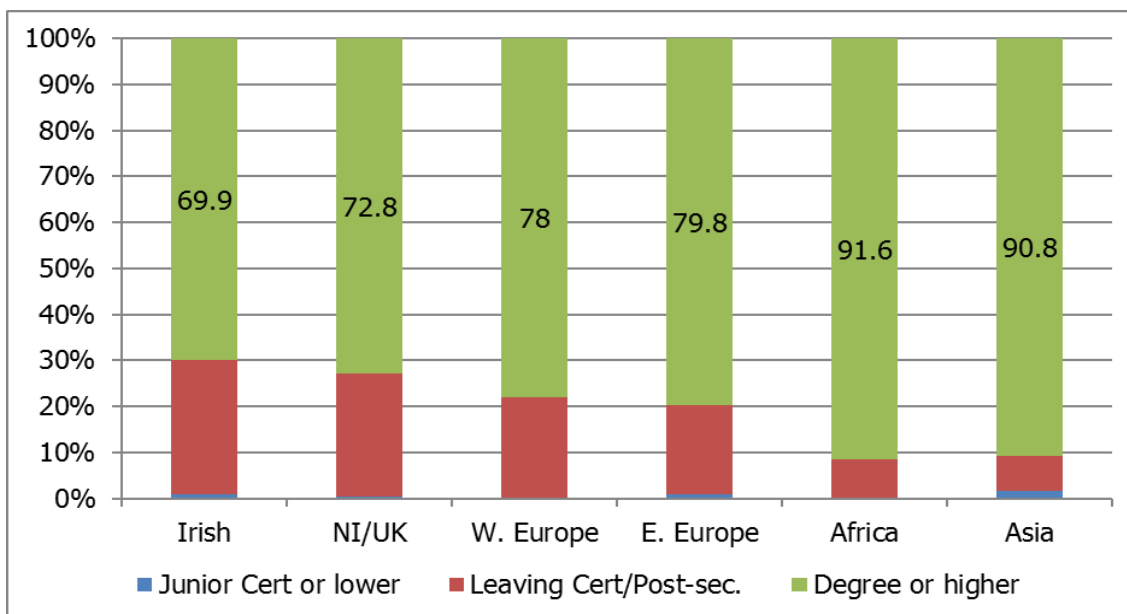
For the purposes of this research Bourdieu's social reproduction theory is not flexible enough to accommodate the explicit rejection of traditional life courses which migrant families engage in. By recognising their current social status (class, education, employment) in their country of origin and deciding to migrate they are actively rejecting this status for themselves and their children. This is a tacit refusal to be the 'reproducers' of the types of social and cultural capital which do not advance their family's position either socially, economically or culturally. Instead, there is a decisiveness and belief that their lives can benefit from migration. While this belief is based on the potential salary, job opportunities and standard of living in their destination country it is also underpinned by hope which can be understood as immigrant optimism.

### **Immigrant Optimism**

The concept of immigrant optimism must be noted as a caveat to traditional social reproduction theories. The literature suggests that migrants are often positively-selected groups who are willing to migrate in order to access better opportunities for their children (Kao and Tienda, 1998). Even if the first generation of migrants do not hold high qualifications, they may hope for an improved situation for their children which is often referred to as 'immigrant optimism'. This 'optimism' has been noted in several countries where studies repeatedly show that migrant students hold significantly higher educational expectations than non-migrant students (Fernandez-Reino, 2016). Migrants in Ireland tend to be well-educated and hold high educational expectations for their children (Darmody et al., 2016). Figure 2.1 refers to the expectations held by newcomer mothers of nine-year-old children. As Figure 2.1 shows the majority of mothers all have expectations that their nine-year old children will continue to higher-level education and this percentage is highest amongst mothers who have Asian and African backgrounds. It appears from Figure 2.1 that a greater percentage of mothers with migrant backgrounds expect their child to continue their education to higher level than Irish

mothers. There is evidence in an international context which suggests the formation of high educational expectations in fact start much younger and sometimes can begin during pre-formal schooling in the early years of childhood (Feliciano and Lanuza, 2015). Research in the U.S. suggests that it is these high expectations held by parents which decisively influence the educational outcomes of migrant students, as opposed to simply their migrant status which was found to have no particular consequences on educational outcomes for white students (Kao and Tienda, 1995). ‘Immigrant optimism’ can result in an expectation versus achievement gap or paradox. This can occur when immigrant parents have unrealistic expectations or expectations that are not consistent with their child’s academic ability. This paradox varies between nationalities of migrant groups and there can be intergenerational differences too between first and second-generation immigrants, for example Kao and Tienda (1995) found no discernible difference between first and second generation Asian students however there was a notable difference in the aspirations and academic ability between second and third (and beyond) generations of Asian students (Kao and Tienda, 1995). Immigrant optimism can be a source of pressure for students especially if their parents’ expectations are not realistic. The expectation versus achievement paradox amongst Russian-speaking young people in Ireland will be discussed in Chapter 6.

**Figure 2.1: Educational Expectations of Newcomer Mothers, by National Group**



Source: Darmody et al. (2016).

## **Rational Action Theory**

Rational action theory, also called rational choice theory adds another dimension to understanding the post-school pathways of Russian-speakers in Ireland. Rational action theory offers an alternative insight or discourse to Bourdieu's social reproduction theory. While Coleman (1988) has previously discussed the linkages between social capital and rational action theory he rejects the 'extreme individualistic premise which often accompanies it' (Coleman, 1988, p. 95). This research uses rational action theory largely in line with Gambetta's (1987) proposition that there are three main processes in educational decision-making: 'what one wants to do', 'what one can do' and 'by conditions which shape preferences' (Gambetta, 1987, p. 169). It is arguably the first of these processes 'what one wants to do' which is overlooked as a mechanism for academic achievement in Bourdieu's reproduction theories as there is no scope for individual agency. Irrespective of what one wants to do Bourdieu's theories suggest that cultural norms and traditional class hierarchies will persist. By incorporating rational action theory into the research the dynamic nature of the subject's agency is given a platform. A criticism of rational action theory is that in order for researchers to explain processes there are assumptions about the intent behind the subject's actions which must be made. The need for assumptions is somewhat lessened due to the qualitative, longitudinal methodology used in this research. However, it must be acknowledged that the students in this research could have been making assumptions about their parents' decisions. Therefore, this general criticism of rational action theories appears to be valid to varying degrees depending on the research and its methodology. The parents in this study have already disrupted their family's 'normal' or traditional life-course by becoming self-selected migrants and emigrating from their country of origin in order to improve their life-chances. Thus, they have broken out of the mould of Bourdieu's deterministic model and consequently a different perspective is required to understand or explain their processes. It is important to consider the point at which the parents in this research decided to migrate. This decision was fundamentally based on whether their family would be economically, socially and politically better off by migrating or not. This is understood in rational action theory as the 'cost' and 'reward' system. In this research, the parents decided that migrating to Ireland, for some learning a new language and potentially being overqualified for their job was a better prospect than staying in their country of origin. Despite the 'cost' or difficulties associated with migration, the 'reward' for themselves and their children appeared to be greater.

Rational action theories are based in pragmatism and to some extent echo the sentiments of Bourdieu's 'sense of one's place'. Evans (2002) found that young people are making pragmatic

choices for themselves which enable them to maintain their aspirations despite the persistence of structural influences on their lives (Evans, 2002, p. 246). This type of pragmatism is illustrated in previous research conducted in Ireland on Russian-speaking families. The research showed that maintaining Russian language is important to some migrant families in order to increase their exam results in the Leaving Certificate thereby giving them greater chances of going to a 'prestigious' college or university (Eriksson, 2011). This suggests that the choices and decision-making processes undertaken by students and their families in some cases are very much rational, considered and measured. They are displaying a good understanding of the school system and exam process and placing a high value on both. However, by approaching their futures with such pragmatism and measured investment there is a sense that they are acting based on the information available in the present tense and not considering how external forces could potentially derail future plans, thus undermining the core belief of the rational action model.

Bourdieu's work on social capital suggests that not all families have a proper understanding of how the education system works. As previously noted in this chapter this is even more so the case for newly arrived migrant families, for example Russian-speakers in Ireland who are unfamiliar with how the Irish school system works and the 'high stakes' nature of the Leaving Certificate exam. However, this underestimates the agency of parents and students (irrespective of their social class) who place a high value on education. These families are essentially educating themselves on the education system to gain the 'insider knowledge' which other families may already possess.

It may also be the case for some families that immediate financial gain is more important and therefore higher education courses which do not translate directly into labour market entry are not their primary goal. As Evans (2002) noted in research on agency in young adult transitions 'they are certainly not blind to the influences of economic and social structures, but the least advantaged emphasised that they have to be 'realistic' in their individual aspirations and goals (Evans, 2002, p. 262). That is not to say that the least advantaged young people have necessarily lower aspirations than their middle-class peers, but their aspirations are relative to the constraints and opportunities they experience (Boudon, 1974; Ball et al, 1999). This is in line with Gambetta's belief that young people do not cultivate goals outside of a set of objectively and subjectively set of alternatives, instead they prefer what their opportunity structures, constraints and resources allow them to achieve (Gambetta, 1987, p. 16). However, these seem to be limiting beliefs which is why this chapter utilised the concept of immigrant optimism. The concept of immigrant optimism attempts to explain the high aspirations of immigrant parents



for their child despite their present opportunity structures, constraints or resources, thus subverting core elements of social reproduction theories and rational action theory. While the incorporation of rational action theory can create an element of speculation and assumptions, it is helpful when used in conjunction with other theories and concepts as an explanatory theory which recognises the individual agency of the research subjects. The concept of agency and bounded agency will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

### **Post-School Pathways**

The use of the term pathways to understand the transition from formal schooling to higher education and the labour market is a popular metaphor (Raffe, 2003). The concept allows researchers to express the length and complexity of the modern experience for young people leaving school. A pathway is longer than a single step and, pathways may interconnect (Evans and Furlong, 1997). The concept also provides a flexible approach, in that the young people or ‘travellers’ may choose between pathways, and they may change direction, or they may set off with no clear destination in mind’ (Raffe, 2003, p. 4). One of the key criticisms of the use of pathways as a metaphor related to its innate connection to structural factors which are under the direct control of policy-makers (Raffe, 2013, p. 16). In other words, the use of pathways as a metaphor can act as a veneer of choice and autonomy for young people who get to choose their pathway whilst steadfastly ignoring structural issues and barriers such as class, race and gender which are highly influential in determining the actual pathways of young people (Raffe, 2003).

The term ‘pathway’ has become of prominent research focus across OECD countries, it became relevant in Ireland in 2011 when it was placed on the Higher Education Authority (HEA) agenda. ‘Pathways’ is a popular metaphor that is used in literature to describe a movement, transition or journey in youth studies (Raffe, 2003, p. 3). Five pathway groups in Ireland were identified in an ESRI study of school leavers: labour market, apprenticeship, PLC, PLC to higher education and direct higher education (McCoy et al., 2014). What is overlooked in this group of pathways is the options for students who leave school early without any form of Leaving Certificate. Research from the UK has found that despite the growing participation of young people from relatively disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds in higher education, they remain over-represented among early labour market entrants and those who are not in education, employment or training (Duckworth and Schoon, 2012, p. 38). According to the OECD, in 2014 Ireland had the highest level of young people who were not in education or training (OECD, 2016). In the Irish education system, migrant students are over-represented in this category of early school leavers. One fifth of migrant students dropped out of second-level

school before their Leaving Certificate compared with just below 10 per cent of students with Irish parents (Darmody, 2012, p. 8).

The subjects chosen upon entering the second-level system can influence future pathways. If a student does not take a European language from first year this can automatically remove any possibility of entering a university straight from school. Subjects for the Leaving Certificate are chosen after third year (or transition year if applicable). So too can the level of Leaving Certificate taken, for example if a student does not take certain subjects at higher level for the Junior Certificate they cannot take these subjects at higher level for the Leaving Certificate. This means they are limiting their chances of going onto higher education after school (Gillborn, 2010; Darmody et al., 2012).

The expectational culture within a school has been identified as a crucial element in predicting post-school pathways in several studies (McCoy et al., 2014; Smyth and Banks, 2012). A low expectational culture in a school can result in students not taking higher level subjects and streaming of students into alternative programmes such as Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) with students not being channelled towards higher education. Streaming or grouping students based on ability has created considerable debate in educational research (Harlen and Malcolm, 1997; Ireson and Hallam, 2001). Research in an Irish context has found that students allocated to lower streams underperform academically, all else being equal (Smyth et al., 2004, p. 16). Existing research shows that although the vast majority of students (93 per cent) are eligible for entry to higher education in Ireland just over half of students make the transition to college (Smyth and Banks, 2012, pp. 266-267).

The key factors in determining post-school pathways for students are the school (including staff) attended by the student, the family of the student and the student themselves. There are differing views within the literature as to which agent is the most influential on a student's post-school pathways. The school social mix has been identified in Ireland as the greatest influence on post-school outcomes (McCoy et al., 2014) while other research has found that it is the family and socio-economic status of the family that is the greatest predictor of post-school pathways (Frigo et al., 2007). The role of the student themselves in shaping their own future is not as prominent. The student is not seen as the key agent in determining their own post-school pathways. The student appears to be an agent of the school or of the family: fulfilling the traditions and expectations of each. That is not to say that the student is entirely passive, research suggests that prior educational achievement and attitude to school are also predictors of future achievement and pathways (McCoy et al, 2014; Smyth and Banks, 2011). However,

a student's achievement in school and their attitude towards school are so often influenced by factors such as student/teacher relationship and family attitudes to school. The student appears to be the embodiment of the broader structural factors and socio-cultural factors. This makes it difficult to identify the extent to which the student's personal agency can influence their post-school pathways in isolation. Certainly, throughout the two waves of interviews it was clear that the participants had their own interests and desires for their post-school pathways; however it was clear that their own aspirations were tempered and moulded to reflect the aspirations of their parents.

### **Agency**

Underpinning social and cultural reproduction theories and rational action theory is the concept of agency or more specifically bounded agency. The latter is the interfusion of agency and structural influences (Evans, 2002, p. 261). The concept of agency is important for this research because it acts as a significant point of departure from Bourdieu's social reproduction theory and leads to the inclusion of rational action or choice theories. This idea is utilised in Australian research which recognises the theoretical debate which pits economic rationality theories against structuralist models. The research indicates that there is a move towards a hybrid of both, a model which acknowledges a degree of individual agency which operates within the context of a range of external factors (Frigo et al., 2007, p. 20). Newly arrived migrant groups can face additional structural barriers to their agency and the agency of their children. Migrant students can face a specific power dynamic in receiving countries; they are given a different status, and their cultural and social capital are often not recognised (Darmody, 2011, p. 224) To varying degrees' parents in Ireland have the freedom to choose which school they want their child to attend. There are instances whereby schools have certain admission policies which would favour certain students because they live within the catchment area or they are of the same religious faith<sup>5</sup>. For the most part, parents can choose between several schools based on their own preference if there are places available. Within their own preferences, the freedom to choose a school may be curtailed for example because there is a long commute and it is not feasible to support the associated travel costs. Chapter 1 outlined in detail the different types of schools available in Ireland. The differences between the types of schools are not necessarily overt which can make it more difficult for migrant families and those not familiar with the system. As previously noted in this chapter migrant parents can lack the 'insider knowledge' to help make informed decision on school choice. Some families can rely on their social networks in the destination country to give them information otherwise they are exercising a form of

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<sup>5</sup> This particular policy with regards school patronage is under review

bounded agency by making decisions without fully understanding the nuances of the system. The majority of students in this research attended their local primary school which was within walking or short commuting distance; there was some differentiation at second-level which is discussed in depth in Chapter 5.

This chapter has already noted that once a student attends a working-class school they are more likely to do less well even controlling for other factors. Once the school has been selected students and parents become actors with limited agency within the broader structure and hierarchical nature of the school system (Darmody, 2011). For example, when choosing what subjects to study a student can only choose from the subjects which their particular school is offering. There is a broad range of subjects that schools can offer to its first-year students, this can range from anywhere between 12-18 subject depending on the school. Some schools insist on first year students sampling all subjects in first year as a 'taster' so they can make informed decisions for their junior cycle (Smyth et al., 2004). In the case of the students in this research, many of their parents had preconceived notions or perceptions of certain subjects. As a result, even though their child may have enjoyed a subject in first year some parents were very influential in steering them away from this choice if they themselves did not deem it to be a 'useful' subject. Here a tension can arise as structure and agency collide at the point of decision-making. While the school is attempting to increase the student's agency through informed decision making, parents are using their dominant position in the parent-child relationship to exert influence over their child's decision.

Research has found that subjects chosen as early as the junior cycle can influence the options for post school pathways. Being placed in lower stream classes in junior cycle has significant negative consequences for student retention and for performance in the Leaving Certificate exam (Banks et al., 2010, p. xix). In addition, subjects chosen at the beginning of fifth year can often close off many options available to students who wish to continue onto higher education. This highlights the issue of the expectational culture within schools. If a school is encouraging its students to take more subjects at pass and foundation level, if there is more of an emphasis placed upon PLC courses and apprenticeships a student cannot necessarily access higher level subjects which will channel them towards post-school education (McCoy et al., 2014, p. 183). Irrespective of a particular student's ability or their commitment to study and preferred post-school pathway, when placed in a school with a low expectational culture students can exert very little agency. This can be understood as 'a cumulative effect of the relative absence of encouraging factors and the presence of a stronger set of inhibiting factors' (Frigo et al., 2007, p. 14). The issue of bounded agency is highlighted in research conducted by Reay et al. (2001)

examining the higher education choice process in the UK. Reay et al. (2001) found that ‘while more working class and minority students are entering university, for the most part they are entering different universities to their middle-class counterparts’ (Reay et al., 2001, p. 858).

In this research, the school is a key influencer in educational decision-making and post-school planning. This is closely followed by parents, the majority of whom are proactive in their child’s educational decision-making particularly at primary level and for some at second-level. This leaves the student with what can at best be described as diminished or bounded agency. Shanahan and Hook (2000) refer to the phenomenon of ‘bounded agency’ as being dynamic, it is the interplay among individual efforts, group based strategies and macro social structures (Shanahan and Hook, 2000, p. 5). Students can express their interests and preferred courses but this is within the context of what subjects the school offers, the guidance provision policy in the school and their parents’ aspirations for them. Ultimately, a student can choose from a narrow set of options which have been filtered and screened by the school and their parents.

The study of active agency in children and young people's lives was given a new critical edge in Hardman’s study. Hardman (1973) drew on the concept of ‘muted voices’ to argue for the study of children and young people in their own right, not just as processes of development, products of socialisation, nor merely as mature adults in the making. This research will utilise young migrant students’ active agency by asking them questions directly and allowing their voices and stories to be studied in their own right. There is no attempt to qualify their words with data collected from their teachers or parents. Migrant youth living in Ireland can find their agency restricted or bounded. Their agency can often be embroiled in immigration procedures either regarding themselves or their parents. For non-EU migrants, there are certain financial barriers to higher education which do not apply to EU migrants or Irish nationals. If a migrant family is seeking asylum and living in a direct provision centre they have no agency over where they live, what they eat or who they share their living space with. If their migration status is that of dependant migrant on their parents’ work visa this can affect their ability to apply for part time/summer jobs as would be the norm for young people in Ireland.

The concept of agency is a useful tool for understanding the research subject within the broader structural system. However, it is the concept of bounded agency which is more applicable for explaining the processes within this research. This research is focussed on Russian-speaking young people in Ireland. Children and young people’s agency is often bound up in the parent-child power dynamic, but also at a statutory level young people’s agency is restricted as there are laws which prohibit certain activities for those under the age of eighteen. While it can be argued that bounded agency generally reflects the position of children and young people, this

chapter has outlined how it also reflects the type of agency possessed by some migrant adults who are newly arrived to their destination country.

## **Resilience**

The ability to avoid negative transitions or do better than expected is a phenomenon also referred to as resilience. While social capital and generation status are factors which are noted to influence educational achievement, the concept of resilience has been used to explain how some immigrant students achieve high educational outcomes despite their socio-economic background, ethnicity and generation status (Ochocka, 2006; Sandin Esteban and Sanchez Marti, 2014). Resilience can be understood as an effective coping competence in response to risky or adverse situations and the development of self-motivation skills to continue in the education system despite perceived or actual barriers. International literature suggests that there is a link between resilience and academic continuity (Sandin Esteban and Sanchez Marti, 2014).

There are several key factors such as individual characteristics, support from significant others and wider social context that might help avoid negative outcomes (Duckworth and Schoon, 2012, p. 40) These key factors of resilience can also be understood as risk factors and protective factors in a person's life (Hunter, 2012). There are several protective factors which can make transition from second to third level education a positive experience or at least a non-disruptive one. In this research those factors could include the HEAR (Higher Education Alternative Route) scheme, parents educated to third level, guidance counselling support and information during decision making. Each protective factor offers a level of protection or reduced risk and when they are combined there is a cumulative effect which offers the most protection from risk. The context that these protective factors are operating within must not be overlooked. In this research the students and their families have migrated to Ireland, their parents have no experience of the education system in Ireland or applying for higher education and making this transition. Protective factors which might help a non-migrant student transition from school to higher education may not be sufficiently protective for migrant students because of the additional risk factors that are present in their lives.

There are several risk factors which can cause a difficult transition from second-level. These factors can include poor guidance counselling, being a first-generation college goer, not being offered the preferred course and accepting a course that may not interest the student. When several risk factors exist in a student's life these are considered to be cumulative which is understood as cumulative disadvantage. Research in an Irish context has found that institutional barriers affect migrant students' educational careers in a number of ways thereby producing

inequalities. The accumulation of educational disadvantage can have a negative influence on the life chances of migrant students in Ireland (Darmody et al., 2012). The protective factor of having a parent who has studied at third level is reduced by the fact that the parents in this research did not attend third level in Ireland and therefore do not have the same insight or ‘insider’ knowledge of parents who have personally experienced the system. Very often guidance counsellors lack information on migrant students’ options for their post-school pathways as they are unfamiliar with specific barriers or obstacles that could prevent them from pursuing certain pathways such as waiting periods for non-EU students to qualify for schemes which EU students can access automatically an example of this will be discussed in Chapter 6. A lack of good quality guidance counselling can be a risk factor for migrant students who are transitioning from second-level school as research shows that young people with disadvantaged backgrounds tend to rely more heavily on formal guidance provided by schools (McCoy et al., 2014).

### **Summary**

A combination of Bourdieu’s social reproduction theories in conjunction with rational action theory offer a solid theoretical foundation for this research. The elements of social reproduction theory that are most helpful in explaining the processes behind the decision-making process will relate to the social capital possessed by the student and their family. It must be acknowledged that Bourdieu’s reproduction theories have been criticised for being overly deterministic in his analysis of the importance of social capital and ignoring the role that the education system, the school and teachers may play in creating and reproducing capital and social mobility in its students (McCoy et al, 2010, p. 8). This chapter has discussed the ways in which Bourdieu’s reproduction theories provide too rigid an understanding of educational decision-making amongst migrant families and on their own are not sufficient, therefore a combination of theories is required.

By incorporating rational action theory this research benefits from being able to determine how students make decisions about their post school pathways and assess the results by looking at how much social capital they possessed at the time of decision making. The longitudinal aspect of this study allows for discussion of their post-school pathway, how they feel about their choices and crucially would they make different choices now. This in turn will show the extent to which social capital plays a role in the decision-making process on the post-school pathways of Russian-speaking students in Ireland. Rational action theory can be understood as explanatory and so will be helpful to this research in explaining how and why certain decisions

were made. Rational action theory does not attempt to examine the origins of beliefs and values and, likewise, no reference is made to cultural or normative differences between social classes to explain their differing educational choices or outcomes. By identifying the key agents and combining social reproduction with rational action theory this research provides a more holistic understanding of the post-school pathways chosen by Russian-speaking students in Ireland.

The push-pull factors of migration theory support the theoretical framework in a peripheral way by offering an insight into the nuanced reasons behind the migration of Russian-speaking minorities from Eastern Europe to Ireland. However, this chapter has highlighted that there are a number of theoretical concepts which also play a critical role. The concepts of agency and resilience lend a more nuanced understanding of the student as an individual as opposed to our understanding of their life in the broader sociological sense.



## **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

This chapter discusses the methodological framework for the research. The chapter outlines the main functions of a qualitative longitudinal study, particularly when researching youth or youth transitions. The research design section discusses the benefits of gathering multiple waves of data to explain phenomena and potential drawbacks that are inherent to a longitudinal design. Following the research design section, this chapter explains the rationale underpinning access and sampling, addressing the decision to research Russian-speaking students as opposed to a general sample of students from Eastern Europe. The third section outlines the role of a semi-structured interview style of data collection, external influences upon the interview guide and how the interview guide was structured. Following this there is discussion around how the data collected from the interviews was analysed. Finally, the ethical considerations of conducting longitudinal research with young people will be discussed. This research is focusing on adolescents many of whom will be classed as minors during the first wave of data collection. Conducting research with minors magnifies the ethical risks and dilemmas that are faced when researching adults. This means that ethical considerations are not just a pre-stage of field-work. As a researcher working with minors there is a need to be prepared for ethical issues emerging in the field (Sime, 2008). ‘Ethical mindfulness’, is encouraged by Guillemin and Gillam (2008), for researchers to recognise the ethically important moments in the research process and being able to articulate what constitutes something as an ethical matter (Guillemin and Gillam, 2008).

### **Research Design**

The research is a qualitative longitudinal study (QLS). It is comprised of two waves of in-depth semi-structured interviews with Russian-speaking students. The first wave of interviews were scheduled for the final year of school before the students sat their Leaving Certificate. The second wave of interviews were scheduled for approximately 12 months later. The importance of longitudinal data in youth research has been acknowledged by researchers in the field. ‘Longitudinal studies are essential in order to understand choices made by young people at different ages and the precursors, consequences and the contextual constraints that may influence choices’ (McCoy et al., 2013, p. 10). The purpose of revisiting the interviewees is to collect additional data, as McCoy et al. (2013) point out there has been a lack of empirical evidence to date on how young people in Ireland experience the transition to post-school education (McCoy et al., 2013, p. 182).

The concept of temporality was previously discussed in Chapter 2. Temporality is intrinsic in the decision to use a QLS. Thompson et al. (2003) argue that what makes a QLS a distinctive

research strategy is the ‘deliberate way in which temporality is designed into the research process making change a central focus of analytic attention’ (Thompson et al., 2003, p. 185). In other words, the processes by which decisions are made and life transitions occur are best captured by a QLS which can be undertaken in waves to correlate with key life events. Additionally, a longitudinal methodology can allow for a greater understanding of temporality as a theoretical concept particularly in childhood and youth studies, Nielson (2016) notes,

An insufficient account of the temporal dimension in different theoretical moments in childhood studies has led to dualisms between agency and development and between change and continuity in the process of subject formation. Confronting these theoretical dualisms with a qualitative longitudinal study of children indicates that the two sides of each dualism may be understood as interdependent dimensions that co-constitute subjectivity (Nielson, 2016, p. 1).

Over the course of two waves of interviews and the students’ historical narratives this research displays the shifting nature of agency from parent to child within the broader structural factors such as the school and the education system.

