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To cite this article: Rosie Alexander (2021): Career development and internal migration: a Scottish case study, British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, DOI: 10.1080/03069885.2021.1934654

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2021.1934654

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Published online: 18 Jun 2021.

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Career development and internal migration: a Scottish case study

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**ABSTRACT**

A growing body of literature has focused on issues of migration in career development and guidance, however typically this research has focused on international migration rather than migration within a country’s borders. This paper presents a specific case study of internal migration in the UK context, focusing on young people from two island communities as they move through higher education and into the working world. The paper is specifically focused on the importance of cultural differences, including workplace cultures, with regard to students’ career development. The findings demonstrate the relevance of internal migration pathways to career development and indicate that a culturally informed approach to career guidance practice is important when working with internal as well as international migrants.

**ARTICLE HISTORY**

Received 17 August 2018  
Revised 2 May 2021  
Accepted 22 May 2021

**KEYWORDS**

Migration; internal migration; career; career development; career guidance

Migration and career development

The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have been described as an “age of migration” (de Haas et al., 2020) with migration increasingly important at both international and sub-national levels (Smith et al., 2015). Issues of migration are also commonly discussed in political and public discourse, including both international migration, and concern with migration on a sub-national scale (often focusing on issues of “brain drain” and gentrification or social change prompted by migration) (Smith et al., 2015). Despite a wide range of literature concerned with all aspects of migration there remains a paucity of literature related to the career development of migrants and implications for career guidance practice (Hughes et al., 2019). Further, where career development and guidance literature has considered migration it has tended to focus on specific forms of migration, most often “voluntary career migrants, especially those with relatively high levels of skill and qualification who are moving within a multinational corporate structure” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 321). This bias in the literature has been addressed somewhat by more recent scholarship which has considered career development, guidance and counselling for refugees and asylum seekers (e.g. Abkhezr & McMahon, 2017; Schultheiss et al., 2011; Zacher, 2019). However, as the field of research grows, specific areas for further research are identified, with one such area being experiences of migration within a country’s borders – also termed internal migration (Kumar, 2019; Wang & Fan, 2012).

This paper therefore aims to contribute to the literature around career development and migration by exploring some implications of internal migration for career development. In order to do this, the paper is focused on discussion of a specific case study: the migration experiences of young people from two Scottish Islands for the purposes of Higher Education and their onward career trajectories. Although student migration (particularly international student migration) is the...
focus of a considerable body of literature (e.g. King & Raghuram, 2013; King & Ruiz-Gelices, 2003) the majority of literature which has considered internal migration of students within the UK has focused on issues of access to university (e.g. Donnelly & Evans, 2016; Donnelly & Gamsu, 2018, 2020) rather than considering mobility in terms of longer-term career development and transition to the workplace. Research on the career development implications of migration with a student cohort does, however, have significant potential, especially considering that younger people (aged 16-24) are proportionally the most mobile age group in the UK population (Smith & Sage, 2014) and are typically actively engaged in developing career plans and making career decisions.

Situating internal migration

Compared to issues of international migration, issues of internal migration have typically received a great deal less focus in the academic literature. King et al. (2008), for example, suggested that the study of “migration” has somehow come to mean “international migration” (p. 2) despite earlier traditions of scholarship that focused on internal migration, and despite the fact that globally internal migration is substantially more significant (in terms of numbers migrating) than international migration. The literature focusing on international migration and internal migration have also been traditionally two quite different literatures, although there are increasing calls to “bridg[e] the theoretical divide” (King et al., 2008, p. 1).

One of the challenges in considering the role of internal migration and career development is the dominance of neoclassical economic models of migration in both the policy literature and the public imagination, as well as in some academic literature (Massey et al., 1993). These models propose that migration is largely a response to the stimulus of better economic opportunities elsewhere – improved employment prospects or improved salaries for example. Migration from this perspective becomes primarily about access to opportunities for career development or progression, and this aligns with popular discourses whereby internal migration is understood as the “solution” to unemployment (Smith et al., 2015).