The first wave of interviews give an insight into the rationale and thought processes behind the decisions that students make for their future pathways. The students were in a ‘critical’ stage of their lives during their first interviews, on the verge of leaving school. Exploring their lives in the course of their final year of school helped to understand the processes shaping their decisions about post-school pathways (McCoy et al., 2013, p. 10). The interval of twelve months allowed time for the transition from school to their chosen pathway to occur. The second wave of interviews show the outcomes of the decisions and choices made during their final school year and how these outcomes will influence their adult lives. Baltes et al. (1979) recognise that the investigation of more critical periods in young people lives ‘may require longitudinal research involving relatively short intervals between observations’ (Baltes et al., 1979, p. 7). Charting the pathways of Russian-speaking students can help guide policy aimed at encouraging participation rates of minority youth in higher education, apprenticeships and labour market entry in Ireland. It can also identify the personal decisions and structural factors which affect the transitional outcomes.

Previously it had been argued that what was missing from much of the literature on ‘immigrant youth’ in Ireland were the voices of the ‘immigrant youth’ themselves (Bushin, 2009; Bushin and White 2010; Ni Laoire et al., 2011). This has changed in recent years as more research has highlighted the importance of taking account of the ‘student voice’ and the potential contribution of the student perspective to school improvement and policy development more generally (McCoy et al., 2013, p. 12). The in-depth interviews for this research facilitated the

‘primacy of respondent’ treating the participants as ‘experts who provide valuable information’ (Sarantakos, 1988, p. 256). The strength of this research lies in the fact that young people gave their opinions on their own lives past, present and future. This allowed scope for self-reflexivity and life mapping techniques, thus, illustrating how their past decisions have impacted on their present conditions and future prospects.

One potential drawback of a longitudinal study is ‘sample attrition’, the risk of participants dropping out of the study mid-way thereby shrinking the sample. This could possibly have implications on the research findings and the conclusions drawn. Several strategies were employed to combat this. Firstly during the initial presentation to the participants it was stressed that there will be two waves, by agreeing to participate in the first wave there is an expectation that students will participate in the second wave also. Secondly, during the data collection, mobile numbers, house phone numbers and email addresses were collected. This will maintain the chances of contacting the participants as easily as possible and by their preferred method. Farrall (1996) argues that in order to re-contact participants the researcher should also collect the full names and addresses of relatives and friends. For the purposes of maintaining contact throughout this research project Farrall’s (1996) methods seem extreme or perhaps just outdated. Using social media, for example setting up a Facebook page and requesting participants to add themselves as ‘friends’ seems a more efficient and pragmatic way to maintain contact. In the case where participants had subsequently migrated during the intervening 12 months or could not meet face to face for the second wave it was agreed that an alternative solution such as Skype would be used.

### **Access and Sampling**

The sampling technique employed in the research was purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is employed when the subjects are selected because they fall into a particular category or meet the specific criteria being studied. This sampling technique is also employed when researchers select cases with a particular purpose or goal in mind (Thompson et al., 2003). Table 3.1 offers an overview of the sample and where they were recruited from.

**Table 3.1: Overview of Sample**

Name (pseudonym)	Country of Origin	Age at move to Ireland	Recruited
Dariya	Azerbaijan	15	Language school

Vera	Moldova	16	Language school
Artur	Latvia	8	Second-level school
Aliona	Moldova	7	Language school
Dmitri	The Ukraine	4	Language school
Vadim	Latvia	13	Second-level school
Inga	Latvia	9	Second-level school
Ludmilla	Lithuania	9	Second-level school
Marta	Lithuania	9	Second-level school
Olga	Lithuania	6.5	Second-level school
Valentina	The Ukraine	9	Language school
Anna	The Ukraine	1	Language school
Ekaterina	Russia	16	Language school
Pasha	The Ukraine	8	Second-level school

Half of the sample were recruited through language schools (one in Galway and one in Dublin), the other half of the sample were recruited from four second-level schools (two schools in Dublin, one in Kildare and one in Navan). Whilst the sampling was purposive, endeavours were made to maximise variations. The sample is diverse in terms of gender, country of origin, type of school attended (DEIS, Non-DEIS, Vocational School and Community College) and to a certain extent the chosen pathways for after school were somewhat diverse. Russian-speaking migrants from EU countries face less structural barriers preventing their transition to the labour market and higher education than a Russian speaker from a non-EU country. The participants in this sample came from six countries, four of which are not members of the EU and two of which are; Russia, Azerbaijan, The Ukraine, Moldova, Latvia and Lithuania. A balanced mix of male and female participants is ideal to help illustrate whether the post-school pathways of young Russian-speakers followed traditional gendered occupations and courses. The sample consisted of 14 participants; ten female students and four male students. Since there is an imbalance of genders in this research it is not possible to make strong claims about the role of gender in educational decision-making. Therefore, findings and contributions which have a gender dimension are put forward tentatively based on the gender imbalance within the sample. A combination of types of school helped to illustrate if students attending a specific type of school are more prepared for labour market entry or higher education as a pathway. Participants in this research attended fee-paying schools, community schools and post-primary schools. A diverse socio-economic background facilitated within sample inter-class analysis; however existing literature suggests that this group are situated within the lower socioeconomic group.

In this research, there were three students attending fee-paying second-level schools, there were five students attending DEIS second-level schools, all students who applied for higher education were in receipt of financial assistance from SUSI<sup>6</sup> and there were four students who qualified for the HEAR scheme.

A school environment was the most practical base for the interviews to take place as this is a familiar setting for the participants. Second-level schools or weekend Russian-language schools were the most appropriate places for recruiting the sample needed for this research. The fact that I required time during their Leaving Certificate year posed scheduling issues as the students had very little free time during this year. Therefore, I scheduled the interviews before Christmas where possible so as not to interfere with Christmas exams, mock exams in February and the Leaving Certificate in June. This was not always possible as recruiting the sample was a slower process than originally anticipated. This was particularly the case for students recruited through the language school because they only met once a week the staff could not remind them before class to get their consent forms signed. As a result the first wave of interviews continued until March. The result was that for some participants the time between interview waves was approximately 12 months but for others who were not interviewed until later during wave one the time between interviews was a lot shorter. This did not impact on the rationale of the research design as all students were interviewed in their final year of school and re-interviewed after they made the transition from school to labour market, further education and higher education. The original timeline was drawn up also to allow time to transcribe and analyse the data before the second wave of interviews were to be conducted. The lengthy gaps between interviews in wave one ensured that I had enough time to have wave one transcribed before embarking on wave two.

The total number of students who sat the Russian Leaving Certificate exam in 2015 was 310. There is much debate around what size a sample should be in qualitative research. The principle argument is that a researcher should continue to collect data until information redundancy/saturation has been achieved (Mason, 2010). For many reasons, this is not always the most feasible guide to follow. Firstly, PhD research is very often time sensitive, it is important that data collected in the field is current and not out of date. Secondly, information saturation/redundancy can be reached prematurely if the sampling frame is too narrow and likewise if the sample is too big, data becomes repetitive and, eventually superfluous (Mason, 2010). Finally, if information saturation is not going to determine the sample size, Bertaux

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<sup>6</sup> SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland) is the single national awarding authority for undergraduate and post-graduate student grants in Ireland.

(1981, p. 35) and Guest et al. (2006) quote 15 participants as the smallest acceptable sample size. Lee, Woo and MacKenzie (2002) argue that studies using multiple (very in-depth) interviews with the same participant (for example longitudinal or panel studies) require fewer participants. Ultimately, the sample size in this study was determined by the number of students who expressed an interest in being part of the study. Using information I requested from the Department of Education, the Russian Department at Trinity College and general internet searches I compiled a database of second-level schools who had Russian-speaking students and a list of Russian language schools. From this database, I emailed and telephoned the relevant schools explaining my research and that I was recruiting participants. I then followed this up with a letter explaining my research and requesting the school to allow me to recruit students from their school (see appendix five). Through this approach I achieved a total sample of 14 students who were recruited through two Russian language schools and four mainstream schools. The 14 students agreed to be participants in both waves of the research (see Table 3.1). There was no sample attrition in this study all 14 participants were re-interviewed for a second wave.

Prior to the first interview wave, forms were distributed to collect baseline data on the participants such as age, gender, country of birth, age at migration (see Appendix 6). During the research-design period this form was originally intended as a selection tool, for example to select participants based on gender and differing post-school plans. However, due to the conservative response rate it was decided that all students who had agreed to participate would have to be interviewed regardless of their demographic information.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

The qualitative data was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews (see Appendix three and four for interview guides). Having a semi-structured guide means that the main themes will get discussed whilst allowing scope for interviewees to discuss more specific issues at length. Using a guide meant that all participants were asked the same questions which allowed for comparisons of their answers. While the semi-structured interview style was chosen for the aforementioned strengths, this method of data collection also has its weaknesses. The validity of semi-structured interviews relies on both the interviewer and the interviewee. The interviewer has a responsibility to explain the purpose of the research and create a neutral environment for the interviewee to answer the questions honestly. It can be difficult to assess the extent to which the interviewer has influenced an interview. Leading questions can be identified when reviewing transcripts, however, an interviewer's preconceived ideas or bias are not necessarily as obvious. Researcher bias can play an influential role in the course of the data

collection and skew the findings of a study. As such it is important for researchers to recognise or acknowledge any bias they may have about the topic they are researching before they begin data collection to minimise the effect this will have on the data and analysis.

The original semi-structured interview guide was piloted in November 2014. The purpose of conducting a pilot run was to refine the interview guide and as an early career researcher it was important for me to be reflexive about my own interviewing skills, to improve where necessary so that I could gain as much data as possible during the subsequent waves. The pilot run of interviews was conducted in a primary school in Galway city which facilitated Russian language classes for Leaving Certificate students on Saturday afternoons. A number of weekend language schools had been contacted, the gatekeeper in Galway who was a Russian language teacher was the most enthusiastic and interested in the research which is why this particular site was chosen. Copies of the consent forms in Russian and English were emailed in advance (see Appendix one and two). The gatekeeper printed and distributed the forms to the students for their parents to read, sign and return. Since the language class only met once a week this process was quite lengthy because if they forgot to return the forms I had to wait another week to see if they had returned them to the gatekeeper. Once the forms were returned and signed the next step was to schedule an interview date. It took several weeks to confirm a date that would suit the students, the teacher and myself (since I would have to travel from Dublin to Galway). Initially the pilot interviews were scheduled with four students, unfortunately on the day two of the students were absent so interviews went ahead with the two that were present. Both students had their signed consent forms with them and both participants (and their parents) had opted to sign the Russian-language version.

The first student was quite forthcoming with answers, she considered the questions and gave detailed responses. The second student was shy and had to be drawn out for an answer that was not simply yes or no. As part of the interview guide there are some questions about their family and the migration process. For both students' this seemed to be a sensitive subject and I felt guilty for addressing it. However, it is a vital piece of their story and if I were to neglect the area I would be missing valuable insights. For example, the first student's father did not migrate with the family. The student's mother did not speak any English and could not find employment. This resulted in the student working part time whilst preparing for the Leaving Certificate which she felt was having an adverse effect on her grades. The pilot run of the interviews had an influence on the interview guide which was used for the first wave of interviews. As a direct result of having conducted a pilot, the interview guide was revised to make the questions which could potentially have been answered with a yes or no as open ended

as possible. The pilot interviews revealed a reluctance to answer questions about the family, and these questions were addressed more tactfully.

The pilot was very helpful in exposing certain areas that need to be addressed. I learned to become more comfortable with the silences, accepting that the student may need a moment to think about the question, therefore jumping in to offer suggestions is not helpful. I also learned to be aware of how to phrase questions which could influence the type of response I get.

### *First Wave*

Following the pilot, the revised student interview guide for wave one was split into three sections. Firstly, their views on their experience of migration, leaving their home, family and friends behind, settling into a new environment and starting at a new school. Secondly, there was a discussion around how their family has adjusted throughout the migration process. This section looked specifically at employment, family dynamics and acculturation of the family as a unit. Finally, participants were asked to reflect on their experience of studying at second-level in Ireland and their hopes, plans and goals for the next twelve months. This guide was structured for the interviewees to be retrospective and prospective in their answers. It allowed participants to map their lives from the past, when they migrated through to the present time in school and looking forward to their future after school. This provided a sense of logic to the narrative and allowed for the participants to become reflexive by explaining their future choices through their personal history.

### *Second Wave*

During the second wave of interviews I did not need to collect as much historical or biographical data, which allowed for more time to discuss the themes and issues which may have arisen from the first wave of interviews. The second wave of interviews also provided more time for reflexivity and issues around causality (Farrall, 1996, p. 18). Farrall (1996) warns of the repetitive nature of longitudinal interviews from the participant's perspective. A benefit to longitudinal research is that the researchers can tailor-make follow-up interviews for each respondent and to plan to ask specific questions of them based on their previous answers and experiences (Farrall, 1996, p. 7). Some questions will inevitably be returned to, and here one needs to pay attention to 'question fatigue' (Farrall, 1996, p. 6). Since this study only comprised of two waves which mapped a crucial transition in the participants' lives the potential for 'question fatigue' is minimal. As per the ethical approval for this research, the interviews were recorded using the voice recording app on an iPad and were transcribed verbatim in order to record all the interviews accurately and truly reflect the interviewees voice. Transcribing



verbatim also allowed me to capture all of the data which gave a context and logic to the interviews in preparation for coding. There were two exceptions to this in the case of two students who were studying abroad when they finished second-level school. During the first wave of interviews both students had indicated that they would be applying to colleges in Europe and Canada and consented to take part in the second wave via Skype. It proved difficult to set a time for a skype call with the participants but they both agreed that if I sent them a list of interview questions they would respond by email. Whilst this was not ideal as it deviated from the semi-structured interview method as outlined in the research design, both students answered the interview questions sufficiently via email.

### **Data Analysis Technique**

I kept a research journal and comprehensive field notes during the interviewing stage. By engaging with the field notes (summaries, memos and reflections) in the early stages of data collection this helped to narrow the focus of the study and establish emerging themes. Once an interview had been conducted the next step was to begin transcribing the data. The interviews were conducted in English so there was no translation necessary. The next step is to code the data. Coding is a critical stage of data analysis phase as it helps to categorise and sort the data (Bryman and Burgess, 1994) to give messy data an order, structure and interpretation (Denscombe, 1997). Coding also helps to reduce the data through the process of 'selecting, focussing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming' (Miles and Huberman 1984, p. 22). In preparation for conducting fieldwork I intended to use the software package N.Vivo to code and analyse my data. N.Vivo does not conduct analysis for the researcher, but provides an extremely versatile vehicle for managing and analysing qualitative data. However, the research sample size of 14 participants meant that it was perfectly feasible to code the data manually without the aid of computer software. By manually coding the data I developed a deep understanding of the nuances and complexities of the interviews, which may not have been fully realised if I had relied on a software package. After the first wave of interviews had been fully transcribed I began to code the transcripts broadly by using highlighter markers and coloured post-it notes to colour code the emerging codes on hard copies of the transcripts. Once the broad codes had been identified I grouped the relevant data into codes using Microsoft Word documents and continued to break down the data into related concepts and sub-categories. I used the comment and track changes feature of Microsoft Word to contextualise why certain codes were created. Due to the longitudinal aspect of my research certain codes were not revisited for a period of several months. Therefore, having comments saved throughout the document for context was extremely beneficial. I used the same system for coding the second

wave of interviews. The final step in data analysis was to interpret the different codes and conduct a thematic analysis.

### **Ethical Issues and Reflections**

In order to interview students under 18 years of age, an application for ethical approval including the interview guide had to be submitted to the ethics committee before any of the interviews were scheduled.

Using QLR does not raise any issues which are not already present in both qualitative and longitudinal research, but rather it heightens them. This is because, arguably, the level of engagement between the interviewer and respondent is greater (due to prolonged contact), so too is the risk of disclosure of matters of a distinctly personal nature (Farrall, 1996, p. 11).

Anonymity was assured to all participants at the beginning of the process. Pseudonyms were adopted for transcription and coding of the data. Any personal or biographical information was stored on my college computer which can only be accessed by me using my username and password which are only known to myself. The limits of confidentiality and anonymity were discussed with interviewees (Kirk, 2006; Duncan et al., 2009). In accordance with the ethics policy of the school of Social Sciences and Philosophy at Trinity College Dublin, it was made clear that confidentiality agreements can be over-ridden in exceptional circumstances, for example to protect individuals from harm ([www.tcd.ie/ssp/research/ethics](http://www.tcd.ie/ssp/research/ethics)).

Having secured permission from two Russian language schools and four mainstream schools I addressed the potential participants as a group and distributed materials myself to reduce the possibility of delays by going through gatekeepers. The parents of the participants were asked for consent for their child to participate in the study. A consent form with material explaining the aims of the research and the purpose for the interviews in English and Russian was distributed for the students to give to their parents. These materials were designed to assist parents and students in making an informed decision about their participation in the research. The participants were also asked for their 'active' consent. The issue of assent and consent often arises as an ethical consideration when researching children/minors. For the purposes of my research participants were allowed to be active agents in the research rather than passive participants. In an attempt to eliminate the possibility of a parent 'forcing' or 'pressuring' their child to participate in the research I required informed consent from the participants in addition to their parents' consent. The longitudinal nature of my research meant that consent will be viewed as ongoing as opposed to a once off event. Consent was requested before each interview, before turning on and off the audio-recording device. The interviewees for this research are young students who most likely have no prior experience being interviewed for research

purposes. Their inexperience may result in them continuing to take part purely because they are unsure of how to withdraw or they are not comfortable telling an adult that they have changed their mind (Duncan et al., 2009). In order to avoid this scenario, before each interview it was explained that they can withdraw at any stage of the interview process. In addition, it was also explained how they should go about this. Kirk (2006) suggests that rehearsing with young interviewees how to decline participating or answering a particular question is an important stage before the interview commences and helps to manage the power differentials at play in the research process (Kirk, 2006, p. 1254).

It was important to me as a researcher that I created an informal non-threatening environment for the participants, I presented myself in casual clothes and explained that the interview was more like a conversation about themselves, when I asked for consent to start recording I moved the iPad out of direct sight of the participants so as not to have it as a constant reminder during the interview. I opened every interview with an introduction about myself and told the participants that I was a student in Trinity College and that I have studied Russian and travelled around Russia and Eastern Europe. This created an opening dialogue for example, some participants asked me had I visited their country of origin and about my experience of studying the Russian language. This was an effective way to begin the conversation. Many of the students had visited Trinity College and some were to study applying there This created a positive and relaxed atmosphere which facilitated the interviews.

### **Limitations**

There were several limitations to the study. To conduct two waves of interviews during a four-year PhD was an ambitious timeline, I travelled to several locations around Dublin as well as Galway, Kildare and Meath to interview participants, it was not possible for me to make several journeys to each destination for wave one so only participants who were available the day I travelled to the destination were able to be part of the study.

The interviews were conducted through English which could have prevented students with poor English language skills from becoming participants. I made every effort to combat this issue by explaining to the gatekeepers and students that I had studied Russian and could speak some Russian. I also created a Russian language version of the consent form and explanatory information in Russian about the study for students to supply to their parents. However, during the recruitment phase I addressed potential participants in English and this may have been daunting enough to act as a barrier for those with limited English comprehension skills. All students that agreed to participate had a high standard of English. Only one student approached

me and said they would like to participate but they did not think their English was good enough. The interview was conducted in English and the student's language ability was not an issue.

The level of commitment required from participants may have acted as a barrier during the recruitment phase. When I addressed the gatekeepers and groups of students I stressed the importance of committing to both waves of interviews. The impression I got was that the students were enthusiastic about participating in wave one because it meant they would get some time out of doing classwork as I conducted all interviews either during class time mid-week or class time at the language school at the weekend. However, the 'buy in' was not strong enough for potential participants to give up their own free time after they leave school. If the research had been for one wave I believe the uptake would have been bigger.

A reliance on gatekeepers in order to access participants could be seen as a further limitation. For several reasons, I was reliant on the 'buy-in' from a gatekeeper in each institution that I contacted. Firstly, the gatekeeper had to facilitate me addressing their students during class time, secondly, they had to distribute paperwork (consent forms) in advance of the interviews and thirdly, potentially allow me to use their class time to interview a student. While there were several very enthusiastic gatekeepers who encouraged their students to take part there were also staff members from several schools who were unwilling to act as a gatekeeper and would not facilitate me conducting research with their students. In this research it is clear that relying heavily on gatekeepers for access to participants certainly acted as a limitation.

The research design of this study had some limitations 'built-in'. The data collection process in this research was limited to qualitative semi-structured interviews. There are several qualitative data collection methods which could have been employed such as focus groups or participant observation which could have added additional data to enhance the thesis. I considered focus groups as an option, but decided against this because the total sample population was quite small I felt participants may not be as inclined to speak freely about their families, migration experience and experience in the education system amongst their peers. When conducting focus groups with adolescents there can be a strong desire for peer approval and an uneasiness about sharing sensitive, personal information publicly. This can create a situation whereby the participants are only offering responses which they feel are socially desirable (Norris et al., 2012, p. 671).

This research used a sample of 14 Russian-speaking students for two waves of interviews. This relatively small number could be considered a limitation to the study. A larger sample size

would have made the findings more reflective of the whole sample population of Russian-speaking students in Ireland.

The majority of the research sample (13 out of 14 students) aimed to continue on to further or higher education after school. This could have been due to the fact that I recruited the majority of my sample through weekend language schools where the students and families placed a high value on their education. The decision to recruit from language schools was made due to time constraints and to increase efficiency, half of my research sample attended a language school. Given more time it is possible I could have recruited more students individually through schools however, I was on an ambitious schedule to complete two waves of data collection within the four-year PhD programme. By recruiting students directly from second-level schools although it would have been more time-consuming there may be scope to recruit a sample with more diverse pathways. However, transition to higher education is the dominant trend for students leaving second-level school so it is likely that irrespective of the size of the sample there would still be a majority who aspired to attend third level education.

The next three chapters will discuss the findings of this study.

## **Chapter 4: Transition to Ireland**

This chapter will explore Russian-speakers' experiences of migration to Ireland, enrolment in school in Ireland including discussion on English language skills and supports. The chapter will then briefly touch upon the experience of those students who migrated during their second-level education.

In this study, parents have made an important decision which influenced their children's futures by deciding to migrate to Ireland. Previous international research suggests that migrants tend to be a self-selected highly skilled group (Liebeg and Sousa-Poza, 2004; Chiswick, 2000). It should be noted that there is both positive and negative self-selection. Positive self-selection is associated with migrants who have high educational levels and whose earnings surpass those of the native population. While negative self-selection tends to be associated with low educational status or migrant groups that consistently earn less than the native population (Cohen and Haberfield, 2007, p. 649). The process of migrating to a new country indicates that the parents are actively choosing to move their family from their country of birth to a new country with a belief and expectation that this will result in a higher standard of living, better quality of life, higher educational outcomes for their children and ultimately better career prospects. These are a diverse group of parents, in terms of country of birth, social class and level of education. They have taken the radical decision to move their family to a new country, knowing that the advantages of migration may not come to fruition until several years after migration. Thus, it is clear how these parents are confident to buy into the concept of 'delayed gratification' and are viewing their children and their children's happiness through the lens of the 'virtual adult' (Reay, 1998). As explained in Chapter 2, the 'virtual adult' is essentially a vision that parents have for their child in the future. For example, a family might endure financial hardship to pay for extra tuition for their child believing that this will ensure that their child will gain a place at university and then will secure a well-paid job. Parents are willing to make sacrifices and for their children to experience upheaval for the long-term benefits, or more specifically the perceived benefits to the virtual adult. In this context, migrant parents, irrespective of social class are displaying the same decision-making strategies as middle-class Irish parents when making decisions for their children's futures.

### **The Migration Experience**

The research sample includes migrants from a mix of EU and non-EU countries: Russia, The Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania, Azerbaijan and Moldova (see Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1: EU and non-EU students**

EU		non-EU	
Name (pseudonym)	Country	Name (pseudonym)	Country
Artur	Latvia	Dariya	Azerbaijan
Vadim	Latvia	Aliona	Moldova
Inga	Latvia	Vera	Moldova
Marta	Lithuania	Ekaterina	Russia
Olga	Lithuania	Pasha	The Ukraine
Ludmilla	Lithuania	Dmitri	The Ukraine
		Valentina	The Ukraine
		Anna	The Ukraine

When exploring the migration experiences of families, it is important to understand the reasons why they chose to migrate. As explained in Chapter 2, a push-pull model has traditionally been used to help to understand the rationale and decision-making process. The students in this study vary in several ways. Firstly, as the table above indicates there is a mix of male and female students that migrated from several different countries in Eastern Europe. There is also a mix of social classes in this research. A trend that emerged from the data suggests that the Ukrainian parents who had higher levels of education compared to parents from other countries and who also had professional occupations were drawn to Ireland by positive, economic pull factors. This contrasts with the parents from Latvia and Lithuania who had the lowest levels of education and were employed in low or unskilled jobs.

As discussed in Chapter 2, there was another notable push factor for Russian-speakers from Latvia and Lithuania to migrate. Since regaining their independence, there were limited opportunities for higher education and employment in some areas for individuals who did not speak the national languages (Cheskin, 2015).

Artur's family started their migration process when his father migrated to Ireland before Latvia officially joined the EU. Artur's family then migrated once Latvia became a member of the EU. Artur shared the experience of his family living in Latvia as ethnic Russians. Throughout Artur's discussion he raises several issues which he feels have driven his own family to migrate from Latvia. Artur noted economic factors such as comparing the better quality of life outside Latvia and also stresses the limited life-chances for ethnic Russians who do not have language proficiency in the official state language which is Latvian:

**Holly:** Do you go back to Latvia regularly to visit?

**Artur:** First few years we went back every year I went in 2014 but that was after two years of not visiting but it's a big stress for me because I don't really like the place. I see my relatives living in poor conditions that I have lived and it is

difficult to kind of even look at it, at the same time Latvia is a peculiar place with Russian Latvians because I'm not sure if they're welcome there or not. They are considered a minority there. A lot of them who don't have citizenship and can't vote like my grandfather doesn't have citizenship because his parent or grandparents weren't living there in Latvia before 1940 and he can't take the exam because he can't learn Latvian there's some exam you can take to get the citizenship it's not that its easy, I don't know maybe he never bothered but his life there is more difficult because of that. I look at it that they are kind of discriminated against, I can't look from any other perspective now that I have moved outside and seen more of the world if I hadn't moved I would think Latvia is fine.

Increased marginalisation can act as a strong push factor for migration. Ireland had strong pull factors for parents from these countries too, as strong economic growth meant there was high demand for labour in low or unskilled roles. The Ukrainian parents had a secure source of employment, often in keeping with their skill set, organised before they migrated. This contrasts with the employment experiences of Latvian and Lithuanian parents that were more precarious. Students reported their parents having had multiple jobs since they migrated and for several families they experienced periods of unemployment and employment uncertainty especially as Ireland entered recession.

As previously noted in this chapter, Artur's family migrated from Latvia where he felt his family were somewhat marginalised in society as ethnic Russians due to language proficiency issues. Artur noted the difficulty his father had in securing permanent employment since he migrated from Latvia to Ireland. As the following excerpt from Artur's interview shows, his father was working in low-skilled jobs and the family were socio-economically disadvantaged even after migration.

**Holly:** Did your Dad have a job organised before he moved to Ireland?

**Artur:** He didn't have permanent work; he went from place to place back then when he came over they were building a road in Lusk he worked there and the Pavilions in Swords was being built and he worked there but it is patchy at times there is a lot of part time jobs all the time but there is no permanent work ever I know people here who work three separate part time jobs.

Vadim's family migrated to Ireland from Latvia also. Vadim notes that while his father did not have difficulty in securing employment in Ireland, it was unskilled work which did not require speaking English or any specific qualifications:

**Holly:** Did your Mam and Dad find work when you moved to Ireland?

**Vadim:** Well my Dad found a job because of a friend and that job was like really easy and you don't need to know English that much and because my Dad is hardworking he likes his job he stayed there like he didn't get fired he's in the same job five year and my mam didn't get a job because she got pregnant so now I have sister she is three years old.



The issue of unskilled work, short term contracts and moving from job to job was not something experienced by the Ukrainian parents. For example, Pasha's father was employed as a computer programmer in The Ukraine and gained similar employment in Ireland. Similarly, Anna's father gained employment in his field of speciality in Ireland as a senior software engineer. This indicates that there is a class divide between the research sample based on what country they migrated from. The Ukrainian parents belong to a higher social class based on their level of education and occupation compared to the Latvian and Lithuanian parents. All the students in this research are from families who have chosen to migrate, however the motivation behind the move varies. The push factors for Latvian and Lithuanian families such as increasingly limited employment opportunities in their country of origin were discussed above. In addition, Irish immigration policy and the requirements of the labour market at the time of migration played a substantial role. Irish immigration policy required non-EU citizens to secure work visas to enter the labour market, as such this would restrict Ukrainian migrants to high-skilled workers or those with professional jobs (Smyth et al., 2009). This was not the case for migrants from Latvia and Lithuania as they were EU citizens with the right to travel and work freely within the EU.

Institutional transition, particularly in the context of migration, is complex. A helpful approach to understand the nuances of the transition to school in Ireland is by studying the experiences of those students who are deemed to be the most disadvantaged in the education system. International research suggests that children who migrate late in their school careers are at the greatest disadvantage because they do not have the language skills or sufficient time to prepare for what is required of them to sit successful exams and attain a place in college (Smyth et al., 2009). The students in this research who migrated very late in their educational careers, during senior cycle, challenge previous findings in this area. In this research the three students who arrived during their senior cycle education (final two years of school) were Vera (Moldova), Dariya (Azerbaijan) and Ekaterina (Russia). All three students had high levels of English language skills when they arrived in Ireland. This could suggest that it is again an issue of class, therefore, one would expect students from higher-professional, non-EU families to be more proficient in English irrespective of what stage they migrated. There are other factors which could have influenced their level of English, for example, the school they attended in their country of origin or whether their parents had a good command of English. The type of school attended by the student and the education level of their parents are bound up in issues of class.

There are two issues which emerge from the data. Firstly: migrating from The Ukraine means that the students were more likely to be from a family where parents had professional jobs, who moved to Ireland because of economic benefits such as higher salaries. Secondly; the data also

indicates that migrating late in one's school career does not necessarily mean that students are at more of a disadvantage than if they had migrated younger, providing they have migrated from a non-EU country. This could be linked to Irish selective immigration policy which favoured highly skilled workers from non-EU countries. For example, before EU expansion, Government officials from Ireland travelled to potential source countries to recruit skilled workers at job fairs (Roeder, 2011). However not all non-EU migrants in this study share similar characteristics. Firstly, two out of the four Ukrainian students (Dmitri and Anna), who migrated to Ireland did so during their pre-school years and had little or no language skills in either English or Russian. Secondly, two of the non-EU students who migrated from Moldova (Vera and Aliona), had parents who did not have secure employment organised in Ireland before they migrated. Their parents subsequently found employment in jobs below their qualification level combined with periods of unemployment. Vera's mother worked as a nurse in Moldova but could not speak English and therefore could not find employment when they migrated to Ireland. She eventually got a part-time job working in a launderette. What can be extrapolated from the data is a divide between students that migrated from non-EU countries whose parents were mid to highly skilled professionals, and those that migrated from Latvia and Lithuania at the time when free labour movement was applied to these countries due to EU expansion.

What further underscores the apparent divide between parents is the fact that none of the Lithuanian or Latvian students attended a fee-paying school or additional Russian language classes at the weekends. Attending a fee-paying school was not strictly equated with the social class of the family in this research, it is more a representation of parental ambition for their child. Three of the students from Latvia and Lithuania attended a second-level school which taught Russian as part of the syllabus which might explain why they did not pursue extra classes at the weekend. It was not a premeditated, strategic move that the parents sent their children to a school that taught Russian in order to maintain their language and cultural capital. None of these parents (or students) knew that Russian was being taught as part of the curriculum before enrolling their child in the school. They only became aware of this when their children reached senior cycle. It is also likely that the financial commitment needed to enrol children in formal classes was beyond the means of these families.

### **Russian Language Maintenance**

For some families, Russian language maintenance was an important issue after they migrated to Ireland. Previous research in an Irish context suggests that Russian-speaking parents tend to encourage language maintenance for cultural reasons (Kraftsoff and Quinn, 2009). Some studies also show that Russian-speaking young people themselves are motivated to maintain

their Russian language skills because it is directly transferrable into an A grade in their Leaving Certificate exam (Eriksson, 2011). The data from the students in this study supports both sets of findings. There was a clear desire for parents to keep the Russian language alive within their homes. Strategies used to achieve this included using mainly Russian language media platforms (Russian TV channels, radio, internet sites) with some families taking this a step further by creating a 'Russian only rule' whereby English was not spoken at all at home.

This is evident in Dmitri's quote below. He refers to 'the no-English rule' which he and his brother had to adhere to at home. Even though he says that he feels uncomfortable speaking in English to his parents he notes that between himself and his brother (who was born in Ireland) they tend to converse in English when they are on their own.

**Holly:** What language would you and your parents watch TV in?

**Dmitri:** Russian.

**Holly:** Do you speak no English at home?

**Dmitri:** I don't know, I think the non-English rule has kind of died down the last couple of years.

**Holly:** Oh, so it was a conscious decision on your parent's part to speak Russian to you so you wouldn't forget it?

**Dmitri:** Yeah absolutely, they were very strong on that, like in recent years me and my brother would be upstairs talking and it would just be more and more English slipping in like around our parents we speak Russian like I feel completely uncomfortable speaking English to my parents it's just so weird.

The following excerpts from the first wave of interviews show that it was much more common for families to watch Russian language television channels which possibly reflected the English language proficiency of parents in the home:

**Holly:** What language do you speak at home, watch TV in etc.?

**Anna:** My mam watches Russian TV, I don't really watch TV but if I'm in the kitchen and she has TV on its in Russian.

[...]

**Pasha:** Well in Maynooth we're living in an apartment and we're not allowed to have any satellites or anything so we can't watch Russian TV but when we used to live in Cork we had a satellite and we had Russian TV.

[...]

**Vadim:** Always Russian, we don't even have the Irish channels.

From these examples, it is clear that the use of Russian language within the students' homes is important to the families. This research suggests that parents have a strong attachment to the Russian language because of it was their mother tongue (most students reported having higher

levels of English language skills than their parents) and its link to their country of origin which is kept alive through links to Russian language media outlets. The findings from this study contrast with findings from Tereshchenko (2013) which found that Eastern European parents in the UK ‘put an extra emphasis on English proficiency often at the expense of literacy in their native language’ (Tereshchenko, 2013, p. 14). One reason for the apparent discord between the findings in this study and those of Tereshchenko (2013) in the UK could be rooted in social class issues. For example, families in the UK study were predominantly working class and in receipt of free school meals which is an indicator of low socio-economic status. Tereshchenko (2013) suggests that the parents’ eagerness to integrate into British society was to eliminate the potential for racism and ‘othering’ of their children. Several UK studies cite media propaganda which fuelled a feeling of resentment and racism towards Eastern European migrants (Tereshchenko, 2013, p. 32; McKenna, 2014).

### **Education Level at Time of Migration**

The timing of migration, in terms of the stage of children’s education is also likely to impact on children’s experiences. Table 4.2 illustrates how the research sample can be divided into three categories in terms of the stage at which the participants migrated to Ireland. The majority of participants arrived to Ireland during their primary school years. Two participants who arrived at a young age attended pre-schools in Ireland in advance of enrolling in primary school. Four participants arrived in Ireland during their second-level school career, three of which arrived during their senior cycle.

**Table 4.2: Education level at migration**

<b>Pre-school</b>	<b>Primary level</b>	<b>Second-level</b>
Anna	Aliona	Dariya
Dmitri	Inga	Vera
	Ludmilla	Ekaterina
	Marta	Vadim
	Olga	
	Valentina	
	Pasha	
	Artur	

Pasha, Anna, Valentina and Dmitri migrated from The Ukraine to Ireland. Their migration stories are typical of the East to West migration Ireland experienced throughout the period of economic growth during the Celtic Tiger years. Their parents were highly-skilled workers and gained employment in their sector of expertise in Ireland. Pasha, who migrated when in primary school, outlined his own migration story in the context of The Ukraine's economic instability versus Ireland's growing economy:

**Holly:** Why did your family decide to move to Ireland?

**Pasha:** Well I suppose the first thing that really happened was that my Dad started to realise that the situation in The Ukraine was such that he couldn't really find any sort of stable job in Kiev so he started looking for opportunities abroad. What he found was an advertisement for a job in Ireland and I suppose those were the Celtic Tiger years and there were a lot of jobs in Ireland especially in computer science and doctor sort of stuff so he decided to come over and take up a job. He didn't come over with us straight away so this was I suppose two years before me and my family moved over. So, me and my mam we stayed living in Kiev the capital of The Ukraine so he moved over and he really like it here so he found a job as a programmer for a big company that works in sort of providing service to car manufacturers so eh he liked it and he brought us over.

The narrative of opportunity, specifically employment opportunities was present in Anna, Dmitri, Valentina and Pasha's interviews and is consistent with the majority of interviews with the participants. Most of the students in the research referred to job opportunities which their parent(s) had already secured prior to migration. In this research it was primarily, though not exclusively, the father who moved to Ireland alone at first to take up a position, followed by the mother and children. For some students, this was never intended to be a permanent move or a move that would include the whole family but it became that way after a period of time. It is important to note that for this research it is only the students who were interviewed and not their parents, there is a possibility that the parents had planned the family migrating in advance but had not communicated that fully to their children until it was nearer the time.

The circumstances surrounding Artur migrating from Latvia to Ireland are within the context of widening EU accession. Artur's father moved to Ireland before 2004, by applying for a work permit. Artur discusses how he did not think his father's move to Ireland was a permanent plan. However, during the course of his stay in Ireland, Latvia joined the European Union and as a result the family were free to travel and live in Ireland permanently without the need for permits, visa or additional restrictions. Artur notes he was initially apprehensive and had feelings of anxiety particularly around starting school due to his language proficiency:

**Holly:** When your parents decided that you were going to move to Ireland did you know anything about the move, did they give you much information?

**Artur:** I definitely noticed because my father moved first, he moved, we weren't in the EU then, he had to get a work visa, the EU talks just took place when he was moving, I remember I saw on the news the EU flag with all the stars and

the news came in that we could go there to visit him. It wasn't intended as a long term living here it was intended to work a little bit then go back a working trip.

**Holly:** How would you describe the experience of moving?

**Artur:** It has been a positive because first of all I didn't know that I was completely moving that was one thing and I was visiting my Dad and my Dad was gone for half a year so to see him was a great happiness just the interaction with the family reunited again that was really cool we went around Ireland you know loads of different places and then I was a bit scared of going into a school without English it was not traumatic but anxious experience it's the same if I was to move to France right now.

The quote above indicates that for some students in this research, the migration experience was challenging and required adjustment, Artur mentions being 'a bit scared'. Although all the participants agreed that in hindsight they were happy to have migrated, the settling in period took some time. Very often one or both parents went ahead for a period of time before the family would be reunited in Ireland. Being separated from friends and family are some of the challenges that accompany the move to a new country. The following excerpts from the first wave of interviews with Aliona (Moldova) and Marta (Lithuania) show that leaving their friends and extended family in their countries of origin was difficult for them both and it took time for them to feel settled in Ireland as a result.

Prior to her own migration to Ireland, Aliona's parents had migrated three years beforehand and she lived with her grandparents in Moldova. This upheaval and familial separation prior to her own migration could also have influenced Aliona's experience. She only refers to this period without her parents fleetingly and describes it as 'a bit difficult'. The language barrier was a key factor which posed a difficulty for Aliona as she did not speak any English when she migrated to Ireland. The repercussions of facing this structural barrier are manifold, as Aliona outlines her migration experience she uses words such as 'traumatic', 'lonely' and 'homesick'. Migrating to Ireland and not being able to speak English was a very isolating experience for Aliona, she could not communicate with her classmates and struggled to understand the curriculum in school. Aliona migrated to Ireland when in primary school. It took a considerable length of time, two years which is the longest out of all participants in this study, to feel that she had settled in to life in Ireland.

**Holly:** How would you describe your migration experience?

**Aliona:** It was a bit traumatic but I got used to obviously the first few years I was a bit homesick and wanted to go back cos I missed all my friends it was a big change cos Ireland compared to Moldova it's just completely different two completely different languages so now maybe I wouldn't want to move back but I'm happy cos my life would have probably been totally different probably life would be a bit better here than back at home probably

**Holly:** So, you had no English when you came to Ireland?

**Aliona:** No, I learned English by going to school here

**Holly:** How did you manage?

**Aliona:** It was difficult the first two years it took me a good two years to learn it, it was difficult to understand and it felt a bit lonely cos I didn't really understand anyone there was not anyone from my country only Irish people speaking English.

Marta, who migrated when in primary school, struggled initially with the migration experience. Marta described similar sentiments as Aliona around homesickness and also like Aliona used very strong language to describe how the experience of migration made her feel. Marta responded very emotionally to the process of migration describing how she had a few 'breakdowns'.

**Holly:** How do you feel the experience of migration has been?

**Marta:** Well I think overall its positive experience but when I moved to Ireland I didn't have as much friends as I had in Lithuania it was a big stress for me I really wanted to go back to Lithuania I had a few breakdowns I was crying a lot but then I just kind of settled I found a few friends here and I just got on with it.

Despite the negative language that Marta used to describe her initial period of settling into life in Ireland, she moves swiftly from discussing the process in negative terms to say she just 'got on with it'.

### **Enrolling in School in Ireland**

Research in Ireland suggests that active choice is a key feature of the education system. Active choice is common among all social groups, although parents with higher education levels are more likely to exercise their choice and their children are significantly more likely to be attending a school outside their local area than those from other class backgrounds (Byrne and Smyth, 2011). Choosing a primary school did not appear to be a major consideration for the families in this research. When choosing a second-level school, there seemed to be much more awareness around school choice at that stage. This could be explained by the fact that having just migrated to a new country the parents were unaware of how the education system in Ireland worked and did not have the 'insider knowledge' about the differences between schools. There is evidence which suggests that some Irish middle-class parents are displaying long-term active choice by considering feeder primary schools when choosing a second-level school (Byrne and Smyth, 2011, p. 59). There are many reasons for opting for a school outside the local area, these include the reputation of a particular school or parents choosing a primary school which is a feeder school for their preferred second-level school. The students in this research who were of primary school age when they migrated all enrolled in a primary school within their neighbourhood. This does not reflect the general trend in Ireland which suggests that attending a school other than the local school is quite prevalent (Byrne and Smyth, 2011). From this point of view Russian-speaking parents are not exercising the same active choice as Irish parents in

choosing a primary school for their children. Possibly reflecting families who have settled in areas where schools are not over-subscribed, where they can walk to school as transportation might be an issue (see Smyth et al. 2009). This could be linked to issues of class as previously noted class inequality is an issue in the type of second-level school attended by students in this study. This has been indicated in Irish and international research which suggest that some groups of parents appear to have greater ‘insider’ knowledge of the education system based on information they have acquired from their social networks to select the ‘best’ school for their child (Byrne and Smyth, 2011). While Russian-speaking parents are not exercising active choice in choosing a primary school for their children it seems they do rely on their social networks when choosing a second-level school as discussed below.

There is some evidence in this research to support a trend of parents using the social capital provided by the Russian-speaking community to navigate the education system and using their cultural capital to enhance their children’s prospects. Seven out of the fourteen students in this research attended a weekend Russian-language school. The main aim for senior cycle students attending the language school is to prepare for the Russian Leaving Certificate exam. Russian-speakers possess a form of cultural capital by the fact that they speak Russian, however research in an Irish context has previously suggested that students do not find that this type of cultural capital translates into social capital in a school environment (Devine, 2009, p. 526). In this study, parents of the students who attend the Russian language schools are using their cultural capital as leverage to increase their children’s exam results and bolster their opportunities for when they finish school. When discussing why she chose to attend weekend classes Anna, who migrated in her pre-school years, said she heard about the classes through a friend at school who was attending them, and another friend had attended the classes previously. ‘Apparently one of my other friends who did her Leaving [Certificate] in 2013 came here as well and when I told my mam she said she knew this place because of her so everyone kind of knows this place’.

Anna’s impression that ‘everyone kind of knows this place’ is a sentiment that was present in the narratives of two other students who attend the classes, Dmitri who also migrated during his pre-school years and Dariya who migrated in second-level education:

**Holly:** How did you find out about this language school?

**Dmitri:** My mam would be talking to her friends and their sons and daughters would be my friends through church so they’d be telling me like just do it its really easy. While the parents were like you should definitely do it to get the points so I just gave it a shot.

**Dariya:** My dad found out about this school on a forum for Russian-speakers living in Ireland. People were discussing it saying they sent their children there for extra help and it was good so we just decided to try it.



In keeping with international research (Tereshchenko, 2013, p. 9; Poros, 2011), findings from this study show Russian-speaking parents using their social network and connections within the Russian-speaking community to source information about schools and the education system in Ireland. The quotes above show the broad range of networks that Russian-speakers in Ireland are connected to. From these examples, it is clear that Russian-speaking networks include friends, religious organisations and online social networks. This is in contradiction to literature that suggests Irish parents have ‘insider’ knowledge based on information they get from their networks which is why they are displaying active choice. However, networks take time to accumulate and if a Russian-speaker has recently migrated to Ireland they might not have developed networks which can advise them on school choice. This explains why active school choice was more prevalent at second-level, when the families had been living in Ireland several years and presumably established their networks, as opposed to choosing a primary school which had to be done upon arrival with no advice or ‘insider’ knowledge to work with.

### **English Language Skills and Support**

Russian-speaking parents are not engaging in similar strategies to Irish parents in choosing a primary school. In addition, their children do have additional needs with regards their English language ability. The majority of primary and second-level schools in Ireland provide formal English language provision for students who have a lack of English proficiency. In order to facilitate the additional classes students are taken out of regular classes for this ‘supplementary’ provision (Smyth et al. 2009). The method of withdrawing migrant students from regular class to provide supplementary tuition is common practice in other countries in Europe but it is not a seamless approach as it can lead to disruption in the classroom or a sense of marginalisation amongst migrant students for being ‘different’ (Smyth et al., 2009, p. 143). The following section explores the English language support received by the students in this research.

The students in this research who migrated during primary school had additional English language needs. Their English language needs were catered for to varying degrees depending on which school they enrolled in and that school’s policy and resources at the time. For example, Artur and Pasha were fortunate that their schools offered them both a high level of English language support:

**Holly:** Were you given extra support with your English language skills?

**Artur:** Yeah, I was taken out for their English time. I was taken out to another classroom there was a teacher there who spoke with international students who were learning words, vocabulary in it was very good I got to learn a lot of words through that there were a lot of posters that I used to look at my dad said learn a word a day and it went along I learned four a day.

[...]

**Pasha:** Yeah and I actually have to say it was probably the best assistance that I ever received. I always had extra teachers throughout every class up to fifth class. I had assistance with my English they basically took me out every time we had Irish they just took me out and there were a range of activities. We had different learning methods it was one on one teaching it was really effective it was a big factor in helping me speak with the fluency I speak with today.

A minority of the participants had learned English in school prior to moving to Ireland. During the first wave of interviews the students spoke about moving from the education system they experienced in their native country to the education system in Ireland. The majority of students had some experience of primary education in their native country (except Dmitri and Anna who moved to Ireland during their pre-school years). From an institutional perspective, it is interesting to explore the experience of transition to primary school in Ireland of Pasha (The Ukraine) and Ludmilla (Lithuania). Both students migrated to Ireland at age eight and nine respectively.

Pasha, who migrated in primary education, describes his level of English before he migrated and upon arrival in Ireland as quite basic and struggling to communicate effectively.

**Holly:** Would you have been involved in after school activities or anything like that?

**Pasha:** Well from what I remember I didn't play too much in sport I was part of a kind of after school learning thing where basically there was some English being taught for kids my age I went to that aside from that I didn't go to anything

**Holly:** Did you only learn English during those after school classes?

**Pasha:** No there was some English being taught as well this was from 1st-3rd class but the level was very basic there wasn't any complicated stuff so when I came here it was a bit of a shock.

Despite the fact that Pasha was taught English at the school in The Ukraine and attended additional English classes after school he still felt ill-prepared when he arrived to school in Ireland:

**Holly:** So, you didn't feel like you had any English when you arrived?

**Pasha:** Em no aside from telling people what my name was and asking people how are you even how are you I mean nobody says how are you they say 'what's the craic' so it's not even close to what you'd need to communicate.

Ludmilla, who migrated in primary education, had a similar experience to Pasha. Having learned some basic English language at primary school in Lithuania she also felt unprepared for attending school in Ireland and learning everything through English. Ludmilla notes that she was fortunate to be placed in a class with students who had experience of socialising with non-native English speakers. This was of great benefit to Ludmilla during the initial stages of settling in:

**Holly:** Did you learn English at school in Lithuania?

**Ludmilla:** We just did very basic stuff like cat, dog, chair, table not even grammar or anything like that

**Holly:** So, did you find it difficult starting in primary school in Ireland learning everything through English?

**Ludmilla:** I think I used to have two classes a day even I think it was a good two months for me to have a conversation but, I was really lucky to get into a nice class the girls in the class were really helpful and welcoming. I think it was cos it was a bit later than the Celtic Tiger they were already used to all the international people and having to speak slower to them so I didn't find any difficulties at all. I mean obviously it wasn't easy to learn the language and my dad was pushing me he'd have me sitting down with a dictionary learning new words.

As the quotes above illustrate, both students reported having very low levels of English when arriving to Ireland. However, the approach that each of their schools took when enrolling them in classes varied greatly. Pasha was enrolled into a younger class than he had been attending in The Ukraine, this was based on his low-levels of English language skills.

**Holly:** What class did you join when you arrived?

**Pasha:** Ok so I was put down a class I was meant to be going into 3rd class continuing into half 3rd class which I did in The Ukraine but instead they put me down because they said my level of English wasn't high enough so they just put me down to 2nd class

**Holly:** You were ok with being put into 2nd class?

**Pasha:** Yeah, I wasn't upset or anything.

Ludmilla's experience of enrolling in school in Ireland differed from Pasha's. Ludmilla reported low-levels of English language ability when she arrived, as she stated in a previous quote she 'learned basic words such as cat or dog'. The school she enrolled in was oversubscribed for the year group she should have been joining. Unlike Pasha who was placed in a lower year group, Ludmilla skipped a year of primary education and was enrolled in an older year group.

**Ludmilla:** I just remember standing there in the office in (name of school) around the corner and they were asking what class she completed and my Dad said she completed third class they said well there's no places in 4th class so we're putting her into fifth class I didn't mind at all I wouldn't have understood the difference really anyway.

The experiences of Pasha and Ludmilla show that schools vary in the way in which they cater for migrant students. While both schools took two different approaches, there is a clear sense that the schools experienced challenges in terms of the students' language proficiency and places available at the school. This is in line with previous findings that diversity in schools is very often viewed as a challenge rather than an opportunity (Smyth et al., 2009; Valencia, 1997). In Valencia's research on deficit perspective, it is argued that the student is blamed for their 'lack' of ability rather than examining the school structure which can prevent certain

students from learning effectively (Valencia, 1997). It is important to note that both Pasha and Ludmilla adjusted to their new classes with minimal disruption. This highlights students' resilience-a concept discussed in Chapter 2. Resilience is intrinsically linked to making transitions which for some, such as Pasha and Ludmilla were successful transitions from the school system in their country of origin with both students taking enrolment in their new school in their stride. The following section will discuss Vadim, Artur and Valentina who experienced a type of culture shock associated with the education system and teaching style in Ireland. There was a period of uncertainty before adjusting to their new school and a new education system.

In terms of adjusting to a new school, Vadim undoubtedly underwent the most challenging transition from his school in Latvia to his new school in Dublin. Vadim, who migrated during his second-level education, attended a private fee-paying school in Latvia which he spoke very highly of, comparing it to 'Hogwarts from Harry Potter'. When his family moved to Ireland, Vadim attended a second-level school with DEIS status and described his initial impression of this school as 'shocking' due to the number of students. Although he thought the school was good after the initial settling-in period:

**Holly:** Did you enjoy going to school in Latvia?

**Vadim:** The experience from private school in Latvia and this school are really different, in private school we had like ten students in a class it was really expensive school it looked like Hogwarts from Harry Potter it was amazing there and when I moved here it was shocking how many people are there but I get used to and found it good.

Artur and Valentina's response to their new primary school system and adjustment period is more associated with teaching style and practices. While Artur remarks on the structural differences between the two systems: for example, having one teacher in one classroom in Ireland as opposed to different teachers and classrooms in Latvia, he was not critical of the new system and accepted that 'this is how they do stuff and this is how it is'. In contrast, Olga, who migrated in primary education, also noted the differences in both systems and goes further to point out her perceived deficits within the Irish system. Olga outlines that the Maths classes were 'much better' in The Ukraine compared to the 'basics' she was being taught when she enrolled in school in Ireland. Olga's perception of the maths classes in Ireland being 'basic' is in line with Smyth et al. (2009) who found this was a recurring theme, that migrant students cited maths as being easier in Ireland, that non-migrant students and teaching staff identified migrant students as having high levels of aptitude for maths.

**Holly:** Did you enjoy going to school in Latvia?

**Artur:** In Latvia the school was a bit different, they have a different programme. We don't have the primary classroom approach not like here it's a similar set up to secondary here we go to different classrooms with different (subject) teachers from first class. I was involved in clubs looking at continual development like if

you aren't pronouncing letters correctly you have to take classes to pronounce them. I also did sports stuff like gymnastics and exercise stuff.

**Holly:** When you came to the primary school here you were surprised by the system?

**Artur:** Yeah, I definitely did, I didn't understand why is the school different that way with one teacher in one classroom. It took me a few weeks to settle, I just thought this is how they do the stuff and this is how it is just talking to myself to understand all the new things.

[...]

**Holly:** Did you enjoy going to school in The Ukraine?

**Valentina:** Yes well, in The Ukraine I loved the way we would come to the board to write up our answers ourselves and in here the teachers write everything and you don't really get an opportunity to answer questions. Oh yeah and we had much better maths classes in The Ukraine because in here it's so easy, when I came here they were learning you know how to multiply 6x6 and that's just basics yeah I suppose it did take a little while.

It is clear that although the students made a successful transition to their new primary school, institutional transition can cause uncertainty amongst young people especially with the added adjustments such as a new culture and a new language to learn.