Within these discourses, spatial mobility is often associated with social mobility (Donnelly & Evans, 2016). Moving to large urban labour markets (also called “escalator” regions) for example has been found to assist individuals to more quickly progress into higher paid employment (Fielding, 1992; van Ham et al., 2012). However, mobility also typically requires a level of resource both in terms of financial resources and other resources (such as networks), and can itself be thought of as a form of resource – for example in the concepts of “mobility capital” (Corbett, 2007), “network capital” (Larsen et al., 2006) and “motility” (Kaufmann et al., 2004). Geographic mobility can therefore become a key dividing line between the “haves” and the “have nots”, between those “trapped” by space and those “transcending” space (Green & White, 2007). If there is a role for career counselling from these perspectives it is to mobilise individuals to access further opportunities – potentially encouraging individuals to broaden their spatial horizons, or to advocate on behalf of individuals for access to greater resources for mobility (see Alexander, 2018b, 2018a).

Despite this, evidence surrounding employment as a motivator for migration is much more mixed than neoclassical models would typically assume. Increasingly it has been argued that although employment is important for a majority of internal migrants it is primarily as an enabler of migration rather than a stimulus for migration; thus, employment is often a precondition of a move rather than a primary motivator (Clark & Maas, 2015; Morrison & Clark, 2011; Crow, 2010). Migrations themselves are characterised by multiple and complex interrelation of factors, including social and biographical factors alongside economic factors (Halfacree, 2004; Halfacree & Boyle, 1993; Ni Laoire, 2008; Smith et al., 2015). The particular importance of anticipated “lifestyle” has also increasingly been highlighted (Benson & O’Reilly, 2016; Walford & Stockdale, 2015). Although typically “lifestyle” migration has been thought of as applying to older retired and semi-retired migrants (classically moving from urban to rural locations) recent research has identified the significance of “bright lights” migrations of young people attracted to city lifestyles (Griffiths & Maile, 2014; Walford & Stockdale, 2015).
Moving beyond concepts of migration as primarily motivated by immediate economic benefit, and instead viewing migration in terms of anticipated futures, clearly connects migration with career development (as both involve investments in futures). Further, career and migration aspirations may be heavily intertwined and indeed Kaufmann et al. (2004, p. 750) identified that individuals are differently mobile depending on how far they “appropriate” mobility, and that this “is shaped by needs, plans, aspirations and understandings” of people. As such rather than a solution to an immediate problem of access, internal mobility can potentially be understood as much more embedded in the longer-term career aspirations of individuals and intertwined with their career dilemmas and needs.

Young people, higher education, migration and career development

Despite a considerable literature on the experiences of young people growing up in rural areas, there is relatively limited research specifically on the career development of rural young people. There is, however, a body of research which has considered the ways that identities and mobility pathways are constructed in relation to rural spaces. This includes research which has identified gendered differences in the ways that individuals construct their future options, and which are at least partly related to rural labour markets and the particular constraints that young women (as opposed to young men) may experience (Cairns, 2014; Joshi & Bakshi, 2021; Rönnlund et al., 2018). Other research has identified how some young people may develop “global, exploring” identities while others may focus more on their immediate locales (Wierenga, 2009). The ways that different identities are constructed depends on the resources that young people have and their positions in their local contexts, with clear differences depending on social class evident in much research (e.g. Jamieson, 2000; Rye, 2006; Wierenga, 2009).

A particularly important feature of youth migration and rural areas is the close association of educational achievement and outmigration, such that Corbett (2007) has suggested young people “learn to leave” rural communities. Indeed a striking feature of rural migration patterns, including those in the North of Scotland is the close association of youth outmigration with further and higher education entry, and with evidence of employment-related migration much more opaque (Stockdale, 2002). The significance of internal migration in terms of entry to higher education is aligned more generally with a growing body of research from the UK exploring student mobility for higher education (Donnelly & Gamsu, 2018, 2020; Holton & Finn, 2018).

Despite a focus on migration for entry to higher education, there is very little research that focuses on what rural students do after university. A similar bias is clear in the literature related to international students, with a limited focus on transition to the workplace of international students (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2014). This is a major gap in the literature, especially considering the evidence in the UK context of the ongoing significance of the family home and return migration for many graduates (Sage et al., 2013). More widely there is clear evidence emerging that migration trajectory and economic outcome of graduates (in the UK at least) has some correlation, with the most mobile graduates (those who moved for higher education, and then moved again after graduation) securing the most lucrative employment, and returners (those who moved away for higher education but moved home after graduation) having some of the worst outcomes (Ball, 2015; Bond et al., 2008; McGregor et al., 2002). This raises a range of questions particularly in terms of how career pathways and migration are intertwined at the point after graduation: Why and how do students end up taking the different pathways that they do? What are the implications for young people originally from rural communities?