### **Migration During Second-level Education**

As previously mentioned, not all students in the research were primary school students when they migrated. Vadim (Latvia) migrated at the beginning of second-level school, he started in first year. A further three students, Ekaterina (Russia), Vera (Moldova), Dariya (Azerbaijan) migrated to Ireland during the senior cycle of their second-level education. Previous research in Ireland indicates that migration at this stage entails a far bigger adjustment because the education system is exam orientated and the language barrier is more pronounced at this level (Smyth et al., 2009). As discussed in Chapter 1, the placing of migrant students into lower level classes as a result of their language proficiency can also create a level of disadvantage for young people migrating during their second-level education. The connection between educational attainment and future socio-economic outcomes are directly linked and cannot be underestimated. This is particularly pertinent for migrant families, one of the primary motivators for migration is better education and career prospects or social mobility for their family (McWhirter et al. 2013; Crosnoe and Lopez Turley, 2011; Sweet et al., 2009). For young people who migrate during their second-level education there are increased risks associated with this disruption. They are entering an unknown system and competing academically with their non-migrant peers in state examinations and ultimately for places in third level education and the labour market. For the students in this research who migrated during their second-level education they had the benefit of a protective factor which reduced many of the associated risks and difficulties of migrating late in their educational career. Dariya migrated to Ireland and

started second-level school in fifth year. Her mother was an English teacher when they lived in Azerbaijan and had taught Dariya and her younger sister English at home as they were growing up. As a result, Dariya could communicate fluently in English and therefore did not face the issue of a language barrier when starting school at such a late stage in Ireland. Ekaterina's parents do not speak English, however Ekaterina had been studying English since she was five years old with a home tutor and she had also benefitted from summer language trips throughout Europe during her childhood. As a result, Ekaterina was well equipped to enrol in school in Ireland during the senior cycle of second-level school. Vera studied English in school in Moldova and so similarly to Dariya and Ekaterina did not face any difficulty joining second-level school in Ireland. Vera is the only young person in the research who had a part-time job during the first wave of interviews which she credits with improving her proficiency in English.

**Holly:** Did you study English in school in Moldova?

**Vera:** Yeah, I studied English like a third language so when I came here it was just the accent a little bit but it performed quite fast because I'm in school and I'm working in a restaurant so that helped.

All three students had excellent English language skills which acted as a potential protective factor thus removing a key barrier which other students in this research were faced with. While the three students who migrated latest in their second-level education did not face any serious difficulties based on language ability this was not the case for Vadim who migrated at the beginning of his second-level education. Despite having attended a private school in Latvia, Vadim found it very difficult to integrate into school in Ireland because of his low level of English language skills.

**Holly:** Did you and your sister and your Mam speak English before you came here?

**Vadim:** We both went to private schools and the education there was amazing and still English was bad.

**Holly:** Did you struggle with your English when you came here then?

**Vadim:** Yes, first year I didn't understand anything at all it was terrible my grades were awful.

Vadim received extra language support, a 40-minute class each day to improve his English language ability. The experiences between the three students who arrived latest in their second-level education is in contrast to Vadim's experience who migrated several years earlier in his second-level education. This indicates that language ability is a much more significant factor than age or stage of arrival for making a successful transition to a new country.

## **Summary**

This chapter has discussed the migration experiences of the Russian-speaking young people in this research. As outlined at the beginning of the chapter the sample was diverse as young

people migrated from Russia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Latvia, Lithuania and The Ukraine. The research sample was mixed in terms of what age and stage at school they migrated. Four students migrated to Ireland in their second-level education, the majority of students migrated during their primary education and two migrated during their pre-school years. The factors such as country of birth and age at migration resulted in the young people and their families having different migration experiences. This chapter has illustrated how country of origin influenced the reasons for migration. For example, for Ukrainian families there were strong pull factors to Ireland with the offer of high professional level employment. This is in contrast to the families from Latvia and Lithuania who described their migration as positioned within stronger push factors from their country as they believed there were increasingly limited employment prospects, therefore migration was their opportunity to improve their quality of life and standard of living. Russian language maintenance was important, whether it was for themselves personally or of importance to their parents who strongly advocated the use of Russian language at home. This research concurs with previous studies conducted with Russian-speaking migrants in Ireland, which found that maintaining their Russian language was very important to parents because it maintained the cultural and historic links to their country of birth. In the case of Russian-speaking students in second-level education the maintenance of their language skills can prove beneficial during their Leaving Certificate examination thereby adding extra incentive to ensure high levels of fluency. While three students from the sample attended a second-level school which offered Russian language as a subject, the majority of the sample did not have this option and as a result only spoke Russian at home with their parents on a daily basis. In some cases, parents felt this was not sufficient preparation for sitting their final exam which led to them supplementing this with additional classes in weekend language schools which focus primarily on the Leaving Certificate exam paper. This chapter highlighted how migrant families can be at a disadvantage in the education system from the time they begin to enrol their child in primary school. This chapter argued that Russian-speaking parents may not have the 'insider knowledge' required to make fully informed decisions about school choice. As a result, decisions made at primary school level can curtail which second-level school they get a place in thus influencing their post-school pathways and future life chances from an early age. This is evidenced by the fact that all students who migrated during their primary level education were enrolled in 'local' primary schools, schools in close proximity to their homes often in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. This is not consistent with the patterns of enrolment for the general student population in Ireland which show that attending a non-local school is quite prevalent irrespective of the parents' social class, although children from higher professional families are significantly more likely to attend a school outside their own area

(Smyth and Byrne, 2011). Consequently, students from families who understand the system and that 'relationships' exist between primary and second-level schools are often making long-term decisions. By enrolling their children in a particular primary school with a view to attending a specific second-level school they are choosing a school (many years in advance) which they feel best meets their needs or shares their values and priorities (Ledwith and Reilly, 2013; Smyth and Byrne, 2009). The next chapter will focus on educational decision-making at second-level.



## Chapter 5: Educational Decision-Making

One of the earliest and most fundamental decisions to be made in a young person's education concerns which school to attend. Chapter 4 explored enrolment into primary schools. This chapter focusses specifically on second-level schools as it is a time that shapes young people's future pathways. This chapter firstly explores the rationale Russian-speaking parents employ when choosing a second-level school. The chapter then moves on to exploring the role parents and the school play in enabling or restricting choices during the decision-making processes in second-level education. The chapter will then explore the high value placed on academic choices as opposed to the value placed on non-academic choices. There will be some discussion around the economic context that had influenced parents' own pathways and subsequently their aspirations for their children. Issues surrounding guidance counselling and schools' provision of guidance will be addressed before the findings will be summarised in the conclusion.

As discussed in Chapter 4, a key difference in the strategies employed by middle-class families is their view of the child as a virtual-adult and their belief in what will create future happiness and success. This belief is often one of the factors that motivates parents to migrate. Irrespective of the social class in which the families are situated, the vast majority could be described as having middle-class values. They recognise the value of education and use it as a tool for social mobility. Ekaterina (Russia) outlined her parents' view of the importance of education for their children. This is linked with immigrant optimism as Ekaterina states: 'We are their children and they think that our future is very important and they do everything they can for our future they think that education is a good choice a good way to do something.' Ekaterina's family decided together that she should be educated in Ireland while they stayed in Russia. This is one example from the research of a family making an important decision while their child was young in order to improve their future life chances, a theme which will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Table 5.1 gives a synopsis of the rationale behind the choice of primary and second-level schools. In terms of choosing a second-level school, for most, the reasons were pragmatic. Distance from home was the factor most often cited by students. For others, there were different considerations at play such as subject availability, academic reputation and fee-paying status. This is in line with Darmody et al. (2012) indicating complex reasons behind school choices.

**Table 5.1: School choice**

Student	Social Class	Age at migration	Primary school	Second-level school	Rationale of choice for second-level school
Dariya	middle class	15	n/a	local	Within commuting distance
Vera	middle class	16	n/a	local	Within commuting distance
Artur	working class	8	local	local	Within walking distance
Aliona	working class	7	local	local/fee	Parents wanted child to attend fee-paying school for senior cycle
Dmitri	middle class	4	local	local	Mother researched the best schools within commuting distance
Vadim	working class	13	local	local	Within walking distance
Inga	middle class	9	local	local	Within walking distance
Ludmilla	working class	9	local	local	Within walking distance
Marta	middle class	9	local	local	Within commuting distance
Olga	working class	6	local	local	Within commuting distance
Valentina	middle class	9	local	specialist	changed schools for specialist subjects she required for University
Anna	middle class	1	local	local/fee	Mother wanted her to attend fee-paying school for senior cycle
Ekaterina	middle class	16	n/a	fee	Parents wanted a European education for their child
Pasha	middle class	8	local	local	Within walking distance

Families in this study represent different social classes using education as a key indicator. It is evident that there was a difference in the level of engagement with the decision-making process and the extent to which some parents were likely to make strategic decisions. Three of the students in this study attended fee-paying schools, Aliona (Moldova), Anna (The Ukraine) and Ekaterina (Russia). Such schools account for eight per cent of second-level schools in Ireland with fees varying from six thousand to eight thousand euro per annum (Darmody and Smyth, 2013). For some students, it was automatically assumed that they would be attending a fee-paying school. Aliona's (Moldova) parents weighed up the financial implications against the perceived benefits of a private fee-paying school. They decided to experience financial penalties because they believed a private school would yield better results. For Aliona's parents, their daughter's education was so important to their social mobility that they moved her from a DEIS school which was in their community to a fee-paying school and experienced financial hardship as a result. Aliona's family are 'working-class' as neither parent was educated at third level, but Aliona reported that her parents felt a private school was a worthwhile investment to get the best education for her. The student notes that 'obviously we're not a rich family we're the average family but my parents are very focused.' (Aliona, Moldova).

Ekaterina's situation differs from every other student's experience in this research. Ekaterina came to Ireland alone to live with a host family with the specific goal of receiving a European education. The decision to undertake such a considerable move was discussed at length between Ekaterina and her parents who were both educated to third level. During the first interview, she refers to the competitive edge between herself and her peers that she would gain by studying in Europe. Having considered several European countries, the family decided to send Ekaterina from Russia to a fee-paying school in Ireland to be educated. Ekaterina and her parents believed she would receive a better standard of education, she would learn to speak English fluently and would benefit from the experience of living abroad with a host family:

**Holly:** How did you decide to come to Ireland to study?

**Ekaterina:** Oh well it was a decision with my parents, we sat down and discuss that I should have a European education because if I would not have education in Russia I would be like better than anybody because I would have certificate from another country. We thought about Czech Republic, London but we settled on Ireland. I sent a form to the school in January and they give me an answer and I do interview with them through Skype and I have an agency in Russia and this agency speaks with agency here and then yeah, I come here and live with host family and go to this school (name of school).

Anna had attended a voluntary secondary school for her junior cycle and transition year. Her older brother who was studying medicine at UCD had also attended a voluntary secondary school for junior cycle but then moved to a fee-paying school for senior cycle. Anna felt there was an automatic assumption or a natural progression that she would follow her brother's example and attend a fee-paying school for her senior cycle. She refers to it as 'being her turn' even though this was not her preferred choice at the time:

**Holly:** So how did you decide to move schools after the Junior Certificate?

**Anna:** My brother went to the Institute in 6th year then 6 years later it was my turn and my mam wanted to send me for 5th and 6th year.

**Holly:** Were you happy to go along with that decision?

**Anna:** Yeah, I was kind of like no cos I didn't wanna leave my friends but now I don't regret it cos it's better.

Dmitri's (The Ukraine) family were very focused on his education, particularly his mother as he speaks about the 'effort' she put into getting him the 'best education'. The 'best education' for Dmitri's family was subject to financial constraints and therefore a fee-paying school such as Anna or Aliona were attending was not feasible. Instead, Dmitri's mother found a school which she regarded as the best community school in commuting distance and effectively lobbied the principal to allow her son attend, even though he did not fulfill the admission requirements.

**Dmitri:** My Mam put so much effort into getting the best opportunities and best education for me like even my Mam spent so many hours just talking to the

principal to get me into the school I'm in right now. I have to just do my very best not to let her down.

It is clear that Dmitri appreciates the level of work his mother put into creating the best educational opportunities that she could for him. He acknowledges this effort and assumes responsibility for the level of work he must now put into his Leaving Certificate; there is an element of a sense of duty so he does not 'let her down'.

Three of the students [Artur (Latvia), Inga (Latvia), and Ludmilla (Lithuania)] in this research attended their local second-level school which offered Russian as a Leaving Certificate subject. This was the only school in the research which taught Russian and is one of only nine second-level schools in Ireland which offer Russian as part of the curriculum. None of the three students knew this information before they started in the school. It was not part of the rationale for deciding on this particular school; they each said that it was the closest school to their home so it 'made sense' for them to go there and it was just 'lucky or a 'bonus' that the school taught Russian.

**Holly:** It is interesting that your school offers Russian as part of the curriculum?

**Artur:** Oh yes definitely unbelievably lucky because you know I chose this school by guessing. I never scanned and analysed the matter of where to go I just went to this school.

It is notable that even upon entering this school the students were not made aware through official channels such as a teacher, year head and/or guidance counsellor that they could take Russian, their primary language, as a Leaving Certificate subject.

**Holly:** Did you know you could do Russian for the Leaving Certificate when you started in this school?

**Inga:** Yeah well when I first came I did German for the first week before and then my year head came in and told someone they could do Russian so I asked her could I do it too.

[...]

**Ludmilla:** No I didn't. I had no idea my friend knew someone who was doing Russian in the school at the time it's all really quiet about it like most people won't know that we have a Russian teacher in the school unless they're like in fifth year or sixth year.

According to both Inga and Ludmilla neither student knew that Russian was a language option for their Leaving Certificate. They did not find out this information until they reached senior cycle even though they had been attending that school since they were in first year. Inga noted that her year head told another student that they could take Russian as a subject but she did not tell Inga directly. This could be linked to the complexity of Russian-speakers as a group, it is entirely plausible that Inga's year head considered Inga to be Latvian and therefore assumed she spoke Latvian rather than being ethnic Russian born in Latvia and who spoke Russian as her first language.

Table 5.2 illustrates the key agents in the decision-making process: parents, the school and the student. The role of each of the agents will be discussed in the following sections.

**Table 5.2: Choice of post-school pathway**

Student	Country of Origin	Class	Supportive/Directive	School Guidance	Final Choice	Rationale of Choice
Dariya	Azerbaijan	middle	directive	yes	student	interest in field
Vera	Moldova	middle	supportive	yes	student	interest in field
Artur	Latvia	working	supportive	yes	student	perceived high salary
Aliona	Moldova	working	directive	yes	parent	perceived high salary
Dmitri	The Ukraine	middle	directive	yes	mutual	perceived high salary
Vadim	Latvia	working	supportive	yes	student	interest in field
Inga	Latvia	middle	supportive	yes	student	wants to earn money
Ludmilla	Lithuania	working	directive	yes	Student by default	interest in field
Marta	Lithuania	middle	supportive	yes	student	interest in field
Olga	Lithuania	working	directive	yes	student	career prospects
Valentina	The Ukraine	middle	supportive	no	student	interest in field
Anna	The Ukraine	middle	supportive	yes	student	interest in field
Ekaterina	Russia	middle	directive	yes	mutual	career prospects
Pasha	The Ukraine	middle	supportive	yes	student	interest in field

The parents are split into the categories of supportive or directive parenting style in the decision-making process which will be discussed further in the chapter. Table 5.2 shows whether the school offered formal educational guidance to the students and outlines whether the final choice (an option put down on their CAO form<sup>7</sup> or deciding to enter the labour market) lay with the student themselves or their parents. Finally, this table outlines the rationale behind the final choice that students made. For some, the final decision was the perceived salary and career prospect whilst for others, the final choice was influenced by the students' own interest in this field of study.

### **The Role of Parents**

In this study, there were two types of parenting styles which emerged in relation to educational decision-making. There were parents who could be described as passive, they seemed to play a supportive role and could be perceived as less engaged than the parents who could be described

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<sup>7</sup> The CAO is the College Applications Office which is responsible for processing the majority of undergraduate admissions applications for colleges and universities in Ireland. The CAO form is the generic form filled out by every student in Ireland by February of the year they wish to enrol in third level education.

as active and in some cases directive (see Table 5.2 above). The reasons behind this perceived 'passiveness' are complex: 'For some, their perceived passivity is linked to their lack of wider social power and wider educational knowledge which we would expect to be higher among migrant communities particularly newer migrants' (Reay and Ball, 1998, p. 435). For most parents whose parenting style was passive, this could be linked to their child having a definite pathway in mind. For 'passive' parents there is still a high level of engagement but in a supportive rather than directive role. For example, Artur (Latvia) knew he wanted to study medicine since he started in second-level school. Artur felt he did not need to discuss his subject choices with his parents because he knew the academic requirements and his parents understood that he was clear about his pathway. Similarly, for Vadim (Latvia) and Pasha (The Ukraine) who both wished to study computer science this was the only pathway they both wished to pursue. Both students were aware of the academic requirements and their parents were satisfied with computer science as a career therefore acted in a passive rather than active role. Hence, the parents seem to be less engaged by virtue of the fact that the choices have been made by the student. In each of these cases the parents are comfortable with these choices thus, are playing a more supportive than directive role.

Another Latvian student Inga, (both parents had third level degrees) wished to take a year out from education after finishing school and enter the labour market instead. While her parents were not completely satisfied with this route, being concerned that Inga may never decide to go to college, they did not adopt any strategies of exerting their influence as other parents in this research did:

**Holly:** Were your parents supportive when you told them you wanted to take a year 'off' after school to work?

**Inga:** I'm not sure if they have a problem with that like I said I wanted to go back after a year but she was kind of saying you probably won't want to go back once you get used to earning money you probably won't want to go back to college.

Similarly, when Inga was choosing subjects in school it seems that she was exerting her own agency and was the key decision-maker, looking to her parents for reassurance rather than guidance:

**Holly:** When you were making your subject choices for the Leaving Certificate, did your parents have any opinions on what you should do?

**Inga:** No, I just like ask for my Mam's advice if she thinks it would be helpful but I choose myself.

All four sets of Ukrainian parents had a third-level degree. Three out of four of these sets of parents displayed the patterns of behaviour that can be classed as directive. The one set of parents who would be described as passive are Pasha's parents. As before the possible

explanation relates to Pasha having decided at an early age that he wished to study computer science and his parents were comfortable with this decision. It is notable that three out of four of the Ukrainian students (Pasha, Dmitri and Valentina) were following the career paths of one of their parents. The fourth Ukrainian student, Anna, considered following her father's career pathway in information technology, but ultimately decided against it in fifth year and decided to pursue a career in optometry instead. Perhaps the high levels of parental engagement in these instances can be explained by the fact that the students wished to follow a similar career path to that of their parents, as such the parents would have expert knowledge of what is required of the student and could offer advice and direction.

Two participants, Aliona and Vera migrated to Ireland from Moldova. Aliona's parents displayed a directive approach to educational decision-making, while Vera's parents could be described as more passive. The difference in decision making strategies could be understood by the length of time that the families have been in Ireland. Aliona's family (parents are categorised as directive) had been in Ireland for ten years whilst Vera's ('passive') parents had been in Ireland for one year at the time of the interview. As a result, Vera's parents didn't have the language skills or 'insider' knowledge to be directive. In this case there were several structural barriers which resulted in their disengagement from the processes such as researching college courses and attending open days.

The parents making the most strategic decisions for their children's education irrespective of social class and parents' level of education was based on their length of stay in Ireland. The families who were in Ireland the longest made the most strategic decisions. This can be understood in the context of previous research which found that regarding recent migrants, duration of stay may be a key factor in understanding their class and financial position (McGinnity et al., 2015, p. 5). As this chapter has outlined, for some families such as Anna (The Ukraine) and Aliona (Moldova) their strategy was to enrol in a fee-paying school for senior cycle. For other families, such as Dmitri (The Ukraine) it was researching the best school within commuting distance and for others like Valentina (The Ukraine) this meant moving to a school which offered the subjects required for their preferred post-school pathway.

### **The Role of the School**

The school also plays a pivotal role in subject choice which can have lasting implications for post-school pathways. There is a large variation in subjects offered by school with numbers ranging from 12 subjects on offer in some schools to 18 subjects on offer in other schools. Some schools provide a wider variety of 'taster' programmes in first year which students then reduce

for second and third year (Smyth et al., 2004). In Valentina's case she decided after her Junior Certificate that she wanted to study architecture in college which requires specific Leaving Certificate subjects that were not offered at her school. Valentina spoke about the decision to move school to be able to do the subjects that would allow her study architecture at university. If Valentina had stayed in the school she had first enrolled in, the lack of subjects being offered would have acted as a substantial barrier to her preferred post-school pathway.

**Holly:** Why did you move school after Junior Certificate?

**Valentina:** Oh well I did my Junior Cert in (insert school name) and then I had to go because there was no physics and I need it for architecture.

**Holly:** so how did you decide which school to move to?

**Valentina:** Mostly my Dad researched every single secondary school in Dublin and he found this one but it's really far away from my house it takes like an hour and a half.

**Holly:** Do you think the travelling is worth it?

**Valentina:** Yeah and plus I got they offer an extra subject in this school-technical graphics and its really useful for architecture.

Pasha (The Ukraine) and Inga (Latvia) both moved house within Ireland during the period when they were due to start second-level school. They both moved during the academic year and as a result there were structural barriers which limited their ability to choose which subjects they wished to study. Due to limited class sizes in the schools they enrolled in, the students were accommodated in whichever classes were not full at the time they arrived.

**Pasha:** When I came here in second year because we came in a week or two later than school started because we couldn't find any accommodation there wasn't any spaces left in this school because we were applying late but there was one spot available in the classes I had to basically just go to whatever was left free because there weren't any spaces so they just put me wherever they could find a spot.

[...]

**Inga:** I didn't get a chance to pick my subjects myself cos we moved to Swords two weeks into the school year cos I was in Latvia so I was a bit later than everyone else. They put me in home economics that was OK but they put me in business too that was bad.

In each of these cases the result of studying subjects that they had not chosen themselves did not have an obvious impact on their post-school plans. Pasha (The Ukraine) planned to study computer science and pursue the same career as his father from early in his second-level school career and this did not change. The theme of parental careers influencing their children's career decisions will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. In Inga's case, she never indicated that she wished to pursue third level studies. Inga did not attend any university open day events and only met with her school guidance counsellor on one occasion. Inga referred to the fact that she wanted to 'work' after school but she did not have any particular area or type of work in mind. It could be argued that if Inga had been afforded more autonomy over her subject choices when



she started in school she may have chosen subjects which would have created more concrete ideas or plans for what she wished to pursue after school. During the second wave of interviews, the rationale behind Inga's decision to pursue work rather than college was explored further. Gaining independence and more specifically, financial independence, was important to Inga. This was not something she felt could be achieved immediately by attending college and therefore wanted to work to earn money. Inga was steadfast in her argument that she could attend college and do a course at any stage later in her life if she felt she wanted to. During the second interview, Inga had been working for several months and spoke positively about her experience. There was no sense of regret or a feeling of having missed out on an opportunity to go to college like the majority of her peers. Instead, Inga still referred to the fact that she could do a college course in the future which was similar to her sentiments during the first interview.

**Holly:** What made you decide to work full time and not do a course?

**Inga:** Well I wanted to be more independent I guess and the way I think about it it's never late to go back and do a course once you know what u would definitely like to do.

**Holly:** How did you find your current job?

**Inga:** While doing my leaving cert I had part time job for weekends and I wanted to get full time job since I was finished school I did apply at many place and got few calls back I tried at Eddie Rockets and lasted two days it really wasn't for me. Then the day I left I got call for interview from my current job and I got started within few days. First I was at the deli and then they decided to train me for the floor and check outs. Working with food isn't exactly for me so I was so excited that I got moved to work on the floor.

**Holly:** In our first interview, you said that you might work for a year and then apply to do a course, do you still think you will do a course in the future?

**Inga:** Yes, I definitely think I will do a course in future, well I want to do nail course but that more as a hobby I was thinking of hotel management.

As this study has shown schools have the potential to restrict decision-making through the subjects they offer. A school can also place restrictions upon students through their use of streaming. The process of streaming or ability grouping as it is also known is not a phenomenon adopted by every school. Smyth et al., 2004 conducted research in an Irish context which had twelve case study schools and found that half of these used streaming or ability grouping. While there are proponents and detractors of the use of streaming, the practice is not uniform or rigid and tends to vary between schools. For example, even in a highly-streamed school students can be in mixed ability classes for some optional subjects (Smyth et al., 2004). Research has shown that migrant students are more likely to be placed into classes of lower ability based on their perceived lack of ability which is mainly based on their English language skills (Smyth et al., 2009).

Vadim (Latvia) arrived to Ireland at age 13 at which stage he enrolled in first year in second-level school with a low level of English language proficiency. Vadim's school was a designated disadvantaged school with a high concentration of migrant students. Vadim benefitted from intensive additional English classes to improve his oral and written skills. Despite achieving a high degree of fluency within his first year Vadim was placed into a lower level maths class which he found unchallenging but was unaware that there was a higher level available until he was due to sit his Junior Certificate.

**Vadim:** (I dislike)...Maths because I was in trouble there cos I went to ordinary level maths I didn't know such system existed with higher level.

**Holly:** So, do you mean when you came into first year you went into ordinary level maths?

**Vadim:** Yes, and I didn't know there was a higher/ordinary level I just went on with it and found it too easy, then in third year I found out there was higher level and I had to study the whole book for a week to pass the higher-level exam.

**Holly:** And did you pass?

**Vadim:** I did and now I'm in higher level maths but it's difficult.

Vadim applied to study a degree course in computer science which has a significant maths component. It was not an essential course requirement to study higher level maths. However, the course is considerably more challenging for students who have not completed higher level maths for their Leaving Certificate. It is clear from Vadim's experience that he narrowly avoided completing the ordinary level exam for his Junior Certificate which would have impeded him from studying at higher level for the senior cycle. This in turn would have had made studying during his degree course more challenging. This example highlights the importance of decisions made early in a student's educational career because they can have long lasting consequences on the future life-chances of students.

### **Academic and Non-Academic Choices**

The parents of the students in this study encouraged them to pursue an academic post-school pathway. It is true for all participants in this study that for post-school planning, arts and creative courses were not actively encouraged, while science and traditionally 'prestigious' courses such as law and medicine at third level were highly regarded and aspired to. The absence of highly gendered patterns in this study which are prevalent in a national context (see McCoy et al., 2014), can be observed at several stages during the student's second-level school careers during the decision-making periods for Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate subjects.

The following are excerpts from interviews with Ludmilla (Lithuania), Aliona (Moldova) and Dmitri (The Ukraine). Each excerpt shows that the schools which these students were attending offered subjects that interested them but they were each steered in a different, more academic

route by their parents. It is important to contextualise Ludmilla's parents' involvement in her decision-making experience. As can be seen from Table 5.3 Ludmilla's parents' expectations for her post-school pathways differed from her own and, importantly, were notably higher to the point of not being realistic:

**Holly:** When you were picking your subjects coming into second-level school did you discuss it with your parents?

**Ludmilla:** The only thing I remember is that I was not allowed to do Home economics and that was heart breaking, I still wish I'd done Home economics.

**Holly:** Was that your Mams decision or your Dads?

**Ludmilla:** Oh it was both of them. They were like 'you can learn to cook food at home you don't need this'.

**Holly:** So, what did they recommend you should do instead?

**Ludmilla:** Eh they got me to do business I'm actually glad really everything I chose I wanted to do myself, just that Home Economics I didn't get to do.

Ludmilla clearly had a strong desire to choose home economics as a subject, she describes her parents' insistence that she did not need to study the subject as 'heart-breaking'. Her parents did not view home economics as a worthwhile option as they pointed out she could 'learn to cook food at home'. Ludmilla ultimately chose to study business at school upon her parents' recommendation and said she was happy with all her subjects, home economics remained a subject she still wishes she could have chosen instead.

Aliona's parental involvement has been discussed previously in this chapter. Her family placed a very high value on her education and chose to move her to a fee-paying school to increase her chances of a successful Leaving Certificate. When discussing subject choices, they were instrumental in encouraging a more academic pathway and discouraged her natural preference to study Art, despite Aliona defining herself as a 'creative person'. As Table 5.3 shows both Aliona and her parents hoped she would get offered medicine in Trinity College. Aliona says her parents had given her two options law or medicine (which is discussed further in the next section) and so the extent to which medicine was actually her own personal aspiration is unclear as it was heavily orchestrated by her parents.

**Holly:** When you were choosing your subjects coming into second-level school did you discuss it with your parents?

**Aliona:** Yeah from first year I wanted to pick something arty, something creative cos I'm quite creative kind of person but they were like pick business and science. So that's what I picked in third year then I dropped business cos it didn't interest me so like they did have an influence in choosing my subjects.

Dmitri's mother was instrumental in getting him a place in a second-level school which she felt was the best school in the area. Dmitri's mother was very engaged with his education and extremely active in the decision-making process.

**Dmitri:** Oh yeah, my mam influenced my choices greatly. But I feel grateful for her influence now cos I would have initially done technical graphics and art but she said to do business instead of art and now business is what I'm hoping to do after school. So I'm extremely grateful, I still remember that night like me and my mam were just sitting and she was like no you're doing business it will be better for your future. I didn't want to do it but she was like no you're doing it.

Dmitri's experience of wanting to study a particular subject but having this preference overruled by his mother is similar to Ludmilla and Aliona's experience during the decision-making process. Dmitri displayed a level of gratitude that was not present in the other two students' interviews. He has a strong belief in his mother's ability to know what is best for him and he acknowledged how grateful he was for her influence during this period of his life.

**Table 5.3: Student versus parental expectation**

Student	Country of Birth	Student Expectation		Parental Expectation	
		Course	Institution	Course	Institution
Dariya	Azerbaijan	Corporate Law	NUIG	Law	NUIG
Vera	Moldova	Business Commerce	NUIG	Business Information Studies	NUIG
Artur	Latvia	Medicine	TCD	Medicine	TCD
Olga	Lithuania	Business	TCD	Medicine	TCD
Marta	Lithuania	Psychology	TCD	Psychology	TCD
Vadim	Latvia	Computer Science	ITT	Computer Science	ITT
Valentina	The Ukraine	Architecture	Berlin	Architecture	Berlin
Aliona	Moldova	Medicine	TCD	Medicine	TCD
Ekaterina	Russia	Business	TCD	Business	TCD
Dmitri	The Ukraine	Global Business	DCU	Business	TCD
Anna	The Ukraine	Optometry	DIT	Optometry	DIT
Pasha	The Ukraine	Computer Science	NUIM	Computer Science	NUIM
Inga	Latvia	Work		Hotel management	
Ludmilla	Lithuania	Social Care	ITB	Law	TCD

The experiences of Ludmilla (Lithuania), Aliona (Moldova) and Dmitri (The Ukraine) raises the question of the role of gender or gender bias in educational decision making. Previous research has found that post-school pathways in Ireland are highly gendered (McCoy et al., 2014). This is most pronounced within further education courses as opposed to university courses. For example, males are significantly more likely to enrol in apprenticeship courses with females more likely to participate in PLC courses (McCoy et al., 2014). In my own research, there are ten female participants and four male participants. Out of a total of 14 students, 13 wished to attend a third level institution. None of the male students aspired to pursue an apprenticeship and although one female participant out of ten (Ludmilla, Lithuania) did enrol in a PLC college this was by default and not where she had aspired to study. As this chapter has shown, some parents had high aspirations for the students that were not necessarily in line with the reality of their child's ability or interests. Two female students, Ludmilla (Lithuania) and Aliona (Moldova) were actively discouraged from studying home economics (a subject traditionally viewed as female orientated) and art for their Leaving Certificate exam.

A thorough review of the data shows that the pathways of female participants were more 'manipulated' or heavily guided by parents than those of the male participants. This began upon the entry to second-level school and continued throughout junior and senior cycle up to decision-making for their post-school pathways. It is not clear whether this is because the students held conventional beliefs about what subjects they should study, or whether the parents held the belief that their children should only pursue the most academic subjects which happen to be traditionally more male dominated subjects. It is difficult to extrapolate a definitive reason for this; there are several options. As a society, there is a large amount of prestige placed on STEM subjects which is highlighted for example through state funding and investment, in addition the areas of science and technology have also been traditionally a male dominated sphere. The data suggests that it is the prestigious and academic nature of STEM courses that motivates parents to encourage their children to follow these pathways. All parents encouraged their children to follow an academic pathway. They did not place a value on what they perceived to be less academic and traditionally more female oriented subjects such as art and home economics. From this perspective, parents are adopting a progressive approach through rejection of gender bias in the education system. If the parents in this study were rejecting conventional, traditionally female orientated subjects for their daughters, they are merely substituting one set of limiting beliefs (gender bias) for another by placing such a high value on a university degree and specific fields of study. The data does not suggest that parents are explicitly contending with the issue of gender bias. The data does however, clearly point to achieving a place in university as the height of their aspirations, a crucial measure of success

for the parents. This is evidenced by the fact that 13 out of 14 sets of parents wanted their child to apply for a degree course in a university. This is in line with international research which suggests that migrant parents are strongly encouraging their children to attend university (Louie, 2001).

### **Economic Context**

The economic context within which students and their parents were making decisions and post-school plans is a key element which requires further discussion. All of the students participating in this research moved to Ireland since 2000, their parents primarily motivated by employment opportunities and standard of living in Ireland. Thus, the families will have lived in Ireland through the Celtic Tiger phenomenon and the subsequent recession formed the backdrop to the student's senior cycle in school and their decision making and post-school planning. This section will outline how parents are advising their children motivated by their own experience of economic uncertainty due to low levels of educational attainment. This rhetoric that it is so important to 'get a good job' with a 'good' salary is often borne out of the uncertainty within the parents' own employment situation. Artur's (Latvia) parents have low levels of education and thus were reliant on a strong economy for regular employment in unskilled roles. Artur was living with his family in rental accommodation in a suburb in north Dublin. His family have been on a housing list since they arrived. According to Artur, his parents were often unemployed and their economic instability caused stress in the family. He reflects on the fact that his parents' employment opportunities are restricted by their levels of education:

**Holly:** Did it take your mam long to find work when she came over?

**Artur:** Not really her first job placement was washing dishes in restaurant.

**Holly:** Would she have done similar work in Latvia?

**Artur:** Yes. They are both very labour intensive because they never had things like third level education. Even if they had I know a lot of people-their friends who have you know degree in chemistry they can't get a job in their area even in Latvia. My father you know worked in building physical sector swapping double glazed windows, electrical wiring and my mother always worked at a bakery at the same time the baking there was like a human conveyor belt it was very intensive.

**Holly:** Have they been steadily employed since moving to Ireland?

**Artur:** It is patchy at times. There is a lot of part-time jobs all the time but there is no permanent work ever. I know people here who work three separate part time jobs. My Dad never did anything research based or he never did any education things in front of me that's what I thought work is you know, you have to physically work. I never actually even thought that there is academic work.

Artur spoke at length about his parent's difficulty to find stable employment which he believed was because they could only apply for low or unskilled jobs which did not offer permanent contracts. His own desire and motivation to get offered the course he wanted at college can be

understood as stemming from the desire to ensure he can find stable, well-paying employment as an adult; that he will not have to engage in the precarious types of work that his parents had to.

Concerns about economic stability were an underlying feature in some of the conversations parents had with their children about post-school pathways and career paths. Parents in this study encouraged their children to follow a career path that offered good employment opportunities. For example, Anna (The Ukraine) says her parents were not influencing her in any particular direction so long as she was on a pathway that would offer 'good' job opportunities.

**Holly:** Are your parents happy with your choice for 3rd level?

**Anna:** Yeah, my mam said choose any course where you can get a job real easy, it can be anything so long as you can get a good job with it and I was like optometry cos its really good.

It is not clear exactly what Anna's parents mean by 'a good job', the inference is perhaps a good rate of pay, good staff benefits or good working environment. It must be noted that Anna's parents moved her from her local school to a fee-paying school for her senior cycle as they had done with her older brother. By investing financially in the education of both children, Anna's parents are showing a commitment to ensure upward mobility for their children.

There is a similar sentiment in the rationale behind Aliona's (Moldova) parents' academic and career expectations for their daughter. Aliona's parents moved her from the local DEIS school to a fee-paying school, which Aliona was quick to mention 'we're not rich, we're the average family but my parents are very focussed'.

**Holly:** So, your parents were supportive of your decision to do medicine?

**Aliona:** Yeah well firstly it was kind of their intention for me to do Medicine they were really kind of like strongly on it. I was just thinking if I got the points I'd go with it but if I don't it's not the end of the world but obviously I'd like to get it because it's a good course and you help people and its well paid.

**Holly:** So, it was your parents who were thinking medicine would be a good course for you?

**Aliona:** Yeah. They always wanted it, it was either medicine or law so there were two choices.

**Holly:** So your parents are very focussed on your future career?

**Aliona:** Yeah, because they see themselves like my dad himself wanted to become a doctor he's really science based he a chef now so like he kind of like is telling me get a job that you'll work all your life, a stable job.

The concerns about future employability and job stability that the students and their families are debating in this research reflect findings by UNESCO and IIEP (2000) on youth transitions, which highlights the role of the healthy economy on young people making decisions for their future: 'A well-functioning economy is perhaps the most fundamental factor to shape young

people's transition from initial education to work. Sound transition outcomes are easier to achieve when national wealth is high and rising and when overall unemployment is low' (Bird et al., 2000, p. 22).

### Guidance Counselling

Another crucial element in decision making, is the availability of guidance counselling. This element is multi-layered and needs to be unpacked to properly understand how influential guidance counselling can be in the decision-making process. The 1998 Education Act stipulated the provision of guidance as a statutory requirement in schools' (Smyth and Banks, 2012). However, the quality of provision varies between schools. Some schools offer timetabled classes for students in sixth year while in other schools the situation could at best be described as ad-hoc where students request a meeting using slips of paper or sign-up sheets outside the guidance counsellor's office.

**Table 5.4: Guidance Counselling**

Student	Type of School Attended	Used Guidance Services in School	Occasionally (1-2)	Regularly (3-4)	Frequent (5+)
Dariya	Voluntary School	Yes	Yes		
Vera	Voluntary School	Yes		Yes	
Artur	Community College	Yes			Yes
Aliona	Fee-paying	Yes		Yes	
Dmitri	Community College	Yes		Yes	
Vadim	Voluntary School	Yes	Yes		
Inga	Community College	Yes	Yes		
Ludmilla	Community College	Yes			Yes
Marta	Voluntary School	Yes			Yes
Olga	Voluntary School	Yes			Yes
Valentina	Community College	No			
Anna	Fee-paying	Yes		Yes	
Ekaterina	Fee-paying	Yes			Yes
Pasha	Vocational School	Yes	Yes		

Guidance counselling services were available in schools for all 14 students in this research. All students except one, Valentina (The Ukraine), had some level of engagement with the service in their school. Valentina did not engage with the guidance service at their school at all. She had decided with her parents that she would be moving to Berlin after second-level school to study architecture. According to Valentina there were not really any decisions for her to make. She knew from age 14 that she wanted to study Architecture and so she needed specific subjects



which meant she really did not have to choose what to study for the Leaving Certificate. When asked about the guidance counsellor in the school Valentina said that most of her friends went but she just ignored them, herself and her father had gone to Germany several times to visit universities which offered degrees in Architecture.

In terms of the guidance received by the other 13 students, Table 5.4 shows that there is a broad spectrum of what is being offered by the different types of schools. For example, in the fee-paying schools there were time-tabled guidance classes in addition to the standard appointment sessions which were commonplace in all other schools. None of the students attending the schools which were not fee-paying reported having time-tabled guidance classes. The extent to which the students are engaging with the guidance provision being offered by the school also varies. For example, one student had no engagement with the guidance counsellor, in addition a further four students met with their guidance counsellor only once in their entire senior cycle. This is in contrast to five students who met with their guidance counsellor in excess of five times over the course of their senior cycle with some of the five students scheduling appointments on a bi-weekly or monthly basis (see Table 5.4). Ludmilla (Lithuania) spoke very positively of the guidance provision in her school describing the guidance counsellor as 'brilliant' and proactive in approaching the students rather than waiting for them to make an appointment with her:

**Holly:** Do you have a guidance counsellor in this school?

**Ludmilla:** Yeah. We have a brilliant counsellor here, we have a class with her every week. First of all, we were arranged a meeting with her at the start of the year without us having to go to her like she seen every student in sixth year and she was kind of helping us looking at points and different colleges and back up plans and it really helped. She's just brilliant. Oh yeah and she even made up a sample CAO account so we could see how to go off and do it.

Even though Ludmilla felt she had received sufficient guidance from her guidance counsellor, she was the only student out of those who applied for college who was not offered any of her CAO choices. Ludmilla failed her Maths exam and therefore did not meet the minimum requirement for the course she applied for. This was somewhat unexpected and Ludmilla had no immediate alternative plan in place.

On average, students in this research met with their guidance counsellor four to five times over the course of their senior cycle. Apart from Valentina, who did not meet with the guidance counsellor at all, there were three students, Dariya (Azerbaijan), Pasha (The Ukraine) and Inga (Latvia), who reported meeting with their guidance counsellor only once. The general sense is that the students felt the guidance counsellor was there to be approached if necessary for example if they had specific questions but oftentimes this was not something the students

actively pursued. None of the students said they wanted or needed extra guidance or advice from the guidance counsellor. Several students from different schools described a similar appointment system where the guidance counsellor had several free time-slots available and the student signed up for one of these time slots. This system of guidance counselling provision that has developed in Ireland supports research conducted by UNESCO which found that ‘too often information and guidance services are marginal within the priorities of schools’ UNESCO and IIEP (2000). This is particularly pronounced in an Irish context since budget cuts in 2011, the Institute for Guidance Counsellors Ireland described the guidance provision service in schools as ‘decimated’ (McLoughlin, 2016).

Aliona described her engagement level with the guidance counsellor as fairly minimal. ‘I think I’m fine I don’t really have questions, if I had questions I would go and she would be really helpful’ (Aliona, Moldova). This was Aliona’s perception of how much support she was receiving and required from the guidance counsellor and echoes the sentiments of many of the students. During the first wave of interviews, Aliona spoke about being moved from a designated disadvantaged school to a fee-paying school because her parents wanted to improve her chances of getting enough points to study medicine. During the second wave of interviews, Aliona was disappointed not to have been offered any of her top choices. She had to accept her eighth choice on the CAO form which was psychiatric nursing in Dublin City University.

During the second interview Aliona spent time discussing the difficulties she experienced during her final year and how this influenced her choices that she made during her sixth year in school

**Aliona:** Well I suppose medicine wasn’t really for me. The HPAT didn’t go well and to be honest I found school daunting at times I lost my motivation because of the large workload, knowing that in nine months you’ll have the biggest exams of your life that determined your future it was quite scary. I had already changed my mind from medicine to nursing it was really my parents dream for me to do medicine but I’m happy nursing is a good course and I will get to care for people and help them recover.

Vera (Moldova) spoke very positively about the guidance counsellor in her school describing her as extremely helpful. Vera reported being very happy with the level of support she was receiving. For example, she felt that she had been well prepared in filling out her CAO form and she felt the guidance counsellor was available if she need an appointment.

**Vera:** Yeah, I had like two or three appointments this year she talked to me and I asked her what course is better what course is bad she explained everything she is such a good woman she explains everything and has time for everyone and I already applied for all the subjects I want to do and I did my CAO form.

Vera's case is particularly interesting as during our first interview Vera was unaware that her migration status, having moved to Ireland from a non-EU country in the previous 18 months meant that she did not qualify for 'free fees' and would be required to pay €12,000 per annum for her degree. Vera did not have this information at the time of her decision making in sixth year. When this issue arose the following year, it was then explained to Vera that if she had waited to reapply the following year she would have qualified for free fees for her degree because she would have been resident in Ireland for the required period of time.

**Vera:** When I went to the fees office and they said you have to pay €12,000 I cried for three days probably. I didn't know what to do. I went back with my friend who was studying there to ask again and they said no you have to be in Ireland three years but I said I didn't know that no one told me that you know. They said I should wait a year and defer then I wouldn't have these fees'.

It is unlikely that if Vera had known all the facts when she was applying to college that she would not have taken on a degree with an annual fee of €12,000. This raises the question of whether guidance counsellors are effectively trained in order to advise non-Irish students of their pathways and potential barriers such as fees. Ekaterina (Russia), felt the guidance counsellor in her fee-paying school was only equipped with the information for Irish students applying to Irish educational institutions, noting 'Well she is more like for Irish universities and I was interested in Canada so she couldn't help me with that but with Irish courses she was very helpful and lots of information'. This reflects Valentina's belief that since she wanted to apply to a university in Berlin there was no point in speaking to the guidance counsellor in her school about this because they would have no information for her.

## **Summary**

As discussed in Chapter 2, children inherit social capital from their parents, their ability to accrue further capital is limited or amplified by the social capital possessed by their parents. Research conducted in the UK, found that Eastern European migrants in England have substantial levels of education and high educational expectations for their children, perhaps reflecting their own relatively high level of education (Tereshchenko, 2013, p. 9-10). This same research found that parents made a direct link between education and social mobility, with most parents expressing very positive views of the English education system and believed it would help their children become more socially mobile (Tereshchenko, 2013, p. 24). In this study, all the parents had completed second-level education and 18 out of 28 parents had gone on to third level education. Literature suggests that 'ethnic minority students' high educational expectations tend to be a reflection of their optimism and drive for success' (Fernandez-Reino, 2016, p. 143). This is reflected in this study as 13 out of 14 students aspired to attend further or

higher education after second-level school. Before the interviews took place, each student filled out a questionnaire with some basic information including the post-school pathway they were pursuing, the options were further/higher education, labour market or undecided. Thirteen students chose a further/higher education course and one student chose labour market. Although 18 out of 28 parents had been educated to third level, only four parents were working in their area of expertise. This is a very important factor which can often be overlooked but is crucial to providing an in depth understanding of the social capital possessed by the families and how this supports their aspirations. As explained by Frigo et al. (2007), parental education may have a more powerful effect on school achievements and aspirations for further education than parental occupation (Frigo et al., 2007, p. 11). This chapter highlighted the important role of guidance counselling in schools and how the guidance provision varies between schools. The dominant trend for post-school pathways was higher education which reflects the national context. This suggests that all students who are planning their post-school pathways would benefit from guidance and information on alternative pathways for example on apprenticeships and traineeships. Several students in this research raised the issue that their guidance counsellor had no knowledge of the procedures for applying to college outside Ireland and therefore they were not supported during this process. This will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter when discussing the students' pathways.

## **Chapter 6: Post-School Transition**

The purpose of this chapter is to explore how the Russian-speaking students in this study experienced the transition from second-level education to their chosen pathways. As seen in previous chapters, choosing a post-school pathway – further/higher education or entry to the labour market - represents an important step in the lives of migrant students in Ireland, in that it has a strong bearing on their future life-chances.

Institutional transitions can be a source of anxiety and unease for some students (Smyth et al., 2004). While some students make the move from second-level with relative ease, others experience considerable challenges such as academic difficulties and social integration (McCoy et al., 2014). In addition, students are likely to experience several transitions during their lifetime, that cumulatively shape their lives. The national context shows that in Ireland the most dominant transition is from second-level education straight into a further or higher education level institution (McCoy et al., 2014). In Ireland, University or college is viewed as a desirable post-school pathway compared to vocational training. An OECD review of vocational education sector in Ireland found that the sector provided only limited apprenticeships to a narrow set of occupations (Kis, 2010). This is in contrast to Germany where post-school pathways are diverse with a healthy vocational education sector which the OECD found to be deeply embedded and widely respected in German society (Hoeckel and Schwartz, 2010).

While there is a growing body of international literature which shows that migrant parents strongly encourage their children to attend university (Louie, 2011), research on the experience of migrant students transitioning from compulsory schooling to higher education or the labour market has remained sparse. The role that the economy plays in the decision-making process was discussed in the previous chapter. The economy also plays a role in shaping the transitions from second-level education to third level and the labour market. If the economy is stable then its role in shaping transitions is more peripheral, but if it is experiencing recession or ‘boom’ then it becomes more of a key influencer. During the period that these students were making decisions for their post-school pathways Ireland was still in a recession and there was a scarcity of employment opportunities. The rate of unemployment had risen from a previously stable 4.5 per cent to 15 per cent in 2012 (CSO, 2012). A transition from second-level to higher education was the dominant route for the majority of students in this research which reflects the national context (McCoy et al., 2014). However, an increase in the number of CAO applications during the recession from mature students who also found themselves unemployed during the recession resulted in increased demand for certain college courses, thus, higher results were required (Hunt Report, 2011).

Using the concepts of protective and risk factors, this chapter will then focus on the characteristics that lend towards making a positive transition for example resilience and their propensity to cope with change. It will also explore the possibilities as to why certain students have experienced a negative period of transition or struggled to some extent with the change from second-level education. The chapter will discuss challenging and successful transitions by focusing on background related factors which may influence (but not necessarily determine) how students experience their transition. These influences include social class, gender, the economy, their new educational institution and the course they accepted.

### **Expectation Versus Achievement Paradox**

Families that decide to migrate to a new country are often ambitious for themselves and their children with a desire for upward social mobility underpinning their rationale to migrate. Chapter 1 outlined the high educational expectations that parents who have migrated to Ireland have for their children. Table 6.1 outlines the expectations of the students and the parents in this study with the actual attainment of the students.

Aliona is an interesting case which was noted in the previous chapter, because she was acutely aware that her parents were driving her to succeed in her education. They moved her from their local DEIS school to a private fee-paying school even though this was a financial burden for them. Aliona discusses how her parents had their own goals in mind for what she should choose. Her choices are being heavily influenced by her parent's hopes for her which as the data shows are borne from her father's previous hopes for himself. Aliona discussed the high level of expectation her parents put on her which she felt stemmed from the prestige associated with education in Moldova:

**Holly:** Do you think has moving here made education more important to you?

**Aliona:** The expectations back home from parents are always high because they say like education is a bit harsher there. So probably the expectations are a bit higher, so obviously like to meet those level of expectations there is pressure.

Aliona, Ludmilla and Olga's parents displayed parenting styles which could be described as directive. They strongly encouraged their children to follow specific pathways which their children were not as enthusiastic about pursuing. In each of these cases they were not realistic expectations considering the students' academic performance and personal preferences. There are several possible explanations as to why their expectations proved to be unrealistic. Ultimately, this came down to the parents having no experience of achieving a place a third level themselves. It would appear that the parents did not have a clear understanding of the level of work required by their children to achieve a place on the highly competitive courses they wanted them to apply for. Their own lack of experience in applying for third level was

compounded by their unfamiliarity with the Irish education system and therefore again not understanding exactly what was required.

Table 6.1 gives an overview of the students own expected pathways alongside the pathways expected by their parents. For the most part students and parents held similar high expectations. There are several reasons which will be explored later in this chapter as to why in certain families the student and parents' expectations were not aligned. Table 6.1 also provides an overview of the actual achieved pathways of the students. The majority of students achieved their desired pathway. However, there were some exceptions, notably Ludmilla, which will be discussed in the following section. The data in Table 6.1 suggests that students held more realistic expectations for their pathways than their parents. One way of interpreting this data is to consider it as aspirations versus expectations. For example, the parents' desired pathways for their children could be understood as aspirations, that is, the pathway that parents want their child to follow in an ideal world without constraints. This is in contrast to the student's desired pathways as expectations which could be understood as the pathway they will realistically achieve given their personal academic aptitude and financial barriers (Perreira and Spees, 2015).

In Ludmilla's case, her mother was very determined that her daughter should go to university, preferably to study law in Trinity. Ludmilla had told her that this was not realistic because she would not get the points and also because she felt a law degree was not compatible with her personality. She referred to a conversation she had with a friend who said that a law degree is all 'writing and reading' which she felt did not appeal to her because she prefers to 'get up and be doing things':

**Holly:** Are your parents supportive of the choices you've put down on the CAO?

**Ludmilla:** No, I've had war with them. Not really my dad it's my mam she really wants me to do law and for a while I was actually like yeah of course I'm gonna do law but then I was looking at my CAO and was thinking no this isn't for me. I also have a friend who's doing law in DCU and he's just telling me it's all writing and reading and that's not my thing I need to get up and be doing things. I've put social work down as my first choice, as soon as my Mam heard there was a social work course in Trinity she was happy and she thought it must be a good course but then I told her I wouldn't be going to Trinity simply because I didn't like the lecturer at the open day and I wouldn't get the points that I'd be

applying to DIT or Blanchardstown IT because it's less points she was saying then it must be a crap course.

Ludmilla was not offered any course through the CAO and had to apply as a late applicant to several PLC colleges which will be discussed in greater detail in the section which outlines challenging transitions.

**Table 6.1: Expectation versus achievement**

Student	Student Expectation		Parent Expectation		Achievement	
	Course	Institution	Course	Institution	Course	Institution
Dariya	Corporate Law	NUIG	Law	NUIG	Legal studies with arts	NUIG
Vera	Business Commerce	NUIG	Business Information Studies	NUIG	Business Information Studies	NUIG
Artur	Medicine	TCD	Medicine	TCD	Science	TCD
Olga	Business	TCD	Medicine	TCD	Business and Law	UCD
Marta	Psychology	TCD	Psychology	TCD	Psychology	NUIM
Vadim	Computer Science	ITT	Computer Science	ITT	Computer Science	ITT
Valentina	Architecture	Berlin	Architecture	Berlin	Architecture	Berlin
Aliona	Medicine	TCD	Medicine	TCD	Psychiatric nursing	DCU
Ekaterina	Business	TCD	Business	TCD	Commerce, International Business	Canada
Dmitri	Global Business	DCU	Business	TCD	BESS	TCD
Anna	Optometry	DIT	Optometry	DIT	Optometry	DIT
Pasha	Computer Science	NUIM	Computer Science	NUIM	Computer Science	NUIM
Inga	Work		Hotel management		Work	
Ludmilla	Social Care	ITB	Law	TCD	Social Studies diploma	SCFE

Olga wanted to study business because she had been interested in business from a young age but she describes how her mother had tried to encourage her to consider medicine as a career path. Olga was a high achieving student and even though medicine is a highly competitive course it may not have been entirely unrealistic for her to have achieved the results required. However, this overlooks the fundamental point that Olga had no personal desire or aspirations to study medicine. It was very much her mother's aspiration for her daughter to study medicine at university. As a compromise, Olga put medicine on her CAO form as her seventh choice:

**Holly:** Are your parents supportive of the choices you've put down on the CAO?

**Olga:** Yes, well my Mam wanted me to be something with medicine but she respected me and I said no way am I doing medicine. We were talking about it during the summer being in fifth year and going into sixth year and she still talks about it 'oh look at the doctors'. I still put in doctors somewhere in my CAO



maybe seventh or eighth choice to calm her down maybe it will be fate to be a doctor!