Lived experience of mobility and career development

In order to explore the interrelation of career and migration pathways the research project presented in this paper adopts a longitudinal approach, exploring the ways that individuals experience migration for university, and how they make decisions in the first year after graduation. This research
therefore specifically focuses on the lived experience of migrants, which is an under-researched area in the migration and career development literature generally (Hughes et al., 2019). In order to do this, this paper takes as its point of departure the suggestion that “internal migration – as with any migration – often triggers challenging experiences of ‘relative adjustment’, not least due to the different place-/neighbourhood-specific, social and cultural meanings of migrant origin and destination” (Smith et al., 2015, p. 10).

The challenges of relative adjustment and cultural differences are a recurring theme in the literature that has focused on international migration and career development. The literature, for example, identifies that international students in Canada would advise other international students to “educate themselves about Canadian culture, Canadians, and the Canadian work environment” (Arthur & Flynn, 2013, p. 34). Issues of cultural difference and the demands of processes of enculturation have also been discussed in terms of implications for career guidance practices when working with migrants, with an emphasis on the need for culturally sensitive approaches to practice (e.g. Arthur & Flynn, 2013; Arulmani, 2019; Bimrose & McNair, 2011). Practical implications for international students such as the importance of work experience and the development of relational networks to assist with awareness of opportunities and enculturation to new environments have also been identified (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2014).

Despite the suggestion that internal migration can involve experiences of relative adjustment there has been very little research on what this means in terms of career development of, and guidance practice with, students who migrate internally. Where it does exist, such research typically explores rural-urban migration in developing countries, focusing on the differences between urban and rural environments and challenges for rural migrants in integrating into the city (Kalyanram et al., 2014; Wang & Fan, 2012). In transitional economies, rural life can be viewed as relatively “untouched” by modernisation and there can be significant challenges in migrating to urban centres which require “street smart” attitudes (Kalyanram et al., 2014, p. 383). Typically, this literature has described ambivalent experiences of rural-urban migration, including barriers to integration (Wang & Fan, 2012) and loss (Kalyanram et al., 2014). Approaches to career counselling and guidance suitable for rural areas that focus on “livelihood planning” as a more inclusive concept than “career” are also identified (Kalyanram et al., 2014; Kumar, 2019).

Rural-urban migration and career development of individuals in developed economies have received less attention than in developing economies. Here the developmental context is such that rural areas cannot be thought of simply as untouched by modernisation – rather individuals are potentially seen as relatively highly connected across spaces by the virtue of transport infrastructures and modern communication technologies. Indeed there is some suggestion in the literature that modern technologies have allowed young people to develop identities that are less tied to space and that young people are therefore potentially more connected to global communities (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006). In higher income countries, the question would be, is space (and mobility between places) still relevant? Ideologically such ideas are connected with modernist thinkers such as Giddens, who claimed that in the modern world space had become “phantasmagoric” – fully “disembedded” by modern technologies (Giddens, 1991, p. 146). However, there have been robust challenges to such notions, including Furlong and Cartmel’s (2007, p. 143) challenge to the “epistemological fallacy” of late modernity:

The television for example can open a window on a world which is remote from our lived experiences; programmes can help shape our opinions and may make us feel a part of broader community. At the same time, our opportunities and our life chances continue to be structured by our lived rather than our mediated experiences. The country we live in, and the neighbourhood where we reside powerfully shape life experiences.

In this research, therefore, the aim is to explore issues of internal migration and career development particularly as they relate to the pathways of young people from relatively rural communities as they enter higher education. The focus of this paper is on issues of cultural difference, adaptation and enculturation which have been identified as significant in the experience of international migrants,
and the experience of rural-urban migrants in developing country contexts. This paper aims to address the question of how far these issues are also relevant in the higher income context of the UK.

Methods

The data presented in this paper is drawn from a larger research project focusing on the relationship of place and mobility to the career trajectories of a group of young people from the Scottish Islands of Orkney and Shetland.