Olga was offered two courses; a level 7 course which would lead into a dentistry degree and business and law degree in University College Dublin. Olga decided to accept the latter as it was a course she personally wanted to study.

The examples above of Ludmilla (Lithuania), Olga (Lithuania) and Aliona (Moldova) show that in their pursuit of upward social mobility, a lack of relevant knowledge in the field has created an expectation /achievement gap within these families. There is an obvious disconnect in these cases between what their parents were encouraging them to apply for and the reality of what they were capable of achieving. This supports research by Fernandez-Reino and Creighton (2016) which argues that ‘immigrants may maintain unrealistically high expectation due to an uninformed or a partially informed view of the educational process they confront, although expectations are not completely irrational, not all educational plans appear to be equally grounded and informed’ (Fernandez-Reino and Creighton., 2016, p. 7).

### **The Influence of Social Class**

There is a mix of social classes within this research. The social class of the students was determined using the highest level of education attained by the parents as a proxy. If family income or parent’s current occupation had been used as indicators there would have been some differentiation in the groups, some of the students would move from the middle-class group down to the lower socio-economic status group. To use family income or parent’s current occupation would be misleading as the parents in this research, which is so often the case with first generation migrants are overqualified for the jobs they are currently doing. The reasons for this vary from qualifications not being transferrable between countries for example a nursing degree from Moldova is not recognised by the HSE, or little to no requirement for their skillset for example Russian language teachers are not in high demand as it is not a compulsory subject in Ireland. In other cases, where the skills are transferrable the language barrier poses a problem. This research acknowledges the work of Frigo et al., (2007) which encourages the use of education as a proxy as a fairer method for determining social class than parental income or occupation. The Ukrainian parents in the research had the highest levels of education therefore their children were all part of the middle class. The four Ukrainian students (Pasha, Dmitri, Anna and Valentina) had very clear ideas of what course they wanted to pursue after school. In wave one it was clear that their post-school pathway had been heavily influenced by their parents with two Ukrainian students Pasha and Valentina following the career paths of their parents. One male student, Pasha, wanted to study computer science at university as his father

worked in this field and one female student Valentina, wished to study Architecture at University which is her mother’s profession. The third Ukrainian student Dmitri, was heavily influenced by his parents who steered him in the direction of Business and Accounting from first year in his second-level school. Dmitri described his father as an entrepreneur who was constantly creating new businesses. He wished to follow this route with his own career and he was aiming to study business in Trinity College Dublin. Another Ukrainian student Anna, wanted to study optometry and her parents were very encouraging of this because they said it was ‘a secure job with a good salary’. Anna could not apply to university instead had to apply to Dublin Institute of Technology because it is the only higher level institution in Ireland that offers a degree course in optometry.

Latvian and Lithuanian parents in the research had the lowest levels of education. Out of six Latvian parents there were four who had finished their education at second-level and out of six Lithuanian parents there were four who also finished their education at second-level. The Latvian students were both very clear about their post-school pathways. Vadim, hoped to study computer science because of his love of computers which he described as ‘a full-time hobby’. The second Latvian student, Artur was the most motivated student in the entire group, despite his family facing financial struggles and having no knowledge of higher education themselves; he wished to pursue a career in medicine. The most notable difference between both the Latvian/Lithuanian and the Ukrainian students in this study is how much the Latvian/Lithuanian students were reliant on their schools for guidance and practical decisions such as subject levels. Their parents could not be relied upon to advise them on the best course of action. This was evident with Vadim’s experience of being streamed into a lower-ability Maths class for junior cycle and as will be outlined below, Artur’s experience of trying to accelerate his learning during class time.

**Table 6.2: Parent’s Education and Occupation**

<b>Student</b>	<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>Mother Education</b>	<b>Mother Occupation</b>	<b>Father Education</b>	<b>Father Occupation</b>
Dariya	Azerbaijan	3rd level	Unemployed	3rd level	I.T.
Vera	Moldova	3rd level	Laundry Worker	3rd level	Construction
Artur	Latvia	2nd level	General Operative	2nd level	Unemployed
Aliona	Moldova	2nd level	Unemployed	3rd level	Chef
Dmitri	The Ukraine	Post graduate	Unemployed	3rd level	Shop Owner
Vadim	Latvia	2nd level	Unemployed	2nd level	Delivery Driver
Inga	Latvia	3rd level	Accountant	3rd level	Security Personnel
Ludmilla	Lithuania	2nd level	Florist	2nd level	Driver

Student	Country of Origin	Mother Education	Mother Occupation	Father Education	Father Occupation
Marta	Lithuania	3rd level	Hairdresser	3rd level	Electro mechanic
Olga	Lithuania	2nd level	Unemployed	2nd level	Self-employed
Valentina	The Ukraine	Post graduate	Photographer	3rd level	Programme Manager I.T
Anna	The Ukraine	3rd level	Self-employed Teacher	3rd level	Senior Software engineer
Ekaterina	Russia	3rd level	Self-employed	3rd level	Self-employed
Pasha	The Ukraine	3rd level	Hairdresser	3rd level	Computer Programmer

The mix of social classes is reflected in the different school types within this study: community college, second-level, denominational, DEIS and fee-paying. Three students attend fee-paying schools where they note that higher education as a destination is the norm. However, there are also three students in this research who are attending their local community college where the college going culture has not been established or is not as prevalent. In terms of the school's aspirations for migrant students who do not have English as a first language the primary concern is language proficiency. When this has been achieved students in this research who were unfamiliar with the education system reported feelings of frustration that their teachers did not have the extra time to help them work through the process.

Artur (Latvia) was extremely frustrated as he intended to apply for medicine which requires very high points. He felt there was a lack of structural support in his school to help him achieve his goal:

**Artur:** The school is never meant to be an all 'A' school which I need for medicine. It's not a strict school it suits the students that its built for, the local community. I do 90 per cent of the work for my grades on my own at home or at the back of the class, like teachers do help but if I was to go into a very academic school like the institute of education it would be way different. I wouldn't need to be studying so much at home.'

Artur's quote shows that he keenly felt the negative impact of the low expectational culture within his school.

The findings from wave two of the research enabled exploration of the students' actual achieved pathways and to establish whether students' aspirations were realistic. As noted above, Artur (Latvia) was one of the most ambitious students who hoped to study medicine but believed that he was not in the best environment to get the type of tuition he needed to achieve this. Artur displayed the ability to see his personal situation positioned within the wider context of social class and the structural barriers he was facing. Artur sat the HPAT exam but did not get enough

points to study medicine, ultimately, he felt it was the language barrier that actually worked against him.

**Artur:** I did prepare my English a bit around it [HPAT]. The actual exam isn't exactly what could be replicated it changes year to year. The exam is an A4 sheet and every page had a long, long paragraph and you need to read it in one minute 30 seconds and answer. It's just a bit of a cut-throat exam it's trying to filter 3,000 people into 500 places.

Instead, Artur was offered a general science degree in Trinity College and benefitted from the HEAR (Higher Education Alternative Route) scheme. Again, displaying a wider understanding of his position within the entire university context Artur noted that between 30-50 per cent of students in his year were doing general science because they did not get their first choice which was medicine. While many of his peers were due to re-sit the HPAT in the hopes of getting into medicine this year, Pasha's financial situation means that he is not in a position to re-sit the exam. Pasha was the most ambitious of the students and also the most disappointed with the course that he is studying.

Vera (Moldova) displayed the same level of ambition to gain a place in university as Artur. Vera came up against an unexpected structural barrier when she entered third level. Vera was offered business information systems (BIS) at NUIG and received assistance through the HEAR scheme. Upon entering NUIG Vera was unaware that because she had not been resident in Ireland for the previous three years she must pay full tuition fees for her course. As a non-EU citizen, the fees are prohibitively expensive for Vera and her family. Vera had achieved very high results in her Leaving Certificate and she is extremely driven and determined to continue her studies at college despite encountering this barrier. The Vice-President of NUIG offered her a scholarship to cover half her fees for first year but at the time of the second interview Vera did not know how she would be able to raise funds for the next three years of her degree.

**Vera:** She (Vice-President of [insert college name]) gave me a scholarship so that was half of my fees so I have to pay another half. I don't know what it's going to be next year the ladies from the fees office said next year I will have to pay again €12,000 because you started with €12,000. I was like I hope something is going to change because I don't believe I am going to pay €12,000 because I don't have the money. If I do good I'm hoping like the teachers will put in a word for me.

It is interesting that the two most ambitious students in the research were most despondent during our second meeting. In Artur's case this could be attributed to the fact that perhaps his aspirations were not realistic. Other students in Artur's year are continuing to pursue a degree in medicine by re-sitting the HPAT exam. During the second wave of interviews, Artur felt he was not psychologically or academically prepared to re-sit the HPAT exam. Artur also spoke about the financial aspect to restating this exam. There is a fee to sit the exam itself but there is

also a fee to attend preparatory workshops leading up to the exam which he felt he could not justify asking his parents to pay for again. In Vera's situation, it is more complex, she got offered her first choice however she had not done enough research into attending third level in Ireland as she says she was completely unaware of the fees for non-EU students. This proved to be a very costly oversight at €12,000 per annum for four years. It was recommended to Vera by the fees office and her tutor that she drop out for this year and reapply next September when she would not be subject to the non-EU fees. However, Vera's aspirations to study at university drove her to continue with the year because she did not want to quit something that she had studied so hard to get. It is clear as our interview progressed that Vera feels the weight of this decision to continue on with her degree despite the financial implications.

**Vera:** Sometimes I have it in my head I should have took the year out because I don't know what's going happen later regards money sometimes I felt I create so many problems for my parents but then like it's not me it's the system.

All of the students in this research said they were happy overall with the results they received in the Leaving Certificate. It is notable that 13 out of 14 students received an A1 in their Russian exam one student received an A2 which confirms previous research of Russian-speaking students which found that sitting the Russian exam guaranteed 100 points for students (Eriksson, 2011). It also confirms the students' belief that they had already secured an 'A' grade before they sat the exam. For some students in this research the 100 points made a vast difference in the courses they were offered because they felt that without the Russian exam they could only have achieved 50-60 points in another subject. The majority of students got offered their first choice. The second wave of interviews were conducted during the students' second semester of their first year of college. At that stage, none of the students had switched courses, no students indicated that they would be switching nor had any student left a course or 'dropped out' of college. All students in the study said they were comfortable with the academic standard required of them. With the exception of one student, all other students that were required to sit exams before Christmas said they passed, likewise for students who were required to submit assignments in their first term they all secured at least a pass grade. This indicates that the students' educational aspirations were in fact realistic.

While all students in the research said they were comfortable with the academic standard expected of them there was some variation between the disciplines. A definite trend emerged from the research whereby the six students who chose science courses at third level reported a much higher perception of their own levels of competency and preparedness for their course. For example, the students enrolled in science and computer science noted that the first semester covered the basics of the subjects which they already knew from the Leaving Certificate

syllabus. In fact, two students said they had not learned anything new on their course: ‘Yeah well actually I haven’t learned anything new at all since I’ve started so I’m not upset about it I have a lot of free time and I can help my friends with whatever they’re struggling with’ Pasha (The Ukraine). Artur (Latvia) discusses the fact that he studied three Science subjects for Leaving Certificate means he understands the basic principles being taught to them now:

**Artur:** Let’s say someone who only studied only or two science subjects in schools are really finding parts of the course a struggle. I won’t boast but I haven’t actually had to study heavily in order to catch up. I understand the lectures even if I didn’t go to the previous lecture. science is so connected physical chemistry is to do with energy and energy is a concept of physics so people who did geography or history in school wouldn’t really have that understanding.

For students who chose arts and social science courses at third level there was a variety of attitudes towards their courses. For many students, they were unaware of the broad spectrum of modules they would have to study in their first year. Some students felt that they were studying topics that did not interest them and did not directly relate to the course. Marta (Lithuania) is an interesting example to examine, she spoke at length during the first wave of interviews about her determination to study psychology at university:

**Holly:** How did you find out about the psychology course?

**Marta:** Oh, I’ve been interested in psychology since I was in sixth class. I just have loads of psychology books like how to be more confident and books like that I’ve just been reading them. I saw this course in Trinity and other universities and read what it’s about and I thought its really for me it’s really interesting. At first I wanted to do psychology but when I went to the open day in Trinity and DCU but when I was there I went to the psychology talks just for myself cos I just like psychology and the more I went the more I liked it so that was it. I just knew psychology was for me I mean I liked law as well but I don’t have such passion for law as I have for psychology so I thought I went for psychology.

When Marta was interviewed during the second wave of interviews, despite having researched the course there were elements that surprised her and did not interest her:

**Holly:** Is there anything about the course that you were not expecting?

**Marta:** Em, I wasn’t expecting statistics to be honest.

**Holly:** Oh really and is it a large part of your course?

**Marta:** Well we have it this year and next year. I failed the statistics exam at Christmas but I could pass overall because I got higher marks in other modules. Numbers and maths really aren’t of interest to me I find it hard to try and study.

It is clear that Marta was ill-informed about the actual components of a psychology degree. She displayed huge interest and enthusiasm and spoke animatedly about her love for psychology during the first wave of interviews. It is surprising that she was missing such a key piece of information about the level of maths involved in the course especially, considering Marta met with her guidance counsellor frequently (see Table 5.4).

Dmitri (The Ukraine) is also an interesting case to look at because he too found that his degree included unexpected elements. Dmitri was very interested in studying business economic and social studies (BESS) in Trinity College. As his father is an entrepreneur, Dmitri says he has been interested in business since he was a child. His guidance counsellor and his business teacher in second-level school both recommended that he should study BESS. During the second wave of interviews Dmitri said that he had been very happy to get offered BESS in Trinity through the CAO however the course was not exactly what he had been expecting:

**Dmitri:** I expected it to be a business course what shocked me was everything else like sociology, politics and economics they all take up the same emphasis. Politics just isn't my cup of tea at all I tried to read a politics text at the start of the year and my eyes just glazed over just pages and pages of stuff I wasn't interested in.

Just like in Marta's case, Dmitri says he met with his guidance counsellor regularly (see Table 5.4). It is not clear how Dmitri could have been so unaware of the course components of the degree course he wanted to study. As noted in Chapter 5, guidance counselling services have been heavily reduced in schools in the last number of years (McLoughlin, 2016). It is possible that a consequence of this reduction of services is that the quality and standard of guidance provision that is being offered to students has deteriorated also. These particular students did not possess the adequate knowledge about their courses before they accepted them even though they both reported meeting their guidance counsellor on regular occasions.

### **Educational Outcomes**

Having explored the influence of social class, the issue of whether gender plays a role in students' post-school pathways is also important to note (see Wright, 2005). There are ten female students and four male students in this study. From this research, it is clear that students from the middle-class group were the most likely group to attend weekend language schools which offer intensive preparation for the Leaving Certificate Russian exam. Of the seven students that attended the language schools they were disproportionately female with six female students attending versus one male student. This suggests that female students, or the parents of female students in this study are placing a value on extra preparatory courses to ensure the best possible results in the Leaving Certificate. In addition, there is a disproportionate gender gap in the number of students attending fee-paying schools in this study. There were three students attending a fee-paying school while there were no male students attending a fee-paying school. Of the six female students attending the language school at the weekend, three of these students also attended a fee-paying school (there is no link between these three students by country as they were from Moldova, Russia and The Ukraine).

In Chapter 2, reference was made to cumulative disadvantage. What is being displayed here is cumulative advantage in certain cases, parents are using their economic capital to ensure their daughters are getting the best education in the country by paying for private education and supplementing this with intensive add-on classes such as the weekend language school. It would appear in this research that the female migrant students are enjoying a sizeable advantage over their male counterparts in the education system. It is interesting to observe whether this apparent advantage translates into the female students having higher aspirations and better outcomes than their male counterparts. For two out of the four male students in this research their aspirations for college and the courses they hoped for were based on very deep set passions and long-held interests for them. For example, Pasha (The Ukraine) and Vadim (Latvia) who only wanted to do computer science described having ‘always’ known that is what they would study, they played computer games outside school time they socialised with their friends by playing computer games this was their entire world and it was an obvious choice for them. The only real decision in this case would be which college they would apply for. One of the male students in this research had the highest aspirations out of all students in the study. Artur’s family had low socio-economic status (using parental education as an indicator) and he had aspired to study medicine in TCD since he started in second-level school. As previously discussed, Dmitri was encouraged by his parents to pursue a career in business as his father was an entrepreneur. This is not the route he initially wanted to go down when he started in second-level school but has since come around to his parent’s view that it is the best pathway for him to follow. Similarly, two female students wished to pursue similar career paths to their fathers which their parents encouraged. One of the female students, Anna, wished to study Optometry. Anna explained that her desire to study optometry came from the fact that she has always worn glasses.

**Holly:** How did you find out about the course?

**Anna:** Em I kind of thought about it at the start of 5th year and I was thinking since I wear glasses I would like to be able to help people see and experience life fully like I did so I kind of just decided to do optometry.

Anna’s parents were supportive of this career path,

**Anna:** Yeah my mam said choose any course where you can get a job real easy, it can be anything so long as you can get a good job with it and I was like optometry cos it’s really good.

As noted in Chapter 5, Ludmilla recounted a pivotal moment, similar to Dmitri’s, where her parents had actively discouraged them from pursuing art or creative subjects in second-level school, in Ludmilla’s case this was home economics and instead advised them to choose what they perceived as more academic subjects.



These subject choices would shape the course of their school career and determine which pathways could be taken after school. Nine out of ten female students wished to attend further or higher education. Five of the students achieved a place at different universities in Ireland, Anna got offered a place in optometry in Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT is the only higher level institution in the country that offers optometry). Two of the female students Valentina (The Ukraine) and Ekaterina (Russia) who wished to follow their father's career paths went abroad to study as was part of their plan in sixth year. The final two female students, Ludmilla (Lithuania) and Inga (Latvia) had the lowest aspirations of the entire group, they both attended the same school which did not have an established college-going culture. This is the same school that Artur (Latvia) attended and noted that he had to do 90 per cent of the preparation for college himself because the school (staff and culture) were not geared to drive the students towards third level. Compared to the other students in the group who had very high aspirations Ludmilla and Inga had markedly lower aspirations and much more precarious plans in place for when they finished school. Ludmilla (Lithuania) felt she would like to go to college but wasn't clear about what course she would like to pursue after school, in August she found herself without an offer from the CAO.

**Holly:** Did you get offered your first choice from CAO?

**Ludmilla:** It wasn't my first choice on the CAO. I thought I would get a place in ITB (Institute of Technology Blanchardstown) for level 8 in social care because I got the points but didn't reach the requirements. So then I panicked for a day or two, applied for every single PLC course I could find in Dublin. I got offers from Drogheda and Sallynoggin, and after my interview I was told I got the place. I was delighted!

Inga (Latvia) went from school into the labour market working for minimum wage in an unskilled job. When we spoke during the first wave of interviews this student felt that she was not going to apply to any further education courses because she wanted to start working:

**Holly:** Can you tell me about why you wanted to start work after school and how you went about getting a job?

**Inga:** Well I wanted to be more independent I guess and the way I think about it it's never late to go back and do a course once you know what you would definitely like to do. When I was doing my Leaving Cert I had part time job for weekends and I wanted to get a full-time job since I was finished school. I did apply at many places and got few calls back I tried at Eddie Rockets and lasted two days it really wasn't for me. Then the day I left I got a call for an interview from my current job and I got started with them a few days later. First I was at the deli and then they decided to train me for the floor and check outs. Working with food isn't exactly for me so I was so excited that I got moved to check outs.

Inga was clear during our first interview that she did not wish to continue studying after school because her main ambition was to work. In this sense, Inga has achieved her goal for her post-

school pathways her parents are supportive in so far as they told her it was her choice what she did after school.

Having discussed the influence of social class and gender on a student's post-school pathways this research suggests that social class is a bigger influence than the gender of the student. However, as previously noted during second-level school there were instances of Ludmilla being steered away from home economics, Aliona and Dmitri being discouraged from studying Art which indicates that gender does play a role in this research albeit in a more nuanced way. There is a perception that certain subjects in school are less academic such as home economics and art which are also perceived to be highly gendered and more 'female' orientated subjects. This translates from second-level school subjects into further and higher-level decision-making as can be seen in this research students being steered away from arts degrees and social sciences in favour of more 'academic' courses.

### **Challenges and Successful Transitions**

The second wave of interviews focussed on the transition from compulsory schooling to higher education. The key themes which were discussed during this wave included balancing studying and socialising, the standard required of students at higher level, orientation within their new college, university, making new friends and their views of the pathway they chose. This section will discuss how students made their transitions with reference to resilience, protective and risk factors.

In Chapter 5, it was found that parents with no third level education had the most unrealistic expectations for their children. The effect that this has on how students make the transition to higher education can be seen in the students' outcomes. Out of five students whose parents did not attend third level, three students Ludmilla (Lithuania), Aliona (Moldova) and Artur (Latvia) did not get offered their preferred choice. These three students faced a more difficult period of transition than the other students in this research. The potential reasons why these students did not achieve their preferred course were explored in previous chapters. Adjusting to their new pathway or less preferred option can make the transition more difficult and a negative experience for the students as they cope with disappointment and their new reality. The extent to which this new reality has a negative impact on the student is intrinsically linked to their level of resilience and how reflexive they are in considering alternate pathways for their future. Their level of preparation in sixth year also plays an important role in making a successful transition. Two students, Aliona (Moldova) and Artur (Latvia), both wanted to study medicine but did not get offered their first choice, fortunately they had both filled out the top ten spots

on their CAO form. Aliona was offered her eighth choice which was psychiatric nursing and Artur was offered his fifth choice which was a general science degree. The fact that both students had put a high level of consideration into other options and back up plans offered them an alternative pathway.

**Holly:** Ok, so what course are you studying?

**Artur:** I'm doing general Science right now that is general entry science you pick from a moderatorship from one of the sciences. Initially I was headed towards Medicine that was my goal and I did alright in the leaving cert I got 545 points but the problem was that the HPAT let me down. I think it's a bit of a hard thing to do especially not doing it before I've heard that people do the HPAT in fifth year just to get a taster and it's a bit of a barrier now even cos it costs 70 to 100 euro to do it and it's one hour and a half and it literally determines your life which is scary because I properly panicked in that exam. It was in Goldsmith Hall where I take all my lectures now I've grown used to it. I walked into the centre there was around 400 people there and I was thinking this is not the only centre there's RCSI, and Cork and I was thinking there's so many people. That was kind of a revelation to me, I never really thought that there are around 3,000 people want to do a 500 place course it was a bit daunting.

**Holly:** So, when you were offered science were you happy?

**Artur:** My initial reaction was ok so I didn't get Medicine.

Artur achieved excellent Leaving Certificate results achieving 545 points out of 600. However, medicine is a highly competitive course to gain a place on, as Artur noted during the HPAT exam there were 3,000 students competing for 500 places. During the second wave of interviews Artur reflected on coming to terms with accepting his fifth choice:

**Holly:** Could you have gotten Medicine through HEAR?

**Artur:** Yeah it was a possibility but obviously the people who applied to HEAR were better in HPAT and Leaving Cert results. There's a lot of factors, there are other people who obviously got better marks and performed better on the day. I got science it's not the end of the world I've apologised to myself for getting science. When I came to Trinity we had an orientation with TAP we sat in a room there was ten of us I was the first to say I'm doing science because I actually wanted to do medicine and science was my fourth choice and then funnily enough only one person said they didn't want to do medicine in the room. So basically our science course is made up of people who wanted to do medicine.

As Artur's interview shows he had a challenging start to university life because he felt an acute sense of disappointment in not achieving his preferred choice to study medicine. There is a sense throughout the conversation that this failure to achieve his goal still had a major impact

on him as he talked about ‘apologising to myself for getting science’ and ultimately resigning himself to the fact that it was not ‘the end of the world’.

As previously noted in this chapter there was one student, Ludmilla, who had only chosen three courses on her CAO form and did not get offered any of these. Ludmilla’s lack of alternatives meant that she had to apply for different courses months after the majority of students would have filled out their CAO forms. Ludmilla’s experience of not getting offered any college courses after her Leaving Certificate was unique in this study. Not all students were offered their first choice. In fact, Aliona was offered her eighth choice out of a possible ten but Ludmilla was the only student to have applied for higher education courses and not get offered anything at all. This experience did not have a lasting negative effect on Ludmilla’s post-school pathways, as she spoke about the experience as a learning curve and was very positive about the course and college that she enrolled in:

**Holly:** Are you happy with the course?

**Ludmilla:** I definitely am, it’s like a stepping stone. I feel like this year has really showed me that I am doing what I want to do and what I am suitable for. Even though it is a bit of a trek getting in and out (travelling by bus from Swords to Sallynoggin) I really enjoy it and look forward to coming in.

For some students, such as Vadim (Latvia) it was a positive and successful transition. Vadim lived in close proximity to the college so there was no sense of unease about the move. He was following his passion by studying computer science and felt it was a much more positive experience than school because he did not have to study subjects that he did not like.

**Holly:** Did you do any work on computers at school that would have prepared you for this course?

**Vadim:** No but I love computers it’s my passion I know a lot about them even before I got into this course.

**Holly:** Have you made new friends since starting college?

**Vadim:** Here socialising is easier cos people that are around you are interested in the same thing that you are and that helps a lot. In school it was different, people were interested in different things and it was not easy to meet people here it is easy.

It was a similarly smooth transition for Pasha who also went to a university which was situated very close to his home (within walking distance) to study computer science. Pasha’s transition was also made smoother by the fact that he was not challenged by the course material. He felt highly competent with the coursework on the first-year curriculum:

**Holly:** Do you feel comfortable with the standard expected of you?

**Pasha:** Yeah well actually I haven’t learned anything new at all since I’ve started so I’m not upset about it. I have a lot of free time and I can help my friends with whatever they’re struggling with. It’s more or less interesting, but there’s other things, two other modules this year that are going to be on java which is the computer language which my dad taught me and the other one is systems they’re

not even programming systems-they'll be a bit more challenging but nothing too difficult.

The transition experiences of Vadim and Pasha raise the issue of geographical location, locality and 'the neighbourhood'. These are key themes in research which focusses on working class young people and decisions they make for their futures. There was a definite sense of security for both students in the fact that they were staying within their immediate locality. In fact, Vadim could literally see his house from his college campus. The building itself was familiar to both students and therefore there was no anxiety surrounding getting to college and finding their way around campus. Furthermore, their close proximity to college meant they did not have the additional financial burden of travel expenses which was an issue to varying degrees for other students in the research. In Vadim's case, he attended a DEIS school and lived in a socio-economically disadvantaged area of Dublin. Based on Vadim's exam results he could have gone to UCD to study computer science and during both of our interviews this prospect was discussed. Vadim's rationale for preferring to stay in his locality were that it was too far to travel and the additional cost of this was also off putting. There was a sense in the interviews, of UCD being too far in a metaphorical sense too. For the most part Vadim's peers would also be going to the local college, he would have a peer network and would be doing what was expected of him. Although Vadim acknowledged that UCD would have a better reputation and may look better on his CV the distance geographically and metaphorically proved to be too great, Vadim stayed within his locality and chose the educational institution that was familiar to him.

The contrasting experiences of Olga (Lithuania) and Marta (Lithuania) provide an insight into the role of resilience in making a successful transition from second-level school to university. Both families had close connections, they migrated to Ireland together, they both lived in the same small town outside Dublin and attended the same second-level school. Olga accepted a place in UCD and Marta accepted a place in MU (Maynooth University). Their experiences of migrating to Ireland and the education system in Ireland were very similar when they were first interviewed. However, they had very different experiences of making the transition to college. For Marta, the commute from Navan to Maynooth (45 kilometres) and restrictive public transport meant that she felt isolated from her peer group who could socialise on campus after class or attend events and join societies. In addition to the feeling of isolation the travel time to and from university made Marta's days quite long which did not leave any spare time to work part-time to earn extra money or gain independence, as a result she felt the first few months of university challenging.

**Holly:** So are you commuting from Navan?

**Marta:** There's two buses in morning and two buses in afternoon and then on Fridays there's three buses.

**Holly:** So how do you find the commute if you are in college in the afternoon do you still have to get the first bus?

**Marta:** Yes, I still have to get the morning bus into college and I would have to get the second bus home which is at six pm.

**Holly:** So are they long days?

**Marta:** Yeah they are long I find it a bit exhausting because I don't do as much in college to stay that long I could have just been home already but the buses don't go that often so that's why.

**Holly:** Are you missing out on socialising?

**Marta:** Sometimes I feel like I'm missing out on college life because I don't really go out with my college mates because you know the last bus leaves at six so I can't really stay til ten or eleven.

In contrast, Olga took a different perspective on her daily commute from Navan to UCD (73 kilometres) and socialising with college friends. Rather than focussing on the negative elements of living far from college, Olga had immersed herself in college life by joining societies and organising events and trips. The issue of her social life being restricted because of the daily commute was not an issue that had arisen:

**Holly:** Are you involved in societies?

**Olga:** I'm in the law society and we just had the law ball last week that was great I had a long black dress it was fantastic it was in Crowne plaza at the airport we organised a bus from UCD to there we had 200 people at it.

**Holly:** How do you get home from a night out?

**Olga:** I stay with friends on campus there's a group of six of us and we really click together we sit together at lectures, have coffee and sleepover or parties I've really settled in and I'm really happy about that cos I thought it would take me a while but people are the same as you are from secondary school looking for friends so it was no bother.

**Holly:** How do you manage your social life and college assignments?

**Olga:** I go out once a month I wouldn't go out every Monday and Thursday the way some people do I went out for the law ball and before that it was semester one results.

The manner in which both students experienced their transition to third level suggests that making a positive transition is closely associated with the student's own resilience and ability to adapt to change, a protective factor which was discussed earlier in the chapter.

During the first wave of interviews none of the students said they were applying to college or university through the HEAR scheme. During the second wave of interviews, five students

reported that they had applied for the HEAR scheme and four were accepted. One student, Aliona, did not meet the criteria as it is means tested and her parents were earning over the threshold amount and therefore Aliona was not eligible. Four of the students, Vera (Moldova), Artur (Latvia), Olga (Lithuania) and Marta (Lithuania) did qualify for the HEAR scheme. The purpose of this scheme is to offer support and assistance to students who may not have traditionally gone to third level for example those from DEIS schools and low-income families. In addition to students being offered a college course on reduced CAO points, the scheme offers a range of supports to help students make the transition to higher education by holding an orientation week, offering extra tuition and mentoring as required and in certain cases financial support when available. Benefitting from the HEAR scheme could be viewed as a potential protective factor for students entering higher education. However, the variables such as low-income household and first generation college-goer which allow qualification for the scheme are all associated with risk factors. Therefore, the HEAR scheme may not be able to offer enough ‘protection’ to students from the inherent ‘risks’ which exist within their lives.

The four students who achieved a place at university through the HEAR scheme noted that they benefitted in different ways from the scheme. For example, Marta who had wanted to study psychology at university all throughout second-level school did not secure enough points to achieve a place on a degree course. If Marta had not qualified for the HEAR scheme she would not have been able to study psychology at university as she had 60 points less than the required amount necessary to get an offer:

**Holly:** So, what were the points for this course?

**Marta:** 510 but I’m under the HEAR scheme for the financial support because my mother wasn’t employed last year, I got myself 450 points and then I realised that I couldn’t do psychology so I had to wait for the CAO to see if I could get an offer through HEAR.

Unlike Marta, Vera did not need the reduced points option through the HEAR scheme. In fact, while Vera noted that there were benefits associated with the scheme: that it was ‘easier to get in’ (referring to reduced points) and that she was given book tokens to ease the financial burden of enrolling at university Vera remarked that she did not have any use for book tokens on her particular degree:

**Holly:** When you arrived then in NUIG did it take you long to settle in?

**Vera:** Oh yeah I have to tell you I got the HEAR programme even though I didn't need the points. I still could have went so I went here before the college started and I lived on the campus for four days we were getting food and everything and we were getting shown around.

**Holly:** Was that from the access office?

**Vera:** Yeah so everything was good and I have one of my friends that I know so it was even easier and it's so good if you get this HEAR programme cos you get a voucher for books like 200 euros but we don't really need books for my course because we downloaded some from the internet then they give you the sheets that you need they say buy the books but there's no point everyone who is third and fourth year is saying don't buy.

As noted previously in this chapter Artur's situation is slightly more complex in that he had originally applied to study medicine and as part of the application process he had to sit the HPAT exam. Medicine was his primary goal and as such he put down three different medicine courses as his top three choices. Based on the aggregate of his Leaving Certificate results and the results of the HPAT exam he did not achieve a high enough result to be offered medicine through the CAO or through the HEAR scheme. Artur was offered a general science degree which he did not need the reduced points for as he achieved high enough results in his Leaving Certificate. Artur was reflective on the different strategies he could have employed to improve his chances of getting the best offer he could through the HEAR scheme. As it turned out Artur was offered general science for which he did not need reduced points, he notes the only benefit he has enjoyed from the scheme is the waiver of the gym fee which he notes was a help financially:

**Holly:** Did you apply through the HEAR scheme?

**Artur:** Medicine was my first three choices, nanoscience was the fourth choice, fifth was science. I knew that if I put nanoscience first I would have gotten that through the HEAR scheme. I applied through HEAR but I didn't get nanoscience through them because people who put nanoscience as their first choice go into the list of HEAR first. If I put it first I would have a better chance, at the same time the science course is 510 I would have still got it without HEAR so the only benefit I got from HEAR is I got my gym fee paid through them which is good because the gym fee is mandatory here and my parents wouldn't have the money for it.

Similar to Vera, Olga did not need the reduced points in order to achieve a place on her degree course. As part of the HEAR scheme Olga was offered on campus accommodation which she declined as she felt she was not ready to be totally independent from her parents. She said she would reconsider for second year but she was going through enough change in first year without living independently also:



**Holly:** Did you apply through the HEAR scheme?

**Olga:** Yeah I did and I got it but points wise it didn't really help me they have their little support funds that are good they helped me with accommodation they're really good if I need advice they're really good I can go to them before my tutor and before college started we had pre mentoring at UCD for two days they showed us around, I actually got offered accommodation on campus but I didn't like it I wasn't ready I might think about it next year I don't mind commuting see if I minded then that would push me to take the student accommodation.

It is interesting to note that Olga rejected the offer of on campus accommodation. As previously discussed Olga had a significant daily commute, approximate ninety minutes each morning and afternoon. While a long daily commute proved inconvenient for other students such as Marta for example, Olga was more practical in her attitude towards the bus journey and when asked about whether the time spent travelling each day was inconvenient to her she replied 'No it's hour and a half I can sleep or read a book'.

### **Summary**

This chapter has shown that a successful or challenging post-school transition is not simply a matter of protective factors versus risk factors or indeed protection from risk factors. It is entirely more complex and dependent on a myriad of broad structural factors intersected by socio-cultural influences. For example, taking the research sample that went on to higher education, the four students who received additional support through the HEAR scheme did not necessarily have a smoother transition or a more positive perspective on the move from second to third level education. The HEAR scheme may not have been the right 'fit' or did not offer the protection from risk as required by the students in this research. The HEAR scheme was designed to offer support to students from socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds. Therefore, the focus of this scheme is not necessarily aligned with the specific needs or difficulties which face migrant students and their parents during the post-school transition. This is supported by the findings in this research which show that two of the students who qualified for the scheme did not need the reduced points for entry to their course of choice and one student who qualified for the scheme was offered subsidised campus accommodation which she did not accept.

As discussed in this chapter there are many factors which can shape the post-school transition of migrant young people. These factors such as parental education level, parental occupation, type of school attended can accrue and work together to cumulatively offer increased protection or increased risk. The factors can also be conflicting and negate each other, for example high parental education levels are often undermined by the fact that these parents did not go through

the Irish education system and do not possess ‘insider’ knowledge or the nuances of a new system. This re-enforces the complexity of attempting to explain completely why some migrant young people can make a successful transition and others struggle with a challenging transition.

The most consistent factor in students experiencing a positive post-school transition in this research is rooted in their own resilience and ability to cope with change. All students in this research have previously undergone a major transition in their lives by migrating to a new country. Arguably, for some of the students this previous transition has built their capacity to cope with change and transition.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusions**

The thesis set out to explore the factors effecting the post-school pathways of Russian-speaking young people in Ireland and to examine the usefulness of cultural reproduction theory and rational action theory as well as other theoretical concepts in examining this topic. The study started off by exploring the migration experience of Russian-speaking young people to Ireland, their experience of the education system and what were the key factors influencing the decision-making regarding their post-school pathways.

The reasons behind the migration of Russian and Eastern Europeans to Ireland are manifold and more complex than the assumed economic pull factors of Ireland's Celtic Tiger era. According to Smyth (2011) the reasons for migration from Russia and Eastern Europe to Ireland range from workers being recruited at employment fairs, students arriving and continuing to live here, while some have sought refugee status. This study addresses the gap in existing research in our understanding of the experiences of Russian-speaking migrants, specifically young migrants, their education journey in Ireland and their aspirations for their futures. By using a longitudinal design and following the participants at a crucial stage in their lives (on the verge of making the transition from second-level school to third level education or the labour market) this study provides a unique insight into this under-researched group in terms of identifying background and structural factors that influence their post-school pathways.

The decision to use the term 'pathways' as opposed to 'transition' was discussed in Chapter 1. It is important to reflect at this point on whether the research was best served by understanding the move from second-level onwards by using the concept of a pathway. Initially, pathway was chosen as a metaphor to reflect the life-course in contemporary society which requires young people entering the labour force to be flexible and adaptable. By suggesting young people are starting on their pathway, there is room for divergence, side-tracks and U-turns. These are the realities and distractions not afforded by the traditional 'transition' which is a much more defined movement from point A to point B. The use of pathways as a metaphor proved most expedient when applied to the outcomes of the students in this research who did not achieve their first choice and who had to accept a different reality to the one they (and their families) had imagined. For those students, such as Ludmilla and Aliona, who accepted vastly different courses than those they had originally chosen, it is clear that they had to change their previously imagined pathway to reflect their current area of study. The use of pathways as a metaphor for students who were fortunate enough to be pursuing the course that they had applied for is also relevant as they are currently only at the beginning of their pathway which can continue on to include further study, the labour market, family life or travel. Rather than considering each

phase as a separate, linear and temporally-bound transition, this research offers a more open perspective which concurs with Ansell et al. (2013) who suggest that ‘it is more useful to see transitions as perpetually stretched across boundaries, spanning time, space and relationships, drawing constantly on pasts and futures in constituting the present’ (Ansell et al., 2013, p. 400).

Temporality was used a theoretical concept to form part of the conceptual framework in Chapter 2 and as a methodological tool in the use of a longitudinal design as outlined in Chapter 3. All sociological inquiry is inherently linked to temporality. Maines (1987) argues that temporality is a foundation stone for all sociological research. ‘There can be no genuine sociological theory, no theory of society, not even a simple assertion made about human conduct that does not contain an underlying theory of temporality’ (Maines, 1987, p. 303). By using a longitudinal design this research gives prominence to the relevance of temporality in understanding the post-school pathways of Russian-speaking students. The value of incorporating temporality into the methodological approach used in this research and within the conceptual framework will be discussed in the evaluation of the research design section.

This final chapter discusses the key findings emerging from the research by assessing the main research themes. These are contextualised by the theoretical and conceptual framework discussed in Chapter 2, while discussing the usefulness of Bourdieu’s reproduction theory alongside rational action theory in explaining the factors influencing the post-school pathways of young people. The concepts of protective and risk factors and also the power of resilience discussed throughout the themes will help further our understanding of certain processes throughout the decision-making process. The following section in this chapter will discuss the unique contribution to knowledge that this research makes and then evaluate the research design, namely a qualitative longitudinal study. The execution of this study is critically assessed to consider its effectiveness in allowing the researcher to understand the process of decision making regarding post-school pathways. The concept of temporality and how ‘time’ was an intrinsic part of the research design is addressed at this point. The theoretical and conceptual framework is then evaluated. Finally, this chapter makes several recommendations for future areas of research.

### **Discussion of Key Findings**

The three main findings of the dissertation are: first, the cultural capital possessed by Russian-speaking students can be utilised in the Irish education system to increase Leaving Certificate outcomes. Second, parental level of education was a key influence and predictor of academic success for the participants in this research. Finally, above any external influences, personal

resilience was the defining feature in making a successful transition from second-level education. These findings are discussed in detail in the following sections in this chapter.

Three over-arching themes to arise from the data were aspirations, decision-making and transition. These three themes are inextricably linked. The participants in this study are part of families which were self-selected migrants with high aspirations for their futures. This was one element that prompted their migration to Ireland. The aspirations of the parents influenced the decision-making processes of the family with regards to education covering the whole spectrum from initial decisions regarding school choice, subject choice, which level to study for state exams and post-school planning. The theme of transition arose in each of the three data chapters, firstly describing emigrating from their country of origin to Ireland, followed by institutional transition from their old school to the new school. Many of the participants enrolled in primary school in Ireland and then had to make a transition to second-level. This involves re-location, dealing with a number of subject teachers, encountering more formal and academically-focussed environment (Smyth et al., 2004). All of the participants in this study transitioned from second-level to their post-school pathways which for the majority (all participants except one) was entry into further or higher education. The following sections of the chapter explore these themes in greater detail.

### *Aspirations*

Bourdieu's theory of capital is beneficial when understanding migrant youth's aspirations and whether these aspirations translate into reality. All three forms of capital- social, cultural and economic can overlap and interplay but it is social capital that can play a pivotal role in a student's educational opportunities. Migrant parents with low social capital may not know how to navigate the school system and may lack either the supportive networks or economic capital that would allow them to spend more time with, and be more involved in, their children's education (Lareau, 2003). International research suggests that first-generation migrant parents tend to have high educational expectations for their children, a concept previously referred to in this thesis as 'immigrant optimism' (Raleigh, 2010; Van Houtte and Stevens, 2010; Tereshchenko, 2013; Teney, et al., 2013). In some cases, these expectations are higher than those of native parents (Raleigh, 2010). Various theories have been put forward to try to explain why this is the case. The fact that the parents are self-selected first generation migrants who are aiming to better themselves and the prospects of their children creates what Teney et al. (2013) have referred to as the 'intergenerational social mobility project'. In the same vein, Raleigh and Kao (2010) argue that as part of this social mobility project, immigrant parents do not see their children's future as downwardly mobile, and consistently reinforce messages about college

plans throughout childhood. This supports data collected as part of the Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) longitudinal research project, which found that a significant proportion of immigrant parents of nine-year-old children across national groups expect their child to reach third level education (Darmody et al., 2016, p. 179). Hegna (2013) posits that central to the understanding of educational aspirations 'is the idea that aspirations are both reflections of young people's past and their vision for the future' (Hegna, 2013, p. 593). Immigrant parents' aspirations for their children are very high in Ireland as reflected in the GUI findings. It became clear from speaking with the majority of students participating in this study that there is a motivation to study and be academically successful which is being encouraged by their parents.

Chapter 2 touched upon the fact that social and cultural capital is not easily translated from country of origin to the country a person migrates to. Language is one example, as a migrant's native language may not hold any value in the country they migrate to which is in itself problematic and becomes doubly so if they do not possess language skills as a second language in the country they migrate to (Devine, 2009; McGinnity et al., 2015). This 'lack' of social and cultural capital, in this instance, language, can negatively impact on a newly arrived migrant's employability or ability to function within the education system. A pertinent finding in this research is that the cultural capital possessed by Russian-speaking students directly translates within the Irish education system as it offers the opportunity for these students to achieve 100 points or A1 with relatively little effort as several students referred to the Russian exam as a 'guaranteed A1'. Any protection that this apparent 'advantage' offered the students was subject to being diminished by the numerous risk factors that were at play, including parents lacking the insider knowledge of the education system in Ireland, social status of the school attended and provision of guidance and counselling services in the school attended. All of the parents in this research attended school in their country of origin and therefore had no experience of the Irish education system prior to their children enrolling in school in Ireland. There were several types of schools attended in this study; fee-paying schools, community colleges, voluntary secondary schools and those with DEIS status. The provision of guidance in each of the schools varied in terms of the amount of time a student could have with their guidance counsellor. There was also variation in the amount of uptake from the students and their level of engagement with the guidance services available to them. As previously discussed in Chapter 5, for students who were planning to study outside Ireland after school, there was a perception that their guidance counsellor had little or no information to guide them and so there was little engagement between these students and their guidance counsellor. In addition, the data in this study indicates that guidance provision was of poor quality in some of the schools which resulted in students

holding unrealistic expectations of the course they had applied for and reporting moments of surprise at discovering the modules involved in their course after they enrolled.

As a group, it is apparent that all young people in the study had high aspirations considering 13 out of 14 went on to study at third level education. Irrespective of the social class background (here defined by parent's education level), the students espoused middle class values of prioritising education to guarantee a place in a 'top-tier' university and a good career. Aiming for second-tier colleges such as institutes of technology was not as popular as university with only two students actively hoping to get a place there. As Chapter 5 outlined the type of school attended was heavily influential in supporting or diminishing a student's aspirations. Vadim attended a DEIS second-level school with a high migrant student population and in a low socio-economic status neighbourhood. Vadim's experience of being placed into a lower-ability maths class in this school based on his perceived lack of ability (he had very little English when he migrated from Latvia to Ireland) illustrates the way in which the school attended can have a potentially negative effect on aspirations and future life-chances. Another student, Artur, aimed to study medicine at Trinity College while attending a DEIS status school with a high proportion of migrant students and socio-economically disadvantaged students. Artur spoke at length of his frustrations that the school did not have high enough aspirations for their students, as a result he did a lot of extra work to aim for higher results in his own time at evenings and weekends. These findings support the work of McCoy et al. (2014) who found that school social mix was the greatest influence on student's outcomes. The final section of Chapter 6 discussed a clear divide between students who studied arts and science subjects at third level. The data suggests that students who chose to study science courses at third level had realistic expectations about what the course would entail and how good a 'fit' it would be for them. All students who took science courses reported being very comfortable with the standard expected of them and several students noted that they had not learned anything new since coming to college. This is in line with Smyth et al. (2009) who found that maths at second-level is often perceived to be easier in Ireland by migrant students than in their country of origin (Smyth et al. 2009).

In summary, the data regarding the aspirations of parents and students suggests that while the majority of participants' and their parents had high educational aspirations they did in fact achieve their preferred post-school option. Therefore, it can be determined that their aspirations were realistic. This indicates that at some point in their second-level education there was a shift from the 'ideal world' aspirations to realistic expectations as outlined in Chapter 6. For the three students who did not achieve their preferred option, two of the three students had aspirations in line with the post-school pathway they achieved but it was their parents' aspiration that were

not in line with the reality of what the participants could achieve. This phenomenon can be ascribed to ‘immigrant optimism’. As noted in Chapter 1, immigrant optimism is a global trend where aspirations of immigrant families and their children are higher than their native peers (Storen, 2011). Since only three students out of 14 did not follow their preferred pathway it can be concluded that immigrant optimism or the expectation/achievement paradox are not defining features of the group of young people participating in this study. The participants in this research defy these particular narratives instead demonstrating that the high aspirations of their families were realistic and achievable.

Aspirations influence the decision-making process in the education system in many ways, the next section examines how parental and school expectations for students influences the decision-making process.

### *Decision-making*

The theme of educational decision-making in this research emerged first when parents were choosing which primary or second-level school their children should attend, followed by decision-making surrounding subject choice and subject level in second-level schools and finally post-school planning. As discussed in Chapter 5, decisions made early in a child’s educational career can have many far-reaching implications for their future life chances. A key example of this is a student studying a subject at ordinary level when they enter second-level school. This automatically shuts off the option for them to study this subject at a higher level later in their school career which reduces their final grade and influences what type of college course they can apply for (Darmody, 2012; Smyth et al., 2011; Gillborn, 2010). This scenario is even more pronounced in the case of migrant students in Ireland as research has shown that students are more likely to be placed into lower ability classes based on their perceived lack of ability which is mainly based on their English language proficiency (Smyth et al., 2009). In some cases, students and their families can make decisions which inhibit their future chances. As discussed in Chapter 4, decision-making around which primary school to send their child to did not appear to have been of major consideration for the families in this study. This is linked to the fact that as newly arrived migrants to Ireland, these parents may have been unaware of the nuances of the Irish education system and the long-term implications of certain decisions. For example, it was the norm for parents in this study to choose a school which is local for the convenience of a short daily commute. In doing so, they were not engaging in the wider decision-making practices which take place such as choosing a primary school based on the preferred second-level school they wish their child to attend (Ledwith and Reilly, 2013; Smyth et al., 2004). At second-level, there was much more ‘active choice’ when deciding on which



school their child would attend. However, this is within the context of parents having potentially (unknowingly) removed several schools from the pool of choice due to the primary school that they attended. While all primary schools were chosen by parents in this study based on the fact that they were local and within commuting distance this changed at second-level decision-making (see Table 5.1). When choosing a second-level school some parents displayed active choice by researching schools outside their locality to find the ‘best’ school. For example, Dmitri’s mother wanted to choose a school with the ‘best’ academic reputation. A little over half the sample cited reasons of commuting distance and proximity to home as reasons for choosing their second-level school. The remainder of the sample attended a fee-paying school or in Dmitri’s case the ‘best’ non-fee paying school his mother could find within a reasonable commuting distance. Although it can be argued that families displayed ‘active choice’ in deciding on a second-level school that was within commuting distance, this is merely a veneer of choice or an example of ‘bounded agency’ (see Chapter 2). For some parents choosing a fee-paying school was a viable option for others it was not. Therefore, saying that parents exercised ‘active choice’ is disingenuous when the reality is that they made the best decision they could when taking into account their family’s socio-economic situation which is a good illustration of how rational action theory was applicable to this research.

Students’ options are also influenced by structural factors such as: the school placing migrant students in lower ability classes, not offering certain subjects at higher level and not offering a European language all of which potentially curtail and limit a student’s future life prospects. In cases where the school attempts to increase the decision-making power of the student by offering sample courses of all subjects in first year, this can often be undermined or overridden by the parent’s influence which they exert to steer their child into the subjects they feel are more worthwhile or ‘useful’. Whilst the schools are to be commended for offering such a variety of subjects with a view to empowering decision-making in first year there is a clear deficit in the guidance provision for senior cycle students (McCoy et al., 2006). Students participating in this research who had some contact with their school’s guidance counsellor indicated that the staff were not fully aware of particular obstacles or barriers which may apply to migrant students in their school. The case of Vera (Moldova), as discussed in Chapter 5, being the most evident. In addition, students who did not intend to study at third level in Ireland such as Ekaterina (Russia) and Valentina (The Ukraine) reported their guidance counsellor had no knowledge about applying to colleges outside Ireland.

The issue of guidance counselling provision in schools has become a prominent topic on the national agenda. Recent government cuts to guidance counsellors hours has resulted in reduced

guidance available for students. These cuts to guidance counselling disproportionately affect immigrant students and first-generation college goers in general as they rely more heavily on formal guidance provision in schools than any other groups in the country. In order to support newly arrived migrants (including Russian-speaking students), particularly those whose parents did not attend third level education, the establishment of dedicated guidance provision for immigrant students is required. Such targeted guidance for migrant students could ensure that issues ranging from citizenship status, fees, requirements, back-up options are discussed. Such a system has a potential to create a fairer or more level playing field for migrant students such as Vera (Moldova) or Ludmilla (Lithuania) who each found themselves in precarious situations following their Leaving Certificate.

In line with international research on high aspirations and social class (Teney et al., 2013; Frigo et al., 2007) the data in this research clearly shows that parents with a third level education had more realistic expectations of their child's academic ability and their expectations were more closely aligned with the courses their children were offered in college or university. This could have been due to the fact that having attended third level education themselves, they were more familiar with the 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu) than their counterparts with lower levels of educational attainment. This study showed that the latter had the most unrealistic expectations for their children. The very high expectations of these parents were not reflected in the courses that their children were offered through the CAO.

While it was suggested in Chapter 5 that country of origin was a predictor of parent's education level, the student's country of origin was not a driver of parental engagement in educational decision-making. It did however transpire in the case of the Ukrainian families that since three out of the four students wished to follow in a parent's career path there was a high level of parental engagement in these particular families. Parental engagement differed within the sample across a range of dimensions including educational level of parents, parent's occupation and whether the student already had a clear idea of their future pathway. Reay and Ball (1998) contest previously held ideas of working class parents' passivity or ambivalence in educational decision-making. It was found that the perceived 'disengagement' can be better understood as a powerlessness within the education system that is linked to their powerlessness within wider societal context (Reay and Ball, 1998, p. 434). This powerlessness can be increased in the case of newly arrived migrant parents who are unfamiliar with the Irish education system.

In summary, the data in this research suggests that social class is influential in educational decision-making. If a parent attended third-level education, then they were more likely to understand what is required to achieve a place at third level and hold realistic aspirations for

their child which reflects Bourdieu's reproduction theory. The data also suggests that migrant students can be more at risk in their post-school planning due to the limited resources and knowledge of their unique situations possessed by guidance counsellors in school. This risk becomes augmented when the migrant students are attending a disadvantaged school and/or their parents have no experience of third level education themselves.

### *Transitions*

The participants in this research experienced a considerable transition before taking part in this research when they migrated from their country of origin to Ireland. Eight of the participants made the transition from primary school in their country of origin to primary school in Ireland, while four of the participants who migrated when they were in second-level school in their country of origin made a transition to second-level school in Ireland. The transition that occurred from formal schooling between wave one and wave two of this research will be discussed in the next section from a methodological and research design perspective. This section will discuss the theme of transition and theorise this theme in relation to this research.