Case study location

The research project under consideration in this paper focuses on young people from two island communities in the UK – Orkney and Shetland. As King has argued, islands can function as “a privileged laboratory for migration studies” (King, 2009, pp. 76–77) due to their geospatial circumstances, and these islands are no different.

Each of these island groups consists of approximately 15–20 inhabited islands, with approximately 21–24,000 people living in each island group. The islands are situated off the North coast of Scotland with Orkney lying approximately 16 km north of Scotland and Shetland approximately 168 km north. The islands are connected by regular ferry services to the Scottish mainland (lasting between 1.5 to 6 hours for Orkney, and 12 hours for Shetland) and flights to major Scottish cities (which are of shorter duration but greater cost).

The islands have a distinctive social, cultural and economic context. The islands have relatively high employment rates, but have stronger opportunities in some career sectors than others with employment in agriculture, forestry and fishery being proportionally higher than in Scotland, and finance and insurance being proportionally lower (Highlands and Islands Enterprise [HIE], 2019a, 2019b). Both islands have some Higher Education provision, with campuses in Orkney and Shetland of the University of the Highlands and Islands, alongside a small campus of Heriot Watt University in Orkney, and distance learning provision through the Open University and other Scottish universities.

Research design

The project was designed to track a group of higher education students from the islands from the point of graduation over the following year in order to explore the intersections of career development and geographical location. The project utilised a methodology based on longitudinal qualitative interviewing, which is an approach that is well suited to exploring the experience of young people in transition (Henderson et al., 2007) and for exploring perceptions of careers as they change and develop over time (Hermanowicz, 2009, 2013).

Participants

Twenty-two participants were interviewed at the point of graduation and one year after graduation. Participants were all due to graduate from full-time first-degree courses in 2015. They could have been studying in any location but must have been domiciled in the islands immediately before progressing to university. Participants were recruited through a survey that was disseminated through local media (the island newspapers and radio stations) as well as online and through the career services of mainland Scotland universities (where possible). Eighty-six valid responses were collected via the survey, and 39 participants volunteered. All of these were invited for interview, resulting in 23 participants, with one withdrawing part-way through, to give a total of 22 participants.

The participants who took part in the project showed some distinctive characteristics – they were predominantly female (18 out of 22) and had been resident in the islands “all my life” (19 out of 22). The majority did not have university-educated parents (14 out of 22). Students were studying a range
of courses, and all but one were studying in Scotland. Two had chosen to remain in the islands for their studies. This paper presents findings related to the 20 students who moved away for their studies.

Analysis

Longitudinal qualitative data lends itself to both cross-sectional analysis of data gathered at one point in time (allowing comparison across the sample) and analysis of individual narratives over time (Thomson & Holland, 2003). The strategy deployed for analysis recognised both the longitudinal and cross-sectional value of the data. The analytic strategy was informed by principles of Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2001), with the analysis focused on theory development (specifically focusing on the role of space, place and mobility in graduate career trajectories). The processes of analysis and data collection were iterative, with the findings from the first analysis used to inform subsequent data collection in the second set of interviews. A short narrative summary for each participant was written after the interview and subsequently updated after the second round of interviews, so that an individual case profile was created for each participant, which enabled the “tracing [of] changes and continuities in their narrative over time” (Thomson & Holland, 2003, p. 236).

Results

The findings presented in this paper specifically relate to the theme of cultural difference (including workplace cultures) between island and urban environments, and the implications of these differences for workplace transition of students. Quotations are used from students to elucidate the themes, however care has been taken to avoid inclusion of any information that may identify students. Ethically this is particularly important given the size of the communities and the ease with which individuals may be identified. Therefore, pseudonyms are not used (so that quotations from the same individual cannot be connected), and details of participants (for example location of study and subject of study) are suppressed.

The data presented here do not cover the transition to university specifically, and the ways that students make choices, as this has been explored in a previous publication (Alexander, 2016). However, in order to situate the current data, it is useful to identify that, in line with Corbett’s (2007) notion of “learning to leave”, the majority of students had assumed they would leave the islands to enter higher education, and presented the choice to leave as “common sense”. However, in order to manage the transition to university (including the significant spatial movement), students typically selected “familiar enough” locations for study – that is those that represented enough of a challenge to offer new experiences but were not too unfamiliar so as to be overwhelming (Alexander, 2016). In effect, this led to clear spatial preferences, and 9 of the 22 students graduated from universities in the city of Aberdeen – a city that is relatively close to the islands and has a large population of islanders. This accords with statistical evidence for island higher education students more generally, which shows approximately 25% of students from the islands graduate from universities in Aberdeen (Alexander, 2015).

“Distances” between island and urban locations

The first finding to be discussed in this paper relates to the significant physical and cultural distance students identified between their island home locations and their urban university locations. In terms of distance, the impacts of transport times and costs mean that unlike many of their contemporaries, students (in the words of one participant) “can’t nip home for the weekend”. For these students the challenge of internal mobility was, in some respects more acute than some forms of international mobility: “I lived with an Irish girl for most of my uni time and she could fly home last minute for £50 for the weekend when for the same weekend for me to fly home short notice would
be £300+”. The findings here show that simple distinctions between the experiences of international and internal mobility are highly problematic. These students were internal migrants but due to the costs and times of travel experienced greater “distance” than some international students.

Further, culturally these students experienced acute differences between the islands and their urban locations. Typically the islands were characterised as “relaxed”, “quiet”, with lots of “space” and with where “everyone knows everyone”. Urban environments were characterised as being “busy”, with lots of “choice” and “opportunities” and by anonymity: “it’s so quiet in Orkney and everybody knows everybody and it’s very relaxed whereas here it’s a lot busier and there’s a lot more going on”. Similar characterisations of the differences between urban and rural spaces have been found elsewhere (e.g. Ni Laoire, 2008). However, in this research the different environments have immediate implications for migrants in terms of the skills and knowledge needed to thrive. Students described needing to learn how to use urban public transport systems for example, with one student at the point of graduation reporting that: “it is still quite daunting figuring out public transport”.

Alongside specific skills for daily living, more broadly students identified different cultures in terms of communication and interpersonal skills, in particular, there is a sense that in urban environments it is important to be more “confident” or assertive:

This might sound really silly but like […] if you’re eating somewhere and say for example the food’s cold, from my experience most people at home would just not do anything about it whereas now I think I speak up a lot more

Just as in international migration then, issues of cultural competence are important in how “at home” a student feels in their new urban environment. The phrase this student used about it sounding “silly” shows how cultural differences can be subtle and/or perceived as minor, but yet can be significant in terms of how a student feels in their new environment.

Day-to-day activities, including the ways that people socialise were also felt to be different in urban environments. Cities were characterised as good places for the variety of opportunities for shopping and eating out: “if you’re going around shops or going to different places to eat out and to have coffee and stuff, I quite like that there’s variety in cities …” However, some students (particularly those who grew up in the more rural parts of the islands) missed the opportunities for being outside and activities like walking, or working outside: “when I spend too long in the city I need to go out to the countryside somewhere just for fresh air”. Students typically reflected on the difference between themselves and those who have grown up “south”, where “south” relates to the rest of the UK mainland. Students made statements like: “when you’ve been brought up like that you don’t notice it”. Students who have been brought up “south” were felt to have different expectations, be used to different lifestyles, and be equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to navigate urban environments.

The differences between urban and rural lifestyles and the challenges of being able to return home were so acute that in several cases students described living “two lives”: “it was quite strange in a way because [it’s] kind of like two lives that are very separate.” Here, students are potentially developing “heterolocal” identities (Halfacree, 2012), in a similar way as international migration can lead to the development of transnational identities.

**Differences in working environments**

Alongside general cultural differences between island and urban locations, students identified further specific differences between working environments. These typically centred around the size of companies: “I want to go to the bigger companies, [and] there’s going to be less chance for that in [the islands].” In general, islands are characterised by smaller working environments. To students, smaller companies typically felt less daunting than larger companies, partly because
they are felt to be more informal, and require less confidence: “it’s almost a bit scary to go into such a big firm being so timid and quiet.” Here there are connections between the cultural expectations of a higher level of assertiveness in city locations, and higher levels of confidence or assertiveness that may be expected in large corporate settings.

The social spaces and potentials of cities also allowed for the development of certain kinds of professional identity, which are felt to be less possible in the islands:

With [name of company] we experienced going out for dinners and all the nice cocktail bars and things which you … they’re for your kind of young professionals. In my opinion there’s not a terrible amount of young professionals in [the islands] and there’s not the kind of cocktail bars or you know …

There are also implications in terms of career pathways when working for smaller companies in the islands. Firstly, smaller working environments require the ability to work across different functions, rather than specialism in one particular niche (see also Sultana, 2006):

Down south you’ll sit and you’ll work in a specific part of [name of industry], and that’s all you’ll learn to do, whereas the [companies] up here, you get a much broader range of experience, just because there’s less people working in the firms so everybody kind of does everything.

Students also described requiring certain specific skills to work in their island communities – in particular the ability to work as a professional with customers or clients who are known to them – which could be considered in terms of “management of intimacy” (Sultana, 2006, p. 27).

**Transition to the workplace: spatial choices**

Cultural differences between lifestyles and working lives in the islands and in the cities became particularly relevant to graduates at the point of graduation and transition to the workplace. Although much rural migration literature tends to assume that young people leave islands permanently, over a third of this sample were in the islands six months after graduation – and this is in line with rates of return generally (Alexander, 2015). There are many reasons why some students returned and others remained away, and a full exploration of these complex factors is beyond the scope of this paper. However, cultural differences and where young people feel “comfortable” were relevant to the choices young people make.

In terms of whether working in a city or working back in the islands appealed to students, the role of previous work experience was notable:

When I finished third year I had a placement here in [name of Scottish city], and I think just doing that placement and seeing [name of Scottish city] from a working point of view - I think that was one of the tipping points I was like: yeah I could work in this firm here, I could work in one of the big companies it wouldn’t be so scary, it wouldn’t be so bad.

Workplace experience therefore provided opportunities for exposure to new and different workplaces, and for enculturation into these contexts. In addition, work experiences also provided connections to companies, industries and people which subsequently supported student transition into the graduate workplace. As a result, not only was work experience of significant influence in terms of the career pathway students followed, but also *where* this pathway developed – that is work experience influenced both spatial and career destinations.

Enculturation to different working environments was one aspect of being comfortable finding work “south”, another aspect was the experience of job search processes. Typically graduates described job searching “south” as “intense” and “stressful”. This was particularly the case for graduate schemes for large companies. Students contrasted the stresses of formal application processes with more informal processes in the islands:

Basically I just came up here and asked for a job and I kind of got a quick interview and that was fine, but the processes for getting a lot of the graduate jobs down south were taking hours and hours and loads of forms to fill out and lots of levels of interviews.
The pressure of competition and “selling yourself” was also something that felt unfamiliar to lots of graduates: “[in the city] you have to like sell yourself and make something of yourself so people would hire you, because they don’t know your family, they don’t know what you’re like, they’ve not seen you around, so you have to make yourself look good I think.”

Where students had limited experiences of workplaces on the Scottish mainland or experienced difficulties with finding employment, the buoyant labour market in the islands, especially for part-time and seasonal work, pre-existing family and social connections, and the familiar (relatively easier) job search processes proved appealing to many students even if it was just for a temporary period of time.

Discussion

The findings of this research project clearly outline the significance of internal migration for the career development of students moving from a UK island community to city locations. It is particularly notable that in terms of cost and time taken, travel connections between parts of the UK can be more significant than between some international locations. Further, this research provides evidence of the significance of the cultural dimension of internal migration, and the experience of migrants in terms of the relative adjustments that they need to make to new social and cultural environments. This is in line with previous research (Smith et al., 2015), but in the current study, the impacts on young people and their entry into employment are particularly highlighted. In particular, internal migration from smaller communities (rural or island communities for example) to urban environments is demonstrated to involve experiences of cultural difference and require the development of cultural competence.

The management of spatial and cultural difference for rural students moving to urban university spaces accords with previous research such as Gabriel (2006). However, the particular contribution of this research is to identify a number of specific implications in terms of transition to the workplace after university. The findings of this research align with findings from previous research with international students in Canada where the importance of work experience was identified (Arthur & Flynn, 2013). In this previous research, the value of work experience was identified in terms of assisting with acculturation of international students to the Canadian workplace, and assisting with networks, with the authors concluding that work experience is, in fact, more important for international students than domestic. Very similar findings, and conclusions around the importance of work experience, are apparent in this study, with work experience providing an important means of creating spatial as well as career pathways. Although the differences in working cultures between “small” contexts and larger contexts have been identified by Sultana (2006) in his work on small states, this research shows that “smallness” is also relevant in the difference between urban and rural (or island) labour markets, and that this can pose challenges for individuals moving between these labour markets.

As well as the specific challenges of different working cultures, the current research shows how general social and cultural differences impact on career development. So, for example, urban areas with a higher diversity of bars and restaurants offer more delineated social spaces, including “young professional” spaces; and the “confidence” and “assertiveness” that are part of urban spaces are also important in job search processes. There are also potentially specific differences in terms of career pathways and career management (or employability) skills needed between urban and rural environments such as the requirement to be able to work as a generalist rather than as a specialist, and the ability to work as a professional with clients that are known to you. Although the difference in job search approaches between rural and urban labour markets has been identified in previous research (Alexander, 2013; Lindsay et al., 2003), the current research demonstrates that for migrants, these differences can place particular pressures or stresses on individuals in terms of understanding or developing the skills for different
recruitment processes. Here the research points to connections again with the international literature (see Sangganjanavanich et al., 2011), in the ways that job search processes can be particularly challenging to navigate for migrants, especially in terms of the communication skills and styles that they require.

Guidance implications

Although the focus of this research project is not on career guidance approaches for internal migrants specifically, the evidence surrounding the cultural challenges of internal migration raises some important questions for guidance practice. Firstly, the findings explored in this paper emphasise that space, place and migration have a relationship with career development. As such, specifically addressing these issues in career guidance is likely to be valuable, in line with arguments that I have made elsewhere (e.g. Alexander & Hooley, 2018). International mobility often comes with certain practical considerations (for example, visas, language competence) and as such may be more likely to be directly addressed in guidance practice. However, and as evidenced by the dearth of literature on internal mobility and guidance practice, internal mobility may come with less obvious barriers and potentially may be less likely to be recognised or discussed in career guidance practice.

If issues of place and mobility are not addressed, then discussion of relevant career issues such as managing transition to different places and managing different cultural expectations may not be addressed directly. Indeed the significance of cultural differences and processes of enculturation for these students raises broader questions about whether multicultural approaches which embed cultural sensitivity are relevant for not just working with individuals from different international contexts (Arthur & Flynn, 2013; Arulmani, 2019) but also for internal migrants.

Limitations and further research

The findings from this research demonstrate some general considerations in the case of internal migration and career development. However, the analysis presented in this paper is to some extent a simplification of the complex processes of migration – for example, the locations that graduates chose to work in after graduation was related to working culture, but the evidence in this research also showed that the structure of specific career pathways, and the role of relationships were also important. The ways that different factors interrelate to shape graduate pathways have been beyond the scope of this paper, but there is room for further exploration of these interrelations.

A second important limitation is that although cities are associated with “bigger” workplaces, this is clearly a generalisation, so for example some graduates find that they work for large companies but based in the islands (albeit in small teams), and some graduates seek work in small companies in central Scotland, finding these smaller environments more comfortable than larger more corporate environments. Although no students in this research were working remotely, the idea of working for a city-based organisation but from the islands was noted by some students as a future possibility. Therefore how students (and others) negotiate the different dynamics of workplaces and social contexts, potentially over different geographical contexts bears further exploration. Such exploration may build on the notion of students and graduates developing “heterolocal” identities (Halfacree, 2012), or “two lives”, and would build in a more complex view of geographical space, influenced by relational perspectives that recognise the heterogeneity and complexity of places and spaces (Massey, 2005)

Conclusion

The findings presented in this paper highlight the relevance of internal (rural-urban) migration processes to career development in the context of a developed economy, an area that has received very
limited attention in the existing literature. Through demonstrating links with the international migration literature, it has been argued that internal and international migration should be considered connected processes which in many cases share similar dynamics and pose connected challenges and issues for career development. In particular, the findings presented in this paper underscore the significance of cultural differences and processes of adjustment not just in international migration, but also in the context of rural-urban migration. This suggests that there may be significant further scope for research that explores other connections between international and internal migration and career development. At the same time, it should be remembered that migration is “a diverse and complex process” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 321) and in this paper brief consideration is also given to the significance of diversity in migration experiences, whereby some individuals may become more comfortable in urban environments over time, and with different personal attributes associated with different kinds of workplace. Further research possibilities have also been identified to explore some of the nuances about the relationship between mobility and career development.

Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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