Research on youth transitions tends to focus on key questions such as; whether the transition was successful or not, what makes a successful transition and why do some young people manage transition with minimal disruption and others struggle (Billet et al., 2010; Duckworth and Schoon, 2012; Raffe, 2013). At the centre of these questions is the assumption that transition is a finite movement from point A to point B and the transition has been completed and made in its entirety. As discussed in Chapter 1 and earlier in this chapter, contemporary pathways which do not reflect the more linear and direct traditional pathways pose challenges for the traditional understanding of youth transitions. Therefore, contemporary pathways require new methods and models of research. Youth transitions are increasingly complex with the concept of youth and young adulthood being extended to a person's mid-20's where previously this period ended upon school completion. It is suggested that the period of adolescence is extending at both ends of the spectrum, with children entering adolescence earlier and young adults exiting adolescence later than ever (Lalor et al., 2007). The result of this phenomenon is that 'youth' has become a much more pronounced stage of the life course thus requiring more research and analysis than before (Cotterell, 2007, p. 20). In the simplest sense adolescence refers to the transition between childhood and adulthood. In pre-industrial societies, this period may be brief, ending when biological maturity brings adult status. In contemporary Western societies, adolescence is a much lengthier period and is often considered to be an 'invention' of industrial Western society (Lalor et al., 2007). A distinguishing feature of adolescence in 21st century Western society is the erosion of the standard pathways to

adulthood and ‘the certainties of previous generations about the connection between future, present and past for the assembly of one’s biography are no longer evident.’ (Cotterell, 2007, p. 17). The focus of this research is on pathways as opposed to transition because pathways proved a more flexible concept and more applicable to the modern phenomenon that young people experience when leaving school in Ireland. Transition as a concept of moving from one point to another is however, a key theme within the research as the participants experienced multiple, separate transitions in their lives.

As discussed in Chapter 2, resilience is a prominent factor during a period of transition. Resilience refers to several elements; individual characteristics, support from significant others and the wider social context that might help avoid negative outcomes (Duckworth and Schoon, 2012, p. 40) The amount of resilience a person possesses can be influenced both positively and negatively by previous experiences and wider social contexts for example, support from family or school (Duckworth and Schoon, 2012). Four students in this research qualified for the HEAR scheme. These four students who received additional support through the HEAR scheme did not necessarily have a smoother transition or a more positive perspective on the move from second to third level education than the other nine students who went on to further or higher education. In this research, the key factor in students experiencing a positive transition would appear to be rooted in their own resilience and ability to cope with change. There were two students, Vera and Ludmilla, who faced the biggest disruptions to their intended post-school pathways. Vera discovered after enrolment at university that her citizenship status (she had lived in Ireland for less than 24 months) meant that she was liable to pay non-EU fees at the university which were in excess of four times the amount of the registration fee she had anticipated having to pay. Vera displayed resilience being faced with such financial difficulties and being encouraged by her university to defer and reapply when her citizenship status had changed. Undeterred, Vera pragmatically applied for grants, scholarships and appealed to her course tutor in order to stay in university which she successfully achieved. Ludmilla was facing the prospect of having no college to attend after school as she did not get offered any of the places that she applied to. Although Ludmilla admits that she experienced panic and it was a very upsetting experience for her, similar to Vera she also adopted a pragmatic approach and researched courses she could apply for at a late stage and ultimately secured a place in a further education college. Both students drew on their own personal characteristics displaying the wherewithal to overcome their negative situations and create a positive outcome for themselves. All students in this research have previously undergone a major transition in their lives by migrating to a new country. Arguably, for some of the students this previous transition could have built their capacity to cope with change and transition.

## **Contributions of the Study**

This research makes a key methodological contribution, several empirical contributions and a conceptual contribution to the literature on youth transitions and Russian-speaking populations. A key methodological contribution is made as this is the first qualitative longitudinal study of Russian-speaking youth in Ireland. By researching Russian-speaking young people making the transition from second-level school, this research contributes new knowledge to the emerging research on post-school pathways in Ireland which focuses on the general student population and other longitudinal studies such as *Growing Up in Ireland* which also focuses on the general population. The qualitative longitudinal methodology contributes a deeper understanding of post-school pathways, youth transitions and pathways of migrant young people in Ireland.

This research has offered a unique insight into the lives of Russian-speaking students in Ireland at a crucial time in their lives. The experiences of Russian-speakers as a heterogeneous group and their uniqueness in this regard is the subject of international research (see Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000; Pisarenko, 2006; Lindemann 2013). For example, the Russian-speakers in this research were born in Russia, The Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova and Azerbaijan. As such, this research contributes new empirical data from an Irish context to the body of international research on Russian-speakers.

At the time that this dissertation was submitted there were only three studies which specifically focussed on Russian-speakers in Ireland (Aptekar 2009; Krafstoff and Quinn, 2009; Eriksson, 2013). Eriksson (2013) focussed primarily on young Russian-speakers in school and pointed to the need for further research on the experiences of when Russian-speaking students leave school. This research addresses this caveat and contributes to the limited research in Ireland on Russian-speakers in Ireland while advancing the literature and filling the current gaps in this area as identified by researchers such as Eriksson (2013).

A reimagining of the traditional concept of child agency emerged in the process of understanding how decision-making occurs within migrant families. The traditional power dynamic in the parent-child relationship would see parents being the 'expert' in educational decision-making. It is known from previous research that the child can become the 'expert' in this relationship in working-class families as parents may have little or no experience of the education system passed primary level (Reay and Ball, 1998). This research has shown how a migrant child can possess more agency than their parents due to two simultaneous issues; the child in this research often had higher levels of English language skills than their parents and the child had more experience than their parents of the Irish educational system. Thus, the foundations upon which the concept of child agency are traditionally understood was

challenged in this research. Instead, child agency meant a disproportionate amount of power weighted to the child than would be usual in the parent-child dynamic. As a result, this research makes a unique conceptual contribution through a distinctive understanding of child agency in educational decision-making within newly arrived migrant families representing a different linguistic group.

As was discussed in the push-pull factors for migration in Chapter 2, Russian-speakers are a minority group within several Eastern European countries, for example, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. As such, a Russian-speaking migrant from Latvia living in Ireland can be considered as belonging to a minority within a minority. Therefore, this research has wider relevance in the field of migration studies for researchers who seek to study migrants who were part of a minority within their country of origin whether that be religious, cultural, ethnic or linguistic.

### **Evaluation of the Research Design and Theoretical Framework**

The longitudinal design was essential to effectively addressing the research questions. The purpose of revisiting the students was to find out whether they realised their goals or not. The importance of using temporality as a methodological tool was outlined in Chapter 3. When used for methodological purposes in the research design, temporality becomes part of the research focus. In this study, Russian-speaking young people were researched over a period of time, which was during a crucial transition in their lives. By conducting two waves of interviews, before and after this transition there was scope for reflexivity on the student's part to reflect on the decision-making process and key influencers in this process. On average a period of twelve months had passed between the first and second interviews. The first wave of interviews was conducted during the student's final year in second-level school. The aim was to conduct the interviews as early as possible in the school year but due to school exams and holidays the interviews were scheduled during whatever window of opportunity the student could accommodate. As a result, the very last interview of the first wave was conducted during one student's last week of second-level school. I interviewed the majority of the students for this research mid-week during school hours, for several students that were recruited for the research through the Russian language school which ran on Saturdays I interviewed those students during their language class. The second wave of interviews were all conducted after Christmas so all students continuing in education had completed at least one term or semester of their course. By the second wave of interviews all students had made a crucial transition from school to a new educational institution and one student to the labour market. The semi-structured interview design allowed for a flexibility whereby the students could reflect on elements of

their transition which were most pertinent to them while keeping within a broad framework of themes.

This research places emphasis on the voice of the young person, as noted in Chapter 3 this facilitates the primacy of the respondent, thereby acknowledging the participants as ‘experts who provide valuable information’ (Sarantakos, 1988, p. 256). Hardman (1979) used the concept of ‘muted voices’ to argue for the study of children and young people in their own right, not just as processes of development, products of socialisation, nor merely as mature adults in the making (Hardman, 1979). Several researchers have noted that what is missing from the study of ‘migrant youth’ in Ireland are the voices of the ‘migrant youth’ themselves (Bushin, 2009; Bushin and White, 2010; Ni Laoire et al., 2011). Using the voice of the child or young person has become increasingly utilised in education research to highlight the voice of the student in school policy as well as national policy (McCoy et al., 2013). There are elements of Chapter 4 which discuss the students’ experience of migration to Ireland which may have benefitted from the inclusion of the voice of the parent to get their insight and rationale for migration. However, as touched upon in Chapter 2, this could easily have resulted in the voice of the adult becoming dominant or qualifying the voice of the child/young person which would ultimately have undermined my vision for the thesis.

This study sought to answer three research questions, each of which involved understanding the process of decision-making and transition. A qualitative approach was the best method to adopt in order to facilitate the understanding of these processes. In this study the qualitative method allowed the subjective voice and experience of the young people to be heard through verbatim (anonymised) quotes. A particular strength of the qualitative approach is that the data and direct quotations can demonstrate the actual lived experiences of the participants which is more than statistical data allows. The researcher then interprets this data to build a hypothesis or create a theory. The difficulty with this ‘interpretation’ is the susceptibility to ‘misinterpretations’. The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis and as such can be the primary threat or weakness to a qualitative study (Atieno, 2009). A qualitative study and its findings rely heavily on the researcher’s experience. An inexperienced researcher or a researcher who has not acknowledged their biases could ascribe meaning or intonation where the subject did not intend any. This has the potential to skew the data and drawing questionable findings. In this study the participants are quoted verbatim. In instances where a statement or answer was vague or open to interpretation I clarified the response with the participants asking them to explain their meaning, this was in an attempt to avoid the possibility of misinterpreting the data.

The theoretical underpinnings which have guided this research are diverse to allow a more holistic understanding of the experience of Russian-speaking young people in Ireland. This work can provide valuable insights into the experiences of other migrant groups from Eastern Europe in Ireland. Concepts such as temporality, immigrant optimism, agency and resilience were used together to form a conceptual framework for the purpose of providing a context to the phenomena being studied as well as explaining observations made throughout the empirical data.

The conceptual framework also works in tandem with the theoretical framework devised for this research which provides the following theories; Bourdieu's social and cultural reproduction theories, rational action theory and push-pull factors of migration drawn from contemporary migration theory. The inter-relationship between these theories and concepts help to understand the phenomena being studied in this research. The use of Bourdieu's social and cultural capital theory was useful for this purpose as it allowed a direct link to be made between students possessing 'cultural' capital through their ability to speak Russian and trade with this capital to gain higher exam results and ultimately a better chance at attending higher education. This research also drew a link between the social capital possessed by Russian-speaking families relying on their social network to gain 'insider' knowledge about the Irish education system which they did not have as they had not gone through this system and were relatively newly arrived migrants. This research suggests that there is an acceleration of social and cultural reproduction in the lives of migrant youth which Bourdieu's theories do not fully allow for. However, when used in conjunction with the concept of temporality this new insight can be gained from the phenomena. For example, migrant parents can seek to engineer their children's futures for the better, oftentimes at the expense of the present (for example their own absence if they migrate ahead of the family, working several jobs). There is an acceleration of the reproduction or transmission of capital from one generation to the next as students must learn a new language to settle into the new education system. In some cases, parents in this research suffered financially to afford private educations for their children and most parents had expectations that their children would attend college or university. If these parents had not migrated it is likely that none of the previous examples would have been achievable for their children, as such, it is clear how social and cultural reproduction is almost 'fast-tracked' because of migration.

While rational action theory proved helpful in this thesis it is not fully explanatory as I am using the students' narratives about decisions and choices their parents made for the entire family. Yet, it helps to explain parents' decisions to emigrate in search of better lives for themselves



and their children. By underscoring rational action theory with concepts such as agency and resilience, this helped to illuminate the students' position as opposed to the students' perception of their position as a result of decisions made by their parents. In this research the students all referenced the lack of opportunities in their country of origin, or the better opportunities in Ireland (both work and education) as reasons for their parents deciding to migrate. While these reasons were presented as rational decisions it is obvious that the students themselves did not play a decisive role in this decision-making process. The unequal power dynamic in the parent-child relationship suggests that irrespective of the children's opinions the ultimate decision would rest with the parents. In this research, none of the students reported that their opinions were sought or that the topic of migration discussed equitably (with the exception of Ekaterina who migrated alone to Ireland while her family stayed in Russia), in each case it was presented as a *fait accompli*. A similar situation can be observed for educational decisions particularly for younger children, parents made choices on schools, subjects and college courses based on their expectations for their children. As discussed in Chapter 5, the school attended and education policy can also play a central role in increasing or decreasing the choices available. Therefore, it is clear that when researching post-school pathways of young people rational action theory alone is not sufficient. Interestingly this research showed a shift in the power dynamic at a certain point or at least in certain parts of the lives of these young people, for example when they had accrued more English language skills than their parents or more knowledge on how the Irish education system works. Young people's agency is so often bound by structural factors and inequalities in relationship dynamics that in order to explain the experience of the young person additional concepts such as agency (or bounded agency) and resilience are required. There was evidence of this throughout this research, most noticeably within families the decision-making process brought the parent-child power dynamic into sharp focus. In Chapter 5, there are several examples such as Dmitri, Ludmilla and Aliona who strongly desired to choose a particular subject at school but were overruled by their parents. In the end, each student had to forego their own personal preference and choose the subject that their parent wanted them to study. In addition to this, Valentina's choices were diminished in her second-level school because they did not offer the specific subject combination required for her to follow her preferred pathway, which was an architecture degree in Berlin. Aliona's father found a different school that offered the required subjects, this involved moving school during her senior cycle in order to overcome the structural barriers which were imposed by her previous school, which would have prohibited her from following her preferred post-school pathway.

The push-pull factors of contemporary migration theory offer an insight into the potential reasons why the families in this study left their country of origin to move to Ireland and what

their expectations were in making this move. The research draws on Bourdieu's concepts of capital to further explain social reproduction theory and how this influences the post-school pathways of the young people in this study. By introducing rational action theory and a rational choice model this research allows for the agency or bounded agency of the individual families and young people in this study to be better understood. The concept of agency and more specifically bounded agency were important in this research because it allows a more nuanced understanding of the freedom and constraints which influence young people making decisions within the education system. When a young person is met with increasing constraints during their educational career, for example low levels of parental education, low expectational culture of a school and poor quality guidance, this can be understood as cumulative disadvantage a concept which was explored in Chapter 2.

As discussed in a previous section of this chapter the concept of pathways was chosen for this research because of its flexibility and appropriateness for the contemporary phenomenon of leaving school and pursuing work, education or travel. This research benefitted from a diverse sample in terms of gender (although there was a gender imbalance), socio-economic status, country of origin and type of school attended. It would appear on the surface that the post-school pathways of the students in this research were not diverse with 13 out of 14 participants all continuing to further or higher education. While only one student went from school to the labour market there was still a degree of diversity amongst the pathways of the other 13 participants with regards to the types of institutions they enrolled in. Two of the participants emigrated to study abroad, one student went to Canada and the other to Germany. Of the students who stayed in Ireland and continued their studies; eight students went to university, two students enrolled in an Institute of Technology and one student enrolled in a college of further education. It is clear that the dominant trend for the students in this research was to enrol in university in Ireland. However, the pathways pursued by all of the participants in this research are reflective of the main pathways available to students in Ireland namely further or higher education, the labour market and emigration.

### **Areas for Future Research**

The methodological approach used for this study lends itself to continuing with the same cohort for another two waves for future research. It would be of benefit to this study and the current body of literature on youth transitions to revisit this cohort in their final year of college/university to examine the decision-making processes they employ at this stage of their education and revisit them for a fourth wave after they have graduated to understand where the culmination of primary, second and third level education has led this cohort. By revisiting this

particular cohort again this would provide data on another key transition in their lives which would be useful to understand if initial aspirations and expectations were sustained throughout third level.

Future research on Russian-speaking young people that had more diverse pathways aspirations would be useful as the majority of the sample aimed to attend further or higher education and only one of my sample wished to go straight into the labour market. Chapter 3 noted the gender imbalance within the sample, future research which consisted of a balance of male and female participants would allow for closer study of the role of gender in post-school pathways.

There is some merit in future research including other key agents as identified throughout this thesis, for example parents, guidance counsellors or other school stakeholders. By getting the perspective from those who have a role to play within a students' educational decision-making this could potentially lead to new perspectives for policy-makers.

This research highlighted the certainty students had surrounding the 'guaranteed A grade' in the Russian Leaving Certificate paper. The current situation regarding the Russian language paper is that Russian is not taught as part of the curriculum therefore it is a paper aimed at native speakers. A system which creates a precedence for native speakers to achieve top marks requires closer evaluation and future research into how this could be addressed would be worthy. The participants in this study and also those who participated in research by Eriksson (2011) acknowledged that they could count on their Russian paper to give them an 'A grade' which suggests this is a relatively longstanding phenomenon that deserves attention.

### **Implications for policy**

Supporting and facilitating migrant students to do well in school and beyond should be a key area for policy-makers. This research found that personal resilience was a strong factor in students making a successful transition. Structural supports at an institutional level could help to avoid or at least alleviate a difficult or failed transition for migrant students with lower levels of resilience.

This research found that parents were key agents in educational decision-making and parental education level influenced their children's academic pathways. Increasing engagement levels between migrant parents and school staff could help migrant parents to understand the Irish education system better, thus, enabling them to make more informed decisions and offer support and advice to their children

Throughout this research there were several examples of the participants having received insufficient guidance on issues ranging from subject choice at school to college requirements. Equipping guidance counsellors in schools with adequate support and information for offering guidance to migrant students, such as choosing subjects including non-curricular languages to applying for further or higher education institutions would be of benefit to migrant students.

A diverse range of post-school pathways should be promoted, rather than the current status quo which has an over reliance on higher education. Higher education was the assumed and desired pathway for 13 out of the 14 participants in this research. Not all students achieved their first choice, several students had to accept a course or an institution which was not their preference. An education system which promoted alternative post-school pathways to encompass the varying interest and abilities of young people as well as considering the skillset required for Ireland's labour force and economy would create a better system for future generations of school-leavers.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Consent form in English

#### Consent Form

This interview is part of a study into the post-school pathways of Russian-speaking students in Ireland. A second interview will be conducted next year. You will be contacted before the second interview for your consent again.

This interview should last 45 minutes. Your child can withdraw from the interview at any time and participation is completely voluntary. Your child will be asked about studying in Ireland and their hopes for next year after they finish school.

There are no risks associated with this study. The information in the interviews will be used for research purposes only. Your child's identity, school and location will not be disclosed in the research.

Ideally, interviews will be tape recorded to make it easier for the researcher to follow the discussion and refer to passages later. The recordings will be stored for the duration of the project only.

Results from this study will be published in anonymous form in relevant journals, book chapters and presented at conferences. Your signature indicates that you are willing to release findings for these purposes only.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact myself, Holly Foley by emailing [foleyha@tcd.ie](mailto:foleyha@tcd.ie).

I hereby declare that the purposes of this research were fully explained to me, and that I am allowing my child \_\_\_\_\_ (name of child) to participate in this interview.

I understand that my child can withdraw from the interview at any time.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of parent/guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of student: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 2: Consent form in Russian

Форма согласия.

Это интервью - часть исследования в деятельности русскоязычных студентов в Ирландии после окончания школы. Как часть исследования, второе интервью проведется в следующем году. Мы свяжемся с Вами перед вторым интервью, чтобы спросить Ваше согласие снова.

Это интервью будет длиться приблизительно 45 минут. Ваш ребенок может уйти из интервью в любое время. Участие полностью добровольно.

Вашего ребенка будут спрашивать об изучении в Ирландии и его надеждах и планах в течение года после окончания школы.

Нет никаких рисков, связанных с этим исследованием. Информация в интервью будет использоваться только в целях исследования. Идентичность Вашего ребенка, его школа и местоположение не будут разглашены в исследовании.

В идеале, интервью будут записаны на магнитофон, чтобы исследователю было легче следовать за обсуждением и обращаться к особым частям интервью позже. Записи будут храниться для продолжительности научно-исследовательской работы.

Выводы этого исследования будут изданы в анонимной форме в соответствующих журналах и главах книг и представлены на конференциях. Ваша подпись указывает, что Вы согласны с изданием результатов в этих целях.

Если Вы имеете какие-нибудь вопросы об исследовании, пожалуйста свяжитесь со мной, Holly Foley, по электронной почте: [foleyha@tcd.ie](mailto:foleyha@tcd.ie)

Я тем самым объявляю, что цели этого исследования полностью объяснились мне, и что я позволяю моему ребенку \_\_\_\_\_ (имя ребенка) участвовать в этом интервью.

Я понимаю, что мой ребенок может уйти из интервью в любое время.

Дата: \_\_\_\_\_

Подпись родителя: \_\_\_\_\_

Подпись студента: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 3: Interview Guide Wave One**

### **Interview guide**

#### **Migration**

1. Which country are you from?
2. Who did you live with before you moved to Ireland?
3. Did you know where you were moving to?
4. What did you know about Ireland before you came here?
5. Did you know any English before coming to Ireland?
6. Did you like going to school?
7. What did you like about it?
8. Were you happy with your grades before you moved?
9. Did you get involved in clubs or after school activities before you moved to Ireland?
10. How did settle into school in Ireland?
11. How long did it take for you to feel settled?
12. How do you feel about going back for visits and holidays?
13. How would you describe your migration experience?
14. Compared to your home country, what opportunities do you think Ireland offers to you?

#### **Family**

15. Did everybody in your family move to Ireland together?
16. Who do you live with in Ireland?
17. What did your parents do before you moved?
18. How quickly did they start work after they arrived?
19. Did they speak English before they came to Ireland?
20. How would you compare their English language skills to your own? For example, would you ever have to translate a letter/sign/document/conversation for them?
21. What language do you speak at home?
22. In what language do you watch tv/listen to radio/surf internet?
23. Has your family settled in to life in Ireland?
24. Does your family plan to stay in Ireland?

#### **School and post-school pathways**

25. Do you like the school you attend in Ireland?
26. What subjects are your favourite?
27. What subjects do you not like?
28. What kind of Leaving Certificate exam are you doing? (LCA/LCVP)
29. Did you and your family discuss which type of Leaving Cert you would do?
30. How many subjects are you taking at honours/pass/foundation level?
31. Do you feel prepared for your exams?
32. Do you attend a weekend language class for Russian?
33. Do you think being able to speak Russian is an advantage for the Leaving Cert? College applications? Job applications?
34. Does speaking Russian have any disadvantages for you?
35. How important is education to you?
36. How important is education to your parents?
37. What would you like to do after school?
38. Are your parents supportive of your choices?
39. Do you have a part-time job at the moment?
40. Did you ever have a part time job in Ireland?
41. Which is more important to you...homework, socialising or other activities?
42. Do your parents have much contact with your school?



43. In what way do you think moving to Ireland has impacted your progress at school?
44. Has moving to Ireland made education seem more or less important to you?
45. How have you gathered information about your options for after school?
46. In what ways could your parents help you make your choices for after school?
47. Is there a guidance counsellor at your school?
48. Is there anything else you would like to mention?

## **Appendix 4: Interview Guide Wave Two**

### **Interview Guide**

#### **College and course**

1. What course in what college are you studying?
2. What were the points required for this course?
3. How many years is this course?
4. What subjects/modules are you currently taking as part of first year?
5. Is this course your first choice?
6. What were your exam results? (if you don't mind me asking!)
7. Were there any grades that were higher than you'd expected?
8. Any grades you were disappointed with?
9. Are you happy with the course and college that you got offered?
10. Do you feel having Russian was an advantage when you were reviewing your points?
11. Is the course what you expected? Did you study any similar subjects in school that might have prepared you for any parts of the course? Do you feel comfortable with the standard expected of you?
12. How do you find the course requirements? (Is there a big workload or do you find it manageable?)
13. How are you meeting the financial costs of the course? Do you get a SUSI grant? Did you apply through the HEAR scheme?
14. Did your schoolwork (essays/exams/assignments) prepare you for the type of assessments you have at college?
15. Do you see yourself working in this area when you graduate?
16. Is there an option as part of your course to study abroad in for a year during your course?
17. Is this something you think you would do?

#### **Settling In**

18. How have you found settling into a new college?
19. Do you spend a long time commuting? How much do you spend on bus fares every week? Do you find it expensive to go to college every week with bus fares/lunches etc?
20. Have you found your way around the campus and do you feel confident getting to your classes in different buildings? (is it a big college, is there a large student population)
21. How have you found your timetable (is there long gaps between classes? How do you fill this time?)
22. Do you feel that there is support from your lecturers? Do you have a dedicated tutor if you have any queries/problems? Is there medical/counselling support in your college?

#### **Independent learning**

23. How have you dealt with taking responsibility for your own learning? (if you don't complete assignments/homework/essays what happens?)
24. Do you use the library to study?
25. Is there group work activities on your course? If yes how have you found the experience of working in a group?
26. How have you dealt with deadlines? (having several assignments due on the same day or same week?)
27. What is your college's attendance policy? Does this suit you?

28. How have you found doing your first set of assignments/exams? (if you got your results are you happy with them?)
29. How have you found the move from learning for the leaving cert to self-directed learning and critical thinking a challenge?
30. Do you feel that there is encouragement and support from lecturers/tutors?
31. Are you having any academic difficulties?

### **Social**

32. How have you found balancing friendships with making time for study?
33. Are you involved in any clubs/societies in college?
34. Are your family supportive of the course you got offered?
35. Are you able to find time for other interests?
36. Do you work part time?
37. How are you coping with long breaks between terms? (did you find it hard to settle back in after Christmas?)
38. Are there other Russian-speakers in your college that you have met?

### **Reflections**

39. How would you describe the transition from secondary school to third level?
40. Is the experience what you expected it to be?
41. Do you feel that you were prepared (by school, parents) for the transition?
42. At this point, is there anything you would change about the experience?
43. If you were starting in school again is there anything you would do differently?
44. Do you have any regrets about the choices that you made?
45. Is there anything about the experience of moving from second-level to third level that you would like to mention?

## Appendix 5: Access Letter



**UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN**  
**TRINITY COLLEGE**  
**Department of Sociology**

18 March 2015

xxx  
xxx  
xxx

Dear xxx

I am writing to enquire whether it might be possible for one of my doctoral students to carry out a small amount of fieldwork at xxxx School. Holly Foley is registered for a PhD in Sociology at Trinity College and is interested in exploring the lives of Russian-speaking youths in Ireland. Her study is the first longitudinal project of Russian-speaking students in Ireland. Russian-speakers are a heterogeneous group who have been under-researched in Ireland. She and I feel that your school is an ideal location for this project.

Holly's project involves a small amount of fieldwork in your school. First, she would like to interview Russian-speaking 6<sup>th</sup> year students between March and May to learn more about their school life and experiences. Interviews will be recorded lasting approximately 30 minutes. Holly would re-interview students 12 months later to analyse their transitional experiences from school to work or further study.

Signed consent will be required from student and parent/guardian before commencing but Holly will prepare all the necessary paperwork in advance. The project has ethical approval from the University and Holly cleared Garda vetting process for the PhD course.

Holly is a very able student and intends to do everything possible not to disrupt the work of the school in any way. I do hope that you will be able to meet with her and facilitate this small amount of fieldwork. I look forward to hearing from you and can be contacted on [daniel.faas@tcd.ie](mailto:daniel.faas@tcd.ie). Holly can be contacted on [foleyha@tcd.ie](mailto:foleyha@tcd.ie). I would be most grateful if you could reply as soon as is convenient.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Daniel Faas'.

**Dr. Daniel Faas**  
Associate Professor  
Head, Department of Sociology

## **Appendix 6: Baseline data form**

Name

Date of Birth

Country of birth

Age of migration to Ireland (if applicable)

Parent's education level:

Parent's occupation before migration:

Name of school attended:

Intended post-school pathway: